

MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION — PERFORMANCE

Motion

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [4.00 pm]: I rise today to bring up an issue that really concerns us, and I move —

That this house condemns the Minister for International Education's failure to protect the \$2 billion international education sector, placing at risk the welfare of students and more than 12 000 jobs whilst tarnishing the state's reputation.

I must say this is of real concern to the opposition. It goes to the theme of this current government of chaos and confusion and the theme that I have been talking about for the last year, which is "cut first, consult later". What the Labor government has done to the international student sector exemplifies it perfectly. As I did the other day, I congratulate the new Minister for International Education; it is the first appointment by the McGowan government to this portfolio. I wonder whether the Premier has done that to take the heat off himself because of the confusing messaging we have seen in the sector. The Premier and the Minister for Education and Training are to blame for that, but they have handballed it to the new Minister for International Education. He is now left to mop up the Premier's mess. That is my prelude.

I want to give some background to the international student sector and how important it is to not only Western Australia but also the whole of Australia. I think China is a perfect example; ultimately, 39 per cent of our students from China have remained outside Australia since the beginning of COVID. Some of the figures I want to give are from September 2020, which relate to national international student facts. Firstly, the international education sector is worth \$39 billion to the Australian economy. That is the fourth largest export after iron ore, coal and natural gas. Australia is third, behind the US and the United Kingdom, in attracting international students. International education supports 259 100 Australian jobs and the estimated revenue loss over 2020 was \$3.1 billion to \$4.8 billion. It was estimated to be \$16 billion over four years. There are 21 000 university jobs at risk. There were 1.4 million domestic and overseas students in Australia's 39 universities and of those 412 435 are international students, approximately 29 per cent. In September 2020, 87 000 or 22 per cent of students remained outside Australia. During the second half of the year, around 84 000 new and first year commencing international students, or 45 per cent of new international students, were due to commence their study in the second half. I think that sums up the importance of the international student sector to not only Western Australia but also Australia.

I would like to give some background if I could. We saw much fanfare back on 10 November 2021, when we were in our last sitting weeks and the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training, Hon Sue Ellery, met with the vice-chancellors from the university sector upstairs from the chamber. Basically, they gave the reassurance that it would be business as usual in semester 1, 2022. The minister said she did not see any reason why international students would not return as they are enrolled now and universities want them back on campus. She said that they have visas and are waiting for flights. Unfortunately, the minister was sadly mistaken and now the sector that is worth more than \$2 billion and supports up to 10 000 jobs is trying to come to terms with the recent events.

From a survey conducted by the leading international education provider Navitas, over the past two years, of 1 000 agents from 70 countries, it was found that Australia had lost whatever reputational advantages it enjoyed during COVID-19 and, overwhelmingly, agents were recommending that students travel and commence studies in the UK, the United States and Canada. In contrast, a sizable proportion of agents are recommending that students considering studying in Australia consider an alternative country. Unfortunately, that is Australia; Western Australia is a subset of that and we have become renowned for our propensity to shut the border. The Premier, as we have seen, has only one tool in the toolbox and he has used it with little thought to the consequences. That really sums it up.

The Premier makes announcements. We all acknowledge that we have been kept safe and strong. But we have come the point at which the Premier has failed to acknowledge that, over the last couple of months, the mixed messaging and the confusion has caused a massive amount of reputational damage to our international student sector. Unfortunately, Western Australia will suffer at the hands of this government and this Premier more than any other state. I hope it does not happen, but I think it will. As I said, the Premier seemed to have only this one tool in the toolbox and the constant bad news media conferences are quite stressful for many people in the community. The Premier is operating on fear and polling. We have seen it recently. The *modus operandi* of the government is to work on the fear factor. In the polling, the Premier's approval rating has dropped to 64 per cent. Every question time he gets members of his party to ask questions to try to justify his decision on 20 January. His backflip on 20 January threw the international student sector into chaos. He spent the last three or four question times getting Dorothy Dixers from Labor members of Parliament to try to make himself feel better and to try to justify that decision. It is not going well. The people of WA can see through it. I remember that I was at a meeting that night with eight or 10 people and there it was: the Premier came on at 7.30 pm and immediately we knew what was going to happen. The people at that meeting could not believe it. That is where the lack of trust has come in. The night of 20 January was the

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night that the people of WA lost trust. I can assure members that out in the suburbs, people are talking about it and they are not happy.

It is having a damaging effect on many sectors of our community, no more so than our international student sector. Overseas students were getting geared up for 5 February, with their flights booked and their accommodation ready, and, of course, our universities, residential colleges and the like were ready to go, but the Premier pulled the rug out from underneath them. What I am worried about as much as anything is the mental health of those students, as many of them were stranded around the world with not a lot of money. Their flights were booked, their accommodation was organised, they were enrolled in courses and they were ready to go, but they were left stranded by this Premier. I do not think we can underestimate the damage that that may do to our sector.

I refer to an article by Aja Styles on 2 February 2022 in which this comment is made —

“It has obviously put WA at a disadvantage compared to other Australian states in the international education sector.

It also has a quote from a woman who spoke on condition of anonymity. She said that she was unable to complete two out of four units in her second semester because those labs needed to be face to face. The article states —

“I still want to go to UWA because in the future I would like to live in Australia and UWA is a great university to study,” she said before the latest change to border rules.

She looked forward to having a normal student life, meeting people, working, visiting Perth, enjoy a face-to-face life instead of an online life.

UWA has a total of 4180 international students, of whom 51 per cent are in Australia, while 49 per cent remain offshore.

A UWA spokesperson was quoted in that article as saying that it was a dynamic situation. That is probably a pretty diplomatic comment.

Murdoch University expected 1 200 to 1 500 international students to arrive throughout 2022, with the largest intake likely in semester 2, so we are now seeing a transference to semester 2. Of those students, 300 were studying offshore. Of course, those universities have also had to undertake sharp measures, including reducing the number of staff, changing academic positions, and teaching in light of their falling finances with the border shut. Unfortunately, Curtin University and the University of Notre Dame Australia had to have rounds of redundancies to cut their salary expenses. As we know, there is no other way. When the business model has been messed up by the backflip of this state government, changes have to be made and those institutions have to readapt. That is an unfortunate by-product of what has happened here.

Moving on, it was a little optimistic at best for the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training to announce that WA was safe and that international students should plan for the opening of semester 1, because at the end of last year, just under 7 000 international students who were studying in WA remained outside the country. That gives members an idea of the number of students who have potentially been stranded overseas. At the time, the WA government was expecting up to 7 000 students to return to WA to study and the minister has said that, as at 15 February, just under 1 000 had made their way into WA.

In November last year, Curtin University vice-chancellor Professor Hayne was circumspect in her outlook for this year and was hoping that by January, the university would have clarity about when WA would open up for international students. I can imagine how Professor Hayne would have been feeling when that press conference was held at 7.30 pm on Thursday, 20 January for the announcement of the backflip on the border rules. The people at the meeting that I was at were incredulous. They could not believe that the Premier was backflipping on that date without any health advice or supporting documentation. It was just that things were not going well over east and that was his decision. I think that was the other part of it. People would not have minded if there was some backup advice or documentation, health advice or the like, but all we got was the Premier throwing it back out there: “We’re going to transfer this date somewhere down the road. We don’t know when the opening date will be, but you need to know that I have to change the date and that is the number one thing.” That was the real disappointment. There was no backup information. We just have to take the word of the Premier because he has kept us safe and strong.

We have found that, without backup advice, a lot of these announcements have other implications for many sectors, whether it is the international education sector, the tourism sector or the business sector, and families who have been stranded on the other side of Australia or internationally. They have an effect on the lives of thousands and thousands of people, and that is what the Premier underestimated. He underestimated how many people would be stranded overseas. The Australian Nursing Federation supported the Premier because it wanted to get the hospital system up to scratch. As the member for Vasse has pointed out repeatedly, this government has had two years to get the health system up to scratch. The Premier is out there saying, “We’ve got a \$5.6 billion surplus; this is great.”

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The state government has had two years to get the health system up and running as well as it can, and that was not helpful. The nurses' union was supportive. It was one of the only sectors that were supportive of the Premier's backflip.

The Premier has been trusted by the community of WA for two years. We saw the original polling. We saw the election result in March last year. There were no two ways about it, and we acknowledge that. The people of WA put their faith in the Premier. But this was a critical point in time and we know now that there was no health advice to back up the Premier's statement. He just thought that he could make another arbitrary statement and change the date with nothing else proposed for the future. I think he underestimated the damage that that backflip would do. The community has trusted the Premier throughout the last two years, but international students and our university sector were collateral damage, and we cannot underestimate that. If I can, I would like to refer to an article by Josh Zimmerman of Thursday, 3 February. It refers to Curtin Student Guild at Curtin University, Western Australia's largest university. It states —

A guild ... has called on the McGowan Government to re-open the State's borders to international students.

The Curtin Student Guild said some overseas students had already paid for two years' worth of tuition but been forced to learn online for that entire period.

International Student Committee President Sofia Gonzalez Torres said some of those students now needed to complete work experience, which could only occur if they were allowed into WA.

“Some of these placements are for degrees in health, such as nursing. We have students who can help alleviate the worker shortage in WA,” Ms Gonzalez Torres said.

“The value of a Western Australian education means so much to International students that for the past two years they had paid full international fees and studied online from their home country.

“The time differences alone has meant that some students have had to participate in classes in the early hours of the morning or very late at night.”

We can see how important this was to our international students if we go by the words of the president of the student guild at Curtin University.

I would like to take members along a time line because that will allow me to clearly demonstrate the confusing, chaotic messaging and the backflips that have occurred on this matter. On 25 January, after the Premier realised that problems were afoot with his backflip of 20 January, the Returning Students Directions (No 2) was released. This meant that a returning student could enter Western Australia if they were fully vaccinated, could quarantine for 14 days in a suitable premise located within 200 kilometres of the point of entry into WA and they had G2G approval. Straightaway that is another thing that I would like to mention. I still cannot work out this 200-kilometre rule. If a person has a farmhouse or similar located 250 kilometres from Perth, why is that not a safe place in which to isolate? We can talk about that another day, but that is the sort of issue that people question.

On the next day, 26 January, the WA government issued the COVID Transition (Border Requirements) Directions that said that an approved traveller could enter if they were enrolled in a school or university. Those directions came into effect on 5 February 2022. On 28 January, two days later, the government released the COVID Transition (Border Requirements) Amendment Directions (No 1) that amended the directions of two days prior. That occurred on the Saturday night of 28 January. I have seen that COVID direction and the Minister for Police signed it on the Saturday night, but the government failed to tell the universities until two or three days later. They found out, I think, on either the Monday night or the Tuesday morning that their international students had to arrive by midnight on 4 February and come through another city such as Sydney or the like, but not Perth. Can you imagine, Deputy Speaker, what it would be like if you were an international student in Hong Kong, Japan or wherever else it might be, and you had three different messages delivered by this government in the space of four days? Members of Parliament here with electorate staff to advise them are having enough trouble as it is to decipher the directions from this government. Members can imagine what it would be like if they were a university student with an airfare booked and ready to go and they were getting this sort of messaging. All I can say is that it is confusing and chaotic and we have an ever-changing rule book.

