



# QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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## Submission

27 February 2018

Queensland Training Ombudsman  
PO Box 15090  
CITY EAST Q 4002

Via email: [info@trainingombudsman.qld.gov.au](mailto:info@trainingombudsman.qld.gov.au)

To Whom It May Concern

### Re: VET Investment Plan, Market Performance Review, Rural Operations Qualifications

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of peak state and national agriculture industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across the state. QFF engages in a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to the productivity, sustainability and growth of the agricultural sector. QFF's mission is to secure a strong and sustainable future for Queensland farmers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ)
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association (QCGA)
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators Ltd (BRIA)
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd (CDIL)
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group (BRIG)
- Flower Association
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd (PV Water)
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council (QCMC)
- Queensland United Egg Producers (QUEP).

QFF welcomes the opportunity to offer comment on behalf of the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (RJSA), and provides this submission without prejudice to any additional submission provided by our members or individual farmers.

RJSA was developed from the agricultural sector's need to engage more with the education and training sectors, and the Queensland government's commitment to create and support jobs across

*The united voice of intensive agriculture*



Queensland. The purpose of the Alliance is to address mutual goals for our member organisations<sup>1</sup> that focus on the attraction, development and retention of new entrants and existing workers to underpin the prosperity of Queensland's agricultural sector now and into the future. The Alliance provides advice to government, service providers and other organisations with respect to employment, skills, industry training and workforce planning on behalf of Queensland's agriculture and related industries. RJSA members, working with the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT), are committed to strengthening the Queensland VET Quality Framework to deliver relevant training to produce a skilled workforce to fulfill the needs of the agriculture and related sectors particularly in rural and remote regions.

We acknowledge the importance of the Market Performance Reviews as a priority activity for the 2017-18 VET Investment Plan and concur with the five key objectives of the reviews as outlined in the Department's Fact Sheet.

### **Executive Summary**

*Since being advised of the process for the review of Certificate III in Rural Operations in early November 2017 we have consulted with our industry networks to collate feedback on the key areas of interest and our summarised response to the Rural Operations Review is that the qualification is successfully delivering outcomes to address industry training needs.*

*We have also been advised by industry members that any funding reduction would be detrimental to those Pre-qualified suppliers (PQS) operating in an already thin market. Further, any effective increase to their cost of delivery especially in regional and remote areas would directly lead to poorer student outcomes and reduce the pool of qualified labour available to industry.*

*The Rural Operations qualification has evolved to provide a broad range of options to acquire skills and knowledge to work in a regional setting, beyond just a specific farm operation context. This could include mixed farming and agribusiness operations, but also a blend of skills that extend to other rural and regionally-based enterprises such as landscaping, parks & gardens, agribusiness, local government, tourism, transport, construction and mining. With the future of work rapidly changing, training products need to support skilled workers for a broader range of jobs. Students benefit from training that includes more generic competencies that can be used across a wide range of occupations, delivering skills that service multiple roles.*

*The training system must continue to support students to move more easily between related sectors and the Rural Operations qualification facilitates this with the incorporation of units of competency that are owned and used by a range of industry sectors.*

*Industry wants to help build confidence in the VET system and the quality of training provided is of paramount concern to industry. Throughout our consultations, including our ongoing participation in informing the Annual VET Investment Plan processes, we have not encountered complaints about the Rural Operations qualifications or indeed any other agriculture-related qualifications. We believe this is borne out by the number of complaints lodged with the Ombudsman, our understanding being that there are no significant issues reported (advice provided by the QTO 16/01/2018).*

*Given the level of funding investment - the advice we were tasked to provide to DESBT was, in essence, does the qualification remain fit-for-purpose? We can confirm that it is delivering those outcomes desired by industry - a solid grounding in the essential skills relevant to living and*

<sup>1</sup> RJSA's members are: Cotton Australia, The Timber and Building Materials Association (TABMA), AgForce, Growcom, Queensland Farmers Federation, Canegrowers, Queensland Chicken Growers Association, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)

*working in a regional or rural environment that meets the initial expectations of employers that can be further developed and upskilled for the particular demands of the job and also capable of adding value to the agribusiness supply chain and rural economic development.*

## **Review of Rural Training Activity**

We welcome the opportunity to provide our industry feedback and response to the Review of the Rural Operations qualifications and we thank the Queensland Training Ombudsman for their coordination and oversight of the consultation process.

