



Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

TAFE QUEENSLAND BILL

Mr MOLHOEK (Southport—LNP) (5.26 pm): I rise to speak in support of the TAFE Queensland Bill 2013. This bill is a long overdue reform of TAFE and will position this public provider to focus on meeting the rapidly evolving training and skills needs of industry within our state.

It is essential that any reform of the VET sector in Queensland will ensure that the sector is able to meet the current and future skills needs of our state's economy. Queensland's industries and businesses, supported by strong government policy and quality VET providers, are central to developing appropriately skilled Queenslanders who will deliver on the economic growth and employment potential of this state. This bill will position TAFE to meet industry demand for relevant and timely training and provide a sustainable supply of skilled workers for Queensland's employers.

The Skills and Training Task Force was appointed by this government to make recommendations about ways to improve the VET sector in Queensland. According to the task force report, Queensland's industries have been faced with chronic skills shortages for nearly a decade. Skills and training have not kept pace with the rapidly expanding economy. An analysis provided to the task force indicates that there has been no growth in VET student numbers in Queensland over the past decade, despite the growth in state population over the same period. Traditional approaches to the public provision of vocational education and training have not met the rapidly evolving needs of Queensland's employers and the expanding demand for skills such as advanced trade and para-professional skills.

Fundamental to increasing the state's productivity is raising the skills and qualifications profile of the population to match the occupational and employment needs of the labour market. Queensland needs an increasingly skilled workforce that is relevant to the requirements of industry to support the establishment and growth of businesses, to enable major industries to capitalise on national and global market opportunities and to support industries undergoing transformation requiring new and different skill sets.

The challenge for the government is investing in the right skills and ensuring that the right training is delivered at the right time. Past experience has shown that ad hoc industry consultation will not lead to significant improvements in the TAFE training delivery that is required by individuals, industry and the state. This bill ensures that TAFE Queensland will be responsive to our industries' training needs.

TAFE Queensland will compete in an increasingly contestable training market where the government will purchase training from public and private training providers linked to job outcomes. A parent entity with a commercially focused board will respond to the needs of the training market and industry. This is a new approach to the public provision of VET to ensure employer demands are being met by the public provider. TAFE Queensland board members will be selected on the basis of their commercial and industry experience to ensure the board has the skills required to operate TAFE Queensland in a commercially successful manner. Board members experienced in commerce, industry and training will inform the strategies and operations of TAFE Queensland. The board will also offer critical links within various industry sectors which will support TAFE Queensland in establishing its formal industry engagement arrangements.

This bill provides that one of TAFE Queensland's functions is to contribute to and actively engage with industry. This government is committed to the requirement for deep industry engagement as outlined in the task force recommendations to ensure TAFE is a sustainable quality public provider of vocational education and training. The revitalised TAFE Queensland will engage directly with business, enterprise and industry leaders, as well as establish relationships with other training providers, universities and the education sectors to ensure that it is positioned to efficiently respond to the needs of the markets in which it operates. It is anticipated that TAFE Queensland will establish regular forums from consultation with industry sectors to better understand their long-term skills and training requirements as well as taking stock of the rapidly evolving needs of those industries undergoing transformation.

TAFE Queensland also faces the significant challenge of operating successfully in a highly competitive market with contestable funding arrangements. The provisions of this bill empower TAFE Queensland to pursue commercial arrangements at a whole of TAFE level with both international and domestic partners. Only through deep engagement with the industries that TAFE Queensland serves, and those providers it may compete or collaborate with, will TAFE Queensland be positioned to operate successfully within the increasingly competitive VET market. While the specific arrangements for industry engagement for TAFE Queensland will ultimately be a matter for the board, through inclusive industry engagement under the functions of TAFE Queensland and requiring a commercially focused board, this bill provides for the skills and training needs of Queensland businesses to be met.

In my own electorate of Southport, the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE is one of the leading providers of health and community services training not just on the Gold Coast but nationally. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate our CEO, Aaron Devine, for his outstanding leadership. The investment of the new Gold Coast University Hospital has strengthened the attractiveness of the Gold Coast as a destination for study and led the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE to look to increase its training provision. Students from all over Queensland and around the country are currently studying online with the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE to complete a diploma of enrolled nursing. These students are choosing Gold Coast TAFE on the basis of its online learning materials, its links with industry, its learning support and its professional approach to clinical placement. While most learning is supported online, many students undertaking the course travel to the Gold Coast for residential intensives, supporting not just our education industry but also tourism.

Since July 2009 student numbers in health and community services have grown significantly. In health training, such as enrolled nurse training, Gold Coast TAFE has achieved a 92 per cent increase in student enrolments from 928 to 1,778 student enrolments—a tremendous example of what a contestable TAFE can achieve in a very competitive environment. In community services Gold Coast TAFE has seen a 75 per cent growth in student enrolments—from 677 to 1,187. The nominal hours of training in this sector have grown from around 600,000 hours of training to just short of 1.2 million hours of training. Figures for the current financial year, while not yet available, will show even further growth.

Gold Coast Institute of TAFE currently has over 440 registered inquiries from students for the next intake of their diploma of enrolled nursing which will begin in semester two of this year. This will be their largest ever enrolment in the program. It is anticipated that up to half of these students will be outside of the Gold Coast. More intakes later in the year are planned to meet the growth in training demand. Gold Coast Institute of TAFE is increasing its staff levels in these areas and is undertaking a very active role in enhancing the concept of the Gold Coast as a health and knowledge hub.

In speaking to this bill I particularly want to acknowledge the great work of the Minister for Education, Training and Employment, Mr John-Paul Langbroek, the member for Surfers Paradise. I also want to acknowledge the work of Saxon Rice, the Assistant Minister for Technical and Further Education and member for Mount Coot-tha. I commend the work of the committee under the member for Burdekin's leadership, Rosemary Menkens. I commend again the great work of members of the leadership team on the Gold Coast at the TAFE within Southport and other parts of the city for their hard work in demonstrating what a successful TAFE can achieve. I suggest to the House that this is just one of the institutions that will really benefit and thrive under these new arrangements.

Our government will continue to set training priorities and purchase qualifications that match training with job opportunities. To inform decision making, this government is committed to rejuvenating industry engagement arrangements. As an initial step, an industry reference group has been established to begin the process and ensure training provided by TAFE meets the needs of the industry. I am proud to offer my support to this bill to reform TAFE and provide solutions to the skills and training needs of our industry and the future economic development of this great state. It is with great pleasure that I stand in the House tonight to speak in support of this bill. I am happy to commend this bill to the House.