




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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**TAFE QUEENSLAND (DUAL SECTOR ENTITIES) AMENDMENT BILL; FURTHER
EDUCATION AND TRAINING BILL**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (7.47 pm): I rise tonight to make a small contribution to this cognate debate. Of course, these bills form part of this government's reform agenda to reduce red tape and provide for more efficient and effective vocational education and training in the VET sector. The provisions in the Further Education and Training Bill 2014 will make the apprenticeship and trainee system in Queensland simpler and more flexible and will improve outcomes for a range of stakeholders, from industry and employers to the apprentices and trainees themselves. As a member of the committee that considered these bills and recommended they be passed, I am confident that the Queensland VET sector stands to become much more effective as a result of the measures proposed in this legislation. As the government has stated on plenty of occasions, having a vocational education and training sector that can respond to the needs of industry is one of the keys to our economic prosperity. I would like to highlight a few aspects of this legislation which mark significant steps forward from the current circumstances.

The bill will reduce the time frame for registration of a training contract to 28 days. Currently, an employer is not required to lodge a training contract until after the completion of a probationary period, potentially leaving this trainee or apprentice in a state of uncertainty for several months. The new time frame for registering a training contract will resolve the employment status of these trainees and apprentices much sooner. Once a training contract is registered, it will be much easier under the new legislation for amendments to be made and for the contract to be suspended or cancelled in the circumstances where this must happen. Suspension and cancellation must now have the consent of both parties. I commend the provision of a seven-day grace period to protect people who may feel that they were coerced or pressured or who wish to withdraw their consent to the suspension or the cancellation of these contracts.

Under circumstances where the parties are unable to reach an agreement, I note that the chief executive will retain the ability to cancel a training contract at their discretion. This also provides for circumstances where an employment contract is terminated but the parties neglect to deal with the training contract.

During the committee's inquiry some concerns were raised, and of course I am very happy that all of these issues have been resolved and we are very happy that employment contracts will be regulated under the Commonwealth's Fair Work Act 2009. Under this legislation an apprentice or employee will be able to permanently transfer their training contract to another employer. This not only gives them some freedom to seek better conditions if necessary, but it also makes it easier to relocate if need be or get training while working on shorter-term projects.

Also, as part of the government's objective to increase options and create flexibility in education and training pathways, this bill provides for the issue of certificates of achievement. Quite often people's circumstances change before they are able to complete a three- or four-year apprenticeship

or traineeship. Certificates of achievement will allow people to be recognised for the skills they have attained if they wish to change their career pathways.

The bill will also reduce red tape by removing unnecessary duplication of rights and processes in the current VETE Act and industrial relations legislation. The current legislation allows aggrieved parties to pursue multiple options for compensation in relation to a single event, which is unfair and costly to those who have to address these multiple complaints. This was an issue identified by the Skills and Training Taskforce as a major barrier for industry. There will now be a clear process for the resolution of issues between apprentices and trainees and their employers, making things less complex for all concerned.

In talking to the TAFE Queensland (Dual Sector Entities) Bill 2014 and the agreement for the merger between Central Queensland University and the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE reached last year, we here in Queensland and the Wide Bay-Burnett area now have the opportunity to implement a significant step forward in tertiary education. This bill will facilitate the merger of CQU and CQIT into a dual sector entity as well as provide a model for the establishment of similar entities in the future—something I am both excited and optimistic about in the near future.

As the minister pointed out in his introductory speech, this government has always been committed to economic prosperity. Having tertiary education institutions that are able to respond and adapt by providing courses that are always relevant to current workforce needs is a fundamental element of that commitment we have made. The dual sector entity model allows institutions to increase their capacity and flexibility to offer a wider range of courses through the sharing of common resources. We also envisage that by combining the industry engagement capability of VET with the research and academic traditions of universities, it will create a strengthened organisational culture across the two sectors.

Operating under one banner also paves the way for a more effective and efficient credit transfer and articulation processes. Being able to take a variety of education pathways that recognise previous study is vital to ongoing learning, and this model will make it easier for tertiary education institutions to accommodate students' needs in this regard. Quite clearly there are significant benefits to establishing dual sector entities. By taking this opportunity to put the framework in place now, our education sector will be better positioned to meet the changing needs of Queensland's regions in years to come.

As a member of the Education and Innovation Committee which considered the bill, I also wish to express my support for the committee's recommendation that the minister consider the merger, and I do encourage the dialogue around a pilot project. Once this entity is well established, an evaluation will be vital to improving and refining the process of establishing such entities even further.

Finally, I wish to note that the bill allows for the dual sector entity to be recognised as a quality VET provider by allowing the use of the protected term 'TAFE'. It is important to recognise that many of the teaching staff and resources come from the proven TAFE system and that their integration into another entity in no way diminishes their ability to deliver quality training products and services. Given the fact that CQU serves as a vital training and education facility for many of my constituents, I will follow the establishment and operation of this dual sector entity with great interest.

I reiterate the point that we now have an opportunity to establish a model of tertiary education that is far more flexible and much more capable of quickly and effectively adapting to the ever-changing needs that exist within our industries.

I thank the minister and his staff for their hard work in bringing these bills to the parliament, and I thank my fellow committee members and all those who contributed to the inquiry. This legislation ticks all the boxes of reducing red tape and creating a more robust VET sector that is able to meet the needs of Queensland. I look forward to its implementation.