The 2017-18 Annual VET Investment Plan Market Performance Review was announced in October 2017 and one of the industry areas and qualifications placed under review was the agricultural sector's AHC32816 Certificate III in Rural Operations (including Certificate II).

During the process of informing the 2017-18 Annual VET Investment Plan cycle, the RJSA on behalf of industry reviewed the investment program areas utilised by our sector. We offered commentary on a number of issues including those related to the potential risk of over-delivery in certain qualifications with a significant increase in enrolment uptake through a relatively small number of PQS. These assessments were based on the monthly 'dashboard' data provided by DESBT. Based on this data and following consultation with the horticultural sector, evidence appeared to exist that the Certificate III in Rural Operations could be assessed as being of potential risk of over-delivery and we advised DESBT accordingly as part of industry's feedback to the Investment Plan (March 2017). DESBT's determination for the finalised 2017-18 Annual VET Investment Plan was that the Rural Operations qualifications be placed on the restricted list, and their subsidy levels reduced. Subsequently, the announcement of the Market Performance Review to include these qualifications and undertake further consultation was welcomed by industry. We prepared to assist DESBT in whatever capacity necessary to provide specific feedback from our industry sector networks, in addition to the ongoing intelligence we provide by means of the Training Market Health Check reporting that we then performed on a bi-monthly basis - directly to the Strategic Engagement, Skills Investment and Market Strategy unit within the Department.

On November 13, 2017 we met with DESBT to discuss how best we might arrange for industry's feedback to be collated and in what format this information should take. We again indicated our preparedness to assist with the Review and undertake meaningful engagement, whether by organising forums regionally or individual meetings with peak bodies. At this meeting, we were provided with an initial 2017-18 Market Performance Review data set from DESBT to outline their understanding of the situation in the market.

In our view, the detail provided by this initial data set was incomplete and did not represent an appropriate level of data to fully describe the rural training market and related industry training activities. At that time, we requested further, more relevant detail to be shared with industry at a level of granularity we believed would better describe the scope and scale of the market to be reviewed. DESBT undertook to develop this additional data and make it available in advance of any future consultation with industry stakeholders using the VET system.

With regard to the most appropriate manner in which to consult with industry, it was agreed that an annual conference taking place in Brisbane (January 2018) that involved the participation of the Queensland Agricultural Workforce Network (QAWN) presented the best opportunity for the QTO to attend and for DESBT to make a presentation, interacting with stakeholder representatives from a variety of industry sectors and regions.

We then began a process within our member bodies and various sector networks, including the seven regional QAWN officers, to obtain feedback from RTOs, employers and other stakeholders

relevant to the objectives of the Review and ‘ground-truth’ the fit-for-purpose aspect of the qualifications.

Based on the existing level of detail provided by the monthly DET data dashboard reports we regularly receive - comprising only of student enrolments and completions (by full quals. - not by units of competency) by region and by PQS delivery - it was clear that there had indeed been an increase in student numbers and the concomitant level of public investment across the Rural Operations qualifications. The student/PQS data indicate a solid spread of training being delivered across the regions and by trainer - notwithstanding that the majority of Certificate III in Rural Operations is being provided by four principal PQS organisations.

Throughout our networked dialogue with PQS and employers, the RJSA has not received any significant feedback to evidence or otherwise indicate that there exist any systemic issues, with either qualification or the quality of training delivered.

There is a strong level of awareness for the government’s investment in the VET sector and our industry’s involvement in training delivery by employers - in fact it is increasing, albeit from an historically low base. [NCVER: *Employers’ use and views of the VET system 2017*]

[https://www.ncver.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/1175830/Employers-use-and-views-of-the-VET-system-2017.pdf](https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/1175830/Employers-use-and-views-of-the-VET-system-2017.pdf)

<https://www.qff.org.au/blog/agribusiness-making-use-vet-system-employees/>

There were also no reports of issues with the trainers operating in or across our regions or with the quality of training delivery - which is of paramount concern to our member bodies and industry in general.

