



Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
education: An action plan for Queensland

Consultation report



Queensland
Government

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Education acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands from across Queensland, and pays respects to the Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the state.

A better understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures develops an enriched appreciation of Australia's cultural heritage and can lead to reconciliation.

This is essential to the maturity of Australia as a nation and fundamental to the development of an Australian identity.



1.0 Consultation process



On 20 March 2017, the Queensland Government released the consultation draft of *Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training: An action plan for Queensland*.

The Action Plan included a range of early childhood, education and training initiatives aimed at empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to achieve their full potential.

Queenslanders were invited to join the conversation by attending regional forums or roundtables, completing an online survey, or submitting written responses.

Queenslanders were asked to respond to the following questions:

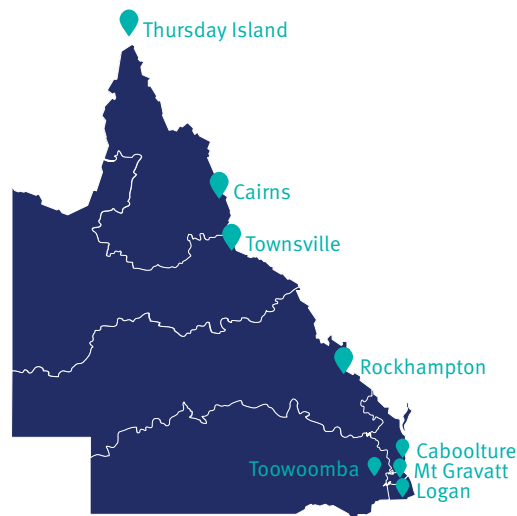
- How can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners be supported to build the knowledge, skills and attributes they need for the jobs of the future?
- How can the education system, and its workforce, be improved to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners?
- What approaches to education make the most difference in your community? What are the key success factors that make these work?
- What are your views on the overall tone and direction of the action plan? In particular, what do you think of the focus on empowerment and achieving excellence?
- How can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, government, education providers, community organisations, businesses and industries work together to deliver the action plan?

The empowerment model underpinning the draft action plan is clear, concise and self-explanatory and gives a clear message that the aim is for excellence.

Written submission

Eight regional forums were held across Queensland during April and May 2017, in Toowoomba, Logan, Caboolture, Rockhampton, Mt Gravatt, Cairns, Townsville and Thursday Island.

The forums attracted more than 180 people and included



parents, Elders, community members, early childhood educators, school staff, education providers, government and non-government organisations, and industry groups.

Three sector roundtables were held in Brisbane to discuss future policy directions. More than 40 representatives from government agencies, unions, major industries, peak organisations and representative bodies attended the roundtables.

Targeted consultation was also undertaken with members of the ministerial Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training Advisory Committee (QATSJETAC) about ways to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people.

Twenty written submissions were received about the development of the action plan.

In total, more than 220 individuals and 71 organisations were consulted on the action plan. This report summarises the results of the consultation under the following six themes:

- Making early gains
- Reaching learning potential
- Transforming pathways
- Supporting successful transitions
- Engaging partners
- Building capability.

Note: Due to machinery-of-government changes, the section formerly dedicated to training and skills development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not addressed in this consultation report and will not form part of the final action plan.

What Queenslanders said...

Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education




220 
Queenslanders from across
71 external organisations consulted.

Queenslanders responded **positively** to the action plan and its focus on **empowerment and achieving excellence**

 **180**
individuals consulted in
8 regional consultation forums

Action plan areas where
Queenslanders made comments



 **20**
written submissions made
to the department

 **44**
representatives consulted in
3 roundtable meetings



2.0 Key findings

Overall, Queenslanders responded positively to the action plan. They indicated that priorities in the action plan addressed identified needs and included practical initiatives aimed at improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and school education outcomes.

Queenslanders welcomed the overall tone and direction of the action plan and strongly supported its focus on empowerment and achieving excellence. The action plan's strengths-based approach was seen as fundamental.