I want to mention the universities' residential colleges because they have been left reeling as well. They have had to undergo a very difficult period in which students had been lined up and dates were set, then all of a sudden, they were getting a trickle of students in that week. If the students did not arrive by midnight on 4 February, they would not be allowed in. Then we had the latest direction. Those colleges have had to quarantine students who have been trickling in at different rates. I have interacted with several residential colleges and they are doing it tough. They are operating under very difficult circumstances, and it will continue for quite some time; there is no doubt about that, and now they have the 3 March date approaching as well.

Yesterday, our new Minister for International Education released a media statement that states —

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“International students are an important part of our community and we want to make them feel welcome.

That is great, but I would not have thought so from the government’s recent treatment of our international students and the international education sector. We have the safe transition industry support package, the student quarantine support program, the industry support fund and \$2 million for a university services for students support program. They have all come in at the last minute, but I can assure members, they are not going to make up for the reputational damage that has occurred. The Minister for International Education has come in with that package, but I am afraid that some of the damage has been done.

I have received feedback from the vice-chancellors and they are very worried about the mental health implications. They are very worried about those students who are stranded around the world and do not know their outcome or fate, and in certain cases they have no money. The universities are the ones that will have to repair a lot of the damage created by the uncertainty of this government. I certainly support these support packages; I have no problem with them, but it is too little, too late as far as I am concerned.

We now have an international student travel portal to which international students can go for information. The minister’s media statement says that the portal will give them clear and easily accessible information. It would have been nice to have that clear and easily accessible information about four to six weeks ago, and not three or four backflips in the space of seven or eight days. I would like to quote from a couple of articles dated early December 2021. The first states —

CCIWA has welcomed today’s State Government announcement of a ... “reconnect WA” package to re-engage WA with the international market for workers, tourists and students.

The Premier’s media statement announcing the package states —

The comprehensive package complements WA’s Safe Transition Plan, and ensures businesses and industries have the competitive edge when WA welcomes back vaccinated travellers from overseas and jurisdictions with COVID-19.

Once again, the sector relied on the Premier’s word, and the Premier failed them. An investment of \$65 million was put towards the marketing campaign to promote WA as safe and full of opportunity for tourists, skilled workers and international students. That needs to be scrutinised because that was put out there in December when people believed that we were going to open, as announced on 5 February. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry supported it. It said it was a positive message, and it would be great for everyone who wanted to come into WA. Unfortunately, it was let down. As I said, students stranded around the world were let down.

The Minister for International Education made a statement about plans for returning students in this place yesterday, 22 February. The first semester for universities starts on Monday. That is three working days away. I believe that the government has had plenty of time to prepare. We have had a mixture of backflips and then a media release three working days before the first semester. We had a meeting upstairs in November last year with the minister, Hon Sue Ellery, and the Premier saying everything was going to be great and semester 1 would be happening.

I turn to the impact of that decision. I believe that we will not know the whole story of how many people were affected for many years, and we will not know the financial and emotional toll that this has had on many people who have been caught up in the policy spiral that this government thinks is good leadership. Now it looks as though many organisations that rely on international students will be looking towards semester 2 for stability in those numbers. I am now worried that we have lost students to other states and other countries. I am worried about the damage that has been done.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Member, I need to inform you that this motion will probably take all of the session as we have a number of members who wish to speak.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will be finishing very shortly, minister.

Mr D.A. Templeman: No, I am just letting you know so you can have more than your usual time.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will press on and finish my contribution.

This pipeline has had a dramatic effect on our numbers and it will take three or four years before we see its impact. Our continuing decline in market share in the past 12 months has seen the number of commencements down by 33.3 per cent while enrolments are down by 16.9 per cent. Prior to the pandemic, the market in WA was just beginning to bounce back. After the 2017 decision by this government to remove Perth as a regional area for migration purposes, the minister overturned that. That was another damaging measure that took a couple of years from which to recover. Now we have the next phase.

I would like to point out that the confusing messaging has really caused havoc not only amongst this sector, but also amongst many other sectors. We saw a good example of that in the last few days with the Premier’s bottle shop

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situation. He just dropped that out of nowhere with no health advice. We saw it once again today, with changes to the number of people who may attend gatherings. Apparently, according to the health advice, the latest amendment to the 30-person in-home gatherings directive relates to indoor gatherings, not outdoor gatherings. Now we can have up to 200 people outdoors as long as there is a space for them all under the two square metre rule. Where was that advice delivered from? It was delivered on the Premier's Facebook page this morning. We do not get information first up from the health department; we get it from the Premier's Facebook page. The health advice has not changed; the message has changed. I am talking about the confusing messaging, the chaos that it is creating and the lack of confidence in many sectors.

Finally, I want to talk about the benefits of our international students. They contribute to the broader economy as a major driver of hospitality, property and rental markets, retail and tourism. Some figures calculate that contribution up to \$1 million per student. International students also contribute to the vibrancy of our multicultural sector and underpin the diplomatic and trade ties in our region. The international education sector supports 250 000 Australian jobs and contributes \$40 billion to our economy. International students are critical to WA's post-pandemic economic recovery and the capacity of our universities to continue delivering high quality education and research.

In conclusion, I want to point out once again the consequences of the instability in the messaging for this sector, the frustration, the lack of confidence and the disappointment in this government's attitude towards this critically important sector. I ask our new Minister for International Education what he will do to repair this sector. The Premier is telling us that we are safe but what will the minister do to reassure this sector that we will not have any more changes? What will he do outside of these temporary packages? We are suffering international reputational damage and businesses Australia-wide are suffering reputational damage. I assure the government that when WA businesses send their executives over east, a lot of them will not come back. Once they have the excuse to go to Melbourne or Sydney, they will not be back. What is our new international education minister going to do to restore the sector? What will he do to repair the international reputational damage that we are now seeing and that we will see for three to five years? That is what I want to know.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.37 pm]: I rise to support the worthy motion moved by our shadow Minister for Education and Training, the member for Roe, relating to the international education sector, which states —

This house condemns the Minister for International Education's failure to protect the \$2 billion international education sector, placing at risk the welfare of students and more than 12 000 jobs whilst tarnishing the state's reputation.

As many of us are aware, on 17 December the Premier announced a reshuffle of his cabinet, which created a new portfolio of international education. The McGowan government will probably argue that that was done to elevate international education but most observers assumed it was a demotion for the Minister for Education and Training, given the significant responsibilities that she had and what she was also challenged with during the lead-up to the opening of the WA border.

There is no doubt that there is merit in the creation of an international education portfolio. There is no doubt that there is significant value in putting the spotlight on this sector here in Western Australia. But it requires more than actions such as this; it requires more than an announcement about a dedicated portfolio. We in Western Australia also require that this important sector, which has a flow-on impact on other sectors—in particular, tourism, higher education, many areas of the retail sector and housing, and also from the skills shortage point of view—provides great value as well and that significant importance be given to this important portfolio.

We know that international education is of great importance to the WA economy—the member for Roe articulated and outlined that very well—but let us not forget WA Labor's plan for jobs, which it launched in the lead-up to the 2017 election. It was full of ambitious statements about the international education sector and it highlighted the fact that the sector was vital for the diversification of the WA economy. At that time, international education contributed \$1.3 billion to our economy and around 10 000 jobs. The former government was diversifying the WA economy, and although it was acknowledged that there was some way to go to garner a greater share of that important, valuable and lucrative market, it was a growing sector and industry. That is how the then Labor opposition acted back then; even though the former government was delivering on international education and facilitating growth, Labor talked it down. It tried to create the impression that nothing was happening in the international education sector, when in fact it was making a substantial contribution to the economy and was on a growth trajectory.

Let us look at what Labor said before the 2017 election. Labor's policy before the election stated that WA needed a comprehensive strategy to stem the flow of international students who were bypassing Perth to participate in the Victorian education market. Labor's policy document went on to claim that the economic benefits from international

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education were further-reaching than student fees alone and made a broad contribution to the economy in terms of domestic participation in higher education, job creation, investment in small and medium-sized enterprises, increased tourism, migration to address skills shortages, and government-to-government trade relations. Labor went even further to talk about international education being a new, emerging economy that would bring net benefits to the state in terms of jobs, local tourism, hospitality, retail and research development.

We have known for years the value of international education to the economy. Members opposite thought that they had talked about it enough and that they would fall back on their own rhetoric. Labor talked a lot about the value of international education, but regrettably all we have seen since Labor came to office is that its actions in government—particularly during this pandemic, when it has had an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to international education—have been sadly lacking. Within the very first two weeks of Labor coming into government, we saw, as part of its WA jobs policy, the introduction of two central measures. The first was to remove Perth from the regional sponsored migration scheme, which is a visa program that allows companies that have proven that they cannot fill a vacancy locally to employ someone from overseas; the second was to make changes to the state's skills list. The government reduced the list from 178 jobs down to just 18. Those two policy changes made it increasingly difficult for WA to compete with other states—particularly Queensland, which has 114 jobs on the list, and Tasmania, which has 161.

This had a significant impact on tourism. As we know, in the market for visiting friends and family, one international student equals five visits to WA. A report by London Economics commissioned by the Group of Eight universities revealed that three international students generate a \$1 million inflow to the economy. These students are valuable not only in terms of spend in the economy, but, more broadly, in the tourism sector. We also know that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia was very critical of the changes the government introduced in its first term. Those changes resulted in visitor expenditure in WA dropping by eight per cent, while there were increases in other states—Tasmania had a 32 per cent increase; South Australia, 10 per cent; New South Wales, 16 per cent; and Victoria, 10 per cent. Students were basically bypassing WA and Perth to go and study in other states. Between 2016 and the first quarter of 2018, international student commencements in Western Australia dropped by 18 per cent. There is no doubt that the Premier and the McGowan Labor government undermined the value of the international student sector by implying that they were job fees. That was a reckless decision by the McGowan government, which exacerbated the failings in the tourism sector we saw in the government's first term. It also exacerbated many of the challenges that we still face in terms of skills shortages, including in the portfolio of health. The Premier rushed to remove Perth from the regional migration scheme, and since then we have seen a significant decline in international students; they are bypassing Perth and heading to competing states. The eight per cent drop in international visitors between 2017 and 2018 illustrates the impact that decision had on the WA economy and, in particular, the tourism sector. We know that that is valuable for our universities as well.

I now fast-forward to recent months. It is important to highlight that international education is valuable not only to Western Australia; it is of great value to other states as well. It is our third-largest market nationally. It is significant to the economies of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. Collectively, Australia has a great reputation for higher education, attracting students from all around the globe, and members can understand why, given the quality of the academics and teachers in our higher education sector and across our universities, and also given the lifestyle that we all enjoy here. That means there is great competition within Australia for international students. That competition is not just between universities; it is also between the states. States realise the value of international students, and they do what they can to persuade students to choose a university in their state.

