

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### *Statement*

**HON LOUISE PRATT** (East Metropolitan) [8.38 pm]: It is indeed terrific to be in the Parliament in the Town Hall in Kalgoorlie, which is in the town in which I was born. I advise those who have not heard what members' statements time is about, that it is a time when members can raise any topic of concern to the member or the wider community. This is why there is an assortment and diversity of topics. I want to talk about the proposition that the Government has taken to the wider community; namely, that the age of 15 is too young for people to not be involved in some sort of education, training or employment. This will be one of the most significant changes to education and training in our history. It is not just about raising the school leaving age; it is about meaningful combinations of school, training, higher education and work. Doing nothing should not be an option. Young people who leave school early without further education and training risk long-term unemployment and disadvantage. Statistics reveal that the prospects of young people who are not engaged in education, training or meaningful employment are not as good as those of young people who have those opportunities. We owe it to our young people not to let them slip through the gaps. Tragically we have been letting down too many young people by not giving them the opportunities that they deserve. Unfortunately, the Gallop Labor Government inherited a mess in 2001, because high school retention rates had plummeted, apprenticeships and traineeships had flat-lined, and the youth unemployment rate was nearly 30 per cent.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon LOUISE PRATT: We have been working very hard to turn this around, with a 40 per cent increase in apprenticeships and traineeships and the creation of 7 400 new places. This is about skills training so that young people can get real jobs. In the Canning district, which is part of my electorate, about 10 per cent of all 15 to 19-year-olds are not in education or employment. That is 2 400 young people who are not getting the best start to their adult life. In the Pilbara, it is 13 per cent, or about 340 young people out of more than 2 600. In the goldfields education district, 400 of the 2 500 15 to 19-year-olds are not engaged in any form of education, training or employment. It is pleasing that in August a consultation forum was held in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, at which the local community raised a number of diverse issues such as encouraging better coordination between government agencies, developing community partnerships to assist students to improve their education and career outcomes and considering the needs of young parents. They said also that in raising the school leaving age it was important to ensure that students were not disrupted by those students who had behaviour problems, to examine state and federal policies to ensure that they support the retention of students, and to consult and engage with young people in the decision making process. The proposal to raise the school leaving age received wide support from the 170 people who attended the forum. It is not just about raising the school leaving age. It is about providing more flexible options for young people so that they can combine school, technical and further education according to the model that best suits them for their future career path. That could be two days of school, two days of TAFE and one day of work.

Fifteen is too young to leave school. The proposal to raise the school leaving age is not about tying young people to their desk or forcing them to stay in the classroom for another two years. It is about providing young people with choices in education and training that are relevant and flexible and suit their needs. It is about encouraging young people to participate in school, training and work, or a combination of these things. We cannot afford to let down young people in this area or any other part of the State and leave them without decent future prospects. Sadly, at the moment, as I have outlined with these statistics, too many young people are without hope for a decent future. It is not good enough.