



Inquiry into the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project

Report No. 36, 57th Parliament
Education, Employment and Training Committee
August 2023

Education, Employment and Training Committee

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Acknowledgements

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All web address references are current at the time of publishing.

Cover photograph provided by the Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training.

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Chair's foreword

On behalf of the Education, Employment and Training Committee, I present this report on the committee's Inquiry into the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project (the project).

Recognising the importance of the government's investment in the state's TAFE campuses, the committee examined upgrades to the Mount Gravatt TAFE in 2022.¹ Given the particular importance of vocational education and training in regional areas, the committee decided to build on that work by examining upgrades to the Cairns TAFE campus in this self-referred inquiry.

The Cairns TAFE campus provides a critical training hub for communities in Far North Queensland, including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The committee was therefore pleased to see the Queensland Government investing in the modernisation of the facilities it offers.

During the inquiry, the committee called for – and received – written submissions from stakeholders, and was briefed by officials from TAFE Queensland, the Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training. The committee inspected the upgrades during a visit to the Cairns TAFE campus in July 2023. It also held community forums in Cairns and on Thursday Island, and held a public hearing in Brisbane.

Based on this evidence, the committee found that the project was designed and delivered in an appropriate and cost-effective manner. We are satisfied that the project will help to ensure that students and employers in Cairns and other parts of Far North Queensland are able to access high-quality vocational education and training facilities.

On behalf of the committee, I thank those individuals and organisations who participated in our Inquiry. I also thank our Parliamentary Service staff, TAFE Queensland, and the Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training.

I commend this report to the House.



Kim Richards MP

Chair

¹ Employment and Training Committee, Report No. 26, 57th Parliament Education, *Mount Gravatt TAFE Upgrade Project*, October 2022. Available at: <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2022/5722T1695-BC38.pdf>.

Recommendations

The committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly note this report.

Executive Summary

On 24 October 2022, the Education, Employment and Training Committee resolved to conduct a public works inquiry into the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project (the project) completed in 2021. The project comprised a series of works at the Cairns TAFE campus, which serves as a critical hub for vocational education and training (VET) in Far North Queensland.

The project had a total budget of \$18.59 million and was the most significant upgrade to the Cairns TAFE campus in a decade. The overall purpose of the project was to modernise the campus to ensure its ability to meet the current and future training needs of students and employers in Far North Queensland. To that end, it comprised several elements, including improvements to specialised teaching spaces throughout the campus, upgrades to the automotive workshop and upgrades to the hair, beauty and hospitality precinct.

During the inquiry, the committee:

- received written submissions from stakeholders
- was briefed by officials from the Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training and TAFE Queensland
- inspected the upgrades during a visit to the Cairns TAFE campus in July 2023
- held community forums in Cairns and on Thursday Island
- held a public hearing in Brisbane.



The committee found that the project was designed and delivered in an appropriate manner, improving access to high-quality facilities for VET students and employers in Cairns and Far North Queensland.

The project appears to have generated a number of benefits to date. In particular, it has:

- allowed TAFE Queensland to offer several new courses and programs in Cairns
- helped to increase the number of VET in School classes that operate on the campus
- strengthened the ability of TAFE Queensland to attract new enrolments
- improved the quality of workshops and studio spaces in the Banggu Mingaany Art Gallery
- contributed to the establishment of the Gimuy Walubarra Yindinji Cultural Museum
- made it easier for students and members of the public to find their way around the campus
- generated training and employment opportunities for local residents during the construction phase.

Given the importance of the Cairns TAFE campus as a training hub for Far North Queensland, the committee encourages the government to explore what else can be done to ensure existing facilities continue to meet the needs of the community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1 Introduction

On 24 October 2022, the Education, Employment and Training Committee resolved to conduct a public works inquiry into the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project (the project) completed in 2021. That project was the most significant upgrade to the Cairns TAFE campus in a decade.