Considering the competition for these students and where we had come from in the very first term of the McGowan government, when incentives for international students were removed, it raises a question about whether the McGowan government's rhetoric from back in 2017 and since has been matched by the actions of the government. Has the government done enough to support our universities by bringing those students back onto our campuses? The Premier talked tough during the pandemic, but the government has held up a detour sign for international students. Remember, the government's policy document said that WA needed a comprehensive strategy to stem the flow of international students currently bypassing Perth to participate in the Victorian education market. That was the commitment that this government made prior to the 2017 election. But what we have seen in the first term and what we are seeing in the government's second term is something that is quite the opposite. The government's policy has been diverting international students, whose preferred destination was Western Australia, to Victoria and other states. Although we have five outstanding universities in WA, the McGowan government has told international students over the past few years to avoid Perth and go to a university in another state. The Premier knew the value of international students to the economy. He has talked about it often, but when it comes to backing up his words with action, he has failed our universities, our international students and our domestic students, who also benefit from the contributions of international students to campus life. He has also failed many businesses, including tourism businesses, that rely on and benefit from international students.

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This Premier stood and watched as people were stopped at the border from seeing loved ones, and made some of the cruellest decisions on compassionate travel. He has stopped people at the border from attending funerals. We have had cases of significant mental health anguish, when parents have been unable to collect the ashes of loved ones who had committed suicide. Therefore, it is little wonder that this Premier has also stopped international students from coming to Perth and is sending them, and the benefits they bring, to universities in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. The Premier is predictable. He will say to us that by stopping the international students, amongst the family and friends he stopped, he was saving lives, but that is simply not the case. We know that COVID-safe travel is possible, and we know that international students are not transient. They are not here for a short stay. They are committing to at least a semester, or most likely a year, to stay, spend and invest as part of their study here in WA. We will hear the rhetoric, the fear and the predictable response from members opposite in response to that. It is fair to say that knowing the students are here for a long time and have demonstrated an ability to pay their way through the fees that they are charged, they could have been allowed in to Western Australia to quarantine for two weeks before the commencement of the academic year. But the McGowan government, as we have heard, had other ideas. It decided to make it as difficult as possible to attract international students to our universities. Every other state put out the red carpet for students to walk into the universities, but when the time finally came for the McGowan government to open our borders to international students, it made it as difficult and as confusing as possible.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: How many different directions did the government issue? First, the government indicated that our borders would reopen on 5 February, and much has been said about the betrayal around that. The government made that announcement last year, allowing international students to plan their travels and for universities to plan for their arrival. But then, on 20 January, the government backflipped. It announced an update to WA's safe transition plan, which included the decision to delay the reopening of the WA border, leaving the plans for international students once again up in the air. The message to those students was to go back to looking at a university over east. Then, on 25 January, the Returning Students Directions (No 2) was signed, making further changes and suggesting students could come to Perth. The direction only added to the confusion for international students, as if they were not confused enough. The government made a further announcement, days later, clarifying that international students were to arrive in Australia after 12.01 am on 5 February 2022 to be able to travel to Western Australia to study at university. The government gave international students a matter of days to travel to the eastern states, requiring them to arrive by 4 February if they wanted to then come to WA to study. It would take a very determined student to want to come into WA rather than stay in the eastern states to study. As if students were not confused enough, another direction was signed on 15 February. That direction removed the paragraph requiring international students to arrive in Australia by 12.01 am on 5 February, meaning all enrolled international students could travel to Western Australia. What a complete and utter mess all of that was.

The member for Roe has touched on some of the comments from the international education sector, but I will quote StudyPerth's interim chief executive, Tara Colyer-Long. She stated —

... the initial decision to keep international students shut out of WA beyond February 5 had “far-reaching impacts both financially and emotionally”.

Another comment from International Education Association of Australia chief executive officer Phil Honeywood states —

“WA's reputation as a welcoming study destination will continue to suffer”. “This has been a complete political shambles,” ... “The victims of these policy backflips are the students as well as education providers who still aren't certain which of their enrolled students will qualify for a semester one start.”

It has been an absolute shambles. What a complete mess! The minister needs to explain why there were so many changes. Why could the government not have just made it easier to facilitate the return to or support the commencement of study for these international students in Western Australia, either directly or via the eastern states, from the start without chopping and changing the rules? Since these changes, the McGowan government has announced the full opening of the borders. Our borders will open fully on 3 March, but this is after universities have commenced their courses of study, compromising the opportunity to have the best possible spread of those valuable international students here in WA. The message is clear: we cannot trust or have faith in what this government says, because there is every chance the McGowan government will change its mind. So much time has been wasted through the ongoing changes because the government could not make up its mind. It could not provide international students with a safe transition to WA. Instead, we saw it go through a process of announcing a decision and then, within days, changing that decision and then changing that decision again.

I cannot imagine what other offices were hearing, but my office was certainly hearing about a great deal of concern amongst international students and their families about the emotional toll that the countless changes to the schedule

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was putting on them. It was just because the students wanted to call Western Australia their home for study. What a cost that has been! This is not good governance. It is not confident decision-making. It is a sign that the government is playing politics with people's lives and does not care about these individuals. This government has done more to support universities in every other state than any in its own. The government has failed to provide leadership on and support for the international higher education sector. It has failed to provide a welcome mat for those coming into WA.

If any international students come to WA after this debacle created by the government, it will be to the credit of the higher education sector in this state. I have touched on that. The member for Roe has been a very strong advocate for our higher education sector and the universities in this state. They have done an outstanding job over what has been a very difficult last few months and the extraordinarily difficult last few years of the first term of the McGowan government. They have been grappling with those original changes the government made that gutted the incentives for international students and saw a lucrative base of students bypass WA and go to other states. More recently, the chopping and changing on decisions by this government has had an impact as well.

The emotional toll this has had on international students who have chosen Western Australia as the place of study is a real concern that has been touched on. It is no small feat for someone from another country and their family to make that decision and investment to go abroad and study somewhere outside their home where they do not know many people and do not have those important social and family networks. We have seen and heard feedback from many students about the anxiety and stress that they have felt about these decisions. They do not understand what the process will be going forward and are unsure whether Western Australia as a place to study is actually welcoming them. The chopping and changing made it clear to these Western Australia-bound students that they were not being welcomed. It is not only my office, but also other offices that have heard that feedback from the international education community. We have heard feedback from individuals and many of the broader advocacy groups that have been supporting students along the way.

As I said, there is a lot of interest in this market. This international student sector is highly valued in WA for a lot of reasons, including that international students provide great diversity to our universities, underpin what universities are able to provide, and all those other flow-on benefits to the WA economy. The decisions that the government made within the first couple of weeks of its first term in office were very damaging. Those hits to visitor expenditure cast a shadow over tourism at that time. They were cruel and had a significant impact. The government removed incentives for international students to come here. It is clear that since then, we have suffered reputational damage. We have suffered reputational damage because this government did not pave the way to ensure COVID-safe travel, including quarantine, for these students to come into Western Australia to study. It did not ensure that they would feel welcome and able to be part of the commencement of the university year this year. That is so important for a student starting out in a new place and for anyone starting university for the first time. It is also very important that we attract these students in the first place and they stop bypassing Perth for other states. We cannot afford to lose any more students or this opportunity. The government has much work to do to improve the reputational damage that it has caused not only in the last couple of months, but also into its second term of government. Much damage has been done. We implore the government to act swiftly to show that the international education portfolio is more than just a name; it is actually a commitment to this important sector, which should be growing in this state as well.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for International Education) [5.07 pm]: I am very pleased to respond to the motion that condemns me as the first Minister for International Education. I am going to take my time to respond, because I think it is important that in this debate we lay to bed a range of issues that the two previous speakers have conveniently forgotten. It is interesting to note that this opposition seems to forget a whole range of things that have occurred in the world and, indeed, in Australia and in Western Australia over the last two years. It is only two years since, of course, the then variant of COVID-19 started to spread through Europe and China and into the United States. It was in only the second week of that March—I remember it very well—that we convened as a government the first State Disaster Council and the cabinet emergency committee to begin to address the impending threat of COVID-19 as it was making its way towards Australia. It had indeed entered Australia through various means, including airport arrivals, cruise ship passengers and others. I am very proud of this government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and I will remain so. I will point out to this opposition and others what has occurred in the last two years that has set us up as a state and as a powerhouse to deal with the Omicron variant that we now face. We do so with the strongest economy in the nation, with job growth continuing to increase, with unemployment rates at record low levels, with businesses in the enviable position of actually seeking employees and with a robust system in which to face this terrible virus.

During this week and in the preceding few weeks, members of the opposition have continued to ask questions about why we would be concerned about death rates. That has been their tone. That is what they have been implying in their questions. That is why the Premier today in question time, and yesterday, asked the Leader of the Opposition, "How many deaths do you want to see? How many deaths are acceptable?" The reality is that the government came

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to this challenge in March last year with a focus on ensuring that we would keep Western Australians as safe as possible. We would do anything we could do within our powers, and with emergency powers, to ensure that we would keep our population as safe as possible. That would include measures that we did not want to put in place, but we knew needed to be put in place in a timely fashion to ensure that the principle of safety of Western Australians was the primary concern. In 2020, other states and territories in Australia were recording huge numbers of virus contacts, viral infections and tragic deaths. It astounds me that anyone would think that a death from coronavirus is just a statistic. It is a tragedy, because behind every single death are families, colleagues and the history of a person's life. The sad rhetoric that we now hear coming from members opposite in the way that they have asked their questions is to simply dismiss measures that have been put in place. They are saying, "Well, it's going to come anyway and we're going to have deaths." The Premier asked the Leader of the Opposition a very true question earlier this week: how many? A tragedy has been unveiled in the eastern states, even with far more repressive lockdowns than we have ever had in the state of Western Australia. The state of Victoria had the world's record number of days in lockdown. Members can criticise Dan Andrews and that government, but they were also focused on trying to save lives and trying to ensure that people were as safe as possible. The variants spread rapidly and, sadly, people passed away. That is a tragedy.

The cautious approach that the Premier has applied throughout this, unswervingly, has been focused on the safety of Western Australians and it has achieved, to this point in time, that principle. Sadly, we have had two deaths, I think it is now, in Western Australia. That is a tragedy in itself but—goodness gracious me—thank goodness it is not in the thousands as it is on the eastern seaboard. If members look at some of the countries around the world, tens and hundreds of thousands of people have died. They are all people and they all have histories and families.

The opposition highlighted in its contributions the closed border that the state of Western Australia has imposed for two years. Let me remind the opposition of this —

An opposition member interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, you did!

Let me remind the opposition of this. When the first variant of coronavirus entered Australia, the international border was closed. It was the federal government that highlighted to many international students and others that they should go home. The rhetoric from many governments in Australia was for Australians to come home. That was the message given to many Australians who were living overseas at the time. International students and other international people living in Australia at the time were encouraged to go home. Members opposite cannot deny that. How long has the international border closure been in place? It has been nearly two years. When members opposite talk about the Western Australian government not allowing international students in over the last two years, they can remind themselves of the fact that the international border is the one that has been closed for nearly two years. The message that the Western Australian government has been highlighting is that we will, of course, allow people to come back into Western Australia when it is safe to do so, and, if necessary, with appropriate measures, including quarantine et cetera. Conveniently, this opposition never mentions that and never refers to it because it lacks an understanding of the circumstances in which this government has been focused on keeping Western Australians safe.

