

TAFE AND TRAINING — INVESTMENT

Motion

HON STEPHEN PRATT (South Metropolitan) [11.31 am] — without notice: I move —

That the Legislative Council —

- (a) acknowledges the important role TAFE and training play in Western Australia to encourage employment and create a skilled workforce; and
- (b) notes that the McGowan government's significant investment in training, including the reduction of fees for 210 courses by up to 72 per cent, the largest TAFE capital works program in the state's history, and support for employers has resulted in record, highest ever, enrolments.

I am very proud today to speak on the McGowan government's strong record of investment and support for the network of TAFEs and training centres across Western Australia. Minister Ellery should also feel very proud of the work that she has done to ensure that Western Australians have access to world-class training and education facilities. I have a lot to speak on today and will be switching to a positive note after this morning's negative approach. I have had an unbelievable experience. In my inaugural speech, I committed to getting around to the TAFEs in my electorate and I have worked my way through them over the past 12-and-a-bit months. I had not had much experience with TAFE prior to this, but it has been an eye-opener to see these facilities that are available to Western Australians and to experience the enthusiasm of their staff and students. We have done an incredible job to cater for the needs of all people, whether they are coming out of school and deciding on their career or have found themselves out of work and needing to reskill and find another avenue into employment. I am going to work through some of the visits that I have undertaken over the past few months and highlight some of the great things that I have seen along the way that point to where our investment in these places is truly having an impact.

As I said in the motion, the McGowan government has made education and training a cornerstone of the post-COVID economic recovery with the biggest TAFE investment in history. As part of the 2020 WA recovery plan, under the rebuilding our TAFEs program, \$229.2 million was allocated, including a record \$167.4 million investment in capital works projects to upgrade essential infrastructure across Western Australian TAFE colleges, including the South Metropolitan TAFE network in the best part of WA. I will go through examples of this as I recount my visits to each of the sites shortly.

Initiatives in the 2022–23 budget have been developed to meet the skills shortages that we face and are informed by ideas and outcomes from the Perth and regional skills summits. As a snapshot, these investments include: \$38.4 million in additional funding for the Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative; an \$11 million boost for the defence industry's professional and paraprofessional workforce; \$14.3 million to support training in Western Australia's in-demand construction industry; \$5.5 million to help mature-age jobseekers and ex-offenders into jobs; \$4.9 million in support of the Collie workforce transition; and \$2.4 million to attract international students, after what we have experienced through COVID.

The Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative saw fees reduced by up to 72 per cent across a range of courses. The McGowan government has made TAFE more affordable for students in the South Metropolitan Region and across Western Australia, putting the option of TAFE study back on the table for students who may not have been able to afford it in the past. As I said, the government has slashed TAFE fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 priority courses. This is a targeted approach aimed at areas of study addressing workforce shortages. It is part of creating a strong TAFE sector that prepares WA students for the jobs of the future, and the government is ensuring that our students have access to world-class equipment to help them learn. Given the strength of the WA economy and our low unemployment rate, it is critical that TAFE helps us to train a skilled local workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.

In my inaugural speech I committed to visiting all the skills centres in the South Metro Region. I have also discovered that South Metropolitan TAFE extends beyond my electorate. Some amazing things are happening at the Mandurah campus, which is an up-and-coming provider in the catering and restaurant training industry, and a significant capital investment has been made into the Armadale campus. I have visited most of the campuses. I will describe what I witnessed firsthand on each of my visits. My first visit was to the Murdoch campus, which is adjacent to Fiona Stanley Hospital and opposite the Murdoch University campus. I saw a fantastic mix of old and really new buildings at this facility. A large array of courses is on offer and the facilities are fantastic. It was not just a quick visit; I had quite a detailed walk-through. I thank Terry Durant and Blair Marsh for the in-depth tours they gave me.

If people are looking to change jobs or are not sure what industry they want to go into, I would encourage them to check out the offerings at South Metro TAFE. They will find a wide range of opportunities at the Murdoch campus. This extends to the beauty industry, which is a growth industry in WA. Students learn how to apply treatments and operate all the new machines that are used for skin treatments and that sort of stuff. They did not give me a treatment,

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but they certainly had all the machinery. I might need one soon, given the sleepless nights I am having at the moment with a young kid! There is also a hairdressing set-up. Each of the schools in this facility is set up to mirror the industry. It looked just like I was walking into a hair salon; they had the whole set-up there. For anyone considering getting into the hairdressing industry, I think it is a pretty sustainable and consistent source of work, as most people's hair continues to come back!

