

TAFE COURSE FEES

Motion

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn) [4.02 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for its massive increase in TAFE course fees and its sustained undermining of TAFE.

The Barnett government has successfully —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member for Cockburn, I am terribly sorry; I am confirming that you are moving the motion.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thought I just did.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I thought you did, too.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will restart. Over the past six years, the Barnett government has abandoned and effectively undermined vocational education in Western Australia. Looking at the history of Ministers for Training and Workforce Development under the Barnett government, we can see that there has been an amazing attitude of ignorance by those ministers and an attitude of ministers who are simply not interested in vocational education. I give as an example the very fact that in six years there have been five Ministers for Training and Workforce Development. The member for Scarborough is the latest minister to hold that post. No minister has really taken the issue of vocational education seriously. No minister has taken a keen interest in that portfolio at all. When Treasury called for cuts from departments across the board in the form of efficiency dividends or savings, as it has for the last six budgets, whoever held the post of Minister for Training and Workforce Development was more than happy to rush to meet the requirements of the Department of Treasury. The ministers handed over responsibility for those cuts to the director general of the Department of Training and Workforce Development, who then applied the cuts at the coalface—that is, in the TAFE colleges around Western Australia. They were all too quick to do that. That meant that the answer to meeting Treasury's requirements for one of their portfolios was, "Tick; got that one out of the way." There was no consideration of or interest in the impact of those cuts. It was simply a matter of the ministers saying, "Treasury needed efficiency dividends and savings. I have directed the director general to find out how those savings can be implemented", and bam—it has been done!

Despite the fact that over the last six years TAFE has been the subject of literally hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of cuts, the cuts continue. They continue on a six-monthly basis. In the midyear review, the Department of Training and Workforce Development effectively delivered to WA state training institutions the full \$53 million budgetary cuts from the federal government. That was passed straight through to the colleges and will be applied over the next few years. For good measure, the midyear review delivered the Department of Training and Workforce Development another \$15 million efficiency dividend requirement. I can guarantee that that \$15 million efficiency dividend requirement will be passed straight on to the state training providers—the colleges—and they will then have to find ways to meet these cuts. How have those cuts been met over the last six years? Course numbers have been cut and there has been a reduction in the number of student contact hours, as well as in the material available for courses, and a reduction in maintenance services and the number of overall full-time employees. There has been a general wearing down of the state training providers consistently year in, year out by a conga line of disinterested ministers.

As of January this year, job cuts in TAFE colleges have started. Two hundred targeted separations for state training providers are currently underway, so 200 positions across WA state training providers are currently underway. I will give the minister an example of the impact of these job cuts. Midland TAFE has lost five of its most experienced lecturers from the metalwork and metal industries section—five! What impact does the minister think that will have on the capacity of Midland TAFE to deliver metalwork courses and metalwork apprenticeship training when five of its most experienced metal training lecturers are lost? That is out of one college. There has been not one or two, but five, from the one section. They will be the most experienced people in that discipline. That will have a devastating impact on that college's capacity to offer not only courses in metals and engineering training, but also post-trade training leading up to the diploma level. Also, the number of people who can gain access to that training will be limited, obviously, by the number of staff employed. It is not as though those five metal trade lecturers can be replaced.

Over the last two years, there has been a freeze on the number of employees, particularly full-time employees, who can be hired by state training providers in their colleges. On one hand, state training providers are getting rid of probably the most experienced lecturers they have and, on the other hand, they cannot replace them because there is an employment freeze in place. What does that all add up to? It adds up to a lack of capacity and

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an undermining of the capacity to deliver training in our TAFE colleges. Those job cuts will continue. As of January, 200 targeted separations were put in place. Rest assured the job cuts will continue; we will wait for the outcome of this year's budget that I guarantee will contain more funding cuts for the Department of Training and Workforce Development. Given the changes made last year to public sector employment conditions, I will not be surprised if redundancies are not even offered. The minister will call on the Department of Training and Workforce Development to reduce its staff numbers but not to pay them redundancies. Now it has the ability to do so, it will get rid of the underperforming assets—people it believes it can line up for the sack—out of TAFE and therefore provide it with a reduction in total numbers without having to pay out redundancy. I bet that will be applied to TAFE and state training providers. I bet it will happen as a consequence of the next round of funding cuts that will come out of this year's budget.

Not content with six years of continuously undermining the budgets of the Department of Training and Workforce Development and therefore Western Australian state training providers, our TAFE colleges, reducing the funding and services that those colleges rely upon, terminating the positions of 200 of the most experienced lecturers and other employees within TAFE—with more to come—since 2013, this government has increased course fees for TAFE students on a massive scale. For example, taking into account this year's increase as of January, there have been increases of over 515 per cent over the last two years at the diploma level and above. If a person were to undertake the diploma of early childhood education and care at West Coast Institute, which is in the minister's electorate —

Mrs L.M. Harvey: It's not in Scarborough.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is right; it is in Joondalup now. That is right; the government closed that one in Scarborough.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Members at the back of the chamber, can you please keep your voices down.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is in the member for Joondalup's electorate. I forgot it had moved.

If a person was to study a diploma of early childhood education and care at West Coast Institute, in the member for Joondalup's electorate, the cost for that three-semester diploma would be \$10 087.75. That is over \$3 000 per semester over three semesters. Originally, that course would have cost in total just under \$2 000. That is just over \$600 per semester, or just under \$2 000. It will now cost \$10 087.75. A person studying a certificate IV in mental health, which is a one-semester course at the same college, would have originally paid just over \$600, but today would pay \$2 800. I used those two examples because of the requirements called for by employers in those two key industries. For example, a person cannot work in the area of mental health without a level of qualification. One of the minimum levels of qualification that employers call for is at least a certificate IV in mental health. It was just over \$600, but it will now cost students \$2 800. Child care and early childhood education, which are critical areas of work, are significant areas of demand, as is the area of mental health because of the high turnover of labour. There is a constant requirement for people to work in early childhood education and child care. Again, there is a requirement of a minimum qualification to work in the childcare industry. In this case, the minimum qualification is a diploma. It did cost just under \$2 000, but it now costs over \$10 000 to get that qualification in order to get a job in an industry that is looking for people; it is calling for workers.

That is what the Barnett government has brought to Western Australia over a period of six years of incompetent management by Ministers for Training and Workforce Development. We have had massive funding cuts—physical funding cuts to the operation and maintenance of colleges—job cuts and, over the last two years, enormous hikes in course fees. The annual maximum course fee under the Department of Training and Workforce Development guidelines on increases to vocational education and training fees and the charges policy, which are issued every January, , for 2015 for a diploma is now \$7 700 per annum. The fees for a three or four-semester course over a two-year period—the diploma of early childhood education and care is nearly \$11 000—could go as high as \$14 000 to \$15 000.

I turn to apprentices. The course fees for certificates II to IV covering traineeships and priority industry qualifications and apprenticeships have gone up by 24 per cent this year alone. That is from the minister's own policy guidelines. The worst and nastiest part of the announcement of this year's fee hikes by the Department of Training and Workforce Development, which were obviously signed off by the minister, whether it was the current or previous Minister for Training and Workforce Development, was that the maximum cap of \$2 000 per semester on fees paid by apprentices for their courses has been removed. That has been taken away, leaving the door open for apprentices to pay more for their training. That is, I think, a heinous action by the state government. Apprentices are the lowest paid workers in Australia. An indentured apprentice is required to undertake training under the direction of an employer at a lower rate than that for another employee who is not

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undertaking training. An apprentice is paid a minimal amount of money in the first year, rising to the trade qualification rate immediately on completion of their apprenticeship, which may be in the third or fourth year. However, they are paid a very, very low rate of pay, and that has always been the case going right back to the Middle Ages. This government has now removed the cap that protected fee increases for people undertaking apprenticeships and basically said, “Future increases for certificates III and IV will now apply to you. The \$2 500 cap is gone as of this year.” That means, again taken from the minister’s own department fee structure set out last year, that the 24 per cent increase will now take the student curriculum course fee on a per-hour basis to \$3.09; in January next year, it will go to \$3.68, which is a further 19 per cent increase; and in January 2017, it will go to \$4.29, which is a further 17 per cent increase in that year. The reason the cap on apprenticeship fees was removed is that the minister and the department had planned and knew of further fee increases for certificates II to IV over the next two years, and they wanted those increases to apply to apprentices, as they will apply to every other person who is not an apprentice undertaking certificates II to IV qualifications. This year apprenticeship course fees went up by 24 per cent; next year, as set out by the department, they will go up by 19 per cent; and in January 2017, they will go up by 17 per cent. Going back from January 2017 to 2013, the course fees for apprentices undertaking certificates III and IV will have risen by 72.28 per cent. Why is this happening? Why is the Barnett government smashing students who are attempting to improve their skills and get jobs? Why is it doing this?

I come back to what I said in my opening statement about the attitude of ministers. Successive ministers have simply not concentrated and focused their attention on what has been happening within the department and on the impacts of what they have been asked to deliver by Treasury. They have not dug down and looked at the impacts at the college level. Why is that? It is because it is not a portfolio that they really wanted. Let us cast our mind back to Hon Peter Collier in the first term of the Barnett government. Peter Collier did not want the training portfolio; he wanted education. He was not interested in vocational education. He really wanted to get his hands on the portfolio that had been given to the then member for Churchlands. That is why he was not interested.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: He loved training.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: He did not love training.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Just ask him! He loved it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes? Go and ask him whether he wanted education instead of training. Ask him whether he wanted that. That is what he told everybody, and he was dirty that the then member for Churchlands got the portfolio that he wanted. Since then, we have had successive ministers. I think the member for Warren–Blackwood was one of them.

Ms R. Saffioti: A conga line.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, a conga line of ministers.

We have had Terry Redman as the minister; he was not interested. He simply signed off on everything that was put before him by the department. The Minister for Health, Hon Kim Hames, simply slept through his responsibility for the Department of Training and Workforce Development. His attitude was, “I didn’t want the Department of Training; I wanted to hang on to tourism.” The last thing he wanted was the training portfolio. Now it is down to this minister. She has caught the training ball and now we will see what she will do with it.

One of the reasons that TAFE fee increases and job cuts have occurred is the attitude of ministers. The second reason is the contempt that the Liberal Party and the National Party have for TAFE. As far as they are concerned, vocational education at TAFE is second-class education. It is not university; it is second-class education. That was beautifully set out by Hon Terry Redman when he was the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. After I questioned him about why TAFE cuts and fee increases had to occur, his statement was, “This means that those students will appreciate their studies more and will take them more seriously.” That was the response by the then Minister for Training and Workforce Development to questions from the opposition about why diplomas had gone up in price at that stage by 490 per cent. His attitude was that it would make them take their studies more seriously and appreciate their courses. What a contemptuous, dismissive attitude towards vocational education! It highlights my point on the second reason that all these cuts, job losses and fee hikes have gone through; it is the contempt that Liberal Party and National Party members of Parliament have for vocational training in Western Australia. There is a contempt for people who attend TAFE because, after all, this is second-class training!

The third reason I put to the house for why this is happening, which was again beautifully set out by the former Minister for Training and Workforce Development, Minister Redman, is the impact of state debt and the

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statements that students can contribute more to the cost of course delivery. In fact, the minister has said that herself. The minister has said publicly that TAFE fees have to increase because they have been too low for too long.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: That is true.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is true, is it? The minister should put herself in the situation of a 19-year-old who is trying to get a job and just think about that. This is an example of the contemptuous, pompous and dismissive attitude of the Liberal Party to vocational education and training.