The Certificate II in Rural Operations, principally delivered via VETiS, provides a solid platform and an important career pathway for school students. The utilisation of this program as an introduction to agriculture and the increased awareness of regional opportunities afforded to school graduates is a success to be celebrated. It is evidence of the good outcomes for students and employers, building on those initiatives of government and industry in partnership – delivering via Gateway schools and the wider School Industry Partnership Program (SIPP).

The Certificate III in Rural Operations qualification provides a broad range of options to acquire skills and knowledge to work in a regional setting. This includes mixed farming and agribusiness operations, and also a blend of skills that extend to other rural and regionally-based enterprises such as landscaping, parks & gardens, agribusiness, local government, tourism, transport, construction and mining. With the future of work rapidly changing, training products need to support skilled workers for a broader range of jobs.

Students benefit from training that includes more generic competencies that can be used across a wide range of occupations, delivering skills that service multiple roles. The training system must continue to support students to move more easily between related sectors and the Rural Operations qualification facilitates this with the incorporation of units of competency that are owned and used by a range of industry sectors.

While this is a consistent industry view that has been expressed over many years, it is also the view of experts who review the training markets, for instance as stated in *“Perceptions are not Reality: myths, realities and the critical role of VET in Australia”* Skilling Australia Foundation (May 2017): *“it is predicted that today’s school leaver will have 17 jobs across 5 careers in their lifetime... the bulk of Australia’s workers will be retraining, upskilling, career changing... several times over the course of their working lives... it is becoming clearer that the jobs of the future will require individuals to possess a broad range of transferable skills.”*

Government initiatives and programs often appear to focus on providing benefits and investment to industry sectors based on projections of their growth potential i.e.: Health due to an ageing population, for instance. However, the Agribusiness sector is an important contributor to the state economy and particularly significant to driving growth in regional areas. There are many and diverse opportunities for new entrants to be involved in the future of the industry; young people must be exposed to different industries and career paths.

The government's My Skills website summary of the Cert III qualification, [accessed 21/02/2018]: <https://www.myskills.gov.au/courses/details?Code=AHC32816&locationId=16041&distance=25> illustrates a dynamic national picture of surveyed graduates:

*Satisfied with Training 87.5%*

*Improved Employment Status 65.5%*

*Enrolled in Further Study 23.7%*

*Employed or in Further Study 91.6%*

The Top 3 Occupational Outcomes:

36.2% *Technicians and Trades Workers*  
 27.5% *Labourers*  
 13.9% *Machinery Operators and Drivers*

Top 3 Employing Industries:

22.5% *Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing*  
 21.3% *Construction*  
 15.3% *Administrative & Support Services*

Data is sourced from the Student Outcomes Survey, conducted by NCVET, which focuses on students' employment outcomes and satisfaction with VET in Australia.

Industry believes that the continued increased uptake of the Rural Operations qualifications here in Queensland is actually a long-overdue positive outcome that reflects well on the policy direction and settings established over the course of the past several years.

It is an example of the efforts made by the state government to deliver on the goals set out at the national level by the COAG Industry and Skills Council (CISC), to examine beneficial enhancements to the design of training products, in partnership with industry and the VET sector. It builds on the work of the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) who are implementing reforms to training packages that aim to, *inter alia*:

- ensure that the training system better supports individuals to move more easily between related occupations; and
- improve the efficiency of the training system by creating units that can be owned and used by multiple industry sectors.

[Federal Department of Education & Training: *Training Product Reform - what is the case for change?* (November 2017) <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/training-product-reform-what-case-change>]

These aims are, of course, reflected in the design underpinning the Rural Operations qualification which is also delivering on the state government's funding objective to increase the proportion of Queenslanders that hold a Certificate III qualification (per national student entitlements). In the long run, less well educated/skilled workers will be particularly exposed to the effects of automation, emphasising the importance of increased investment in lifelong learning and

retraining. Boosting education and skills levels helps people adjust to new technologies or methods of better practices. Less skilled workers will generally bear more of the costs of increased automation, so improving their adaptability and transferable skills is crucial to enabling workers to more easily navigate disruptive or structural changes within or across industries over time. This is particularly relevant in regional and remote rural areas and has implications for the health of local communities and the state economy. It is the responsibility of government, working with industry, employers and education providers to invest more in the types of training that will be most effective in producing adaptable workers for a potentially increasingly automated environment.

