




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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### **EDUCATION (OVERSEAS STUDENTS) BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.28 pm): I rise to speak about the Education (Overseas Students) Bill 2018. Toowoomba is a great provider of education. In my electorate, many high schools have overseas students come in, some on exchange and some on a more permanent education program. I shall speak briefly on this bill because I think it is good that we are setting up a system that will allow for smooth transition so that we have one administration looking after this and it will make the life of those schools easier. Whether it be Toowoomba Grammar School, Toowoomba Anglican College or any of the private schools, I know that all have international students coming in, that they want to grow that business—along with the University of Southern Queensland which I know is not covered by this bill—and that a lot of overseas students who come into our high schools in Toowoomba often look to go on to tertiary education as overseas students. It is a great business for the people of Australia. It is a \$2.8 billion export revenue, and Toowoomba wants its slice. We have some great schools that are active in that space. At different times all our state schools, be it Wilsonton Highfields or Toowoomba State High School, have exchange students. A couple of years ago I met some German exchange students at Toowoomba State High School, and I know that the students from Toowoomba State High School were very excited about going to their exchange in Germany.

It is really important to ensure that we have a regulatory framework and a system in place so that their education is not affected by being an exchange student. In fact, both of my daughters studied in France as part of their education program from Fairholme and I know that Glennie, the school where my wife works, also has exchange students go to France every year. It is really important that someone going through our system—which, as we know, is currently an OP system and we know, because Labor could not get it organised, that that has all been delayed by another year—whether it is the OP system or whether at a future date it will be the ATAR system, can go on these kinds of cultural exchanges and that we can receive these kinds of cultural exchanges to enrich our education and our knowledge of other places for the students and the people of Queensland. This is a good piece of legislation in that regard to try to simplify it for schools.

When my daughters were going to France on exchange, which obviously made a huge difference to their language skills and their ability in their French subject when they were going for their OP, it was very important that their education flow would not be affected and that this was able to be managed as part of their normal education program. Many schools are doing a really good job with that and it is something that is very important to both the students and the schools.

I want to talk briefly about the OP system. The OP process replaced the TE scores that existed in Queensland that had been in place for an awfully long time. In fact, when we came to government in 2012 we found that the system was failing in many regards and it was beginning to be gamed by students. When it was first introduced a very high percentage of students at schools would go through the overall position process. In recent times we have found that many students are no longer participating in that OP score, which is then to the potential advantage of some kids in the school. We end up with this bizarre situation where a student in a school who has done really well may in fact find

themselves struggling to get the OP they require because of their peers. I do not think we should be judging someone's educational opportunities and their educational potential based on how good their peers are. I think we should be basing it on their own individual capabilities. This legislation that will allow the ATAR to be used will make a difference and will make it fairer for students.

One of my daughters is studying in Victoria and one is studying in New South Wales, but both of them had to get their OP translated over to an ATAR score for them to be able to apply to those universities. It was just an unnecessary stress on them as they were trying to apply to study in other parts of our country. Likewise, people coming up from over the border to study at the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba—and lots of them will chose there because it is a great university—will have to get their scores translated in order to gain university entry in Queensland.

The system was in great need of an update. The update had been done due to work by John-Paul Langbroek and the pieces were in place and then we found out that there was a delay. It is not unusual to find a delay. In fact, in my electorate the school hall at Wilsonton was delayed. It was due at the end of November. In fact, I am not sure if it has officially been handed over to the school yet, but I know the school had its first function in there some two to 2½ months late. I look forward to the minister visiting my electorate and officially opening that school hall because it is greatly needed by the community. It is just a shame that it could not be done on time and we will find out through the budget process whether it is on budget.

While talking about delays, we know that the second range crossing is going to be delayed by some seven months. It does not surprise me at all that the changes to the OP system were pushed back by 12 months because there is good form for that from those on the government benches. We know that Labor struggles to get anything done, but when it does often it will be late, and this is another example of that. Overall, the policy direction we are heading here is the right direction and therefore our side of the House will be not opposing this bill.

In the few moments I have left there is one other section of the bill that I wanted to talk about. As someone who has been in business, opening hours were often government controlled in the hospitality industry. Knowing when you can open, knowing when you cannot open, knowing how you can plan and schedule your staff and understanding how to manage your payroll coming through and the costs and the potential customer base you might have coming in is very important. Over a holiday period in regional areas it is absolutely critical, because some regional areas will have particular events on for Easter and some regional areas will have lots of people go on holiday. Being able to manage and operate your business during that time can make an enormous difference to your profitability over the 12-month period.

What we find is that for no apparent reason—just a complete oversight by a Brisbane-centric drafting team when this bill was put together with no decent oversight from a minister to ensure that they were getting it right—people in Mount Isa, Goondiwindi, Chinchilla, Kingaroy, Roma, Childers, Bowen, Ayr, Charters Towers, Proserpine, Mission Beach, Cloncurry, Weipa, Nanango, Home Hill, Pittsworth, Blackwater, Charleville, Longreach and Oxley were all disadvantaged because of this oversight.

Whilst it is certainly not timely to come in here to fix this—and we note that it has been hidden underneath the title of the bill, but I guess that was designed to try and save some embarrassment for the oversight—at least it has been fixed up and that is a start. We are hopeful that for Easter next year we can get opening hours right. We have had three years of warnings. We have had a hot cross bungle, as it is called by the media, every year for a number of years and what we need to do is to start planning now for opening hours for next year's Easter. I ask the minister to take that on board. We are hoping that we do not have to come in here to correct legislation for Easter opening hours next year.

*(Time expired)*