The project comprised:

- improvements to specialised teaching spaces throughout the campus
- upgrades to the B Block workshop and installation of a new solar power system
- upgrades to the S Block hair, beauty and hospitality precinct and customer service point
- creation of a new Banggu Minjaany Art Gallery space and the Gimuy Walubarra Yindinji Cultural Museum
- improvements to campus navigation
- replacement of the air-conditioning chiller in K Block, and
- other supporting infrastructure upgrades including electrical switchboards and transformer replacements.

The map provided in Appendix A indicates those parts of the Cairns TAFE campus where major upgrades occurred.

The project commenced on 18 April 2019 with a total budget of \$18.59 million.

1.1 Why put the spotlight on the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project?

In November 2017, the Queensland Government committed to investing up to \$85 million to upgrade the state's TAFE campuses through the Advancing Our Training Infrastructure (AOTI) initiative. Between 2018 and 2021, that initiative funded major upgrades to TAFE campuses in Mount Gravatt, Alexandra Hills (Redlands), Ashmore and Southport (Gold Coast), Toowoomba, Pimlico (Townsville) and Cairns.



Recognising the importance of the government's investment in the state's TAFE campuses, the committee chose to examine the upgrades to the Mount Gravatt TAFE Campus in 2022, as part of its oversight of public works.² Given the importance of vocational education and training in regional areas, the committee now seeks to build on that work by examining the upgrades to the Cairns TAFE campus, which is a critical training hub for Far North Queensland.

Most of the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project was funded via the AOTI initiative. Certain additional sub-projects that formed part of the larger project were funded through the Annual Training Infrastructure Program.³

² Employment and Training Committee, Report No. 26, 57th Parliament Education, *Mount Gravatt TAFE Upgrade Project*, October 2022. Available at: <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2022/5722T1695-BC38.pdf>.

³ The replacement of the air-conditioning chiller in K Block and other supporting infrastructure upgrades including electrical switchboards and transformer replacements.

1.2 Scope of the inquiry

The terms of reference for the inquiry, in accordance with s 94 of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, were to examine the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project and report to the Parliament on:

1. the stated purpose of the works and the apparent suitability of the works for the purpose; and
2. the necessity for, and the advisability of, the works; and
3. value for money achieved, or likely to be achieved, by the works; and
4. revenue produced by, and recurrent costs of, the works or estimates of revenue and costs for the works; and
5. the present and prospective public value of the works, including, for example, consideration of the impact of the works on the community, economy and environment; and
6. procurement methods for the works; and
7. the balance of public and private sector involvement in the works; and
8. the performance of —
 - (i) the constructing authority for the works; and
 - (ii) the consultants and contractors for the works;with particular regard to the time taken for finishing the works and the cost and quality of the works; and
9. the actual suitability of the works in meeting the needs and in achieving the stated purpose of the works.

1.3 Key findings



The committee found that the project was designed and delivered in an appropriate manner, improving access to high-quality facilities for VET students and employers in Cairns and Far North Queensland.

The committee is satisfied that:

- the purpose of the works was appropriate and that the nature of the works was suitable to achieve that purpose
- the project was necessary and advisable
- the project delivered adequate value for money
- the project is likely to generate broader public benefits for the community
- the procurement process employed for the project was appropriate
- the performance of contractors and consultants was acceptable
- the completed works are suitable to meet the needs of the community and achieve their stated purpose.

2 Examination of the Cairns TAFE Upgrade Project

2.1 Purpose and suitability of the works

The Cairns TAFE campus is a critical training hub for Far North Queensland. It is the region's largest TAFE campus, serving a student population of more than 8,000 students in 2021-22.⁴

The Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training (department) advised the committee that although existing facilities on the campus were well-used prior to the upgrades, many of the facilities were dated and no longer fit-for purpose.⁵ It explained, 'due to its age and the significant evolution of industry and their needs, some buildings and training facilities had become increasingly unfit for existing and projected training demand.'⁶



The overall purpose of the project was to modernise the campus to ensure its ability to meet the current and future training needs of students and employers in Far North Queensland.