The floristry school is in the older part of the campus. The TAFE also teaches dog grooming. If anyone is looking to get their dog jazzed up, the students are always looking for subjects so they can try out their skills. There is also cybersecurity and nursing there. The set-up is just like being in a hospital setting and is quite high-tech. It has high-tech dummies that students can practice resuscitation or treatments on. The groaning and the sounds that they were making in pain were almost scary. Students get the real experience there, for sure. Like I said, if anyone is thinking of changing their job or source of employment, there are great opportunities for people at TAFE. It has become more common in modern society for people to change jobs five or more times.

I then went to the Fremantle campus of South Metropolitan TAFE, which has a completely different mix of opportunities for people. Basically, the facilities where the staff and the library are located are almost brand new. It is right on the water, so it is an attractive place to work. If people want to get into any maritime industry, this is the place for them to go. The TAFE also offered, interestingly, a drone course, which is an avenue to get into the Jandakot piloting course. I think that is probably another growth industry that will be more and more popular. I touched on this in a previous contribution. The aquaculture set-up at the TAFE has small fish all the way through to huge yellowtail kingfish in tanks. It is certainly a sight to be seen. We have quite a few members in here from the South Metropolitan Region. I am sure the minister has been there and Hon Klara Andric should check it out. It is just incredible. You would not want to fall in there for sure. The fish would probably take a limb off! The TAFE also has a ship maintenance room and I was able to use the set-up there. It has huge computer screens and basically the panel of a ship so that people can replicate driving a ship. I got to try to drive one under the Sydney Harbour Bridge while I was there, but it was sabotaged by the other staff, I am sure, because I ended up collecting another ship as I was driving along.

Then I visited the TAFE at the naval base at Henderson. It recently won a national defence award for its program, so it is winning awards and kicking goals thanks to the investment of the McGowan government. The Henderson site also has a real-life set-up, so if someone were about to be quickly employed in the mining industry, they would know exactly what to do because this site has the exact equivalent of the equipment that they need to know about. People can basically come away from that set-up and go onto a mining site with exactly the same equipment. That is done through significant partnerships with the big mining companies. It was great to see what they are doing there. I also got to have a go at the augmented reality set-up at the naval base TAFE, which teaches students how to weld. This is an important set-up; if someone has never done it before, they do not want to jump onto a welding machine and look like the former Prime Minister did during the last campaign! People can use the augmented reality and have a go at welding at a range of different angles. It is quite incredible. People who are thinking of getting into deep-sea welding can get into the position that they would find themselves in underwater and get used to the angles at which they need to hold the welding machine. The rest of the work sheds are set up for students to learn how to get on the welding machines once they are up to scratch and have passed the test.

I am probably going to run out of time, but the Kwinana automotive centre is attached to Gilmore College. I remember at the graduation ceremony last year the loudest applause was for one of the students who won the award that meant he would get a scholarship to the TAFE program in welding. Everyone was up on their feet, cheering for this young man who was about to embark on competing in the world competition for welding, and I think that local Kwinana resident actually took out the award. The automotive training facility at Kwinana has a huge workshop filled with donated cars. It also has a partnership with some of the local car manufacturers, so it has stuff available all the time for students to work on. I thank Keith Murray for the tour of that set-up. Again, it is a relatively new building; it has been there for only a few years. It is really well looked after, and it provides the best experience for students.

I now turn, lastly, to Rockingham TAFE. The campus almost has the feel of a university campus. It is so big that I did not get to see everything, so I am planning to go back. While I was there, I was able to go through the workshop where the students are learning how to make metalwork parts. The workshop has amazing machinery, thanks to the investment of this government. It has state-of-the-art machines that can produce parts in a matter of minutes just by pushing a button. The game has changed a bit with the advances in technology. Students still have to learn the basics of how to make and maintain the parts, but now they also have to learn how to use these machines that do the job for them.

I have touched on the metropolitan TAFE campuses, so I will not go back to that. Some of my colleagues will touch on the heavy investment that has been made in regional TAFE campuses. I think that more than half of the financial investment this government has made in TAFE has gone towards regional TAFEs.

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Hon Darren West: Hear, hear!

