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> **Supporting Business-School Connections**

**CCIQ Submission to the Business-School
Connections Roundtable**

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Invigorating Business Skills

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Business and industry engagement with the education sector delivers significant benefits by supporting the development of young people, contributing skills, improving knowledge of existing and future workforce demands and enhancing the educational outcomes for students. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ) recognises these benefits to the community, schools and business and is a strong advocate for meaningful school-business partnerships.

Business and industry participants in school-business partnerships report a variety of benefits including:

- Increased engagement with the community;
- Enhanced reputation and community profile;
- Identification as an employer of choice;
- Enhanced employee morale, recruitment and retention through involvement in an altruistic program;
- Opportunities to attract, train and retain young people in the workplace;
- Reduced impact of future skills shortages by influencing the skills and knowledge of the future workforce, cultivating a reliable source of better-trained and better motivated employees;
- Positive publicity and promotion opportunities;
- Enhanced employability skills of young people in the workforce;
- Increased customer loyalty; and
- Larger recruitment pools.

> Guiding Principles for Business-Education Partnerships

CCIQ supports the proposal to develop guiding principles for business-school relationships. Developing broad guiding principles that reflect best practice that are accompanied by tools to assist business and industry in engaging with the school system would provide a valuable resource for businesses seeking to participate in partnerships. Guidelines published to assist businesses and schools in developing relationships should be clear, precise and mutually acceptable to both the school and business.

While acknowledging the importance of defining ethical boundaries for school-business interactions, CCIQ recommends that caution be taken in applying the principles published by the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF). The “Guidelines for Education/Business Partnerships” published by the BCTF and referred to in the discussion paper could be considered highly prescriptive and may diminish the perceived benefits of partnering for business.

CCIQ recommends that guidelines be developed to assist businesses and schools in identifying appropriate partnering opportunities and to guide them through the process of creating, implementing, sustaining and evaluating partnerships. To prevent creativity and innovation being stifled, the guidelines should include sufficient flexibility and avoid being overly bureaucratic.

As partnership structures are significantly influenced by the size and complexity of individual partnerships, incorporating flexibility into the guide will be essential. Ideally, the



guidelines will go beyond ethical principles to provide a tool that can assist both businesses and schools in developing and sustaining relationships. Topics that could be incorporated in the guidelines include:

- Definitions of types of partnerships;
- Ethical boundaries for school-business interactions;
- Benefits to businesses and schools engaging in partnerships;
- How to identify opportunities and establish partnerships;
- Elements of sustainable partnerships;
- Barriers to successful partnering;
- Mechanisms for overcoming barriers;
- Framework for evaluating partnerships;
- Relationship management strategies;
- Frequently asked questions; and
- Case studies of successful partnerships.

CCIQL recommends that the guidelines and any tools targeting increased business participation in partnerships be developed in collaboration with peak industry bodies, including the Chamber of Commerce network. To facilitate the effective implementation of these guidelines and tools, endorsement should be received from both Federal and State Education Ministers and peak industry bodies.

> School-Business Partnership Tools

In addition to guidelines for school-business relationships, CCIQL would support the development of a suite of tools to promote and raise awareness about school-business relationships. Equipping participants with resources and knowledge of best-practice in school-business relationships will be crucial in developing a culture of sustainable relationships and increased interaction between industry and the education sector.

National and regional communication strategies should be developed to promote and facilitate school-business relationships. Tools that could be utilised in a communications strategy to support and encourage greater interaction between the school and business communities may include:

- Development and circulation of frequently asked questions and other fact sheets that specifically target the education sector and the business community;
- Promotion and distribution of case studies showcasing successful partnerships and highlighting the benefits derived from the process;
- Introduction of state-based champions or liaison officers to promote partnerships locally, offer guidance, provide best-practice advice and objective mediation to participating schools and businesses; and
- Investigation of the feasibility of utilising technology, including blogs, social networking sites and e-learning tools to provide information, training and support while promoting best-practice in school-business relationships.

> Enhancing the Sustainability of School-Business Relationships

Strong partnerships are formed, maintained and sustained in an environment where there is a tradition and culture of collaboration. Building local capacity and embedding a culture of sustainable partnerships will require clear leadership, mentoring, understanding and long-term policy commitments from the education sector and government.

