



Speech by

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (3.07 p.m.): It is pleasing to have members of the State Youth Advisory Council with us in the House. I welcome and congratulate them on the great work they have been doing in supporting this reform process. I look forward to working with them on it over coming years.

It is interesting, and I think fair, when people comment that school is not like it used to be. The people who say that are absolutely right; it is abundantly better. I know many of us can hark back to our school days and think with joy about some of the things we got up to, but whenever I walk into a school now I am so impressed with what is happening. Forest Lake State High School in my local area is achieving great things and is very new—only a couple of years young. Calamvale Community College is powering ahead. It is amazing the opportunities young people have now.

Mrs Lavarch: And the choices.

Ms STRUTHERS: And the choices available to them. In debating these two bills in the House members are clearly acknowledging that these are the most significant and positive changes to education ever seen in Queensland. They are grounded in the view that, regardless of income and background, all young people deserve the best possible educational opportunities and best possible pathways into work. I have great confidence that the two ministers driving this legislative reform—the Hon. Matt Foley and the Hon. Anna Bligh—will make every possible effort to ensure that the aims of these legislative reforms come to fruition and bring lots of wonderful opportunities for young people around this state.

I am very pleased to report to both ministers in the House today that the Education and Training Reforms for the Future trial in the southside corridor from Brisbane through to Ipswich is powering ahead. Under the leadership of Mike Ludwig and others—the education providers, the schools, the TAFE—that trial is progressing well. The community sector representatives are working well and hard at making sure this process works well locally.

During consultations leading up to the introduction of the legislation I was concerned with some of the views I was hearing. I know that many of these have been addressed in the reforms being put to us through the bills. Some teachers concerned me when they said things like the ETRF is not core business. I cannot think of anything more core to education than wanting to give 15- to 17-year-old youths the best possible education and training opportunities and flexible pathways into work. If teachers raise that point or that concern, underlying it is a concern that there are so many things teachers are required to do. They are all core educational business and they are all being resourced and supported by a very effective system. I encourage them to get behind these reforms because the outcomes will be very positive for young people into the future.

The changes are evidence based, but it does not take much rocket science to know that, quite simply, young people have the best prospect of scoring a job and the best prospect of getting in life if they complete year 12. There has been a lot of energy through Education Queensland directed at that aim—to retain young people through from year 10 on to year 12. They have the best possible opportunity to learn and earn if they can get those flexible pathways available to them. If they can end up with money in their pocket, if they can enjoy the learning that they are involved with and eventually enjoy the jobs they have, then we have young people who have a very bright future.

We all know that it is the young people who are not learning or earning—the 10,000 that the minister, Matt Foley, constantly reminds us of. It is so important that we are aware that there are 10,000 young people who are not learning or earning. They are the ones at risk of getting into strife. They are the ones who are at risk of self-harming behaviour. They are the ones at risk of getting into crime. They are the ones people complain about in the local area. People say they are causing graffiti problems and getting into all sorts of trouble. It is those young people we need to assist to get back on track. We can offer them opportunities to take on a trade, for instance, while at school. A lot of vocational education opportunities have been happening in Queensland schools.

Under these reforms there will be even more flexible arrangements where young people might spend a day at school, spend a couple of days at TAFE and be on a job for the rest of the time. That is the sort of flexibility we need in the system. The success of these reforms will be dependent on teachers, educationalists generally, the TAFE providers, the training providers, the community reps and the youth support workers who are part of this system all working together and being determined to make sure that these things can happen and finding solutions rather than barriers to these things happening.

It will be very important for the success of these reforms that they are resourced well to do that. It is pleasing to see the youth support resources particularly being introduced at this early stage. That will be a key part of the system—that young people have that support. If we are going to retain these young people into that compulsory participation component beyond year 10, it will be dependent on staff and parents overcoming the view that they are necessarily going to be kids who play up and who become problem students because they do not really want to be there.

I would like to think people can be more positive about this and see this as an opportunity to reduce bad behaviour and to improve behaviour management within schools. I am very positive about that because from the young people I know who drop out, the young people I know who do not enjoy school, I understand that it is because they do not see it as meaningful. They might say, 'I didn't like a teacher,' but really what they are saying is, 'I didn't fit in. I didn't enjoy it. I didn't get a lot out of it.' For many of them they are not putting much into it because of those factors. It is very important that people have a positive approach to it and that all those stakeholders in this process continue to work well together.

The evidence that I mentioned earlier—it is not rocket science but it is very compelling—shows us that we have to be determined in our efforts. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum, for instance, in its key indicators report of 2003, provided an update about the learning and work situation of young people in Australia. The report noted that, while we have had significant improvement in economic conditions nationally, 15 per cent of teenagers have not been in full-time learning or work for the past decade. As other speakers have mentioned today, 45 per cent of teenagers in indigenous communities are not in full-time work or education. That is a significant problem and it is pleasing to see that members have highlighted that in the House today.

It is also concerning that 49 per cent of year 10 school leavers or below and 36 per cent of year 11 school leavers were not in full-time learning or work for five months after leaving school compared with 18.7 per cent of those who completed year 12. There is very clear evidence there that staying on to year 12 does improve the life opportunities of young people.

The concerning thing—and this is what the minister, Matt Foley, and Anna Bligh are very keen to address—is that Queensland's record has not been very good in terms of young people's participation. The persistently highest proportion of teenagers not in full-time education or work is sadly found in Queensland—the highest rate at 18.3 per cent this year. I commend the way that the minister has called out the rally cry of, 'Ten thousand young people are out of work and out of school in Queensland, and that is 10,000 too many.' People have embraced that. People are embracing the 'learning or earning' concept. We need those types of short, sharp messages out there so people do embrace and understand what we are trying to do here. The problem that I have found and I touched on earlier is that some people are focusing simply on this idea that we are trying to keep kids at school longer without providing the necessary supports and opportunities. Clearly that is not what we are about.

I commend the changes that are being introduced. They will certainly re-establish the importance of trades and technical jobs and technical careers. One of the things we are seeing in Queensland is young people not having the same sort of desire or interest to move into a trade or technical area. They are important career paths for young people. We have significant skill shortages in areas like the construction industry. It is important that we have these opportunities and that we heighten the value of those sorts of trade opportunities.

Mr Purcell: And in primary industries as well.

Mr STRUTHERS: And in primary industries. I take the interjection from the member for Bulimba.

I commend these initiatives. I commend the hard work. I know that a lot of work has been put into these bills by a lot of people across both departments, across sectors, in my local area, in the local project, by the high school teachers, the TAFE providers and others. They are all working together to make sure that this works well locally and that the trial can be a good demonstration of how this can work across the state.