

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the provisions of the Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skills Needs) Bill 2005

Submission no: 8

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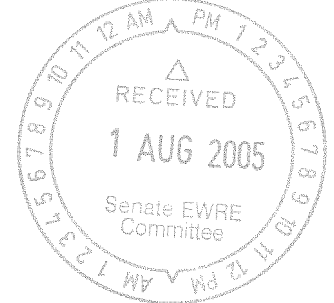
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Minister for Education and
Minister for the Arts



Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and
Education Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skill Needs) Bill 2005. The Queensland Government's position in relation to the establishment of Australian Technical Colleges in Queensland was clearly articulated in its Submission to the Commonwealth's Expression of Interest process in establishing Australian Technical Colleges. The position adopted in that Submission remains relevant and is submitted for consideration by the Senate Committee.

The Queensland Government has consistently stated its support for the policy intent behind the implementation of Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs), that is, to increase the number of trade apprenticeships, especially in priority industry areas experiencing skills shortages. VET in Schools is strong in Queensland, with 60 000 students participating in vocational education and training in 2003. Moreover, in 2004, there were 6000 school-based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in Queensland representing over 45 percent of all commencements in school based apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia. Queensland is particularly committed to encouraging school-based trade apprenticeships. Of the 6000 school-based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in 2004, more than 1250 were traditional trade apprenticeships. This number of commencements in 2004 represented a 48 percent increase on 851 school-based trade apprenticeship commencements in 2003, and a 77 percent increase on the number of commencements in 2002.

The intended outcomes the Commonwealth is seeking through the introduction of ATCs are already encompassed by this State's comprehensive package of education and training reforms under the *Education and Training Reforms For the Future* (ETRF) agenda. Given that Queensland has three of the recently announced successful sites for the establishment of ATCs in 2006 and 2007, it is in the interests of all to work collaboratively to ensure that young Queenslanders, regardless of their individual circumstance, have access to a range of first class learning opportunities.

The centrepiece of the ETRF reforms to the senior phase of learning is new legislation that means from 2006 young people will have to remain in school, training or work until they are 17.

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One of the aims of Queensland's ETRF agenda is to have more young people study vocational education while at school and leave with qualifications that are not only highly regarded but are demanded by industry.

Within this context there are particular areas where the Queensland Government is seeking to cooperate with the Commonwealth to ensure that all young people, including those attending an ATC, are able to achieve the very best education outcomes possible.

One area of interest is in relation to the new Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). The QCE, as an element of the ETRF agenda, will be a standards-based qualification that will be awarded only when a young person has achieved an agreed amount of learning to set standards. The QCE will recognise a broader range of learning achievements than the current Senior Certificate. However, it will be awarded only for courses of study that meet the Quality Criteria developed by the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) and only when a young person has achieved, at least, set standards in literacy and numeracy. The reforms give young people the flexibility to combine studies towards their Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) as well as achieve a nationally recognised vocational qualification. It is in the interests of all parties that students attending ATCs are able to bank their achievements with the QSA and be eligible to receive a QCE.

Further to this, the QSA is reviewing the scope, range and relevance of the Years 11 and 12 syllabuses within the context of the broader education and training policy environment. The development of new innovative syllabuses through partnerships with industry and schools will enhance the curriculum and learning products available to schools and potentially ATCs delivering programs closely linked to industry.

The spirit and intent of ETRF is that young people have the best opportunity to compete for jobs in new and emerging fields as well as apply their skills to advancing the growth of traditional industries. ETRF focuses on providing young people with the academic and/or vocational education qualification and skills they need to successfully participate in the labour market.

While there are many ways in which students in Queensland schools can access vocational education and training, Queensland recognises school-based apprenticeships and traineeships as a key strategy to transition students into long-term employment. What ETRF has highlighted is the need to improve the interaction between schools and industry in order to increase the numbers of employers willing to take on new apprentices and, as a result, increase the overall availability and diversity of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

To give effect to this aspiration a number of significant partnerships with industry have been established. Effective collaboration between the Queensland Government and industry has led to the establishment of some unique industry-driven approaches that respond to the needs of industry for highly skilled trade staff while providing students with the incentive to remain at school and achieve highly regarded industry qualifications.

