

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Statement by Minister for Training

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Minister for Training) [11.01 am]: Vocational education and training is increasingly becoming the learning sector of choice for Western Australians. It is the largest provider of post-compulsory education in Western Australia with more than 100 000 people enrolled. The VET sector also represents a \$450 million annual investment by the state government. It is a major contributor to employment, productivity and export earnings, and a key driver for our state's future economic growth and prosperity.

Western Australia now has a minister dedicated to training, with a focus on increasing training participation and skills development across the state. As Minister for Training I want to ensure that we maximise the benefits of our investment for students and industry so that everyone, no matter who they are or where they live, will have access to training that is relevant and will lead to a genuine employment outcome.

The training system has a vital role to play in maximising participation of all individuals in training, including those who are most disadvantaged. That opportunity needs to extend to strategies that will help close the gap for Aboriginal Australians and provide greater access to training for clients in regional locations. Over the past five months, the training sector has seen a lot of changes and new demands placed upon it. Inevitably the downturn in the economy is impacting on growth in employment-based training. People are now focused on training that will assist them to gain or retain employment. Now more than ever we need a training system and training institutions that will provide the flexibility and capacity to meet the needs of industry and employers and ensure that individuals have the skills to maximise their job and career opportunities in an increasingly competitive labour market. I continue to believe that one of the greatest strengths of our training system lies in its diversity and choice, and that the best training outcomes can be achieved within a competitive training framework that enables both private and public training providers to respond to the needs of training clients.

I want to share with members some of the achievements in training that have been made by this government over the past five months.

Training Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2008: First and foremost, this government has delivered a legislative framework that enables our training system to respond to the needs of industry. I have ensured that the long-awaited training legislation was made a priority in our first 100 days of office. I must acknowledge the support of members on both sides of the house for that achievement.

The new State Training Board: The State Training Board plays an integral role in contributing to the strategic direction of the state training system and in ensuring that the skills needs and priorities of Western Australia's industry and workforce are met. Since I have taken office, the membership of the board has been strengthened, with new appointments to the board announced on 28 November. Members have been appointed for their mix of experience in industry, community, education and training, and for their ability to provide high-level advice on Western Australia's training needs. I met with the board recently to discuss the government's training priorities, and to highlight the board's key role in providing independent advice to ensure Western Australia's training system is innovative, flexible and responsive to the needs of industry.

Industry training advisory arrangements: Importantly, the government will be investing over \$4 million per annum over the next three years to support industry training advisory arrangements through the training council network. I have approved new arrangements that will see a network of 10 independent industry training advisory bodies established to provide strategic advice and information on the training priorities and workforce development needs of industry. The Construction Industry Training Council commenced on 1 January 2009, with an additional six training councils commencing in February 2009. The remaining three training councils are in the final stages of establishment and are expected to be operational in the near future. I commend members of the new industry training councils for their significant contribution to the state's future industry training strategy.

Aboriginal participation in training: There is a clear need to engage young Aboriginal students in programs that provide access to work opportunities and better employment outcomes. The Aboriginal school-based training program is being introduced with the support of schools, group training organisations, registered training organisations and employers, in a partnership that supports students as they acquire the skills and knowledge needed to prepare them for the world of work. Cultural awareness training and mentoring are key components of the program, and every education district around the state is involved, from Albany, to the goldfields, to the Kimberley and the Pilbara. The state government has given its commitment to the ASBT program with funding of \$8.5 million over the next three years, and we expect that around 900 students will benefit from the program. I am committed to increasing training participation and securing better outcomes for our Aboriginal youth. I therefore took great pleasure in launching the ASBT program in October last year.

Technical and further education action plan: I have already mentioned the need for flexibility and responsiveness within our training institutions. In an increasingly competitive labour market, there is a critical role for TAFE colleges to play in meeting the needs of employers and to ensure that individuals maximise their job and career opportunities. I have met with TAFE managing directors, and I am continuing to progress with them a coordinated action plan for colleges to respond to those challenges. Key areas of focus for TAFE through the action plan include targeted industry consultations, information seminars and employer consultancy services that will be available statewide; coordinated college resources for skills recognition, to recognise prior learning and to assist displaced workers to transfer their skills to new jobs and industries; coordinated and enhanced careers advisory capability through stronger links with employment and job agency networks; and individual advice on training pathways, courses and qualifications for people changing jobs, changing careers and seeking new fields of employment. In response to the shifting demand in employment-based training, I have ensured that there is increased capacity for training places in a range of alternative courses and qualifications for students who are unable to secure an apprenticeship.

