EVOLVE COLLEGE SUBMISSION

TO

THE EXPERT REVIEW ON AUSTRALIA’S VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

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This submission is made in response to the Expert Review on Australia’s Vocational Education and Training system (“Review”), announced by the Prime Minister on Thursday 29 November 2018.


Why review VET? Is it needed?

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Australia is indeed very needed.

VET provides real, hands on training in multiple and diverse areas of Australian industry. Its goal and work is to produce graduates who are ‘job-ready’; that means they are ready to walk onto the job and start, straight away.

The importance of this, and its immense value to Australian industry, commerce, and national economic performance, cannot be understated.

- International education is Australia’s largest services export and Australia’s 3rd largest export overall.¹
- The education industry contributed a record amount of $28 Billion to the nation’s economy during 2016-17.²
- VET has a record number of students with 4.2 million students enrolled in 2017 (up 0.7% from 2016).³

These are impressive statistics indicating the importance of VET in Australia. For any intelligent observer, there is no doubt VET is important to Australia. However, it is not always perceived that way.

VET: Coming out of difficult times

VET has been through a needed and tumultuous time of change over the past 3 years. This has largely been due to the maladministration of the VET FEE-Help scheme and a number of rogue training providers who were prepared to use that scheme for their own financial advantage, to the detriment of their students, and the system as a whole. There has been a very concentrated, and needed, focus on eliminating those providers from

¹ ACPET International Education Committee Report for ACPET AGM November 2017
² ACPET International Education Committee Report for ACPET AGM November 2017
the system, and commendation should be extended to ASQA, the National VET Regulator, in this regard which, under the leadership of [redacted], has called rogue operators to account and led a strong program of using audits to weed out providers who are not genuine and/or have misled students and/or misused the system. [redacted] leadership is undoubted and respected, by Evolve College.

What has happened in the VET sector is a correction. And, as with any correction, there is an opportunity to start anew. There is an opportunity to recognise the potential of VET, give it its deserved place within the Australian education system, and to support it to grow to its full potential. This is not for the benefit of any small group – but purely because of the nature of VET and its importance to Australia as a whole.

Is VET needed? Looking at VET amidst the whole education sector

However, despite the above, the disparity between VET private providers and TAFE, and between VET as a whole and higher education (higher education providers and universities under TEQSA), is significant, at present. There is a rift between the two, and as yet there has been no ownership publicly of the value which VET brings.

Instead, alongside the clean up, has been a reaction to the VET sector and some unfortunate comments politically where private providers (as a whole) have been spoken of diminutively, in favour of the public providers within the TAFE system.

Reference to the above must be made in any responsible addressing of the VET sector and there must be a responsible realisation of the value which quality private providers offer, year on year, to the VET sector and thus Australian education as a whole.

To limit VET to TAFE or to cut off private providers, by reducing their focus or support in any manner, would not do VET justice. Each arm of the education system has its place and all must be supported to be the very best they can be.

The same goes for VET as opposed to higher education. Both have their place and both are very needed. A university education is quite simply not for all. It plays an extremely important role in serving the industries in which degrees and higher qualifications are required. The way that university educates is very different from the VET sector, and this is understandable – they have different approaches and the type of subject matter and also student, are different. VET is very practical – it is about teaching competence so that a worker is ready to enter their chosen industry and do their job. They should be ready to walk out into work, and
be raring to go – fully prepared by their institution of choice. The industries that VET services are diverse, and the importance of supporting and sustaining education in that large range of industries is obvious.

**A responsible and mature approach to education in Australia would thoroughly respect each sector, knowing its place and its purpose.**

It is quite a simple matter to see that not everyone in every industry requires a Bachelor’s degree, a Masters or a PhD. There is a place for these qualifications and they are a much needed part of our education system as a whole. But equally so, there are many industries that require qualifications of a completely different nature, which must be taught in a highly practical manner, in order to prepare those workers for what will be required of them upon graduation.

Likewise, TAFE has its place, but it should not thwart private providers or become the focus of government support (financially or otherwise) in relation to the VET sector. TAFE plays its part, just as private providers do theirs.