Through the ETRF agenda this State is pursuing a public policy position of integrating pathways so that school, vocational education and training and university options are available to students at various stages in their individual learning paths. This position has been based on a two-fold understanding. First, many emerging and traditional industries require skilled workers across all levels of their business including trade, para-professional and professional levels and that industry itself is interested in working in a more integrated way to address its own skill requirements. Second, Government's role is to facilitate access to a range of pathways that meet the aspirations of students and their parents.

There is a clear synergy between aspects of the proposed ATCs and Queensland's reform agenda. The Queensland Government maintains a willingness to explore more flexible arrangements that would see better integration of ATCs into the Queensland education and training systems and, therefore, optimise outcomes for students.

ATCs provide another option for students to build a career in traditional trades. The Queensland Government invites the Commonwealth to join in partnership with the State in adopting a coordinated and planned approach to working with schools, industry and local communities to achieve positive results for young people.

While the Queensland Government would cooperate with the model for ATCs as broadly outlined in the *Request for Proposal*, Queensland would also be prepared to discuss alternate arrangements that would achieve the same objectives and yet be more flexible as well as more consistent with current industry partnerships especially in regions.

The Queensland Government has proposed a more flexible model whereby students from 'feeder schools', both state and non-state, would maintain an enrolment in their respective school and enrol and attend the ATC to access high quality specialised trade training. This dual enrolment arrangement would enable a greater number of feeder schools to participate and thereby deliver a broader range of options for a greater number of students and their parents.

This model is particularly viable in regional areas of the State, such as Gladstone, where the introduction of an ATC has the potential to create a competitor in what is, a relatively small market. The failure to accommodate other industry partnership models that are currently delivering significant outcomes for Queensland industry and students is, not only regrettable, but may impact negatively on the co-operation that currently underpins successful industry and school partnerships.

This lack of flexibility in relation to the point of enrolment being with the ATC provides no scope for the implementation of the Queensland Government's preferred model for implementation of ATCs in Queensland. In addition, the mandatory employment requirements mean that, in general, Queensland state secondary schools will have a limited scope of involvement in establishing ATCs in this State. Queensland state schools will not be able to be ATCs. The proposed ATC will need to be established in the non-state school sector and be accredited by the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (NSSAB), a statutory body established under the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001*. The Act and the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2001* sets out the criteria for accreditation and eligibility for State Government funding.

Key criteria for accreditation as a non-state school include the requirement that an applicant must be a corporation and must be considered suitable to be the school's governing body as well as issues of financial viability and criteria concerning administration, governance, land and buildings and educational facilities.

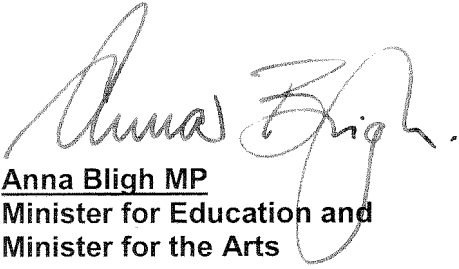
If a school then wishes to apply for State Government funding, the initial but critical issue is that the applicant must meet the suitability and not-for-profit legislative requirements. If the NSSAB is satisfied about the not-for-profit status, eligibility for government funding criteria must also be taken into consideration. Under the Act certain criteria must be considered, including the likely impact on other schools operating in the subject school's catchment area, the extent of choice of educational provision, unfilled enrolment capacity in existing schools and an analysis of demographic data on school populations.

However, in line with the Queensland Government's position of working collaboratively with consortia selected by the Department of Education, Science and Training, and in

consideration of the Request for Proposal requirement that ATCs will not duplicate existing infrastructure, Queensland's secondary state schools have been given direction that they can consider approaches by ATC applicants to develop co-operative or partnership arrangements in relation to accessing school facilities or school services on a fee-for-service basis.

I reiterate this State's commitment to continue to work with the Commonwealth to achieve the optimal education and training outcomes for students and I recommend to the Committee the attached Queensland Government Submission that was lodged in response to the call for expressions of interest in establishing Australian Technical Colleges.

Yours sincerely



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