

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION COMMISSION AMENDMENT (FUNDING GUARANTEE FOR TAFE) BILL 2016

First Reading

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Prue Car, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) (10:50): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

As the shadow Minister for Skills I am proud to be speaking this morning to the Technical and Further Education Commission Amendment (Funding Guarantee for TAFE) Bill 2016. The bill was introduced by the Leader of the Opposition but the Government let it lapse, so here we are again today. This bill is about protecting TAFE—one of the great public institutions of New South Wales, one of our State's greatest equalisers for over a century, the vehicle by which thousands of students have gained the skills they need to put them on the right path and by which our young people and, in turn, the families and communities around them, have been put on the road to a better life. This bill will ensure the future health of TAFE in this State. It acknowledges one inalienable fact: It is the role of government to ensure there is a strong, affordable and accessible public education system.

The bill proposes to do this by capping contestable public funding for private education providers at a maximum of 30 per cent. This is, in effect, a guarantee that TAFE, the public provider, will receive a guaranteed minimum of 70 per cent of public funding, and potentially more. Clause 3 of the bill inserts in the principal Act—the Technical and Further Education Commission Act 1990—a TAFE funding guarantee that will deliver the guaranteed minimum 70 per cent funding for vocational education and training to be allocated to the TAFE Commission, but it will also ensure that the TAFE Commission receives, in each of its institutes, not less than 70 per cent of the funding allocated to vocational education and training courses.

Let us look at why such a bill is necessary. This week's budget is another timely reminder about what this Government is in the process of doing to our great TAFE system. The numbers are in the Government's own budget, in black and white. They are there in plain sight. The forecast for 2016-17 shows that there will be 126,000 fewer students enrolled in TAFE than there were in 2012. Of this incredible number, 14,500 are students with disabilities. This is a disgrace.

The budget reveals that 5,200 teachers and support staff have been lost. In an unbelievable insult to hardworking TAFE teachers and their students, the papers reveal that while the Government is sacking staff, cutting course hours and increasing fees, it spent a total of \$314 million less on TAFE than was promised last year. This week, when the Treasurer was asked about these sobering statistics in question time, she said she was proud of what the Government was doing to TAFE. What an insult. That tells us everything we need to know about this Government's approach. These are not the actions of a government that believes in TAFE.

A few weeks ago, in Tamworth, together with the Hon. Daniel Mookhey from the other place, I had the privilege of speaking through an interpreter with a group of hearing-impaired students. TAFE had had a transformative impact on those students. Their teachers, together with the classroom support workers, had provided opportunities for them to learn skills that would enable them to contribute to the workplace and to our communities. They were given those opportunities because of the specialist support that enables them to realise their potential. That specialist support is one of the things that makes TAFE unique. However, the New South Wales Government decided to remove that specialist support and rolled those jobs into generalist support, leaving these students without that

vital link to a better future. They were angry, and why would they not be? I asked them what they would say to Mike Baird if he were there. They answered: Tell him to pick on someone else.

After much media attention and scrutiny—amid the revelation that TAFE NSW was planning to appoint 14 new highly paid executive managers in head office—it now seems that any changes to the Disability Services Unit at that TAFE institute are on hold. It is a small victory in the face of an increasing assault on TAFE. But it should not require desperate students and their families to go to the media to stop cruel cuts to their education.

I turn to the issue of our hardworking, passionate, highly skilled teachers in TAFE. In the past few months as the shadow Minister, it has been a real pleasure to meet many of these professionals. They care about the future of their students. They are usually experts in their industry and they love TAFE because they have seen what it can do and have seen lives transformed. They are bringing about that transformation. Together with the support workers and the learning consultants I referred to earlier, over 5,000 of them have gone since 2012. What government would think that is acceptable? This Government does.

This Government comes into the Chamber and heckles the Opposition about its concern for TAFE teachers. Yes, we are concerned and we wear that concern with pride. TAFE teachers teach TAFE students—it is not brain surgery. The *Sydney Morning Herald* recently revealed that many of the TAFE teachers who are being shown the door are teaching core trades: building, carpentry and plumbing. And they are teaching in institutes that are geographically placed in the middle of the Sydney building boom. Every other day we have Government Ministers coming in here crowing about housing approvals and infrastructure. Who is going to be building these homes, if that same Government is so hell-bent on sacking the teachers who teach the necessary skills? It is sheer madness. On top of everything else, we have had the chaos of the Education Business System [EBS].