The tone of the action plan is refreshing. The focus on empowerment and achieving excellence is both inspirational and aspirational.

Early childhood provider

The importance of partnerships between the community, education, government and business and industry sectors to improve outcomes was considered vital. Genuine engagement and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were identified as critical to implementing the action plan.

Analysis of feedback from consultation confirmed there was strong support for:

- increasing participation in **early childhood education and care services**
- prioritising foundational skills such as **literacy and numeracy** for students to reach their full potential
- adopting approaches that **connect learning** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- ensuring **curriculum is culturally attuned** to the current and future needs of students
- preparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for the jobs of the future by increasing participation in **science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)**
- **developing pathways** for students from the early stages of schooling through to secondary education and into post-school education, training and employment
- **strengthening engagement** between schools, parents, carers and families
- building the **cultural capability and competency** of early childhood education and care services, schools and providers.

The plan's focus on excellence (is particularly welcome). It is not sufficient for example to focus just on 'national minimum standards' (in NAPLAN) or 'closing the gap'. Important as these efforts are, the goal must be for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to realise their full potential.

Written submission

Queenslanders also provided advice about how government can more effectively deliver education services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some suggestions included:

- implementing tailored and place-based approaches that respond to the diverse needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families
- supporting initiatives that are funded long term and given the time and opportunity to yield results and make a positive difference
- adopting initiatives that consider local needs and foster genuine and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- implementing programs and services that are informed by evidence of what works and that directly address the underlying causes of issues rather than symptoms.

2.1 Making early gains

Consultations confirmed Queenslanders value the importance of high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Many Queenslanders welcomed initiatives in the action plan designed to increase ECEC participation and the role of families in early childhood learning. Family involvement in children's early development was seen as critical, helping children to have the best start in life, creating a supportive environment for lifelong learning, and building the skills and confidence of family members by valuing them as their children's first and most important teachers.

Initiatives in the action plan to strengthen the delivery of ECEC in remote areas were also strongly supported.

“The plan’s focus on more holistic and responsive services is particularly welcome. This is critical given the range of needs families may have.”

Written submission

Specific ideas suggested for making early gains included:

- increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood educators and leaders
- strengthening transition processes from ECEC services to schools (Prep).

From a broader sector and system perspective, Queenslanders advised that early childhood services that provide culturally safe and welcoming environments (people, programs and places), and are valued and accessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, were critical for improving childhood outcomes. Queenslanders acknowledged the importance of delivering holistic, integrated and responsive ECEC services.

Addressing health concerns and supporting vulnerable children were identified as two key areas where ECEC providers could integrate services with other service providers. The Child and Family Centres (CFCs) across Queensland were noted as good practice examples of integrated services that were child-centred and responded to identified needs.

2.2 Reaching learning potential

Queenslanders welcomed initiatives in the action plan to support every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student to succeed, reach their full potential and achieve academic success.

“Empowerment through cultural identity, oral traditions, respectful relationships with a strong understanding of kinship and family, communication experiences, high levels of independence and high level of resilience can only be achieved through actively engaging our local communities and working in partnership with the key educational bodies.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher

There was widespread support for improving the attendance, participation, engagement and retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Mentoring, use of positive role models and case management were identified as effective strategies to support students, particularly students at risk of low achievement or early school leaving. Supportive learning environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel culturally safe and have a sense of belonging were seen to be effective in keeping students engaged in school.

Prioritising foundational skills, such as literacy and numeracy, was a consistent theme to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve academic success.

Queenslanders agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students perform better when teaching and learning reflect and positively reinforce their lives, experiences and values. A curriculum that is culturally attuned to the current and future needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was identified as vital. The importance of language and building teachers’ capability to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) were also raised in consultations across Queensland.