In that context, dramatically reducing the support to private providers within VET is unfortunately very short sighted. We need to move forward as a sector in a manner which recognises the importance of all parts of the system and support them to realise their full potential, for the benefit of Australia as a whole.

**The resilience of the VET sector**

Following the maladministration of the VET FEE-Help scheme, and the misuse of it by certain providers, the Government reduced funding from $2.98 billion in 2015 to approximately $90 million in 2017. A reduction of funding to a sector to 1/30th of its former value is certain to have an impact. However, the VET sector is resilient, and has shown this.

- There were 4,279 providers that delivered to 4.2 million students in 2016 (the first year of the change). (4,331 providers delivered to 4.0 million students in 2015.)
- There were 4,193 providers that delivered to 4.2 million students in 2017.

Those figures indicated relative stability despite the eroding of funding.

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A commitment to VET is required

There is a need for government to commit to VET, and by that it is meant to both TAFE and quality private providers.

In addition to that, there is needed to be regulation that allows true innovation to bloom, and a true response to what industry is calling for.

As part of this, we don’t need minimum standards – we need support and a forward thinking government, regulator and providers that deeply appreciate and know the value of VET to all Australians.

However, at present, we have a solution throwing approach – much like a dartboard. We have various political spokespersons putting forward solutions, but none so far has shown a holding and respect of the VET sector as a whole. There is work to be done.

Part of us maturing in our approach to education, is to realise that solution-throwing does not work. As presented by Evolve College at a prominent VET conference in 2017, that approach simply throws solutions at a problem; but like a band-aid, they do not last. Therefore, in order to truly move forward in VET, we need to value what it is that VET is. From that realisation, each stakeholder within VET can play their part in making it all it can and should be.

Part of this is a call to all operators in the VET sector (public and private), to ensure they are educating to the standards being called for – for the true education of the Australian public. As is shown in more detail below, education is not about minimum standards, just getting by, chasing our tails and living in overwhelm (which is the experience of many in the sector). This grossly undersells what we could be offering, and what it is our job to offer.

Being an education provider is a privilege.

And the bottom line really is – that education is not about us. It is not about making a buck and nor is it a quick way to success (although it is fine to be successful as a consequence).

A call to all stakeholders

The shift in VET applies equally to all other stakeholders in VET – the advisers, the sellers of materials, and the consultancy industry. That part of the market is full of buzzwords, quick fire sales, non-compliant resources being sold, and a lot of money to be made. Blame could be laid upon those selling (who of course are accountable for this) but underneath that practice is something deeper – that the providers taking up those offerings are
looking for quick solutions. After all, there can never be supply without a demand.

All stakeholders in VET should be held to account.

**Standards**

However, there is also a regulatory aspect to the practice of purchasing resources as described above. If the government standards are tick boxes, then the response of at least many providers is going to be to do what is required to tick the box. Unfortunately, this breeds a market where service providers and curriculum resource sellers can do very well, but working only to absolute minimum standards and, from our experience from what we have observed across the industry, many are actually not even achieving that level.

**Evolve College operates nothing like this.** Evolve College has purchased resources in the past, for informational purposes and to get an indicative benchmark of what was being used in the industry. However, across various options, Evolve College found very little if any it could use – to measure up to the level of educational quality we have committed to. Evolve College thus resolved, a number of years ago, to write all its own materials, and we have been developing our own materials ever since.

Our product not only meets compliance standards, it exceeds them, because it has one thing at its core – and that is a sharp focus on the quality of education delivered to the student.

This is an example that should well become the benchmark for all providers. Nothing about our operation is geared to “make a buck”. Our purpose is to educate and as said elsewhere in this submission, we consider that to be a privilege, that comes with a responsibility; it is not a right.

**What is needed in education is not to lift our standards. We actually need completely new standards,** not in a regulatory sense (as the technical aspects are needed and should remain), but in a real, operational sense. And therefore, it is not compliance that we need in VET, it is quality.

