



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (4.42 p.m.): I am pleased to speak to the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill. I note that the explanatory notes state—

The reforms are aimed at ensuring that young people leave the education and training system better equipped for future success.

We on this side of the House are certainly very happy to support this legislation. It is a step in the right direction. We can do all sorts of things to have a Smart State, but we do not necessarily want slogans; we need action. This is one piece of legislation that will help to enable Queenslanders and their children to have a better life in the future. We can provide no better opportunity than give to our children a better education.

The bill provides that the age of compulsory school attendance will be changed from 15 years to 16 years, or the completion of year 10, whichever comes first. This will not take effect until 1 January 2006. The attendance obligation will be met if a child is enrolled at an educational institution as opposed to specifically a state school or a non-state school and attends that institution or school on every enrolled day.

We need to explore a number of issues. I hope that the government has considered some of the additional costs that will be involved in this legislation. No doubt it has. For instance, some of the towns in the western areas that I represent, such as Cunnamulla and Thargomindah, and Tambo and Quilpie to a certain degree, do not necessarily have that other educational option such as another educational institution or a TAFE that offer the courses that would be suitable for some students. Some students may be able to get a job for the 25 hours a week that is required but, generally speaking, if we want students to have a real opportunity we need to beef up the TAFE courses in those towns. For example, Charleville has a magnificent facility. In the past, a lot of the courses that that facility offered were very, very limited. This legislation may be a springboard from which the courses that are offered at that facility can be increased. That will be great, because it is a wonderful facility.

The other problem relates to what happens when we actually try to draw those students into those towns that have those educational facilities. In the past there were quite a lot of hostels in the town for those students, but they are closing down. For various reasons it is getting very, very hard to keep them going. I think that we need to look at those options. Further, there needs to be a better opportunity for students to go away to attend school. AIC allowances and suchlike need to have a bit more flexibility in them. I know that for years there has been a move to try to get some students who live in the bush to qualify for the allowance. Boarding school is the only option for them. They just cannot get an education locally. So I think that there is definitely a need to look at those guidelines to create a bit more flexibility. If we want this legislation to work, we have to be prepared to look at the constraints that exist at present. It will cost money but, by the same token, if we want to educate kids and give them far better opportunities, this is one way in which we can do it. Of course, there is Austudy, which is certainly a help.

In relation to apprenticeships, they are an opportunity which may expand even further. That is wonderful. The problem that we have bubbling along now is that, in some cases, there is plenty of work but apprentices just cannot pay the rent. So affordable housing is certainly an issue there that has to be looked at. That issue relates to what I was saying before about hostel arrangements. I really think that we need to give encouragement to groups—whether they be church groups, communities or councils—to set up a hostel arrangement to at least allow some of those children from remote areas to live in towns and utilise this opportunity. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.