



Speech by

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.25 p.m.): It is appropriate that we ensure the future of our young citizens by providing them with an opportunity to engage in the training and education system to the fullest possible extent. These bills will make the necessary legislative changes to support the implementation of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future outlined by the minister and the Premier late last year in his link to ensuring that Queensland is the Smart State.

Youth peak organisations, private schools authorities, TAFEs and registered training organisations, private training providers, peak organisations, school principals associations and parents groups as well as concerned individuals have been consulted during this process. This bill introduces the concept of a compulsory participation phase in the education system. This commences when a young person stops being of compulsory school age and finishes when the young person either gains a Senior Certificate or certificate III, has participated for two years beyond the compulsory school age or turns 17.

The bills create an obligation for parents of young people in the compulsory participation phase to ensure that the young person participates in defined education and training options or employment skills options. Furthermore, the bill also includes provisions to enable young people to comply by working in paid employment for at least 25 hours a week. Young people will also be able to apply for an employment exemption if they want to participate by working but cannot gain employment for the full 25 hours a week or want to engage in unpaid employment.

The reforms are aimed at ensuring that young people leave the education and training system better equipped for future success. The reforms will raise the school leaving age from 15 to 16 or when the young person has completed year 10, whichever comes first. Young people will then be required to continue to participate in education or training or work for another two years or until they have achieved a Senior Certificate or a certificate III vocational education qualification. The requirement will cease once the young person turns 17.

These reforms will equip young Queenslanders with the skills necessary to compete on an equal footing across the employment spectrum through a flexible education and training system that offers an immense range of choices. Youth can elect to stay within the traditional education system, leave after year 10 to work in industry and obtain a vocational education certificate, or complete their senior school leaving certificate. Various students in Mount Ommaney have told me that they will individually be taking one or another of the options available. They are ensuring they are competitive in the Smart State.

Schools in the Mount Ommaney electorate trialling the state government's learning or earning reforms have benefited from the \$955,000 grant for the Corinda and Ipswich trial area to expand education and training pathways for senior students. In total about 23,000 year 10 students from more than 200 schools and 12 TAFE institutes will take part in the senior schooling trials. The funding enables communities taking part in the trials to develop and implement innovative local programs and services to engage young people in learning or earning.

Communities are thinking outside the box in relation to how they can expand pathways for students and how they can attract young people who have left school back to learning. The trials of these landmark reforms will provide critical information for their statewide implementation in 2006. A community organisation will be contracted by Education Queensland to identify quality mentors who are prepared to offer their time to provide valuable advice and support to students in each trial area.

Where appropriate, young people who might be considered at risk of leaving learning may be matched with a mentor from their local community. The mentor should be someone they can easily and readily identify with so that they can help students make informed choices about their future. Community mentors will also assist youth support coordinators to offer young people for whom traditional schooling is not suitable a fresh start through flexible learning programs. A lot of work has been put in by my local high schools, Centenary and Corinda, to ensure that these trials are a success.

Corinda High's boat building project has received significant recognition in the local community and with Education Queensland. As a result of this project a number of students from the school have been offered apprenticeships in the boat building industry.

The training reforms are about making sure that education is useful and leads towards a suitable career path. We also need to ensure that we have enough people trained in various areas to meet the demands of industry. I congratulate the Minister for Employment, Training and the Arts and the Minister for Education on these reforms. I commend the bills to the House.