

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY TRAINING FUND, APPRENTICES

332. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Education and Training:

I refer to the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund.

- (1) Why has the basis of payment under the BCITF been changed for apprentices registered on or after 1 January 2004?
- (2) What was the previous payment structure and what is the new structure?
- (3) How and when were employers and subcontractors with apprentices notified of the changes?
- (4) What avenues are there for an early payment when a small family business can show hardship from generating two wages while the apprentice is off the job studying?
- (5) Is the minister concerned that such hardship discourages employers from taking on apprentices at a time when the state is in desperate need of tradespeople?
- (6) Will the minister act to address this anomaly in the new structure?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:

I am really curious about the opposition's level of support for the BCITF. The training fund and I go back a long way, given that I was the ministerial adviser responsible for working to ensure that the bill that was to come into this Parliament was subsequently passed. It has been in force for the past 13 or 14 years. Over that period the BCITF was at very severe risk and under threat. Who was it under threat from? It was under threat and at risk from the people opposite. This training fund collects over \$14 million annually and that money goes directly into the training of apprentices and trainees. I am quite happy to get to the heart of the question. It is very hypocritical of the member to defend the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund after spending years trying to quash it. However, it could not be quashed because it is too good. Indeed, it is a great model for other industries.

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) To ensure more equitable distribution of BCITF funds to employers, to encourage additional employment of apprentices and to encourage retention of apprentices in training.
- (2) The previous payment structure is as follows: direct indenture employers received a \$7 000 subsidy paid in three instalments. Further, under group training schemes, hirers of group training apprentices received a \$9 900 subsidy payment in arrears as a monthly payment of \$275. The new payment structure is a single subsidy rate of \$9 000
- (3) In writing and through press advertisements and on the BCITF web site, which is www.bcitf.org, prior to the change taking place.
- (4) The subsidy for direct indenture apprentices is now paid in three instalments of \$3 000.
- (5) I am encouraged by the results achieved by the BCITF in encouraging employers to take on apprentices. This financial year the fund will provide subsidies for the employment of more than 3 500 apprentices. This represents an increase of 27 per cent in the number of apprentices supported in the past 12 months and a 56 per cent increase in the past two years.
- (6) Refer to the answer given to (5).

I am pleased that the BCITF has survived the year-after-year machinations of the Liberal Party when it was in office.