The SPEAKER: It being 11.00 a.m., in accordance with the resolution of 2 June 2016, debate is interrupted. I remind all members to extend the usual courtesy to the Leader of the Opposition to allow him to deliver the budget reply speech uninterrupted.

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION COMMISSION AMENDMENT (FUNDING GUARANTEE FOR TAFE) BILL 2016

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 23 June 2016.

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) (10:28): As shadow Minister for Skills I resume debate on this important bill, and I am proud to do so. The Labor Opposition is proud of the Technical and Further Education Commission Amendment (Funding Guarantee for TAFE) Bill 2016 because it is about protecting one of the great public institutions of New South Wales. That institution has been one of our State's greatest equalisers for more than a century. It is the vehicle by which thousands of students have gained the skills they need to put them on the right path. It is the institution that so often has put our young people, and in turn the families and communities around them, on the road to a better life. I speak of the TAFE Commission of New South Wales.

This bill will ensure the future health of TAFE in this State. At its heart it acknowledges one inalienable fact—that it is and should be the role of government to ensure a strong, affordable and accessible public education system. The bill proposes to do this by capping contestable public funding for private education providers at a maximum of 30 per cent. This is a guarantee that TAFE, as the public provider, will receive a minimum of 70 per cent of public funding, and potentially more. Clause

3 of the bill inserts in the principal Act, the Technical and Further Education Commission Act 1990, a TAFE funding guarantee. That will not only deliver the guaranteed minimum 70 per cent funding for vocational education and training to the TAFE Commission but also ensure that the TAFE Commission receives, in each of its institutes, not less than 70 per cent of the funding allocated to vocational education and training courses.

Let us look at why a bill such as this is so desperately necessary. This year's budget was yet another reminder of what this Government is in the process of doing to our great TAFE system. The numbers in the Government's budget, in black and white, cannot be interpreted as anything else. They are there in plain sight for all to see. The forecast for 2016-17 shows that there will be 126,000 fewer students enrolled in TAFE than there were in 2012. I repeat: 126,000. Of that incredible number, 14,500 will be students with disabilities. That number is a disgrace. The budget reveals that 5,200 teachers and support staff have been sacked. In an unbelievable insult to hardworking TAFE teachers and their students, the budget papers reveal that while the Government is sacking staff, cutting course hours and increasing fees, it spent a total of \$314 million less than it promised to last year. In budget week, when the Treasurer was asked about these sobering statistics during question time, she said that she was proud of what the Government was doing to TAFE. What an insult. That tells us everything we need to know about this Government's approach to TAFE. These are not the actions of a government that believes in TAFE.

Some months ago in Tamworth I had the privilege of speaking with a group of hearing-impaired students, through an interpreter, for whom the impact of a TAFE education had been nothing short of transformative. They were students whose classroom teachers and support workers had given them opportunities to acquire the skills they needed to contribute to the workplace and the community. They were given these opportunities through one of the features that makes TAFE unique: specialist support to help them realise their potential. The New South Wales Government thought it a good idea to remove that specialist support, rolling those jobs into generalist support and leaving students with disability without that vital link to a better future. They were angry, and why would they not be? I asked them what they would say to the Premier if he were there. Their answer was simple: "Pick on someone else." After much media attention and scrutiny, and following the revelation that TAFE NSW is appointing 14 new highly paid executive managers in head office, it now seems that the proposed changes to the Disability Services Unit will not occur. It is a small victory in the face of an ever-increasing assault on TAFE. It is obvious that it should not take desperate students and their families going to the media to stop cruel cuts to their education.

I turn to our hardworking, passionate and highly skilled TAFE teachers. As shadow Minister it has been a real pleasure for me to meet many of them in the past few months. They care so much about the futures of their students. They are experts in their industry and they love TAFE. They have seen what it can do. They have seen lives transformed before their eyes. More than 5,000 support worker and learning consultant positions have gone since 2012. What government would find that acceptable? It is this Government. The Government heckles Opposition members in this Chamber every sitting week because we care about TAFE teachers. Yes, we do—and we wear that badge with pride. TAFE teachers teach TAFE students; it is not brain surgery. The *Sydney Morning Herald* recently revealed that many of the teachers being shown the door are teaching core trades such as building, carpentry and plumbing in institutes that are geographically placed in the middle of the Sydney building boom. Every other day we hear Ministers crowing about housing approvals and infrastructure. The question is simple: Who on earth will build the homes and infrastructure when the Government is hell-bent on sacking the teachers who teach those trade skills? It is madness.