Hon STEPHEN PRATT: I now want to revisit this government's capital works program, which is the biggest in history, and touch on some projects that have taken place. I am a bit biased, because I will touch on the ones in the South Metropolitan Region. The government has invested \$16.87 million in Mandurah TAFE and \$39 million in Armadale TAFE. It has also invested \$4 million in the maritime training vessel in Geraldton, and also the one at Fremantle, which I was lucky enough to go on. I am going to run out of time. This is an example of the heavy investment that this government has made. It is also testament to the work that Minister Ellery has done in this area.

HON PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [11.47 am]: I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by Hon Stephen Pratt. I would like to thank Hon Stephen Pratt for moving such an important and positive motion in the house today. I would also like to acknowledge his fine contribution, and in particular his commitment to TAFE and training centres in the metropolitan area. I also acknowledge the Leader of the House, Hon Sue Ellery, who is here with us, for her contributions and strong leadership and performance in the education and training portfolios.

I will be speaking briefly on both limbs of the motion today. TAFE and training play an important role in creating employment opportunities and a skilled workforce, and this motion recognises this. Furthermore, the McGowan government's significant investment in training, with the largest TAFE capital works program in this state's history, and in providing a range of supports for employees, has resulted in the highest ever level of TAFE enrolments. We in regional Western Australia have benefited from this as well, and I will reflect upon that later in my contribution.

The McGowan government has been investing heavily in both training and TAFE through successive state budgets. The 2022–23 state budget also outlines a large investment in this area. As we all discovered when the McGowan government came into office in 2017, the TAFE system was in pretty bad shape. However, our government has been spending the last five to six years trying to repair the damage and upgrade TAFE facilities, invest in equipment, and get the enrolment numbers back up. Enrolments and participation were down, so in 2017 our government acted and froze TAFE fees. It followed this up in 2021 by slashing TAFE fees to make training both affordable and accessible for all Western Australians, including those in the regions and in my electorate of Mining and Pastoral Region.

Our government recognises the importance of training to build a skilled workforce and retain people in regional areas. Our government has ensured that our investments in training extend from the metro area and into the regions. We are supporting employees to take on more apprentices and there are a number of programs, including the jobs and skills incentive program. I want to talk about that program in particular, because an allocation of money was put aside for construction following the Wooroloo bushfire and tropical cyclone Seroja. Additional grants were put in place to encourage construction workers in particular to operate in both those areas. We have spoken about Kalbarri a number of times in this house, and this incentive program is helping to attract more construction workers to Kalbarri. I was there recently and a lot of houses have now been rebuilt, which is fantastic.

Hon Stephen Pratt talked about the extensive funding commitment for the capital works program. Half of the money for the capital works program has been allocated to regional areas. I believe there was a commitment of \$229 million for the TAFE capital works program, so half of that money has gone to regional WA, including Roebourne, Kununurra, Broome and South Hedland in my electorate of the Mining and Pastoral Region. Some of those projects are underway. There is a \$48.9 million upgrade to the Pundulmurra campus in the Pilbara. As part of those works, we will be getting some new workshops, new classrooms and specialist training areas, with modern industry-relevant equipment, and I will talk about some of the equipment shortly. This was funded through the Rebuilding our TAFEs plan. Training for a range of in-demand trades and specialist skills areas will be available, including heavy automotive—as members can imagine, a lot of heavy trucks get around in the Pilbara—mobile and fixed plant, which is especially important for the mining industry; engineering; and commercial cookery. Of course, there are a lot of tourism operators in the Mining and Pastoral Region, so we need to train up our chefs. The new upgrade followed extensive consultation with the local community and industries. I know that the chambers of commerce in particular across the Mining and Pastoral Region were consulted.

Works have also started on the \$6 million health and hospitality training centre at the North Regional TAFE Kununurra campus. Again, that will support tourism and hospitality. Training spaces have been set up for nursing and aged and disability care. That is great; we might be able to get some more aged-care workers and nurses in the north west. Through the upgrade, North Regional TAFE will also be able to deliver National Disability Insurance Scheme training in Kununurra, which is also quite important. An amount of \$7.9 million has been allocated for a new classroom block at the Minurmarghali Mia campus in Roebourne to provide expanded classroom space and to upgrade existing facilities, which I believe is underway. There is \$111.8 million for a hospitality and student services centre at the North Regional TAFE Broome campus to expand training to support Broome's extensive hospitality and tourism industry, with a focus on supporting Aboriginal businesses. Again, Broome is quite a popular tourist destination and it is great that we have been able to train more staff to support it.

