

North Metropolitan TAFE —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

Ms H.M. Beazley, Minister Assisting the Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

Ms K. Ho, Director General.

Ms G. Husk, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms M. Hoad, Managing Director.

Ms J. Wallace, Executive Director, Policy Planning and Innovation.

Ms E. Paterson, Executive Director, Service Resource Management.

Mr A. Walker, Director, Service Delivery Operations.

Mr G. Thompson, Executive Director, Corporate.

Dr S. Gallacher, Chief of Staff, Minister for Training and Workforce Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Minister, will you set out the order in which we are doing things?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you very much. I thank everyone for being here. I know I have quite a large contingent of agencies, so thank you to everyone for coming along. Before I start, I know a lot of people here have orange on because it is a day to acknowledge the work of volunteers, and I am sure there will be many volunteers riveted to the viewing of budget estimates this morning; thank you.

We have nine agencies here today, so I wanted to thank them all for being here. We have WorkCover WA here; I understand from talking to opposition representatives that we will have some questions of them but today we will begin the proceedings with North Metropolitan TAFE, so I have Minister Beazley here to assist with some of the questions.

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I thank the minister, advisers and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. My question relates to page 390 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I refer to the 2023–24 estimated actual number of employees listed —

The CHAIR: Sorry, member. We are doing the North Metropolitan TAFE.

Ms L. METTAM: This is under training and workforce development.

The CHAIR: Yes, but this is the off-budget part of that, from page 394. It is specifically North Metro TAFE.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Are we doing on-budget next?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to TAFE colleges on page 394 and the overall asset investment program under “North Metropolitan TAFE”. I have a question about the number of employees that are part of or supported by that asset investment program. How many employees at North Metropolitan TAFE work as lecturers, tutors and teachers? I am not sure whether I can ask that here or in the training section.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We are happy to take the specific question about the number of employees at North Metropolitan TAFE. I have here not only the minister assisting, but also the managing director of North Metropolitan TAFE. I will see whether she is able to answer that question.

Ms M. Hoad: Thank you, minister. In 2024, we have about 835 lecturers and about 490 support staff.

Ms L. METTAM: How many lecturers are required to deliver all classes and units at North Metropolitan TAFE?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the managing director.

Ms M. Hoad: At the moment we are fully staffed, so 835 are meeting expectations and delivering classes. We have some scalability around casual staff, but we are essentially meeting all the class requirements. The 835 lecturers are delivering our full profile of classes scheduled.

Ms L. METTAM: Is there currently a shortage? I appreciate the response that we have received, but are there any shortages or is every single unit and class fully staffed?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: I thank the member. I am happy to divert to —

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is a bit confusing, because of the assistant minister. Is there any problem with Hannah taking the questions?

The CHAIR: No, not at all, but it still has to come through you.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Okay, I will hand over directly to the managing director again.

Ms M. Hoad: Thank you, minister. At the moment we have no lecturing shortages. We have very good recruitment processes. We work closely with industry and all classes are addressed by lecturer availability.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will supplement that answer because TAFE lecturer shortages have been the subject of some discussion. I will make a general comment apart from North Metropolitan TAFE. The colleges are experiencing managing short-term staffing vacancies without disruption to students. It is becoming difficult for some of our regional TAFE locations to achieve that due to geographical challenges, particularly in a tight labour market. We have instigated a \$2.9 million temporary regional incentive initiative for the 2024 calendar year to help regional TAFE colleges attract and retain lecturers in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Kalgoorlie. The colleges have implemented a range of recruitment strategies to attract lecturers including a sector-wide TAFE lecturer recruitment campaign to attract skilled professionals from industry to lecturing positions across TAFE colleges. They have reported that it has been a very successful recruitment campaign, with approximately 1 330 applications received across all the TAFE colleges.

[9.10 am]

The CHAIR: Sorry, Minister Beazley, my apologies. You and Minister McGurk can both answer questions.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Thank you, chair.