Indeed, the way forward for VET, and for education as a whole, is to make it all about quality. As part of that, to truly move forward in VET, we need to completely revamp our approach, and re-frame it in terms of what matters to us – to us all.

Education is Australia’s third largest export. But education in VET is also what shapes entry to industry. And the quality of worker industry receives.
Evolve College, for one, will continue to set and walk standards of true excellence and care in its delivery of education and the student experience that will surpass the benchmarks set by Government. This is the way forward for all educational institutions.

We offer this submission on that basis and foundation.

**Respect for private providers**

We applaud the genuineness of those members of the VET sector, some of whom have been in the sector for a very long time, and bring a very real, practical and realised commitment to seeing their students become the best prepared graduates they can possibly be.

There are many success stories in VET due to the presence of such people – and this adds much to the quality of Australia’s education system and the enormous contribution that in turn makes to the ongoing wheels of industry and its driving of economic sustainability in Australia as a whole.

Yes, VET has enormous value to Australia. This is a fact.

As stated in this submission, universities play their role. Scholarly advance, academic study and preparation for certain professional careers, are all part of the university system and its role. However universities are not for everyone, and their way of educating is different.

Therefore, a responsible Australian government / administrator of the education system in Australia will let universities do what they do best, and let VET do what it does best.

However, quite aside from that – across the entire education system, there must be one tenet. One tenet that binds all of education. And that is that:

**Education is about people.**
What is needed is a focus on quality. By this it is meant true quality.

**What is also needed is true backing of VET by the Government (State and Federal) – a backing of the true importance and vitality of VET to Australia's educational and economic future.**

And for each provider within the system, all need to make it about nothing but quality. Guidance and support is needed in this regard.

**Using case studies to support providers**

Colleges like Evolve College can be used as a case study and example that can offer an example and inspiration to others that it can indeed be done. This is needed, as providers benefit greatly from seeing how it is done – so they can realise that there is no need to be bogged down in what they see as red tape, but they can in fact operate to a completely different standard.

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Across the industry, education is needed to bring the true meaning of quality. Not quality as in ticking boxes, but quality as in meeting the purpose of education: to develop and grow people.
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At Evolve College:
- There is no getting bogged down by red tape, there is no struggle against the system.
- The standards are so much higher than the minimum, and the whole operation is founded on such a strong degree of care and commitment to the student, that meeting the minimum standards is a fundamental part of what we do.
- It is simply obvious that those standards need to be met, as part of us working to *something far greater* – the need to truly support the student to grow, develop and be prepared to be the best worker they can be, and in-turn upon graduation play their part in helping to lift standards in the workplaces they enter.

We offer the above, not to blow our own trumpet but to state how simple it is to bring what is needed – an attitudinal shift is required so that the whole sector views quality and the sector’s purpose in this way.

**Watching out for empty words**

It is very easy to state such words as above and sound impressive, and perhaps there may be many submissions so made to the Expert Review on Australia’s VET system. However, we offer what we as a team have learned through many, many years in education, and that is what we know to be the true purpose of education. The key is in whether the words are actually lived.
Education is one of the core pillars of our communities and society

The true purpose of education must always be quality delivery, which can only ever be from a quality lived, breathed and walked by all its management, staff and trainers, as well as reflected in its training and materials, and the way in which students are developed and given the opportunity to learn and grow during their entire time of study.

This is a priceless offering to all those who partake in it, and the contribution such quality students can then offer to industry when they become the graduates and workers of tomorrow, cannot be understated. Its effect is, in fact, obvious.

The above forms the foundation of all of our recommendations and comments in relation to the VET sector. We look below at how work patterns are expected to change in the future and what education needs to do to respond. All comments are made in the context of what is said above.

Expected changes in future work patterns (Terms of Review, item 3)

[The Review] will consider expected changes in future work patterns and the impact of new technologies and how the VET sector can prepare Australians for those changes and the opportunities they will bring.

In response, there is much discussion in Australia at present about skilling Australians for the future. It is known that new technologies are emerging and that this is likely to increase exponentially in coming years.

