




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 15 July 2015

QUEENSLAND TRAINING ASSETS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY REPEAL BILL

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills) (10.22 pm), in reply: It is certainly my pleasure to rise to sum up the debate on this bill and thank the members on this side for their contributions in relation to this debate, because I know that each and every one of them on behalf of their communities advocate every day to ensure that we have a strong public provider through TAFE in this state. They know what it means to the people in their communities; they understand the value of TAFE and the importance of having a very strong TAFE system well into the future. I thank them for their hard work and their campaigning during the election around our TAFE sites, and I have thanked them every day since for their ongoing advocacy on this very important issue.

We have heard a number of issues that were raised by those on the other side, and I want to address some of them. The member for Everton, the shadow minister for training, talked about the national partnership. He made quite an issue about there being a national partnership and stated that the national partnership talks about competition and contestability. It is absolutely true, and I confirm, that the national partnership was actually drawn up by the former federal Labor government. I was part of that government. I was on the Parliamentary Committee for Education and Training when it was drawn up and I am very proud of that document. I have that document, and I encourage the opposition to show me anywhere in that document where it talks about 100 per cent contestability, because it does not.

The document that I have was signed on 13 April 2012 by not only the federal Labor prime minister at the time but also the premier of Queensland at the time, the Hon. Campbell Newman. The principles in the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform say, amongst other things, that we should be strengthening the capacity of public and private providers and businesses to deliver training and support people in training. It talks about competition and contestability. It talks about requiring jurisdictions to put in place strategies to support public providers to adapt to the particular circumstances of their local training market, including an environment of greater competition and contestability. But nowhere in this document does it say 100 per cent contestability. In fact, only three states went down that path: Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. Where are they now? South Australia has now reversed their 100 per cent contestability, and tomorrow we will see the Victorian government come down with its funding review. I am hopeful that they will also see the merit in supporting their public provider of TAFE. I know that their system has been devastated down there. In the last few years, when it comes to the market share of funding for TAFE across this country, Queensland now sits at the second lowest; Victoria is the lowest. The Victorian government under the conservatives absolutely devastated the TAFE system down there, and they are now working really hard to try to rebuild that because they know the importance of having a strong public provider.

Why is it important to have a strong public provider? Let me go back to this national partnership agreement that the member for Everton wanted to refer to. In point 4 on the first page it says, 'The Parties are committed to increasing the level of workforce participation.' We heard this a lot from the then LNP state minister for education and training. We heard that training is only about getting jobs. If it did not lead to employment then they were not going to fund it, and we heard a lot of that. But what the national partnership agreement says is—

The Parties are committed to increasing the level of workforce participation and providing the support an individual experiencing disadvantage or disengagement (including young people) may need in order to gain skills that lead to employment or—

In the previous government I never heard the LNP talking about the 'or'—

other meaningful engagement in society.

I would have thought that those foundational skills for people with disabilities about getting those life skills and making their lives easier, making their lives better and making them more independent, would fit into that 'meaningful engagement in society'. The paragraph goes on to say—

This includes consideration of strategies and performance indicators to ensure the needs of students with disability are addressed.

That is what the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform actually says. When you go through the QTAMA Act, what you will not find in there is any reference to those broader engagement strategies. You will not find anything in the QTAMA Act which talks about community service obligations. You will see many references to commercial objectives; there is no doubt about that. It is all about commercial objectives. You do not hear about the people; you do not hear about those most vulnerable in our communities. You do not read anything about community service obligations or quality training, for that matter, in the QTAMA Act.

There have been comments and I saw some of the Submissions to the committee which stated, 'Why didn't the government just look at amending the QTAMA Act and changing its objectives?' The fact is that the fundamentals of what QTAMA was all about would never, ever have lined up with this national partnership agreement, with the TAFE Queensland Act, our community service obligations, our obligations as members of parliament and our obligations as members of government. They were never, ever going to align no matter how much tinkering I did with the QTAMA Act, because this body was set up for one purpose and one purpose only: to treat our assets as income-generating organisations so that the LNP could line their pockets, as the act said, 'or dispose of assets'.

We have heard about the run-down TAFEs and the under-utilisation of TAFEs and that they needed to set up QTAMA because they have all these empty campuses. How many campuses did the LNP close? Quite a few. When we talk about the under-utilisation of TAFE assets, we have to ask why that is the case. Would it have anything to do with the reduction in training funding over three years under the LNP? Would it have anything to do with the reduction in subsidised training, the reduction in course offerings, the removal of foundation skills that saw a further reduction in TAFE? There was no investment in TAFE by the LNP.

Mrs Smith interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: They love talking about the former Labor government. It is like the last three years never happened! It is a bit like, 'Charter boat? What charter boat?' Instead it is, 'Campbell Newman? What Campbell Newman?' There was no investment in TAFE by the LNP.

I have heard from those opposite—and those on this side—about the great job TAFE is doing. TAFE is doing a great job. Their marketing campaign is fantastic. They continue to deliver quality training. Businesses, industry and schools recognise TAFE's great work and the quality students that come out of our TAFE system.