### **16 January 2018 Meeting**

Formal consultation with representatives from diverse industry sectors and regions took place during the QAWN Annual Conference, held in Brisbane January 16-17, at which DESBT personnel gave a presentation on the first afternoon (with the QTO participating). It was only at this time that the level of detail industry had been requesting since the previous November regarding the units of competency delivered within the qualification was provided for our review. The identification of those competencies being delivered under Rural Operations was considered critical by industry to more fully understand how the feedback we have obtained aligned with the training data itself – and whether those commonly selected elective units represented a suitable range of those preferred by industry, as being fit-for-purpose.

The data then provided on the day as ‘Market Performance Review – Rural Operations, Analysis of Core and Elective Units [of Competency]’ (included here as an attachment to this submission) very much aligns with the evolved scope of the qualification’s intended purpose, as previously described herein as being:

*“The Certificate III in Rural Operations qualification provides a broad range of options to acquire skills and knowledge to work in a regional setting. This includes mixed farming and agribusiness operations, and also a blend of skills that extend to other rural and regionally-based enterprises such as landscaping, parks & gardens, agribusiness, local government, tourism, transport, construction and mining. With the future of work rapidly changing, training products need to support skilled workers for a broader range of jobs.*

*Students benefit from training that includes more generic competencies that can be used across a wide range of occupations, delivering skills that service multiple roles. The training system must continue to support students to move more easily between related sectors and the Rural Operations qualification facilitates this with the incorporation of units of competency that are owned and used by a range of industry sectors.”*

Industry is therefore satisfied that the Rural Operations qualification, as evidenced by the data, continues to remain fit-for-purpose and delivers the training outcomes desired by our industry sectors.

RJSA, on behalf of industry, wishes to state that it supports the Queensland VET Quality Framework and acknowledges its principle objective and focus to only accept quality outcomes for students, and that quality is a shared responsibility for stakeholders working together to provide oversight of publicly funded VET.

Industry appreciates the opportunity to make this submission to the Ombudsman and we look forward to further assisting by responding to any request for additional information.

Aside from the ongoing training market activity monitoring noted above, that the RJSA conducts on behalf of industry members, we will also be making appropriate submissions to national reviews



based on industry feedback. For instance, to the reforms of the vocational education and training (VET) sector that are currently being undertaken by the Australian Government's Department of Education & Training, consulting on two aspects of the system: unduly short courses, and training products. These reforms focus on ensuring students and employers receive high quality training that is responsive to the needs of industry and translates into employment opportunities for individuals.

If you have any queries regarding this submission, please contact Peter Perkins at [peter@qff.org.au](mailto:peter@qff.org.au).

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin  
Chief Executive Officer

***Attached:***

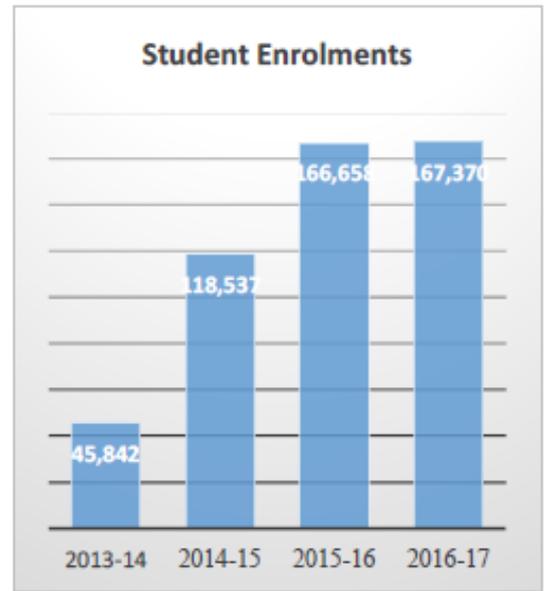
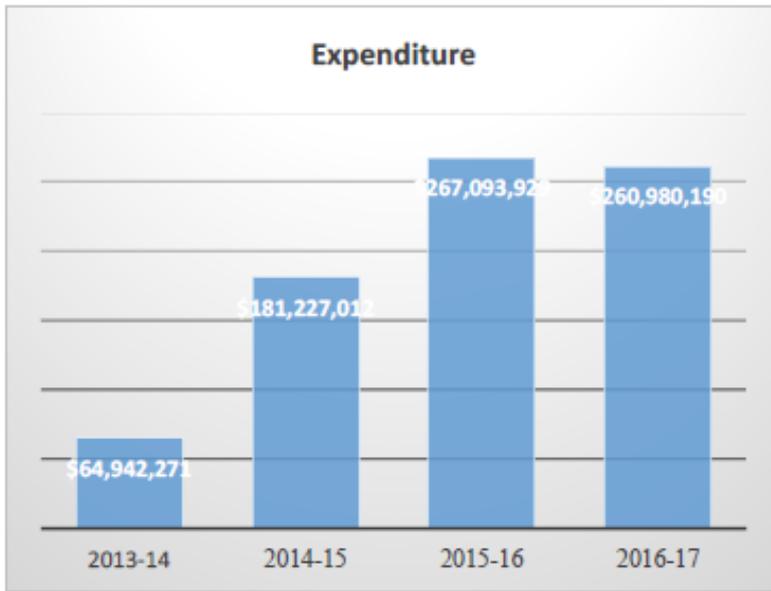
*DESBT provided: Market Performance Review - Rural Operations, Analysis of Core & Elective Units*

