

TRAINING AND SKILLS — INVESTMENT

Motion

HON STEPHEN PRATT (South Metropolitan) [11.34 am] — without notice: I move —

That the Legislative Council notes the Cook government's record investment in training and skills.

I again take the opportunity to speak about the importance of investing in training and skills. As members may recall, in my inaugural speech I touched on these issues and made a commitment to visit all the TAFE centres in the South Metropolitan Region. Over the time I have been in this place and this position, I have had the pleasure of undertaking those visits. Later on in my contribution I will revisit some of the key highlights and takeaways of those visits. I am probably due to check them all out again because this government has had a consistent commitment to investing in these centres, and I am sure that changes have happened in the short while since I have been to them. I note that just a fortnight ago Premier Cook was speaking about training in the other place and he said something that I concur with. He said —

A key ... pillar of a WA Labor government is that everyone should have access to quality education and training opportunities.

I do not think anyone can disagree with that premise. We can look to the previous government, which we are apparently obsessed with. Unfortunately, it is the next nearest comparator, so we have to refer to what the previous government did. There is a clear juxtaposition between the two governments when addressing training and skills. Since coming into office in 2017 this government has been very focused on repairing the damage done to the training sector and investing in training to provide a steady pipeline of skilled workers outside of the boom–bust cycle. Under the Barnett Liberal–National government TAFE course fees soared by 500 per cent, placing training out of reach of the average Western Australian. As I said, referring to that quote from the Premier, we do not want an impediment for people to access training and skills so they can find some level of sound employment in the community, whether it be the range of things at each of the centres I have visited, which I will touch on, we need to encourage that type of thing and we need to make it readily available to anyone seeking upskilling or training in a certain area. In each metric—that is, the number of apprenticeship and trainee commencements, apprenticeships and trainees in training, and apprenticeship and trainee completion, as well as the number of publicly funded vocational education and training total and TAFE course enrolments—levels fell significantly under the previous Liberal–National government. There was never an increase in these metrics under the previous government.

On the positive side, which is what I prefer to talk about, upon coming to government in 2017 we immediately froze TAFE fees to provide students with cost certainty. Then, we slashed fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 courses in key industries, which has made training much more affordable and accessible. We strategically rolled this out as we made improvements to the budget position, because when we came to government, we had a mess to clean up and we had to make some really difficult decisions and get the finances back on track. We were able to do that and then slowly but surely make improvements in this area, which has a key impact on the economy and getting people into jobs and training.

Our Free in '23 program is providing fee-free training in over 130 courses and skill sets across high-priority areas. We are focusing on the areas in which we need people in certain jobs, and we are providing those courses free to people, so providing incentives so that people will consider going to those lines of work—the care sector; information technology and cybersecurity; agriculture; construction, which we definitely need more workforce in; and hospitality and tourism. We have supported employers to take on more apprentices and trainees through a range of targeted programs, including the jobs and skills employer incentive, the GTO wage subsidy and the adult apprentice employer incentive. We are providing ongoing incentives for employers in the building and construction industry to take on apprentices and trainees through generous employer grants from the construction training fund. Our Rebuild with TAFE program includes a record \$243 million investment to upgrade essential infrastructure across TAFE. As I said, when I go back to visit those TAFEs again, I am sure I will see some of these new buildings and bits of infrastructure at those campuses. This is the largest TAFE capital works program in this state's history. There are 14 major upgrades to TAFE colleges across the state, with over half located in regional areas. Apprenticeship and traineeship commencements are now at their highest level in 10 years, with nearly 4 500 contracts registered in July 2022—the highest monthly total on record. Apprenticeship commencements are almost 50 per cent higher than they were two years ago. That is a really positive story, and something that we should be proud of as a government. I will take great pleasure in speaking more about these great government initiatives.

I also congratulate the Leader of the House for her role as Minister for Training when we came to government, and the current minister, Minister McGurk, who has been able to carry on that momentum. We have some further great initiatives underway to encourage people to reskill or enter their chosen line of work through training at TAFEs and skill centres. It is also worth noting that commencements by female apprentices and trainees has increased by more than 90 per cent on pre-pandemic levels, with almost 12 300 commencements by females in 2022. I had a quick

Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Lorna Harper; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Acting President; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Peter Foster

look at the South Metropolitan TAFE website, where I saw its recent announcements and initiatives, encouraging more women to look at doing courses through TAFE.