In pursuit of this purpose, the project incorporated:

- upgrades to specialised teaching spaces, including:
 - installation of new freezer rooms that will provide apprentices with access to leading edge refrigeration technology
 - refurbishment of the 'makerspace' to support virtual and augmented reality activities, while improving accessibility and functionality
- upgrades to the automotive workshop, including:
 - installation of a new dyno room and new dynamometer
 - replacement of the gantry crane, which was old and non-compliant
- installation of a new solar power system, to reduce operating costs and provide training opportunities for students and apprentices
- upgrades to the hair, beauty and hospitality precinct, including:
 - creation of a new hair and beauty hub, with modern and specialised equipment
 - transformation of the student care and customer service centre to create a more vibrant social hub
- upgrades to the Cultural Arts Centre, including:
 - refurbishment of two workshops/studio spaces in the Banggu Mingaany Art Gallery
 - works to establish the Gimuy Walubarra Yindinji Cultural Museum on the campus
- upgrades to air-conditioning units that were nearing the end of their life, and other upgrades to the electrical system of campus.

Committee comment

The committee is satisfied that the purpose of the works was appropriate and that the nature of the works was suitable to achieve that purpose.

⁴ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 12.

⁵ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 7.

⁶ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 8.

2.2 Necessity and advisability

The department advised the committee that the project was necessary due to:

- enrolments, which had declined in some areas, including food and hospitality, in the period between 2015 and 2018
- projected training demand, which was forecast to increase in certain areas, including automotive engineering and technology, until 2027
- feedback from students, who had described some of the facilities as old and run down.⁷

The department considered that investment in the Cairns TAFE campus was advisable in light of:

- its role as the flagship TAFE campus for Far North Queensland
- the campus's accessibility via public transport
- the central location of the campus, which is in close proximity to retail centres and the city's main industrial hub
- existing strong connections between the campus and the community, including industry.⁸

The department advised the committee that it considered a number of options for the Cairns TAFE campus during the master-planning process.⁹

In addition to the options that eventually became part of the project, these options included:

- defining and expanding the campus heart around Block H (rather than Block S)
- improving the visibility of the campus along Gatton Street, including developing a new outdoors sports precinct
- extending and improving access for remote students via partnerships with private student accommodation operators
- replacing air conditioning systems across the campus.¹⁰

The department advised the committee that it chose not to progress the options listed above as part of the project for a variety of reasons. However, some of these options were ultimately funded via other channels, or may be progressed in the future.¹¹

Committee comment

The committee is satisfied that the project was necessary and advisable.

2.3 Value for money

The total project budget was \$18.59 million. This comprised:

- \$15 million for the AOTI components of the project
- \$3.59 million for the components funded under the Annual Training Infrastructure Program.

⁷ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023.

⁸ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, 8.

⁹ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 9.

¹⁰ Department, correspondence dated 14 March 2023, p 3.

¹¹ Department, correspondence dated 14 March 2023, p 3.



Overall, the project was delivered under budget, at a cost of \$15.65 million. There is approximately \$353,000 still to be spent on the Banggu Minjaany Art Gallery, to establish the Gimuy Walubarra Yindinji Cultural Museum.¹²

There were some notable discrepancies between the budget and actual expenditure.¹³

The department advised the committee that it assigned nominal budget allocations for each part of the project at its commencement, when the design brief was still in development. As the design brief was finalised it balanced overspends and underspends on certain components to ensure 'that project costs were managed against the overall approved budget.'¹⁴

The department explained the most significant variations between budgeted and actual expenditure as set out in Table 1.