I say to the LNP that the success of TAFE has absolutely nothing to do with the actions of the LNP over the past three years. In fact, it is despite the actions of the LNP over the past three years that TAFE has actually been so successful. We know that they have under-utilised properties and assets, but our job is to work with them to find the best use of those assets—to help them grow their business, to strengthen training opportunities—and, where that space is not needed by TAFE anymore, to work with business, to work with other providers, to work with community and with industry to get the best outcome. It is not about just flogging things off for whatever purpose and getting an income from them, because once they are gone they are gone.

We heard a lot of misinformation, both in the evidence to the committee and also from those opposite, that TAFE was never forced out of their assets; it was about empty space. That is not true. All that shows me is that no-one talked to TAFE Queensland about what is going on. Clearly, no-one

on the other side ever set foot on a TAFE campus, because every time I set foot on a TAFE campus I am told the stories of what QTAMA has been up to: QTAMA coming on site and saying, 'Clear out these floors'—floors they are utilising. 'Clear out the floors for use.' It happened at South Bank TAFE.

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: Those opposite might want to talk to the manager of TAFE to hear the stories of what is really going on.

There is one thing the LNP does not talk about in relation to QTAMA. We have heard about the rent. It is true: TAFE has been getting their rent subsidised since QTAMA was established. We acknowledge that. We acknowledge that, in writing at least, for the first two years of QTAMA TAFE would get priority access to their own assets, but that was not happening in practice. What the LNP does not talk about is that come 1 July 2016 that subsidy was to cease. TAFE Queensland would be paying full commercial rent on all of its own buildings. It was going to have to pay full commercial rent.

Mr Mander: Gasp!

Mrs D'ATH: I take that interjection from the member for Everton. Shock, horror! TAFE should pay full commercial rent on public assets to—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order, members! We have all had a pretty good go. How about we let the minister finish? We can have a vote then move on to the adjournment debate. Please, members, we have two more days.

Mrs D'ATH: I am not finished yet, Mr Speaker! This is very serious. What we do not talk about—the LNP certainly does not talk about it—and the reason it is important that this bill goes through and QTAMA is repealed is that after that two years was up our TAFEs were going to have to move out of their own properties in many areas because they could not afford to pay full commercial rent. It would have meant significantly increasing course costs—once again seeing people walking away from the VET sector. Where have people been turning when forced out of the VET sector because of increased fees? They have been going to VET FEE-HELP and signing up to diplomas with a cost of \$15,000 or \$20,000 with no up-front fees, only to find after the first term that they did not have the key foundation skills to continue.

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: Recently I had a conversation with the Commonwealth minister about this because the states and territories know that with VET FEE-HELP for diplomas there are no up-front fees. The marketing mechanisms being used are causing real problems. What the LNP was doing to the VET sector and TAFE in Queensland was forcing people in that direction. I digress. What those opposite do not talk about is the two-year mark.

Mr Rickuss: Can we ask for relevance, Mr Speaker?

Mrs D'ATH: The relevance is that come 1 July 2016 there would be no priority whatsoever for TAFE to access their own assets.

Mrs Smith interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Mount Ommaney, you have had a pretty good go.

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Speaker, I want their electors to hear what they have to say about this.

Mr RICKUSS: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The minister is actually quarrelling about this.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Lockyer. I do not need your assistance.

Mrs D'ATH: Member for Lockyer, I will be the one who has a smile on my face at the end of the evening because we will see the delivery of another election commitment of this government.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, do not bait the opposition.

Mrs D'ATH: Then the member for Lockyer can go back to his electors and tell them that he does not support TAFE.

Mr RICKUSS: Mr Speaker, she is doing it again. She is quarrelling across the chamber again.

Mr SPEAKER: Please, everyone. Thank you, Minister, if you could come back to the bill.

Mrs D'ATH: From 1 July we would have seen that reference to priority access removed. TAFE no longer would have had any preference to use its own facilities. If QTAMA believed that it could get more dollars from some other provider out there—more than TAFE could pay—it would have taken it.

Mr Mander: It is called contestability.

Mrs D'ATH: That is exactly what QTAMA was set up to achieve. Thank you very much, member for Everton, for agreeing with me.

Mr Langbroek: It is a Labor federal minister idea—contestability.

Mrs D'ATH: The former minister has come back in. The national partnership agreement: you know this one, don't you?

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: I think they want to go home, Mr Speaker. I remind the former minister that I have seen his signature on these documents that actually reaffirm the importance of TAFE. At the same time, he was coming back to this state and pushing through 100 per cent contestability so he could starve our TAFEs.

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Speaker, can I finish—

Opposition members: Yeah!

Mrs D'ATH: Maybe not. Let us go to the national partnership agreement again! Can I finish with the words of the member for Morayfield—

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: They are a rowdy bunch tonight!

Opposition members interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: I have got all night.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you, members. The minister is waiting. I call the minister.

Mrs D'ATH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In speaking to this bill, the member for Morayfield made a very relevant point, and that is that TAFE needed rescuing from the LNP. That is exactly what the Palaszczuk Labor government is intending to do. This is the first step in restoring a strong public TAFE system in this state to strengthen the VET sector in this state. I commend this bill to the House.