When I asked the former training minister, Minister Redman, in an estimates committee why TAFE fees have to increase, he was quite blunt about it. His attitude was that the Department of Training and Workforce Development has to contribute to resolving the state budgetary situation. Therefore, TAFE students, who are subsidised—as the current minister has indicated, by too much and for too long—will have to pay more. Therefore, what Minister Redman was really saying was that students who are trying to improve their skills in order to get a job will now be required to pay for the budgetary situation that has been created by the Barnett government. That is exactly what that means. The Department of Training and Workforce Development, and state training providers, now have to contribute to the issues that are put to them by Treasury, and to the budgetary situation, and the only way they can do that is by increasing TAFE fees, which, as the minister herself has just indicated, have been subsidised by too much and for too long. What the government is really saying is, “Our state debt, and our budgetary situation, which we have created ourselves because of our incompetence, can now be paid for by students who are going to TAFE and attempting to improve their skills in order to get a job.” That is exactly what the government is saying.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Member, if I may, if their education is so curtailed, they might never learn the difference between AA and AAA and what this government has done!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am sure that would be the case, particularly if they were doing a diploma of finance, for example. I am sure that when they deal at TAFE with Moody’s-type ratings, they would take that into consideration, particularly as they will be the ones who will have to pay for the drop in the state’s credit rating from AAA to AA. I believe that is why the funding cuts to TAFE have happened, the job cuts have happened and the TAFE fee increases have happened. It is because of the attitude of ministers and their unwillingness to concentrate on their portfolios. It is because of the contempt that the Liberal Party and the National Party have for TAFE and the fact that they see it as second-class training. It is also because, as the former training minister, Minister Redman, and the current minister have both said, TAFE students have had their course fees subsidised for too long and now it needs to change. The reason it needs to change is that the Department of Training and Workforce Development needs to contribute to the state budgetary situation, and that means that students will have to pay for the financial stuff-ups that have been made by the Barnett government. That is basically it.

We will hear from various members in this house this evening about how the funding cuts to TAFE, the job losses at TAFE and the fee increases at TAFE are impacting on the ability of people to undertake TAFE courses. What the government is doing to TAFE will also impact on the Western Australian economy and the declining employment opportunities in this state. Many of the people who will be seeking training to enable them to work in a different occupation will be required to go to TAFE. There is also a constant demand for apprentices in this state that is not being met by the state training institutions. Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P. Abetz), you have seen me stand in this house on numerous occasions to appeal to the Barnett government to take some positive action that would increase the number of apprentices and incentivise employers to take on more apprentices.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Members, can you please keep your voices down a bit, please.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: However, nothing has occurred over the past six years. There has been a continual decline in the number of apprentices. I have some information from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research in Western Australia on training rates for apprentices and trainees in the construction trades. In 2008, the rate was 12.3 per cent, and as of 2013 it is down to 8.2 per cent. The Master Builders Association, as quoted in *The Australian* of Wednesday, 4 June last year, has said that the construction industry now has fewer than half the apprentices who are needed. Report after report has been given to successive ministers for training from the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund, which I questioned the minister about the other day, calling on the state government to concentrate on the declining number of apprentices going into the building trades. Do members know what the government’s response was? The Department of Training and Workforce Development, in its “State Training Plan 2014–2017”, determined through an econometric modelling exercise—that is, a desktop theoretical modelling exercise—how much funding should go into the budget of state training providers for the period 2014 to 2017. That was based on the belief by the department of training that there

would not be an increase in demand for apprentices in the construction industry over the time of the “State Training Plan 2014–2017”.

That proposition was put into the econometric model, and what came out was a significant cut to construction industry training across the state training providers. It has been indicated to me, and I would like the minister to confirm or deny this, that the construction industry training courses at Bunbury TAFE will be closed. That would have come straight from the advice of the “State Training Plan” and the econometric model that had cut funding to state training provider courses for the construction industry. That took place despite the fact that the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund—for which the Minister for Training and Workforce Development is still the responsible minister, as were her predecessors—had told the Department of Training and Workforce Development and successive ministers that there had been a decline in the number of apprentices and that something had to be done about it to increase the number of apprentices needed.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, if you want to have a noisy conversation, please take it outside. Thank you.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The Master Builders Association and other building industry groups are now calling on the state government to allow more 457 visa bricklayers to come to Western Australia. What the hell is going on in that department, minister? How can those boofheads get it so wrong—seriously? I do not know whether the minister has read the “State Training Plan”, but she should have a look at it and at what it states about the construction industry. At a time when the industry is calling for more places for apprentices and more training to be offered by TAFE, these meatheads at the Department of Training and Workforce Development have gone the other way and cut training. What is the matter with them?

The worst part about it is that it is not as though the department can say, “Oh, we didn’t know.” The BCITF provided it with advice and it is required under its act to present its reports to Parliament. It should have set it out that over the previous four years something needed to be done. This is a clear example of the point I have made several times earlier—that successive Ministers for Training and Workforce Development have had no interest in their portfolio. If they had, they would have met with the BCITF, listened to what it had to say, gone to the department and asked what it was doing and then, when they had read the “State Training Plan”, they would have challenged the department and asked, “What the hell are you doing? That’s clearly not the advice from industry.” That is why we find ourselves in this situation. We have had successive training ministers who were not interested in their portfolio and have taken no interest in vocational education and training in Western Australia.

The undermining of vocational education and training in Western Australia is one of the results of the incompetence of successive Ministers for Training and Workforce Development. Another impact is far more personal and far more emotional—that is, kids trying to undertake training that will get them a job. Kids have turned up to enrol in courses thinking that the cost of the course would be around \$1 800 to \$2 000 and are discovering that instead they are between \$8 000 and \$10 000. I pointed this out to Minister Redman when he was Minister for Training and Workforce Development, and he had no idea at all about how apprentices paid their fees. Potential apprentices have to go to their parents and ask them to fork out the money up-front so that they can enrol in a TAFE course. Minister Redman at the time said, “That’s not right; the employer pays it.” Yes, that is right: the employer pays it to an indentured apprentice, after the apprentice has shown them that they have successfully completed the course at the end of the semester. That is what they do. I can count on one hand the number of generous employers who say, “Here, I’ll pay your TAFE course fee up-front while you undertake your TAFE attendance.” The rest of them say, “I’ll reimburse you for the cost of undertaking your TAFE off-the-job training when you bring me a certificate showing that you’ve attended and you’ve passed the course for that semester.”

We need to remember that apprentices are being paid \$6 or \$7 an hour as first-year apprentices, and they are then faced with \$2 500 for enrolment in a particular course. They do not have that kind of money, so what do they do? They go to their parents, grandparents, relatives or friends to pay, and then hopefully they pass the course and get that money back. That is what happens. Another former Minister for Training and Workforce Development, Hon Kim Hames, also had no idea at all. I do not think he ever spoke to an apprentice, so it is not surprising that he did not have any idea.

I could go on and on with examples of how the TAFE course fee increases are causing devastation and financial hardship out there in the community, because obviously every parent wants the best for their kid. If they have not attained the TEE results to get them into university, they undertake vocational education and training. Quite often they undertake vocational education and training courses at school, and they then want to continue on after school so that they can improve their chances of gaining employment. Their parents, grandparents and relatives

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all stand behind them, so when it becomes difficult for them to enrol because of the course fees, it hits the whole family and it is emotional for the whole family.

I refer to an article by Victoria Laurie in *The Australian* of 28 January 2014, headed “Downturn hits the tradies’ nursery”. Mr Ken Marshall was one of the very lucky ones who did his plumbing apprenticeship in the early 1980s with Western Australia’s then Public Works Department. The article states that Mr Marshall —

... despaired that his 17-year-old son Neil would not get that opportunity due to a downturn in apprenticeships, laying off of trainees by employers and a stiff hike in TAFE training fees for trades. He said boom-time Western Australia should be the state that offered its young people opportunities for upskilling, but it was heading down the wrong path.

On Friday on my way home from my electorate office I got a phone call from Ms Karen Keeffe. She talked about her son, who had discovered the cost of undertaking the diploma he wanted to do, and it had really upset her and her son. They were upset about the cost of the diploma that he wanted to undertake and the bill he would be left with at the end of the day. Ms Keeffe just could not believe that the course fees had gone up so much. As a working mum, she would struggle to help her son meet the costs of those courses. She was disgusted by how much the Barnett government had increased course fees and the fact that the government was basically cutting off training opportunities for her son.

Far more stories will come out tonight from my colleagues, and all of them will go to the point I have made over and over again: the Barnett government, under five successive Ministers for Training and Workforce Development, has completely abandoned vocational education and training in Western Australia. Those ministers are not, and have never been, interested in TAFE. They have continually agreed to the cuts handed down by Treasury, they have not defended their portfolio, they have not defended the Department of Training and Workforce Development, and they have not defended the state training providers by shielding them from the impacts of the cuts or arguing against the need for the impacts of the cuts. They have appeased the Department of Treasury by going along with the job cuts through the redundancy program, and they have further appeased the Department of Treasury by agreeing to and implementing massive increases in TAFE fees, thereby cutting off training and job opportunities for young and older people in Western Australia. It is a disgraceful situation that we find ourselves in, and one that is building a head of steam out there in Western Australia amongst mums and dads. It is one that will hang around the minister’s neck right the way up to the 9 March 2017 state election. So far, what the minister has said in the press and what she has said in this house show that she is going to continue on the same path as the other ministers who preceded her. She believes that TAFE students and their courses are subsidised too much by the state of Western Australia, and that the cost burden should shift more to the students. That cost will shift more to the parents of those students. Remember, as I said earlier, we are looking at cost increases for certificates II to IV of 24 per cent this year, 19 per cent next year, and 17 per cent in 2017. I will bet you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P. Abetz), that the latest Minister for Training and Workforce Development will just go along with what the Department of Treasury wants, despite her saying in the press that she will have a look at the TAFE fee increases. I will bet that she will go along with those fee increases, and I bet she will be implementing the further cuts that will come to the Department of Training and Workforce Development and state training providers out of the next state budget. I will be watching very, very closely what actions this minister takes to try to defend her portfolio. I put it to the house that she will do nothing, except implement everything the Department of Treasury wants.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [4.53 pm]: That was a very fine speech by the member for Cockburn.

This government has its priorities all wrong. We have had the budget blowout, Elizabeth Quay, the footy stadium, the empty Fiona Stanley Hospital, nib Stadium, for which we paid out \$7 million because someone wanted to get out of a contract; and we have the Pelago developments. Who do we hit? We hit the people who are most vulnerable in our community. When I look at the other side of the house, I see all the people who would have had an education paid for and assisted over a long period, as would some of their children. But when they get into government, they say to the people in my electorate who want to improve themselves, “Well, if you want to go to TAFE, we’re going to charge you, and charge you a lot.” It might be all right for the minister and the Premier, who are in safe seats, but I would not like to be one of the marginal seat holders sitting on the government side. They came in on a swing and they will go out on a swing.

TAFE affects many people, including young people coming out of school and people who want to be retrained. I do not know whether members opposite are not listening to their constituents, but we have fly in, fly out workers who have been going up north earning a lot of money, and all of a sudden they are coming back to the city. That will put more and more pressure on jobs. A lot of young people who are coming back to the city went up there for the boom in the construction industry without any training, and they earned a lot of money. I was talking to one of our training industry representatives in Albany who is getting people coming in in droves

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saying, “I’ve got a big mortgage and debt on my car.” People thought it would last forever, and now they want to be retrained because they do not have a trade. They will have to go to TAFE to be trained, but they cannot afford to.

