



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2007

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (12.12 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Vocational Education, Training and Employment and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and to also put on the record the wonderful opportunities that are available to young people through TAFE colleges. In my electorate, we have a very progressive and constructive relationship between training organisations, schools and the major industries in particular to develop skills in young people. It is a recognised area of skills shortage. I put on the record my appreciation to the schools and industry network, to the group apprenticeship scheme, to all of the secondary schools in the electorate that are involved in school based training and to the TAFE and indeed the university for the cooperation that they show in terms of progressing opportunities for young people.

It is true that we have had a couple of pendulum swings. We had an overemphasis in the past on tertiary education, then there was a swing and emphasis on only getting trade training and then a bit of a swing back to the university. The reality is that, with the broad cross-section of young people and their different interests, skills and aspirations, a balance between the two is where we ought to be. Young people and their parents and other mentors can recognise in each individual person their strengths, weaknesses and interests and encourage them into the area of training that will most benefit them. The other benefit that has occurred in recent years is the transportability of skills, where young ones may start off in one area and get some credits there and then transport them across to other training areas.

In his second reading speech, the minister said—

Ensuring we have a vibrant and robust public provider, alongside a thriving private sector, is the cornerstone in ensuring Queensland's workforce matches the needs of industry and our vocational education and training system remains world class.

I would have to echo those words and commend the minister for that statement.

One of the criticisms of TAFE in my electorate has been the lack of flexibility in the delivery methods from TAFE. In some cases, young men and women are listed on courses for particular training programs but they get a phone call a day or two before the package is supposed to be delivered saying that the course has been cancelled. That is very disruptive for young people and their employer if the employer is relying on the training packages to be delivered when needed. If this bill will give a more commercial focus to TAFE, that commercial focus also has to include reliability of course provision.

When I was first elected and for a number of years after that, Dave Burns was the leader of GAGAL. I have a lot of respect for Dave. He has a great heart when it comes to young people and their training. One of his aspirations was to see that the young men and women who had to come in from Biloela or other more remote areas for training packages at Gladstone TAFE had somewhere to stay. His vision was to have the group apprentices actually construct the accommodation on government land adjacent to the TAFE college and for the building of that accommodation to be included as part of their training, and then in subsequent years young men and women could stay there while they did their TAFE block training. I hold that aspiration as one that could still be achieved. It was well thought out and would certainly provide accommodation for young people in a region where rentals are at a minimum, if there are any at all.

The increasing reliance on and the increasing involvement of students in vocational education in secondary schools is a measure of our maturity as a community. It used to be that if young men and women were not academically interested and engaged they very easily fell through the cracks. Now the focus on vocational education in the curriculum allows for an early identification of academic difficulties. Indeed, vocational education is not only for young men and women with academic challenges. Some wonderful young people who are engaged in training apprenticeships et cetera have a brilliant mind and great practical skills as well. As I said, it is for the cross-section of the community.

I believe that making vocational education a very dominant stream in the schools several years ago has done much to re-engage young men and women in the educational process and to provide them with an opportunity at the end of the day to have training and skills that are portable, recognised and, most importantly, in high demand.

I certainly support this legislation. I know people who are involved in the vocational education stream and they have a great heart for the community. In my electorate, we have a number of major industries that are looking at expansions. These include: Rio Tinto Yarwun; Monto Minerals, which is looking at the commencement of its operation; Santos, which is investigating a pipeline down into Gladstone; the Gladstone Pacific Nickel project; and Orica, which has other expansions. They will really demand an increased skills base for the region. If we can provide a sound education for our young men and women—and our more mature students as well—it will enhance that skills base and will enhance this state's opportunity to provide workers in the expanding economic base. I support the bill.