



Queensland Secondary Principals' Association

QSPA Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 Submission

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The need for an amendment

The primary policy objectives of the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 (the Bill) are to support school autonomy by enhancing localised decision-making, support school safety, improve educational outcomes and reduce red tape. The Bill also aims to ensure the portfolio's legislation is contemporary and meets the current operational needs of the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) and its education and training stakeholders.

It is the position of the Queensland Secondary Principals' Association (QSPA) that federal, state and territory governments have an obligation to ensure that high quality public secondary education is provided to every young person no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances.

Education in our nation is a democratic and human right. In contemporary Australia, the provision of education also comes with an expectation of a minimum standard that ranks highly when international comparisons are made. Australia has slipped in this area in recent years.

The adolescent years are the **high stakes years** as they are significant predictors for life success and wellbeing. It is during these years that exposure to adult and community problems (such as drugs, peer violence and sexual experimentation) have the potential to change the lives of young people..

Only government can ensure that there is a schooling option for all and only government, working with the profession, can require achievement benchmarks to reflect the quality of that schooling.

In this context QSPA provides the following submission to the Education and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 addressing selected key themes.

1. Miscellaneous amendments to DETE portfolio Acts

QSPA acknowledges that the reduction of red tape is an important component in the improvement of the functioning of school.

QSPA supports this section of the Bill.

2. EGPA amendments

1) Directions to 'hostile' persons

The safety of students, staff, parents and visitors to a school premises is paramount. The ability of a Principal to give a hostile person a verbal direction to leave the grounds is very practical; previously a letter needed to be issued, often under difficult circumstances. The 24 hour period allows for a 'cooling off' period that is often needed to find a solution to the matter concerned.

The ability of a Principal to prohibit a hostile person from the premises for a period of 60 days will be used where the 24 hour period has not worked or the situation is of a serious nature.

The ability of DETE CEO to prohibit a person from the premises for up to one year will be used for the most serious conduct.

The amendments stated in this section are fully supported by QSPA.

2) Power to grant exemptions

The power to grant exemptions is best placed with the Principal of the school that the student is attending. The Principal is aware of the personal circumstances of the student and his/her family.

QSPA supports this amendment.

3) Enrolment of mature age students

The enrolment of mature age students in mainstream high schools can be problematic. When mature age applicants are issued with a negative notice, this can place the school and school staff in a difficult position.

The ability of a mature age applicant to attend Schools of Distance Education and TAFE are sensible alternatives and in many situations, the most appropriate.

QSPA supports this amendment.

4) Criminal history information

The good order and management of a school is a precursor to excellence in teaching and learning. The transfer of critical and relevant information from the Queensland Police

Service (QPS) to DETE (and schools) is clear in the sustaining of a safe environment for all persons on that school site.

QSPA acknowledges that there may be civil liberty issues in relation to the release of such information about minors, but from a principal's perspective, this is an expansion of their rights to access information about the students in their schools.

QSPA supports this amendment.

5) Power to commence proceedings

Attendance at school is clearly linked to success at school. The ability to initiate proceedings correctly sits with the Regional Director with advice from the Principal. Principals will continue to deploy a wide range of targeted strategies, through a variety of people and agencies, to ensure students are engaged in schooling.

QSPA supports this amendment.

6) Distance education – fees and cancellation of enrolment

Queensland Schools of Distance Education (SDE) deliver high quality programs in many cases to rural and remote students. As a result, SDE's enjoy a high reputation.

The ability for non-Queensland families to exploit a loophole and therefore have access to SDE's should rightly be corrected.

QSPA supports this amendment.

7) International educational institutions

QSPA supports this amendment.

8) Confidentiality

Secondary schools are increasingly requested to be the source of research – both at a staff and student level. QPS in carrying out their duties, often seek student/family personal information as a matter of process.

QSPA supports this amendment.

Conclusion:

QSPA acknowledges the desire to reduce red tape in our secondary schools. Secondary schools are increasingly complex organisations, particularly with family and social dysfunction becoming increasingly prevalent in our society.

We believe that the amendments presented here will reduce red tape and enable the role of Principals to be focussed on learning and teaching.

QSPA represents the Principals and Deputy Principals of over 400 Secondary, P-10 and P-12 schools across the state of Queensland. We are dedicated to the moral purpose that universal access can serve – an education provision that enables all children to achieve their potential.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Education and Other Legislation Amendments Bill 2014.