We know that the Premier also, in the lead-up to and in the announcement about 5 February, said that that would be the date unless there was an emergency circumstance. We all know, and we have said it in this place a number of times, that the great challenge that was not known when that decision was made, but then became known in the lead-up to 5 February, was the Omicron variant. The Omicron variant was far more virulent than the other strains of COVID-19. The spread of the virus is also much faster and more virulent. We saw that on the eastern seaboard. This was at a time when we were still working hard to try to lift our vaccination rates. In the lead-up to that time, we knew our vaccination rates were still not at the optimum level we were seeking. That is why a mandated process for getting vaccinated was imposed. It was to lift vaccination rates. With higher vaccination rates, we would, when it was safer to open our border, be at a much higher level of protection, with a higher level of vaccination rates to respond to the inevitability of the Omicron variant spreading through the community.

As has been highlighted, the border will open on 3 March. The Premier has said that. The opposition asked the question the other day and there was a motion. The border will open on 3 March. It was intended to open on 5 February, but things changed that required us to change our course. If members opposite learn anything about this once-in-100-year experience of a major pandemic, it is that nothing is certain—nothing! Because we want to keep the community as safe as possible, our vaccination rates are as high as possible. We now know that Western Australia, member for Roe, has the highest vaccination rates of anywhere in the world for first and second dose vaccinations, and we are now trending very well with the third dose booster.

We know that when we get to 3 March, we will be far better placed than at any other time with our vaccination coverage and protection. That is a great achievement and I am bloody proud of it. Western Australians should be

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proud of it because they have understood, unlike the opposition, why we have done this. Yes, we take a bit of skin. The member talked about polls. Western Australians understand very well why we have done lots of things. They do not always like it, but they understand the principle. They can see that we have done it to improve and enhance the opportunities for us to face the Omicron variant. We know that by the time we open on 3 March, we will be as best placed as we possibly can be. Will it mean that we will not have a spread? Of course, it does not. We know it will happen, but we will be very well placed for that.

The member referred to students whom we have somehow kept out during the intervening period. They would not have been able to return anyway because of the federal government's imposition on the border. For a long time, we have had caps on how many internationals could arrive. Western Australia's cap is now about 530, from memory. By 3 March, it will be none; we will have no cap. Any unvaccinated international arrivals will quarantine, but that is the arrangement that will be in place. Effectively, from around 19 March 2020 to December last year, most of those students could not have entered Australia anyway. Some students were beginning to come back and were mainly entering Australia on the eastern seaboard—Sydney and Melbourne in particular.

In recognition of that, we recognised that that was an important mechanism or means of international students returning to Western Australia. I will go through the package of support and the ongoing discussions that I have had, that the Premier has had and that my office has had with the sector about going forward. The members for Roe and Vasse showed their limited understanding of international students in their speeches, because they referred only to university providers; they are very important and provide the bulk of services to international students, but they are not the only ones. Neither the member for Roe nor the member for Vasse highlighted the importance of other providers that provide vocational education and training. International students attend TAFEs. International students attend English language education providers. International students receive vocational educations. International students are even attached or part of our own secondary and primary school communities as well. All of them are important. We want all of them back. We want more of them to come to Western Australia.

I refer to the time line. I mentioned 5 February. We knew the change from the 5 February opening date, as necessary as it was—I support the Premier's decision absolutely for the reasons I have already outlined—would have ramifications. I had been minister for only two weeks or whatever it was. I met with the vice-chancellors and they were very concerned. No-one dismisses that. Of course they were concerned. I met with the vice-chancellors and I have subsequently met with all the players a number of times, and I will continue to do so. My office is in regular and consistent contact with the sector, as is the department. Why? It is because we recognise the challenges that the delay has caused. We also recognised that we needed to put in place a range of measures to support students and all the providers—not only one, but all of them because they are all important. We know that there are issues around accommodation and financial support. When international students are able to enter Australia again, they will be supported financially. Shortly, I will go through the targeted package.

Who influenced the package? It was the sector. I got really peeved with the member for Roe a couple of weeks ago because the member said I did nothing to talk to the sector. That was absolute rubbish. The fact of the matter is this: we are having ongoing conversations with the sector and its input is assisting government to respond. It is why we have in place a range of measures, and there will be more, to not only bring back those international students to the education suppliers that they seek to return to, but also build more. We want to build this industry—absolutely. It was trending quite well before COVID. Like many other industries, things took a dramatic turn for the worse because of COVID.

I absolutely do not share the member's pessimistic and negative attitude about Western Australia and its reputation to visiting students or indeed visitors of any nature who seek to come to Western Australia. The member has fallen for the trap in opposition of opposing everything and demeaning the state. Opposition members bring down the state at every opportunity they can because they think it will hurt government.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The fact of the matter is it hurts the individual Western Australians and the businesses when the member keeps talking down the place.

As things improve with Omicron—I really hope things improve with Omicron and this pandemic because I sense that communities throughout the world are frustrated and anxious—where, of all the places in the world, would an international student seek to go to get a world-class education with a world-class lifestyle, great culture, great history and great opportunity? They would choose Western Australia. Of course, they would. That is the message that we are sending to international students, and will continue to send into the future. We reckon we have something very special to share. Yes, we have had to do some tough things to protect this population here and to protect businesses, lifestyles and livelihoods, and we think we have achieved that pretty well. Now we want to share it. Of course we do. We know the mutual benefits of a student who might come from Vietnam, India, China, Japan or Indonesia. Wherever they may come from, we know that not only will they have a great experience here

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in Western Australia, studying, living within our communities, experiencing the wonderful opportunities that there are, but also they will give back. Some of them work in hospitality. Some of them work in tourism. Some of them are employed while they are here while others get involved in a range of community things. One of the things I have learnt in this international education gig in the last eight or so weeks that I have been minister is that those students give a lot back. They make us a better place.

I have a dream for my kids. I have four—remember, the Minister for Transport has three. The most productive seats in the house are over there where the member for Nedlands sits. I want our kids to grow up studying and learning from international students. What a great thing; it is one of the greatest opportunities of a multicultural society.

Despite what the doomsayers across there say, the people the Premier referred to as—I think he stole this line from me—those who get up every morning and go to the fruit bowl and grab a big lemon and suck it as hard as they can before they come back in here. That is my line, Premier. You can't steal that one, son; it's my line! Apart from doing that every morning, they are almost proud of the fact that there is this dark cloud that hangs over them. Everywhere they go there is this dark heavy cloud —

Ms R. Saffioti: Must be a rain cloud.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is. It follows them everywhere. All they can talk about is how terrible things are, how bad things are and how awful people are. Those are not the principles and attributes of Western Australians. They are not!

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is right. That little penguin cartoon character.

Let me go through a few of the firsts for Western Australia that I am proud of, particularly in regard to the international education sector. Not only, of course, am I proud to be the first Minister for International Education—apart from looking forward to the extensive travel that will take place—but also the McGowan government is the first state government to develop a strategy for international education. It is titled *Where bright futures begin: International education in Perth, Western Australia 2018–2025*. That was established in 2018. I pay tribute to the Minister for Education and Training in the other place for the work that has been done. I know that the member for Jandakot will make a contribution. He is an example of an international student—a successful person who came to Western Australia and not only built up a very successful business and made a great contribution to his community, but also now represents it proudly in this place, which I think is tremendous. I know that when he speaks shortly he will outline the work he did with the Minister for Education and Training prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, when they went to India and sought to establish strong relationships with the Indian government and Indian communities for Where Bright Futures Begin and to promote Western Australia as a great place to study, learn and live.

We are the first Western Australian government to value the sector and provide it with a designated portfolio and a minister. As the Minister for International Education, I think that is great. It is tremendous. In May 2019, the Premier announced an additional \$4.5 million over three years for StudyPerth. StudyPerth is a very important component of the international education story here in Western Australia. It is a very important organisation that assists in connecting students and promoting Western Australia as the first-choice study destination. As we know, the sector finished 2019, as I said, full of optimism, but because of COVID, the world changed.

The McGowan government continues to invest in the recovery and long-term growth of the sector through a range of measures, including the *Western Australian international education recovery and renewal plan*. That was part of the \$185 million Reconnect WA package. Most significantly, recently, international education initiatives were announced—I will go through those in detail—under the \$77 million safe transition industry support package, which, of course, has been heavily influenced by direct asks by the sector itself. This government will keep on speaking with, talking to, engaging with and ensuring that this sector's interests are addressed and supported because it is working with and supporting those students.

When the border opens on 3 March, it will allow for safe travel into the state for international students. Before the member for Roe leaves the chamber—I know he has to head off—I want to tell him this, because he said that none of them are going to come back; it is all dire. Even under the current arrangements, and before the border opens on 3 March, just under 2 000 international students have already arrived in Western Australia since 20 January. Has he got that? A further 4 321 G2G PASS applications have been granted to both international and domestic students through active engagement with students who are not yet in Australia or on the continent. Members will see that that number shows that they intend to be here as soon as is practicable and possible. That is a total of just over 6 000, but it is going to grow, no doubt about that. We want to promote Western Australia as “the” place to come to study, learn and experience. We want to market this—and we will be—and have started again through constant effort and work by StudyPerth and by liaising with universities and other educational providers. Agents will be an

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important part of this whole question going forward as we build an even greater cohort of students into the future. As I said, I am absolutely confident that we are well placed to do that.

The member for Roe can go now. I know you have to go to an important meeting, even though you have condemned me, you rascal!

I want to talk about the \$77 million safe transition industry support package announced by the Premier on 10 February, which will provide funding of around \$16 million to the international student and education sector. It includes an \$8 million commitment to the student quarantine support program, because we recognise that there is a requirement for seven days' quarantine. That will change after 3 March, as we know. That fund is providing support for accommodation and there will be support for self-quarantine. The program includes a one-off payment of \$2 000 to eligible students who arrive in Perth between 20 January and 2 March, the day before the opening.

Initial registrations of interest continue to be made and are made through support for international education on the government's webpage. I know that the sector—that is, the providers—is very, very effective in ensuring that students are connected to the information that they need. WA universities will also receive through this package a supplementary payment of \$500 a student, which will assist those universities and providers to support students during their quarantine period either on campus or in private accommodation. We know that a number of students have been in hotels or quarantine hotels during their quarantine period. Some are in private rentals or private accommodation. This fund will assist the universities to support them. This addresses the concern—and it is a concern—around mental health. The health and wellbeing of students once they arrive here is of absolute importance. Money has been put aside and provided for that.

The \$2 million university services for student support program acknowledges the role that universities have played in assisting students. Those supports include support for counselling and transport and even care packages. A whole range of support mechanisms have been put in place to support students once they land in WA. But there is more to this because we also recognise, and it is a glaring omission from the opposition in its contributions, the other important elements of the international student sector. We announced and have in place a new industry support fund valued at \$6 million. This is very important because many of the other education providers, including private providers, have suffered a significant financial impost. This industry support fund valued at \$6 million will provide grants of \$50 000 and \$100 000 to assist Western Australian-based small and medium-sized international educational providers impacted by the pandemic. This is in the space specifically for international students, but we also have, as part of the broader Reconnect WA package, a \$185 million package—as I said, a range of initiatives that complement and will benefit directly international students and international education in Western Australia. It includes increased funding for the aviation recovery fund. I have noted with interest, despite some interesting banter from the CEO of Qantas, that lo and behold we have new flights. Jetstar and Qantas have announced —

A member interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Okay, not a direct flight. The opposition thinks that no-one will come here. It thinks that we are bad. It thinks that we have a brand that is not sellable. It, the opposition, is totally wrong, because people are actually very keen to travel again, to experience the world and to experience Western Australia. The Reconnect WA package is focused on ensuring that we have a global marketing campaign to promote the opportunities in Western Australia, and that will include international education. It also provides additional support and funding for the state's overseas trade office network to activate the student pipeline. That work is occurring now and will continue with greater intensity over the next period. It will include the promotion of Western Australia to the international education sector and the support of students in market. Intensive work will be done in market. Those markets have been and are lucrative, they are diverse and they will add value to Western Australia. That work is happening and will continue into the future because it is important.