Commencements by Aboriginal apprentices and trainees are also up by almost 40 per cent compared with pre-pandemic levels. Apprentice completions have also increased by 27 per cent since 2019. I think that is probably the most important one to focus on—the completion rate, which is the number of people who are completing training and entering the workforce, clearly demonstrating that the Cook government has been investing in training over an extended period, and it is working.

I will touch on those key initiatives again in case I have missed any. We froze TAFE fees as soon as we came to government, to give Western Australians certainty on fee prices; slashed TAFE fees for 210 high-priority courses by up to 72 per cent; offered fee-free training in more than 130 courses and skill sets, in partnership with the Albanese government; and reached agreement to extend fee-free training for three more years. The Cook Labor government has funded additional fee-free places to keep pace with demand, which has seen fee-free enrolments across VET soar to more than 36 000 this year.

This is the largest TAFE capital works program in Western Australia's history—\$243.3 million, including a number of regional projects that I have already mentioned. There is \$25 million for new state-of-the-art equipment at TAFE colleges across the state. I must say, one campus that I visited that particularly sticks out for me is the Naval Base campus. I went down to Naval Base and they had virtual reality headsets for practising welding. It takes away the danger and risk when someone has their first go on the oxy. They can use the virtual reality headset and have a few goes in a safe environment and almost perfect their skills using that equipment. It is a great modern facility for people training in that skill set to undergo. We have also secured \$1.34 billion for skills and training in WA as part of the new five-year national skills agreement. That is to be commended.

I return to the negatives. When we came to government, the training sector was in a mess. Under the previous government we saw the trashing of the TAFE system: funding cuts, skyrocketing fees and plummeting enrolments. Between 2013 and 2017 the Liberal–National government increased fees by more than 500 per cent. Annual student enrolments fell by up to 25 000. These are shameful statistics. I remind members that under the Barnett Liberal–National government, TAFE fees soared by 500 per cent, placing training out of reach for the average Western Australian. In each metric that I have mentioned, there was never an increase under the previous government. It wrecked the TAFE sector. The Cook government has been working to fix that damage, and our investment in the TAFE sector is paying off. I commend both the previous Minister for Training, Hon Sue Ellery, and the current minister, Hon Simone McGurk, for their hard work and commitment in this space.

There is a range of things to mention about the fee-free initiative, which I already touched on. We want all Western Australians to have access to affordable training so that they can benefit from our state's strong economic position, low unemployment and thriving jobs market. We have done this in a targeted fashion so that we can encourage people to skill up in the areas where we need more people in the workforce. They can do that for free and then, hopefully, find some sound employment in those key sectors of industry. Off the back of the incredible success of Free in '23, we are extending fee-free training into 2024. This year, the strongest enrolments in fee-free qualifications—some of my colleagues will be happy to hear this—are in early childhood education and care sectors; aged and disability care; nursing; information technology; and hospitality, adding much-needed skills for these priority industries. Fee-free enrolments in these care sector courses climbed to 19 600 enrolments—that is up by 31 per cent on the same time in the previous year.

I want to talk about some of the visits I made; last time I ran out of time, so I will rush through it. I got around the campuses in South Metropolitan Region, as I had committed to doing in my inaugural speech. People who go to do TAFE courses to learn these new skills really have great facilities and state-of-the-art equipment. The Fremantle campus is right on the water in the maritime area down there. It has state-of-the-art equipment for specialised courses across the areas of maritime engineering and marine industry. I have seen the Minister for Training down there; it is in her electorate. She had a go on the same thing I did: they have a computerised demo facility where you can have a go at captaining a ship under different scenarios. I had a go at trying to direct a ship under the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Hon Pierre Yang: How did you go?

Hon STEPHEN PRATT: I think I was sabotaged, because I swear a ship came out of nowhere and cleaned me up! I probably would have failed that course and had to have a few more goes at it.

I also went to the Kwinana campus, which is alongside Gilmore College. That works really well for students who are trying to get the skills to work in the automotive industry. There are some great vehicles in the lobby area. I saw the students in action on the floor and they were all pulling cars to pieces, working out how they worked and gaining the skills necessary to fix vehicles. One of the main things they were doing on the day I visited was air-conditioning systems. As we all know, that is pretty important in the summer months.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 30 November 2023]

p6822b-6830a

Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Lorna Harper; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Acting President; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Peter Foster

The Murdoch campus is also a great facility with both new and old buildings. In the new buildings I witnessed students in the fashion, hair and wellness sectors. Unfortunately, my colleague Hon Ayor Makur Chuot is away on urgent parliamentary business, but I know she went to their fashion catwalk event the other week. That showcased some of the skills that the students there have taken on.

HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [11.49 am]: I too rise to support this fantastic motion by Hon Stephen Pratt on the Cook government's record investment in training and skills. I went back and had a quick look at *Hansard* the last time we spoke about this to make sure that I did not repeat myself, but I might do that because it is now in my head.

My colleague Hon Stephen Pratt went over a lot of the figures and talked about how much the fees went up under the previous government, the significant drop in apprenticeships and course enrolments, and the impacts, which we are still feeling today. He also spoke about how, when Labor came to government in 2017, it straightaway froze TAFE fees then slashed fees by over 72 per cent. It is really important to look at the history and make sure that we are aware of how much money and investment has been put into training people in WA. It is important that people really comprehend that this Cook Labor government is investing in the future of not only the youth but also WA as a whole. It is looking at all sectors and all industries.

My colleague mentioned and quickly chatted about how many people did qualifications in early childhood education and care. As my colleagues know, part of my background is in early childhood education and care. Going back quite a few years now, I was a TAFE student and did a diploma in early childhood education—children's services, I think; they change the names. I was lucky in that I went to Swan TAFE in Midland at the Yelverton Road campus. It was a very old building but had brilliant service. I got a very good education there, so much so that I ended up being the most outstanding student for a diploma of children's services that year. I thought I would just toot my own horn for that one; I found it quite amusing.

People forget that things like TAFE bring the people that we need into society. The Cook government, in partnership with the Albanese government, is investing to ensure that we get the workforce and skills we need for the future of WA and Australia. This is extremely important because right now we have a crisis in early childhood education and care. The crisis is that we do not have enough staff. It is predominantly female based, which is reflected in the figures of how many women enrol in these courses, and the crisis is because the wages are so low compared with, say, a certificate III graduate working in building and construction.

That is something else in which the Cook government is investing heavily. In fact, if we look back to earlier this month, the Cook Labor government made an announcement about "Free training paving the way for building construction careers". Great! I am somebody who just built a house, and it did not take too long or as long as people think. There was a slight delay when we were looking for roofers, but we were lucky apart from that. We had excellent tradespeople and excellent services. They were well trained, on time and did everything, and we should be really proud that we have those services here in WA. It took a few months extra, but I was in the house in less than a year and a half; it was not three years or more. We should be proud of what we have, and we should be proud of the apprentices coming through and the fact that we have those apprentices. My daughter's partner was an apprentice, and he benefited from some of the investment that the Cook and former McGowan Labor governments put in. He is now a qualified—I get this wrong—fridge; he does air-conditioning. I think he is a fridge. It is important to make sure that these services continue and everybody is coming through. I lost my train of thought of where I was going.

The Cook Labor government has also recently talked about one of my favourites—we go back to women—announcing "Scholarships for women to break into their dream career". The scholarships are for women to break into non-traditional female roles. That could be as mechanics, boilermakers or a whole heap of different roles that women traditionally do not go into. The Cook Labor government offers a grant of \$5 000 to assist them to move forward. I was never a daddy's girl, but my father was a joiner. We call them that, but I think they are called carpenters here. I followed my father around, so I can fix things. I can put certain furniture together. I can put wallpaper up. I can paint, and I can do all those traditionally male things because I followed my dad around and he showed me how. As a young child in the 70s and 80s, I was discouraged from going anywhere near any of those roles. We are in 2023 now, and we are still pushing women towards roles in caring industries, and we are still not valuing the roles that these women do. It is brilliant that we are encouraging women to go into non-traditional female roles, but my view is that as well as supporting the free training to get women—people, anyone—into roles in aged care, disability and early childhood, we should be looking at those essential services and how we as a society can improve them. The Cook Labor government does this on a regular basis, but we cannot forget that roles in female-dominated services are not looked on as highly as, say, somebody in IT. They are not looked on as having the skills that, say, a bricklayer might have. I could argue that somebody working in early childhood education and care is actually building the bricks of the future of WA society by the influence they have on children aged zero to three. They are putting them into roles and helping them learn their pathway into the future for training. Right now, it is quite hard.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 30 November 2023]

p6822b-6830a

Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Lorna Harper; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Acting President; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Peter Foster

We could also look at the fact that, although we have all these people going into training, we unfortunately do not always have places available for women and families to put their children while they study, because of the crisis in early childhood education and care. Again, that is something that we need to look at as a society.

