

TAFEWA Colleges — Governance and Accountability — Adjournment Debate

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan) [10.11 pm]: I rise this evening to speak about the future of technical and further education colleges and specifically about the ministerial statement made by the Minister for Training yesterday afternoon. He said that TAFEWA colleges will be subject to greater market forces and associated opportunities. Of course, this will demand that the colleges individually and the TAFE system as a whole be flexible and responsive to changing economic and labour force requirements. There also will be an opportunity to participate in the growth of global training markets, such as extending the reach of Australian vocational qualifications to students offshore. Ideologically, it is fair to introduce a greater element of competition within the training market, and there is no doubt that everybody would want a diverse and vibrant training market.

In some way TAFE colleges are well placed. There are 10 colleges in the state-six in regional areas and four in the metropolitan area-so they are well placed strategically to make a significant contribution to the training of individuals in the state. However, I have some concerns with the minister's statement. According to his ministerial statement, he will have to make some changes. He will have to make some administrative and, I think, legislative changes to effect this policy. It concerns me that the minister has been anything but up-front about what he is really aiming to do about opening up the training delivery system to greater competition. There is no doubt that there is an agenda to increase the proportion of training allocated through competitive processes. Currently, 25 per cent of training is allocated through competitive processes and 75 per cent is funded through a public provider profile. What is on the agenda in Western Australia is that by 2012 the proportion of training allocated through competitive processes will increase to 40 per cent and the proportion of training allocated through a public provider profile will decrease to 60 per cent. That is a significant reduction. It is of concern that not only will the TAFE system take the hit of the three per cent efficiency dividend, but also, on top of that, there will be a change to the funding formula to reflect the government's aspiration to increase the proportion of training allocated through competitive processes to meet the target of 40 per cent by 2012.

There is no doubt that there is significant concern within the training sector. What is of most concern is that the government has wrapped this up as being a positive thing for TAFE colleges without being up-front and honest about its agenda. One of the first things the minister did when his party assumed government was to give TAFE lecturers a pay rise that they were satisfied with. I think the minister thought that once they got their pay rise they would be compliant and put up with anything that the government put before them. However, I think he has been a little bit sneaky because already there are rumblings throughout the TAFE colleges.

Hon Peter Collier: You are talking to the wrong people.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am terribly sorry: I might be talking to the wrong people, but the minister is not talking to anybody. I have not seen a media release on this issue.

Hon Peter Collier: How many TAFEs have you been to?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I have been to heaps of TAFEs, many times over. The minister should not worry about that.

This minister has not provided information to the training sector that signals to it what the government's agenda is. Is it not true that the profile will be increased so that the competitive funding element will be 40 per cent by 2012? Is that true or false?

Hon Peter Collier: I am sorry, I have stopped listening.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Of course the minister has stopped listening. How convenient of the minister to stop listening.

Several members interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I said that the proportion of training allocated through competitive processes will increase to 40 per cent by 2012.

Hon Peter Collier: They are 30 per cent at the moment.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: They are 25 per cent at the moment. Why has the minister not gone out and made that statement public? Why did the minister —

THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): Order, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich! I did not want the member to refer to the ministerial statement. I will explain why. I will not use up the member's time; the clock has been stopped. The ministerial statement given yesterday is now an order of the day and it appears on the notice paper. There will be an opportunity in due course to debate it. As Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is aware, standing order 98 provides that there shall be no anticipation of debate. If the member can talk about the general issues, she will be

safe, but when she specifically refers to the ministerial statement she causes me to have to enter into the debate. The member knows that I would not do that if it was not necessary. If the member can generalise and not refer specifically to that, she will have the opportunity in due course to state her case again.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. I overlooked that standing order and I know that I should not have because they are all etched in my brain. I had them confused for a moment.

The point is that I believe the minister should have made that information public to the sector. I know that there is concern in the TAFE colleges. They are concerned about taking the impact of the three per cent efficiency dividend hit. There is no doubt that this particular policy decision will also mean that there will be less money allocated to the colleges and they will need to source business from outside. There is no doubt in my mind that, already, TAFE lecturers are of the view that they are going to have to cut the hours that they deliver. There are certainly some significant concerns in the north of the state, where there are thin markets, that, in this environment, the TAFE colleges are going to have to compete in the short-term to survive.

Hon Peter Collier: I agree.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That will be very challenging. There is no doubt in my mind that there are some reservations among the teaching fraternity about this matter. The minister might shake his head, but I can tell the minister that I am getting this information from very —

Hon Peter Collier: How many TAFEs have you visited since you have been the shadow minister?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I think it is a bit irrelevant how many TAFEs I have visited

Hon Peter Collier: You are the shadow minister. You should be an authority on this. How many TAFEs have you visited?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Why not ask me how many people from TAFE I have spoken with?

Hon Peter Collier interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Minister for Training! I am trying to allow Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich to state her case.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I have to say, with all due respect, that the Minister for Training has obviously been caught out yet again. He is being tricky. He is not being open. He is not being honest. He is not actually telling this sector what they need to hear. He clearly has talked with a small group of people, and he has gone to a couple of TAFE colleges, and he thinks he is the font of all knowledge. I can tell the minister that I have few surprises in store for him. The source of that information is very, very important. I am speaking to TAFE lecturers, and I am speaking to people who work in the TAFE system, on a very, very regular basis. So the minister needs to understand that. That is really all I want to say. I will have more information to share with members of this house in due course.