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I want to talk about some of the equipment. We talk a lot in this place about hydrogen and things like that. As part of the \$25 million modern equipment initiative, a number of new pieces of equipment were bought for our Pilbara TAFEs, including some hydrogen training systems valued at \$132 000, some renewable energy training equipment, some fuel cell training equipment and some solar power systems. It is great to see that we are modernising the equipment in our TAFEs in the north west.

While I was doing my research, I came across the announcement that a new managing director was recently appointed to North Regional TAFE. Helen Smart took up the position as managing director of North Regional TAFE on 8 August. I want to point out in particular that we have five women managing directors in our TAFE network, and I think that is really great. It just goes to show our government's commitment to getting more women in leadership roles.

I want to talk about the regional skills summits. In the middle of last year, the government held a skills summit in Perth, which was well attended. The government made a commitment at that skills summit to hold regional skills summits. I had the privilege of attending five of those regional skills summits, in Kalgoorlie, Karratha, Port Hedland, Broome and Kununurra. I attended the summits in the Kimberley with Hon Rosie Sahanna and Divina D'Anna, the member for Kimberley. I attended the summits in the Pilbara with Kevin Michel, the member for Pilbara. It was great to sit down with business owners and representatives of not-for-profit organisations, and aged-care and early childhood services to get a better appreciation of the skills deficit and talk about the things our government is putting in place to try to address that.

I thank the McGowan government for supporting the regional skills summits. A lot of positive feedback was received from the businesses that were there on the day. They were really impressed that people were coming to them to talk about what they need to address the skills shortage. Over 40 business leaders attended the summits in the Kimberley and over 60 business leaders attended the summits in the Pilbara. The outcomes from the regional skills summits include a commitment of \$38.4 million to keep TAFE fees low, the introduction of fee caps for a number of courses under the Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative, and \$2.4 million to attract international students to study at TAFE in the regions. We need extra workers in the regions, so we also hope that those students will stay once their studies are completed.

I have only a minute left, but I want to talk about the new jobs and skills centres that opened last month, I believe. A new jobs and skills centre in the Kimberley was officially opened by the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training on 1 August and a new jobs and skills centre in the Pilbara, based at the South Hedland campus, was officially opened on 2 June. Having these centres in the Kimberley and Pilbara is really important because they enable people to live in the regions while they study and train, and then obviously find employment in the regions. Not everybody's family situation enables them to travel down to Perth for training. Some people like to be at home or on country when they undertaking training, so it is great that we have jobs and skills centres up in the north to promote upskilling.

Noting the time, I will finish up. It has been great to have the opportunity to speak on this motion today and talk about some of the investments in TAFE and training in the regions, in particular in the north west. Thank you.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [11.57 am]: I rise to make a few brief comments on behalf of the opposition in response to the motion that has been moved.

Training absolutely plays a critical role in encouraging employment and creating a skilled workforce, which is reflected in part (a) of the motion, and is something I support. Yes, we are seeing for the first time the number of apprenticeship and traineeship commencements increasing after a period of continual decline since 2017. When the McGowan government first came to power back in 2017, some 34 605 people were in training. However, the numbers continued to fall over the next few years. They fell in March 2018 and again in March 2019. The number in training had fallen to 28 825 in March 2020, which was a 17 per cent decrease since 2017. We saw an increase in the number of commencements in 2021 and again in 2022, and that is great. I will put it out there: yes, that is excellent. But given that a number of apprenticeships, for example, take around four years to complete, there is still a long way to go before we alleviate any of the pressure in our system right now. Notwithstanding that, the figures are certainly welcome. I hope that they will continue to increase even further.

Correspondingly, though, I will also say that we need to ensure that we continue to see increases in completions, because we know that people go into training but then might cancel or withdraw. We need to ensure that that also continues in a positive trend.

Hon Sue Ellery: Honourable member, will you take an interjection?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I will not, just because I have limited time. I raise it in a positive sense, minister; that is what we need to ensure.

Hon Sue Ellery: I will say it in my speech.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: That is understood.

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I will also say that although the motion focuses on the reduction of fees and capital improvements to TAFE facilities, which is certainly a very positive move, it perhaps could have lent itself to acknowledging the role of private providers and non-government organisations in addition to TAFE and the important role that they play in supporting training in this state. That is not a criticism of the mover of the motion, but I think that it is important to recognise the other players in the system whenever we talk about training.