Enterprise bargaining agreement: Fundamental to success in training is the quality and commitment of our vocational education and training workforce. Prior to last year's election, TAFE lecturers had not received a salary increase since January 2007. The new government reached an "in principle" agreement with the State School Teachers' Union of WA within four months of taking office. I have ensured that this agreement provides significant benefits for lecturers and introduces flexible work arrangements that allow TAFEWA colleges to be more responsive to the needs of students and industry. I am pleased to have delivered for TAFE lecturers a six per cent interim pay increase within our first 100 days of office, a \$168 million agreement to make our VET lecturers among the best paid across the country, and salary increases for lecturers of up to 20.5 per cent. Salary increases of up to 26.5 per cent over three years have been provided for lecturers who are working flexible hours, and further incentives have been provided for lecturers who are working in regional colleges or centres.

Council of Australian Governments National Partnership for Productivity Places program: The government has signed up, under the National Partnership Agreement, to the commonwealth government's National Partnership for Productivity Places program. This program is significant for Western Australia as it will provide approximately 74 000 new training places over the next four years. The productivity places program will help alleviate skills shortages and support individuals and enterprises with additional training opportunities during the economic downturn. I will be reporting to the house the details of this agreement when negotiations are finalised with the commonwealth.

I turn now to future directions.

Positioning TAFEWA colleges for the future: We are well on the way towards repositioning TAFE in Western Australia to ensure that the delivery of vocational education and training meets the requirements of industry and the career aspirations of all students. We need schools to be counselling students about vocational qualifications and pathways with at least the same enthusiasm as is given to university pathways and career options. I would like vocational education and training to be considered on an equal footing with a university education for people seeking a successful career—not as a second or third choice. I would like to see employers and professional associations specify a vocational qualification as their preferred criterion for employment, and advertise that fact. Importantly, I want parents to be proud to say that their sons or daughters have achieved success because of their training qualifications. I am working with colleges and in consultation with the private sector to achieve these shared goals, and I am pleased to report that I have received very positive and constructive feedback. I have engaged in a direct dialogue with each of the colleges, seeking their input on ways to address a range of institutional and structural barriers to ensure TAFEWA continues to perform well in an increasingly competitive training market.

"State Training Plan": This government is committed to maximising the participation of all Western Australians in the workforce and in the community, and to leading a responsive, flexible and innovative training system. At 7.1 per cent, Western Australia had the second lowest training participation rate in the country in 2007. The lowest rate was seven per cent in Queensland, while the national average was 8.2 per cent. Although apprenticeship and traineeship delivery has increased in recent years, the uptake of higher qualifications did not keep pace with the needs of industry, and institutional enrolments have actually declined over the past five years. The development of the government's training plan is based on the advice of the State Training Board in addressing barriers to training participation and skills development across all of Western Australia; providing people with the skills to make the transition into employment; and increasing the skills of the existing workforce in line with regional and industry requirements. Through the plan, I have made a commitment to ensure that a holistic and collaborative approach to training is adopted, which will not only meet the needs of individuals and enterprises, but will also offer benefits to those in training, or considering training; those wanting to upskill or reskill; those in regional and remote Western Australia; and those who have yet to engage or are traditionally under-represented in vocational education and training. The release of the state training plan is subject to final

negotiations with the commonwealth government on the National Partnership for Productivity Places program and budget approval through Treasury. This plan will be a blueprint for future investment by the Western Australian government in the state's training system and will support the economic and social development of our state. I look forward to working cooperatively and collaboratively with all sectors of vocational education and training to make further significant improvements in the future.

Consideration of the statement made an order of the day for the next sitting, on motion by **Hon Ed Dermer**.