



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (3.00 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 as a member of this parliament who has completed their senior schooling within the last decade. As such, I can readily appreciate the importance of secondary schooling in the development of young people.

The provisions of this bill facilitate the introduction and administration of new education and training certification arrangements in Queensland, namely, the introduction of the Queensland Certificate of Education—or QCE—to replace the Queensland Senior Certificate or the Queensland Certificate of Post-Compulsory School Education. The QCE is described as a broad based school qualification awarded to young people, usually at the completion of year 12, who have achieved a significant amount of learning at a set standard and meet certain literacy and numeracy requirements.

As I understand it, the intention of setting down these broad sets of standards of competency is to provide prospective employers and higher education institutions, such as universities and colleges of technical and further education, with a clear indication of the type of skills and the knowledge base that each student has achieved. The proposed legislation providing for the QCE will establish the quality and quantity of education and training that students must achieve in order to receive a senior qualification, including learning that takes place outside school. The QCE will record achievement in a broad range of learning environments, including learning in a traditional classroom and vocational education and training that will contribute towards the final level of achievement of a student's senior qualification.

The rationale behind introducing the QCE is an attempt to increase the percentage of young people completing year 12. Thus, students will be required to be actively learning or earning until they turn 17. The QCE will recognise a much wider range of learning options, which will include academic subjects, vocational education and training, employment, community learning and even introductory university subjects.

The implementation of the QCE is a soundly conceived proposal. That there is an emphasis from educational authorities and governments across Australia for students to remain in formal education beyond year 10, or turning 16 years of age, is also a positive step as long as those learning outcomes of students will be enhanced by spending that time at school. If a student's capabilities are more suited to commencing vocational education programs or another type of practically orientated training, these opportunities need to be facilitated and the students supported to pursue these opportunities.

After students complete year 10 or turn 16, they have several options to meet their obligation to be earning or learning. They can stay in formal education or training for two more years, get a Queensland Certificate of Education, get a Certificate III in vocational education or higher, or turn 17, whichever comes first. There is an exemption available for young people who are working at least 25 hours a week.

In order to achieve a QCE, a year 12 student needs to have earned themselves a total of 20 credit points prior to leaving school. The QCE recognises a student's learning at school, TAFE, in the workplace and, importantly I think, in the community. This realises that not all learning occurs in the formal school classroom. Each area of learning attracts different credit points. However, a minimum of 12 credit points

must be achieved through successfully completing core courses of study that include minimum literacy and numeracy requirements. Another eight credit points can be achieved from a combination of core and other types of learning, including VET courses, extension subjects and diplomas.

Until recently, the QSA maintained that a student must achieve at least a sound level of achievement in order to gain the required credit points towards the QCE. A number of educators in my electorate felt that that was appropriate, as students had to earn their QCE by passing each of their senior courses. However, at some time towards the end of term 1 this year, the QSA appears to have changed its intention with regard to this requirement and, as I understand it, now allows a year 12 student who does not achieve the required 20 points on their QCE permission to use some limited achievement results to count towards their QCE. This is a regrettable development. I understand that this arrangement has been questioned by some educators in Queensland who feel that the positive opportunity that the QCE presents to the education system in Queensland will not realise its full potential as a record of achievement for Queensland students if it is compromised by the inclusion of this provision for limited achievements to be included as part of that record.

Some educators in my electorate have described the inclusion of limited achievements on the QCE as a dumbing down of that record of education. As educators, they express the view that if a QCE were to be awarded as a record of learning and achievement, then students must pass their respective and chosen courses of study at least at the sound level of achievement. Good QCEs have to be earned and ought not be given away lightly by the QSA in the same way that vocational education certificates must be earned through demonstrated competencies.

I would like to acknowledge that there has been a high level of consultation by the QSA with school administrators and teachers. That means that there will be a smooth implementation of the QCE in Queensland. The QSA has been able to do this because it made an effort to consult stakeholders at the grassroots level—from classroom teachers, to heads of departments, to administrators and executive directors of schools. These are the people who know what is happening in our schools.

One of the most positive aspects of the QCE is that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach to learning. The QCE provides young people with an opportunity to tailor their learning experiences to suit their interests, their needs and their capabilities. At its core, the QCE is designed to represent a record of learning that will prove that the holder of that certificate has achieved a significant amount of learning at a set standard of achievement with a set benchmark in literacy and numeracy whilst still providing flexibility about what learning is undertaken, where that learning occurs and when that learning takes place. Meeting these set standards and benchmarks will generally deliver that student 20 credit points, thus qualifying them for the QCE. However, I understand that turning 17, leaving school before the completion of year 12, or a failure to earn 20 credit points before finishing year 12 will not mean that that young person will not have the opportunity to obtain a QCE. The credits earned can be banked and the student will have the ability to complete further learning in the future. A QCE can be issued when the required 20 credit points are eventually obtained.