*QAWN: Agriculture Skills Needs - Certificate III in Rural Operations - industry preferred units by sector*

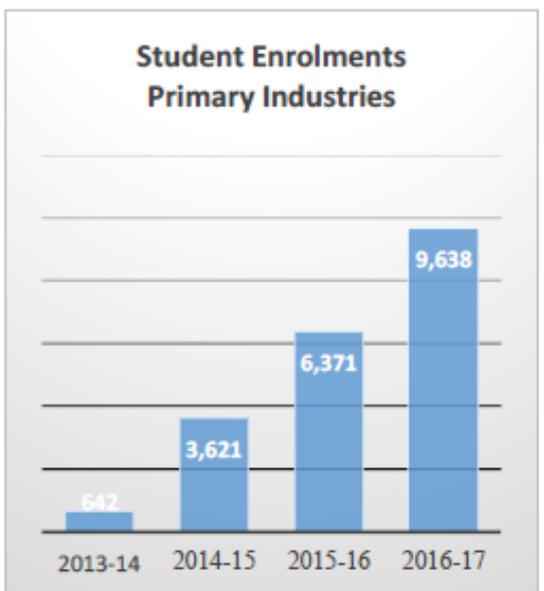
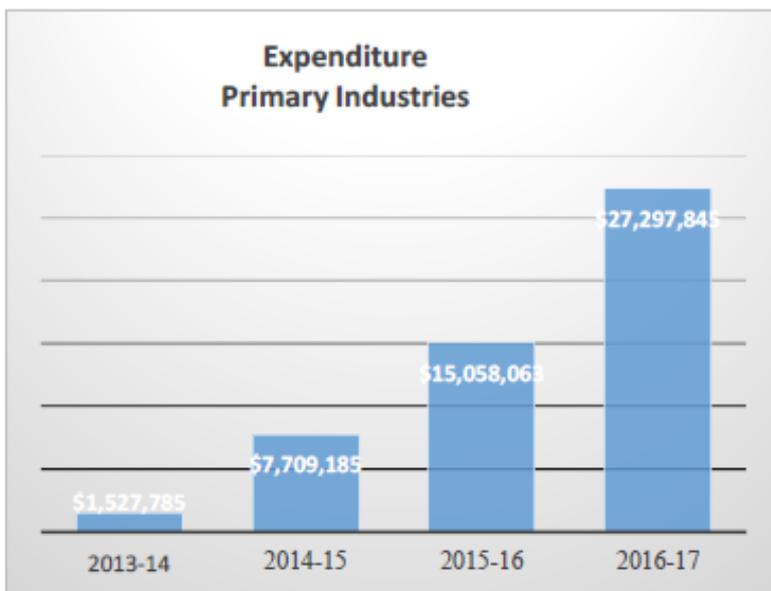
*DESBT: Delta data - 2013/14-2016/17 (over page)*

**DESBT Delta data – 2013/14-2016/17**

**Total ITG C3G Expenditure / Student Enrolments**



**Total Primary Industries - C3G Expenditure / Student Enrolments**



**Total Rural Operations - C3G Expenditure / Student Enrolments**