In addition, we have witnessed the chaos caused by the Education Business System [EBS]. Last week the Minister announced that the Government was finally ditching its shocking computer enrolment system. The thousands of lost enrolments and wasted hours for teachers will never be recovered. Following disaster after disaster, this was a humiliating backdown. The EBS has been responsible for thousands of students being unable to enrol or graduate, locking them out of the jobs market. In December the inquiry convened in the other place recommended ditching the software. As I have visited TAFE colleges I have heard endless stories about problems caused by the EBS: apprentices unable to graduate, graduation ceremonies cancelled, students being told electronically

that they had not passed a course when they had, and people ending up with someone else's transcript. The Auditor-General was unable to verify TAFE's accounts and \$6 million was given to KPMG for a crisis audit. More than a few teachers have told me that they have come to use the TAFE acronym differently. To them, the "T", "A" and "E" stand for "Try And Enrol". The "F" stands for something unparliamentary.

The Government must urgently rule out making further cuts to teacher and support staff positions to pay for this bungle. The Opposition is most worried about the fact that, during the Minister's live streamed announcement that the EBS would no longer be used, he flagged a "move away from the bricks and mortar", raising the prospect that more TAFE campuses will be sold to pay for this debacle. That will disturb many people in communities across New South Wales, especially in the context of the leaked Cabinet document from last year that pointed to the sale of TAFE campuses. A replacement enrolment system will not be in place until 2018. That means frustrated teachers and students will be forced to cope with the old system for a further 18 months.

They have been run off their feet, scrambling to enrol students using this substandard enrolment program, and now they are stuck with it for another year and a half. I call on the Minister to ensure that teachers are consulted so that the new system can be used effectively and does not become a further drain on their teaching time. This is a Government that recently used its own commissioned report to compare TAFE to a disgraced college that had been raided by the Australian Federal Police and investigated for fraud by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. The Government held up that college as a standard to which TAFE should aspire. The chief executive of that college said:

When it comes down to it, it's a lot cheaper to train students who don't turn up to class than it is to train students who do.

Every other week a private college goes to the wall, leaving students in the lurch and often forcing TAFE to pick up the pieces. This bill caps the amount of public money available to the private market.

This is about stopping the drift to private colleges we have seen in other States while we still can, before it is too late. Over the past few months, talking to students and teachers at TAFE colleges has taught me a lot about the irreplaceable value of TAFE in New South Wales—hearing from students in Tamworth and apprentices who cannot graduate; listening to teachers who fear the closure of their campuses because they have been whittled away and are dying a slow death by a thousand cuts. I even went to a town with the local member, the member for Shellharbour, where the Government closed a TAFE, opened a shopfront in its place and then claimed it would be okay because it had free wi-fi.

Before I conclude I acknowledge the tireless work by my predecessors from the Opposition in this portfolio—the member for Wyong for making this bill a reality and the member for Keira who is almost solely responsible for this being the Opposition's policy. I know how many students and teachers he connected with and to whom he listened. Opposition members stand proudly in this Parliament today with a plan to guarantee funding for the future of TAFE in this State, to ensure that 70 per cent of vocational education and training [VET] funding will go directly to it, and to put a cap on contestable funds.

TAFE is being ripped apart by the Baird Government. It is not broken but the funding model is, with teachers sacked, courses cut and hours slashed, and fees increased, all without any evidence whatsoever that the race to the bottom to privatise our training system will be good for anyone. No amount of Baird spin will cover up the facts. Generations of people will not get the skills they need if this is allowed to continue. This Government will go down in history as the Government that ripped apart our TAFE colleges. There is no better way for me to finish than with what I learnt at Tamworth from the deaf students at the TAFE college. They turned into the teachers that day and this is what they taught me: Stop TAFE cuts.

Debate adjourned.