



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (2.45 p.m.): I have pleasure in supporting the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill and the Training Reform Bill 2003. I would like to raise a couple of issues about TAFE and the training organisations.

First of all, I would like to make a short comment about the ongoing dispute between Yeronga TAFE and the nearby residents. Before the minister ceases to be the member responsible for Yeronga and the minister, I ask that this issue be resolved and resolved very, very quickly. Otherwise, this is going to be an ongoing issue for whoever replaces the minister as the member or as the minister. Obviously, the issue started when Mrs Clair Crowther succeeded in obtaining an order from the Planning and Environment Court for the cessation of certain activities at Yeronga TAFE. These activities had impacts upon local residents contrary to the provisions of the Environment Protection Act 2003. Clearly, the situation reached that far regardless of what the minister thought about it—or what we all thought about it. The government originally announced an intention to appeal this order, which contained a series of time lines for various actions to occur. However, the government eventually determined not to proceed with the appeal.

There is no doubt that the TAFE authorities should comply with the court order. At present, TAFE appears to be making some attempt to comply with the order and also to improve its liaison with the local community. I table a newsletter from Yeronga TAFE which obviously is one of the first attempts to liaise with the general public around that area. I have asked questions in the House today about this particular issue. I have asked the minister why non-offensive courses that include interior decorating, tiling and floor laying currently being held at Park Road at Yeronga TAFE are being relocated to the Construction Training Centre. What activities will replace those activities in their current Park Road location? Is Yeronga TAFE being made redundant? I would like the minister—

Mr Matt Foley: No.

Mr LINGARD: I heard the minister say 'no' to the last comment.

Mr Matt Foley: It has a strong future.

Mr LINGARD: As the matter is currently before the courts, which have the capacity to vary the court order, we have to try to work out exactly the minister's attitude. If he says, 'No, it is not going to be made redundant,' that is the answer to the question. I would have to ask: what action is the minister taking to ensure compliance by Yeronga TAFE with the terms of the order of the Planning and Environment Court in the matter of Clair Crowther v. the State of Queensland? I know that this is a very difficult issue, but it is ongoing and I believe that it is going to get stronger and stronger. Mrs Crowther is not going to back down for sure and I would be upset if I felt that the minister was going to leave his position without making any further definite statements about the issue.

In relation to this legislation, I was lucky enough to be a teacher during 1965 and 1966 when the year 8 level of schooling became part of the high school. It was a much more controversial issue than probably this issue, but it was handled well. I support the earning and learning concept. I always have. When I was shadow minister, as soon as I heard those words 'earning and learning' I supported it, and I still support it because I believe that that will be very good for our whole system. I do have some concerns, and I have no doubt the teachers have some concerns. I believe these concerns must be addressed before 2006, otherwise we will have some problems, especially in our public schools.

There is now a particular group within the school that is moving through the school all through the day. Once upon a time, anyone found outside the school at 9 o'clock was in trouble. Now kids move in and out of the school—down and around the streets and across to businesses—and it is very difficult to maintain good discipline within the school. That is especially the case for the anomalies—those kids who do not want to be at school and those kids who want to play up.

There has to be an enforcement of discipline, especially within the public school system. I do not envisage many problems within the private school system because I do not believe there will be movement in relation to years 8, 9 and 10. That is because the parents of most of those kids have them going to school for a specific reason; that is, to complete their education. But the public schools are different.

There is certainly difficulty with teaching timetables. This is something we must resolve with the unions. I heard the member for Lockyer talk about this issue. More and more, teachers will have to vary their lunch hours, vary their morning tea breaks and vary their finishing times. This is not easy to monitor, unless the government has the support of the union and the union is prepared to vary some of its regulations.

I believe that we have to help TAFE, especially in terms of its physical facilities. One of the biggest concerns I ever had in Queensland was in the late 1970s, when we did not move together with TAFEs and high schools and build facilities which would use the massive amounts of money that were coming in. Tasmania has a common system. It does not have separate TAFEs and high schools. It combined the money.

Unfortunately, we in Queensland built some grandiose TAFEs because we believed that the high schools were there to send students on to universities, not to vocational education. We thought those students who would be going on to vocational jobs would be the ones who would leave at year 10 and, post year 10, would go to TAFE. We have seen a change in society over the past 10 to 15 years. Unfortunately now we have two completely separate organisations—one with great practical facilities and the other still with its academic classrooms. Now we are trying to institute a system that will use those practical facilities.

Another issue relates to transport to TAFE facilities. It is okay to just say that students in years 10 or 11 will go for one day and study at TAFE, but many of these students, especially in low socioeconomic areas, do not have the finance, the ability or the transport facilities to go to these colleges for one day. That has proved to be difficult certainly out in the Woodridge and Logan areas, where I have noticed it particularly.