We are very lucky with everything that is happening here in WA in the training field. We are very lucky that we have a Labor government that is investing in the future, especially if we look at the infrastructure development going on. We hear some complaints about Metronet, but I will be highly delighted next year when I am on a train from Ellenbrook and into the city in less than 30 minutes. I might actually be able to go into the city. I do not know whether I will go if Basil Zempilas is still mayor; I might wait awhile. I will go into the city and be able to look at some of the facilities that apparently are there. There will not be any community facilities, because we know that is not what the Lord Mayor of Perth likes to think about.

One reason I can do that, and I will go back to it, is because of Metronet and the investment in the services at North Metropolitan TAFE in Midland, in the wonderful East Metropolitan Region. We have invested \$2.5 million in a trade training centre to provide real operations and signalling training. The fact that we are building parts of trains, working towards building trains and bringing some forms of heavy industry back here to WA is because of the Labor government. It is because we are building Metronet. It will make our lives a lot better. We are investing in training for people for the future, to continue and maintain what we have. Hopefully, we will continue to put more and more money into investing in the future of WA, not just for the young girls but also for the young men.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [11.59 am]: I rise to say a few words on the motion. It is somewhat similar to the self-congratulatory motion moved by Hon Dan Caddy on the subject back in March this year. Nonetheless, it is the end of the year and the government has clearly run out of ideas on what to talk about.

The central tenets of the issues I raised in the motion moved by Hon Dan Caddy remain. Although I do not intend to go through all of them in detail because I appreciate other members want to speak to this motion, the fact is I acknowledge that there have been some good initiatives by the government in the training space. However, there is still more that can be done. I always say, whenever there is a motion in this place on training—and I make this as a general statement—the training system remains far too complex. I do not think it is a matter just for this government. It has been a problem for successive governments. The commonwealth's involvement is also an issue, and there are obviously a range of organisations involved in the training space. As has been mentioned, we have TAFEs. We have registered training organisations, group training organisations, industry associations, unions and schools. Most importantly, we have students and all of them find it complex. Plenty of reports show that.

Whenever we debate or discuss training—I would like to think we can have these debates and discussions in a good way—I think we should all acknowledge that the system is overly complex and creates unnecessary barriers. More work needs to be done, particularly at the state and commonwealth level. To be frank, when I was the shadow Minister for Education and Training, most complaints around the requirements and regulations of training were at the commonwealth level. However, there is obviously a clear role for the state to play.

I will focus on an area that I think is particularly important. I and others have reflected on the need to better advocate for the value of vocational education and training and the VET pathway for young people. For example, I support the government's Year 9 Career Taster Program. I think that is a really good thing. I think that we need to look at every opportunity to increase students' awareness—I will mention their parents in a moment—of the options and opportunities available to them. I think that program is good and I know that there are some other units within the curriculum for the earlier years. I think it is important to start providing even year 6 and 7 students greater knowledge of what those options are and opportunities to think outside the box of what their life could be like. I will always support those types of initiatives.

I ask questions in this house pretty much routinely every year about the Western Australian Certificate of Education. We know that there has been a decline in the number of students achieving their WACE through the VET pathway. There might be a few reasons for that, but I have a concern—I am not the only one—that some of the decline is attributable to the decision taken by the former Minister for Education and Training to introduce a third pathway for students to achieve their WACE. That concern was raised at the time of the minister's announcement and it still remains. The fact is, in 2020, 10 928 students achieved their WACE via the VET pathway. In 2021, that dropped significantly to 9 001. In 2022, it stayed at 9 070. It dropped and now it has flatlined. I raise that we need to be very alive to the fact that the number of students achieving their WACE through the VET pathway has declined. I have also raised before, and say again now, that there are significant concerns that remain about the negative perceptions around the value of VET. The State Training Board released a report in June of this year titled *Mobilising WA's future: Young people in VET*. It is quite a comprehensive report and I will take a couple of points out of it. It states —

There is strong demand for skills gained through a VET pathway in WA. In 2021, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research ... found that 57% of WA employers used the VET system to meet their

training needs. In addition, 40% of WA employers had jobs that required vocational qualifications and more than a quarter employed apprentices and trainees.