Ms L. METTAM: At any point in the 2023–24 financial year to date has North Metro TAFE pulled lecturers from a course because of an expected impending shortage in another course, leading to a disruption; and, if so, which courses does that relate to?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Could the member repeat the question?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. At any point in the 2023–24 financial year to date has North Metro TAFE pulled lecturers from other courses because of an expected impending shortage, leading to a disruption for students; and, if so, which courses?

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: At that level of operational detail, I will defer to the managing director.

Ms M. Hoad: Thank you, minister. Lecturers are assigned, reassigned and timetabled to different units depending on their specific skills. We have very strong regulatory requirements around lecturers' currency and competency to deliver. It is absolutely a bit of a juggling act to get the right people in front of the right classes, so there is a lot of movement amongst lecturers on a regular basis, particularly as new lecturers come in with particular specialised skill sets. I am not aware of any specific cases in which anyone has moved because of a lecturer shortage or because of an anticipated shortage, but there is rescheduling of lecturers to classes all the time throughout the entire industry areas.

Ms L. METTAM: Have any courses been cancelled in the last financial year due to staff shortages; and, if so, which courses?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Specifically in North Metro TAFE?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: Not to my knowledge, but I will confirm with the managing director.

Ms M. Hoad: There was a miscommunication and one class was temporarily postponed, but that was really just a miscommunication and it was rescheduled straightaway.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The member for Vasse asked whether any courses were cancelled, but I think the managing director's answer was related to a class. Can I clarify that there has never been a course cancelled?

Ms M. Hoad: Sorry—absolutely. No course was cancelled; it was just a class.

Ms L. METTAM: I was referring in my last question to the light fabrication unit. As I understand it, student construction workers were advised that it had been cancelled due to staff shortages, and they were left in limbo, as they described it, for two weeks. Is the minister able to provide any more clarification on that? Was there always going to be a temporary pause on that course? The situation did not appear to be resolved until questions were asked.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is actually not the case that it was only after external questions were asked that the situation was resolved. My advice on the light fabrication course that the member is talking about is that one of the staff members took some unscheduled leave and, without authorisation, an administration officer sent out advice to students that there may be some delay to the course as a result. But, in fact, as I said, that advice was not authorised and the course was able to proceed. The class was able to proceed and the full course was able to proceed because staff were able to fill those temporary gaps, which occurred as a result of staff leave, not staff shortages.

I will ask the assisting minister if she has anything further to add.

Ms H.M. BEAZLEY: No, I do not. I have nothing further to add, thank you.

Ms L. METTAM: The circumstances around the delay to this course were not communicated to the students until after questions were raised by *The West Australian*, and it was also communicated that the course would not continue for the rest of the year. Does the minister have anything further to clarify?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the managing director to give some confirmation about the chronology of events. As I said, my advice is that an administration officer sent out advice to students and employers in the area affected without authorisation and before proper arrangements could be made for the temporary leave that had been taken, rather than any ongoing staff vacancies, but I will hand over to the managing director.

Ms M. HOAD: Thank you, minister. The minister's statements are correct. It was an unauthorised response, somewhat offhandedly sent out by a client services officer. The team was, in fact, swinging in behind and making sure that the class could continue; that was already in train by the management of the portfolio that delivers the course.

Ms L. METTAM: As far as the minister is aware, have any other classes or courses been affected in this way due to temporary leave or staff shortages?

Ms S.F. McGURK: If the member is asking specifically about North Metro TAFE, that is one thing. If the member is asking across the whole TAFE system, she will understand that with thousands of lecturing staff and courses being delivered, it is not the case that lecturing staff are allocated to particular courses and that is all. It is a fluid situation whereby depending on student numbers and demand at the time, people can be moved around. As the managing director said, it is obviously also dependent on the lecturing staff's technical expertise. They are authorised and accredited to deliver certain subjects. It is not my understanding that any staff shortages have caused the cancellation of particular classes or courses, but it is the case that we continue to prioritise staff recruitment and retention in and across the TAFE colleges. They are a crucial part of the operations. They are valued, and it is competitive at the moment to attract and retain them in the system.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the North Metropolitan TAFE authority.

[9.20 am]