Effective and sustainable partnerships depend upon a number of key attributes including:

- Embedded culture and support for partnerships at all levels of the school, business and relevant government agencies;
- Strong governance and leadership;
- Clear understanding of roles;
- Regular assessment and review;
- Capacity to effectively develop and maintain relationships;
- Clearly articulated objectives and shared goals;
- Defined benefits to all participants; and
- Strong promotion and advocacy.

Training, guidelines and assistance should be provided to all schools and prospective business partners to assist them in identifying and developing partnerships with these attributes.

Mechanisms to encourage the development of a culture of partnering in schools and the business community may include:

- Embedding partnership and relationship management training in professional development for school staff;
- Developing and distributing case studies to showcase the potential of partnerships to contribute to educational outcomes;
- Encouraging, where appropriate, schools and businesses to enter into partnership agreements and memorandums of understanding, formalising the partnership roles and objectives;
- Developing long term policies and initiatives to support and encourage school-business partnerships;
- Implementing communication and promotion strategies at local, regional and national levels; and
- Implementing a suite of incentives to encourage greater participation and engagement in partnerships.



> Incentives to Enhance Business Participation

Queensland's business community is acutely aware of the important role that school-business partnerships have in improving the educational outcomes for students and addressing future skills needs. Businesses currently engaging in partnerships are donating time, resources, skills and funding, which are anticipated to have direct impacts on the productivity and profitability of the business. Incentives to increase the economic feasibility and enhance the benefits for businesses participating in partnerships would assist in strengthening the business case for new and ongoing interactions with the education sector.

Introducing new and enhancing existing incentives for business participation in partnerships with schools will be critical to the development of a culture of sustainable school-business relationships. Combining advocacy and promotion with a series of financial and non-monetary incentives could facilitate increased engagement of the business community with schools.

Significant benefits could be derived from implementing a suite of incentives which could include:

- Financial incentives to offset the productivity costs and support businesses engaging in school-business partnerships, including State and Federal tax offset schemes and grant programs;
- National and regional awards to recognise the value of partnerships, promote best practice and encourage new relationships to be developed;
- Local promotion and recognition of the outcomes of individual partnerships; and
- Opportunities to network and engage with other businesses participating in partnerships.

> Existing Barriers to School-Business Relationships

Barriers to schools, businesses and brokers are extensively canvassed in the discussion paper. As identified, the primary barriers to sustainable school-business partnerships are awareness, understanding and internal culture. Significant benefits could be derived from addressing these barriers through the tools previously discussed, including promotional and communication activities, and through the development of an easy-to-use guide to assist schools and businesses.

Overcoming these barriers could also be achieved by:

- Providing training and professional development to all school staff to increase understanding of the value of relationships with business and to develop a culture of school-business relationships in schools;
- Undertaking activities and providing information to schools aimed at increasing understanding of appropriate mechanisms to engage with businesses and the cultural differences between the school and business environments;



- Development of policies and curriculum linkages to encourage and support the involvement of all staff in business-school relationships;
- Introducing state-based champions and industry liaison officers to assist schools and businesses in developing relationships and to provide objective guidance and mediation; and
- Working with peak industry bodies to develop collaborative, industry specific approaches to school-business relationships.

> Measuring Outcomes

Typically, successful and sustainable partnerships are well-structured and managed to ensure continued benefits for all parties involved. Such partnerships are developed with clearly articulated objectives that link to appropriate mechanisms for evaluation, which would include the definitions of success for all partners.

CCIQ would be supportive of an initiative to develop a framework to assist businesses and schools in evaluating the outcomes of partnerships and collaborative projects. The measurement of outcomes should be guided by the following principles:

- Measures for success should be identified at the commencement of the partnership and/or specific project;
- All parties should agree to regular review and evaluation of the partnership;
- Evaluation processes should avoid being overly prescriptive and bureaucratic;
- Review measures should identify both the accomplishments and benefits derived from the partnership and areas for ongoing improvement.

Measures of success are dependant on the specific partnerships and projects being undertaken, however potential measures of success could include:

- Improved student performance
- Increased publicity for business
- Larger recruitment pools
- Higher profitability
- Successful job placements
- Employee morale
- Student attainment and transition rates
- Customer loyalty
- Increased parent involvement in schools
- Positive public relations and media recognition
- Project completion

CCIQ trusts that this information is of assistance to the Business-School Connections Roundtable. To discuss any aspect of this submission, please contact Elizabeth Roberts, Education and Training Advisor on (07) 3842 2227 or at eroberts@cciq.com.au.

