




Speech By
Peter Russo

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

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

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (3.43 pm): I speak in support of the Further Education and Training (Training Ombudsman) and Another Act Amendment Bill and recommend the passing of the bill to the House. Our government has sent a clear message to the people of Queensland since being elected to office that we will fully support our TAFEs and other training providers to reach their world-class potential and to help young people get trained up and into fruitful employment as well as people who require retraining.

This bill is an important plank in this government's initiative. The Training Ombudsman provides Queenslanders with a one-stop shop, where students, parents, providers and others will be able to go to get help to navigate the vocational education and training system. This includes a mechanism for making complaints and dispute resolution. Supporting students is an essential part of an effective education system. The Training Ombudsman will provide complete wraparound support for students, apprentices and trainees.

The bill seeks to improve Queensland's vocational education and training sector in two key ways. Firstly, it establishes an ombudsman to whom stakeholders can make complaints and from whom they can seek advice about their training program. The Training Ombudsman will increase transparency and accountability and allow students to easily access help and reliable information. It will also provide an avenue for students to make suggestions as to where the system can be improved, and this information will have a direct path to the minister. This simplified and central oversight body will provide users with reliable and timely information and will help restore a high level of accountability to training providers.

Secondly, the ombudsman's office will act as a monitoring body. It will be focused on identifying trends and devising ways to combat systemic issues in the VET system. By tracking complaints and quality concerns and reporting directly to the minister, this body will help improve the overall quality of our training providers.

It is this ability to identify and report on systemic issues to the Minister for Training and Skills about the provision and quality of vocational education and training in Queensland which is a critical tool in advancing Queensland and creating jobs for the youth of Queensland and those Queenslanders who are undertaking retraining because of redundancies. It will mean that we have a real launch pad for improving the delivery of vocational education and training services to Queenslanders, including Queenslanders in the regions.

The previous state government did everything they could to gut our public TAFE system, and the industry is still struggling to recover. That particular policy direction was hugely unpopular in my Sunnybank electorate, and understandably so. On the campaign trail I spoke to a number of young people, their parents and their teachers at TAFE who were anxious about their future studies at the Acacia Ridge SkillsTech TAFE. Our community would not stand for the accelerated deterioration of

such an important public asset, especially with the rates of youth unemployment so high, and neither should they.

During the last government, industry and customer confidence in our state's training institutions had waned. Both students and employers rightly began to question the value and quality of the programs offered and the effect of that on opportunities available to graduates. Our government promised Queenslanders that we would reverse the cuts to TAFE and that we would invest resources into skilling people for work.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to rescuing and restoring TAFE and reinvigorating vocational education and training. This bill is one of the planks in helping restore TAFE to its rightful place as a leading educational institute, helping young Queenslanders to find the gainful employment they so necessarily need.

In last year's budget, the Palaszczuk government committed \$34.5 million to rescuing our TAFEs, and \$240 million to other programs to boost the skills of Queensland's workforce. These commitments mean at least 100 extra teachers and support staff for students at our TAFEs. Already our TAFEs are starting to pick up in terms of enrolments. The Queensland government has recently awarded thousands of dollars worth of grants to skills providers in my electorate alone. Our government's funding commitments have gone a long way to restoring this confidence, but this bill will take it a step further.

I had the pleasure of visiting the Acacia Ridge TAFE on their open day last year and I was impressed by the hard work that is being done there and by the diverse range of industry skills on offer. I had the opportunity to watch the bricklayers making a wood-fired oven. I also had the opportunity to watch the panelbeaters spray-painting semitrailers and prime movers.

The Acacia Ridge campus is one of four SkillsTech TAFE institutions across Brisbane. It specialises in mechanics, building and construction, manufacturing and engineering, sustainable and renewable energy, water management and electrotechnology. At its open day I had the opportunity of seeing hundreds of high school students flood the campus, eager to try out the different stalls and ask questions about the different apprenticeships and training on offer. I was proud to visit the Acacia Ridge TAFE to see and feel the energy of an invigorated campus. I am proud to be part of the Queensland government—a government which is once again supporting these institutions and the students who depend on them to kickstart their career.

This bill will increase transparency and accountability. It gives students a real voice. It restores vocational education and training protection by restoring an independent watchdog for Queensland's vocational education and training sector.

When introducing this legislation to the House, the training and skills minister, the Hon. Yvette D'Ath, advised the House that this legislation will be fulfilling a key component of the government's Working Queensland agenda to create jobs and lower unemployment. The minister advised that establishing the Training Ombudsman will ensure that students, employers and other stakeholders have a clear pathway for complaint.

This bill provides Queensland students with improved consumer protection and provides Queensland with a means to identify solutions and develop properly informed systemic change. I am proud to be part of a government which introduces such an important initiative for current and future generations of Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.