



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (3.19 p.m.): I rise to support the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill and the Training Reform Bill before the House today as they herald a new way forward for education and training for our children. They also provide our young people and children with a framework that will improve their chances of securing meaningful and rewarding employment and improve their future job security and opportunities. The reforms announced in these bills have been subjected to extensive community consultation across the state. In particular in the electorate of Aspley, many parents, teachers and students have taken the opportunity to have their say about the proposed reforms.

I had the privilege of attending a considerable number of these consultations and am of the view that the electorate of Aspley widely and strongly supports the reforms that require young people aged 15 to 17 to stay in school until year 10 or to age 16 and then to remain in education or training for a further two years. Consultation with my community on these reforms has only really reinforced the direction that many of the schools in the electorate have been taking for a number of years. The high schools in the electorate—Craigslea, Aspley, Pine Rivers and St Paul's—have been involved in vocational training programs and in cooperative relationships with local businesses for many years that provide flexible training opportunities for the young people in my area. Pine Rivers State High School is a particularly innovative and supportive school, and it is no surprise that it is a trial school in the senior phase of the learning reforms program. As I go about my electorate I often see young people who are students at the local schools participating in vocational training opportunities with local businesses. When I speak to them they say that it is their view that it is helping them achieve their future goals.

One of the real challenges for governments, schools and parents is to give our young people a clear message that a good education is the foundation for a long-term secure employment future. We must then commit to supporting them in achieving that good education in a flexible and student focused way. These bills outline the new rules for compulsory schooling clearly and reinforce our support to young people in a flexible and meaningful way. I particularly note that it is our year 7 students of today who will be affected by these reforms. As the parent of a year 7 student, I have taken a keen interest in the changes and am really looking forward to being part of the new education agenda.

The Training Reform Bill, as the minister advised in his second reading speech, puts back the vocational education into training and ensures that Queensland vocational education and training is further strengthened. The bill enhances further the protection for workers, apprentices and trainees. The bill gives effect to nationally agreed standards in vocational education and training. The Training Reform Bill will also improve the vocational education and training system and will provide clear direction to registered training organisations, businesses, trainees and apprentices as to what are acceptable standards, portability of qualifications for graduates, and ensure that quality training is maintained.

I have to confess that in years past, in particular since the election of the Howard government, I have been concerned about the quality of training that some trainees receive on the job and concerned at times at the motives of some employers in the traineeship arena. I am concerned that traineeships have been seen at times as a means of achieving lowered labour costs at the expense of both the trainees and existing workers, job security and learning outcomes. Vocational education and training is quite simply too valuable in too many of our growing industries like hospitality and aged care, to name just two, to treat it as a way of reducing costs. I know that most employers do not hold nor support this narrow and limited view and that they are the ones who support these efforts and training reform agendas.

The bills provide a further plank in what is our Smart State agenda, and it is a commitment to our future that is brave and visionary. I cannot think of a more vital commitment that a government can make than to our children's education. But I simply cannot talk about education without feeling a real sense of anger and conflict about what will happen to both my children and the children of many families in my electorate after they finish school. With the excitement that is very apparent in our schools these days, our schools do great things, and as parents we feel that our children's opportunities are being ever enhanced. However, I am disturbed as a parent of a year 12 student to think about what the future might hold for my young Alex and all of his friends.

What I am faced with is a group of teenagers who have worked very hard in schools like Pine Rivers State High School to achieve their scores and think about the future and the possibilities only to find that, weeks from the end of the school year, they face the very real chance of not being able to go further in the careers of their choice. They are inhibited by limited numbers of places. They may very well achieve the OP scores required but are inhibited by limited places and inhibited by exorbitant HECS fee costs.

The HECS debt for a course that just one of my children wants to do—I have four children—means that he will carry a debt of over \$35,000 into his young working life. Quite frankly, for my four children—and I am very proud to say that all of my children will probably end up at university—that equates to something like \$140,000 that my family alone will carry as a HECS debt. It is terrible as a parent to find that, despite all of the great things that we as parents, this government and other families are doing, we are having to start saying to our young people, 'You have to think really carefully about the course that you choose, because if you get in it will cost you \$6,000 or \$7,000 every year, and what if you change your mind?' Then my kids and their friends say, 'I have to think about whether I can carry that kind of financial burden into my young working life.'

It disturbs me that the federal government does not have the same visionary approach to education as this government. I hope that it is looking very carefully and very closely at—

Mr Horan interjected.

Ms BARRY: This should be of great concern to the opposition as well. Quite frankly, I am hopeful that the federal government will take careful note of the vision of this state government and realise that the Smart State is about the very specific planks of education and training for our children. I am hopeful that the federal government will see that it needs to have the same vision and the same commitment to our children's education, because I would hate to think that we would give them so much hope just to find that when they get to university their hopes are dashed by virtue of unavailable places and exorbitant costs.

I want to end on a positive note by congratulating both the Minister for Education and the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth on what is a brave and visionary reform. I look forward to it both as a parent and as a member of the government that implements it. I commend the bills to the House.