Table 1 – Explanations for significant budget variations

Variance ¹⁵	Explanation provided by the department ¹⁶
Underspend on upgrades to specialised teaching spaces <i>\$4.5 million budgeted compared to \$2.6 million actual</i>	Specialised teaching included the construction of a new capstone training room for electrical trade training and new refrigeration training facilities with the latest nitrogen refrigeration systems. The design brief did not identify any other works to be undertaken.
Overspend on improved car park access <i>\$0.5 million budgeted compared to \$1 million actual</i>	Improved entry and access relate to onsite parking and general access to H Block Student Services. This option provided secure access-controlled parking space for TAFE-owned vehicles, electric vehicle charging points and duress alarm points. Other works included the removal of original vegetation at the entry to H Block, new landscaping, new outdoor seating, refurbishment of the façade of H Block, new entry doors, new channel and kerbing, paving and concrete pathways, signage and painting works
Underspend on the automotive workshop upgrade <i>\$1.9 million budgeted compared to \$1.1 million actual</i>	B Block Automotive upgrade delivered a new entry point to the light vehicle workshop, compliant battery room, new ventilation arms, replaced the overhead gantry crane, relocated the dyno-tuning machine to a new sound attenuated room with student viewing area, new storage shed and a small engine workshop. No other needs were identified in the design brief.
Underspend on the café improvement <i>\$0.4 million approved compared to 0.075 actual</i>	The expansion of the café in S Block was considered unnecessary due to the inclusion of a new kitchen and café in H Block. Works were limited to the construction of seating areas in the foyer for patrons attending the Hair and Beauty salon on L2 in S Block.
Overspend on the social space refurbishment <i>\$0.6 million approved compared to \$2.7 million actual</i>	The demolition of the old cafeteria on the ground floor H Block provided the opportunity to develop a state-of-the-art social learning and collaboration spaces adjacent to the new Café and with direct connection to Student Services and TAFE administration. This area has now become the hub of the campus and is used by students, TAFE staff and visitors to the campus.

¹² Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 28.

¹³ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 28.

¹⁴ Department, correspondence dated 14 March 2023, p 7.

¹⁵ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 28.

¹⁶ Department, correspondence dated 14 March 2023, pp 7-8.

Committee comment

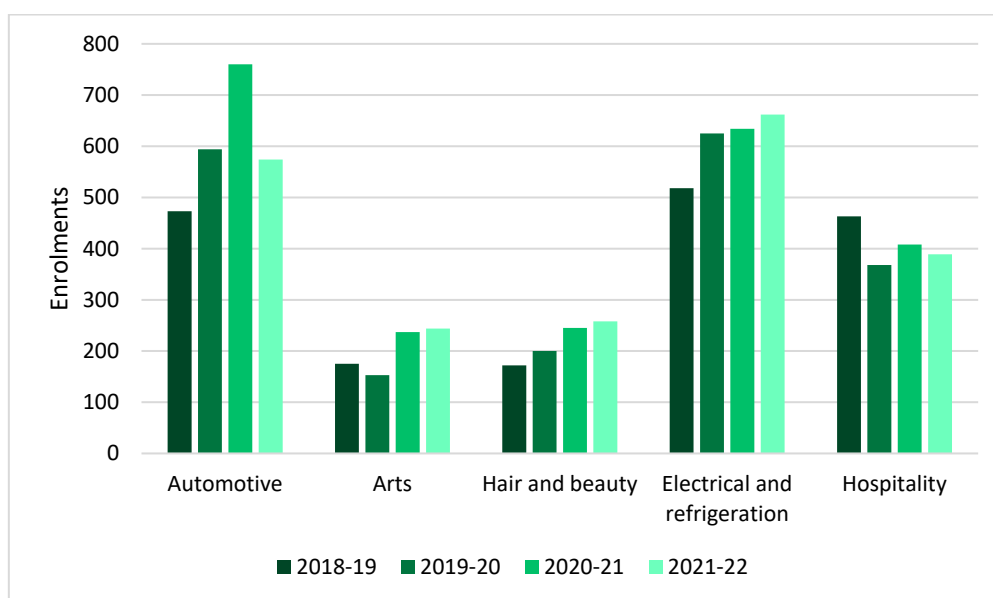
The committee is satisfied that the project delivered adequate value for money.