2.3 Transforming pathways

Building pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to increase engagement and achievement in STEM was a strategy well received by Queenslanders. It was seen as important in light of our changing world and preparing students for jobs of the future. The use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models and champions in STEM was suggested as a way to inspire students.

“The continued emphasis on encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects is welcomed.”

Written submission

Queenslanders identified the importance of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the science curriculum in a way that recognises and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, and professional learning for teachers to support this.

2.4 Supporting successful transitions

Initiatives in the action plan to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people make successful transitions throughout their education journey were acknowledged as essential. The development of clear and relevant pathways from school education to post-school education, training and employment was considered vital to increasing engagement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schooling.

We need to identify career pathways early in school.

Regional consultation forum

There was a clear and consistent message that well-crafted career information was needed to support development of career pathways and build aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Providing targeted and continuous support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote areas transitioning to boarding schools was highlighted. Smooth transitions minimise unnecessary disruptions to student learning, increase student connectedness to family and community, and strengthen student resilience and coping skills.

Queenslanders suggested delivering targeted programs to support students with complex needs, such as students leaving youth detention. Mentoring and individualised case management were identified as effective student-focussed strategies to support successful transitions. Queenslanders noted the improvement in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 graduates with a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) or a Queensland Certificate of Individual Attainment (QCIA) achieved through focussed case management support.

Queenslanders confirmed the development of local partnerships between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, schools and industry support successful transitions for students from school to training or employment.

2.5 Engaging partners

Queenslanders responded favourably to actions that involve partnering and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, carers, families and communities to improve student learning outcomes

There was strong support for robust and ongoing engagement between schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, carers and families. Schools that provide a welcoming environment that encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and the wider community to have input into their children's education were identified as examples of good practice. These approaches facilitate family involvement in children's learning and create an inclusive environment.

Increased opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents to have input into decision-making about the education of their children was a consistent theme raised throughout the consultations. Queenslanders identified that engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities provides opportunities for ECEC providers, schools and the department to benefit from community expertise and gain insights into strengths and areas for improvement.

We would like to see more opportunities for parents to have input into decision making and processes for students.

Regional consultation forum

The development of genuine and meaningful relationships built on trust, respect and open communication were identified as key success factors when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Community education counsellors (CECs) employed in schools were acknowledged as performing a key role in linking schools with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The capability of departmental and school staff to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was highlighted during the consultation as a key element of effective engagement.

Queenslanders noted existing collaboration between schooling sectors in providing transitional support for students and the management of middle ear disease and highlighted that this could be built upon.

2.6 Building capability

Initiatives in the Action Plan to continually build and strengthen the cultural capability of staff and services were considered essential for improving outcomes and delivering responsive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students, their families and communities.

“A key part of advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education must be a focus on employment strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Such strategies must be comprehensive and focus on recruitment, retention and career progression.”

Written submission

A number of suggestions were put forward to strengthen the cultural capability of teachers, principals, school staff, early childhood educators, training organisations and senior department leaders and executives.

These included:

- building effective working relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and local communities
- celebrating significant cultural and community events in partnership with local communities
- providing online training and professional development resources and tools for teachers and educators.

The recruitment, retention, professional development and career progression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff was identified as essential to achieving an optimal level of cultural competency across both early childhood and school education.

At a broader sector and system level, ensuring that services at all levels are culturally responsive and competent was recognised as critical. The Department of Education’s Hidden Histories, Crossing Cultures program was cited as an example of good practice in the education sector to build cultural capability.



3.0 Conclusion

Queenslanders who joined the conversation on the draft *Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training: an action plan for Queensland* were clear — aiming to achieve and deliver excellence in education will prepare Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, students and young people for a successful future.

In response to the feedback received from Queenslanders, the action plan is being revised.

Visit www.indigenousportal.eq.edu.au for more information and updates about *Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education: an action plan for Queensland*.

Artist Josiah Omeenyo, "Coral Beds Down Under", Catalogue JO20110611, Lockhart River Arts Centre QLD

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