Additionally, we are expanding the offshore delivery of the WA curriculum. One of the things I learnt very quickly is that the WA curriculum is very highly valued. We have tremendous expertise. Through the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and those other entities, our reputation with regard to curriculum is remarkable. We want to maximise that opportunity and that value. That is a very important commodity.

We believe that through international student attraction, the \$1 500 accommodation subsidy that I mentioned will be provided for up to 5 000 eligible international students to support them in securing accommodation. This is intended to support semester 1 students in 2022. There is also the \$1 500 English language cost bursary. Again, this is direct support that is an intended incentive to attract international students to study at one of our English language schools in Western Australia. We have some tremendous English language schools in Western Australia. Those bursaries will be open soon to eligible students.

On Monday, 21 February this week, we announced the launch of a new one-stop shop to help international students enter Western Australia. The travel portal provides links to students to book the best possible flight deals. If

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students cannot find a suitable flight, they are able to access assistance from a travel agent through the travel portal. We wanted to have a one-stop shop portal that allowed easy access to information for potential international students. The student travel portal was launched on Monday morning, and by Monday night it had had some 9 000 hits with numerous requests for support to book family tickets and make direct bookings. We will keep working on the portal's capacity and delivery.

On 3 March, we will relaunch the StudyPerth welcome desk that welcomes international students as they arrive in Perth. Again, this is a very important measure. When an international student arrives in WA, we want them to be greeted and to know that as soon as they step out of that aeroplane, they are welcomed and supported. We have a package to support them. We have a government that supports them and wants them here, and we have, I think, a willing community that understands that it is good for Western Australia to have students from overseas studying here.

I turn to the StudyPerth crisis relief fund—another fund! For opposition members to say that we have done nothing or are doing nothing is just rubbish, quite frankly, but we are getting used to it from them. As an example, the StudyPerth crisis relief fund that was supported by the McGowan government has had some great feedback. I am going to quote a few students who have been assisted by the crisis relief funding and given some feedback to StudyPerth —

Thank you so much for your help! It's important to us this support because my country doesn't want to help. I'm really happy for this help, you made my next two weeks super good. God bless you and your family.

That is good feedback. I will quote from some more feedback —

I am very grateful for this gesture of goodwill given to me and my family. Indeed, it is one that cannot be forgotten at this critical time engulfed many lives across the globe. From deep down of my heart, I say 'THANK YOU!'

That is good feedback too. I am pleased with that. StudyPerth ran the grants program and received the following feedback from the University of Western Australia, which is pleasing to receive —

International students' overall perceptions of their university experience and study destination are closely linked to engagement in activities that are supportive and enriching. **We have successfully connected many international students, who were experiencing homesickness and felt isolated through activities from the grant we received for our Friendship Friday Project.**

The University of Western Australia

Again, because we recognise that there are issues and concerns around mental health and wellbeing, we have the programs and initiatives such as those that I have highlighted to the house this evening. A range of programs and activities have been delivered to enhance the experience of international students who have stayed in WA. I think that this is really important. For example, they have included Rottnest student days, hikes in the Perth hills and Bickley Valley, movies under the stars, Cabaret Cave yoga—that is an interesting one—a walking tour, a bush food talk through Karrgatup (Kings Park) and a Fremantle day tour. Those activities might sound menial to some but they are important. They help rebuild that reconnection and connection and they help ensure that people feel they are now part of the community in which they are studying and visiting. That is tremendous.

I could go through the other events that have been held. They include a range of cultural and recreational pursuits and sport engaging international students. They will continue because we want to see reconnection and the capacity to continue to build the sector.

There have been lots of comments from students that I think are important but I want to share one from an international student from Colombia. It refers to the connectivity with StudyPerth and how people are welcomed and connected before they arrive and as soon as they arrive. To know that when students land, they feel safe, protected and part of the place is welcoming and the support for them is really critical and important. This young Colombian student said —

I wasn't sure whether to go back to Colombia or not, as it gets lonely here sometimes and I really miss my family. However, seeing the effort my school and the WA industry bodies are making to help us feel 'at home' and to support us has convinced me to stay and complete my course. I am also considering enrolling in a Bachelor of Communication degree next year to further my qualifications while I am here.

Since I was a little girl I always dreamed of studying abroad, and I am honoured to have earned my postgrad degree in Perth. I always knew that an international degree would have significant value, but I never thought about my life as an international student in a different country, and what that would look like. StudyPerth provided numerous opportunities for me to meet other international students, network and explore Perth. I met some of my closest friends through StudyPerth. StudyPerth also helped me to grow personally. Through working as a Greeter, and being given added responsibilities during events and excursions I grew

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in confidence. StudyPerth played a significant part of my time in Perth. Many of my memories of Australia are either at a StudyPerth event or with a person (or people) I met at or through StudyPerth.

That was Lindi. That is a great validation—there are many others—of the work done by groups or organisations such as StudyPerth and the support provided.

Other support has been provided to the international sector through the online capability fund. This supported providers to engage and implement alternative delivery models while borders were closed, with grants of up to \$40 000. An international education COVID-19 support fund included financial relief of up to \$50 000. During the experience of COVID, support has continued.

I have been in this job for only eight weeks or so but already the respect that I have received from the sector is very much appreciated. I do not deny that I am on a learning journey, too. As members know, my previous employ was a teacher, but I must admit that the international education aspect has enhanced my interest in education more broadly. That is why I am very pleased to have this gig. I appreciate the full and frank discussions that we have had with people, whether it is vice-chancellors, private education providers, those people who work with international students learning English as a second language or those who work in the vocational area. I am looking forward to going to places such as Canning College, which is a state-based educational institution, and also meeting international students over the coming months and years during my time as minister.

When we had our meeting with the vice-chancellors—I started saying this at the beginning of my contribution—there was concern. Why? It was because the vice-chancellors and the other providers are always focused on the students—student welfare and student wellbeing. The first meeting involved listening, hearing those important messages that I needed to hear and then having a very receptive Premier. I pay tribute to the Premier because he understands the importance of international education. He hounds me every day about what else we are doing and asks me what else we can do. I am very pleased about that.

Comments made during a debate on international education or questions in this place a couple of weeks back intimated that we were doing nothing. I have outlined a range of initiatives that have been ongoing and new to address the challenges that faced international education in Western Australia, particularly students from other parts of the world who choose WA as the place to come for their education.

The member for Roe is not in the chamber; he had to be paired. I want to put on the record that my relationship with the vice-chancellors and others is very good. For example, I am pleased that the deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Notre Dame Australia, after ongoing packages that I have highlighted, said —

“I wanted to pass on the thanks to the Minister and his team for today’s conversation. As he said, it’s a difficult time but it was well received and we appreciated the approach”.

The vice-chancellor of Edith Cowan University said —

“We are very grateful for the hard work of the Minister and the Department of our behalf”.

I do not normally say things about myself. I do not believe in doing that. I want to put to bed any negative thought the member for Roe was trying to draw that we are not working as hard as we can because we are. We are making great progress. I think we are positioning ourselves to be in a magnificent position to welcome back students from many other countries in the world, build on our international student numbers and also build on the mutual benefits to Western Australia and Western Australians in having high cohorts of international students studying here, be it in vocational education, English as a second language—this has been a pathway into further tertiary education, some of our magnificent universities in WA—Canning College, other places where we have international student cohorts or the little primary school in Cottesloe, which apparently has one international student. No matter whether it is one student in one school or thousands of students in a university, they are all welcome, they are all important and they are all special because it helps build the story of Western Australia, and it helps build our reputation as a welcoming, exciting and optimistic place to visit, study and live. We will make sure that we will do that.

As Minister for International Education, it gives me the opportunity to strengthen and forge new relationships both internationally and within the broader sector, not only in WA but across the state. It is a very competitive sector, as we know. I honestly believe that Western Australia has tremendous assets to sell and promote over and above some of the other states and territories in Australia. We have put in place a framework for that to thrive, and we will keep doing it. We will keep working hard and keep engaging to make sure that we have well-tailored and well-nuanced packages that deal with demand and need. In the broader economic sense, literally billions of dollars go into the economies of Australia, and obviously we get our share too through our international student activity. Jobs and employment in the sector are important and will continue to be important as the sector grows. I am very conscious that these international students are not just statistics or a number; they are human beings. We always need to remind ourselves that it is not just about economies and how much a student is worth in terms of their product and what money they bring with them or deliver. They are human beings. Most of them are young people

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and there are exciting opportunities for us to learn from them about the world, about their aspirations and about their skills and opportunities. One thing they have done is to recognise the value of our education system and the opportunities that our education system can provide them. Many of those students seek their education here, supported by their families, and many of them go back to their country of origin, but a lot of them stay here—and thankfully they do, too. They realise the beauty of this place and the importance of this place, and there is no better example of that than the member who is going to speak next, the member for Jandakot.

MR Y. MUBARAKAI (Jandakot — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.00 pm]: Once again I will start by expressing how delusional the opposition is with this motion. In reality, this motion should be the perfect prediction of what would happen if the Liberals and Nationals were to be in government. Members opposite talk about fearmongering, disappointment, damage and a mess, when we know that that is exactly what they left this state with. I am glad to see that the McGowan government has done a profoundly sensational job for all Western Australians, particularly through this pandemic.

In respect of this motion on international education, we have a new minister in Hon David Templeman, who has addressed the situation of attracting international students back to this amazing state, which has renowned universities. Twenty-five years ago, I attended one of them, Edith Cowan University, as an international student, and I am definitely a product of this amazing state's international education sector. For me, international students are the state's greatest import asset.

International education is very important. In 2018, we launched the Best and Brightest program to attract students from overseas to come to universities in the amazing state of Western Australia and see all that we have to offer. It was Hon Sue Ellery, the Minister for Education and Training, who launched that program, because she could see that that market was not being used to its full potential. In 2019, as the minister alluded to earlier, I went on a trip to India with Minister Ellery to launch that program. On that trip we went to universities across Mumbai and Delhi and we spoke to international student agents. Our final destination was Gujarat, and I will go into more detail on that later.

