




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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**FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TRAINING OMBUDSMAN) AND
ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (5.12 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Further Education and Training (Training Ombudsman) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015. I am pleased to say that this is a government that is committed to jobs and training. This government recognises that a durable and effective vocational education and training sector is vital to a durable and effective jobs market. As our economy grows and opportunities for employment increase, we need to respond by providing pathways for people who may want to upskill or change their career. We need to bring confidence to business that our VET sector is able to deliver the skills it needs to stimulate the economy and growth. I am a strong advocate for vocational education and training. I believe it is vital to a healthy economy that we provide every opportunity to our citizens to get the right education so that they can make a valuable contribution to our society.

I went to TAFE at one stage in my life. It was one of the highlights of my life. I had two small children. When my youngest started school, I was so excited to be able to go to TAFE. My daughter has a PhD and a medicine degree, yet she still laments the fact that her husband, who 'only' went to TAFE for three years and did an IT degree, earns twice as much as she does. TAFEs are a very important part of our society. In my electorate, TAFE Queensland South West provides those very opportunities to thousands of students every year: students from multicultural backgrounds, refugees, young people, the long-term unemployed, early school leavers and the many people who wish to change careers.

I applaud the minister for her dedication to education in this state. This bill seeks to establish a Training Ombudsman in Queensland. Currently, Queensland consumers in the VET sector do not have access to a complaints mechanism that is specific to the sector. A sector-specific and independent mechanism to deal with the wide range of issues that may arise in the VET sector is vital to ensuring transparency, responsiveness and regard for all interested parties. This government recognises that VET consumers can face challenges in identifying the most appropriate avenue to direct concerns or complaints. As I said earlier, TAFE Queensland South West provides training and education to many students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, refugees and people with limited formal education. Those students need to know where they can go for advice and information if there is a problem and for assistance in resolving any potential dispute that may arise. An independent and unbiased system to provide that support for consumers is an essential component of an effective VET program.

We on this side of the House recognise that consumers and governments invest significant resources in VET and, although measures for improving training quality have recently been implemented at the national level, a Queensland Training Ombudsman will help the government improve the quality of VET in this state. The Training Ombudsman will have a number of roles. Predominantly, it will be responsible for receiving complaints about a range of matters, including those related to the provision and quality of services provided by TAFEs or registered training organisations.

We have all heard of RTOs that pop up overnight and promise the world to their students and then sadly either do not deliver high-quality education or worse disappear with the students' money. In my own electorate, only last month a group of students from an RTO in Ipswich advised me that they turned up for class one day to find a sticker on the door saying that the school was closed. Those students have little recourse. Their money has been taken and they have nothing to show for it. They even discovered that the course they were enrolled in is no longer current, so even if they had completed their education they would not be competitive employees in the market. This attitude to training is appalling. Those students are seen as nothing more than a cash cow for the RTO. I am pleased to say that the Queensland Training Ombudsman will be able to hear those complaints and act accordingly. If the matter falls within the jurisdiction of another agency such as the Australian Skills Quality Authority, the Training Ombudsman can help resolve the problem and even progress the complaint to the other agency.

Before the last election, the Palaszczuk government made a promise to the Queensland public. We said we would look after the VET sector in Queensland. We said we would not tinker with its operations and that we would provide it with the necessary programs and facilities so it can continue to deliver exemplary training and education. I am proud to say that on Saturday I will attend the graduation ceremony of TAFE Queensland South West, and I believe the Attorney-General is also attending. Last year I went to this event as a fairly newly elected member of parliament. It was an extraordinary event. There were people from so many different backgrounds and the looks on their family's faces as they went up to receive their certificates was very heartwarming. It was great to see the way it brings the community together. It embraces diversity and changes the nature of my electorate of Ipswich, which is very important to me. I am proud to say that this legislation helped deliver on the promises of the Palaszczuk government. I commend the bill to the House.