I spoke to some young people at the Great Southern Institute of Technology in Albany; we had a bit of a meeting there and they came and spoke to us about the issues. They cannot get in there because they cannot afford it. Some told me they have a certificate IV and want to improve their skills and chances of gaining a better-paid job by studying a diploma course. They are angry that the discount for concession card holders is no longer available. It is out of the question for them to do a diploma course that now costs between \$6 000 and \$8 000. What do they do? They cannot get training, so they cannot get a job. I think the latest unemployment figure in Albany—actually, the Parliamentary Library put it out today—is 3.8 per cent. I can see that roaring right up; it is going to get right out of control because all our FIFOs are coming back. I am a FIFO—I fly in and out of Albany when I come up for Parliament—and I see these people at the airport. I can see that the number of people sitting around is diminishing at a great rate. I go back to Albany at 5.00 am on a Friday morning, and there used to be maybe 400 people in the departure area; now there are probably 150 people. That is 250 fewer people just on one shift changeover. They have come back to Perth and they will put pressure on not only people who do not have jobs, but also those people who have jobs, because there are other people who have jobs but who are not performing well—they probably need training too, but they cannot afford it.

The other problem is that the cap on fees has gone, which has meant that certificate courses at Great Southern Institute of Technology now have the bare minimum of electives, which keeps student hours down and, therefore, fees down. The problem is that if someone fails just one elective, they fail the whole course. Having caps made it possible for all young people to go TAFE, but not anymore.

How are young people now meant to afford to pay for the training they need to get jobs? By 2017 it will be more expensive per student hour to be enrolled in a certificate course than a diploma course. Students are telling me that we need to go back to the fee caps. I spoke with a childcare worker yesterday who told me she has a certificate III in children’s services and was looking to do a diploma of early childhood education and care to improve her skills and further her career. Last year, under the National Partnership Agreement on TAFE Fee Waivers for Childcare Qualifications, fees were waived; this year they have to pay \$7 700. I do not know whether members know, but child care is one of the sleepers in our communities. I have families in the community of Albany in which the husband and wife both work and they cannot afford to pay their bills because a lot of their money goes to child care. I know the childcare providers in Albany are very concerned that they cannot get staff, and if they do not have staff they cannot allow people to enrol their children, so the wife cannot go to work and there is more pressure on the family. It has a domino effect, and it is a huge issue. It is happening in my electorate and it will be happening in electorates of members on the other side. I am disappointed that no-one from the other side, especially some of the regional members where things are a lot tougher than they are in the city, have stood up for their community and young people who want to do something. We keep saying that our young people do not get off their backsides and do anything. A lot of them cannot do so now because of these fees. The VET FEE-HELP was not an option for her because she did not want to go into debt knowing that with the job reclassification and overtime, she would quickly hit the \$53 000 income level whereby the loan, with the 20 per cent loan fee, would need to be repaid and would be a big commitment. The massive increase in these fees for the certificate or diploma courses in Albany is proving to be a disincentive to people wanting to enter that industry. As I said, there is a huge flow-on effect.

Courses on the priority industry qualifications list, such as the diploma in conservation land management or the diploma in horticulture, have strong enrolment numbers because the fees are less than they are for other diplomas. This leads to more enrolments and places being available. Again, some students do not want to go into debt to pay for them. Other courses are not available this year in Albany due to the drop in applications. The diploma in sustainability will not run this year due to lack of numbers, nor will certificate III in laboratory skills or certificate IV in environmental monitoring and technology.

As I mentioned in my contribution to the Premier’s Statement the other day, panel beaters in Albany are trying hard to keep apprentices, but they are having a lot of difficulty. This is a city versus country issue and I am very disappointed that the National Party has not raised this. A young apprentice panelbeater in Albany has to go to Perth twice for three weeks at a time. They have to go to Perth for three weeks, come back to Albany and then go to Perth for another three weeks. This does not happen to apprentices in Perth. They have the option to go to TAFE one day a week, so that means they have one day a week away from their work. Employers in Albany have to send their apprentices to Perth for three weeks at a time. They also have to do another part of their TAFE course in Albany. That might add up to four weeks and if they have, say, two weeks’ sick leave during the year, that employee is not working for six weeks. Why would an employer take on an apprentice under those conditions? This is what the apprentices were told, so I followed it up with the TAFE in Perth. After I raised it in

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 25 February 2015]

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Parliament the other day, suddenly the TAFE is saying that the apprentices have to be in Perth for only one lot of the three weeks. If I had not intervened, these apprentices would have had to go to Perth for two lots of three weeks. Not everyone tells their member of Parliament these things. The guy I rang personally, whose name I will not mention, was very good. After we sat down and had a chat, he understood how difficult it is for people in regional areas. With his supervisor he made a decision and now they are saying the work can be done in the home environment. The minister and her advisers obviously did not read the information to learn that these people would have to come to Perth. The people travelling to Perth are all young apprentices, and for some it would probably be the first time they have driven to Perth. Yet, that was compulsory. No commonsense is applied to these requirements. There are also accommodation costs. As I say, a lot of the apprentices want to go home from Perth at the weekend during the three weeks because they are involved in sport; they do not want to stay in Perth. I do not know whether members opposite realise, but people cannot get much accommodation in Perth for under \$200 a night. I was told that 80 per cent of apprentices in the panelbeating industry come from the country. Surely that would have been taken into account when this decision was made.

I do not think members opposite or the minister realise that this is a huge issue that affects people who want to get a job. As I said before, people say that our young people today do not want to get off their backsides. Here there are people who want to train and go to work but they are being charged these outlandish fees. Members opposite, including ministers, had a free education or an education that did not require them to pay these kinds of TAFE fees. Members opposite and the minister should mark my words: this is a real sleeper that could well pull down the government at the next election.

MR J. NORBERGER (Joondalup) [5.05 pm]: I thank the members for Cockburn and Albany for their contributions. A lot of points have been raised this afternoon, some of which are well beyond my pay grade or experience to talk about. However, I believe I can add some value to the discussion. I have made a few notes in response to some of the comments made by the member for Cockburn and, more recently, the member for Albany. I am mindful that I will be travelling with the member for Cockburn for three days next week so I have to be somewhat nice to him!

I am the lead speaker.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: You're not the lead speaker.

Mr J. NORBERGER: I am sorry; I am not the lead speaker. I cannot read properly; I should have gotten a better education! I want to make it clear that I am not the lead speaker—thank God for that. I thought, “Gosh, speak for 60 minutes, steady on!”

The member for Cockburn started and finished his speech with the statement that this side of the house has completely abandoned and undermined the vocational education training sector. That argument will be a bit hard to justify. The other day I came across a great quote from Mark Twain, who said, “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.” Some pretty amazing statistics have been bandied around the place, not so much tonight by the two members who have spoken, but certainly in some of the media releases from members opposite. We have heard that fees for such and such a course have gone up 524 per cent and we think, “Holy moly, 524 per cent!” We have to understand that TAFE fees have come from an extremely low base. A lot of what I will talk about tonight, I suppose, is probably more from a philosophical level. The two members have raised some individualities. The member for Albany talked about panelbeating apprentices and issues in the country. I am sure the member for Kimberley will chat about some of the challenges up there. I am not qualified to speak about them. Certainly, at a philosophical level, I will have a look at that.

Historically, on average, under Liberal and Labor governments, however far back we want to go, TAFE courses have been subsidised to the tune of 93 per cent. That is why the member for Albany referred to the fact that people would more or less—bar the seven per cent contribution—get a free TAFE education. The changes we are talking about now have been phased in over a number of years. If as the member for Cockburn said, we are completely abandoning the VET sector, we would not be providing any subsidy or any help or support. Quite frankly, that is just not the case. In fact, as a state, across the board, on average, we will be contributing 80 per cent to help people get the qualifications we have just been hearing about that will help them get a job. That is phenomenal. The question we have to ask ourselves at a philosophical level is: why do we train people? We know, of course, that we train people because we want to create job opportunities. We want to see people get employment and become engaged in our economy and further their careers. We also want to train people in the right areas; we want to train people to fill skill shortages in the workforce. Under these changes, which are called priority skills, we have identified what jobs and qualifications employers are asking for in the economy at the moment. That is where we are putting in the maximum amount of financial resources. We are supporting and subsidising those courses because we know that is where the job opportunities will be. There are some fantastic courses on offer out there. I wrote some of the more obscure ones down. Courses can be undertaken in stone

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therapy massage as well as certificates in calligraphy and in spray tanning. I think it is absolutely outstanding that our TAFE colleges offer those courses. But if that is not where the jobs are, we have to ask the philosophical question —

Ms M.M. Quirk: It will be, once you ban tanning beds!

Mr J. NORBERGER: There will be a few more jobs in spray tanning, admittedly.

Should the taxpayer pay? When we talk about providing subsidies, we are also talking about opportunity cost. It all comes out of one pot. It is taxpayers' money—the taxes all Western Australians pay. Should we provide subsidies towards courses that will not realistically end in meaningful employment for the masses? If people want to do a course in stone therapy, I think it is fantastic, but it is quite right that they should pay for it. If I decided tomorrow that I really wanted to get a certificate III in origami—I am not even sure whether that exists—and if I was passionate about it and there was a TAFE course for it —

Mr F.A. Alban: It would suit you!

Mr J. NORBERGER: I am sure it would suit me. It would give me something to do during question time! But I should pay for that.

I digress a little. I do not for a moment question the member for Cockburn's passion and commitment to the training sector. I know him well enough to know that he is very passionate about the sector. However, there was something he said that I cannot agree with. The member said that a TAFE education is a second-class education. I think that demeans our TAFE system. I do not believe that a TAFE education is second class. An example was given that related to the West Coast Institute. It would be remiss of me not to mention how phenomenally proud I am to have West Coast Institute in my electorate as part of the Joondalup learning precinct. To Michelle Hoad and her staff, I say that I think it is an outstanding, high quality and superbly professional educational facility. I intend to come back to the example related to nursing. West Coast Institute has an outstanding nursing college, or nursing arm, and is fairly close to Joondalup Health Campus. A big part of what it does is offering a diploma in nursing. The first thing I want to say before I come back to that other example is that our TAFE system is highly professional and I have phenomenal respect for it.

A lot of members will probably know that for five and a half years prior to joining Parliament I had the great privilege of being very actively involved in the vocational education and training sector. Admittedly, I managed and ran a private registered training organisation. It was not a public registered training organisation; I ran a private RTO. The courses that we offered attracted no subsidies at all. That is not entirely true—some of the courses we offered attracted funding —

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

Mr J. NORBERGER: A lot of the training that we provided —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Members for Butler and Forrestfield, the member for Joondalup has the floor. Please do not interject. It is against standing orders. You are not allowed to interject.

Mr J. NORBERGER: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I appreciate your protection.

Mr N.W. Morton interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Forrestfield, I call you for the second time.

Mr J. NORBERGER: That was a really short stint!

A lot of the courses we provided attracted funding through what was called the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund and is now called the Construction Training Fund. That was about the limit. Other than that, people paid full training fees. People came to us for the same reason that people go to TAFE—they wanted to improve their career and their job prospects.

One of the examples that the member for Albany gave, which I thought was interesting, related to some fly in, fly out workers who had worked up north and earned phenomenal amounts of money. In the example he gave, they were laid off, which is unfortunate. The industry can be cyclical and it can be very project driven. It is not entirely uncommon for people to earn a phenomenal amount of money on a particular project for, say, nine months but not have any work for three months before picking up another project. Unfortunately, there is an element to the industry where that is the nature of the beast. The company I worked with was heavily involved in construction activity in the north west. I know firsthand the type of opportunities that were available to people working up there, either with qualifications or with none. A forklift operator up north could earn \$160 000 plus—earning more than a member of Parliament.