In Evolve College’s view, the discussion is missing a key element, which is that the exact technologies and thus the skills required for the human element of jobs that will surround them in years to come, are not known at this point.

Instead of committing our education to a static point addressing what is currently known, we need to open ourselves to the skills that will be required in order to cope with a rapidly changing future.

What does this look like in reality? In reality, the workers of tomorrow need to be skilled in ways of adapting to a changing world. It is not possible for anyone today to define what the workers in decades to come will be doing or what will be required of them. Herein lies the trap – if we mould our education system on teaching technical skills, we will teach only to the parameters we can currently see. Technical skills are important, and of course they must form part of our curricula, as an education system, but more important even than that, is the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing world and working environment.
Best practice model

It is very important in shaping the education system of tomorrow to use and refer to best practice models. This is not to aggrandise the model or case study selected but to offer inspiration to others in the knowing of what is possible for other educational institutions, through virtue of the fact that one educational institution has done it.

Evolve College has focused entirely on three things in its education delivery:

- Quality
- Integrity
- Student support

These are critical to the success of the student. They also are fundamental to ensure that the student is fully prepared to enter their chosen industry whether now or in the future.

Technical prowess is a given in all Evolve College education. All students are taught the technical skills they need in their chosen field, by experts working in the field who are dedicated to both that chosen profession, as well as education.

Alongside technical prowess it is very important that students be prepared with core skills that will see them ready for the working environment, whatever this may bring. Evolve College has been teaching in this manner for 4 years, and prior to this its founding directors taught in VET for approximately 20 years. We are leaders in the VET sector.

Evolve College graduates are exemplary. For this reason, the feedback we have received of the change and growth in students over the duration of their course is outstanding.

Sample feedback from Evolve College graduates

Sample 1:

“Studying has not only offered me a qualification that I can now use to work in my chosen field, it has changed my whole approach to how I live my life. I am feeling strong and confident to go into this next phase of my life.”

Sample 2:

“My life was a mess and I was not happy. My life changed during the course, and now I am strong in my independence, working full-time and feeling really happy with myself. My family and friends really noticed the changes in me.”
Sample 3:

“From studying with Evolve College my life changed in ways I never thought possible.”

Further samples of feedback of student transformation are included in Appendix A.

This is the type of feedback all education providers should receive, and the very reason we share this with the Review committee – because we are deeply committed to quality in education.

How is the above achieved?

It is very important to note that the above is not achieved through “life-coaching” or imposing any “development agenda” or the like on the student. We do not use buzzwords here at Evolve College and we are not out to “get our students anywhere”. In fact, the way in which the above results are achieved is almost astoundingly simple.

The above is achieved simply from student support – true support.

We teach massage and other community services courses – and our focus is on the education in the chosen field to prepare the student for entry into their profession of choice. They need to be ready and confident to walk into their chosen job and hit the ground running.

All of Evolve College’s people and systems are there to support the student.

Effectively (and without even having to say so), the College says to the student –

We believe in you, you have enrolled with us so you have already demonstrated a readiness to work and prepare yourself for your chosen industry (as our students have to work and our standards are high) – so if you have come to us, then you have our full support and, quite frankly, you can take this as far as you want to go. You have all resources at our disposal to develop and grow as much as you want to....

That is not rocket science – it is simple, and it is absolute in its (our) dedication to the student.

And so, from this, we see students come in who may be anxious, or who may lack confidence, or who may have not been able to hold down a job. All of these are very typical problems across our modern society. Evolve College
does not teach how to deal with anxiety, or how to increase commitment to life and work. That is all taken care of by fully supporting the student and standing behind and beside them with our full commitment – to bring them all they call for from us so they can go as far as they want to in their study.

It is actually all very simple.

But its simplicity comes from the fact that Evolve College is fundamentally committed to true education – and that, to us, means it is all about people.

This is the shift that is required in education across all providers, at whatever level of the system they work. The above comments apply equally to higher education.