I will mention the Motivation Foundation, which is based in my electorate in West Swan and has reached across other parts of the state. I have had a very long and positive association with the foundation over a number of years. I know that the minister has been out there and is also supportive of the Motivation Foundation. The foundation offers a certificate II in civil construction and a certificate II in resources and infrastructure work preparation, which are delivered through onsite training as well as work experience. The foundation's outcomes are exceptional. It has pretty much a 100 per cent graduation rate and a 100 per cent, or thereabouts, employment rate for its graduates. When they finish, graduates either have a job, are about to have a job or are going into further training. The foundation is exceptional.

Notwithstanding all that, the VET sector continues to be held back by a number of issues and barriers. They are not necessarily linked to just this government; a number of them have been longstanding. First and foremost—I do not think the minister would disagree with me—is that the system is still far too complex. When I was the shadow Minister for Education and Training, the biggest issue was the complexity of the system, no matter who I spoke to and in whatever training context. As I said, that is not an issue for just this government. It involves the commonwealth and a whole range of people, but it is far too complex. Also, greater and closer relationships are needed between public and private training providers and industry to ensure that training remains up-to-date, relevant and responsive to industry's needs.

I am reflecting on the *State training plan: 2022–23*. Of the eight priority areas that were identified in the plan, two were in and around the issues of attraction and the value of VET. With my shadow Minister for Youth hat now on, I will say—as I have said before—that the language around VET needs an overhaul and that promoting the value of a vocational pathway must be a priority. Sadly, it has been the case for a long time that a general view—not in all cases, but a general view—remains in the community and continues to permeate that somehow a VET pathway is not as significant and not as valuable as a tertiary pathway. That should not be the case.

When we were in government and Hon Peter Collier was Minister for Education, he introduced a requirement that students either complete a certificate II or take the ATAR pathway. That arose from a review that found that around 5 000 students were leaving high school without any qualification. The certificate II was considered to be a valuable pathway and it was proven to be successful. In 2016, 69.5 per cent of students completed a cert II upon leaving school. That continued to increase and, in 2020, 75.4 per cent of students had completed a cert II. That is a very positive move, but more can be done. I want to reflect on the *State training plan 2022–23*, which states —

Despite so many individuals and employers engaging with the VET system, and indeed dependent on it, VET still battles poor public perceptions and a lack of awareness of the value it brings to individuals, employers and the economy.

The Board encourages the State Government, public and private training providers, and industry to work together to increase the community's understanding and appreciation of the value of training ...

By better advocating for VET, we can shift the narrative to emphasise its many strengths. Training is agile, industry endorsed, and has employment outcomes and earning capacity comparable to university. VET supports career development and professional growth by enabling workers to quickly upskill and by supporting continuous learning to keep up with today's ever evolving technologies and work requirements.

This is the issue —

In particular, it is important that both industry and the school system better acknowledge and promote VET pathways.

A clear message from the Board's work on youth engagement is that more needs to be done to raise awareness and understanding of VET among young people. Young people frequently reported being discouraged from taking a VET pathway at school, with an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) pathway often promoted as the preferred option for students. Students reported experiencing stigma around their choices, with VET viewed as a second-class option to university.

Members, that is not appropriate; it is completely unacceptable. As I said, it is not just an issue for this government; this issue has been around for a very long time. I will certainly support any initiatives that go some way to addressing this issue. Students should not feel that they are second rate because they choose to take a vocational education and training pathway, and that is something that we can all take action on. I encourage the government, through the state plan, to do more in this area.

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HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [12.07 pm]: I, too, rise to support the motion by Hon Stephen Pratt about TAFE. I would like people to know that I am here after coming through TAFE. When I left school, I went to college, but we will not talk about that. When I moved to Australia, having a young child did not really go with the skill set I had in hospitality management. It is very difficult to work until midnight or one o'clock in the morning as a sole parent. I decided to retrain and I went to what was then Swan TAFE, which is now North Metropolitan TAFE in Midland. The first thing I did in 2003 was a certificate III in community services, teachers assistant. The language has now changed for that one. In 2004, I went on and studied a diploma of children's services, now classed as a diploma of early childhood education and care. I was able to do that because the Premier at the time was Dr Geoff Gallop and it was a Labor government. The fee structure at the time meant that as a single parent, I could actually afford to go. I have to say that it was a first-class education. I wholly support the comments of Hon Donna Faragher that going through TAFE is incredibly important and that no-one who takes a vocational pathway should ever be seen as a second-class citizen. We can have as many doctors and lawyers in the world as we like, but when their toilet backs up, a university degree may not assist them.

