

TAFE — FEE-FREE COURSES

**15. Dr J. KRISHNAN to the Minister for Training and Workforce Development:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's significant investment in affordable training, which has seen strong demand to study fee-free courses in 2024. Can the minister outline for the house how this investment is allowing Western Australians to study for a diploma of nursing for free; and can the minister advise how this free course compares with the cost increases that were delivered by the Liberals and the Nationals WA?

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

I am very pleased to address these issues. Not only is the state government's commitment to vocational training—particularly through subsidised and, importantly, free courses—providing opportunities for students, young people and anyone wanting to improve their skills, it is also making a huge impact on the industries and sectors that we know need a supply of skilled labour. That is nowhere more the case than in our health system.

I was very pleased recently to be joined by the Premier, the Minister for Health and the members for Bateman and Willagee. As august as that company was, we were even more pleased to be with a group of students who were studying for their diploma in nursing. They will end up being qualified as enrolled nurses in our health system, and that will provide huge opportunities. There was a wide range of students there. They were engaged in their third semester of study, so they will be finishing up at the end of this semester, and they were surrounded by world-class facilities. It was great to see that environment and be able to meet some of those students.

As the member implied in his question, it is particularly exciting when we start to talk to these students and understand exactly what benefit they are getting from our fee-free program. Under the previous Liberal–National government those students would have had to pay more than \$10 000 for their qualifications—\$10 000! I do not know whether the shadow Minister for Health is paying attention to this—I can see that she is talking to one of her colleagues, so I am not sure that she is—but being asked to pay \$10 000 for a diploma to qualify as an enrolled nurse is an absolute outrage. We did not just pay the price for that when members opposite were in government; we will be paying the price of the increase in fees that the previous government added to our TAFE system for years to come, because there is a pipeline effect. It creates a disincentive in the market for people to participate in training. We do not just have a blockage straightaway; we have a blockage when we do not have people qualifying or enrolling in apprenticeships, and three or four years later, we have a lack of tradespeople. That is the real damage that was caused: not just immediate damage, but damage for many years after.

It was also a real pleasure during that visit for me, the Premier, the Minister for Health and the local members who were there to meet some of the lecturers. The lecturers I talked to that day are also practicing nurses. I met someone who was a nurse in ICU; I met someone who was a practising nurse in surgery; I met a practising midwife. They practice as well as lecture, so they do both those jobs. That means that our TAFE students are being taught by people with real-life experience. They work in hospitals day in, day out and are able to impart their experience and communicate their enthusiasm for their work to those students. It was a very, very positive interaction, and I am proud of it. As I said, under the former Liberal–National government, it cost more than \$10 000 to complete that course. Under the previous government, if a person wanted to do a Diploma of Anaesthetic Technology and Practice, it would have cost them \$8 000; a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education would have cost \$7 000; and a certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice would have cost \$6 000. Under this government, all those courses are free—thanks to not only the state government, but also our positive and cooperative relationship with our federal counterparts. We are grateful for the new five-year agreement with the Albanese government. I am proud of the work we are doing on fee relief and infrastructure upgrades, both the physical infrastructure and new equipment. It is good for students, good for industry and good for Western Australia.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Vasse with the last question.