On that trip with the minister, we really saw keen interest from university students in Mumbai and from the student agents. These agents are basically advisers to the youth of India who are looking to explore their education options throughout the world, and the Best and Brightest program is a strategy for attracting these brains to Western Australia. Throughout that trip there was lot of interest from universities that wanted to collaborate with Western Australian universities, and the minister absolutely absorbed that energy coming through that large-scale market. I do not know whether members in this place fully understand, but India has one of the largest unskilled markets and is potentially one of the largest exporters of international students in the world; I think the number is close to half a billion people who are at an age where they are ready to learn skills for the workforce. They are aspirational, and they look at Australia and Western Australia as a destination, particularly now that Western Australia is seen as a safe place for people's children to go for study. To now have a motion like this one presented to the house by the opposition is just disappointing; it leaves a bad taste in the mouth for the opposition to use these scaremongering tactics to tarnish Western Australia's huge international student import market. I do not know why the opposition would do that. It is shameful for representatives in this house, as Western Australians, to diminish our growth and prosperity in an ever-increasing market in which we stand at the highest order in terms of our reputation. It is really disappointing and very delusional on the part of the opposition to come into this place to misrepresent what the McGowan government has done for the people of Western Australia and for the promotion of this wonderful state of ours.

The minister already went through the measures put in place in his new capacity of having responsibility for international education. These are to assist universities and to provide support for international students who either have already been here or who want to come here for their future prospects. I really commend the minister and the McGowan government for actually putting those measures in place.

To come back to our tour of India, the final destination was Gujarat. At the time the minister and I were there, one of the most important biennial conferences in this sector was being held, the Vibrant Gujarat Education Summit, which takes place around the middle of January every alternate year. The last one was in 2019, and the minister and I travelled from Mumbai to Delhi and then from Delhi to Gujarat. We were very fortunate at the conference to have an audience with the Prime Minister of India, Hon Narendra Modi. It was really interesting to hear the Prime Minister of one of the biggest countries in the world describing to the then Australian Ambassador to India, Harinder Sidhu, and Minister Ellery what he perceives to be the importance of the bilateral relationships between India and Australia. He particularly emphasised to the minister that he would love to see those half a billion youth skilled and educated in the profound technical background that Australia has, whether in agriculture, medicine, mining or research and development. There was quite a clear emphasis on that. Before departing that meeting, the minister shook the Prime Minister's hand and spoke to him quite fluently in his language to wish him goodbye. There is actually a photo of that moment, and Prime Minister Modi is shaking Minister Ellery's hand with his mouth

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agape at that personal gesture of the minister wishing him goodbye in his native language. That facial expression was such a moment to remember because it rounded off that tour with a full understanding on our part of the importance of India and what a big market it is and will continue to be, along with China, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia and other countries that send international students to the wonderful state of Western Australia.

On our return, the minister and the Premier announced a package of \$4.5 million over three years for StudyPerth. It does a fantastic job in promoting this state's potential for attracting international students, and all aspects of their interests while they are here, studying at our universities and colleges. In 2019, the Premier put an additional \$4.5 million into the budget, fully understanding the importance of attracting more international students, who obviously, as the minister described earlier, create a ripple effect, because not only do they come here to study, but also they work, they rent, they buy cars and they pay for fuel and groceries, and their mums and dads and cousins come to visit. They experience the genuineness of a wonderful state like Western Australia. Now more than ever before, the real conversation is about Western Australia being the safest place for parents to send their children to. Any parent who wants to invest in their children's future education knows it is also about their safety and wellbeing. Right now, we are the safest destination in the world. Again, that is to the merit of the McGowan government for putting the highest priority on the lives of all Western Australians in terms of safety, security and wellbeing.

I again commend these efforts, because it has rewarded the reputation and goodwill of this government and this state as a destination in years to come. The packages that have now been put in place are clearly the right measures to reassure and help not only those who are already here, but also other international students who are eager to call Western Australia a destination while they enhance their education profile to propel their future careers.

On that note, I once again congratulate the new minister on his position. I know that various other speakers are lined up to share their views on this motion. Again, it is disappointing that the opposition does not understand the merit of working with government and keeping a government accountable, especially one that has done the right thing by cleaning up its mess and providing a prosperous future for the state. Thank you for the opportunity, Acting Speaker. It is much appreciated.

MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park) [6.12 pm]: I rise today to speak against this spurious business from the opposition claiming that this government has failed to protect the international education sector. In fact, I thank opposition members for the opportunity to detail the unprecedented level of support by the Western Australian government for this sector. Understandably, much of what I am about to say will reflect the minister's comments.

I am very proud that my electorate of Victoria Park is home to a university where I once studied, Western Australia's largest university and one of the state's top two single-site employers—Curtin University. Victoria Park is also home to the wonderful Canning College, right next door to Curtin. I am also very proud that I worked in education for almost a decade, and half of that was spent in a senior position at a WA university. It is a sector I know well and I hold all its myriad works in highest esteem.

Just after I left the tertiary education sector, the McGowan government developed a state strategy for international education, *Where bright futures begin*. My leaving had nothing to do with the need for that strategy! The strategy launched in 2018 to attract the best and brightest students from around the world to study here in WA, and it has worked wonderfully, complementing the significant work, commitment and investment of tertiary education sector players to do the same. May I add that the McGowan government was the first Western Australian government to develop such a strategy, focusing on international education and international student attraction and retention. The Liberal and National Parties, when in government for the majority of the last 14 years, did no such thing. We are also the first Western Australian government to appoint a Minister for International Education, Hon David Templeman, and I thank the minister for his already considerable work in this space in a relatively short time. We are the first Western Australian government to demonstrably value the sector and provide a designated portfolio and minister. We value it for the educational outcomes and further opportunities it provides our people and students; for the sector's research capacities, outcomes and commercialisation opportunities; and for the jobs it secures, the significant economic activity it generates and its social importance.

Almost three years ago, the Premier announced in the budget an additional \$4.5 million in funding over three years for StudyPerth to promote Western Australia as a first-class study destination. Before the pandemic, way back in 2019—if we can remember such a time—the tertiary education sector ended the year strong and optimistic. All providers anticipated growth as a result of the new WA government initiatives, including the additional funding I just mentioned, the “Where bright futures begin” strategy and StudyPerth action plan, and the new migration designation and the extension of the state-nominated migration pathway skilled occupation list. These initiatives and investments were working. In March 2020, international student commencements were up by four per cent year on year in WA, whereas nationally there was an almost one per cent decrease. Yet again, WA universities' international education sector was proving to be a top performer.

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Today I am very proud and grateful on behalf of Curtin University that the McGowan government continues to invest in the recovery and longer term growth of the sector through the international education recovery and renewal plan, part of our \$185 million Reconnect WA package. Most recently, we have invested in specific international education initiatives with a \$77 million safe transition industry support package. This \$77 million support package recently announced by the Premier provides support totalling \$16 million for international education specifically. This includes the creation of an \$8 million student quarantine support program to support international students who are required to self-quarantine. This program also provides a one-off payment of \$2 000 to eligible students who arrive in Perth between 20 January and 2 March this year. Western Australian universities will also receive a supplementary payment of \$500 per student they support during their quarantine period from the \$2 million university services for students support program. This program acknowledges the roles that universities have played in assisting students affected by their quarantine requirements. The new industry support fund, valued at \$6 million, will provide grants of \$50 000 and \$100 000 to assist eligible Western Australian-based small and medium-sized international education providers that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

After working in the tertiary sector, I also know that planning and student numbers are not just about the numbers today; they are about a pipeline of students. That is why we are expanding the offshore delivery of the WA curriculum to build the pipeline of future international students, and we are implementing international marketing campaigns in key countries, which will assist the growth of student numbers.

In terms of international student attraction, a \$1 500 accommodation subsidy will be provided to up to 5 000 eligible international students to support them to secure accommodation in an increasingly tight rental market. Additionally, as the minister mentioned, a \$1 500 English language intensive courses for overseas students bursary, intended as an incentive to attract international students to study with one of our English language schools in Western Australia, will shortly be available to eligible students.

Just two days ago, on Monday, 21 February, a new online one-stop shop was launched to help international students enter Western Australia. The member for Roe mentioned this in his speech. The international student portal provides links to relevant government travel and health information and a direct booking service for students to book the best possible deal for their flights. If students cannot find a suitable flight, they are able to access assistance through the travel portal and from a travel agent. By Monday night, on its first day, 9 000 people had visited the international student travel portal, with 20 requests for travel agent support to book family tickets and two direct bookings. Next week when our border fully reopens, the StudyPerth welcome desk at Perth Airport will also reopen to welcome international students as they arrive in Perth. This desk is, of course, also supported by the WA government.

This government throughout COVID has implemented a range of measures to assist international students who remained in Western Australia, including the StudyPerth crisis relief fund, which was supported by government funding. The minister has already mentioned these programs but I think they are worth mentioning twice. As the minister stated, a range of programs and activities were also delivered to enhance the experience of international students who stayed in WA. After all, they are here to not just learn, but also experience WA life. The programs included the Rottne student day, hikes in the Perth hills and Bickley Valley, movies under the stars, a walking tour and bush food talk through Karrgatup or Kings Park, a Fremantle day tour and something called Cabaret Cave yoga. I like two of those three things! I wish someone had organised such activities for me over the past two years.

A government member: You can organise that around caucus.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Noted, as caucus secretary, minister, I will bank that one away—minus the yoga.

Other support has been provided to the international education sector by the way of the online capability fund, which supported providers to engage and implement alternative delivery models while borders were closed, with grants up to \$40 000, and the international education COVID-19 industry support fund, which provided financial relief up to \$50 000.

The international education sector continues to work collaboratively with this government, as it recognises the McGowan government understands the importance of international students and the value of our international education sector to our state. I also cannot ignore the obvious. The best thing the McGowan government has done for universities and the international education sector is to make and keep WA the safest place to study and live in the world. If I were aged 18 years and looking around the world for a place to study, I would usually be looking for a place that offered an internationally reputed education, enviable lifestyle and that was comparatively safe. These days those things would be in my top four, but my new number one question would be: how COVID-safe is where I will study? And there is nowhere safer than WA. We have one of the highest, if not the highest, double-dose and soon third-dose vaccination rates in the world; we have a world-class health system by any international measure; we have businesses and institutions that take COVID safety practices seriously; and we have a government that people can rely on to keep them safe. In fact, my local university, Curtin, has followed the McGowan government's lead and implemented its own vaccine mandates. At Curtin University, all staff and students who attend campus or

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participate in a university activity in Western Australia must be vaccinated. Those students can be confident that they will be safe on campus. I congratulate Curtin and vice-chancellor Professor Harlene Hayne on this leadership.

I will also take a moment to commend Curtin vice-chancellor Hayne for her personal leadership, driving the Curtin community. Professor Hayne began her tenure at Curtin in April last year, going straight to quarantine before she could lead in person. In just the last year, with all the challenges and hurdles from day one, Professor Hayne has already done so much to advance and enhance Curtin's reputation as a bold, entrepreneurial and inclusive university. That is a huge enticement to potential international students. I thank Professor Hayne for working collaboratively and proactively with me as the local member of Parliament.

I think the level of financial and services support the McGowan government has provided our tertiary and international education sector, particularly over the past two years of the pandemic, has been unprecedented. That is especially when one considers that investment in tertiary education is usually the domain of the federal government and that our international borders are under the control of the federal government. I do hope that this federal Liberal government will take a leaf out of the book of this Premier and the McGowan government on the leadership and investment decisions they have shown, rather than continually cutting funding, because that has placed this vital sector in an unnecessarily vulnerable position. There was a precariousness in the sector that was highlighted by the impacts of COVID-19 and that this government has stepped up to steady. The McGowan government and our new Minister for International Education, Hon David Templeman, have worked closely with the sector to ensure our support initiatives are responsive to the needs of the sector and international students, and we will continue to do so. Thank you.

DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands) [6.25 pm]: I also rise to stand in strong opposition to this motion. I have to say, preparing my response to this motion has been somewhat personal for me, because I have a long history in the tertiary education sector. My electorate, the seat of Nedlands, is home to our state's first university—the University of Western Australia. Established in 1911, it was also the first free university in the British Empire, beginning a strong history of promoting equal access to tertiary education for people from diverse backgrounds, including of course international students. I have worked at both UWA and Curtin University for over two decades, as an academic in both their social work programs, as well as being a three-time alumni of UWA. I am now a parent of a student at Curtin University, who has of course had to show his vaccination certificate as he has moved around the campus this week for orientation, as well he should.

I was working at Curtin University when the global pandemic first hit and have firsthand experience of how the federal Liberal government treated, or rather completely and deliberately ignored and undermined, not just international students, but also the entire tertiary education sector. Because if we really want to consider the difficulties and challenges facing universities and international students, we need to look clearly across to Canberra. In fact, the McGowan government's recognition and support of international education is something of a redress to some of the damage done by the federal Liberal government to what was our thriving education sector.

International education contributed \$28 billion to Australia's economy in the 2016–2017 financial year, which was a 16 per cent increase on the previous financial year. It is Australia's largest service export and one of our greatest exports behind iron ore and coal. Despite this economic value, the federal Liberal government did not at any time—at any time—acknowledge or respond to the crisis in universities rendered by COVID-19.

Beyond the economic contribution of the tertiary education sector and international education in particular, I say, as a previous academic, that international students contribute so much to the life of a university. They bring different perspectives to the classroom. They progress discussion, enriching our understanding of the human condition and experience, culture, family, power, and how systems, organisations and countries operate. And of course they add diversity, which is essential to all disciplines, but I have to say particularly powerful in my discipline of social work.

At the same time, as educators, we were well aware of our responsibility to international students who were often far from home and family. Many were from families and communities who were making immense sacrifices for them to study overseas. One of our international students at UWA had an entire village contributing to her living and education expenses as she undertook her social work studies. Their understanding of services and systems is limited by virtue of being new to the state and to the country.

As we all know, when the global pandemic hit international students returned home in their thousands. In fact, they were told to go home by our Prime Minister. It was hardly the welcome and recognition that those working in tertiary education had endeavoured to provide. Enrolments at universities shifted dramatically while our workloads, as academics and for our professional colleagues, went up exponentially. We shifted our teaching delivery online, responded to significant student wellbeing and mental health issues, and modified research projects to allow for remote data collection while still meeting our ethical obligations. That was all done while never allowing the quality of teaching and learning to decline, yet thousands of people lost their jobs. I watched colleagues with decades of experience and expertise exit the campus, while we who were left behind absorbed the additional workload requirements created by these job losses. We became each other's IT and tech support, teaching assistants and

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research assistants. We all sat with an immense sense of job insecurity and vulnerability. As a sole parent, this vulnerability hit me particularly hard. The gendered impact of COVID-19 is well known and is still being revealed, and universities were no different. Women were more likely to already be in insecure work. Our care responsibilities at home substantially increased. Students turned to us to support their wellbeing as well. Our research track records, and therefore career progress, were impeded by both of these changes.

I will take a moment, if I might Acting Speaker, to acknowledge my colleagues across all universities who have stepped up during this pandemic and managed their own vulnerability at work, to continue to educate and research, to contribute to a smart, educated and thriving workforce.

Imagine, too, where all the graduate nurses are coming from to work in our hospitals—the tertiary education sector. Yet, as the crisis in our university sector unfolded, particularly around international students, calls for federal government assistance were largely ignored. I say largely ignored because the federal Liberal government did take the trouble to amend provisions around JobKeeper, three times, to specifically exclude public universities from eligibility for JobKeeper. However, private universities—often connected, as we know, to religious institutions—were eligible for and did receive JobKeeper payments. The longer the federal Liberal government refused to act, the more jobs were lost and the harder those remaining worked. Even prior to COVID-19 there was broad recognition that, after more than a decade of federal funding restrictions, reallocations, cuts and freezes, the sector had been left severely underfunded. In 2018, the sector was financed more by student fees than it was by commonwealth grant schemes funding. The federal Liberal government's response to the sector's plight during COVID-19 went beyond deliberately denying public universities access to COVID-19 job subsidies. It told international students to go home, cracked down on partnerships with foreign countries and changed federal funding rules to more than double fees for arts studies such as politics and communications. I note, too, that the courses most impacted by those fee increases were also female-dominated courses.

Of course, I say very clearly that I do not speak on behalf of my previous employer but I can speak to my experience as a longstanding academic and the experience of my many friends and colleagues in the tertiary education sector. We were completely and utterly abandoned by the federal Liberal government during COVID-19. By abandoning us, the federal Liberal government also abandoned local students, international students and the entire Australian community. It means a lot to me, personally and professionally, to stand here now as part of the McGowan government, which has long—and long before COVID-19—recognised the value of the tertiary education sector and international education in particular. Now, in this difficult time, we are putting an ongoing investment into the recovery and, just as importantly, the ongoing longer term growth and sustainability of international education.

We have already heard from others that the McGowan government's commitment to tertiary education began before this current crisis as the first Western Australian government to develop a state strategy for international education, *Where bright futures begin*, and the first to provide a designated portfolio and minister. Now, in this time of recovery, we have the safe transition industry support package, the details of which we have heard from others. We have worked closely with the sector to ensure the initiatives are responsive to the needs of the sector and international students, and will continue to do so as the recovery unfolds. There are well-established frameworks, structures and relationships for this ongoing dialogue and consultation to occur. I know from my connection to the University of Western Australia how well appreciated these relationships are, being experienced as both positive and robust.

Western Australia's full border reopening will occur on 3 March 2022, a time line that will allow international students to arrive in week 1 of semester to commence face-to-face learning. Many orientation activities are occurring online, which students can access if required. In fact, my son is at home today completing his academic essentials orientation activity online. Accessing such material online is not unusual, certainly not anymore.

I am lucky enough to be on the UWA campus in my role as an MP once or twice a week and most mornings as a community member walking the dog. In my discussions with the University of Western Australia, it has told me very clearly how much it welcomes the returning students' directions and the safe transition industry support package. It has made particular mention of the new travel portal, which will enable universities to provide increased support for their international students, along with helping them cover the unexpected costs of any self-quarantine required. The University of Western Australia told me today that more than 478 of its international students have now completed their journey to UWA and are benefiting from these initiatives already. The university is expecting another 72 students as the week unfolds. It is also working with StudyPerth to support international students returning, and some of its students are indeed quarantining in UWA facilities. UWA is very much looking forward to welcoming international students back to campus, acknowledging their resilience throughout the pandemic and in their communications acknowledging to international students that campus and on-campus learning has simply not been the same without them.

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The University of Western Australia is also offering a number of its own initiatives, including a \$1 500 welcome grant to all international students studying a degree on campus for the first time in 2022. New international students, or those who have started their degree online due to border restrictions, can receive \$1 500 cash to help cover the costs of travel, accommodation and getting set up to study in Perth. UWA has an international student support team based on campus that can assist students with academic and social supports, such as settling into Perth and orientation to UWA; support with visa and visa conditions; working while studying; support with homesickness or feeling overwhelmed; bringing family to Western Australia; achieving that ever elusive work, life and study balance, and managing priorities; meeting other people on campus and at social events, excursions and activities; referrals to services; and ultimately, returning home. UWA also has its Language and Cultural Exchange program that brings students together across cultures and languages, across the university and the globe. This program helps students to make friends, build lasting relationships and practise speaking English in informal settings to support them later in their academic studies as well.

The university's in-country international student agents are key intermediaries for international students, and are crucial therefore too to the recovery and growth effort in returning international students to study in Western Australia. Crucial to this work is agent confidence that the government values international education, that it will consider the sector in future policy settings and that it holds ambitions for the sector to grow. The McGowan government's recognition of the importance of international education for Western Australia's economy and community, and the international education portfolio, all contribute to this growing confidence. UWA has told me that it looks forward to working in cooperation with the state government on recovery and growth of the sector.

I stand here not just as the member for Nedlands, home to Western Australia's oldest university, but also as a university academic, the parent of a brand new university student—I am sure they are still called “freshers”—and I say thank you, a deep personal and professional thank you, to the McGowan government for the recognition of and investment in tertiary and international education.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.38 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to this debate. We have spent the week so far talking about gun control and firearm safety, but it appears as though the Liberal–National coalition has learnt nothing, because the first thing it did with bringing this motion before the chamber is shoot itself in the foot by debating the international education sector. What do we see? We see an erudite, thoughtful, intelligent, compassionate and dedicated new minister, the very first Minister for International Education, who is passionate about his job, who gets up in unambiguous terms and clearly articulates why he is the person to steward this important sector through the COVID recovery.

Then the minister sits down and we hear the member for Jandakot, with personal, firsthand experience of what it is like to be an international student in Perth, Western Australia, and see the contribution that he can make to the community to repay the benefits that he has received from the community of Western Australia as he came to be an international student in Western Australia.

Then we heard the excellent contribution from the member for Victoria Park, who highlighted the chaos and confusion that the commonwealth government has inflicted on this sector. That was picked up by the member who represents the excellent institution of Curtin University. Then we had the former academic; there is nobody more qualified to speak on this issue than the member for Nedlands. She enjoys the University of Western Australia in her electorate. She stood and redoubled our attack on the commonwealth government and the negligent way in which it has handled this sector over the last 18 months. That elevates and emphasises the completely irrational basis for the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA to bring on this motion. We now get a chance, in the lead-up to a federal election, to say what a great job the McGowan government has done to support the sector and what a terrible job the Morrison federal government has done.

Happily, in addition to the member for Victoria Park, who represents the seat in which Curtin University is located, and the member for Nedlands, who represents the seat in which UWA is located, I, as the member for Mount Lawley, represent the seat that Edith Cowan University is located in. We could have had the member for Willagee talk about the university sector as he represents the seat where Murdoch University is located. The member for Joondalup represents the seat with the other ECU campus. We are passionate. The communities we represent are where these institutions are located. We understand these issues and that is why we are so proud to see the cabinet reshuffle that took place in December last year and the appointment of the very first Minister for International Education. However, it is not the first time that international education has been a priority for the McGowan government.