Despite employers placing a high value on VET pathways, and young people's experience within the sector being overwhelmingly positive, the VET system is still perceived by many as a second rate post-school pathway.

The State Training Board had a number of conversations with young people. The report goes on to state —

Throughout our conversations, young people repeatedly identified poor public perception as a major barrier to choosing VET. The stigma surrounding their choice to undertake a VET qualification left many participants feeling inferior to their peers who chose a university pathway.

Studies show that parents and other family members have the greatest influence on young people's career choices. While students often turn to educators for information on study and career options, it is parents who have the greatest influence on their final choices. Where parents have little or a misconceived understanding of the VET system, they are unlikely to support their children choosing a VET pathway. This is consistent with the experiences of the young people we spoke to.

When considering their post-school options, some roundtable participants found that their parents and schools viewed VET as a second rate option, taken by academically 'low performers'. Some participants reported that they were not advised of their VET pathway options and were counselled away from pursuing a VET pathway because they were academically high achievers.

Members, that should not be happening in 2023, but it continues. This is not something that happened overnight. It has been an issue for a very long time. This report makes a number of findings and recommendations. I do not intend to go through all of them, but recommendations 1.3 states —

Ensure that career development programs and advice also focus on raising awareness of VET and VET pathways among parents.

I agree that it is not just the job of the government to fix this. This is a system-wide community issue. However, government can take a leading role. I had a quick look at the government's response to the very comprehensive report undertaken by the board, and I was a little concerned. If members read the government's response, most of the recommendations, according to the government, have already been addressed or partially addressed. That may well be the government's view, but there remains a significant issue about young people and VET. According to the government, the recommendation I referred to about raising the awareness of parents has apparently already been addressed—it has not. The government states that the Department of Education is undertaking career conversation events and has an online portal. I am sure they are very good, but in my view, that does not mean that the issue has been addressed. If the issue had been addressed, we would not be discussing it, and the State Training Board would not have prepared a significant document; it is not an old one. This report was released only in June this year. Clearly, more work has to be done. I understand it cannot be fixed overnight, but let us not just say that something has been addressed when significant issues clearly remain. I do not want a report like that to just be put on the shelf, say the job is done, tick the box and move on. The government has done some good things in this area, and I encourage it to do more for young people in this state.

HON PIERRE YANG (North Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.09 pm]: I want to say from the outset that this is a fabulous motion moved by Hon Stephen Pratt. It is an area in which the government has a proud record of achieving a huge number of benefits for the people of Western Australia. I confirm I am providing the government response. It has been some 11 months since I was appointed the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Training. I have had the opportunity to meet many industry stakeholders during that time. I am incredibly impressed by the sentiment of people in this industry. It is a sentiment that we all understand. Vocational education and training changes people's lives. That is why the Cook Labor government has been investing heavily in the sector, as Hon Stephen Pratt and Hon Lorna Harper discussed in their contributions. I want to quickly go through a number of major programs that have been put in place by the state government.

When we came to power in 2017, we immediately froze TAFE fees. That was something we had outlined in our Plan for Jobs back in 2016. We said we would do it and we did what we said. We introduced the Job Ready program to provide Western Australians entry-level skills to take up jobs in high-demand sectors, including construction, bricklaying, aged care, child care, truck driving and drilling. We invested \$243 million in the largest TAFE capital works program in the state's history. We invested \$25 million in modern TAFE equipment, which Hon Stephen Pratt talked about seeing during his visits to the TAFE campuses in his electorate. We significantly reduced fees for existing worker traineeships and introduced the WA jobs and skills employer initiatives. We created 17 jobs and skills centres. We now have 19 jobs and skills centres operating across the state, from Kununurra to Albany. Again, that is something we said we would do in our plan for jobs back in 2016. If I may, I would like to touch on that. We

Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Lorna Harper; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Acting President; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Peter Foster

also said we would rebrand those institutions as TAFE, after they were changed by the former Barnett government. We said we would transform TAFE colleges into industry skills centres. We not only looked at modernising and providing the hardware of all the training facilities, we also looked at how we could improve the quality of TAFE and vocational education training.

