

**MANDURAH AND PEEL REGION — YOUNG PEOPLE — UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS**

*Grievance*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah)** [9.50 am]: I grieve to the Minister for Training and Workforce Development this morning about what I believe to be one of the most fundamental issues of priority and concern in the region and city we both represent. As the minister is aware, the unemployment level for young people in Mandurah and the Peel region has hit 20 per cent. We all know the devastating effects that unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, has on individuals and their families, and ultimately on the community in which they live.

Over the past year, including during the minister's time as Minister for Training and Workforce Development, this is what has occurred. I am not blaming the minister for all of these, but the following facts are true and the minister is in a position to fix many of them. Indeed, it is his responsibility; it is what he is paid for. In September last year, the minister's predecessor closed the workforce development centre in Mandurah, which serviced the Peel region. No other region lost its centre but we did, despite having the highest youth unemployment levels in the state and some of the lowest training participation rates too; it has gone, and the minister sat by and did nothing to save it. The May budget saw TAFE fees soar. People who were already on fixed and low incomes, hoping to use TAFE as a springboard into employment and further training, were smacked with huge increases in fees. No wonder participation and enrolments reduced. In places such as Mandurah, this has affected many people seeking to find a pathway to employment through retraining at TAFE. In education, the government first cut local school budgets—an estimated \$4 million in Peel region schools—and just recently announced a new funding model that will see some of our most needy schools, such as Coodanup Community College and John Tonkin College, take further cuts of over \$1 million combined over two years. Then, only a few weeks ago, I was particularly angry and outraged to learn that two highly successful and revered apprenticeship courses, bricklaying and wall and ceiling construction, were terminated at Mandurah's Peel Challenger TAFE campus and students told they would have to do these at Rockingham.

I want to focus on this last point particularly. In 2004, industry, local employers, key stakeholders such as Dale Alcock and the Association of Wall and Ceiling Industries of Western Australia came together to establish the two courses I mentioned. These businesses and stakeholders contributed financially to the sheds and resources necessary to get these courses going. Local construction business owner Colin Healey employs several apprentices and has had a number trained through Peel TAFE. He believes the quality of training has been the best in Mandurah and is angry that the decision was made to close these courses without consultation. South Yunderup grandfather Jeff Dunmall, who actually helped to establish these courses, cares for his 17-year-old grandson, who signed on for a six-month pre-apprenticeship course and was astounded to find it had been shifted to Rockingham. Claire Evans's son was hoping to use public transport to get to the Peel campus, but the shift to Rockingham has made it almost impossible to get there, and has thrown his plans out the door.

The response to me from the Department of Training and Workforce Development and the minister has been that these courses were shifted because there were insufficient enrolments and "no complaints received". I refute those so-called excuses. I have spoken directly to the people who delivered the courses and to parents, and I have figures that show that these courses were viable. Even more importantly, they were delivering quality training in Mandurah, to local Mandurah people, but the bureaucrats decided, in my view, that they had to shift numbers to Rockingham to prop up low enrolments there to make sure the new training centre there did not look like a white elephant. These courses were working, addressing the needs of local kids, some of whom were in need of extra support; were accessible locally; and were giving these young people hope, and the department took them away. The minister and I also know that young people in particular have been dealt a double whammy by the minister's Liberal mates in Canberra. Abbott's May budget saw the demise in Mandurah of the Youth Connections program that was delivered by local provider Bridging the Gap. Overnight, that service went, without a comment from the minister. Changes to the unemployment benefit will see more and more young people forced into poverty and we all know what that will mean. We will see increased crime rates, increased rates of mental health issues and an increased sense of hopelessness.

I have lived in Mandurah for over 27 years. Some of the kids I taught in primary school there are now parents themselves and they are telling me that their kids cannot get traineeships or apprenticeships, and parents with teenagers tell me that their children cannot even get part-time work after school and on weekends. Their dream of getting their first part-time job at Woolworths or a fast-food place and saving up for their first car is seriously under threat. It seems that unless people know someone, those part-time jobs are much scarcer than they have ever been. The last thing the minister should allow to happen, particularly in his own electorate, is even more barriers being put in the way of our local young people reaching their potential and accessing the opportunities they need so they can become active participants in our community. The matters I have outlined today are

genuine barriers to these young people, and the minister can fix some of them because he is the minister responsible.

I want the minister to do three things. Firstly, I want him to personally investigate the circumstances that led to the loss of two important courses at Challenger TAFE a few weeks ago—the bricklaying and the wall and ceiling courses. He should not listen to just the bureaucrats from the department and from Challenger TAFE but, rather, talk to the former lecturers and the local students and their parents who are affected by the loss of these courses to Rockingham. I have their names and contact numbers, and many are the minister's constituents. The minister should listen to them and learn for himself why these courses, delivered in Mandurah for local apprentices and trainees, were revered and valued, but the department took them away to satisfy numbers in depleted courses in Rockingham.

Secondly, I want the minister to report on any progress he has made, as he promised in May, in preparing a business case for the re-establishment of a workforce development centre in Mandurah. He must reinstate the centre that the government closed in September last year—the only regional workforce development centre that closed. The other regions did not lose theirs, but the one in our region, with the highest youth unemployment rate in the state and rivalling the highest in the nation, was closed. The minister can fix this; he is the Minister for Training and Workforce Development and has ample evidence to support its reinstatement.