We know for a fact that concentrating on economic diversification through strengthening areas such as international education has been a priority for the McGowan government since it was elected in 2017. Right out of the gate, the Liberal–National opposition brought on this motion and shot itself in the foot. Then in the prosecution of its case, it could not lay a glove on the efforts of the McGowan government. I listened intently to the member for Roe. He does a commendable job of trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but all the facts and figures that he quoted,

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all the anecdotes that he referred to, the report that he cited in support of his argument, were all federal figures. They just make the point and highlight that to the extent, if any, that the university sector is struggling in Australia, the blame and responsibility for that lies squarely at the feet of the commonwealth government. He quoted the net benefit to the Australian economy. He quoted the survey by Navitas. He said Australia had lost whatever limited advantages it had built up and people would travel to the US, the UK or Canada instead. I did not understand how he could make the argument that it was the Western Australian government that, according to the motion, had failed to protect the \$2 billion education sector. If anything, all the propositions that were being advanced by the member for Roe supported our contention so articulately advanced by the member for Nedlands and the member for Victoria Park that the charge should lay at the door of the commonwealth government.

One of the things that this opposition has still failed to fundamentally grasp is that we are operating in the environment of a global pandemic. It was not until the minister got up to respond to the arguments that had been made by the member for Roe and the member for Vasse that this issue was put fairly and squarely before the chamber. I would like, if I may, members, to refer to an article from *The Economist* dated 8 August 2020. One of the complaints that I have about the case that was put on behalf of the opposition was that so much of what it referred to seems to be re-litigated in its complaints about changes to the regional skilled migration scheme from 2017. Opposition members, time has well and truly moved on since then. Whatever consequences may have arisen from changes to the regional skilled migration scheme, the entire labour market is now entirely different in character and shape from what it was in 2017. I will come back to that point.

One of my criticisms was that members opposite were going back in time. I ask members to indulge me. I will go back to an article in *The Economist*—it is hardly a well-regarded left-wing journal but rather a very centrist journal—dated 8 August 2020 titled “Covid-19 will be painful for universities, but also bring change”. The reason I will quote from this article, members, is just to provide a bit of context for what I am going to say next. The article states —

IN THE NORMAL run of things, late summer sees airports in the emerging world fill with nervous 18-year-olds, jetting off to begin a new life in the rich world’s universities. The annual trek of more than 5m students is a triumph of globalisation. Students see the world; universities get a fresh batch of high-paying customers. Yet with flights grounded and borders closed, this migration is about to become the pandemic’s latest victim.

Systemic changes to the way in which international education operates in Australia and Western Australia are not a consequence of policies of the McGowan Labor government; they are the consequence of a global pandemic. The article continues —

For students covid-19 is making life difficult. —

For students, for politicians, for businesses and for everybody else —

Many must choose between inconveniently timed seminars streamed into their parents’ living rooms and inconveniently deferring their studies until life is more normal. For universities, it is disastrous. They will not only lose huge chunks of revenue from foreign students, but because campus life spreads infection, they will have to reform the way they operate ...

Yet the disaster may have an upside. For many years, government subsidies and booming demand have allowed universities to resist changes that could benefit both students and society. They may not be able to do so for much longer.

Higher education has been thriving. Since 1995, as the notion spread from the rich world to the emerging one that a degree from a good institution was essential, the number of young people enrolling in higher education rose from 16% of the relevant age group to 38%. The results have been visible on swanky campuses throughout the Anglosphere, whose better universities have been the principal beneficiaries of the emerging worlds aspirations.

Yet troubles are piling up. China has been a source of high-paying foreign students for western universities, but relations between the West and China are souring. Students with the ties to the army are to be banned from America.

I interrupt myself to say at this point that if anyone poses a risk to our international education system, it is the dog-whistling federal Liberal members, like Peter Dutton, who undermine our relationship with nations like China. It continues —

Governments have been turning against universities, too. In an age when politics divides along educational lines, universities struggle to persuade some politicians of their merit.

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This is where the interjection from the minister, the member for Armadale, was apposite. He said they are anti the academy. This is the problem with the Liberal–National opposition. It is anti the academy. This is exactly the point *The Economist* is making. It continues —

President Donald Trump attacks them for “Radical Left Indoctrination, not Education”. Some 59% of Republican voters have a negative view of colleges ... In Britain universities’ noisy opposition to Brexit has not helped. Given that the state pays for between a quarter and a half of tertiary education in America, Australia and Britain, through student loans and grants, the government’s enthusiasm matters.

Scepticism among politicians is not born only of spite. Governments invest in higher education to boost productivity by increasing human capital. But even as universities have boomed, productivity growth in the rich-country economies has fallen.

“Back to the mortar board” says the final paragraph of the article, which states —

Covid-19 is a catalysing innovation, too. The Big Ten Academic Alliance, a group of midwestern universities, is offering many of its 600,000 students the opportunity to take online courses at other universities in the group. There is huge scope for using digital technology to improve education. Poor in-person lectures could be replaced by online ones from the best in the world, freeing up time for small-group teaching which students value most.

Universities are rightly proud of their centuries-old traditions, but their ancient pedigrees have too often been used as an excuse for resisting change. If Covid-19 shakes them out of their complacency, some good may yet come from the disaster.

What are the consequences of COVID-19 for the higher education sector globally? The trap that the opposition is trying to set is that it is trying to trick members into thinking that what is happening with higher education in Perth, Western Australia, is somehow removed from what is happening all over the world. We will not fall into that trap. We see the consequences both of the global pandemic and of the negligence of the commonwealth government. Happily, there is an upside. A more recent article from *The Economist* dated 27 November 2021—about three weeks before the minister received his commission—is titled “China’s globetrotting students are getting back on the road.” It states —

QIN YIBO is half way through a science degree at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. But she has not been in the country since early 2020 when it closed its borders to prevent the spread of covid-19 (she was back in China at the time). Instead the university has arranged for Ms Qin and other stranded students in China to take up residence on campuses in their own country while they continue their studies remotely. Ms Qin has thought about transferring permanently to a Chinese university, but she still plans to return to New Zealand when it eases its border controls.

That is the fundamental feature of the challenge that is posed to universities in Western Australia. These border controls are necessary to keep the community safe. Part of the problem with this opposition is that it is not clear on where it stands on the public health safety measures that we have put in place to keep the community free from COVID. It does not know which way it is going because it does not know what it stands for.

The border controls that we have put in place are designed to protect the community, and they have worked. The vaccine mandates that we have put in place are designed to protect the community, and they have worked. We were talking in question time today about the extraordinary success, the unparalleled success, of the McGowan government’s vaccine mandates. It now makes Western Australia one of the safest places in the world in facing this global pandemic. This point was raised very well by the member for Victoria Park. She talked at length about some of the things that she would consider as she tried to determine where she might like to undertake her tertiary studies if she had the opportunity to study abroad. She talked about campus life, safety and the quality of the institution that would be available to her.

Then she said that in addition to those three criteria, the new one that she would put at the top would be how that has jurisdiction responded to COVID. I thought that was a brilliant point. If what we are talking about, as the motion suggests, is the global reputation of Western Australia—brand WA, if you will—the one factor that would resonate globally, the one factor that has been referred to by *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Der Spiegel*, is the way in which Western Australia has kept its community safe from the ravages of COVID. People all around the world now know about WA because of the way in which we have handled COVID. As we emerge from the global pandemic, that is a priceless asset for brand WA. Leave aside the fact that the McGowan government would have done all these things to protect the community of Western Australia anyway, the collateral benefit is that we are now regarded as one of the safest places in the world when it comes to COVID. We are setting a new standard. If anyone thinks that that will not be an incredibly encouraging aspect for people who are

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trying to decide where they want to undertake their tertiary studies, they are mad. It will be one of the first things that people give consideration to.

Our tertiary sector, particularly the Western Australian tertiary sector, is incredibly well placed to rebound well from the global pandemic. For a number of universities on the eastern seaboard—Melbourne University, Monash University, UNSW and, I think, one other—more than a third of their revenue came from international students. In corporate language, they were highly exposed. As soon as the global pandemic hit, all of a sudden there was a state of panic in those institutions because they realised that such an important stream of income would evaporate, not through anyone's fault, but because we were in unprecedented times. Compare that predicament facing those universities on the eastern seaboard to the situation faced by our outstanding tertiary institutions in Western Australia.

Professor Steve Chapman is the vice-chancellor of Edith Cowan University. He runs an outstanding institution that is a beacon for students from across Western Australia, all over Australia and overseas. The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in Mt Lawley is a wonderful institution that people come from all over the world to study at. When I speak to Professor Chapman, he is so optimistic and so enthusiastic about what the future holds. Professor Chapman and the university senate are positioning their university in a way that will take advantage of all opportunities that the future may present. They are brave and optimistic about what the future holds. That is in stark contrast to members of the opposition, who just want to talk down Western Australia, undermine what we are trying to do and criticise what our wonderful tertiary institutions are doing. Frankly, it is embarrassing, and it is not needed. If they had thought more about the consequences of bringing this sort of motion before the house, they probably would not have done it. Steve Chapman is leading a charge that will see the revitalisation of his university in an unprecedented way.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: The relocation of the Edith Cowan University campus to the CBD will not only provide wonderful benefits for students undertaking their degrees at ECU, but also have knock-on benefits for the City of Perth. This is a landmark project that has the support of all levels of government—local, state and federal—across party lines. This is the sort of project that speaks to the optimism, enthusiasm and confidence that the tertiary education sector has in Western Australia, thanks to the stewardship of the McGowan government. The government has recognised how important this is. The Labor Party believes that governments have an important role to play in assisting educational institutions, the market and private enterprise. We know what we stand for, but we have no idea what the opposition stands for. We know that the government has a fantastic role to play in supporting the tertiary sector. That is why we have the first Minister for International Education.

What I thought was really unkind, unfair and unnecessary is that this minister has been in the job for only six weeks and has done a great job already—he has done nothing but good work since he was appointed as minister—yet this motion condemns him in no uncertain terms, as though he was responsible for all of this. Much to my dismay, the minister was not prepared to sing his own praises. He is way too modest to do that. But this minister is so well qualified and so well placed to take on this portfolio, it is worth highlighting. This minister brings all his experience of working with the international tourism sector. He also knows the wonderful stories about and unique position of Western Australia from his time as Minister for Culture and the Arts. This minister knows exactly what is needed to invigorate the higher education sector. As I said at the outset, the minister is passionate and committed to this portfolio. But unlike under the previous government, the burden for making sure that our higher education sector is supported will be shared by the whole government, because this is a united government. Government members are on the same page and are heading in the same direction.

This government knows how important diversification is for our economy. I think about the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade; Deputy Premier and the fundamental reforms that were undertaken to our international trade network on the back of the grubby scandal in Japan, which was the legacy of the former government. The way in which our trade and investment commissioners work has been restructured. We now have professional, qualified and enthusiastic trade commissioners in key markets in Japan, South Korea, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Singapore, Dubai and India. These trade commissioners will focus on not only supporting Western Australian businesses from the south west, the great southern and areas that the member for Moore represents that export products overseas, but also cultivating the necessary in-country links that give rise to people expressing the desire to come to Western Australia to take advantage of the opportunities that the member for Jandakot took advantage of.

I want to speak about Divij Gupta. Divij is a young man who is from the same town in India as the member for Jandakot. Probably following the experience and example set by the member for Jandakot, Divij has taken the plunge and has moved to Western Australia to study a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in finance and marketing, at the esteemed University of Western Australia. He will pursue his educational dream because of the example set by the member for Jandakot. Now that he is here, Mr Gupta is not resting on his laurels.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 23 February 2022]

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Katrina Stratton; Mr Simon Millman

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