We heard the Liberal–National alliance refer to the Auditor General’s report a number of times. I will follow its example and recite a few lines from the Auditor General’s report on the Training Accreditation Council from back in the Barnett days. The Auditor General’s report *Regulation of training organisations* states that in 2021–22 —

... 60 per cent were non-compliant with the national standards. Thirty-five per cent were significant or critical non-compliance and 22 per cent were minor non-compliance.

When we came into power, we put in all the necessary levers and mechanisms to make sure that the vocational education and training providers are not only of a modern standard, but also comply with national standards. At this point I wish to give a shout-out to one of the two best training ministers that this state has seen—that is, Hon Sue Ellery, who is sitting in the chamber. She has done an amazing job in this space.

Hon Darren West: She fixed the mess.

Hon PIERRE YANG: That is right. She fixed the mess left by the Liberal–National government when it was in power last time. I think we should acknowledge the amazing work Hon Sue Ellery did when she was the Minister for Education and Training. Of course, I need to give a shout-out to my minister, Hon Simone McGurk, as the other best training minister that this state has seen. Unlike the other side —

Several members interjected.

THE ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Sally Talbot): Excuse me, members. I would really like to hear the speech being made by Hon Pierre Yang. If other members could desist.

Hon PIERRE YANG: Thank you, Acting President. The other side had five training ministers during its eight and a half year reign. They were Hon Peter Collier, from 2008 to 2012; Mr Murray Cowper, from June 2012 to March 2013; Hon Terry Redman, March 2013 to December 2013; Hon Dr Kim Hames, December 2013 to December 2014; and Hon Liza Harvey, December 2014 to March 2017. That government was passing the portfolio around like a hot potato. Nobody wanted to hold onto it. Nobody wanted to continue in that portfolio. That tells us something about the other side.

I refer to an online article by Hayley Roman, dated 9 August 2015 from the ABC News. I read it in *Hansard*, so cannot claim credit for finding this article. It is something that was recited by David Scaife, the member for Cockburn, during his contribution on the Vocational Education and Training Amendment Bill 2023 two days ago in the other house. In any event, I would like to quote from the article, which states —

WA Training Minister Liza Harvey defended the State Government’s funding for TAFE colleges, saying it had decided to prioritise certain courses under its Future Skills program.

This is interesting; it continues —

“We determined that our best effort and highest level of subsidisation should go into our priority skills area, —

Fair enough —

so we’ve had a 6 per cent increase in enrolments in the priority skills areas.

...

Ms Harvey said the Government had simultaneously reduced funding to some of the more “recreational-style” TAFE courses.

Let us look at what sorts of recreational-style courses that the previous government cut funding for. Those courses included the advanced diploma of civil and structural engineering. In 2013, the non-concession fee for the course was \$2 504. In 2017, under the Liberal–National government, it was \$8 685. A number of members have spoken about the 400 to 500 per cent fee increase. What about the diploma of building design? It rose from \$1 200 to \$6 100. Such was the attitude of the former government. I think it is important that we remind ourselves that we did not get to this situation fortuitously. We had a plan, we carried out our plan, and that is why we are in such an incredibly strong position. I commend the member for this motion.

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [12.20 pm]: I rise in support of the excellent motion moved by Hon Stephen Pratt and thank him for the opportunity to speak about some of the great things that the Cook Labor government has done in training and skills in Western Australia, and also about some of the great things that has translated into in my own electorate in and around Geraldton, the midwest and Gascoyne.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 30 November 2023]

p6822b-6830a

Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Lorna Harper; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Acting President; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Peter Foster

Both Minister Ellery in her contribution earlier today and Hon Stephen Pratt as he introduced this motion have highlighted some notable achievements. Some of the great things that have happened of late in training and TAFE include free courses and targeted free courses that really are targeted towards the areas of need in skilled workers. We have increased the number of people training and we have contributed record investment into TAFE infrastructure to rebuild and refurbish those facilities to make sure they are at the standard that the industry wants and needs so that students emerge trained and job ready. More young Western Australians than ever are training at TAFE facilities, and it is also fantastic to note that there are more women. That means we are getting more women in skilled work and sometimes less traditional work for women. It is also fantastic to see that women are being supported to enter courses that they may not necessarily have traditionally considered, and people's minds and perspectives are being broadened to the roles and jobs they can undertake. As was highlighted earlier, there is also greater course completion than ever, which is fantastic to hear.