**What motivates us?**

To add to the above, Evolve College does not go out seeking financial return first. Our business is centred firmly on our primary principle, and that is that our business, the business of education, is about people, and the quality of what we deliver to them, in every aspect of our business. This flows through all of our arms of education and training.

At educational conferences and trade shows and the like, where Evolve College representatives are often asked to speak, we share that we could always just sail along and do brilliantly ourselves as an organisation, but our business is not about that. It is about people and because of this, it is about giving back. We devote much time to sharing with others the way we do things – we do this through networking, speaking at events, and one on one meetings.

In submitting this submission to the Expert Review on Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System, we liberally share the expertise that our team has gathered over 30 years in education at a very senior level, as well as in training individuals in the very important skills they need to enable them to realise their full potential and be truly valued contributors to their workplace and Australian industry as a whole.

The above commentary is not only essential to the future of education in Australia; it also underpins Australia’s future economic performance. Evolve College sees a fundamental equation, which is as follows:

\[
\text{The quality of graduate} = \text{the quality of worker} = \text{the quality of contribution to industry} = \text{the quality of output.}
\]

All of the above, of course, impacts upon Australia’s Gross Domestic Product, i.e. education is critical – it affects our performance and level of wellbeing as a nation as a whole.
Hence it is not only a philosophical discussion which is to be had on shaping the VET system, but it is one that impacts our whole society:

- The education system
- Our young (of today and tomorrow)
- Our workers (of today and tomorrow)
- All industries
- Our economy
- Our Gross Domestic Product and hence financial performance
- Australia’s standing internationally
- The value of our exports, of which education should be seen as a primary example

The above indicates the importance of not educating to minimum standards. In order to educate beyond minimum standards, to the level required, a huge injection of purpose is required into the education sector as a whole.

That injection is one that is focused on people.

Moving beyond minimum standards

Each year, Evolve College gathers its trainers and assessors for an intensive training and PD session to grow and develop them, bring them into line with where Evolve College is going next, and so all of this can be brought back to the students.

At a session two years ago, the trainers, in groups, were asked to define the minimum versus real/true standard for particular areas:

- **Minimum standards were defined** as being the standard required in order to be “compliant” or meet the benchmark required legally or under regulatory instruments, of educational institutions. In other words, minimum standards are – getting over the line, **ticking the boxes**, and doing the **minimum possible to not get in trouble** as an educational institution.

- **The real or true standard** was defined as the standard educational systems **should be teaching to**.

That was all the definitions that were given to the trainers – they know education; they are with Evolve College for a reason. We wanted to see what they would come up with in defining key terms in education, using aspects that are common across diverse training packages.

The difference between the two “standards” was marked in the trainers’ answers. A sample of the trainers’ answers is below. The trainers were asked to give the minimum and true standards for each of the following areas, all
of which are very common in many training packages, and hence applicable to many different industries:

Ethics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Standard</strong></th>
<th><strong>Trainers’ answers</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Standard</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Behaviours that everyone complies with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real/True Standard</td>
<td>• Living a high level of integrity and being a role model</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Understanding what you do has a flow on effect</td>
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Diversity:

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<tr>
<td>Real/True Standard</td>
<td>• Celebration and appreciation of all – equalness of every level of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Absolute equality meaning our differences become insignificant.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• There are no differences within</td>
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</table>

The total six areas which trainers delivered their definitions of standards for, are summarised at **Appendix B**.

The above is demonstrative of the manner in which education is geared at present to minimum standards.

At present, educational institutions of all levels teach via a curriculum and approach that is based on ticking boxes.

Unfortunately, the result is that even well meaning and dedicated teachers/trainers/lecturers are restricted as to what can be delivered as there are so many tick boxes that need to be satisfied that their focus is forced to be upon that, as opposed to what matters – which is a far more fulsome and rounded educational experience for the student.

**If we as a nation are to mature into a society of responsible, fully contributing adults, then our education must prepare students according to the true standards that are called for in education.**

This applies to students of all ages and stages of our population: our young, as well as upskilling or new skilling adults already in the workforce, and
educating and preparing our unemployed of any age and background for the world of work.

