



Speech by  
**Dr DAVID WATSON**  
**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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**YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—Lib) (3.42 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in the debate on the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill 2003 and the Training Reform Bill 2003. There is no doubt that these bills are particularly important for the future of education in Queensland. I cannot help saying that the last couple of speakers have indicated quite clearly why these are important bills, and particularly for their constituents. The member for Whitsunday actually outlined just briefly some of the opportunities that are coming about because of new technology and the ability to expand the areas in which students can concentrate. This is going to be particularly important in the future, because there are significant areas that students ought to be able to concentrate on but which we cannot possibly deliver in every high school or every educational institution throughout the state.

The member for Logan outlined very clearly why his students will benefit significantly from these education bills. I must admit that I am not as convinced that my electors will actually significantly benefit from these very important bills. That is not because there is anything particularly wrong with the bills, but in the electorate of Moggill that I represent there is already such a strong commitment to education and training. That comes from the fact that the people who live in my electorate have a high degree of education themselves and, therefore, value the education experience.

Recently I looked at the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures. The Moggill electorate, together with the electorate of Indooroopilly, has the highest percentage of people with degrees and higher degrees of any electorate in the state. For example, in Moggill some 31.4 per cent of people have bachelor degrees, graduate diplomas, graduate certificates and postgraduate degrees. In Moggill, 29 per cent of females have those qualifications and 34.1 per cent of males have those qualifications. In fact, I was just looking at the *Australian* and the issues that were going on in Wentworth. I notice that only 29 per cent of the people in that blue-ribbon area had higher degrees and degrees. So the education level in Moggill is even greater.

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Dr WATSON:** Not in Moggill. The Moggill electorate provides an interesting environment. Because there is a value placed on education by the parents in that electorate, that flows through to the students and to the schools. Teachers who come into the schools in my electorate tell me that they like coming into the schools there, because the school life of the students there reflects the same kinds of values as their home life. Therefore, that produces good students and, therefore, good teachers.

Of course, the electorate provides opportunities that perhaps do not exist in other places. I know that the Minister for Education knows, and certainly the Minister for the Arts knows—although I think that it was Dean Wells who came out to the school—that Kenmore State High School provides opportunities for the students that perhaps not are available elsewhere. For example, they have a German immersion program, which I think is absolutely outstanding, and in which students do year 11 and 12 subjects all in German. They actually do their exams and all of their projects in German. That is an opportunity that would not always be available.

That school has an extremely talented and very good arts and media program. To its credit, the government has put a lot of money into that program. It is well supported and it provides an opportunity that may not be able to be provided to other schools, again because of the commitment of that school. Also, the schools in my electorate have good science blocks and a good commitment to commerce and IT.

Most of the schools in my electorate are actually state schools. I have only two private schools in my electorate: Our Lady of the Rosary, a Catholic primary school; and a very small school called the Brisbane Independent School. Virtually all of the other schools in my electorate are state schools. They are an outstanding group of schools. They are demanding because the students are demanding, because their parents are demanding. As the member for Moggill, I would like to see the Minister for Education put a bit of extra money into particular areas, which I have spoken to her about, because the demands are there and I know that the students and the schools will use the money appropriately.

The member for Logan talked about self-esteem. Self-esteem is absolutely critical and it is as critical in my electorate as it is in his electorate. For example, over the period in which I have been the member, self-esteem at Kenmore State High School has changed dramatically. That was partly because the year before I became the member the principal changed. The principal at that time, Jeff Shepherd—I am sure that he would not mind me mentioning his name—instilled in the students a great sense of pride and self-esteem. He provided tremendous leadership at that school. I saw a change in that school over time. Then Jenny Hadrell came along and developed that further. That school now has a new principal who has to fill fairly big shoes. Irrespective of what area we represent or what the socioeconomic background of the electorate is, that kind of leadership is absolutely crucial. If it is not there, then schools can go downhill—there is absolutely no question about that—and people become disillusioned. So in the constituency of Moggill is a group of families who value education and who value training. Therefore, that is reflected in the schools: the quality of the teaching and the quality of the output.

Education leads to a number of very positive outcomes. Other members in this place have spoken about them. Earlier the member for Barron River spoke about the opportunity that education provides and gave some statistics on that.

I think education provides positive outcomes in at least three major areas. First of all, it provides a greater range of opportunities for individuals. It allows them to adapt to changing economic and technological circumstances. It allows them to adapt, as the member for Kallangur mentioned a little while ago, to a more competitive and more demanding world. The ability to understand that is essential if we are going to compete in an ever changing world.

