

TAFE COLLEGES

65. Mr M. McGOWAN to the Minister for Training and Workforce Development:

I refer to the Liberal–National government’s decision in 2009 for TAFE colleges to rebrand themselves that created 11 disconnected and rather strange brands, and resulted in Western Australian TAFEs each spending on average \$250 000 a year on advertising and public relations and competing against each other for greater market share.

- (1) Does the minister acknowledge that her government’s flawed decision to rebrand TAFE into a series of differently named colleges and the subsequent wasted expenditure on advertising of \$250 000 each, per year, is a failure?
- (2) Is it the case that the model the government created has failed because student numbers are declining and as a consequence another 230 Western Australians will lose their jobs?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

- (1)–(2) I welcome the opportunity to speak about training in this place, and I thank the Leader of the Opposition for a question on training. I am very committed to Training and Workforce Development; it is a very exciting portfolio area.

With respect to the Leader of the Opposition’s question, we need to understand the context of where those changes were made. The genesis of the policy around separating those colleges into 11 separate institutions was initiated around nine to 10 years ago, and then those changes were initiated in 2009. A lot has changed in the training sector since that time. The federal government has moved to a fully contestable market because it wants to see more contestability in the TAFE sector. As a result of that, the federal government requires state TAFEs and state training sectors, particularly the publicly funded TAFEs, become more efficient and more competitive in the way that they conduct themselves, so that they can be eligible and competitive in a contestable environment. What has also changed is that there has been an explosion in the number of private training providers.

Out of the changing environment, in 2014, the Leader of the National Party, who was then Minister for Training and Workforce Development, brought down the findings of the Sears review. Margaret Sears, in her 2014 review, recommended a range of changes to the sector, to TAFE and to the way that the state administers training. One of the outcomes of that review was a recommendation for a more thorough interrogation of what we should do within TAFE colleges. The purpose of the model was to have the individual colleges become more highly specialised, and a degree of specialisation has occurred, but we found from this review process that in this changing environment, with far greater competition from the private sector, in order to keep our TAFE sector’s reputation intact as one of the best publicly funded training sectors in the Australian jurisdictions, we needed to make some changes. Those changes are about collapsing administrative structures that are burdensome and costly. There were 11 governing councils and 11 management teams. Six of our colleges are the smallest colleges in the country. The model was no longer going to be sustainable in the changing training environment, and that is why I initiated the reform. Out of that reform, the government has adopted the recommendations of that review committee. Those recommendations are to collapse the structures down from 11 institutes to five TAFEs and to go back to the TAFE branding, which has been well received, because everyone was calling them TAFE anyway. I put to opposition members —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, you are on two!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The purpose of our training sector and TAFEs is to deliver training to students. The choice is whether to spend \$23 million on bulky administrative structures that the review committee said are no longer the most efficient way to operate and release that \$23 million each year into the training sector to make TAFE sustainable or to keep the administrative structures for the sake of saving those 230 administrative jobs. The taxpayers’ dollar has to go to training people to get into employment or further education. That is our commitment and that is my purpose. We will continue to push on with reform in this sector to ensure that we keep our rung as one of the benchmark state-funded training institutions in Australia.