

UNIVERSITY COURSES — EARLY OFFERS

562. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Education:

I refer to the minister's correspondence to year 12 students at the start of the school year, in which he urged them not to be distracted by early university offers.

- (1) What is the status of early offers across Western Australian universities for education streams?
- (2) How do these dates of early offers compare with those in other states to avoid predatory offers from eastern states universities?

Dr A.D. BUTI replied:

- (1)–(2) That is a very important question; I thank the member for asking it. Yes, I did write to every single year 12 student at the beginning of this year because of the alarming reduction in the number of students who are doing ATAR in Western Australia. ATAR is not the only pathway and I am not saying that it should be the only pathway. I was trying to communicate that students who have the capacity and ability to do ATAR should be doing ATAR generally, although sometimes that might not be the case. What we were finding was that not only discouragement by particular schools but also the fact that universities were offering unconditional early offers was affecting the motivation of people to remain on the ATAR pathway. As a result of that, I set up a post-secondary pathway inquiry led by a number of esteemed educationalists, and they will be reporting to me next year. The inquiry is looking at what the ATAR pathway should be; whether that pathway needs to change; what a non-ATAR pathway should look like and how rigorous it should be; and how those pathways should prepare students for university, TAFE or whatever.

The member asked a very good question about the current status of unconditional offers. I have had meetings with the vice-chancellors in which I made it quite clear that I do not approve of unconditional offers. I am not sure what the member was like, but if I knew, as a 16 or 17-year-old, that I could get into university without worrying about what my exam results would be, I would not have been studying two or three hours a night to ensure that I got a good aggregate score in my TEE or TAE—I cannot remember what it was now—to get into my choice of study. I cannot actually answer the member's question because it is difficult to get this information out of the universities. They are telling me that they are not doing unconditional offers, but I am hearing otherwise from other people. I am still seeking that information. I am meeting with the vice-chancellors on Monday and will reiterate the point that I want them to provide me with clear data and evidence about their situation.

The member raised an important issue about the eastern states, because there is an issue with our students being enticed to go over east. I know that New South Wales and Victoria have made noises that their universities are not engaging in unconditional offers, but the evidence is still a bit sketchy on that. These issues remain in my focus. I will continue to seek information from the universities.