The member for Woodridge earlier mentioned the Kingston College—a magnificent college run now by Bob Topping—where students who might be having difficulties with maths or English can go. However, people cannot get into those colleges. They are completely booked out. Whilst they are magnificent for those students who have access to them, many students are unfortunately missing out. Therefore, they are not as effective as we would like to think. Similarly, students have to get to those colleges. Kingston College is not an easy college to get to.

I especially want to talk about the training authorities. The Queensland government has made some specific changes to training authorities which will affect them greatly. Many of us would have training organisations in our areas. I have one which originally was running on a budget of about \$3.3 million and is now down to a budget of about \$280,000. It provided magnificent service and facilities for school activities and school based apprenticeships, for kids who wanted to go for one day to a training organisation. A training officer would come and work with them.

Under the present program we will make more use of TAFE. That is great if there is a very effective TAFE nearby, but in areas where people do not have access to the TAFE, the TAFE is hard to access or the TAFE does not have up-to-date facilities it will not work.

Unfortunately also, either the Minister for Education or the Minister for Employment has not monitored the user choice contracts within TAFE. I am sure they were due to be signed quite a while ago, but they have not been signed at this stage by the TAFE campuses. The difficulty is that the TAFE can say to a kid who wants to get in, 'We are full.' The training organisations could not say that. There are many kids who want to get into TAFE, to participate in these courses, but who are unable to do so. Private RTOs never had that ability.

I ask the Minister for Education specifically for a promise to maintain school based traineeships and apprenticeships. All of these have been under continual review. The minister might also correctly say that it is part of the federal government policy and that we need to confirm exactly what is coming through from Brendan Nelson. If the money is cut, especially below the \$500 per student who gets a position, then a lot of these will not be viable to maintain within the schools.

In the school situation we do not have teachers looking after these young people; it is people who are experienced in the work force and who are coming into the school situation and being paid by the school, from funds either raised through the tuckshop or raised through these \$500

apprenticeships. Some of them are worth much more. If that money is cut, then those very good programs will end. There are some brilliant programs that are currently running in the high schools. How do the relevant ministers intend the program to work effectively, in the best interests of the student and employer, especially when the user choice has gone to TAFE?

I refer to on-job training. How will we ensure that TAFE goes out and visits the students on site as much as the RTOs had to? Some of those RTOs were extremely good. Some of them were bad, but some of them were extremely good. How will a TAFE college ever have officers going out as effectively and watching students who are part of particular programs?

I also ask: will TAFE deliver block training for school based apprenticeships during school holidays? Many times that is the most effective time for a student to complete block release. But if TAFE is on holidays as well—we know they always are, and usually a week before and a week after—then these students will have to complete their block release during school time. Someone will have to control what happens between TAFE and schools.

To both ministers I say that these programs have been excellent in the schools. I as shadow minister have always supported them and always will; however, they need help. TAFE needs help. Anyone who has studied through TAFE knows that it has some very serious limitations, especially in terms of the standard delivered. If TAFE cannot deliver the standard achieved by our RTOs, there will be some concerns.

I support the change in the age of compulsory school attendance to 16 or year 10, whichever comes first. What happens to a young student who finishes year 10 at maybe only 14 and a half or 15, goes out and gets a job and is either sacked or leaves the job within a couple of weeks? That will happen many times. What happens to a kid who goes out, supposedly gets a job and is out of a job within two months and cannot fit back into the school program? That sort of situation has to be addressed.

The attendance obligation will be met if a child is enrolled in an educational institution—I support that—as opposed to specifically a state school or a non-state school, and attends that institution or school on every enrolled day. That is where I believe the Kingston colleges will come into their own. Once again, the government has to ensure there are positions available for all of these particular children.

Where a child is not attending school because of a disciplinary absence, the parent is still meeting their obligation and not in breach. We have to look at what is happening in relation to the suspension program. Many students are now not being suspended a total of 10 days. Some of them are being suspended for four days because the school does not have an obligation to do anything for that kid. So he comes back from one or two days, plays up again and is suspended again for four days. Quite correctly, the school should be suspending that child for 10 days and placing him in a program where he receives assistance for what might be his misdemeanours.

I am supportive of the fact that a new provision will be included to exclude non-attendance due to illness for up to 10 days where a parent has complied with obligations prescribed by the regulation. Those are a few of my problems. I would like to hear the minister give us an answer on the Yeronga TAFE, if he can provide more than he has already. I would like to hear both ministers make their commitments about apprenticeship schemes within high schools.

Another issue I would like to refer to is that of indigenous areas. Whilst we might have great ideas about what is going to happen in Brisbane, we have indigenous areas, especially in the Torres Strait, such as Thursday Island and Bamaga, which have high schools but not a supportive community as far as businesses for these kids to go to. There are probably plenty of programs, but what are we going to do for indigenous students? Where are they going to go? Where are some of the country kids going to go—those who have severe limitations on the number of jobs that are available?