Australia, in order to truly be a leading nation in the future, and to look after its people, needs to work to a completely new set of standards in education, and remove the minimum standards currently operated to. These minimum standards will of course be required to be met, with all the detail they entail, but this will follow consequentially by virtue of the set standard being much higher.

This is the transformation which is on offer through educational reform in Australia. It is the way in which Evolve College currently operates. Hence the Evolve College model is offered by way of this submission, not to highlight or showcase Evolve College for this College’s own benefit, as we have no interest in this, but rather from our sincere, proven and highly dedicated approach to education as a whole.
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE FEEDBACK FROM EVOLVE COLLEGE STUDENTS

Sample quotes:

“Studying has not only offered me a qualification that I can now use to work in my chosen field, it has changed my whole approach to how I live my life. I am feeling strong and confident to go into this next phase of my life.”

“My life was a mess and I was not happy. My life changed during the course, and now I am strong in my independence, working full-time and feeling really happy with myself. My family and friends really noticed the changes in me.”

“From studying with Evolve College my life changed in ways I never thought possible.”

“The course has prepared me for everything I have encountered in my business.”

“My life has changed significantly since graduating.”

“My life had no real direction. Through my studies and the support I have received from the College, I am now motivated, inspired and looking forward to my future business!”

“From my studies I have become competent and confident, growing as a person and therapist and I am now successfully running my own business.”

“I was always stressed and anxious, slowly and with much encouragement and support, I have settled into a rhythm with my studies which has impacted every aspect of my life.”

[Names withheld as information is personal]

This is a grand transformation on the back of a very supportive educational institution.

For quality providers, compliance is never a tick box. It is the BARE MINIMUM.
APPENDIX B

TRAINER RESPONSES – MINIMUM VERSUS TRUE STANDARDS

Evolve College Trainers and Assessors were asked in 2017 about the difference between minimum standards (“compliance only”) and the real/true standards – applicable to topics common across multiple training packages. Samples of their answers are below.

**WHS – Work Health and Safety:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Trainers’ answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Standard</td>
<td>• Identifying hazards and eliminating risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real/True Standard</td>
<td>• Taking care of people</td>
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**Infection Control:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Trainers’ answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Standard</td>
<td>• Eliminating contamination and risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real/True Standard</td>
<td>• Care and safety of people; taking responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Excellent Communications:**

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<th>Standard</th>
<th>Trainers’ answers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Standard</td>
<td>• Having the skills to make yourself understood and to understand others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Real/True Standard        | • Listening, speaking and responding to whatever is needed  
                           | • Expressing and sharing from our own lived experience  
                           | • Understanding that we are always in communication and this has a ripple effect |

**Diversity:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
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</table>
| Minimum Standard          | • Being tolerant of differences (i.e. silently ‘putting up with’, which can allow underlying disrespect)  
                           | • Not discriminating (i.e. outward actions, which leave underlying attitudes and beliefs untouched) |
| Real/True Standard        | • Celebration and appreciation of all – equalness of every level of society.  
                           | • Absolute equality meaning our differences become insignificant.  
                           | • There are no differences within |

**Ethics:**
### Standard Trainers’ answers

<table>
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| Minimum Standard | - Delivering a code of conduct and respect  
                  - Behaviours that everyone complies with |
| Real/True Standard | - Living a high level of integrity and being a role model  
                     - Understanding what you do has a flow on effect  
                     - Acting on behalf of a greater benefit for all |

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### Education:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Standard</strong></th>
<th><strong>Trainers’ answers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Minimum Standard | - Ticking the boxes  
                  - Meeting minimum standards  
                  - Producing learning outcomes that establish a business profile that is profitable |
| Real/True Standard | - Being a role model to inspire growth of a person on every level in all aspects of life.  
                     - Confirming. Equality.  
                     - Provide a foundation for students to develop & grow.  
                     - Enabling every individual to be the best they can be, and to continue to aspire and evolve. |