

MALE-DOMINATED OCCUPATIONS — FEMALE PARTICIPATION

148. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Minister for Training:

I refer to the McGowan government's commitment to create safer and more inclusive workplaces for women. Can the minister advise the house what actions this government is taking to attract more women into occupations that are traditionally male dominated, such as technical and trade occupations, and how these initiatives will provide a boost to WA's building and construction workforce?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I am very pleased to answer this question and I appreciate the member for Belmont's interest in this matter, because this is a government focused on jobs for Western Australians. We are focused on developing the skills for the jobs for Western Australians to make sure that people in this state have the skills to fill the jobs that we know are out there. We are particularly interested in those members of the community whose ability to participate in the workforce or think about a job change is under-utilised. That is certainly the case for women. We have an ability for women in this state to participate more in the Western Australian workforce if we give them the opportunity.

As the Minister for Training, I know that there is a real chance to target women moving into secure jobs, into well-paid jobs and into jobs that traditionally they have not been large participants in—the non-traditional areas. Many members would know that I worked for the manufacturing and metalworkers union for many years. In fact, that union took some of the best years of my life. I joked that I got out before I grew facial hair and took on a Scottish accent! I am very familiar with those non-traditional metals, manufacturing and construction areas. As the Minister for Training, I know that we have opportunities to train women in some of these areas of work, where they can have good jobs and well-paid jobs. We need to crack into those areas if we want to address the gender pay gap and if we want to increase the number of jobs for women in our state. I was pleased when the Premier was able to announce on International Women's Day our initiative for scholarships for women working in non-traditional trades and technical occupations. This is a key area if we want to focus on improving the gender pay gap in this state. We know we have a significant problem and getting women into those non-traditional occupations is key to making serious inroads into the gender pay gap.

As I said before, we know we have a skills shortage in this state. We have the jobs. We need to be able to train people to get them into those jobs. We are sending the very clear message to women in this state that if they want to retrain or train in these non-traditional areas, a \$5 000 scholarship will be available for up to 400 training places. This is a very practical program that will not only make a real difference for women who are thinking about moving into those areas, but also send the message around the state that we want to support women in these areas. The criteria will be when women comprise less than 25 per cent of the workforce. This will be in state priority occupations, STEM fields and building and construction. Of course, this builds on our Free in '23 program—a huge opportunity for people to get not only qualifications, but also just a taster. The skill sets are opportunities for people to perhaps go in there and see whether it is an area in which they might want to work. I am particularly pleased that the reports are that the number of female apprentices operating in building and construction has grown by 228 per cent, more than threefold, under our government. I am very pleased with the figures for the three years preceding 2022.

I would also like to give a shout-out to the AUKUS agreement, because this agreement has been identified as a significant defence announcement, but of course it is an announcement about the jobs of the future, as well. I was pleased when the Minister for Defence Industry, Minister Papalia, who sits alongside me, was at South Metropolitan TAFE as part of that announcement. In September last year, our own South Metro TAFE was named at the Defence Connect Australian Defence Industry Awards 2022 in Canberra as the academic institution of the year. That is something we should be very proud of. In fact, in making that announcement about the opportunities in AUKUS, Minister Papalia was joined by a couple of young women who talked about why they are interested in joining the defence industry. Already this government has The Other Force—Start Something campaign and is proactively going out to people who might think about those defence industry jobs. There is lots going on—women in non-traditional trades scholarships, very practical supports and Start Something. There is a clear message from our government that we want women working in those non-traditional industries and we are prepared to support them.