



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard 12 December 2001

EDUCATION (QUEENSLAND STUDIES AUTHORITY) BILL

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (11.31 a.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Queensland Education portfolio has been served through the last two decades by three statutory authorities with responsibilities for curriculum development, assessment, certification and tertiary entrance procedures. These bodies are the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, established in 1988, the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority, established in 1990, and the Queensland School Curriculum Council, established in 1996.

The statutory bodies provide a range of valuable services and establish curriculum parameters in our schools. These services are fundamentally intersystemic in nature. The systems created by the three statutory authorities are complex, with overlapping functions and roles and different approaches used for the preschool to year 10 sector of schooling and the senior years of schooling. The systems were designed to cater for students taking a linear path from school to further study or employment. They favour students seeking entrance to university or other tertiary study at the end of school, yet this is only about 35 per cent of the age cohort. Increasingly students are seeking to follow many different pathways to further study and employment. It is therefore critical that our systems work to support smooth transitions and maintain high levels of community confidence in our education system.

OECD data clearly shows that economic prosperity in a global economy is linked to the proportion of young people who complete a full upper secondary education or equivalent and hold a recognised qualification for work and/or tertiary study. It also shows that high levels of skills and knowledge at the conclusion of the initial phase of education is an important foundation for future labour market participation, further education and active citizenship.

Determining the future statutory arrangements for the Education portfolio to suit the needs of Queensland in a global economy has been the subject of extensive community consultation over the last 12 months. This sits within the broader context of education reform necessary to achieve this government's vision for a Smart State. The consultation process was focused around a green paper called Student Achievement in Queensland, which was released in late 2000 by my predecessor the Hon. Dean Wells. The consultation was led by the then parliamentary secretary Darryl Briskey. The paper explored some of the challenges facing education, including key factors that hinder student achievement and progression to post-school destinations. It proposed several alternative models for curriculum development, assessment, certification and tertiary entrance procedures in Queensland. Government's preferred option for addressing the anomalies in the current statutory arrangements was to establish a single statutory authority that will subsume the functions of the existing authorities. Importantly, the single authority would also have the capacity to enhance and integrate existing functions with a view to progressing coordinated P-12 curriculum development, assessment, certification across all sectors of schooling, tertiary entrance procedures and systems which facilitate lifelong learning.

I wish to acknowledge that the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, the Queensland School Curriculum Council and the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority have served Queensland well. It is however time to move on, to build on the best of what we have and to create new statutory arrangements. The Queensland Studies Authority will subsume the Board of Senior Secondary School

Studies, the Queensland School Curriculum Council and the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority. This new authority will advise the Minister for Education on, and have responsibility for, syllabus development, assessment, certification and tertiary entrance across diverse P-12 contexts and settings, with articulation to post-school destinations.

The bill provides the new authority with a specific function to advise the Minister for Employment and Training on relevant vocational and educational training matters. Further, the bill specifically provides for the minister responsible for vocational education and training to refer matters to the authority and, in concert with the Minister for Education, to issue written directions to the authority about those matters. These provisions, which facilitate the involvement of two ministers in the work of a statutory body, are administratively novel. However, they send a very clear message about the determination of the government to ensure that every possible opportunity is provided to young Queenslanders to complete 12 years of schooling or their equivalent in the training and related sectors, and for this to equip them for work and, wherever possible, tertiary opportunities. Administrative structures and portfolio responsibilities must not stand in the way of sound educational outcomes and opportunities for young Queenslanders.

The bill allows for the existing functions of the statutory bodies to be taken over by the new Studies Authority. This is important to ensure that there is continuity and certainty for the education community. The nature of the transition will mean that the current high standards and procedures for curriculum, assessment and certification will continue so that students currently enrolled or about to enter years 11 and 12 will not be disadvantaged. For schools this means business as usual. At the same time the Studies Authority will, in carrying out its functions, work with the state and non-state schooling sectors to resolve future policy issues related to its functions.

One of the Studies Authority's key functions will be to develop syllabuses and preschool guidelines. Syllabus is defined in the broadest terms to include standards of learning and standards of assessment for areas of learning. This definition will cover the wide range of materials that could be used by schools to develop their total curriculum programs, including the eight key learning areas such as English, maths and science, as well as training packages, vocational education modules and learning frameworks such as the New Basics.

A new function has been introduced to the legislative regime. The authority has the function of accrediting syllabuses or preschool guidelines developed by other bodies. This will allow state and non-state schools access for the first time to quality assured syllabuses developed throughout the world. Stakeholders have worked together to recommend a carefully defined and balanced state, non-state membership of the authority which includes teachers, parents, industry, vocational education and training and tertiary representatives joining the sectors as members. As this authority has a broad remit from preschool through to tertiary entrance, it is difficult to include representation from each of the interest groups or areas of expertise that this encompasses. The authority will access that broader representation and advice through a relevant committee structure. In particular, I expect the new authority to canvass the full range of parent views through appropriate committee mechanisms.

Under this bill the Minister for Education will have a strategic role in the oversight of the effectiveness, efficiency, economy and timeliness of the authority and its systems and processes. Like its predecessors, an office will be established to assist the Studies Authority and, with the exception of the director, the staff of that office will be appointed under the Public Service Act 1996. This will ensure continuity of employment conditions and provide security of transition for staff of the former statutory authorities. The director of the Studies Authority will be appointed under part 3 of this bill. This will provide for a distinct separation of the role of the director of the office from the Department of Education.

The bill also includes amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act. These amendments are necessary so that the direction to state schools for the implementation of syllabuses and tests is provided in the general provisions act that applies specifically to state schools. The intention of these amendments is to put beyond doubt the power of the minister to mandate curriculum and syllabus for state schools. This allows the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Bill to be neutral in its treatment of state and non-state schools.

This bill is an important step in fulfilling this government's commitment to secure Queensland's future in a global context. It provides the framework around which the future for curriculum, assessment and certification can be built. It is a significant step forward in our determination to improve the number of young Queenslanders completing 12 years of schooling or their equivalent. Representatives of the Association of Independent Schools Queensland, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, Education Queensland officers, the chairs and chief executive officers of the existing statutory bodies, parent groups, industrial unions and principals associations have all contributed significantly to this piece of legislation. I thank them for their advice and their constructive criticism along the way.

Finally, I wish to thank my own staff and my parliamentary secretary, Jo-Ann Miller, for having chaired the many meetings and discussion groups on my behalf and successfully steering the

development of the bill. I am encouraged by the willingness of both the state and non-state sectors and all other stakeholders to tackle the hard questions about education and to embrace a vision of excellence for all Queensland students. I give the education community my commitment to continue working with them to ensure that education leads the Smart State agenda.
