




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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QUEENSLAND TRAINING ASSETS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY REPEAL BILL

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (7.56 pm): Tonight I am speaking on behalf of the opposition against the repeal of the Queensland Training Assets Management Authority Repeal Bill. The establishment of the Queensland Training Assets Management Authority, or QTAMA, was one of the most important reforms of the vocational education and training sector undertaken by the LNP government. QTAMA was part of a series of reforms all aimed at creating a contestable VET market.

In government we set up a Skills and Training Taskforce—experts in the sector who told us that TAFE was not competitive and would not survive without major reform. This independent Skills and Training Taskforce recommended that we set up a separate specialist entity with expertise in infrastructure management to efficiently manage TAFE's assets. We took the advice of the experts and worked hard to set up QTAMA.

We took this action so TAFE Queensland could focus on what it does best—its core business: the delivery of quality training for Queenslanders—and not be limited by the responsibilities of having to look after assets. To create the much needed revitalisation of TAFE assets, the independent task force recommended removing the assets from the control of bureaucrats in the education department and allowing asset management experts, who could apply a level of commerciality, to apply their skills.

QTAMA was going to enable TAFE Queensland to be more competitive, more responsive, more innovative and more flexible. After years of Labor neglect, the training sector in Queensland was withering on the vine. Many TAFE campuses in regional Queensland were empty and more money was being spent on administration than on training—clearly an unsustainable model.

QTAMA delivered on the LNP government's commitment to increase front-line services by giving all existing and prospective training organisations equal access to VET facilities. It was a stronger and more sustainable way of managing our training infrastructure and had the capacity to substantially boost the availability of VET in the regions. Now it has been dumped because yet again this Labor government has delivered for its union masters. Minister D'Ath is only focused on making sure her union masters have what they want—protected workplaces and inefficient and wasteful service provision, not what the people of Queensland deserve, particularly in regional areas.

The people of Queensland need a vibrant and efficient VET sector with both public and a wide range of private training providers delivering quality and well-targeted training programs that result in Queenslanders gaining employment or being even more valuable to their existing employers. This objective was consistent with the nationally agreed reforms articulated in the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform under COAG. Let us not forget that it was the previous state Bligh Labor government that was happy to sign up to greater contestability with their friends in Canberra when in power federally under the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform. Any impacts on contestability risk putting Queensland at risk of losing \$260 million and nearly 100,000 training places.

The Minister for Training should understand the national partnership because she was a member of the former Labor government that advocated for greater contestability—an agreement that sought to achieve an improvement in training accessibility, affordability, participation, qualification completions and facilitating the operation of a more open and competitive training market. The repeal of QTAMA is a step away from the aims of the national partnership.

Before and during the election campaign the unions staged what seems to have been a successful campaign to scare the community about the impacts of QTAMA. It is important to put on the record a few matters. The first thing we need to understand is that, despite what the unions have said, not one public training asset was sold under the QTAMA governance model. There were plenty of underutilised land and buildings in the assets of TAFE, but not one of those were sold under the QTAMA governance model. There were plenty of opportunities to use that unused land. The member for Cleveland told me about a block of land in the Cleveland area for which negotiations were taking place to have it transferred to the Department of Health for future hospital needs, but unfortunately there was not enough time to facilitate that transfer.

I know of another transfer that took place in Townsville, in Pimlico. I visited a site up there which had facilities that were quite embarrassing. Some of the buildings cannot be used because they are unfit for humans. I understand that the minister has transferred it to the Department of Housing and Public Works for an initiative that I was very enthusiastic about, which was NRL House in Townsville. I am very hopeful that the current government will continue that. It is a great program for Indigenous students to come from their communities to Townsville under the guise of Rugby League but at the same time receive a great education and learn more about the life skills that are necessary to lead a successful life. I am hoping that that will take place.

Another fact which is important that Queenslanders understand is that there were no cuts to TAFE courses, no course fee increases and no job losses as a result of the formation of QTAMA, despite the misleading claims to the contrary.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr MANDER: That is a very good question, member for Lockyer. As confirmed by the CEO of TAFE Queensland during the committee hearings, absolutely no rent was paid by TAFE to QTAMA. The whole idea of the legislation that went through was that TAFE would get a subsidised rate of rent for the first two years to give them a chance to adjust to the new model, and right of this moment not one bit of extra rent has been paid by TAFE to QTAMA.

The other startling piece of information that I think is relevant to this debate is that the number of VET training placements across the whole sector has increased over the last 12 months, despite a lot of rumour-mongering put about by the unions.

QTAMA was going to increase the utilisation of Queensland VET assets, resulting in increased revenue from those assets. This could have been ploughed back into funding desperately needed campus upgrades and maintenance or even paying for more training delivery. QTAMA was going to provide more efficient and effective management of expenditure associated with state VET assets as a result of a sharper focus on efficient asset use, cost control and contract management.

QTAMA was going to enable TAFE Queensland to focus on excellence in service delivery without having to concern itself with the complexity of managing a substantial asset portfolio. It would have been free to choose any facilities that it wanted to use. Now, unfortunately, all this reform is going to be lost. Once again, under Labor we will see a TAFE system that has no chance of being fixed and will continue to wither on the vine. The LNP worked hard to make training more accessible for students and in line with what business needs, not training for training's sake but training for jobs.

As a result, TAFE usage has increased to 65 per cent whereas under Labor when the assets were managed under the old model they were 60 per cent empty—totally underutilised. This Labor government has failed to understand that TAFE cannot continue to operate as it did a century ago. Many TAFE campuses are ageing, crumbling relics. Standing back and throwing money might keep union bosses happy, but it will fail the people of Queensland, particularly those seeking employment or wanting to make themselves more employable.

What are we doing now under this government's plan? Those assets will be going back to the department—people who have no expertise in asset management; people who put us in this situation in the first place. The repeal of the QTAMA legislation is a disgrace. The people of Queensland will realise that it is a huge mistake. I speak against the bill.