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I have to say that I find it a little rich for the opposition to say that there is now an obligation on taxpayers. That individual might have had a job for nine months, or one or two years. He or she might have been up there for three years earning a six-figure salary. In the example that the member for Albany gave, he or she indebted themselves by buying the jetski and the car, but did not plan their finances. Upon their return they want to do some training, which I appreciate—I have no issue with that—but it is somehow now incumbent on the tax-paying public of WA to foot the entire bill! The government is not saying it will not contribute anything. We have to keep within the paradigm of the argument here. The average subsidy for these courses will still be 80 per cent. As it is, we will be subsidising that man or woman's further training to the tune of 80 per cent. But I find it difficult to argue that we should subsidise so much more because that poor person earned only between \$160 000 and \$180 000, and they had to sell the jetski! I know we are arguing around the periphery and that members will always find examples in which it might not be the case —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr J. NORBERGER: I know the minister will talk about apprenticeships. I am just referring to opposition members. I am referring to what was said recently. I do not know whether it was a gentleman or a lady in the member for Albany's example—it was not disclosed—but they came back after working up north. He or she already had a certificate IV qualification. Because they have now been laid off, they want to upgrade their qualification to a diploma. Good on them; I appreciate and admire that. Somewhere along the line, apparently, with everything that was happening with the fees, it was unfair that that person would be asked to pay 20 per cent towards their diploma. The other thing that was not mentioned is that at the level of diploma and above—a diploma or an advanced diploma—that individual could have applied for a higher education contribution scheme equivalent-type scheme; I think it is called FEE-HELP. They would not have had any up-front costs at all. They could have completed the training without paying up-front costs. If that diploma led to gainful re-employment, hopefully in a higher earning capacity, once they earn over \$50 000 the money is repaid. I do not understand what is wrong with that.

Ms M.M. Quirk: A lot of courses would not reap those sorts of wages.

Mr J. NORBERGER: Member for Girrawheen, I am talking about the example given by the member for Albany. That is all I am doing. If the member has an issue with it, she should talk to the member for Albany. The member for Albany's example on this motion was a FIFO worker who had earned over \$100 000. I saw firsthand how much they earned. He or she lost their job, and I am sorry for that. They already have a certificate IV and they want to upgrade to a diploma, which I applaud. The state says, "I'll tell you what; we'll subsidise 80 per cent to further your career", which is great, but apparently the FIFO worker said, "I'm not happy that I've got to pay the 20 per cent." Even then, we say, "Hang on; we'll even allow you not to have any up-front costs." It is a bit like a person attending university; they do the course and if they do not get a job afterwards, in theory they will never repay the money and the government will be left footing the bill. But if they get a job and earn over \$50 000—this is no different from any uni graduate—bit by bit they pay us back. I do not have an issue with that.

The other example given by the member for Albany related to one of his constituents, I assume, who currently holds a certificate III in child care. I have phenomenal respect for childcare workers. The example that the member for Albany gave applies to me. My wife and I both work full time. We take turns in the morning dropping my little three-year-old at child care. In this very chamber I made a 90-second member statement expressing my phenomenal gratitude to the very childcare centre we go to and to the childcare workers to whom we entrust, really, our most precious possession, if I can even call him that, my son Daniel. I drop him off in the mornings, teary as it might be, and he gets loved and doted upon and educated. I have phenomenal respect for childcare workers. When someone is already in that industry, which I think has to be a personal calling, and decides they have an opportunity to do a diploma, do not quote me, but I think a diploma-level qualification can open up career opportunities at a supervisory level. I am about to get called to order. It would have been a really good argument, Madam Acting Speaker, but, all right, I will not go there. It does not matter.

Remember, help with fees was available. The person wanted to do a diploma, but did not end up doing the diploma because—the member for Albany even admitted this—they did not want to get indebted. Golly; okay—so what are we saying to our university students? If we want to have a philosophical argument, does the Labor Party believe in and will it commit to a policy position federally that all university courses should be free? I do not understand how we can say that it is okay for university students to be indebted over the course of their studies and to pay that money back to the federal government when they get a job, but a person's only stumbling block to doing a TAFE diploma, clearly knowing in this example that they had FEE-HELP available, is that they did not want to be indebted.

Why? The member for Albany went on and said that that person knew that once they got the diploma, they were going to be reclassified, earn above \$50 000 a year and have to pay back their debt. That is great; that is fantastic. That person should be reclassified. We want them to get that pay rise and earn more money; it is the whole notion of a person investing in their own future. To make out as though there is no support at all is just rubbish. If a person is of secondary school age, the fee cap is still in place. There is a \$410 per annum fee cap in place for anyone of secondary school age wishing to do TAFE training. Lower income earners, and I do not know the exact threshold, can get up to a further 50 per cent concession. Of course, we know that for diplomas and above there are HECS-style loans.

Coming back to the member for Cockburn referring to TAFE as a second-class education, I disagree with that. We have seen increased employability and increased recognition by employers of the value of TAFE courses. I have also noticed, certainly in my electorate, a huge increase in cooperation between universities and TAFEs.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr J. NORBERGER: More and more these days, higher TAFE courses such as a diploma or an advanced diploma, depending on the course, can easily count as credit for the entire first year of an equivalent university course. Let me give an example. One course offered at West Coast Institute of Training is a diploma in nursing. We have heard that that is a three-semester course with a fee of roughly \$2 700 a semester. That is a diploma course, so the fees do not need to be paid up-front. By doing a diploma in nursing, a person is getting, I believe, a first-class education at a great training institute in West Coast. When that person graduates as a level 1 enrolled nurse, according to the awards scale, they will start off straightaway on \$54 000 per annum before penalties. Before penalties, shift allowances, overtime and all of that, the starting salary after having potentially left high school and done 18 months of training at a first-class training institution is \$54 000. So, yes, from the moment they start, that person would be paying back their education—but I think that is great. Eighteen months ago that person was potentially graduating from high school and now they are an enrolled nurse.

Furthermore, most universities will give recognition of prior learning or credit towards a nursing degree from that diploma. If that person had gone straight to university, they would have paid at least as much for their study, if not much more. What are university fees these days? Surely, we are looking at 15 grand, 20 grand or 25 grand for a three-year degree. If the argument opposite is that the diploma should have been free or of negligible cost, why would anyone do their first year at university? Why would everyone not just do their diploma of nursing courtesy of the WA state government, and then just get that recognised by universities and then pay only for years two and three of the university degree? I do not think that is a sensible argument.

It comes back to what I mentioned before. It is the discussion about opportunity cost. As a government, like any government, we are charged with the efficient allocation of scarce resources. What are those scarce resources? They are taxpayers' moneys. We need hospitals, we need schools, we need police resources, we need transport infrastructure and, yes, we also need to assist people with their training; that is part of it, but it cannot be the only part. We need to look at what is fair and equitable for the allocation of taxpayers' money, and whether we apply it to get maximum value and a fair and sustainable—that is the other key word—model. Is something funded to the tune of 93 per cent sustainable? Possibly not. That is not the case with the growing demand of our state. We can quibble about whether we think the freeway should have been widened or the third lane should have been put in the tunnel, but it is the job of government to look at the resources available and the demands of our society.

I will not rabbit on about this, but it is interesting that just last week we heard talk yet again from members opposite in debate on the Premier's Statement about the current impact on our budget by falling iron ore prices. In the media we heard the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer say that if we were to go into deficit, it would be inexcusable: there was no reason to have gone into deficit; it was entirely avoidable. I do not want to repeat the speech I made last week, but it would be interesting to look at it. It is a big claim by members opposite because they are basically saying that irrespective of falling iron ore prices and their volatility, the government should never have counted on them in the first place—and shame on the government for even thinking it could even budget on volatile iron ore revenue. They said that the Labor Party would never have made that mistake and that it would have delivered surpluses. When we ask members of the Labor Party how they would do that, they cannot answer. They do not know. All we know is that they want more of this, more of that, more subsidies here and more support there, but we do not have a magic pot of money. No government does. The Labor Party would not if it was in power.

At the end of the day, I support our TAFE system. I am proud of the TAFE system we have in Joondalup. The member for Albany alluded to the fact that we all got a free education, but I do not think that is the case. I will be honest. I am one of those people who did not get as high a tertiary entrance examination score as I would have liked. I was very immature during high school. My parents got divorced and that probably threw me around a bit. When I graduated year 12, I had to do my TEE, but I cannot remember my exact score. I do not

think it was flash, but it was over 300, which is a start, is it not? However, it certainly was not enough back then to get into university. I could not get into university, so I went to TAFE. I went to Central TAFE here in Perth and enrolled in an advanced diploma of applied science (computing). In that regard, the member of Albany is right. I cannot remember how much I paid for my fees; it would not have been a huge amount. In fact, I got Austudy as well, but on top of that I went out and got a job. My first job was earning \$5.40 an hour working for a company called Instant Gardens out the back of Wanneroo weeding the nursery. That was my start to my working life. I never finished that course. I am more than happy to admit in this chamber that at that age, 18 or 19 years, I was too immature.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Did you pay your Austudy back?

Mr J. NORBERGER: I would have, and I will come back to that. I did not finish that course; I ended up joining the Air Force. Fast forward to when I was 26 years old, having matured a bit I decided I wanted to advance myself. At that stage I had no qualifications; I had nothing. I thought: I want to advance and improve myself. I went to Curtin University as a mature-age student to do a degree in accounting and finance. At that stage I was already working, so I have no HECS debt, as I was literally paying for my units up-front. The member for Albany said that we all got a free education; I did not. I might have had a year or so at TAFE that I squandered. In hindsight, there may well be a bit of truth in what Hon Terry Redman said, but in my case, certainly, I did not make the most of that opportunity and later in life I have paid my way ever since. I have no regrets about that; I do not think that that is wrong. I think that is exactly how it should have been. I was earning a wage and I wanted to improve myself.

I know we will shortly hear from the minister, especially in and around some of the claims that have been made about apprenticeships. I worked in the industry around traineeships and my recollection is that our traineeship students never paid a cent. Their fees were paid by their employer. The wonderful Indigenous people on the traineeships that I helped to manage and was very proud to be a part of earned an income from day one—on average \$90 000 a year. Admittedly, that was in the resources industry. It was with Karajarri people in Port Hedland—I hope I pronounced that correctly—and the Martu people in Newman. They are wonderful people who were sick and tired of taking course after course. They had more tickets than you could poke a stick at, but no-one would give them a job. The traineeship program we were involved with—we administered it—was through BHP Billiton, and credit goes to BHP for that. BHP held the view that that was rubbish and that these people did not need more tickets; they needed employment. As a group training organisation, we took people on board and on average they earned between \$80 000 and \$90 000 a year from day one. We put them through either certificate II or III level in civil construction, open-cut mining, and some of the girls did certificate III in business and site clerk work. When they graduated at the end of the program, we had a huge uptake of graduates by the host companies, and they went on to earn \$160 000-plus a year. I am happy for them and they deserved it; they were working four weeks on, one week off, which is not an easy roster in the construction industry.

My experience has not been with apprenticeships, which I am sure the minister will talk about. It comes back to the final philosophical argument that we are not abandoning the VET sector. I know that the minister feels extremely proud of the VET sector—as I do. I am very proud of our TAFE system and the trainers who work in that sector. We are continuing to subsidise people's training on average to 80 per cent of the total cost and to provide additional forms of assistance through FEE-HELP, discounts for those on low incomes and the cap for school-age students. To say that we have abandoned the industry is a little bit rich. We are putting funding where we know it will result in the jobs that are needed and the skills asked for by industry. If people want to do something else, I think it is outstanding that our training providers provide such a rich variety of courses, such as stone therapy massage, calligraphy and spray tanning. That is great, and we should have as many options as possible available, but not all are in hot demand. If people want to do those courses, they should pay full fees for them, because potentially they are almost studying them as a hobby. We provide FEE-HELP for apprenticeships for plumbing and carpentry and some diploma courses because we know that there are jobs for people at the end. At the end of the day, I very much appreciate the member for Cockburn's passion for this subject. I think it is a passion that we share. I know we obviously look at it slightly differently in some respects, and I appreciate that as well. Having heard some of the examples given, I felt that it was important to look at the flipside of the issue—and I thank the house for giving me the opportunity to share some of my thoughts on this matter.

