

Division 25: Training and Workforce Development — International Education —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for International Education.

Ms K. Ho, Director General.

Ms K. Kelleher, Acting Executive Director, Service Delivery.

Ms R. Trotter, Acting Chief Finance Officer.

The CHAIR: I have just been told you will be spared from me reading the spiel because the same advisers are present. I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to item 6 on page 384. As outlined in the narration —

Recruitment and Management of International Students involves the marketing of Western Australian TAFE Colleges and public schools offshore and onshore, and managing admissions, compliance and the welfare of international students according to relevant legislation.

How many students does the allocated \$29 million account for in this financial year?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The international student numbers have gone from 2 106 in 2022–23 to 2 470 in 2023–24 and 3 048 in 2024–25. Those numbers will rise in the out years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What strategies are in place for the recruitment and management of international students and how much of the budget is allocated to that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: An important part of the work of the department is to continue to attract international students into the various courses at our TAFEs, colleges and schools. I have noted that certain course offerings, interestingly enough, see students coming from certain countries. For example, in more recent times in the vocational areas, the number of students from South America has grown. A number of those students come from Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela and Chile and they have been attracted to courses such as hospitality, cookery and aged care. The departmental staff regularly engage with and visit our international markets to create relationships to attract students, which has been very productive and effective. This is an important area for us because we know that some jobs in Australia are well supplemented by not only having international students train here, but also get work experience here.

For example, I have visited a number of TAFE colleges and met with international students who are studying and also working in the aged-care sector, therefore supporting the local economy. In fact, I think we would find in our aged-care sector in Western Australia, and probably other parts of the country, that a significant number of international students are, if you like, holding up those aged-care providers. This underpins why it is important to respect the value of having international students here to not only learn and train, but also support industries in which there is a staff shortage. I am particularly interested in the aged-care sector because, as we know, it has attracted a lot of attention in recent times both through Senate inquiries and the assessment of quality of care. International students get quality training here through our institutions in Western Australia while they study and learn. I shudder to think what would happen in the aged-care sector if we did not have that contribution.

Ms Ho may wish to add to that specifically about the marketing or outreach techniques to gain students. I will ask the director general to respond.

[7.50 pm]

Ms K. Ho: Thank you, minister, and thank you, chair. It is good to explain to members that the role of TAFE International Western Australia, which is a section of the Department of Training and Workforce Development, is to globally market international education and the opportunities that are available through our world-class TAFE colleges and government schools. It is a collaborative single-desk marketing approach, which means that we can work with the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation on its global marketing efforts and leverage off those campaigns about Western Australia being the place to live, work and study. We efficiently go out to the global market through marketing activities, some of which are offshore, such as going to student fairs and working with agents. Some of those are, as the minister said earlier, famils designed to bring education agents to look at our education and training offerings here in Western Australia. We work with education agents. Part of our work is making sure that they know what is being offered in Western Australia and the quality and standard of the available training. There was a specific question about what part of our budget might be devoted to marketing activities. It is in the vicinity of 10 per cent.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Of the 51 FTE employees, how many are solely responsible for the welfare of international students, and what does that involve?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask the director general to respond.

Ms K. Ho: The 51 FTE are slightly more than the numbers at TAFE International WA because they reflect overheads in the department as well. Two or three FTE are solely responsible for the welfare of students. We have some particular responsibilities for school students who are under 18 years of age.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does housing come into the welfare of students? How is the department managing the lack of affordable housing? Are any international students couch surfing or homeless?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Effectively, when students come onshore, the expectation and reality is that their accommodation needs have been provided. There are various avenues. Most students under the age of 18 have family networks within the metropolitan area or wherever they are living. A lot of those students live with family, as they should, because an adult must be responsible for them. Many students over the age of 18 stay with family. The diaspora plays an important role in accommodating many students. The use of family connections is important in that context. We supported a reinvigoration of the home-host program because it alleviated the need to compete in the rental market. A significant number of students are accommodated through the home-host program. Am I using the correct term?

