



Response to draft Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training: An action plan for Queensland.

May 2017

Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) provides this submission on the draft consultation paper, *Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training: An action plan for Queensland*, to inform early childhood, school education and training initiatives to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to achieve their full potential.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 302 Catholic schools that educate almost 147,000 students in Queensland.

QCEC is committed to continually improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In 2016, there were 6,142 Indigenous students enrolled in Queensland Catholic Schools, demonstrating a large involvement and commitment by QCEC to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education across Queensland.

QCEC is supported in its goals towards providing educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Network, which represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education throughout Queensland Catholic education.

The identified aims of the *Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training: An action plan for Queensland*, are to enhance conversations about 'closing the gap' and to achieve excellence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This vision and aim are supported and shared by QCEC and the following response is provided by QCEC with the aim of providing constructive feedback on the document.

Structure of the response

This response has been structured in accordance with the headers utilised in the document (*Achieving excellence, Building on our successes* etc.) which are supported as appropriate and logical structures for the Action Plan. QCEC then offers some final overarching comments about the plan.

Section: Building on our successes

There have been some significant gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all areas of education in Queensland. Likewise, this is reflected in the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within Queensland Catholic schools.

Section: Delivering our plan

QCEC supports, in principle, the elements identified in this section of the plan. It is noted that the Department's Indigenous Governance Committee (IGC) will drive this Action Plan. If the Plan is to be considered to cover non-government as well as government schools, QCEC would seek to have QCEC representation on the IGC. To date, QCEC has not been invited to participate in this group.

Section: Making early gains

QCEC supports the commitment to lift the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-old children in early childhood education to 95 percent. QCEC also strongly supports the involvement of parents at all stages of education.

QCEC notes that capital works have been targeted to ten state schools to upgrade the physical early learning environments for delivering pre-Prep in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. To benefit all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in these communities, consultation with all the sectors of education would be beneficial so that all families can benefit from such an initiative. For example, St Michael's Catholic Primary School on Palm Island would also benefit from upgrades to its early learning environment.

Section: Reaching learning potential

QCEC supports the principles that are outlined within this section of the Action Plan. School engagement is crucial for the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Also, foundational skills remain critical for a child's success at school.

Specific projects are listed, including the Clontarf Academy, an Indigenous dashboard on OneSchool, and the Evidence Hub. It is implied that these resources are for State School students. Where programs would benefit all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Queensland, regardless of which school they are enrolled at, QCEC requests that access and learnings be made available to all sectors of education. Some of our students come from some of Queensland's most disadvantaged communities and would benefit from being able to access these support services.

Section: Developing skills

QCEC supports, in principle, the initiatives outlined in the *Developing skills* section of the Action Plan. Providing training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, helps to create an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can gain meaningful employment and support for their families.

Section: Transforming pathways

QCEC agrees, in principle, that Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is important and that we need to increase engagement with STEM.

Section: Supporting successful transitions

Providing support for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student transitions is fundamental to the educational, cultural and emotional success of those transitions. The Transition Support Service (TSS) has been beneficial to students from Palm Island and many of our boarding students who have come

from remote Indigenous communities. The Youth Employment Program (YEP) would be beneficial to many of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Section: Engaging partners

QCEC agrees that effective partnerships will help achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people. Cross-sectoral partnerships are critical to improving outcomes and closing the gap for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Cross-sectoral collaboration is a means of working collectively to improve student achievement.

QCEC has been involved in the development of the Deadly Kids, Deadly Futures Framework and is listed as one of the supporters of this Framework. QCEC continues to express this support. This is one example where Health and Education in Queensland will work collaboratively to minimise the educational impacts of middle ear disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

QCEC supports, in principle, the establishment of the new state-wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory body, the Ministerial Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training Advisory Committee (QATSJETAC), which will provide an Indigenous voice to issues around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Queensland. QCEC has provided two nominations and is strongly interested in having an active involvement in this group. QCEC also supports initiatives that increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Kindergarten and would welcome access to related resources where possible.

Section: Building capacity

Many Queensland Catholic schools recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders among their students. Many of our schools have had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participate in the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foundation (QATSIF) program. Queensland Catholic schools have also participated in the Constitutional Convention, which is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in Year 11 to be involved with the Parliamentary process. All Queensland Catholic School Authorities celebrate and participate in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural events. In principle, QCEC would support professional staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to access the EALD Hub online.

Final comments

Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in Queensland Catholic schools could benefit from many of the initiatives outlined in the Action Plan. Many of the opportunities identified in the Plan are targeted to State Schools. Whilst the governance responsibilities and structures of each schooling sector are acknowledged, it is considered there is opportunity for significant collaboration to ensure that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student in Queensland has similar opportunities, regardless of which sector they happen to be enrolled in.

Our schools do express a high level of concern regarding the sustainability of funding and programs. Schools and communities find it frustrating and difficult to plan when programs are short-term. Consultation is also paramount in ensuring the successful implementation of any program. QCEC supports sustainable, consultative and collaborative approaches underpinning any funding programs.

QCEC supports strategies that assist students to reach their learning potential by addressing their individual needs and contexts. Some of our schools have unique needs. St Teresa's College at Abergowrie is a male boarding school with most boarders coming from remote Indigenous communities. Meeting the needs of these students and their families presents a daily challenge for the school. Another school with unique needs is St Michael's Catholic School at Palm Island. The school has a 100% Indigenous enrolment. There are issues which are pertinent to that community which provide

daily challenges for the school. Parental engagement, resourcing and transition programs, as referred to in the Action Plan, are some of the key needs of this school.

While QCEC appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the *Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training: An action plan for Queensland*, we would like to highlight the principle under the *Engaging partners* section, that effective partnerships will help achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people. QCEC is fully supportive of this statement. QCEC participates in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education cross-sectoral group. QCEC is also one of the partners on the Deadly Kids, Deadly Futures 10 year Framework. However, QCEC has had limited opportunity to contribute to the development of this new Action Plan for Queensland which appears to focus on Queensland state schools. While QCEC supports, in principle, the overall aims of the Action Plan, it would have been beneficial to have been involved in the development of this Action Plan in its formative stages rather than towards the end of the process, to help provide a more comprehensive and inclusive picture of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in all Queensland schools.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee-Anne Perry', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Lee-Anne Perry AM
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