




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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### TAFE QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.27 pm): I rise to support the TAFE Queensland Bill 2013. It is important to acknowledge my fellow committee members, although sometimes they were hard to get along with—I jest! I thank the committee staff: Bernice, Emily, Greg and Carolyn. Without those wonderful staff members, our roles would have been a lot more difficult.

**Mr Gibson** interjected.

**Mr BENNETT:** I can tell the member for Gympie that that was said in jest. They are a wonderful group and we do push through a lot of work. It is great to be a member of the Education and Innovation Committee.

I am a product of TAFE and all my children have studied at TAFE to some degree, so we know all too well the importance of Queensland's vocational education and training sector. TAFE can be a pathway to further education, skills and development. The policy objectives of the bill are commendable and will establish an independent body, TAFE Queensland, to be the public provider of vocational education and training. However, most importantly, the bill will ensure that TAFE Queensland operates in an effective and efficient way and is commercially successful. The bill allows the transitional arrangements to establish TAFE Queensland. We all know that TAFE is a major part of Queensland's training future. TAFE Queensland is the largest vocational education and training provider in Queensland. As we know, TAFE delivers quality practical and industry-relevant training to more than 230,000 students each year. The college comprises institutes in a state-wide network of 13 institutes and 70 campuses across city and country Queensland, delivering more than 800 courses.

With the VET sector needing review the government last year commissioned the Skills and Training Taskforce. This independent task force provided recommendations on vocational education and training in Queensland. The review needed to examine not only Queensland's VET sector but also the ramifications of the national initiatives on things like performance, governance, regulatory and funding arrangements and importantly the process for industry and community engagement in this very important industry—the training industry.

The task force reviewed the appropriate role of TAFE in supporting our economy given the impacts and contributions of registered training organisations and the increasing role of schools. Operational efficiency and asset management, workforce management and operating systems were all included in the review. With the emerging pressures on the VET sector to address economic and market expectations the government responded to the task force recommendations by creating the new TAFE Queensland that is fit for the intended purpose of providing training into the future.

During the committee's deliberations it became clear that the demand for vocational education and training comes from the students, industry and skills needs. We had great representation from key stakeholders. We all agree that we need to improve responsiveness to industry demand while addressing skill shortages.

TAFE Queensland needed a parent entity outside the current department of education structure to be a statutory body. This will allow for a more commercially focused board constituted by and

accountable directly to the minister. This is a positive step to drive training and business focused operations supporting products and services of the VET sector.

With the change proposed, that being for TAFE Queensland to operate in a more commercially focused environment, it is important that there is a higher level of flexibility to discuss employment conditions directly with staff to be able to meet the entity's new business needs. This bill allows TAFE Queensland to employ staff outside the Public Service Act 2008 so that it has more capacity to determine employment arrangements, like common law contracts and structured awards. The bill's intention to enable a contemporary, flexible and more productive approach to employment is important if we are going to make the public VET provider competitive and commercially viable. It also needs to be commercially focused.

The TAFE brand issues were addressed. The brand will be protected through the creation of an offence against the unlawful use of the brand. The committee submitters, including union and industry representatives, support this bill in principle, though it is acknowledged that there were some concerns around the industrial relations provisions. There is broad agreement that the changes will stimulate further competition within the existing private training sector and will allow progress towards TAFE being the VET provider of choice in Queensland.

From the committee's consideration of the bill and from the many submissions received, it is clear to me that the VET sector needs to be able to respond to industry demand. The bill supports that goal by establishing TAFE Queensland as a body that can be more responsive and flexible. We have witnessed issues locally with the Wide Bay Institute of TAFE wanting to progress training outcomes only to lose the opportunity to private providers operating from back rooms or under houses and undercutting VET services. What we need is guaranteed quality training and the TAFE providers are excellent. Having direct industry experience as a criteria for board membership is seen as a significant step forward.

After many years associated with the TAFE sector—either as an employer of apprentices receiving training or as a student, firstly when I did my carpentry and joinery apprenticeship many years ago and then my further qualifications in project management and business and attaining builder qualifications—I knew that TAFE needs to operate in an effective and contestable market. We as Queenslanders have large TAFE assets in key locations and we need to see these state assets utilised to develop skills for the future.

In my area the Wide Bay Institute of TAFE is held in high regard. We do look forward to the reforms that this bill proposes. It is with much pleasure that I commend the minister and his department for bringing this bill to the House. It is with great pleasure that I thank the committee and commend the bill to the House.