

# Frequently Asked Questions

Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges (QATC)

Including Longreach Pastoral College (LPC), Emerald Agricultural College (EAC), and Statewide Training (previously referred to as Rural Training Queensland (RTQ))

## Background

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to ensuring central-western Queensland has access to high quality vocational education and training (VET). As the economy and the agricultural industry evolves, change is needed to make sure training needs are met and rural economies are supported.

A review by Professor Peter Coaldrake has found demand for residential agricultural industry training has declined and more flexible options are needed. He also identified there are opportunities to improve skilling and training options by better utilising the existing facilities, including, but not limited to, agriculture.

The Queensland Government has considered Professor Coaldrake's recommendations and has decided to close the Queensland Agricultural Training College at the end of 2019.

As such, residential-based enrolments at Queensland Agricultural Training College's Longreach and Emerald campuses will cease immediately. Non-residential based enrolments offered by QATC through their state-wide training hubs, will be suspended until alternative options are considered.

To minimise impacts to affected students, staff and communities, the Queensland Government has directed that QATC campuses at Longreach and Emerald continue to operate through 2019 so that currently enrolled students can complete their studies.

After 2019, modern and more flexible industry training will be conducted by other providers.

This decision has not been taken lightly. The long and proud tradition of agricultural education and training and its importance to the region is recognised. However, demand for residential training has been falling and VET needs to keep up with modern industry needs.

The Queensland Government is committed to constructively engage with employees and union representatives throughout this process to ensure the best possible outcomes for staff.

The Government will invest more than \$30 million to reshape VET, to ensure the central-western Queensland has the skilled workers to fill growing industries now and into the future.

Over the coming months the community will be provided opportunities to help shape the implementation of an Economic Transition Strategy for the region, to be coordinated by the Queensland Government.

## **FAQs**

### **What is the Coaldrake Review and what were the findings?**

Emeritus Professor Peter Coaldrake AO was engaged by the Palaszczuk Government to undertake a review of vocational education and training across central-western Queensland in 2018.

The purpose of the review was to optimise the government's investment in vocational education and training in the region to ensure prospective students can access quality training and employment opportunities without having to leave the area.

In summary, the Coaldrake Review found that the residential training model provided by QATC is no longer relevant and should cease operations by 31 December 2018. The review recommended that the Rural Training Queensland program become the responsibility of TAFE Queensland.

The Coaldrake Review concluded that vocational education and training in the region could be improved through better utilisation of the existing assets and resources, with view to supporting additional training needs beyond agriculture.

### **What is the problem that has resulted in the Coaldrake Review recommending that the QATC cease operating?**

Despite years of effort and funding investment by successive governments, the QATC business model (and its predecessor AACC) has not been a success.

The QATC residential colleges at Emerald and Longreach are underutilised and running at a substantial loss with steeply declining enrolments since 2011-12 and costly residential programs all contributing to the business no longer being sustainable.

The growth of tourism, hospitality and allied health industries in regional Queensland is driving the need for diversified training options. This is beyond the current focus of QATC.

### **What does this mean for QATC moving forward?**

In order for the government to implement the direction recommended by the Coaldrake Review and in the interest of QATC staff and students, it is proposed to 'teach out' students until the end of 2019. QATC will ceasing operating at the end of 2019.

### **How many staff are affected and where are they located?**

All staff employed by QATC will be affected by the decision to modernise and reinvigorate vocational education in the region.

QATC currently has staff working in a number of regional locations across Queensland. This includes the residential colleges at Emerald and Longreach. Corporate staff are located in Toowoomba and Rural Training Queensland staff operate from the 'satellite' training hubs located in Ayr, Bundaberg, Cairns, Charters Towers, Dalby, Mackay, Nambour, Rockhampton and Walkamin.

## **Why not close down the residential colleges and keep the RTQ training hubs open?**

QATC is operated as a single Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with multiple delivery sites, including eight study hubs and the two residential colleges. Unlike the residential colleges, the study hubs have no associated training resources and are essentially rented office spaces. Maintaining a dedicated head office and associated resources just to maintain the operation of these hubs was not recommended by the Coaldrake Review.

## **Why not amalgamate the residential colleges and keep one?**

The Coaldrake Review found that the demand for residential agricultural training continues to decline and is no longer the preferred choice for those seeking a career in agriculture. The QATC Emerald and Longreach colleges are unsustainable, and with enrolment targets unable to be reached, they operate at a substantial loss. The review recommended training delivery in these regions be diversified, to develop the skills mix required to meet the needs of the future. As such, one option is the residential college facilities may be repurposed to meet future industry-based training needs.

## **Where will students be able to access quality agricultural training in regional Queensland?**

There is an existing and strong network of local registered training providers that will continue to provide vocational education and training in central-western Queensland. For further

information on these networks please refer to the Student FAQs.

## **What will happen to the colleges? These are long-standing icons in our community.**

The training and accommodation facilities at Longreach and Emerald will be repurposed. Options will be discussed with the community and key stakeholders with a view to benefit central-western Queensland.

## **Will the community still be able to use the facilities at the colleges (e.g. sporting fields) once QATC ceases operation?**

Yes, it is anticipated that local communities will continue to be able to utilise the facilities moving forward. As part of the repurposing process all possible uses of the facilities will be explored with the community.

## **How can I find an alternative training provider?**

You can access professional assistance provided by the Queensland Government during the transitional period or contact either the QATC student help line (1300 160 972), or the Training Queensland Customer Centre (1300 369 935).

## **What will happen to the properties?**

The Coaldrake Review found that QATC assets were not being fully utilised and there was an opportunity for facilities to be optimised for the benefit of the local community.

The plan is for properties to be more effectively utilised moving forward, and in some cases repurposed, to meet the broader training needs and economic opportunities for the local community.

### **What happens to the records and items of heritage significance from the colleges?**

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will work with the local community to ensure that records and historical equipment of significance to the colleges including memorabilia, student of the year boards, and historical equipment e.g. blacksmithing equipment, treasured horse saddles etc. are preserved.

### **What will be done for the students currently residing at the colleges?**

Current students will have the opportunity to complete their studies through a soft close of teaching services on-site, or will be assisted to transition to alternative training providers.

Students currently residing at Longreach and Emerald Colleges will be engaged and alternative options for accommodation explored.

### **What is happening to the QATC Board?**

The Board's professionalism and conduct while the Coaldrake Review was being conducted, and in subsequent months while the Government considered the review, is to be commended.

It is acknowledged that the QATC Board has been looking for urgent direction from the

Palaszczuk Government regarding a sustainable business model for QATC.

It is understood that the Board's first concern will be the welfare of staff and students during the transition.

Moving forward, there will need to be an assessment of the Board to ensure the right skills and experience are present to guide the transitioning arrangements.

It is noted that members have indicated a strong willingness to work constructively with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to implement whatever course of action Government determines appropriate. If this results in the need for a renewed Board composition, it is hoped that members will continue to support the Government's direction through their leadership roles in the community.