2.4 Impact on revenue and recurrent costs

The department advised the committee that the cost-benefit analysis for the AOTI components of the project predicted they would have a positive financial effect on TAFE Queensland by contributing to an increase in student enrolments and associated revenues.¹⁷

Although it is not possible to attribute changes in enrolments directly to the project, it would appear that it has generated some financial benefits. Student enrolments in several of the industry areas that benefited from the upgrades grew almost 11 per cent between 2018-2019 and 2021-22, as illustrated in Figure 1. The most notable increases were in hair and beauty, where enrolments increased by 50 per cent.

Figure 1 – Student enrolments increased in most areas that benefited from upgrades



Source: Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 19.

The exception was hospitality, where enrolments have declined by 16 per cent, despite the campus upgrades. The department explained:

This decrease in enrolment demand coincided with the start of the global COVID pandemic, which almost entirely impacted the hospitality industry due to the associated lockdowns. In Australia, these lockdowns greatly impacted regions like Cairns where there is significant dependence on tourism and hospitality.¹⁸

The department advised the committee that it budgeted \$1.1 million for maintenance of the campus in 2021-22, and \$760,000 in 2022-23. This compares favourably to the annual cost of maintenance prior to the project, which was \$1.25 million per year for the 3 years prior to the project.¹⁹

Committee comment

The committee is satisfied that the project is likely to have a positive effect on TAFE Queensland's revenue over the longer-term.

¹⁷ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 10.

¹⁸ Department, correspondence dated 14 March 2023, p 4.

¹⁹ Department, correspondence dated 14 March 2023, p 4.

2.5 Public value of the works

The department advised the committee that the project has generated broader public benefits through its impacts on students, the economy and the environment.

2.5.1 Impact on students

The department advised the committee that the project has:

- ‘revitalised the training environment and increased student satisfaction’²⁰
- contributed to the creation of a ‘sticky campus’ environment that encourages students to attend classes, and study or socialise on campus²¹
- allowed new courses to be offered at the campus, including:
 - apprenticeship programs in Outdoor Power Equipment and Motorcycle Maintenance
 - Fixed and Mobile Plant Mechanic and Heavy Commercial Vehicle Mechanical Technology training packages²²
- increased the number of VET in Schools classes operating on the campus.²³

2.5.2 Impact on the economy

The department advised the committee that, during its completion, the project generated significant training and employment opportunities. These included:

- more than 14,000 hours of work for apprentices (equivalent to 62 apprentices)
- roughly 6600 hours of work for Indigenous workers (equivalent to 26 workers)
- opportunities for apprentices and other workers to complete training in Elevating Work Platforms, Working at Heights, First Aid and Forklift Licenses.²⁴

In the future, the department expects that the project will benefit the economy by ensuring that growth industries in the Cairns region are able to employ suitably trained workers.²⁵

2.5.3 Impact on the environment

The department advised the committee that it did not complete an environmental analysis or energy efficiency assessments as part of the project. However, the department did take some steps to reduce negative environmental impacts both during construction and in the future. This included reducing construction waste and installing a solar power system as part of the project, which will allow the campus to use more sustainable energy in the future.²⁶

Committee comment

The committee is satisfied that the project is likely to generate broader public benefits for the community.

²⁰ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 20.

²¹ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 20.

²² Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 22.

²³ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 22.

²⁴ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 15.

²⁵ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 19.

²⁶ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 16.

2.6 Procurement

The department advised the committee that it procured the project 'via traditional delivery using QBuild (DEPW) as Project Manager, Procurement Manager and Contract Administration.'²⁷

Committee comment

The committee is satisfied that the procurement process employed for the project was appropriate.

2.7 Public and private sector involvement

The department advised that most trade packages were delivered by QBuild. For those trade packages that required technical expertise not available via QBuild, the department found suitable suppliers via tendering processes managed by QBuild. Those processes varied to suit the size, scale and complexity of each tender.²⁸

Committee comment

The committee is satisfied that the project maintained an appropriate balance of public and private sector involvement.