Higher education leads to positive outcomes in the area of employment. It also leads to less unemployment and shorter periods of unemployment. In Moggill we have the highest educational level, and concomitantly we have the lowest unemployment area. In Moggill the unemployment level is three per cent or lower.

**Mr Mickel:** One follows the other.

**Dr WATSON:** One follows the other. That is less than half the average in Queensland which the Premier was in here a short time ago bragging about. There is a positive outcome in terms of employment and therefore lower unemployment and a shorter time in the unemployment queue.

There is a strong correlation between educational levels and incomes. Throughout the world we are seeing a strong, positive correlation between education levels and income. That brings me to a point which some members in the Labor Party have talked about, and that is student fees at universities. If education on average leads to higher incomes, why is it not fair for students to contribute or invest in themselves? The Labor Party believes in that.

**Mr Mickel:** We are having trouble convincing the doctors to do that right now.

**Mr Purcell:** Whoops-a-daisy!

**Dr WATSON:** The member for Logan is right. The Labor Party has as big a difficulty convincing the medical profession as the Liberal Party does that it should be contributing. The Labor Party supports the principle of students contributing towards their higher education costs, because it was the Labor Party that introduced the higher education contribution scheme, HECS. I listened to the contributions of some of the Labor Party members. They are complaining about the issue, but it is not a matter of principle; it is a question of degree. The Labor Party supported the introduction of PELS, the postgraduate education loans scheme, which is the postgraduate equivalent of the HECS scheme.

The principle of students contributing to the cost of education is supported on both sides of the political divide in this country—both by the Labor Party and by the coalition. So, when I hear people like the member for Indooroopilly come into this place and complain, he is not complaining on the basis of any principle but perhaps in the self-interest of a few people.

There is no doubt there ought to be public support for education because there is a public benefit in having a more highly educated population. I will return to that issue in a moment. In other words, education does have some attributes of a public good. But what we have to remember is that education, particularly higher education, has a significant private benefit. That is why average incomes are higher for those people who have higher education. There is a significant private benefit in terms of income, job opportunities and opportunities in other areas.

**Mr Mickel:** Long-term employment.

**Dr WATSON:** Long-term employment—as I said before, shorter periods of unemployment. There is a significant benefit and, therefore, there is an argument for some contribution. I have two sons, both of whom went to the University of Queensland as undergraduates and both of whom have HECS debts. They ought to contribute to their educational cost. My eldest son is currently doing his postgraduate diploma and MBA. He will have a significant debt under PELS.

**Mr Mickel:** He got his brains from his mother.

**Dr WATSON:** He, like many others—wherever they got their brains from—is genetically advantaged in that area. A lot of people are advantaged in that area. Yet, if we argue the way the member for Indooroopilly argued—that it ought to be based on merit and nothing else—then what we are arguing is that the Howard battlers ought to subsidise academic elites. That is what it comes to.

**Mr Reeves:** That is a long bow. That is different.

**Dr WATSON:** Not if you want to argue it should be totally subsidised.

**Mr Mickel:** The Howard battlers are going to underwrite the doctors' insurance fees.

**Dr WATSON:** That is what the medical profession wants. I just want to make the point that there are significant private benefits. There is a moral justification as well as an economic justification for some kind of contribution by students towards their higher education costs.

Finally, I want to talk about the public benefit of education. The public benefit of education includes a more informed society, an ability to analyse complex issues, to be able to interact with a more competitive and demanding world and, very importantly, a more tolerant society. A more highly educated society tends to be a more tolerant society.

**Mr Mickel:** That's right.

**Dr WATSON:** I know the member for Logan will recall, because he is interested in this particular topic, the 1998 election. If one did a correlation between education levels as reflected by higher degrees and the One Nation vote, one found a negative correlation between the electorates with a high One Nation vote and education. In other words, the higher the level of education, the lower the One Nation vote, and that was true right across the Queensland electorates. If we want a tolerant society, then we need an educated society, and there is definitely a public benefit to that. Therefore, there is definitely a reason for there to be some contribution from the taxpayer to the educational level.

As I said, I am not sure exactly how many of my constituents will benefit directly by the bills, but these bills are important. They are about education; they are about making sure that Australia and Queensland have a well-educated population in future—one which can take its place in the world and one which produces a very tolerant society.