



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 9 October 2003

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL; TRAINING REFORM BILL

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (12.35 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to contribute to this debate on the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill and the Training Reform Bill. The reforms to Queensland's secondary education and training regime contained in this legislation are the most fundamental and far-reaching since the introduction of universal secondary education in Queensland in the 1950s. These reforms will provide young people with the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in the increasingly complex world of the 21st century. Our young people need innovative and flexible learning opportunities and extra support from our education and training system if they are to gain the qualifications they need to succeed in that world.

We know that students who leave school at 15, the current school leaving age, face an uncertain future. The Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows the employability benefits that flow from post-school qualifications. In May 2001, 70 per cent of people who completed year 12 and almost 80 per cent of people with vocational education and training qualifications at certificate III or IV level were in employment. This compares favourably with those people who have not completed year 12. Only 57 per cent of these people were in employment.

Young people need to obtain year 12 or some kind of substantial vocational or university qualification to get a good job, earn a decent income and lead a rewarding life. The work force has changed and no longer offers a job for life. High-level qualifications are the currency of the global economy and the rapidly changing job market. The government response to this reality is to provide an environment in which all Queensland teenagers aged between 15 and 17 will be either earning or learning. We can no longer allow some 10,000 young people to fall through the cracks and jeopardise their future chances.

So how is the government proposing to achieve this goal? From 2006, under this legislation, it will be compulsory for young people to remain in school until they finish year 10 or turn 16, whichever comes first. Young people will also be required to participate in learning for another two years or until they have a Senior Certificate, or a certificate III vocational qualification, or until they turn 17. Young people will be able to enter the work force, as long as they are working for at least 25 hours a week.

Every year 10 student will develop a senior education and training plan in conjunction with their schools and parents. These plans will help young people decide what they want to learn and how they will achieve their learning goals. As young people participate in learning, their achievements will be credited to a learning account with the Queensland Studies Authority. The accounts will be opened when year 10 students register with the QSA and will remain open until they have achieved their Senior Certificate or certificate III qualification.

The Queensland Studies Authority is currently developing a new Senior Certificate. This new certificate will count many more learning achievements than the current certificate. Young people will be able to gain credit or learning in school, vocational education and training and perhaps even in the community or at work. The new certificate will be an even more valuable document for young people and potential employers.

Since July 2003, seven areas across Queensland have been running trials of the reforms to the senior phase of learning. In these areas, leaders from state and non-state schools, TAFE institutes and the Department of Employment and Training, business and industry, local government, youth organisations and community services are developing district youth achievement plans. These plans identify the existing resources available to young people, the learning needs of young people and the strategies that will be used to meet their needs.

While there are currently no trials under way in far-north Queensland, I am hoping that that will be remedied next year. However, high schools in the Cairns region, including Smithfield and Kuranda—the two high schools in Barron River—are already providing flexible pathways for students providing students with opportunities to study vocational courses and engage in school based apprenticeships and traineeships. Since the beginning of August, nine Kuranda State High School students have been undertaking various units from the certificate II in tourism in conjunction with their regular studies with teacher Vicki Jones. To date, the program has focused on developing the students' understanding and knowledge of tourist operations. On top of their regular training, participants have visited a range of established attractions such as Koala Gardens in Kuranda and Fitzroy Island and commenced work experience with other businesses in Kuranda.

In the next school term the students will work with certificate IV cultural guiding students at Kuranda to develop skills in heritage, cultural and interpretive tourism before devising their own guided tour of the Kuranda State High School grounds. The students are to be commended on their commitment to the course, which will prepare them for further TAFE study, traineeships or direct employment. I thank TAFE director, Dale Anderson, for his support for this course and his willingness to consider my request for the delivery of a range of TAFE programs for both students and adults at Kuranda High.

Smithfield High School, which is a centre of excellence for science, maths and technology, is the only school in the state to include the QANTM certificate level III and IV multimedia course as part of a senior ICT subject which gives them a semester's credit towards study at nearby James Cook University. The school is also proposing to strengthen its relationship with JCU in the areas of journalism and film and TV. The outstanding achievements of Smithfield students in IT were recognised again last night when Chris Diehm and Kwanta Fuangvila received Building Youth Technology Excellence Awards from Minister Anna Bligh in the senior school and girls category. While not present last night, year 9 student Christopher Bell also won an award in the middle school category, making Smithfield High the only school to receive three awards. These students are all assured of bright futures, and I congratulate them on their success and commend principal Larry Gallagher and all the IT staff for their commitment to excellence in this field.

During the long consultation process regarding these reforms which began in 2001, there have been a number of legitimate concerns raised by principals, teachers and parents in recognition of the difficulty of engaging reluctant students in the compulsory participation phase after year 10, or 16 years, and in delivering these reforms in rural and remote areas. However, I should remind members that students are not required to spend all their senior years in education or training. The compulsory participation obligation will not apply to young people who obtain 25 hours per week of employment. The compulsory participation obligation will not apply to young people who have obtained a dispensation from the director-general for reasons such as they are receiving appropriate home schooling or they cannot or it is unreasonable to expect them to participate in any eligible education or training option.

In addition, where students are not complying with attendance requirements, the legislation will allow as defence for parents against prosecution the fact that there may be circumstances in which a parent is unable to control the young person's behaviour or where a young person does not live with that parent. The minister will move an amendment to this legislation to retain existing provisions in the Education Act which will enable principals to exclude students from school and cancel their enrolment as requested by principals. A policy will now be developed to detail the steps that must be taken prior to the principal cancelling a student enrolment. There are also a range of positive measures to ensure that appropriate educational and training programs and student support is available particularly in regional and remote areas where it is acknowledged that it is more challenging to provide flexible pathways.

For example, there will be up to 100 additional youth support workers, new TAFE courses, employer incentives for an additional 1,750 school based apprenticeships and traineeships, an employment preparation program and a grant program to trial a range of innovative programs to improve participation and retention for at-risk students. The next decade will see a profound reshaping of our education and training system. It will be exciting, challenging and rewarding for teachers, parents, employers and, most importantly, for the students themselves, who will be better prepared to face the future and grasp the opportunities that it presents to them. I congratulate Minister Bligh and Minister Foley on their commitment to these reforms and the development of this legislation, which will play such a vital role in realising our vision for Queensland as a Smart State.