

SMALL BUSINESS TRAINING PROGRAM

375. Mr BAKER to the Minister for Employment and Training:

I understand that a small business training program has been piloted in the south west. Will the minister inform the House if this initiative is to be expanded to other regions?

Mr BOARD replied:

I thank the member for the question.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Some people must really be a little thick. I am allowing people to make interjections, but I cannot accept the situation when someone has asked a question, the minister is trying to give an answer and people are having their own conversations and interjections across the Chamber. That is unacceptable.

Mr BOARD: Both sides of the House have focused on small business during question time today. It is appropriate that we recognise that 96 per cent of businesses in Western Australia are small businesses. They employ over 50 per cent of the State's work force. One of the difficulties for small businesses has been to update skills and be competitive because of the very nature of small business with its shoulder to the wheel. We trialed a program in the south west for 1 500 small businesses, recognising that the number of small businesses in the south west is growing at four times faster than the national average. We provided training vouchers for 1 500 small businesses, all of which were taken up. This morning I was privileged to hear a number of the success stories as a result of expanding businesses. As a result of that, today we announced an additional \$1m to go right around the State, with \$200 vouchers for 3 400 small businesses to access training, whether it be information technology, improved communications or marketing skills, improved skills for desktop publishing or for them to be able to provide training for their staff. These programs are making a big difference to small business and generating a lot of jobs in Western Australia, particularly for micro and self-employed people.

Last night I had the opportunity of patting a lot of young people on the back through Livewire, a program which supports young people and helps them enter business. Unprecedented numbers of young people are entering self-employment and business in this State as a result of the program. This morning I also had the opportunity to launch a document, which is the State Government's commitment to employment in this State, recognising that it will continue capital works, its process for buying, good planning, workplace reform and a commitment to generating employment in this State. We are proud of the fact that we have reduced unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, which is at half the level it was when we came into government. We are proud of the fact that we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in Australia. We are not complacent about that or about anybody being unemployed. This document is about a commitment to continuing to seek greater outcomes for those seeking employment and for generating employment in this State.