MS J. FARRER (Kimberley) [5.34 pm]: I rise to support the member for Cockburn's motion. I would like to speak for the people of the Kimberley who feel that they are very disadvantaged in pursuing higher education because a lot of the courses they look for in TAFE are not available. The region's only university, the University of Notre Dame Australia, supplied a lot of courses for people, but the university recently modified its services and no longer delivers the courses it once did. Due to distance and the financial cost of travel and accommodation, it has proven challenging for Kimberley locals to study through another university, although

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that is now their only option. People across the Kimberley in the remote communities, those Aboriginal people, were told that they have to make work available to look after their communities. Some such people attended the Kimberley Training Institute Broome Campus and Notre Dame campus where they could take up the courses they wanted to do to help their communities. But because of the changes at Notre Dame, they can no longer pursue some of the things they want to do to get a better paid job instead of living on unemployment benefits. Notre Dame is a special place that was set up to accommodate the needs of those people with courses in enrolled nursing and bookkeeping for the financial work that Aboriginal people take on in their communities. But we have seen some changes since then.

The Kimberley TAFE has always provided a great alternative for locals across the Kimberley. In my town there is a TAFE facility but the intake and number of people who can apply is restricted. There is a deadline for how many people it can take for the courses that are available. In the years when I could not find work anywhere, I applied to TAFE to do some courses in ecotourism, which are courses that I believe would have benefited a lot of our people. But because the course was not administered through that TAFE, we were told it could not be done anywhere except at the TAFE in Broome—and the lecturer who taught that course was not able to come further because of the distances involved.

Many people see TAFE as an affordable and local solution to gain qualifications to enhance their career prospects. We have seen this with a lot of the young Aboriginal men who took on courses such as driving forklifts, machine operating and driving big trucks to qualify to get jobs in the mines, but some of those courses are not available anymore. For the ones who were able to do those courses, they have qualified and have got work with some of the mines, but some of those courses have been taken away for the majority of people. We talk about upskilling our people, and these are the courses that our people need, but we find that the fees for TAFE courses are so high that people cannot afford to pay them. I would like to make that point very clear: this Barnett government has now shattered those people's prospects with this outrageous decision to skyrocket TAFE fees. That is what a lot of people in the Kimberley are saying. They do not have the opportunity to further enhance their skills and qualifications to bring them to the level so that they can also qualify.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Can't they just go out and sell their jet skis?

Ms J. FARRER: Where I come from we do not have jet skis.

Students who are enrolled to commence study in a childcare course must now pay \$7 000 more than was paid by previous students. In places such as Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, there is a great need for qualified local people. However, because the local people cannot afford to do their training through TAFE, because of the cost, those people are not there. It has been reported that the childcare centre in Fitzroy Crossing cannot find local qualified staff and has to advertise interstate and overseas for workers. That is also the case with aged people's homes. They have to advertise for staff all over the place, and many of the people who are working in these places are people from overseas. That is because courses are not available to upskill our local people. Therefore, most of these jobs are taken away from them.

The government's decision to increase fees for the majority of TAFE courses has crippled the potential to grow the local workforce in the Kimberley. A lot of our young people have not gone to high school, and TAFE has been their only link in helping them to acquire the skills that they require. However, we are seeing more and more that a lot of these young people do not have the money to go to TAFE. We would like to see local people get local jobs. We believe that the money that grows in our area should stay in our area. However, most of the money, along with the work, goes out of the area. We are talking about growing the Kimberley. We want young people to be able to stay in the Kimberley and not have to leave the region to look for work in the city or elsewhere. Time and again, people come and talk to us about how they feel and how they would like to do a lot more for their families but they are not able to. Recently, a young woman came to see me, and I will quote what she said —

I work every day to afford to live. I have no option but to work and hold off studying, as now I could never pay the fees. I am depressed that I may never get a better job or more money, because I can't financially afford to stop working or pay the fees to start studying. I feel stuck in this situation.

That comes from a young mother who is the sole carer of her children. I can honestly say that I understand that very well. One of my girls has two little ones, and she had to leave her job because she could not put her children into child care, not only because there were no vacancies, as there was not a qualified childcare supervisor or manager, but also because she could not afford the fees.

It seems to be a cycle that if people have money, they can get a better education and better jobs and better pay. We see that in a lot of places. The Barnett government's policy means that the rich will get an education and become richer, and the poor will stay poor, with fewer education opportunities and employment prospects.

I believe this is not fair. More opportunities need to be created and made available to all who desire higher education—not fewer options for a fewer number of people. The Barnett government needs to spend money where it matters. Education and training, and employment opportunities, for our youth is what matters. People in regional Western Australia deserve the same opportunities as people in Perth. Our young people cannot choose to go to university or college. TAFE is the lifeline in education for a lot of our people in the Kimberley. I want to make that point very clearly. I cannot just say to my kids and grandkids that they should go to that university or that college, because a lot of money is involved.

I believe that a residential agricultural college should be established in the Kimberley. I have been lobbying groups and talking to different people for some time to support the establishment of a residential agricultural college based in the Kimberley. This college could provide agricultural experience and training for high school students, who could attend as boarders from across the country. This college could also provide all the necessary skills for students to enter into career fields such as agriculture and horticulture, or the international cattle industry, or they could become a vet, which is something that is needed in the Kimberley. It would also create pathways towards many more employment options. I believe this would provide opportunities for the Kimberley region in supporting local training and employment and would boost the economy of the Kimberley. This college could support more local people, and other Australians, to become involved in the Ord irrigation scheme and the Water for Food projects. A concept such as this could enable a lot of our young people, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to find employment, because it would boost their enthusiasm to attend school and to learn so that they can receive an education.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [5.47 pm]: I want to make a few brief comments about this issue because, more than anything else, this increase in TAFE fees indicates how heartless and how out of touch this government is with ordinary families in the community. The first point is that there are families in my electorate who are absolutely struggling with the current cost of living. The amount of money that they now have to pay for housing has become an astronomically high proportion of their income. No matter whether they are pensioners or the beneficiaries of social security, or whether they are ordinary working families, people are struggling to meet their household costs. The cost of housing is the first and biggest cost for most people, whether that is mortgage payments, if they are fortunate enough to own their home, or rental payments, if they are in that situation. On top of that, people have had massive hikes in utility fees for electricity, gas and water. Water bills are now arriving every two months. On top of that, this government has withdrawn some of the supports that people used to get for their family. Members will remember the It Pays to Learn allowance that all high school students used to get during the time of the Gallop and Carpenter governments. That allowance has been removed by this government. That is a support that families used to get at the start of the year and that they now do not get. People are really struggling. I wanted to make that point with respect to young people and the overall cost of living.

The second point I want to make is that whether people are from a low socioeconomic background, or whether they have been a new migrant to this country at any time since this country's inception, just about, their one ticket out of poverty was an education, getting some training and skills, or doing an apprenticeship. What Australia offered to so many migrant groups over so many years was that if they worked hard, went to school, got an education or did a trade, there were great opportunities in this country for them. But, sadly, this government is locking people into poverty, because it is not affording them the opportunity to get an education. It is all very well to talk just about young people. Young people are, of course, very important. Providing people aged 17, 18 and 19 with the opportunity to get some skills can set them on the path to become self-sufficient, earn a good living and make a great contribution to the community. If however it is too difficult or costly for them to gain the skills they require, they become locked into doing menial work. Ironically, we then end up with a skills shortage in many areas. The Liberal Party's solution for that is to just bring in more 457 visa workers. I am appalled that the government is apparently bringing in 457 visa workers to work at the Midland Public Hospital, when there are people currently working at Swan District Hospital who have not been given an offer of a job there. That concerns me.

In the brief time I have left to speak, I want to highlight a couple of other issues. One is in the portfolio area of culture and the arts. There is probably no greater losing area in the TAFE sector than the area of the arts. We have lost our art course at what is still referred to locally as the Midland TAFE, rather than Polytechnic West, or whatever name it is currently going under. We used to have a very well regarded art course there, but it has been withdrawn over the last couple of years. Many young people will miss out on the opportunity that others have previously had to develop their artistic and creative talents. The government might regard that as some kind of luxury, but I do not think so. I think developing the creative talents of everyone in our community, including young people, is very important. As most people in the arts area will know, training in the arts does not necessarily lead to a well-paid job; not everybody becomes a great sculptor or painter, but

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I have spoken to some celebrated artists in the Midland and Swan region who have been beneficiaries of the TAFE system and are now recognised at a national level, in some cases. People might say, “They’ve done very well; therefore, they can afford to put back into the community.” Those individuals probably have, but they have given back to the community already in so many different ways. The fact of the matter is that a lot of people were the beneficiaries of those courses, but they have been cut. There will be less creativity and fewer people engaging with the arts because they simply will not be able to afford to do so.

A lot of constituents come to see me, including a lot of young people and parents, but I want to highlight the case of a middle-aged woman working in the food industry—I will not identify the particular business—serving lunches and dinners at a particular establishment in my electorate. She is a migrant who has been in Australia for a number of years, trying to better herself and to provide opportunities for her children into the future. She has been doing a social work course and is in her second year. This year her TAFE fees were so high that she could not continue the course. It is all very well for the member for Joondalup to say, “Well, if you do nursing or something else, you can potentially upgrade your wage to \$54 000 a year.” I do not know what this woman earns, but she is working long hours and earning perhaps three-quarters or thereabouts of that wage at the moment. However, she has to pay rent. She is not like the member of the Joondalup, who probably lived at home when he was studying and had his parents covering his rent and food. I would expect that a low rent is currently between \$300 and \$400 a week. Well, \$300 a week is \$15 000 a year; \$400 a week is \$20 000 a year, so if you earn, say, \$54 000, you have to pay your tax and after you have taken your rent out, I do not know how people would be able to afford to pay the rest of their bills or afford to do anything, let alone pay very high TAFE fees.

I just point out that this heartless government is denying opportunities to a lot of migrants, particularly migrant women and other people in low socioeconomic circumstances. Although it may be that young people aged 17, 18 or 19 years can effectively get sponsorship and support from their parents, it is not the case for migrants or single mums who have to send their children to school and work full time and go to TAFE, which many people struggle to do. The moment they add into the equation having to come up with up to \$5 000 or more per semester for their education, it becomes impossible. Over a two or three-year period, that is \$20 000. That is more money than they can afford to pay, which just locks them into working in positions for which they do not need a qualification. I have heard about a lot of other similar circumstances, so I just think this is particularly heartless.

The comments made by the member for Joondalup really need to be exposed; he joked about FIFO workers having accumulated assets and having to sell off their jet skis to pay their TAFE fees. I think it is pretty heartless and horrendous for the member for Joondalup to make light of FIFO workers who have lost their job. I will tell members what is happening in my electorate at the moment. MIDLAS, the Midland Information, Debt and Legal Advocacy Service Inc, is currently absolutely swamped with people who have huge financial issues that they are trying to work through and sort out. The biggest increase in demand for MIDLAS is from FIFO people who have lost their jobs. They are often in situations in which, because of their previously high earning capacity, they have signed up to significant debt. They are not able to keep any jet skis or luxury items; they are all gone. These are people who are looking at a potential mortgagee sale of their home, losing their car, and not being able to afford the basic necessities for themselves and their families. They are in shocking debt situations, so I do not know how the member for Joondalup can come out with these trite words that are frankly insulting to people who find themselves unemployed. I do not think it is funny; I think it is a very serious matter for people to have unexpectedly lost their jobs, and some of them lost their jobs to 457 visa workers.

