



Speech by

Hon. MIKE REYNOLDS

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard 28 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. M. F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.09 a.m.): I am pleased to inform the House that submissions have been received from six of the seven Queensland universities contacted by my department after I urged these institutions to work more closely with the state government to ensure that graduates are fully prepared and equipped to work in the challenging field of child protection.

The CMC inquiry into foster care was critical of the level of skills and knowledge that graduates possess at the time of recruitment to the role of family services officers, or child safety officers as we intend to rename them. It is clear that a number of gaps exist in the knowledge, skills and abilities of some graduates to perform their roles effectively as frontline staff.

The department had already formed a university curriculum liaison committee before the CMC inquiry, and I am determined to see the work of this committee expedited. At a meeting early last month I provided representatives of each of the universities copies of documents identifying departmental needs that should be covered in course curricula, including key issues surrounding child protection.

The next phase of this exercise involves representatives of my department meeting individually with the universities to discuss in detail the proposals they have sent to us. These proposals will then be given to an evaluation panel comprising key people from my department and representatives from the non-government sector. The University of Queensland and James Cook University have already indicated a preparedness to establish a graduate certificate course in child protection, and we will be looking at ways to make this happen.

It is important that the universities recognise that many child safety officers are needed throughout the state, including in rural and remote areas and in particular in indigenous communities. The Department of Child Safety wants to see key partnering arrangements with the universities which include recognition of prior learning and advanced standing for vocational education and training qualifications that can lead to articulation with degree courses. We are keen to see innovative strategies that include the delivery and marketing of courses across Queensland. We will also be considering university proposals for the state government, through my department, to support course content and curricula in the form of scholarships to provide some certainty to these partnering arrangements.