It has already been mentioned, but it bears repeating, that under the former Barnett government, the fees for training went up dramatically. That proved to be incredibly unhelpful. I think even employers will tell us that there were fewer people taking up courses. But it also has a cultural impact in the way TAFE operates, and I can tell members that because I was working at a TAFE during that time. I was doing some project management and was charged with designing some materials for that TAFE. I was asked to design a form that students would have to fill out. I designed the form and handed it to my employers, and they were talking about printing and the costs and that sort of thing. I asked a question that I almost regret asking: "Who pays for this?" The answer from management was that they would pass that cost on to the students. I was horrified. I wished that I had not ever redesigned the form or had any part in it.

It really drove home for me my Labor values. I think it is indicative of the impact on the culture of an institution when we take the attitude that it is okay to charge students a lot for things that we desperately need them to do, but it also has a roll-on impact of people not being mindful of how complicated it is for some people to pay for and participate in TAFE courses and training, because people have complicated lives and the playing field is not level.

I will talk about some of the great results that we have had in my electorate and the electorate of the member for Geraldton, Lara Dalton, and some of the things that I know she has pushed for and put forward to our government to make sure they are achieved to deliver appropriate and targeted training in Geraldton and the midwest.

One great event we recently attended was the major overhaul of Central Regional TAFE's marine training vessel, which was opened by Minister Simone McGurk. The vessel is called *Master Class*. I think that is a really appropriate name, because I think that in this and the last term of government, this government has delivered a master class in how to provide funding and services that allow training and skills to be developed in a way that really works for the state and the community. The vessel was part of a \$2 million upgrade. It is a floating classroom; it is fantastic. Geraldton is a coastal town. We have the Abrolhos Islands on our doorstep, and we have a lot of people engaged in both recreational and commercial marine activities, and a lot of young people who want to harness the opportunities of jobs in that industry. It is a growing industry. We have crayfishing, pearl farmers, an emerging oyster industry and also a tourism industry around the Abrolhos Islands and our beautiful coastline, as well. That first-class learning environment provided by the upgrades to that vessel, the *Master Class*, delivered for our maritime students, has flow-on benefits for employers in the maritime industry.

I refer to the boat builders that did the work of refurbishing and upgrading the beautiful vessel *Master Class*. It was refurbished by local boat builder Dongara Marine, which overhauled the vessel with things like new engines, gear boxes, hydraulic systems, electrics, air conditioning and navigational systems, so it really made sure that the vessel is at tip-top level for the students. It is modern and really can service their needs. It has places where students can sleep and cook, so they can really participate in the real experience of jobs that involve being on the water. It is an incredible classroom. I went and had a look and went down into the hull where all the magic happens, where the mechanics of the boat are, and it looked like a brand new vessel. It is fantastic and I know that the students that I had the opportunity to speak to are really excited about the opportunity to learn on this amazing floating classroom.

The local boat builder that completed the major overhaul of that vessel, Dongara Marine, has recently moved to Geraldton. The company itself identified a need within our region and then approached our Minister for Ports at the time, Minister Saffioti, and they worked together to establish a Geraldton Fishing Boat Harbour boat-building precinct. Our government then contributed \$3.6 million to that precinct for a new heavy haul road, utilities, fire-fighting equipment and that sort of thing. We can see how that training and skills feeds into real, on-the-ground experience and opportunities and continues to perpetuate those opportunities for young people. Dongara Marine received a contract to deliver the new fishing—what are they called?—department of fisheries patrol vessel, so it has also secured a contract for that, but it has done a lot of great vessel-building work in our region and beyond.

I will talk about that funding, because the funding to build the *Master Class* was part of our state government's \$243.3 million to rebuild TAFE—for rebuilding, refurbishing and all those really important capital works. It also funded a \$4 million visual arts and creative industry hub at the Central Regional TAFE, which is also in Geraldton. That was officially opened last year by the minister at the time, Minister Sue Ellery. It is a really great facility that

Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Lorna Harper; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Acting President; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Peter Foster

looks at some of the broader opportunities for young people and people across the age spectrum, I should say, because the arts are for everybody—just ask Minister Templeman! That gives opportunities to our budding artists and fashion designers, media specialists and all the other dynamic and creative industries that emerge around the region, as well. Pearl farmer Pia Boschetti lives in Geraldton. She runs a couple of creative activities that I know TAFE students and students from across the region get involved with every year. We have an incredible jewellery design and thriving arts community in Geraldton, as well. That facility was designed by Geraldton architect firm Eastman Poletti Sherwood Architects and built by local builders Crothers Construction.

