




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOowoomba North

TAFE QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.36 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the TAFE Queensland Bill 2013. I thank the minister for bringing the bill into the House. The key objectives of the bill are to establish an independent body of TAFE Queensland to be the public provider of vocational education and training and to ensure that TAFE Queensland operates in an effective and efficient way and is commercially successful. This is a very important change to TAFE. I am very lucky in Toowoomba to have the wonderful Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE—affectionately known as SQIT—right in the heart of my electorate. There is a great team of people who work there who have had good success over many years. Trevor Schwenke leads our TAFE and has been working hard. Several of the members who work in the TAFE organisation in Toowoomba have worked with me and for me at the university: Neville Siebenhausen; Rob McGrath, who works in hospitality and ensures that that program works; and one of the candidates who I picked for the Queensland Plan Forum, Sorita McGrane. SQIT provides a great opportunity for the young people of Toowoomba.

This bill will help bring our TAFE up to date. Toowoomba and the surrounding regions of the Darling Downs and the Burnett are facing a potential boom time with the advent of the coal seam gas industry and growth in the agricultural sector. That is starting to spark increased commercial activity and building. All of these sectors are in desperate need of VET trained people. The Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE has been providing them to the region for a long time. If we are going to achieve our objective of reducing unemployment in this state it is important to make sure that we have people who are effectively trained and ready to take up the positions. To be able to do that institutes, such as the SQIT campus in Toowoomba North, need to be nimble on their toes, adjust to changing environments, adapt their programs and be commercially focused.

I thank the minister for bringing this bill forward. I thank the member for Mount Coot-tha for doing the work in this area. The Skills and Training Taskforce delivered a good report. Many of the changes that are proposed will allow the institute based in Toowoomba to take up the challenge of ensuring we have well trained VET graduates in the many areas that we need for our region to grow.

I might mention a little quirk of history, which is that the Toowoomba TAFE campus is located in Bridge Street because a former member of this place, Mike Horan, who worked for the Toowoomba show, moved the show to new showgrounds out of town at Glenvale and so the TAFE campus was built in Bridge Street. The TAFE campus is right in the heart of our city. It is very accessible. Many students have great opportunities to access VET education there. I believe that the changes that have been put forward here will help ensure that the people and the youth of Toowoomba have good opportunities in VET training going forward.

In Toowoomba, TAFE has always received good cooperation from local schools and the University of Southern Queensland. Toowoomba is well known as an education hub. In my small urban electorate there are 19 schools. They are great schools. Many school based apprentices get their training and VET provision from the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE. My daughters have

many friends in year 11 at the moment who are just beginning their journey on the VET program. Those young people want to make sure that they have skills that are job ready. They want to make sure that they are ready to take their place in the workforce. It is important for a TAFE institute to provide the sort of programs that students need. It is important that it has an independent board and an independent set-up that is commercially focused, ensuring that it is meeting industry needs in a way that is both cost effective and efficient for students who choose to enrol in the VET path.

This is a wonderful bill. I believe it will be very helpful for my local TAFE and for all TAFE campuses, particularly with the development of a western corridor as the expansion of the coal seam gas industry and other resource industries to our west start to take off. There will be lots of job opportunities. A TAFE sector that is able to compete on a contestable basis with other providers will ensure that it is a strong sector going forward.

I commend the bill to the House. I thank the minister and the member for Mount Coot-tha for bringing it forward. I am sure that the people who work on the campus in Toowoomba will be very happy with the changes because it will bring more and more opportunities, not only for good educational outcomes but also for employment growth for the teaching staff and other staff who work on the campus as more and more programs are delivered because they are commercially effective and they are what industry wants. With that brief statement, I thank the minister for the bill, which I commend to the House.