



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

Hansard 1 June 2000

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (4.58 p.m.): If this State and its leaders are serious about securing our economic future, we must devote our energies to strategies that will make this inevitable, and quality vocational education and training is one strategy that must be adopted by every sector of our community if we are to compete in an environment of constant change. No-one in this Parliament can ignore the effect that technological advances have had on the way we do business, and neither should we assume that these advances will in any way diminish the effect on Queensland commerce, and yet the most obvious strategy to combat the challenges offered by technology is overlooked until the situation becomes critical.

Continuous improvement has long been accepted as a technique for success within many organisations, yet its connection to the maintenance of skills has yet to be made for many of our employers. We need a working ethos which values training and lifelong learning and which is underpinned by responsive, flexible and fair legislation. The private sector needs the right environment within which it can operate successfully. What is needed is an industry-led training system where industry sets the standards and one that reduces the bureaucracy to an absolute minimum.

The committee structures created in this Training and Employment Bill build an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy onto an already complex vocational education and training system in Queensland. There is no doubt that we need a far less cumbersome system than that which we have under the current legislation. When the coalition consulted on reforms to the vocational education and training system in 1997 and 1998, we got a very clear signal from industry, training providers, apprentices and trainees that the maze of advisory structures and standing committees had not instilled confidence in the system. Duplication of operations and unnecessary bureaucracy were two of the major common concerns.

Under the current legislation there are four statutory committees: a Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission; a State Training Council; an Accreditation Council; and a State Planning and Development Council. Then there are a number of committees which either successive Ministers or the commission have created, including Nagi Binanga, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee; a Disability Advisory Committee, an ACE Advisory Council and a Small Business Advisory Committee. I understand that the department recently added to this long list of committees with the creation of yet another committee, a Recognition Management Committee, to deal with quality issues.

That is 11 committees. Overlaid on those 11 committees are some 20 industrial training advisory bodies and their council, creating a system which is weighted down with a complex network of decision-making and advisory committees. Stakeholders tell us that it is a wonder any decisions which have any real impact on the end users of the system—employers and individuals—get made at all. Indeed, it is a wonder that, with all that input, we do not have the best system in the world. But we do not.

We listened to the concerns of stakeholders, and in the 1998 Bill we put before the Parliament we pared back this bureaucratic committee system to one Queensland Training Authority. We took the view at the time—and it is still relevant today—that the implementation of initiatives under the National Training Framework, including the Australian Recognition Framework, would require system flexibility

that encouraged participation in training by industry, business and the community. In addition, we wanted to ensure we had a system that would foster decision making at the local level. We also wanted to achieve a balance between system flexibility and system quality. Our 1998 Bill embodied both these aims. So I am pleased that the Bill we are debating today has reduced that burdensome and outdated committee structure, even if only to some extent.

We envisaged one authority which would operate independently of the department with the responsibility for determining criteria and guidelines for the registration of training organisations, accreditation of courses and the registration of training agreements. This authority would have represented industry and would have had the charter to write the rules for the vocational education and training system and advise on how the quality and integrity of the system would be enhanced. The authority we proposed would have had membership of up to nine people appointed for their experience and expertise in vocational education and training, industry or community affairs and for their ability to contribute to the strategic direction of the State's vocational education and training system. In line with the principles of tripartite representation, we also made it explicit in the 1998 Bill that membership would contain employee and employer representation. Accountability, particularly to small business and industry, lay at the heart of our proposed new arrangements. We saw a State Training Authority that would not work in isolation from its constituency.

It is still true today that advice from industry and the community needs to be sourced from a broad base and plays an important role in shaping the State's vocational education and training initiatives. Industry, enterprises and the community must have access to the decision-making and advisory bodies but must also be routinely consulted on major issues which impact upon them. Our legislative proposals would have achieved this. We were committed to true industry leadership of the vocational education and training system in Queensland. Let us hope the Government pursues this aim with its new Training and Employment Board. Let us hope that it gets it right this time, because it certainly has not got it right to date.

The committee structures we have before us in the Government's Training and Employment Bill include a Training and Employment Board and a Training Recognition Council. The proposed Training and Employment Board will replace the existing commission. This board will have advisory and executive functions. It will have up to 15 members, four of whom will be persons with standing with unions and four of whom will be persons who have standing with employers.

It is a good thing that this board is subject to signed directions from the Minister, because it does not have within its membership as a directly appointed member the chief executive of the department. Let us hope that the board does not venture off into territory that is not of its domain and do any damage before such direction can be issued. Without the guidance of the chief executive on policy matters, this may be a very real risk. This lack of policy direction of the board represents, as it currently stands today, a very major weakness of the Bill.

We held the view that the principal advisory committee to the Minister should have a statutory requirement to consult widely with appropriate industry and community bodies, and the administrative arrangements for implementation included a performance review mechanism to ensure that the committee would be held accountable. We did not include any statutory standing committees of this principal advisory committee. We did not want to continue the duplication of effort by the Accreditation Council, the State Training Council and the State Planning and Development Council under our proposed legislation. This did not mean that the authority would have acted in a void, however, and we included the capacity for the authority to create its own committees as needed, with the approval of the Minister.