Ms K. Ho: It is the Australian Homestay Network.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. It is when people have one, two or more students living in their homes. There is a payment arrangement, which is scaled according to what is provided. If it is fully hosted, a certain amount is paid to the home host, and it is scaled depending on what is offered or requested from students. Of course, many students stay in purpose-built accommodation. We are very keen to support increased purpose-built accommodation. With Edith Cowan University moving to the CBD, further student-specific accommodation is planned, some of which has commenced construction in and around the CBD. There have been conversions of old hotels or old stock into student accommodation; we encourage that. Of course, in the university context, there is student accommodation on university campuses. It is my understanding that few students have complained or reached out because they find themselves at risk of homelessness. I think it is because many of them secure accommodation before they arrive in WA by reaching out to the networks that are available, be they the diaspora or family and friends, to secure accommodation so that they are safe and well looked after.

One of the functions of StudyPerth is to continue to support students onshore. It has a variety of programs available to ensure that international students have an opportunity to experience Western Australian life and culture. I have been to a number of activities that StudyPerth has organised for international students. It is all about making sure that they feel welcomed, safe and encouraged to participate in the broad suite of Western Australian life.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I recall the homestay program. I remember the minister talking in Parliament about a regional program whereby students stay with families or whatever. Does the minister have any numbers on how that went and how many students were accommodated?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The WA Regional TAFE International Student Bursary included a \$5 000 bursary, which is a very important part of the financial support for students who we are seeking to attract to study, live and work in regional areas. The program is currently in seven regional locations, being Broome, Geraldton, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Albany and my region, which is a very important region. I can give the member some figures. I will briefly go through some of the courses. As I was saying earlier, a number of the courses cover areas such as community services, early childhood education and care and a Diploma of Nursing, all of which are offered in Geraldton, for example. There is also information technology, aquaculture and commercial cookery. There is a range of others in the Broome and Albany courses. Did the member want some figures?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, the figures in those regional locations.

[8.00 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The numbers are small because we commenced this only recently, but it is showing some good growth. There are seven students in Broome, 17 students in Geraldton, five students in Kalgoorlie and 24 students in Bunbury. The program in Mandurah, which only started this semester, has four enrolments. We are looking to grow those numbers. I cannot think of a better place than a region in Western Australia for an international student to get a good, high-quality experience.

The students I met in Geraldton earlier this year are very heavily engaged in the local community. They are studying at TAFE. A young woman from Kalgoorlie whose name is Anelie, I think, is studying cert III in early childhood education and care but she works at the Goldfields Child Care Centre. Another student from the Philippines studies at the Central Regional TAFE Geraldton campus but works in the local learning centre in Wandina in Geraldton. There are a number of these students. I have met students who are working in hospitality and tourism, and students who are working in commercial cookery. I want to grow that. I am very keen to see TAFE continue to grow those numbers going forward.

In terms of accommodation, we know that it has always been challenging to get accommodation in Broome. After talking to students in Broome, I know that a number of them have had their accommodation provided by the employees.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister ask the director general to provide figures on how many students are attending public schools and how many are attending TAFEs in Western Australia?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I can give the member the figures for 2023–24. The college TAFE numbers are 2 050 and in our schools, it is 697, which is a total of 2 747. This budget projection, or current number—this will grow of course—is 2 260 students in TAFE colleges and 788 students in schools, for a total of 3 048 students.

Ms M. BEARD: The minister has been talking about TAFEs. Does he know how many international students based in the regions are using either the Geraldton Universities Centre courses or the Pilbara Universities Centre courses or are studying tertiary courses online?

The CHAIR: That is a bit of a triple whammy there, minister; you might want to split it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Because they are university related, that does not relate to our state TAFEs and/or schools. That question is probably a more relevant question for another minister.

Ms M. BEARD: I can reframe it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The numbers could be found. Universities obviously have a number of campuses. The UWA has campuses in Albany and Curtin University has a campus in Kalgoorlie et cetera.

The CHAIR: Member, you indicated that you might be able to reframe the question.

Ms M. BEARD: Yes. I know that international students in my space up north are actually studying online and, as the minister said, integrating with the community and working as well. I was interested to know whether that is a line that international students are encouraged to take as opposed to basing themselves in Perth.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is actually a good question.

The CHAIR: As opposed to the others, minister!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask the director general to make a comment, particularly about the universities and the online issue, because the member would need to be aware of some specific information.

Ms K. Ho: The international students on student visas generally cannot do their whole course online. There may well be international visitors on some other type of visa arrangement if they are doing online study.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank all the advisers from the international education portfolio area.

The appropriation was recommended.