

TRANSFIELD SERVICES, APPRENTICES

281. Mrs C.L. EDWARDES to the Minister for Training:

I remind the minister of the importance of apprentices and trainees to the future of the Western Australian economy.

- (1) Is the minister aware that on 15 October, Transfield Services at Bibra Lake suspended 14 apprentices, allegedly because government departments, for which the company carries out contract work, were concerned about the additional costs and risks associated with using apprentices?
- (2) Will the minister confirm whether Transfield Services contacted his office about this matter? If so, what action has he taken to investigate those allegations and will the minister advise the House of which government departments have refused to support apprentices in this way and what action will be taken against them?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

- (1)-(2) I appreciate the opportunity to respond on the importance of training. I am not aware of the specific issues with Transfield Services but I will check on them and provide a response. We have a dynamic economy, and although there can be huge growth there can also be a downsizing and loss of work in one area and therefore people need to move. That has been happening for some years and is a fundamental reason for putting together group training schemes. In the building and construction industry in particular, there has been clear evidence for many years that a builder may not have ongoing work, and taking on an apprentice for four years becomes problematic. Therefore, many builders prefer to use a group training scheme, so that if their overall volume of work or work in a specific trade falls away those apprentices can continue their training through a group training scheme. That is just one example in which the Government has moved to accommodate companies that find it difficult to maintain apprenticeships.

There has been a reduction in apprenticeships in a range of traditional trades. Training overall has grown; it grew under the last Government and it continues to grow under this Government. Under the last Government there was a slide in the number of apprenticeships in the traditional trades that, unfortunately, we have not been able to turnaround. This occurred in Western Australia and in most of the other States. There is a range of reasons for that, and this Government has started to tackle them.

One of the key undertakings of this Government has been in government contracting, in which the building skills program applies for construction projects valued at over \$2 million. This is radically different from and much improved on the priority access program put in place by the last Government. Although that program was heading in the right direction and attempted to give priority to training, in effect it did not produce any extra apprenticeships. It did highlight the issue and was of some value, but did not deliver what had been hoped for. We have put in place a range of programs, the first of which is the building skills program, which makes it an absolute requirement for government construction contracts over \$2 million to have a percentage of apprentices.

Mrs C.L. Edwardes: What about a commitment by government departments?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That program does not apply to government trading enterprises, and the Government will be looking at extending the building skills program to them. We need to look at training within government, and the Government is building on its initiatives in that area.

Before I close, I need to thank the member for Peel, who put a lot of work into getting that building skills program up and running to ensure that when government money goes into building and construction we will have a greater number of apprenticeships than in the past. I will ascertain the specifics about Transfield Services and will provide the member for Kingsley with an answer.