Another feature of the Queensland Training Authority structure proposed by the coalition Government in 1998 was the strategic focus of this authority. We wanted to relieve this peak body of administrative and operational responsibilities. We wanted the authority to be the stakeholders' voice and vision for the vocational education and training system.

A separate Training Recognition Council under the Government's Bill will amalgamate the State Training Council and the Accreditation Council. Instead of there being two moribund and irrelevant committees, the Government has taken the bold step of simply joining these two moribund and irrelevant committees into one and collapsing their functions. It is a source of concern that this council will have such wide-ranging executive powers. As my honourable colleague the member for Clayfield and shadow Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations has highlighted, we do not have driving licences issued and withdrawn by a committee. Why would we use such a scheme for the registration of training organisations or the accreditation of courses? It is simply not necessary. Who does the work on the ground anyway? It is the officers of the department who will execute the Training and Recognition Council's functions on a day-to-day basis. This simply creates a facade of a committee doing these things.

We provided for a range of industry and community advisory mechanisms. We saw the industry training advisory bodies continuing to play a key role in the system by giving specific industry

perspectives on industry skills shortages and other training requirements. We expanded the source of advice to include groups representing a sector of industry or a geographical area. This was to ensure that advice was representative of industry and community needs, particularly for small business and enterprises in rural regions, many of whom told us of their dissatisfaction with the consultative mechanism inside the ITABs. Advice from the eight regional round tables we established, along with other community and industry groups, would have balanced the advice. Round tables were a successful coalition initiative introduced in 1997-98. Their role was to provide advice on regional skills shortages and to assist with planning and allocating resources for the vocational education and training system by providing a regional perspective.

Representatives of both public and private training organisations sat on these round tables with local industry representatives so that changing regional needs could be addressed at the local level. Accountability needs to extend to everyone in the system, including those groups responsible for providing the advice that is so crucial to the success of the system. Similarly, conflicts of interest and the potential for bias in these key advisory bodies must be managed.

We stipulated that industry training advisory bodies would be ineligible for appointment as ITABs if they were registered as training organisations. To provide credible, unbiased and impartial advice on training priorities for public funding is virtually impossible when an ITAB is itself in the business of training. This potential for bias and conflict of interest is not recognised in the Government's Bill.

The committee and advisory structures in the Employment and Training Bill are a step forward in that the heavy weight of bureaucratic structures and functions has been improved somewhat, but they run the risk of perpetuating the old ways of doing things. I commend the Government for finally bringing this long overdue legislation before the House. For too long Queensland has suffered under the weight of a complex and highly regulated system. It is a pity that the opportunity to really refine that regulatory system has not been fully realised.

There will, of course, be interest in how this Bill affects training outcomes throughout Queensland. My own interest is naturally focused on CSIT on the Sunshine Coast. This facility, as with everything on the coast, has undergone dramatic growth over the years. The Mooloolaba campus is in what could be called an academic precinct in my electorate. We have the Mountain Creek Primary School and the Mountain Creek State High School co-existing comfortably in the same street, with the TAFE college and the University of the Sunshine Coast not far away—a pleasant bike ride away, in fact.

The Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE is probably no different from any other provider, Government or private, in that it is bursting at the seams with IT training. The most significant areas for training at Mooloolaba are tourism, training and hospitality. One of the interesting areas that is proving very popular is heritage and interpretive tourism studies, which is responsible for training our new generation of tour guides. I also understand that CSIT has recently gained the services of Helen O'Niel in the hairdressing faculty. I believe Cooloola's gain is Central Queensland's loss in this respect.

Recent advice is that in round two CSIT has just been offered a \$2.5m training package which equates to 520 student places. I say well done to the Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE. If this offer is accepted, it means a flow-on to teacher positions, administration and supplies to be purchased in the local community. This is all great news for the Sunshine Coast. I trust that the Minister will be mindful of CSIT's current role and future challenges when capital works funding requirements are being considered. The team at CSIT are very proactive. Last year we were looking at the Camcos corridor which is planned to provide a new way of getting to and from the Sunshine Coast. It was quite a fulsome consultative process. CSIT offered to become involved by utilising part of its land so that it could have a station on the transport corridor. The station would help students on the campus and assist the community.

I have attended a lot of community organisation meetings at the TAFE college at Mooloolaba. It interfaces very well with the local community. That is something that should be encouraged in all our schools, whether they be universities, TAFE institutes, high schools or primary schools. These places tend to be locked up at night. However, they can be used for these meetings. I know that the TAFE college in Mooloolaba is very much involved in this area. I understand that discussions are taking place this week with people from the Mountain Creek Primary School and the Mountain Creek State High School in order to overcome significant problems caused by parking and traffic access by students, parents and staff. I am sure that that cooperative spirit will ensure that the needs of all persons are met.