Thirdly, I want the Minister for Training and Workforce Development, as my parliamentary colleague, to host a summit in Mandurah for all Peel stakeholders with a vested interest in creating employment and training opportunities for young people in our region. I have a list of some of the people who should be invited. It must not be just a talk fest, but a facilitated gathering of people from government, business, training providers and the education sector to tackle this complex problem that will, unless addressed, leave a lasting blight on the community I call home. We need to come up with a real strategy in our region to tackle unemployment, particularly youth unemployment. The minister is in the best position to lead it as Minister for Training and Workforce Development. If he will not do it, I will have to try to do it myself. I want to work with the minister on this challenge in a bipartisan way. It is the least we can both do for the young people of Mandurah and the Peel Region.

**DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Training and Workforce Development)** [9.57 am]: One would think, in listening to that grievance, that youth unemployment in Mandurah was a recent phenomenon created by actions of the Liberal Party.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I didn't say that.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** He didn't say that at all.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** One would think from what was said that that was the case.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Armadale, the member for Mandurah can look after himself.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** We have seen headlines in the newspapers recently about unemployment rates in Mandurah and the Peel region of 17.3 per cent, but I recall during the time of the previous government, I think when the member for Mandurah was a minister, periods when youth unemployment hit 25 per cent. I went through the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures just this morning, looking at youth unemployment rates. In 2003 the rate rose above 25 per cent. The rates are very volatile, looking through those figures. The rate rose to 60 per cent at one stage during our time in government, but then a year or so later it was down around 6.7 per cent. The numbers are very volatile and the ABS itself says that we cannot take great note of them. The figures that I have show that, at present, youth unemployment in Mandurah is 7.8 per cent. It is still higher than the state average. That shows, however, that although 7.8 per cent are unemployed, over 80 per cent of the youth in our region have jobs. I am sure that those people have worked very hard to get those jobs. I also found, while I was searching on the internet, a conversation with Paddi Creevey, who was Mandurah mayor in 2005, complaining about the lack of action by the then government—now the opposition—in recognising the youth unemployment problem, and, indeed, the whole employment problem in Mandurah. She said that not enough attention was being given to Mandurah as a rapidly growing region to address those employment statistics.

That does not mean to say that I reject everything the member for Mandurah has said, because I certainly do not. It was the present government that closed the workforce development centre in Mandurah. The reason the Mandurah centre was closed when no other region lost its centre was the constant bugbear that we have in Peel that we are regarded as part of the metropolitan area. It was a Fremantle–Peel workforce development centre. Therefore, all the metropolitan area ones got closed and all the country ones stayed open, except that, although our one was based in Mandurah, it was representing Fremantle and the Peel region together. As I said to the member before, I am very keen to get that replaced, and I have had conversations with the Minister for Regional Development, who funds all those other workforce development centres. I have been asked by the Peel Development Commission to put it temporarily on hold because it is doing a workforce

strategy proposal with all the businesses in the area right now. The member talked about a summit and the development commission is already doing that internally without needing to have a summit.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** But you should lead it. Do not leave it to the Peel Development Commission.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah!

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** You should lead it.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** When the member says I should lead it, the Peel Development Commission will represent this government doing exactly what I have asked my department to do and the department is working together with it to make sure we look at strategies. One of those strategies that may well be reintroduced is the workforce development centre. In fact, I got cranky with my department the other day because it had not progressed this to the business case that I wanted, and I was asked by the development commission whether I could please hold off because it was working really well with my department and all the local businesses in the area to develop a plan for a workforce development strategy for the whole region. The development commission thinks the workforce development centre will be part of that, but it has just asked me to just hold back until we do it.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** For how long? How long have they said?

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** Two months, it said.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** It's nearly a year since it closed.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** It said it will take a few months and I think that is well progressed. I know my department has prepared a proposal and it is meeting with the development commission in the next weeks to go through that proposal with them to develop a strategy, and I believe that the workforce development may be a part of that. Of course, the government has invested a lot of money, but not in Mandurah. Indeed, there was \$28 million for that centre in Rockingham and another \$15 million to develop the oil and gas centre in Munster, which is also run by the Challenger Institute of Technology. The member needs to understand that the bodies that manage those, such as Challenger and Polytechnic West, are at arm's length from government. They largely manage their own business. I do not dictate to them what they will and will not do. My bureaucrats did not make the decision to close those courses in Mandurah; Challenger Institute of Technology made that decision. However, I am happy to look at the reasons it gave —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** If I give you a list of people to talk to, will you talk to them?

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** I am on leave for two weeks, but when I come back —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I understand that.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** I will talk to some of them; I probably will not ring all them, but I am happy to ring a few of them.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I'll give you a list of five people to contact.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** The member can give me a list and I will talk to them, because I would like to get the other side of the story from what I am getting through Challenger to my department to me about the reasons it shut the courses down. At the end of the day, it is their choice. I can direct them to do things, but is not something I prefer to do when organisations have boards that manage their operations, and we expect them to manage them without losing money. If according to them there are courses for which they are not getting sufficient enrolments to justify that course, I have to accept what they say. However, I will be happy to front them with those conversations I will have with those people.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I'll give you five names.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** That will be fine; the member will give me five names and I will call them.

It is critical. Unemployment in Mandurah is always higher than is the case in most other parts of the state, and youth unemployment particularly tends to be higher than in other parts of the state. It is not a new phenomenon, but it is one that continues. As I said, it was our government that shut that workforce development centre, which I believe was doing a good job. I think Rhys, who was in charge of that, was doing an excellent job in managing that program for the region, which is why I have said that I would like to see that centre reinstated for the Peel region.