



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 5 September 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Voluntary Student Unionism

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.41 am): The Howard government's introduction of voluntary student unionism in July last year has ripped the heart out of our universities, with the Department of Education, Training and the Arts reporting a number of alarming trends after seeking feedback from Smart State universities. Essential services that are critical to students and their families, such as child care, counselling, medical services, and legal and welfare advice, have been scrapped or wound back at universities across the state.

Universities are being forced to foot the bill to keep some level of services running. This means finding money out of their existing budgets. I will give members some examples. Griffith University estimates that \$6.5 million in revenue has been lost by its student associations as a result of the introduction of the anti-unionism policy and the university has been forced to provide \$1.5 million from its own budget to help offset this loss. The community spirit that was once a key part of university life is disappearing along with the on-campus activities that student associations once provided. Many student associations are continuing to struggle on, despite the downturn in memberships, but staff numbers have been slashed.

At Central Queensland University, the loss of the student levy has meant that the number of staff employed by the student association has been reduced from 42 to 15, either through redundancies or attrition, resulting in a loss of about \$1 million in wages in the local community. Similarly, James Cook University's student association was forced to retrench much of its existing staff.

A government member: Shame!

Mr BEATTIE: There has been a significant reduction in many services, including sport and recreation, Orientation Week events and academic advocacy. I take that interjection. It is a shame. At the University of Queensland, we are all familiar with how the much-loved Schonell Cinema was forced to close its doors. A cafe has also been shut and two refectories, including the sole Ipswich facility, are also under threat of closure. The student associations are doing a remarkable job to try to maintain some level of service for students despite the Howard government's attempts to destroy everything that our universities stand for.