I have heard of at least two separate situations in which people have lost their jobs to 457 visa workers. I was made aware of the circumstances of one fellow who lost his FIFO job about three years ago, and found out from some of his former colleagues that he had been replaced by 457 visa workers who were being paid significantly less than he had formerly been paid. Three years ago he was able to get another FIFO job because there was plenty of work available at that time, but again a few months ago he and his mates in one particular area were told that there was no longer a job for them and that they were surplus to requirements. Again, he has since found out that that company has taken in 457 visa workers who are being paid significantly less. People like him still have mortgages to pay, children to send to school, utilities to pay and council rates. They still have to meet all those bill payments and they simply cannot do it on unemployment benefits. That means that if they want to retrain, it is not a simple matter of selling a jet ski; it is a matter of, “How do I pay off this debt and still keep my car so that I can drive my children to the doctor’s or wherever?” The prospect of going to TAFE is absolutely unaffordable for them. Those kinds of comments show us how completely out of touch members on the government side are.

I said I would speak briefly, and I believe I have. In summary, the Liberal Party is totally out of touch with what it is like for ordinary people and their cost of living. The Liberal Party is relegating young people, migrants, Indigenous people, as mentioned by the member for Kimberley, and other people with a low socioeconomic

status to a life locked into poverty and menial work, rather than being able to better themselves and contribute. To my way of thinking, it is un-Australian. This is not the land of opportunity that used to exist in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s, when people could get a good education or learn a trade very affordably and could better themselves. It is a very sad thing that the massive increases in TAFE fees have, without warning, left a lot of people stranded, including people in my electorate who have had to discontinue their courses and have no option but to keep working in menial jobs.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [6.01 pm]: I was perplexed by the comments of the member for Joondalup tonight. He did a very dangerous thing in his contribution as an apologist for the Liberal-National government and what it has failed to deliver in training in Western Australia, and he did a great disservice to his electorate of Joondalup. Many, many young families call Joondalup home. Many young people in those families are seeking to embark on a career path, and for many of those people that career path involves accessing TAFE courses. The member for Joondalup came into this place today and was the great apologist for the government, while failing to recognise the genuine impact that cuts to TAFE and the huge increase in fees are having on people in his and other electorates in the metropolitan area and on people in regional Western Australia. What a stupid thing he did. I do not know who put him up to it, but I tell members it was one of the worst performances in terms of representing our communities that I have ever heard. It showed appalling ignorance, and he fell for the three-card trick: he had to get up and defend the indefensible. There has been a conga line of training ministers under the Liberal-National government since 2008. The member for Cockburn made that very clear and highlighted it. The current minister is the latest in that conga line. Her predecessor, the member for Dawesville, should hang his head in shame for the pathetic performance he gave as Minister for Training and Workforce Development. The minister before him, the National Party leader, was appalling. As the member for Cockburn said, the government bought Treasury's argument box and dice, and now genuine people in our communities—young people and not-so-young people—are suffering every day. They now have huge impediments to their future training. There is now a disaster not only in apprenticeship training in this state, but also for people, including single parents, who are seeking to improve their education and training so that they can take that step up and get a job that will make a difference for them and their families. Young people seeking out a career path are finding—the government having boosted fees by hundreds of a per cent—that fees or course costs that were a couple of hundred dollars are now a couple of thousand dollars, and most of them are paying them up-front. People in the government, including the new members and backbenchers over there, sit there with their rose-coloured glasses on. They are not listening to their own communities, and they will pay for it.

I have selected a few examples of real people in my community, but they are also examples of real people in the minister's community and all communities represented in this Parliament—people in the member for Kimberley's community, people in the member for Maylands' community and people in the member for Gosnells' community. All of us have people in our electorates like the ones I am going to highlight, because the minister is sitting on a disaster and she is doing nothing about it. Real people are being affected by what the minister is doing by sitting on her hands and simply accepting Treasury's bunkum and not realising that genuine people are affected by these disastrous changes to TAFE, particularly the appalling increases in course fees. I want to highlight a couple of examples of the effect they have in my electorate.

I will start with a grandmother called Joy Ware from Mandurah; she lives in the member for Dawesville's electorate. Joy and her husband, Terry, because they believe in education have, like many grandparents, taken in their grand-daughter who was educated in Northam. Many more grandparents in our communities are doing this—taking in their grandchildren and giving them a hand. Their young grand-daughter who graduated from Northam Senior High School was seeking to further her education through TAFE, so what did she do? Like many thousands of people—many thousands of young people in particular—she went along to the course open day to sign on. Joy told me the story. She went there with her grand-daughter to sign on for a certificate II course. She went through the process of filling out the application, and then there was the fee. It was nearly \$3 000 for the course. They were gobsmacked, but they were not the only ones in the room who were. They were shocked!

Mrs L.M. Harvey: How much was the course?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was nearly \$3 000 for this course. They were gobsmacked, but they were not the only ones, particularly in an area like Peel where there are so many people on fixed and low incomes who are seeking to make a better pathway for themselves but get slapped with a \$3 000 course fee. In Joy's case it was an up-front cost. She had to pay there and then or her grand-daughter would not have been on the list or enrolled. Because Joy is a great grandparent and she is on a fixed income, she got the credit card out and paid it herself. I reckon that story has been repeated around this state this year and last year when this government—this Premier—allowed this appalling thing to happen to TAFE in Western Australia. She paid the fees, but she said

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that the gut-wrenching thing was that when she looked around, the longest line, apart from those who had just signed up, was the line seeking advice and assistance from the officer there who might have been able to help people who might be eligible for fee relief. As we know, with a number of these courses people who do not fit the eligibility test have to pay up or they do not sign on. She said she saw a countless number—dozens and dozens—of young people, some with their parents, some by themselves, some with their mates, and some of them, like this young lady, with their grandmother. They were desperate. If you guys over there in the government do not think this is real, you are living in la-la land, because it is real! This is one grandmother. I reckon there are hundreds of examples like that.

Let me read from an email from Mr Jamie Jones of Mandurah. I have known him for a little while. He has been the P&C president at North Mandurah Primary School and was heavily involved in sport and a range of community initiatives. He is a very positive man and believes in supporting young people. In his email to me he states —

Now your question comes about them —

That is the government —

putting up TAFE fees to the thousands of students and adults trying to better their careers and lively hoods and make their families live a little better with a better paying job. Most of these people are average wage earners and with paying rents and mortgages trying to feed clothe and support their families.

So I guess the question has to be asked if the education department and the minister don't know what is going on in their own departments —

That was a key point made by the member for Cockburn. To continue —

and meetings how do they know to put up fees for an education system that they have no idea of what or how it works.

I am also involved in sport with the Peel District under the Western Australian Football Commission as the Peel District Mulga Team Manager for indigenous youth aged between 13 and 15. These boys are all indigenous and come from as far north as Rockingham as far east as Waroona and as far south as Australind.

Most of the indigenous families I have had the opportunity of meeting and working closely with all have the best intentions for their boys.

They have the same dreams as you and me a better life for their children than what they had, get a fine education and find a good job and have a family and live a nice life. So with fee rises how do these families afford for their children to attend TAFE to study for better paying jobs.

Some of these boys have excelled at school and some have now got themselves full employment and a couple now have apprenticeships some have gone the wrong way and some are going that way but with the staff of this program and some good mentoring the success stories outweigh the bad.

What of the future for not just our indigenous community but all our youth in the Peel area if they can't afford TAFE fees to better themselves. I try to help all and any children and youth in our community to be better citizens and better students by going to school and getting an education and making their lives better than what they would have been.

I am on a fairly decent wage and I and my wife volunteer in the community all year and I have got to see the good and bad and sad in our community and with a mortgage and bills and kids schooling and swimming and sport the money only goes so far. My wife would like to do an education course at TAFE to help out at school but it is simply too expensive for us to pay for her to do it.

That was from Mr James Jones of Mandurah. He puts the situation in context. Genuine families are now finding out what the Liberal–National government has done to them by putting up these fees and putting an impediment in front of people who are simply seeking to find a pathway to good quality jobs and good employment so they can then support their families. Members opposite sit there, and backbenchers are so frustrating because they do nothing but articulate from the mouth of their Premier, who does not care about them in the end.

Mr J.R. Quigley: He won't be there.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Of course not. He will retire from this place with a beautiful superannuation scheme. He does not care. It is upon the backbenchers of the Liberal Party and National Party members, who supposedly represent and support the people of regional Western Australia, to stand up against that man who is creating a disaster in education and training in Western Australia. The training and apprenticeship situation is a debacle,

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yet they are sitting back and blindly following him because they will not stand up to him. A lot of them will pay at the next election. I hope a lot of them will pay at the next election so that we will be on that side because our commitment to TAFE is a strong training and apprenticeship scheme in Western Australia that genuinely delivers opportunities to people. I will tell members opposite one thing: under Labor, TAFE fees will be much less. They will not be the sorts of fees members opposite have jumped them up to in their pathetic handling of that portfolio.

I want to finish with an example of an employer, because it is important we understand that this policy is affecting not only people seeking to go into employment and follow career paths, but also employers. I want to highlight what Mr Peter Bensley, a senior massage therapist at Applied Body Therapeutics in Mandurah said. He wrote to me and articulated in his email the effect that the government's cuts and the minister's pathetic handling of the training portfolio is having on his capacity, as a local small business, to employ people in his profession. Mr Bensley wrote —

Hi David,

I saw your Facebook post regarding the Barnett Govt having dramatically increased fees for many TAFE courses.

My wife and I have used their services in the past. The email continues —

We have been operating in Mandurah for 14 years now and we have a well established Clinic in Cooper Street, Mandurah and we employ a staff of 12. We employ therapists who attain a Diploma of Remedial Massage through the TAFE or private college system. Generally they complete CERT IV portion of the course first then continue on to complete the Diploma.

From an employers point of the view, the proposed changes made by the Barnett Government to increase the fees for TAFE courses have directly impacted on our ability to find qualified remedial massage therapists.

We had a representative from the Beaconsfield TAFE (Fremantle) who coordinates the Diploma of Remedial Massage course, visit us in November 2013 when these changes were being implemented by the Government. We were warned then that due to these proposed increase in fees, they were anticipating a significant drop in potential students taking up the course because many couldn't afford the initial outlay.

This is from an employer, minister. He goes on —

This would impact on our industry's future ability to find enough qualified therapists to meet the demand.

Well, 15 months later we find ourselves in the situation where we have been advertising for 3 months now for qualified therapists with no luck. We have been in contact with Beaconsfield TAFE (Fremantle) and again, they are telling us that the cannot produce enough therapists so 'join the queue' of businesses like ours, chasing staff.

Add the geographical issue we have with Mandurah being 1 step further down the road from Perth, and we are in a situation where we have so much work we can't keep up and not enough therapists to do the work. The current demand for our services is so high we could expand and employ even more Western Australians, but there are not enough people taking up the course.

I can only see this situation getting worse and we have even resorted to interviewing applicants from overseas and inter-state. We just aren't getting anybody from WA applying.

This seems to be a short sighted decision by the current Government and if something isn't done about it, the supply of qualified therapists being produced will continue to dwindle and stifle growth in our industry.

Why is the minister not listening? Why?

