

GOVERNMENT BUILDING TRAINING POLICY

Statement by Minister for Training and Workforce Development

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Training and Workforce Development) [2.03 pm]: I am pleased to inform the house of the new Government Building Training Policy, which is set to create more opportunities for apprentices and trainees in Western Australia's building and construction industry. It replaces the Priority Start program, which had been endorsed by the former Labor government in 2007, and will apply to new building, construction and maintenance work issued for tender from 1 October this year. Priority Start has been widely criticised by industry and the Auditor General. The Auditor General found that the policy had significant flaws with the collection and reporting mechanisms, and that legal advice raised concerns about a possible breach of free trade agreements. Priority Start is unworkable.

The Government Building Training Policy will make use of state government building and maintenance contracts to grow the training commitment of the construction sector. The new policy will require companies awarded state government building, construction and maintenance contracts with a labour value of over \$2 million to meet benchmarks in the engagement of apprentices and trainees. The policy will apply to state government construction projects such as public schools, hospitals and large-scale public housing projects, as well as maintenance contracts. Under these new contractual arrangements, construction contractors undertaking state government building projects with an estimated labour value of over \$2 million will be required to meet industry average training rates of apprentices and trainees across their workforce and those of the subcontractors they are using. A target training rate of 11.5 per cent has been set for the policy, based on the building and construction industry average for the ratio of apprentices and trainees to tradespeople in Western Australia. These requirements will apply also to state government maintenance contracts with an estimated labour component of \$2 million, or more, for the total contract. The new policy will fix the compliance problems of the old policy and improve transparency and accountability by reporting performance measures in agencies' annual reports tabled in Parliament.

The building and construction industry is the largest single employer of apprentices and trainees on a sector-by-sector basis, and the demand for building and construction skills remains strong. The state government has a commitment to ensuring an adequate supply of skilled workers in the building and construction industry, and continues to invest heavily in new infrastructure and maintenance. It is fitting that this contributes to the sustainability of the highly skilled construction trades workforce in our state. The state government is committed to developing a strong training culture and promoting the employment of apprentices and trainees. For that reason, the state government is pleased to support employers who choose to invest in training and help to ensure the ongoing sustainability of WA's construction sector workforce.