



Speech by


# Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Thursday, 21 June 2012

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## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (COMMONWEALTH POWERS) BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.07 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Vocational Education and Training (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2012. It truly is an honour to follow our Madam Chair, who I find extremely pleasant to work with and who achieves great outcomes, and I thank Madam Chair for that. I also thank the committee members who I am getting to know better. I am sure we will have a productive year. In echoing Madam Chair's remarks, I want to thank Bernice, Emily and Carolyn as well. They are wonderful staff and are truly an asset.

At the outset, I would also like to recognise and apologise for the number of acronyms I will use in my contribution—something that is inevitable in some of these presentations. As a member of the Education and Innovation Committee, which has reviewed the proposed legislation, I am happy that areas such as Technical and Further Education—TAFE—colleges are excluded from the referral as my children and I are products of the VET sector: my daughter studied business, my boys both completed school based apprenticeships and I studied and obtained qualifications in business, building and construction. I am personally happy that the bill aims to improve the quality and outcomes of students in Australia's VET business.

Since 2000 the Training and Employment Recognition Council, known as TERC, and its predecessor, the Training Recognition Council, have provided strong and consistent leadership of the regulation of vocational education and training, known as VET, in Queensland. TERC has a diverse membership with its membership drawn from experienced practitioners in industry, unions, private and public training providers, group training organisations and Australian apprenticeship centres.

Foundation chair, Mr Barry Nutter, a retired industrial commissioner and former director-general of the department of employment, vocational education, training and industrial relations remains the chair to this day. TERC has been responsible for implementing a number of significant reforms in regulation. TERC was instrumental in establishing a risk based approach to regulation of training providers in Queensland. This same approach is being adopted by the National VET Regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, known as ASQA, because of its most effective and efficient way of regulating.

It is a measure of TERC's effectiveness and attention to detail that regulatory decisions made by TERC when reviewed by external bodies, such as the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, have always been found sound. Similarly, Queensland has a 100 per cent success rate of prosecuting providers who have breached the requirements of the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Act 2000. With such a track record of consistency and success it is responsible to ask: why then do we need to change the national model of regulation? Quite simply, Queensland cannot stand alone in a market that ignores state borders. The state based model of regulation has significant weaknesses in responding to concerns about interstate providers. The TERC has little capacity to sanction such providers should they fail to meet the required standard.

In addition to the referral power, the bill also introduces transfer of responsibility for managing apprenticeships and traineeships from TERC to Skills Queensland. Skills Queensland was established in late 2010 as an advisory body for government on skills and workforce development priorities. Skills Queensland has a strong industry representation and is well placed to assume responsibility for managing apprenticeships and traineeships. Skills Queensland is supported by Public Service officers to perform its role, and the staff who currently support TERC will now support Skills Queensland in performing its new functions. Having worked as chair of Skills Queensland's predecessor, Construction Training Queensland, from 2005 to 2008 I have intimate knowledge and faith in Skills Queensland's capacity to deliver for Queensland.

The bill also makes amendments to the Building Act 1975, the Liquor Act 1992 and the Gaming Machine Act 1991. The referral power has highlighted that some of Queensland's legislation is inconsistent with the scheme of national regulation of RTOs because it imposes additional requirements on RTOs over and above the registration requirements of ASQA. In an environment where delivery of training is increasingly mobile and flexible, including dramatic increases to online delivery, a national agency is able to respond quickly and effectively to emerging issues. This capacity is crucial if Queensland industry is to continue to have confidence in the qualifications delivered by Queensland registered training organisations and, indeed, those from other jurisdictions.

Queensland has also played a leading role in the establishment of ASQA. The national VET regulator task force established to develop ASQA included a significant number of staff from the Queensland regulatory body. Most notably, the former head of the Queensland agency, Dr Dianne Orr, headed the task force charged with developing ASQA's regulatory strategy. Dr Orr has since been appointed as one of those three ASQA commissioners. ASQA's chief commissioner, Mr Chris Robinson, is a former deputy director-general of the Queensland department of employment and training. Both Dr Orr and Mr Robinson are based in the Brisbane office of ASQA. While ASQA's third commissioner, the Hon. Michael Lavarch AO, is based in ASQA's Sydney office, he has strong ties to Queensland. It is clear that Queenslanders will continue to play a pivotal role in monitoring the quality of training provided in Australia.

Under the current model an RTO is registered by a state and can then deliver training nationally. Queensland's capacity to monitor or take action against these providers registered in other states was severely limited under this model. Two states, Victoria and Western Australia, have decided not to refer their powers. The Commonwealth has advised that it will continue to work with these two non-referring states to encourage them to also refer their powers. All providers operating in Queensland will be subject to regulation by ASQA, ensuring the quality of training delivered here.

We do need a national approach to deliver a more mobile workforce with qualifications recognised throughout Australia. This would mean employers would be assured of the standard a prospective employee has obtained whichever state the qualification has been obtained in. Think of the opportunities into the future with our skills shortages and our future needs. This bill is a much-needed reform that will bring the standard of regulation of VET across Australia up to the high standard of regulation we have enjoyed for some time in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.