Mr J.R. Quigley: Because she doesn't care!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Why? This employer wants to employ more Western Australians. The minister's changes to the TAFE system prevent it. As Mr Bensley said, it will only get worse. Why should he have to search interstate, and even overseas, for jobs that can be delivered and created here in Western Australia? The Minister for Training and Workforce Development is overseeing a disaster. The minister has her hands on the rudder but she is doing nothing about it. I fear it has already hit the iceberg. The minister knows that course enrolments have already dropped 26 per cent. Surely, the minister needs no other indicators to tell her that this

situation is unacceptable. The minister has to take control and stand up to that fellow who sits next to her—the arrogant Premier of this state. For goodness sake, backbenchers of the Liberal Party, before you end up being the rats that start jumping into the water because the boat is sinking stand up for your communities! Stand up for the young men and women who want to have a future, who have a willingness to work hard and follow a career path. They should stand up for the single parents in their communities who realise that they need to look at how they can retrain or improve their skills to get jobs to provide for their families. They should stand up for the grandparents of the world who are looking after grandchildren, paying for their grandchildren and parenting for a second time—people like Joy Ware of Mandurah—because they believe in education and training, and they know that a well-skilled, well-trained young person is far better placed to pursue a life that brings with it all the benefits of knowing that they can have good and quality employment. Government backbenchers have a responsibility to represent their communities. They should not do what the member for Joondalup did earlier this afternoon and make excuses and even blame some of these people. What did he say? He said, “Sell your jet ski.” Goodness gracious! Who is he listening to? For goodness sake, stand up for the people who need a quality, affordable training system in Western Australia, because that is the responsibility of the elected members of this place; they should not just follow blindly the hollow words of the Premier and the hollow words of the conga line of training ministers that we have had since 2008.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [6.22 pm]: I am pleased to speak on and support the motion of the member for Cockburn that this house condemns the Barnett government for its massive increase in TAFE course fees and its sustained undermining of TAFE. I am pleased that the Minister for Training and Workforce Development is looking to get to her feet on this issue. She has been in the role for some time now and I see that she has been taking careful note of things. I hope that through the course of this debate she has learnt about the situation that people are facing when it comes to going to TAFE, paying for TAFE courses and finding that a career path that they had hoped for, a training opportunity that they had been wishing for, has suddenly been taken away from them due to excessive costs. These cost increases have come as a total surprise to people. They had anticipated a fee of some sort, but when they applied for their courses, they found that the cost was significantly more than they had ever thought; in many cases it is double or many times more than it was previously. These price hikes on TAFE fees have happened under this government, so the minister, as part of this government, sitting around the cabinet table and now as the minister for TAFE, is responsible for these price hikes. They are price hikes that cause people to think twice about getting a higher education. It puts them off and makes them look at other options; it makes them think that working in a fast-food outlet is all that they can actually afford at this point in time, when really they are crying out for the opportunity to get extra skills to make a more meaningful contribution to our community. They do not want to stay as the flippers of burgers; they want to be able to go onto better things. However, if they are not allowed to do the courses and if they are not allowed to get that essential training, it just cannot happen.

I know of people in my electorate who thought that they just had that perfect opportunity to get a skill together and it has been ripped away from them, or they have had to undergo incredible financial sacrifice to pursue a particular course of study. I think about the case of Jason Kowalski. I know Jason’s mum, Diane Kowalski, very well. She is the president of the Southern River College P&C. The Kowalski family values education and encourages their children to do whatever they can to get the skills together to improve their capacity to have a good job and to make a good contribution to our community. Jason enrolled for a certificate II cabinet furniture-making course at TAFE and had anticipated that the cost of that six-month course would be \$1 500. He went along to enrol and was told the course would cost \$3 000. This government has doubled the cost of learning to be a cabinet-maker—a six-month course that contributes to the building industry and this growing need we have for housing. We know about 20 000 new dwellings are built each year and the industry is crying out for people with good skills, yet the government has doubled the cost of acquiring one of the key skills that go into the industry. Jason, to his absolute credit, was so determined to get those skills together that he decided he would sign on to the course costing \$3 000, and although it was incredibly difficult for him, he managed to pay off the amount on a fortnightly basis. He enjoyed the course, but like many young people, now that he has completed his course, he is wondering whether he could perhaps look at something else in the building industry. That is perfectly reasonable and he has good foundation and experience from cabinet-making, but the government has just provided the perfect disincentive for a young person to want to go on to develop further skills in the building sector.

I go to other examples from my electorate such as that of Lauren Adams, who has enrolled in a certificate III course to do education support. I know Lauren’s mum, Karen Adams, well too. She is the former parents and citizens association president at Ashburton Drive Primary School and she did a fantastic job there. If Lauren is anything like her mum, she will have thought about how she will continue her education so she has a really good skill base. She has identified a career she is interested in—that is, being involved in education and helping kids who might be struggling at school by being on the education support staff. That is a fantastic choice. Lauren

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went to enrol for the course in January this year and, first of all, she found that a course that had previously cost \$600 for six months had gone up to \$2 740. To make matters worse, she just missed out on getting the under-18 concession. She missed out by three months because when she enrolled in January she was 17 years and nine months of age, but she had to be 17 years and six months of age or younger to be eligible for the under-18 concession. The fact that she is under 18 does not seem to matter. It has something to do with some cut-off date and so she missed out. She is doing this course, but as Karen Adams, her mum, said to me, this is exactly the sort of thing that turns people off doing further education. Is that what we want in our society, to be turning people off doing higher education?

I also think of the struggles and pressures that I know TAFE teachers face—increasing class sizes, less resources, and often machinery and equipment that needs replacing. They should not be left with those challenges. They should be able to provide the very latest facilities that will help them communicate with their students. That is only reasonable.

I go to another example from my electorate, the case of the Eastley family. David and Jenn Eastley do the very best for their children, but it is a struggle. They are on a very low fixed income and Rochelle, their daughter, also wanted to be a cabinet-maker. Rochelle is really keen to be involved in building houses. That is what she wants to do. It is perhaps an unusual career choice for a young woman, but it is something she is really passionate about. They live in Corfield Street in Gosnells and they realised that the Thornlie TAFE, Polytechnic West, was running the perfect course for Rochelle. They had a look at the prices, thinking that it would be perhaps around the \$1 000 mark, but then they got a kick in the guts when they found that it would be \$3 000. Jason Kowalski was also told it is \$3 000 for six months. If someone does not pay, they cannot do the course. That is simply too big a debt. In the case of Rochelle it meant, unfortunately, that she has not been able to go ahead with the course. It is simply too big an impost on a family that is really struggling to get funds together. Where does that leave Rochelle? It leaves her in some sort of trap of temporary minimum-wage casual work with conditions that cause instability. It is exactly what this young person does not need. She needs the opportunity to develop her skills, plan a career and pursue her passion to be involved in the building industry. As we know, the building industry is very male-dominated, so an opportunity for a young woman such as Rochelle to be involved would be an asset to the industry, but the \$3 000 price tag is too much.

I hear the comments from other members about how people can go to TAFE. I am pleased to see that the member for Joondalup has come back into the chamber. I was in a situation similar to that of the member for Joondalup. I also had to go to TAFE after school because my grades were not satisfactory. I went to

Leederville TAFE, as it was in 1981, and I had a wonderful education there, but the cost was not an issue as it was free education. We had the benefit of that. I did not get Austudy, as the member for Joondalup did. These people are not getting any kind of support for their studies. They are just being hit with massive fees. Surely we should be advocating for a system that enables people who often have come from very difficult financial situations to have the support they need. We should not be assuming that all people have riches.

The member gave an example of a jet ski sitting in the garage ready to be sold. We should not be telling people to sell off things that, in the case of my constituents, they do not have. They do not have that sort of asset just sitting around idle to flog off. These people are desperate to enter into some form of higher education. They want to gain skills that will be with them for life, to use for the rest of their days. They want to build upon those skills and perhaps become small business people, or work for one of the major building firms or, in the case of Lauren Adams, the Department of Education. They could work in the private Catholic school education system or wherever they choose, but they need to gain those skills. We should not be talking about the sacrifices that they might have to make as though it is easily within reach. These people are really struggling. The sort of sacrifice that the member is asking them to make is beyond their comprehension. They do not have those assets that the member is talking about that they might be able to sell off. Those assets do not exist for these people. It is a gross unfairness in the system.

I think of other people who have done a university degree and then found that that degree does not necessarily lend itself to a position in the job market as it is today. I can think of one person in particular, Sara Saberi, who did a degree in environmental management at Edith Cowan University and then went to TAFE to do a diploma in occupational safety and health. She had that base of a degree but then needed to fine-tune it. To do a similar course in occupational health and safety costs many thousands of dollars before she could have that fine-tuning done to her skill set to enable her make a contribution in the jobs market.

Most of us in this chamber are of an age when we had these opportunities and benefited from free education. When I first enrolled in a degree, I was one of those in that era who had no university fees to pay. It was obviously an amazing opportunity that we had at that time and we did not appreciate it. Who are we to be now saying, “Young people of today, you should have to pay huge amounts”? The amounts proportionate to the asset

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base of the families involved are absolutely astronomical. Who are we to be saying that they should pay these amounts? I believe it is hypocrisy. Given the way the member for Joondalup spoke about this matter, I do not see how he can justify it. He admitted that he had received Austudy and that he did not have to pay it back. He was able to take and take from the system, and he perhaps did not make the most of that opportunity. People make mistakes, as young people do.

Mr J. Norberger: By way of interjection, member for Gosnells, that was my whole point. I cost the taxpayer money for training that I never put to any use or good for this economy; so whatever training I did later on in life, I paid for myself. Later in life I did find my niche, if you like, and I enjoyed it. I went and paid my own way at university and I continue to do that right now.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: But the member for Joondalup was able to benefit from it. Perhaps he did not take full advantage of it but he received a free education. He received Austudy from the state to assist him in his study and now he is prepared to support these incredible costs associated with an education today. That is unfair.

Mr J. Norberger: No, no, no.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Is the member for Joondalup supporting a fee of \$3 000 for a six-month course at TAFE—yes or no?

Mr J. Norberger: The very course that I started —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: No! Could the member for Joondalup answer my question? Is he supporting a \$3 000 TAFE fee for a six-month course to be a cabinet-maker?

Mr J. Norberger: What qualification is it?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is a certificate II in cabinet-making. Does the member for Joondalup think that is reasonable?

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Member, can I interject? I am actually quite concerned about what you said because I do not think that information is correct. Ordinarily, the cost of that certificate is \$2 500 for the whole course. It is actually normally done by way of an apprenticeship and it is a four-year apprenticeship.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I have two examples, minister.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: You can't complete it in six months, so I think perhaps your constituent might need a little bit more information, and I am happy to connect her with the TAFE.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I have two examples of people wanting to do that. I am not sure if they both wanted to go to the same TAFE. However, I have information on Jason Kowalski who, as I say, paid fortnightly to do the course at \$3 000 for six months. He previously understood that it was going to be \$1 500.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I have information on the case of Rochelle Eastley as well who was enrolled in the six-month certificate II course in cabinet-making. I know for Rochelle it was at Thornlie TAFE, or Polytechnic West. They were told that the charge would be \$3 000 for six months. I can quote to the minister what Rochelle's mum, Jennifer Eastley, told me. She said —

“Whatever Rochelle chooses to do, she makes a good job of it.” Thornlie TAFE (Polytechnic West) had a place for her, but they wanted to charge \$3000 for 6-months—a two term course.

I understand two terms fits into six months. Am I correct on that, minister?

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Yes, that's correct.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is therefore a six-month course at \$3 000; that is what she is saying. Unfortunately, Jennifer Eastley, Rochelle's mum, went on to say —

That was the end of that. How can anybody take on a \$3000 debt unless they have family wealthy enough to cough up the fees? People who are not in that position are priced out of training and kept from the skills that would benefit them, their families, the community and Australia.