2.8 Performance of contractors and consultants

The department advised that in its view, QBuild 'performed exceptionally well on the project... the supervision of all work was high and the majority of projects were handed over defect-free.'²⁹

2.9 Actual suitability of the works

The department advised the committee that the project has:

...revitalised the training environment and increased student satisfaction. There is also now greater alignment with industry needs, as students are training using modernised state of the art training aids and equipment.³⁰

According to the department:

- the upgrades to the automotive workshops have allowed the Cairns TAFE to offer new apprenticeship programs in Outdoor Power Equipment and Motorcycle Maintenance, as well as new training packages in Fixed and Mobile Plant Mechanics and Heavy Commercial Vehicle Mechanical Technology³¹
- the upgrades to the hair, beauty and hospitality precinct 'provide excellent simulation of an industry-based setting and have also provided the local community with a retail amenity in a convenient and visible location'³²
- the upgrades have made it easier for students to find their way around the campus, and made it a more appealing location for study.³³

The committee inspected the upgraded facilities at the Cairns TAFE Campus on 10 July 2023. During that inspection, the committee noted the wide range of upgrades included in the project.

²⁷ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 14.

²⁸ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 15.

²⁹ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 15.

³⁰ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 20.

³¹ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 22.

³² Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 25.

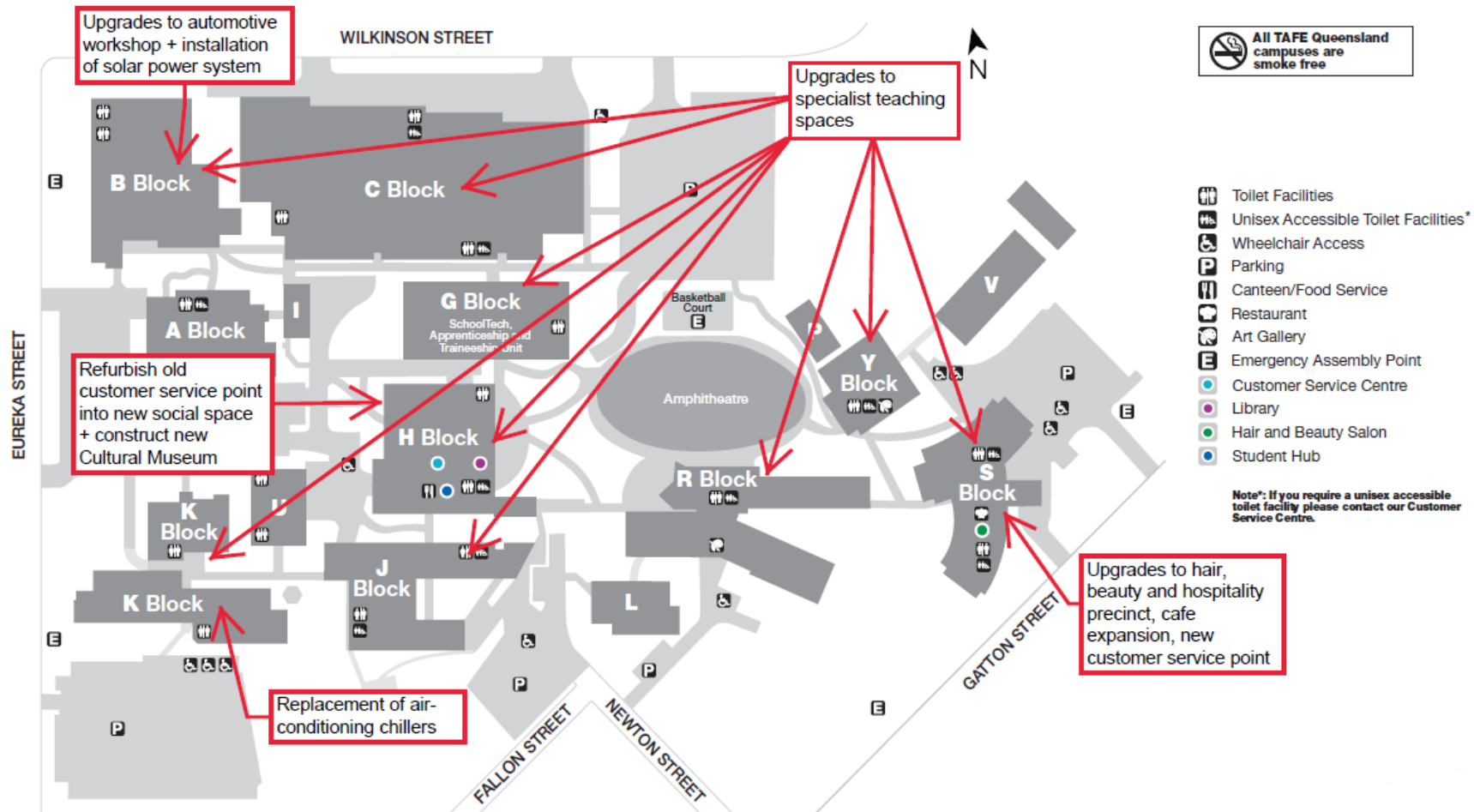
³³ Department, correspondence dated 12 January 2023, p 20.