I would like to talk about how the QCE will give schools in my electorate the opportunity to build on their already strong achievements in the area of innovation and relevant education for their students and highlight some of their areas of excellence. Tully State High School is my old alma mater and I am very proud of what that school has been able to achieve. Over 600 students are enrolled in that school. It operates commercially productive sugar cane plantations, banana plantations, cattle fattening yards and aquaculture facilities. The school of excellence project is a federally funded project. Schools from around Australia apply for funding and Tully State High School was successful in doing that. The funding received was used to develop several projects, including the aquaculture centre as part of that program's spotlight on science. The centre was created for the purpose of growing barramundi for the students to study. When the fish reach a length of about 300 millimetres, they are tagged and released into the local rivers to increase fish stocks, with the hope that information about the tagged fish will one day come back to the students for further study. Throughout the year, the fish are the centre of study of growth rates of fish under various conditions, such as different protein concentrations, different quantities of food, different frequencies of feeding and different stocking densities.

Gilroy Santa Maria College in Ingham is a Catholic co-educational institution where a great deal of emphasis is placed on the individual, with a concerted focus on academic excellence.

Mr Lucas: What an amazing name for a college, to pair Cardinal Gilroy with BA Santa Maria. They were opponents in philosophy.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, it is. They are nice compliments, Minister. If I remember correctly, it was a merging of an all-boys Catholic school and an all-girls Catholic school. The school also offers a range of vocational education subjects. Gilroy Santa Maria College has demonstrated a commitment to academic excellence by producing a TJ Ryan medallist in both 2005 and 2006.

Abergowrie College is a Catholic boys secondary school situated in the Herbert River valley, west of Ingham. The college has been operating since 1933. The current enrolment is about 240 boys who come

from centres all around Queensland and, in particular, from Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, as well as Papua New Guinea and other overseas countries. The college provides a unique environment where boys participate in a structured education program. It is a full boarding school and the college provides sporting and cultural opportunities along with the curriculum.

Ingham State High School has an interesting way of motivating its students in partnership with the Beacon Foundation, the Hinchinbrook Shire Council, industry representatives and parents when it asks year 10 students to sign the 'no dole' charter during Education Week each year. The productive partnership established between Ingham State High School and the Beacon Foundation provides a focus on problems associated with youth unemployment with a series of strategies designed to assist young people with making good decisions and choices about their future. These strategies have an emphasis on the local community taking an active role in providing opportunities for young people to pursue employment and further learning in their home town.

The vocational education program at Ingham State High School is an important contributor to this goal, giving students opportunities to learn skills and enhance their employability. In the last school year, Ingham State High School offered certificate I and II level qualifications from nine different training areas. It had 231 work placement applications approved, resulting in 1,260 days of work placement completed, as well as facilitating 50 school based trainees and apprentices covering 13 different qualifications.

Four secondary schools exist outside the boundaries of my electorate but they service the communities inside the Hinchinbrook electorate. Good Counsel College in Innisfail has increased its student body population by 200 in the past 10 years and now has approximately 600 enrolments. The college has a strong record of academic subjects and has a good relationship with its local communities. It facilitates apprenticeships and traineeships for students while they are at school. Highlights for the college in recent years were four OP 1 scores in 2004, which was up there with the best in far-north Queensland.

Mr Lucas: Hear, hear! It was named after the patron saint of the Augustinian province in Australia, Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Mr CRIPPS: That is probably right, Minister. St Anthony's Catholic College is a Catholic co-educational school, situated in the rapidly expanding area of Thuringowa to the north of Townsville. The school was established to provide a Catholic education for families in that area. St Anthony's Catholic College aims to provide a curriculum that promotes the potential of all students and caters for individual difference while providing students with skills and knowledge to understand and manage themselves in their local and global community.

Enrolments of over 500 students mean that the Northern Beaches State High School is another major educational facility servicing my electorate. Students with special needs are catered for through a special education class, and that is a particularly good aspect of this school. A vocational education program at the Northern Beaches State High School is extensive and meets the changing needs of the wider community, where there is a strong demand for these skills. Interestingly, the Northern Beaches State High School also offers an Army cadet unit program.

Mr Pearce: Go the Army.

Mr CRIPPS: It is good for them. Innisfail State High School is very active in its local community and is a member of the Innisfail Chamber of Commerce. The school generally has about 750 students enrolled, although that is down a bit at the moment for obvious reasons. Innisfail State High School earlier this year was a high-profile victim of Cyclone Larry. Its buildings were very badly damaged—indeed, several were eventually demolished. I would like to thank the Minister for Education and Training and the government for responding quickly and rushing a fleet of modular classrooms into the cyclone affected area to get schools fitted and their doors open as soon as possible after that cyclone occurred so that some semblance of normalcy and routine could be reintroduced to the lives of the young people in that area.

All students at Innisfail State High School from year 12 to year 8 were able to return to school by Monday, 3 April—only two weeks to the day after Cyclone Larry hit far-north Queensland. For anyone who was in the cyclone affected area during that time and understands the scale of the destruction and the enormous logistical issues that were faced by the communities in that area at that time, it was indeed a great effort to have the doors of the Innisfail State High School open so quickly after Cyclone Larry.

While I support the bill, I would appreciate it if the minister would address the one concern that I raised in relation to the inclusion of 'limited levels of achievement' contributing to the eligibility of a student for a QCE. Other than that issue, I see the QCE as a positive step forward for education in Queensland.