

*Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Bill — Third Reading - 16 December 2009*

Hon Sir ROGER DOUGLAS (ACT): The Education (Polytechnics) Amendment Bill is, or at least it should be, all about students. It should be about which governance structure is most likely to deliver a quality product for the student: the subject and the skills that they require. But if we listen today to the Greens, to Labour members, and to the Māori Party, we would think it is all about representation on the board. Labour wants representation for the sake of it, whether or not the person is qualified. If we listened to the Labour Party, we would hear that we simply have to have a student on the board, whether or not the student is up to it.

We have to have a staff member on the board—forget the conflict of interest. We have to have a union representative, we have to have a businessman on the board, and we have to have Māori representation. Nothing whatsoever is mentioned about a quality product for the student, yet I always thought that polytechs were there for the students. Labour members do not ask themselves what will deliver a quality product, but rather, they talk about the tokenism of having students or unionists. When Labour's previous leader, Helen Clark, was Prime Minister, she sent out a letter at election time about education. She mentioned public schools 12 times in the letter, but never once mentioned students. We have heard that again today.

This sector needs to have a quality board at every polytech throughout the country. The fact is that we will have a quality board if the Minister appoints a quality chairperson and a quality deputy chairperson. If we get a quality chairperson and a quality deputy chairperson, they will ensure that a quality chief executive officer is appointed. If we have this in place, the system will work.

The first question any quality board will ask is what the needs of the people who live in this area are. It will ask what the potential students' needs are and which subjects and skills they need. We are talking about having to have a student on the board—one student, picked at random. What about the 1,000 or 2,000 students who actually attend the polytech? They would rather have a polytech that meets their needs. They would rather have a board that understands their needs and is able to deliver quality governance. But, no! Labour would prefer to have a student, or a staff member, or a union representative on the board. It does not care about the quality of the product; it simply cares about representation.