



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (3.38 p.m.): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Training and Employment Bill 2000 and to develop in more detail some of the issues already discussed by the shadow Minister, the member for Clayfield. Australian businesses today are facing the challenge of global competition. To survive and prosper in this environment, enterprises need access to skills that are of world-class standard. We need an effective framework in place which will provide those skills. The apprenticeship system has stood the test of time as an effective way of upskilling people.

The notion of apprenticeship training is certainly nothing new. Trade training has been around for as long as commerce itself. The essence of learning a vocational skill through being indentured to a master has changed little over the years, perhaps even centuries. Labour trends confirm that rapidly advancing technologies and pressures from global competition are squeezing out the necessity for unskilled labour. Instead, the requirements for current and emerging industries focus on specific skills that demand the support of dedicated vocational education and training.

Consequently, trade training is experiencing a dramatic shift in focus with the development of niche services and the expansion of structured training into industries where it has not existed in the past. Historically, the apprenticeship and traineeship system in Queensland has not kept pace with these developments. It is a system in need of legislative overhaul. Structured training opportunities have for too long been restricted to what we know as traditional trades. They have been restricted by an approval process which is very bureaucratic. Under the existing legislation, industries also have to apply through a highly regulated process to have other callings recognised as apprenticeship and traineeship callings. In our view it is an inefficient process which is increasingly open to question.

It is unfortunate that the Government has not taken the opportunity to streamline this bureaucratic approval process for apprenticeships and traineeships when it is clearly in need of comprehensive overhaul. To some extent, the antiquated approval process seems to be a wasteful duplication of State and Federal bureaucracies, because the training has already been endorsed at the national level.

The national training framework provides for a wide range of qualifications across a wide range of occupations. Under this framework the industry sets the standards for the qualifications and how the skills should be assessed for that particular industry, including for apprenticeships and traineeships. These standards, assessment guidelines and the qualifications determined by industry are endorsed nationally. It has not even been established that there is a need for an additional approval process, but that is, of course, what we have in this Bill. The Government has seen fit to perpetuate an unduly bureaucratic process of applications and approvals after industry has already gone through an extensive consultation process and there has been a national validation and endorsement process. Under the national training framework, qualifications can be obtained through training on the job, through recognition of prior learning, through college training or through a combination of those. It allows the sort of flexibility that employers, apprentices and trainees have long been asking for.

I will give an example. The new national training arrangements for one industry may include 28 qualifications ranging from a certificate I through to certificates II, III and IV, diploma and advanced diploma. In Queensland, under this Government's legislation we are debating today, the industry would

have to make 28 applications, some of considerable length, to have each of these qualifications recognised as apprenticeship or traineeship training. All of this when these qualifications have already been through an endorsement process! It is bureaucracy gone mad!

There is no disputing that one of the best ways of people getting skilled is through the mix of workplace training—that is, learning on the job—and college-based training. This type of training should be available across a broad spectrum of industries and enterprises. Under the new national arrangements this is possible. The potential is there for any qualification in any occupational area to be obtained through an apprenticeship or traineeship under this scheme, but not in Queensland. The Beattie Government, in maintaining this additional layer of approval process for apprenticeships and traineeships, will be holding Queensland back.

The chief executive has been talking in public forums about his department's success in creating generic training orders for apprenticeships and traineeships. He claims that as each of these training programs is developed and approved the industrial relations aims are put in place and that new packages bolt on to the generic order. Industrial relations are obviously not the problem. What could possibly be the real reason for including a highly bureaucratic approval process for apprenticeships or traineeships? If an industry group or a company wants to employ people in traineeships or apprenticeships, it will have to apply to the Training Recognition Council for approval for the specific apprenticeship or traineeship. If the current processes are any indication, it will continue to be a paper-ridden bureaucratic process. If members doubt this they should just ask the industry training advisory bodies about the tedious application processes they currently go through to get approval.

Industries have really embraced the new framework and have sought to have some new qualifications in different occupation areas available as apprenticeships and traineeships. In doing so they have hit a wall of paperwork and inflexibility. In the past it has taken up to five or six months to get these approvals. That is, of course, if they are processed at all. Queenslanders are missing out on employment opportunities while these bureaucratic processes are used as a filter to restrict apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities to the usual club. While we recognise the importance of these more traditional trade areas and the historically important contribution these industries have made to Queensland's economy, we must also look to the future, where the new jobs will be. We must not ignore skills shortages in these manufacturing industries, but at the same time we must not forget the obligation to prepare for the future. Expanded opportunities for structured workplace training are needed. They should not be restricted to the traditional trades.

A recent report published by the Australian Industry Group titled *Engineering Skills Shortages* has highlighted that the flexibilities enabled by the introduction of a national training framework are not being taken up. The report states that rigid regulatory requirements and difficulties in accessing the system are part of the problem. There was an opportunity to fix the rigid regulatory requirements through this legislation. That opportunity has been deliberately disregarded. The old system is being maintained.

For too long the State Training Council and its decisions have reflected a dominant union bias. The continuation of the same arrangements with the proposed Training Recognition Council will cripple the system. The Government needs to look seriously at the membership of the proposed council and the board to ensure that the old ways are not simply perpetuated. The old training club needs a clean sweep. We need an approach that will truly see our training system at the leading edge. We need reform, not just a continuation of an antiquated system at the hands of tired old union bureaucrats.

Where is the logic in imposing a second layer of approvals for apprenticeships and traineeships? Why is there a need for a statutory approval process? People in apprenticeships and traineeships have long had specific protections safeguarding their employment and training. It is good to see that the Government has followed the coalition's 1998 lead by bringing employment-related matters under the industrial relations legislation. However, what is different is that our legislative proposals would have brought new flexibility to the training system while not compromising the protection afforded to apprentices and trainees or the quality of their training.

A large majority of Queensland businesses do not invest in training their employees, preferring to recruit the skills they need. Developing the necessary training culture is difficult enough without having inflexible, unresponsive and inaccessible training models when businesses do make this commitment. Employers do need to see apprenticeships and traineeships as an effective recruitment strategy for the skills they need.

Some employers find it impossible to commit to a four-year training contract because of the nature of their businesses. The new qualifications under the national training framework make it possible for those employers to employ and to train for shorter periods. Group training companies—I had a fair bit to do with these when I was Minister, as the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing would today—have an increasingly important role to play in bringing employers into a system in which they would otherwise not be able to participate. They are providing their host employers with the information and assistance they need to deliver on-the-job training to apprentices and trainees.

It is the belief of the Opposition that the Government has not taken up the challenge of making the apprenticeship system more accessible to employers. Under this Bill, even if employers overcome all sorts of hurdles and actually see the apprentice or trainee through to the completion of their training a superfluous paper war ensues. The requirements of multifarious applications entangle the training provider, the employer, the apprentice and the council in a web of crippling bureaucracy.

The Beattie Labor Government, on advice from the Minister, has not met the challenge of creating the framework for an innovative, quality vocational education and training system, of building something that encourages enterprise, individuals and communities to invest in training, or of getting the right balance between regulation, flexibility and quality. Of the major failures in this Bill, this is certainly one. I think that hampers the employment of young Queenslanders. Because it hampers the employment of young Queenslanders, it makes a nonsense of the Premier's mantra of "jobs, jobs, jobs".