I also had the opportunity to see the on-the-ground outcomes of these things when I attended the Vocational Education and Training Delivered to Secondary Students awards in October this year. I would quickly like to get these names out, and hopefully I can. Congratulations to student of the year, Chelsea Routledge; Aboriginal vocational student of the year, Navaeh Bell; trade-based training student of the year, James Browne; vocational student of the year, Kalirra Tesling; and higher vocational student of the year, Adelle Lang. I got through them all! Well done. Employer of the year was Turtle Cove Early Learning Centre. Just one last thing: all those students bar one came from Champion Bay Senior High School, so I really congratulate Champion Bay Senior High School on obviously putting a lot of time and effort into supporting those students.

Lastly, I thank the TAFE staff, the teachers and the employers who support the students involved in the VET Delivered to Secondary Students program in the regions. They are crucial and the collaboration between the different groups is what makes the program successful for students and supports training and jobs in our region.

HON PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [12.30 pm]: I note there are only about four and a bit minutes left, so I will try to do my best to get in as much content as I can in that time.

I start by acknowledging Hon Stephen Pratt. I thank him for moving the motion because it has given members of the chamber a really good opportunity to talk about skills and training and in particular the Cook Labor government's investment in training and skills. I acknowledge the comments of Hon Lorna Harper. She is a champion for the early childhood education community. I also acknowledge the comments of Hon Pierre Yang. He is doing a great job as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Training. I acknowledge the comments of Hon Sandra Carr, who is a strong advocate for the midwest.

As a lot of honourable members have talked about today, I think the free courses and the frozen course fees are a really good outcome. As we have heard today, a lot more people are getting upskilled and receiving training. We have talked about the cost of living. This is a perfect way that people can save some money and get skilled at the same time. I think it is really great that we are both freezing fees and also offering free courses. We have also talked a lot today about the investment in upgrading not only TAFEs, but also TAFE equipment. It is really pleasing that a large proportion of that investment is in regional WA. We have heard about some of the investments in the midwest. I want to talk briefly about the investments in the Pilbara and the Kimberley.

Earlier this year, a \$6 million health and hospitality trade training centre opened in Kununurra. The opening was attended by the member for Kimberley, Divina D'Anna, MLA. She is a strong advocate for trades and training up in the Kimberley. Work is also underway for the \$11.8 million hospitality and student services centre at North Regional TAFE in Broome. In the Pilbara, we have a \$7.9 million investment in North Regional TAFE at the Minurmarghali Mia campus in Roebourne. A major upgrade is also taking place at the North Regional TAFE facility in South Hedland. These TAFE facilities, especially in the Pilbara, are really, really important for us. We have a lot of mining industry at home in the Pilbara, and so it is great that our TAFEs are operating and providing the skills and training that we need to keep our workforces up in the Pilbara highly trained.

We often talk about Carnarvon in this place and we do not always share some positive stories, so I want to talk a little bit about some of the skilling and the training that is taking place in Carnarvon. I want to particularly acknowledge Real Futures. Real Futures is an organisation in Carnarvon that deals with mostly First Nations people but also a lot of people in Carnarvon who want to re-enter the workforce or enter the workforce for the first time. It helps people upskill, access training and connects them with jobs. It was announced earlier this year that it will operate the Driving Access and Equity program. A couple of years ago, I attended a number of the skills summits and one of the issues that came up quite frequently was that people were struggling to get a licence. They needed a licence to get a job. It is really great that Real Futures in Carnarvon is now providing that service. It is very, very busy. Now people in Carnarvon can get their drivers' licences.

One of the programs that I am quite proud of is the cafe in Carnarvon called Jardilunji Mia, which is based at the cultural centre. People at the cultural centre can do a certificate II in hospitality. There is an article about it in the *National Indigenous Times*, but I will not have time to read it. A number of students have now completed their certificate II in hospitality and they are working in the Carnarvon community. These people either left school early or had never held a job before and a number of them are now working in full-time employment as a result of doing the certificate II program.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 30 November 2023]

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Hon Stephen Pratt; Hon Lorna Harper; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Acting President; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Peter Foster

Noting there are only 10 seconds left, I thank Hon Stephen Pratt for moving this motion today. It was really great to hear members' contributions around investment in skills and training, and I commend the motion to the house.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.