Everybody has their own different way of learning. We all have multiple intelligences. We are not the same. My brother is a scientist. I love him to pieces, but do not give him a flat pack; he just cannot do it! But he could do a mathematical solution that looks like gobbledegook to me, or some chemistry thing. I say "thing" because I do not have a clue. I am more practical and hands-on. I will not say that my brother is more intellectual; he is a nerd, let us be honest, but he is a loveable nerd. We all have multiple intelligences and different abilities.

Vocational education is a wonderful pathway. Going to TAFE is a wonderful and great thing to do. We know that studies say that the younger generation change their careers, and that is fine. Being able to go to TAFE to do that is a great thing. Unfortunately, under the Barnett government, the fees rose by over 500 per cent. I had young women coming to me at the time who told me that they wanted to work in early childhood but to get a certificate III was going to cost them over \$3 000. That is out of reach for someone who is on a very low wage. For somebody to become an enrolled nurse at that time would have cost over \$8 000. That was putting vocational education out of the financial reach of many in society.

Coming from a United Kingdom background, I was given a grant to go to college. They paid me to go to college. I had no fees and I was given money to survive on while I was there. Again, we will not discuss what I spent the money on, but it was given to me. When I came here and realised that I had to pay for an education, it was actually quite a shock to the system. We are now in a position in which a lot of sectors are struggling to attract qualified staff, and that is partly because of the drought of years when we could not get people to go to TAFE because they could not afford to go. I am really, really pleased to look at the lower fees, local skills course list. Previously, the cost for a diploma of early childhood education and care was over \$10 000, but under the McGowan Labor government the charge for that course is now \$2 800. That is a saving of over \$7 000. That is amazing—over \$7 000! Aged care is another industry that is struggling to get qualified staff. Previously, that course cost nearly \$5 000, but it now costs just over \$1 300. Again, that is a saving of about \$3 500.

Some of the people who migrate to Australia—I am one of those people—arrive here and cannot use their qualifications from overseas. They go into community service and work there while they are upskilling or getting their degrees from other countries recognised here in Australia, so we have a lot of migrants working in aged care, community and early childhood services. How would someone who is new to this country be able to afford \$10 000 or \$5 000 to attend TAFE? Now, under the McGowan Labor government's investment in TAFE, we have people from all over being able to go to TAFE.

TAFE is more than just a pathway to university. Look at me! I went to TAFE and now I am a member of Parliament. Who knew when I went to TAFE, and after wiping children's bottoms and noses, that I would end up standing here, sometimes dealing with the same kind of effluence, but thankfully I no longer have to wipe it away. I actually wore gloves then; I would wear gloves now! It is extremely important that we have here in Parliament a reflection of society—I believe we now have that—with people from different backgrounds, with different educations, who were born in different countries. We are all completely different. But without TAFE, I do not believe that I would be standing here today.

During my research, I also looked up all the free short courses. They are absolutely brilliant. What a way for people to change their career by undergoing one of the free short courses that are offered. Some of the courses really stood out. One was the free course called Operate a Small Business Skill Set. That is great for anyone who is thinking about going into business. Other free courses encourage future small businesses. There is the Integrating Mental Health Practice Skill Set. We talk about mental health on a regular basis. Also on offer are the Family and Domestic Violence Early Intervention Skill Set and the Entry into Working In Agriculture Skill Set. I am sure that the Minister for Regional Development is very keen on that. There are also courses for green jobs, heavy vehicle operators, cybersecurity, civil construction, and on infrastructure. Labor is proactively putting money into many free courses and is encouraging people to plan for and change their future.

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We have a skills shortage now. Do I have direct evidence in front of me to suggest that that is because a whole group of people could not get into TAFE? No, I do not. Anecdotally, would I say that? Yes, I would. We have a great system in place and we are investing in it. That means we are also investing in our youth. The number of apprenticeships is increasing, which is fantastic. Any young student who is thinking of going into TAFE should do it. They do not all have to go to university. We are all different. I commend my colleague Hon Stephen Pratt for moving this amazing motion and I look forward to seeing what else the McGowan government will do in this sector.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training) [12.16 pm]: I appreciate that other members want to speak on this motion, so I will try to not use the whole 10 minutes. Frankly, I could speak for 10 hours about the fantastic work being done in TAFE. I thank Hon Stephen Pratt for moving the motion.

