

Division 25: Training and Workforce Development — International Education, \$21 307 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for International Education.

Ms K. Ho, Director General, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms G. Husk, Acting Executive Director, Service Delivery, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms R. Brown, Director General, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Ms J. Kirk, Acting Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Mr A. Blagaich, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards, Department of Education.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy, Department of Education.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for International Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 385 and paragraph 5 under the heading “Labour Market Conditions”, which states —

With the lifting of the State’s hard border, the Department is implementing new initiatives to attract skilled migrants and international students ...

Can the minister outline what some of these initiatives are?

[3.40 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Ms Ho to elaborate on that.

Ms K. Ho: Thank you, minister. There is a new budget initiative in this year’s budget—that is, the regional TAFE international student strategy. It is a \$2.4 million initiative to attract international students to live, work and study in regional Western Australia, alleviating critical skill shortages being experienced by regional businesses in targeted occupations such as aged care, disability care, child care, hospitality and tourism. The program will commence on 1 January 2023 for a two-year period. It will offer up to 200 international students a bursary of \$5 000 and support to find part-time work and accommodation from a designated officer in the TAFE colleges. The courses will be available and will align with skilled migration pathways to permanent residency. Students will be able to study with South Regional TAFE, Central Regional TAFE or North Regional TAFE.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is very good. I have a further question on that. I note, minister, obviously those elements—aged care, child care—are well and truly needed and the \$5 000 assistance et cetera is good, but what is the time frame for how long it will be before those students end up in the workforce to assist in those industries?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member asking how long it will take those students to complete their course?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Ho to answer, but, obviously, it will depend on whether they are doing it part time or full time.

Ms K. Ho: Many of those courses in those areas are one-year courses but international students are able to work part time while they are studying. We expect that through their part-time work arrangements they will be able to assist with the skills needs in each region.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is it correct that this program starts in 2023?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It starts on 1 January 2023.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Why is it starting so late when the need is right now in child care, in tourism and in aged care? It is right now. Why are we waiting? Why is the government dragging its feet until 1 January 2023?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure Ms Ho will add to this, but, as the member would know, most courses start at the beginning of the academic year. This budget announcement was made in May and we cannot retrospectively apply it to February this year, so that is why it will start in the next academic year.

Ms K. Ho: That is correct, minister. I would add that there is a lag time with the marketing to and recruitment of international students from overseas. We will commence marketing and recruiting students in about August for the 2023 academic year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is well intentioned, but the reality is it is not going to affect what we need presently. Small businesses are desperate. People in regional communities are desperate because they cannot work because they

cannot put their kids into day care. There is no sense of urgency. Surely, there are other incentives to get international students to come and provide some relief. It will not be all because the number of workers that is needed is too great, but by waiting until 2023, it seems like the government is missing the boat on it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Ms Ho may want to add to this. This is about international students. It is not about preventing people from coming to work in these industries straightaway. Also, may I add, thank goodness we have a new federal government that takes these issues very seriously. We are looking at the workforce but this is about training. Part of the issue the member raised is about the workforce, which is a slightly different issue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, sorry, minister; I understand what it is. It is training. We are offering international students not only a pathway, but also part-time work, whether that is in a cafe, or in a restaurant at night, or in a bar, or at the front counter of a hotel or motel. It will provide incentives to get international tourists who have been our lifeline, when it comes to backpackers and so forth. This is a welcome addition but an addition that is way too late to be able to fill the current gaps. We have been through mental health issues and small businesses are under pressure. It is huge. Anyway, I must not go on because I have another question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 384 and spending changes. I note the line item “Regional TAFE International Student Strategy” under new initiatives has funding of \$776 000 in 2022–23, which then drops to \$622 000 and then down to \$202 000 and then to zero. Can the minister tell me what this funding in the current budget is for, and why it is dropping to zero in the out years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Ho to answer that. It is interesting that this question just shows how the previous Liberal–National government left us such bad financial books.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I cannot see that item in any line item. Where is the line item for that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We budget for a certain period of time. We do not just continue to evaluate. We will provide funding to the end of 2024–25 and that will then be re-evaluated. We do not just keep funding going on forever. I will ask Ms Ho if she would like to answer that question.

Ms K. Ho: Thank you, minister. This is the line for the new initiative that we previously described, the \$2.4 million for the regional international TAFE student strategy. It is a two-year pilot and so, as the minister said, when that pilot has been run it will be evaluated to consider the future.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does that include sparkies, plumbers and, given the fact that there is a shortage in the building industry, apprentices? We could get international students to come and do that now. They would not have to wait until 1 January. There is a huge need now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: All right. I will ask Ms Ho if she wants to answer that. But, look, the member is getting mixed up here between students and workforce. If you are going to bring these students in to do a sparky course, that is going to take a number of years as well. We cannot just bring in students and say, “You become a sparky straightaway”. They will be either a qualified sparky or not, and they can come from overseas. This is a program about students, not the workforce, as such. Anyway, Ms Ho, do you want to answer the question? But really, the member’s question is not properly directed.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No. With all due respect, minister, this is about someone who wants to come from overseas who does not necessarily need to go down a particular path. They can go and get a trade and be training on the job by 1 January if they started now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Nothing is preventing them doing that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The need is now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, and we are not stopping them from doing that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am talking about providing incentives. What I am trying to say is that if the government provides the same incentives for the building industry to the hospitality industry with apprentices, it could fulfil whatever the government has as its criteria.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Ms Ho.

Ms K. Ho: The trades mentioned are achieved through four-year apprenticeships in general and they are not generally offered to international students. There is a four-year lag to have a fully qualified tradesperson. There are a range of other initiatives that do not relate to international education to address the needs in the construction trades.

[3.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think the lag is in the decision-making by the government.

Dr A.D. BUTI: May I just add that the issue is the dire need for people to move into these areas that have been identified, such as child care and aged care. They do not need an incentive to become sparkies; people are becoming sparkies.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 392, “Recruitment and Management of International Students”. I note the FTE growing from 32 to 51 in the next budget year. Can the minister enlighten us as to what those FTE will be doing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Ho to answer that.

Ms K. Ho: The growth in the FTE reflects the recovery of the service delivery. As international students increase, staff at TAFE International WA will increase to service that business.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. In light of that, what is the expected increase in international students over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Does Ms Ho have any comments on that?

Ms K. Ho: Yes, I have; thank you. We are forecasting TAFE college students for 2022–23 at 1 450, rising to 1 700 the following year, 2 486 in the following year and in the 2025–26 year to 3 030. They are the TAFE students. I have got figures for English language intensive courses for overseas students as well. Are you interested in those? For 2022–23, we have 100, then rising to 200 in 2023–24, 200 in 2024–25 and 200 in 2025–26.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay, thank you.

The appropriation was recommended.