



Speech by

Phil Weightman

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2007

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WEIGHTMAN (Cleveland—ALP) (9.46 pm): I rise to give my strong support to the Vocational Education, Training and Employment and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I am a big supporter of vocational education because I believe all Queenslanders should be given opportunities to develop the skills necessary to compete in the workplace. I am particularly pleased about the success of vocational education in my area through the senior schooling system in conjunction with the various TAFE institutions.

As a member of the Metropolitan South Institute advisory board I have watched firsthand the evolution of TAFE institutes over the past few years. The move towards statutory authorities is a further positive step in that direction. There have been many benefits gained through the process so far, and I can see that there are many more positive steps to be made in the future.

In line with action 1 of the Queensland Skills Plan—growing Queensland's VET sector—the bill helps provide vocational education opportunities by reinvigorating the TAFE system and making a more effective partnership between government and industry. No-one will argue that we need to embark on a skills program for Queenslanders. We need to address real needs as we build a state that will be able to enjoy the benefits of a booming industry.

The Queensland Skills Plan calls for greater collaboration between industry, training providers and government to build skills where jobs are and to fill the jobs with skilled workers. Here in the Smart State apprenticeship and traineeship numbers well and truly outperform the national rate. I think the member for Aspley noted that it was double the national rate.

More Queenslanders are taking up vocational educational options to kick-start their careers and to reinvigorate their careers with a change of direction requiring a new skill set. In my area the level of senior students undertaking some of the vocational education training is about 40 per cent. I commend the high schools in my area for their professional approach to providing high standard vocational education programs when we most need new skilled workers.

All this comes at a time when more employers are recognising the way to a prosperous future is through the acquisition of cutting-edge skills—skills in high demand thanks to our enormous infrastructure, technology and resource booms. It is becoming a well-recognised fact in schools and industry that vocational qualifications translate into an exciting, secure and well-paid career. Queenslanders of all ages across our broad state deserve the best skills development opportunities available. This legislation is a key part of this skills reform program.

These reforms of the TAFE governance arrangements are not ideologically driven; they are driven by the social, training and industry needs of Queensland. It is as much about keeping young adults in school, providing skilling opportunities for everyone and providing a booming economy with the required skilled workers to support it now and into the future. Statutory TAFE institutes will be better equipped to make timely commercial decisions, achieve greater commercial growth and develop their training capacity

and capability to best meet the needs of industry and individuals. Importantly, statutory TAFE institutes will also be able to offer eligible students access to Commonwealth FEE-HELP assistance. The federal government has extended FEE-HELP to full fee-paying VET students studying diplomas, advanced diplomas, vocational graduate diplomas and vocational graduate certificates due for implementation in January 2008.

Although there have been substantial changes to many TAFE institutions in Queensland, under the current legislative model they cannot offer FEE-HELP to students because they are required to have body corporate status or its equivalent under the law. The higher level VET fee-for-service market is expected to grow substantially as a direct result of the expansion of FEE-HELP to the VET sector. Training provision is a growth industry in its own right and, as such, there is a high level of competition and the move towards becoming a statutory authority will allow TAFE institutes to be very competitive. Queensland TAFE institutes must be established as statutory authorities to meet the growing needs of individuals and industry in the associated professional qualifications market. I am concerned that TAFE students in Queensland will be disadvantaged simply due to the definition of 'eligible training providers' and I am very pleased to hear that Minister Welford has negotiated an agreement with the federal minister for vocational education and training to ensure that eligible TAFE Queensland students are not disadvantaged.

I am proud to be a member of a government that takes vocational education seriously and I lend my strong support to the revitalisation of the TAFE system for students, for industry and to meet the skilling needs of Queensland's booming economy. The Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE was one of the first institutes to amalgamate under the Queensland Skills Plan. There are 400 programs available across 10 campuses. Programs include years 11 and 12, apprenticeships, traineeships and certificates through to advanced diplomas as well as specially tailored programs for industry and business clients. Double diplomas and part-time or full-time study options are available. In addition to core courses, the institute is the largest provider of adult community education courses in Queensland. It has gone from strength to strength with strong performances in the fashion design industry in particular. It has also been a strong financial performer. With the ability to become a statutory authority, it will be well placed to become an industry leader in the provision of training in many fields such as fashion design, health, visual arts and business studies. I congratulate the minister and his department on being visionary in all aspects of revitalising TAFE as a whole and on their hard work in pulling together all parties, some of whom had reservations with regard to the employment status of those employed within the new TAFE institutes. I am pleased that this legislation caters for those employers by retaining their status within the Public Service. I am very pleased to commend this bill to the House.