I acknowledge the flexibility and amazing efforts during the last two and a half years of the trainers at TAFE, the TAFE leadership and, in fact, the whole training sector, both publicly funded providers and private providers—so not just TAFE. They have had to adapt again and again. If members think about some of the practical hands-on courses that are taught in our training system, they will realise that it is not as easy as delivering a lecture online, which the universities needed to adapt to. Those providers have had to think outside the square and run classes outside the normal teaching hours. They really have done an amazing job.

I want to touch briefly on a few matters. The first is what we inherited, the second is the results of our investment and the third is some of the work that our TAFE colleges have been doing with industry to meet industries' needs and to be incredibly adaptive and responsive to those needs.

I will not belabour the point, but there is no question that under the former government the training system had been run down and the increases in fees had put TAFE and public training beyond the reach of ordinary Western Australians. That is something the former government needs to be ashamed of. In an interview with Gareth Parker in 2019, Liza Harvey said that the former government increased the cost of the courses, put TAFE out of the reach of people and lost the election. I think she actually acknowledged in that interview that that was a bad decision. Another thing that happened during the previous government was that it had five different ministers for training. It is not unusual to change ministers during the course of government—the former government was in power for eight years—but it is important that each of the ministers who accepts the new portfolio is completely dedicated to it, understands it, works for it and advocates for that portfolio when sitting at the cabinet table. That did not happen. When I first became the minister, the people at the State Training Board said, “You’re the first minister we’ve seen in about five years. The previous ministers didn’t come and talk to us. They didn’t ask us about the things that were important.” As Hon Donna Faragher pointed out, the State Training Board provides advice to government on setting the training plan going forward, but the previous government did not even bother to talk to the board, never mind turn up to the occasional board meeting and engage with it about the issues that industry was feeding into the State Training Board. It was not just a lost opportunity; I think it was worse than that, and so we had a big job to do when we came to government.

I refer to the point that Hon Donna Faragher made about increases in commencements. It is true, there has been a significant increase in commencements. It is also worth noting that completions for apprenticeships and traineeships are trending upwards, with more than 10 300 people completing an apprenticeship or traineeship in 2021–22, which is up 16 per cent from the previous year. Apprenticeships with the most significant completion increases were mechanical fitters, up 71 per cent; automotive electricians, up 70 per cent; heavy mobile mechanics, up 46 per cent; and heavy welding fabricators, up 42 per cent. Apprenticeship completions across all courses have increased by 26 per cent. Therefore, the member is right to point out that completions are the important part of that equation, and they are up as a direct result of a record investment. There has never been as much money invested in the training sector as there has been in the past five years, and it is one of the achievements of the McGowan government that I am enormously proud of.

This issue is about not only making TAFE and training more accessible by reducing fees and having fee-free courses, but also having the infrastructure, equipment and training for the trainers. The McGowan government has significantly invested in all those things, and, as a consequence, during COVID, the training sector became even more critical than it is in a normal economic cycle. Because TAFE was able to adapt really quickly, it put in place some of those measures that Hon Lorna Harper talked about around the skill sets, such as short courses and recovery skill sets. Members will recall that at the start of the pandemic, we were told that there would be millions of people unemployed, and hundreds and thousands of people would die. Before the federal government introduced measures to support people who had been displaced as a result of the pandemic, we saw images of thousands of people queuing up outside Centrelink as the tourism and hospitality industries—millions of small and large businesses shut down. I am thinking about the number of Qantas and other pilots who lost their jobs. As a consequence of that, training became incredibly important to help people re-skill so they could quickly move jobs.

I can give members some figures around the recovery skill sets, such as swimming and water safety teaching, hospitality service, heavy vehicle driving operations, infrastructure ready and work safety in construction. This

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year some 1 800 students were involved in those skill sets, and we can multiply that figure for the last two years. These were critical COVID-19 skill sets, such as infection control, COVID-19 direct care, operating a small business, COVID-19 collection, infection control and food handling. Every single business needed to immediately adapt to infection control. It did not matter what their business was; they needed the skills to do that, and TAFE provided that training in the hundreds. In the lower fees, local skills cohort of courses, some 71 000 enrolments in those targeted courses were delivered across Western Australia.