It is grossly unfair. If the minister has some other information, I would be keen to hear it. But I have two examples with this particular cabinet-making course that clearly indicate that the cost is \$3 000, for a six-month course.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Member, I think there might be some confusion about the duration of the semester as well, so we might need to find out exactly what those two constituents of yours wanted to enrol in, and the information that they were given. I think that some of the information that has been relayed to them does not sound right.

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Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister is right. It does not sound right at all.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: No, it does not sound right to me, and I would ask the member to write to me, because I would really like to follow up on it.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is absolutely wrong. I imagine that the minister would have advisers who are able to communicate with her now, just to double-check this. The minister can check how much it costs to do the certificate II course in cabinet making at Thornlie TAFE, Polytechnic West. I have two people who have clearly indicated that the cost is \$3 000. That seems outrageous. The other is a certificate III to be an education support teacher, at a cost of \$2 740, again for a six-month course. I do not think there is any doubt about it. I could have come up with more examples. I have just picked out those ones. It confirms all that we hear in media reports and elsewhere about these massive hikes in fees for people who wish to go to TAFE.

There is also the issue that I raised about the cut-in point at which the under-18 concession applies. I am not sure how much or how significant that under-18 concession is.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: It is a 50 per cent discount, depending on whether they are on a concession card. It is complicated.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Right. Obviously we are talking about people who have been through around 12 years of schooling, so they would be close to 18 years of age, especially as the system works now. The government is kind of manipulating it. It is hoping that a whole lot of people will be ineligible for that concession. That is certainly the case for Lauren Adams. She missed out by three months on getting a 50 per cent reduction in her fee of \$2 740 for a certificate III in education support.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Member, can I just clarify something by way of interjection? Ordinarily, a semester is six months. Therefore, if it is two semesters, it would be a 12-month course. Usually if people are looking at a two semester course, it is a 12-month program. But it depends on the course as well.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am sure that in this case, though, it is a six-month issue that the family is looking at. That is how families do their budgeting. Families want to know upfront what the fee will be. For the Adams family, their bill for that course was \$2 740, and they just had to wear it. To Lauren's credit, she is going ahead with that course, and the family have really had to stretch to find that money. I do not know what will happen if there is a second semester or a third and fourth semester to take it up to a diploma level or something like that. But the reality for Karen Adams and her daughter, Lauren, is that for six months starting in January and through to the middle of this year, she will have to pay \$2 740 for this course. Lauren just missed out on what the minister has told me would have been a 50 per cent reduction. She missed out on that by three months. Had she been born three months later, she would have been given a 50 per cent reduction. How unreasonable is that?

Mrs L.M. Harvey: There is a course fee cap for school-age children, which is \$410. So, those fees are capped. But there is also a concession for concession card holders, which is a 50 per cent discount. I think from the sound of it that your constituents may have been in contact with somebody who potentially does not understand the fee structure, because the information that you are giving to me does not mesh with the information that I have.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It was only in the case of Rochelle that the family was not able to go ahead with the enrolment, so I suppose there is a possibility that they did not get all the information. But in the case of Jason Kowalski and Lauren Adams, they did go through with their enrolment. Therefore, if any error has been made, it is with the Department of Training and Workforce Development, and with TAFE. So, they have made an error, and the minister is suggesting that they might be reimbursed.

Mrs L.M. Harvey: No, I am suggesting that if you could write to me about your constituents and their courses, I would like to clarify what the fees should be, how long the course should go for and if there are options. If some of these training programs are linked to an employer and they are done as an apprenticeship, the apprenticeship is very heavily subsidised and the fees can be significantly reduced because the employer picks up a lot of the cost. It may be that your constituents need better information, particularly, if they are talking about a certificate II or II in cabinet making, because those courses are available through the apprenticeship program as well.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Maybe for some reason an apprenticeship was not an option for my constituents. Is the minister suggesting that these people have enrolled and a mistake has been made? I do not think there has been a mistake; they are doing the courses and I think any mistake would have been revealed before now. Yes, I am happy to write to the minister with further details, but the only case in which there is the potential that a mistake was made is that of Rochelle Eastley, and her case mirrors that of Jason Kowalski; in fact, it just confirms what Jason faced. I think we are seeing that some families can stretch just that little bit further to come up with the \$3 000 for fees, but meanwhile others such as the poor Eastleys cannot manage it so their daughter

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misses out. This is a young person's future. She is now destined to do very low-paid work with all the precarity that goes with working in a McDonald's, a Red Dot store or something like that. If people are in difficult financial straits, they just cannot get beyond that. She will not be able to put money aside to save for this \$3 000 course, yet it is something that she really wants to do. We are dashing young people's hopes and ambitions. It is unfair for these people, and as a society we are missing out as well. We are missing out on encouraging and nurturing the enthusiasm and goodwill of young people who want to get into a particular career or trade. We are missing out on the opportunity to harness their enthusiasm and instead we are dashing their hopes, and we will reap the consequences of that.

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Training and Workforce Development) [6.47 pm]: There is not a lot of time left this evening for me to canvass all the issues raised by members in this debate, but I shall make a start. Firstly, I would like to put on the record that this government is committed to funding a student-centred, industry-driven and sustainable training system. Future Skills WA is the opportunity for us to take that step into a sustainable vocational training system that will continue to meet the needs of our community and industry into the future. It is fair to say that the system we inherited from the former Labor government had grown increasingly inefficient and there had been no real attempt to ensure its long-term survival. I would say that to allow the vocational training system to become moribund and inefficient is to perhaps treat it with the highest level of contempt one can muster.

The Liberal–National government has been accused of treating the TAFE sector with contempt. I will put on the record examples of the serious work that this government has put into the training sector that absolutely refute those assertions. Since 2008, under the watch of the Liberal–National government, the sector has grown by 14.8 per cent. That hardly sounds like a failure to me. The Western Australian training system is recognised as one of the best in the country; indeed, we are the envy of the other Australian states. Most of our apprentices will pay less than \$1 000 when they start their course. They pay a maximum of only 15 per cent of the total cost of their training. The government at present subsidises 85 per cent of the training for apprentices and the employer picks up the rest. The member for Albany spoke about the Great Southern Institute of Technology. He might be interested to know that the Great Southern Institute of Technology last year recorded a 91.8 per cent satisfaction rating from students with their courses delivered through that institution.

This week I announced that we had doubled the accommodation assistance for our regional apprentices and trainees. That is effective from 1 February 2015. To put this in context, up to 30 September 2014, over 42 000 apprentices and trainees were in training in Western Australia. Thirty per cent, or 13 000 of those were in regional areas. We have doubled the accommodation allowance. Last year 541 regional people took advantage of the accommodation allowance, and we expect around 650 students to take advantage of this bonus from the Liberal–National government, which will allow students and lecturers to now claim \$70 per night in accommodation allowances for accommodation below the twenty-sixth parallel, or \$110 per night above the twenty-sixth parallel. This will also give some flexibility in having lecturers moving to regional areas as the student numbers build up for particular courses, when otherwise it may not be a sustainable option to have a full-time lecturer based at one of those institutes.

One of the issues that the member for Albany raised was the diploma of child care course. This is a very interesting course to choose, because the federal government used to fund the diploma of child care course 100 per cent. That funding has now stopped for that area of training. There have been increases in the cost to students who want to engage in that course but, being a diploma course, students who enrol in those advanced diploma courses can access vocational education and training FEE-HELP. We have heard about this before; it is like a higher education contribution scheme fee. Students normally would be eligible for a charge of 20 per cent in loan funding, but students who receive VET FEE-HELP in a publicly subsidised training course do not pay the 20 per cent loan fee. Someone wanting to obtain a diploma in child care would have access to VET FEE-HELP, which means that they would not pay a cent until they were earning over \$50 000 a year.

Mechanisms are in place to ensure the sustainability of the sector. I do not think anybody would disagree that if numbers for course enrolments anywhere in the sector are low and the courses are not sustainable to run, the government cannot be subsidising the courses if there is no sustainability. We are working with the state training providers and the sector to try to ensure that we achieve those training outcomes. It may be that the appearance of those courses changes over time.

In regional areas we have made a huge investment that I would really like to get onto the record. We have put funding into ensuring that we are covering the lecturers' travel allowance, so they can travel from Perth to regional areas to deliver off-the-job training to groups of apprentices in regional training settings. We have increased the availability of local training providers and the flexibility in the provision of training services. We have invested a huge amount in our regional training infrastructure to improve access to our training facilities.

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Through the Liberal–National government’s royalties for regions scheme, we have invested \$6.9 million in the extension of the Derby campus and workshop facilities, and \$2.8 million in upgrades to the Halls Creek facility, and a new auto workshop there, which I am sure the member for Kimberley would be interested to know. There is a sustainability challenge in regional areas, and, indeed, we need the enrolments on deck to make delivery of the courses sustainable, but we are committed to that. In 2012–13 this government spent \$8.126 million on delivery of training and upgrades to training institutes in regional areas. For 2013–14, \$76 million is allocated to that.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I listened to the member in silence; I would appreciate the same courtesy.

The government is committed to moving long-term unemployed people through training and into employment. Indeed, the member for Joondalup spoke very passionately about his experiences in that space. His experience in the training sector is quite extensive, and we heard the passion with which he spoke of the Aboriginal students he had moved through the training system to be employed in high-paid jobs in the mining and resources industry. I find it somewhat abhorrent that members opposite chose to take one comment made by the member for Joondalup in his very worthwhile contribution and tried to present to the community of Western Australia that that one comment epitomises his great commitment to, and depth of knowledge of, the training sector.

The government is spending money where it matters in subsidising training programs that will deliver employment opportunities, and that is what it is all about. It is a shame that the member for Kimberley and, indeed, most opposition members are not here in the chamber; I acknowledge that the member for Mandurah and the member for Cockburn are here. Apparently my contribution and my response to their queries are not worth listening to, but I know that members on this side of the house will be interested to know that in 2014, Aboriginal students who went through our TAFE courses had a 93.7 per cent satisfaction rating with their training program. Of those Aboriginal students studying vocational education and training, 80 per cent ended up either employed or undertaking further study. I think that is a pretty good record.

Another of our strategies for putting long-term unemployed people through the training sector is offering unemployed concession card holders up to a 50 per cent discount on their fees. We are very sensitive to cost-of-living issues and we are committed to moving people from unemployment, through training, and into employment. That is the entire purpose of this sector.

That is where Future Skills Western Australia comes in. Future Skills WA is designed to ensure that the highest level of government subsidisation goes to the courses we know will lead to employment. We have 600 state priority training areas. These are areas in which we know that there is demand for employment in those occupations and that students have a very, very good chance of moving from our training programs into employment. These programs are heavily subsidised by government—up to 80 per cent in most cases, and sometimes, for apprentices, for example, almost 100 per cent. We are deliberately putting our effort into those courses that we know will lead to employment outcomes, and that is an appropriate spend of taxpayer money.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The member needs to look at the facts. If he wants to understand a little bit about the success of Future Skills WA, he should listen. In the face of a four per cent decline in enrolments in our training institutes, we have seen a nine per cent increase in enrolments in priority areas of training, for which the government has made available its maximum subsidisation effort. Our policy lever of Future Skills WA and our choice and decision to put funding into areas of priority that we know will lead to employment are showing up in the figures. We have seen enrolments shift into courses in which we know employment outcomes lie for people engaging in training. I am proud of that outcome. The member for —

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: There have been a lot of outrageous statements made. The member for Midland, who pretends to be connected to her community and to understand —

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr I.M. Britza): Member for Cockburn, I call you for the second time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The member for Midland, who says she understands what is going on at Midland TAFE, has apparently found a course that does not exist but has cost one of her constituents \$20 000.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm

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