

SECOND READING SPEECH

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TASMANIAN ACADEMY)
AMENDMENT BILL 2010

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TASMANIAN POLYTECHNIC)
AMENDMENT BILL 2010

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS)
BILL 2010

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS AND
RESCISSIONS) BILL 2010

Mr Speaker,

I move that the bills be now read the second time.

These bills are cognate and therefore I will be addressing my remarks to the total package of the bills.

I am pleased today, Mr Speaker, to bring to the House the bills that will result in the next evolution of post-Year 10 education and training in our State. These bills will refine and build on what is already in place. They will continue the efforts of Labor to improve productivity, increase the number and level of qualified Tasmanians and have more students achieving meaningful qualifications, with which to start or grow their careers or progress to further education and training.

The early indications are that the previous changes were already having a positive impact on retention and completion rates. Data from 2008 to 2009, validated by the Auditor-General, showed that enrolments from August 2008 to August 2009 increased by 5%; attainment from 2008 to 2009 increased by 4.7% and the amount of VET undertaken by students increased significantly with 77% of students doing some VET. February census information also shows a 9% increase in enrolments from 2008 to 2010.

Here I acknowledge the work of the past Chair of the Tasmanian Polytechnic Board, Dr Michael Vertigan and the interim Chair Kathryn Thomas; the Chair of the Tasmanian Academy Board Kym Boyer; all of the Directors of both boards; the CEO of the Tasmanian Polytechnic, Belinda McLennan; the CEO of the Tasmanian Academy, Mike Brakey as well as staff from both organisations, including staff from Shared Services. All have worked hard in a challenging environment and achieved these significant gains for Tasmania. I thank them all for their contributions over the last 20 months.

It is however acknowledged that there have been some issues with the introduction of the reforms; issues of identity, collaboration and implementation. These bills aim to address those issues. When the Minister for Education and Skills was appointed to office, the Minister immediately sought to get to the heart of the issues. The Minister consulted widely, met with staff, unions, students, parents, board chairs and industry groups and received hundreds of emails and phone messages from those who were supportive of the previous reforms and also from those who opposed them.

It became clear that the community has found it difficult to make the transition from the well understood concept of a local college to the concept of a state-wide organisation. Staff cultural change was also a major issue. Unsurprisingly, the latter is always the most difficult aspect of any reform.

This package, Mr Speaker, consists of four bills that will revise the governance arrangements for the Polytechnic and Academy from statutory authorities with boards of directors to bring them under the Department of Education. This will ensure that there is a single point of direction in building pathways between them, that there is collaboration and that the refined model is always learner-centred.

It was determined that to gain community and staff confidence in the system, there needs to be greater identity given at the local level. These bills will achieve this by establishing colleges as part of the Academy. Under the Academy Act each college will have a principal who is responsible for the day to day management of that college.

The Academy, through the colleges, will be an entry point for year 10 leavers who will be provided with pastoral care at each local college. The strong focus of the Academy on academic attainment will be retained, but additionally the Academy and the Polytechnic will work together to ensure that students enrolled at a college will have access to a diverse range of vocational education and training pathways for those who wish to pursue them as part of their Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) studies. The Academy will be responsible for these young people, their retention, and the achievement of their ambitions detailed in the pathway plan that each student lodges with the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority at the end of Year 10, unless the student and this accountability transfers by agreement to the Polytechnic.

The Academy will have an executive officer who will ensure effective and efficient management of the Academy as a whole. The executive officer will ensure cohesion and collaboration across the state and a learner-centred focus.

The Polytechnic will also have an executive officer to provide coordination and a statewide focus. The Polytechnic will continue to build on the work undertaken to date to provide industry-relevant, applied learning opportunities for Tasmanians for the purposes of work preparation and career development. It will deliver its wide range of qualifications from certificate I to advanced diploma with the potential to expand into higher level qualifications. It will provide support for students, particularly those reengaging with learning and will continue, wherever practicable, to work with rural and regional communities to expand their access to post-Year 10 education and training.

Both executive officers will be directly responsible to the Secretary of the Department of Education, or his/her delegate, which will provide structural support and accountability for the collaborative approach necessary for a genuine learner-centred focus.

The majority of the learners at the Polytechnic will continue to be adult students. However, those year 10 leavers who wish to enrol directly with the Polytechnic will continue to be able to do so through a mechanism that transfers accountability for their retention and their achievement from the Academy to the Polytechnic. This is important to retain and increase the flexibility achieved to date as these refinements are implemented.

The qualifications provided by the Polytechnic will be aligned with needs of industry, as identified by Skills Tasmania, to directly support increased productivity and growth in Tasmania.

Both organisations will continue to be inclusive, with a personalised leaning approach. Individuals with high support needs, major barriers to learning or a disability that affects their ability to learn will be well catered for.

There will be a new level of community engagement established through this legislation. A high level Academy association with members appointed by the Minister/me will provide advice to the executive officer in relation to global issues for the Academy such as the learner-centred focus of the Academy, the collaboration of the colleges and coordination within the Academy in relation to state-wide issues, for example, interactions with the University of Tasmania. Membership will be drawn from state-wide representative bodies including parent bodies as well as representation from the community, business, education and university.

There will also be college associations. These will advise the college principals on local issues affecting students at that college. Membership will be drawn from the local community of the college including the parent community.

The Tasmanian Skills Institute will continue as a statutory authority with its role in technical and further education skills development for both employers and employees including apprentices and trainees. A minor consequential amendment to the Tasmanian Skills Institute Act will improve clarity between the differing roles of the Skills Institute and the Polytechnic by reinforcing the employer needs focus of the Skills Institute.

Consequential amendments are required to the Education Act, State Service Act and Teachers Registration Act to reflect the changed governance arrangements for the Academy and the Polytechnic.

I am proud Mr Speaker to advise that Labor and the Tasmanian Greens have worked cooperatively to develop these changes to the model. This is another example of a successful minority government working in the best interests of Tasmanians.

If these bills are passed, the refined model will commence from 2011. A considerable amount of work is already underway to ensure that this is achievable so that students are not disadvantaged in any way.

A draft implementation plan was developed and the Minister for Education and Skills/I established a Stakeholder Implementation Advisory Taskforce to advise on and respond to this draft plan. This taskforce had representative membership from unions including the Australian Education Union, the CPSU and the LHWU, the Tasmanian State Schools Parents and Friends, the Tasmanian Principals Association, the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, school associations, the colleges, the Tasmanian Legislative Council and the boards of the Skills Institute, Academy and Polytechnic. The taskforce members worked together to refine the plan and its principles which is guiding the fourteen working groups that have been established to identify and work through the issues necessary to achieve implementation for 2011.

As I noted previously, cultural change has been a key issue in the implementation of these reforms. Staff are being updated on progress and decisions regularly. All will be transferred to the Department of Education and will be deployed in accordance with the principles in the implementation guide.

Mr Speaker, we have learned from the past and will be building on the success and potential that the reforms have shown to date.

We are not returning to former structures and I believe the changes we are making will enhance our efforts to improve Tasmania's low retention and attainment rates by responding to those issues of identity, collaboration and implementation. We will continue to build upon the diverse range of supported learning options that were established under Tasmania Tomorrow to ensure that all Tasmanians have the opportunity to further their education.

Mr Speaker, the Government fully supports the introduction of these bills. I commend these bills to the House.