



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR ROBINA

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EDUCATION [QUEENSLAND STUDIES AUTHORITY] BILL

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (3.02 p.m.): At the outset I indicate that the Liberal Party will be supporting this bill. The bill itself is the culmination of a long journey by Education Queensland and the private schools in Queensland. It is interesting to refer to history. In 1991 the then government under Wayne Goss commissioned a report into the curriculum structures in Queensland to try to find a commonsense solution to all the various structures we had at that time determining curriculum in Queensland. We had the Department of Education doing it for state schools. We had the private sector looking at the department's document and then modifying it for use within their own schools. Usually the Catholics did one set of documents and the independent schools could have done another if they so wished.

The government at that time commissioned Professor Phillip Hughes, a Tasmanian academic, to come to Queensland and provide some advice on how these issues might be resolved in Queensland. I think that at that time there was a common view, particularly within the non-government sector, that we had a bit of a mishmash and needed to sit down and think about where education in Queensland was going to ensure that resources were not unduly wasted. Professor Phillip Hughes produced a report to the effect that Queensland needed one statutory authority overseeing curriculum development, assessment and accreditation in Queensland. So it was some 10 years ago that this idea first came to Queensland. It is not a recent construction of the Beattie government. In fact, it was over 10 years ago. So it has taken us a long time to get to this position.

After that, the government never accepted Hughes' report, and the report was buried. The government then commissioned Ken Wiltshire to go into the Queensland schooling system and produce another report. Wiltshire also came to the conclusion in 1994 that there ought to be one statutory authority overseeing curriculum development in Queensland. Again, the government moved in that direction, but it did not move to give the curriculum development bodies a statutory authority basis. It left the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies in place and appointed another body to oversee curriculum development from year 1 to year 10 and had a semiformal relationship, if you like, with the Department of Education. It was not a statutory authority with the fully independent basis that everyone required at that time. In fact, that was one of the issues that I had to deal with when there was a change of government in 1995-96. We had organisations in Queensland that were developing curriculum but without independent status, and long after Wiltshire's report they were not really getting on with the job.

When I was minister the body overseeing P-10 curriculum development had not come to grips with the enormous task in Queensland of modernising the curriculum that was being taught in our schools. It had been there for the best part of 12 or 18 months but had not got cracking on the task which Wiltshire identified as a critical component in upgrading the curriculum that was being taught in our schools. The coalition at that time moved to give independent status to those bodies. We moved legislatively to ensure that they were statutory authorities, but at that time I took the decision that because we were lagging so far behind with the revision of the curriculum we simply could not spend another two or three years in a consultation phase to determine whether or not we wanted one curriculum authority. So we really had to get moving. Those authorities got cracking at that time and started to produce new curriculum for our schools—desperately needed curriculum. As I said, this was on the agenda for quite a number of years. We now have the Queensland Studies Authority, which is a

culmination of all the work that has gone on before. It is where we wanted to go, but it has taken us a long time to get there.

This bill continues the tradition of intersystemic cooperation in Queensland. We have a long and proud history of the state school sector cooperating with the non-government school sector to ensure that there is not a wastage of resources and that everyone understands that there is a need for high-quality curriculum in all schools around Queensland; that no matter where parents send their kids to school, it is important that they have confidence that the curriculum being taught in those schools is of the highest quality. That is the idea behind this: one curriculum for all schools in Queensland. That is where we wanted to be after 10 years. However, it is important that Education Queensland is mandated to put the curriculum into its schools. There is now a responsibility on those in the non-government sector to make sure that they do the same, although this does not necessarily impinge upon their independence. They can still make changes if they so wish, and some of the smaller independent schools may do so.

It is also important to note that whereas in the past the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies almost exclusively focused on children going into the university stream, it is now focusing on the 70 per cent of kids who are looking at a vocational education outcome. That is a great move in terms of trying to integrate those subjects into the school curriculum to make sure that those kids are catered for right through to the end of year 12. I think it is important that the Minister for Training has an input into the outcomes of the authority. The mechanism to allow that to happen, that is, the issuing of a written direction to the board or to the authority, is very important. It was one of the features of the original legislation that went through under the coalition.

I support the legislation. This legislation does not represent a new initiative. It is not something dreamt up by the Beattie government. It is something that is over 10 years old. It is about time this happened. It has been a slow progression since 1991, but we have finally arrived. This brings us in line with most of the other states, which simply have one curriculum authority.

If there is to be a further advance on this system it is, I suggest, that there needs to be one minister for education and training in this state. The gap between the two ministers can sometimes cause problems in terms of resolving issues. We need to look now at whether it is time to merge those two responsibilities, as has been done in other states.

Training is not solely training by definition. TAFE stands for 'technical and further education'. It encompasses education. I think we need to come to grips with that and start thinking along those lines. The next step towards seamless education from preschool right through to year 12 is to have all students catered for under one minister and one authority. That would eliminate all the anomalies in the system. This legislation takes us part of the way. The next step is the political step of understanding that there needs to be one person in charge in this area. The turf warfare between ministers that has been conducted in the past—I can attest to it—cannot go on any longer, because we need to ensure the welfare of students. The highest quality education is at risk here. This legislation takes us a long way towards our goal. We need to take the further step, which is to bring together those two departments. As I said, the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill.
