




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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EDUCATION (OVERSEAS STUDENTS) BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (3.11 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the Education (Overseas Students) Bill 2018. As the shadow trade minister, I know that attracting international students and the trade of ideas and education is so important to our state's economy and our trade relations. According to the international education and training strategy, onshore international student visa enrolments in Queensland have the potential to increase from 103,000 in 2015 to 150,000 by 2026. That is an increase of around 33 per cent over 10 years. These students come from over 160 countries and are based all the way across our great state from Gold Coast, Cairns, Toowoomba, Townsville, Brisbane, Bundaberg and Rockhampton to the Sunshine Coast to name but a few places. International education is one of our largest service exports, contributing approximately \$2.8 billion to our economy in 2015. In terms of export revenue, it supports around 19,000 jobs. Of course, why would these international students not want to come to beautiful Queensland to experience our unique natural attractions and learn at our world-class schools?

This bill represents a good step in streamlining the regulation around international education to make it consistent with other states. Essentially, it brings closer alignment with the national framework and removes the duplication that has been occurring. It is important to ensure that there is one set of rules around the whole country for international students and the schools that wish to host them. It is also important when it comes to our state's trade relationships—whether it is resources or goods and services like education—that Queensland puts a consistent foot forward. We cannot afford to flip-flop and create uncertainty which may cause international and overseas students to reconsider moving to another country or—which is the problem we have in Queensland—another state. States like South Australia, to name one, are beating us in terms of international education. Of course that is very concerning, so we need to remain on the front foot when it comes to the opportunities available here in Queensland.

This bill also talks about the change to senior schooling assessment and the tertiary entrance scores which, I would note, the Palaszczuk government has delayed for a year. Let us be clear that the move to adopt the ATAR in Queensland was a result of the former LNP government's long-term thinking about education in this state. This is about a change that was initiated by the LNP when in government, and it was about long-term thinking. We were looking ahead to those students who were originally going to graduate in 2019, but it has now changed to students who will graduate, like my daughter Elke, in 2020. I commend the member for Surfers Paradise and the work that he did to initiate this when he was the education minister. We note that it was on track under the LNP when in government. Unfortunately, we have had to delay that and we have now seen it pushed back to 2020. Those kids who are now in year 11 thought they were going to be part of this, but they are not. They are back to the old scheme, and I know that has created quite a bit of angst across schools not only in my electorate but all across Queensland. I see the disbelief of the education minister.

Ms Grace: I do not know what you are talking about.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I will take the interjection that she does not know what I am talking about, and that is disappointing because there are principals in the Nanango electorate who I am quite sure would be more than happy to express the uncertainty they have had to go through in pushing that change back. Let me be clear that we need to work with the education department, and the principals can only work with what they are given and the frameworks they are given. They are working extremely hard in stressful circumstances because they had to change the goalposts. I think we should be clear that the goalposts again have moved because of the Labor government and what the Palaszczuk government has done to those principals and students. On that note, I wish every student graduating in 2020 all the best, as I wish all students graduating this year and the next and all years going forward.

It is important that we provide a framework for these children, whether they go into tertiary education, a trade or straight into the workforce. They need the confidence to have those jobs if that is what they choose to do. I really am distressed about students who are finishing up in the outback, where we see youth unemployment at over 60 per cent in the seat of my good friend the member for Warrego, my good friend the member for Gregory and my friend the member for Callide, who is yet to make his maiden speech in this House so is unable to interject. These are distressing figures for the graduating students who have that hanging over their heads at Longreach high and Charleville high and the students who are out there at Mount Isa who just want a job, whether it is a job in a local shop or a bakery or whether they want to go into a trade. We need to instil some confidence back into the bush. It is so disappointing that we have not had that from the other side over here under the Palaszczuk Labor government.

That leads me to the fact that this bill also fixes up the minister's Easter trading laws. This is the third year in a row we have come into this parliament to fix Labor's sloppy legislation. Who does this affect the most? Once again, it affects small businesses, which are generally in the bush. I note that places like Oxley—

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, your interjections are not being taken by the member.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I take that interjection from the minister. If she does not think that the people this affects in areas such as Nanango and Kingaroy are bush enough for her, that is just a bit sad. I consider Longreach, Charters Towers, Home Hill and all these towns to be bush—and all good luck to them if they have had rain this week as well—but, again, it is an attack on small business, regional Queensland and the lifeblood that holds up this economy. Guess what? Again, this incompetent Labor government has attacked the lifeblood—small businesses—and for the third year in a row we must return to this chamber to fix this legislation. This flip-flopping is not good for business.

Under this government, businesses hardly know if they are allowed to open on any which day, because that is how often in this state the goalposts change. It is absolutely laughable, but we are in here to support the government make this change because we know we have to give them as much help as they can get. Honestly, it is just a debacle. We know that businesses in all those regional areas I just outlined, particularly Kingaroy and Nanango, want certainty about trading over that Easter weekend. What a bungle! How many chances does this minister need in terms of legislating trading hours and those public holidays? We already know that this government flip-flops from one issue to another and that even when they do something they get it wrong.