Committee comment

The committee is satisfied that the completed works suitably meet the needs of the community and achieve their stated purpose.

Appendix A – Map of Cairns TAFE campus showing main components of the project

Gatton, Newton, Eureka and Wilkinson Streets Manunda Cairns Qld 4870



Appendix B – Submitters

Sub #	Submitter
001	Robert Heron

Appendix C – Officials at public briefing

Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training

- Steve Koch, A/Associate Director-General
- Marc Levy, Executive Director, Infrastructure Investment
- Dave Lucas, Executive Director, Service Delivery
- Alix Winter, A/Executive Director, VET Strategy

TAFE Queensland

- John Tucker, A/Chief Executive Officer
- Simon Pritchard, Chief Financial Officer

Appendix D – Witnesses at community forums and public hearing

Note: The community forums and public hearing also formed part of the committee’s Inquiry into the delivery of vocational education and training in regional, rural and remote Queensland.

Community forum – Cairns – 10 June 2023

- Mr Bruce Houghton, Principal, Bentley Park College
- Ms Sharne Roby
- Mr Andrew Hayes, Enterprise Development Manager, Norsta Maritime Pty Ltd

Community forum – Thursday Island – 11 June 2023

- Mr Moses Nelliman, Principal Project Officer, Acting Manager Thursday Island, Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts
- Ms Amara Horgan, Deputy Principal—Senior Schooling, Secondary, Waybeni Buway Ngurpay Mudh, Tagai State College
- Mr Matt Tully, Head of Campus, Thursday Island Secondary, Tagai State College
- Mr Gavin Dicoski, Managing Director, Occupational Skills Centre Australia
- Ms Flora Warrior, Board Member, Torres Strait Islanders Regional Education Council

Public hearing – Brisbane – 14 June 2023

Apprentice Employment Network, Queensland and NT

- Mr Paul Hillberg, Chair
- Mr Craig Westwood, Executive Officer

Queensland Alliance for Mental Health

- Ms Jennifer Black, CEO
- Ms Sarah Childs, Director, Sector Engagement and Development

Agforce Queensland

- Ms Ruth Thompson, Policy Director

Queensland Farmers’ Federation

- Mr Rod Morris, Industry Skills Advisor - Primary Industries

Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association

- Mrs Kate Bradshaw, Vice President

Rural Medical Education Australia

- A/Professor Megan O’Shannessy, CEO

Country Universities Centre

- Mr Duncan Taylor, Founder

Queensland Water Directorate

- Dr Georgina Davis, CEO
- Mr Neil Holmes, Skills Partnership Manager

Queensland Resources Council

- Ms Katrina-Lee Jones, Policy Director, Skills & Diversity

Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union

- Mr Allen (Jamie) Shepherd, Professional Officer, Team Leader
- Mr Daniel Prentice, Professional Research Officer
- Dr Helen Klieve, Research and Policy Officer

Appendix E – List of abbreviations

AOTI	Advancing Our Training Infrastructure
committee	Education, Employment and Training Committee
department	Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training
VET	vocational education and training

All Acts are Queensland Acts unless otherwise specified.