One of the things I am also incredibly proud of is how TAFE has been able to work with industry to meet its needs. Whether it is working with agriculture, transport, defence—a huge amount of work is being done with defence, particularly out of the South Metropolitan TAFE—hospitality, aged care or child care, TAFE managing directors and their leadership teams sit down with industries, ask them what they need. They work together to create or adapt courses to deliver.

I want to thank Hon Stephen Pratt for moving the motion. I could talk for hours on this issue, but I will not. I want to place on record my thanks to all the staff and leadership of TAFE colleges across Western Australia who have done, and continue to do, an outstanding job.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [12.24 pm]: I would like to thank and commend Hon Stephen Pratt for bringing this admirable motion to the house. I have listened to a lot of the contributions, and I agree with all of them, but they mostly—apart from the contribution from Hon Lorna Harper—gave the higher level view of TAFE. I would like to give a lower level view from the individuals and the families.

It starts, I think, with the idea of schooling. Schools are not for everyone. I have two very intelligent children, and one of them has just finished school and did terribly. The reason for that is not lack of intelligence at all; the creativity was there, but there was nothing in the school that interested him. I look back at my schooling, and I got reasonable marks, but I make no use of trigonometry these days. Geometry is entirely unimportant. I could not tell you—apart from the current monarch and his mother—who the monarchs of the UK were.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: What?

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Well, maybe one or two! But that knowledge is totally useless. It serves only as a stepping stone to get to the next stage of education so that people can move on. I am immensely proud of my son, but he sat in school and suffered because he was just in the wrong place. Mind you, young people are like that, young men in particular; their brains finish growing at 23 or 25, so they have a very difficult time indeed. Their emotions are flying, their hormones are going, and life can be just hell. He left school demoralised, demotivated, uncertain about where to go and beaten down. So I said to him, “Do you know, no-one cares about your ATAR score after you leave school—no-one. The question is: what do you want to do, and how do you want to get there?” He went to a job centre and they interviewed him and asked, “What do you like?” They do not ask that when people are going to school. He said, “This is what I like”, and they said, “These are the jobs that are available, and this is what the chances are of you finding a job in those various areas.” He said, “Oh!”, so he chose a course that he liked and that had good chances of further development.

He then went to North Metropolitan TAFE and I have to say, it has been life-saving, because he found himself in a cohort that included both people fresh from school and people retraining or changing their direction. He was able to speak to people who are a bit more mature than him, with more life experience, who told him their stories, which then allowed him to say, “I am just like everybody else. We’re all going down the same path, we’re all going to go down different paths in the future, and it is all good.” He is going through a course and doing very well in that course. It has put in his sights that the next thing he is going to do is go on to higher learning. We are actually going to be sending him abroad for life experiences and to get an education using his current education through TAFE as a stepping stone. He would not have had that were TAFE not available to him. This process has given a young man self-confidence and pride in himself, and has provided him with a stepping stone to the future. He will be able to contribute to society as a well-developed, well-formed, highly intelligent creative young man, of which we need untold numbers in our society.

That is a personal example, multiplied thousandfold I believe, thanks to the skills that have been developed in TAFE from the higher level, creating that from the lower level, and making use of it. I thank Hon Stephen Pratt for his motion and, indeed, thank all who have contributed.

HON STEPHEN PRATT (South Metropolitan) [12.30 pm] — in reply: I take this opportunity to close off the debate and thank members for their contribution. I thank Hon Peter Foster for his comments about our investment in the regions and the impact that that is having in both his electorate and the rest of Western Australia. I thank Hon Donna Faragher for her comments, which were mostly supportive in nature. I tend to agree that attention needs to be given to completions because if they are over-incentivised, we could be faced with another challenge, although that would not be the worst thing to be confronted with. I thank Hon Lorna Harper for sharing her personal

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experience of having to retrain and change her career while she had young kids and finding that she could not work nights because she had to be home looking after them. I thank the Minister for Education and Training. One can see the pride that Minister Ellery, who is on urgent parliamentary business, has in the work that she has undertaken and her track record in this area of education. It is one she should be very proud of. I also thank Hon Dr Brian Walker for sharing a personal family experience. That is something that I was not able to do because I have not experienced the TAFE system until now. I concur that people learn in different ways and from what I have seen, and what I am in awe of, the set-ups at TAFE campuses give people real-world training so that when they transition from TAFE to any area of the workforce, they deal with the same infrastructure and have the skill set needed to operate in that workforce. That is highly valuable. I am extremely proud to stand here today as a member of the McGowan government, which has made a strong investment in and has a track record in TAFE training.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.