

TRAINING AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Motion

HON DAN CADDY (North Metropolitan) [1.04 pm]: I move —

That the Legislative Council acknowledges the state's strong conditions post-pandemic and commends the McGowan Labor government for its historic investment in training and vocational education.

It gives me immense pleasure to bring this motion to the house today. Although the motion is in one sentence, it has two limbs. The training part of this motion is especially important to members in this house. Indeed, we have two former ministers for education in this house, and Hon Donna Faragher and Hon Stephen Pratt have spoken at length about training and the importance of investment in training, as have many others—I do not want to miss anyone out.

I will go to the start of the motion, which is about the strong position post the COVID pandemic. I think it is important to touch on this for more than just a few seconds because it is the strong position post the COVID pandemic, and the way the McGowan government managed the COVID pandemic from both a health point of view and an economic point of view, that has provided this state with the best set of books of any state in the commonwealth. It is only on the back of that good and sound fiscal management that we have the ability to invest, as we are doing, in our TAFEs and training. We know that we have the best set of books in the country because the Premier of New South Wales evidences that in the way he constantly whines about how well our state is going as opposed to the finances of his own state.

We also had the best health outcomes of any state in the commonwealth. I heard a report a couple of weeks ago about the COVID infection and hospitalisation numbers in Western Australia. I note, sadly, that just last week in New South Wales there were 8 900 new cases, 834 people in hospital, 13 in ICU and, quite tragically, 22 lives lost in that period. Our good position is because of the decisions taken by government, and the people of Western Australia came along with us for the journey. The people of Western Australia backed what we were doing and were with us the whole way. I also note that now, in any case, Western Australia has the highest per capita spend on health of all the states in the commonwealth.

Post-COVID life in Western Australia has had its challenges, as it has all around the country and the globe. However, Western Australia is in as strong a position as any other jurisdiction on the planet, and I think it is important that we recognise that and we recognise, as I said, that this incredibly strong position has allowed us to invest significantly in training in Western Australia, including in our TAFEs. The McGowan government on day 1 started fixing TAFE and training even prior to the COVID pandemic. This McGowan government now in its second iteration is incredibly proud of its record on training and funding for training and the TAFE sector. I remember in this chamber listening to my good friend Hon Stephen Pratt talking about the incredible programs being run across the TAFE campuses in his electorate, the South Metropolitan Region. Indeed, he committed very early on—it may well have been his inaugural speech—to get around to all the TAFEs in his region and to see firsthand exactly what is happening. That is this government's commitment to training and TAFEs from the Premier, the Minister for Education and all members, including members in this place.

Speaking of regions, the other key point I wish to make about overall investment is that under the former education minister, Hon Sue Ellery, more than 50 per cent of capital investment in our TAFEs was made in regional areas. That also shows the importance that this government puts on looking after our regional areas. I wanted to contrast this government with the previous government, which members in this place know I am wont to do from time to time. I take some guidance from the formidable Leader of the House, as I often have throughout my career. She has made the point that there is no question that under the previous government, the training system had been run down, TAFE fees had increased and public training was beyond the reach of many ordinary Western Australians. This occurred some years ago, but it is a legacy that those opposite should not walk away from. I remember that Liza Harvey, the former member for Scarborough and Leader of the Opposition, acknowledged this in an interview in similar terms.

One of the strengths of this government is the education ministers we have had. Hon Sue Ellery was education minister for the entirety of the first term of this government. Now we have Dr Tony Buti, who is also an incredible minister. That is in contrast to the previous government, which had a revolving door of education ministers. I think it had five ministers during the time it was in government.

After Hon Sue Ellery was first sworn in as minister in this place in 2017, she visited the WA State Training Board. The people at the State Training Board said, "You're the first minister we've seen in about five years. The previous ministers didn't come and talk to us. They didn't ask us about the things that were important." This highlights the

issue of not only making TAFE and training more accessible by reducing fees, as we have done with courses, but also about making sure we maintain the infrastructure, the equipment and everything else at an incredibly high level.

I want to now touch briefly on training for veterans and those in the defence industry. Members of this house would know that I have a longstanding interest in the welfare of our veterans and their transition from the Australian Defence Force into whatever their new civilian role may be. A very important part of a smooth and good transition into civilian life is often the training they receive. The Australian federal government has launched a \$10 million program that will provide Western Australian graduates with a 12-month traineeship in areas that are important to the defence industry. A pilot program will support 120 students. The Australian government will contribute almost \$45 000 per trainee to fund their wages. This program is supported by both sides of Parliament in the federal sphere.

I turn to what we are doing as a state. In 2020, we launched a campaign to attract Western Australians to apply for defence jobs. We complemented this campaign with the establishment of seven new maritime defence industry TAFE courses. Those courses, which are super important, will contribute to a defence-ready workforce to bolster WA's defence industry and support maritime defence contracts. A total of \$3.3 million was set aside for TAFE short courses, which were put together in consultation with the industry to meet the skills demand. Those courses are available through the South Metropolitan TAFE. The campaign was also supported by other initiatives, including \$8.5 million for defence industry employers to train apprentices in key trades; just under \$3 million for an additional 335 apprenticeships in nominated trades; investment in scholarships for women; the creation of the defence industry veterans employment scheme; and facilities upgrades through capital injections to accommodate this training at South Metropolitan TAFE.

This state is doing a lot in our training institutions, including TAFE, and across the board to look after our veterans who are transitioning from the defence force and look after those people who may not necessarily be veterans but who are looking for jobs in that industry. As someone who has taken a keen interest in this industry for many years, that is incredibly heartening to see.

As I said, from day one, the McGowan government has invested heavily in training and TAFE. Since coming to government in 2017, we have looked very closely at where TAFE had gone under the previous government. We became very focused on bringing TAFE and training back so that it was an accessible pathway for all Western Australians. From memory, I think the first thing we did in 2017 was to freeze TAFE fees, which provided students with cost certainty. It meant that students, either those at TAFE or those looking to go to TAFE, were able to look at their lives and budget knowing that they would not see incredible increases in certain courses, which happened over previous years. Not only that, but also we slashed fees by up to 72 per cent for over 200 courses in key industries. That not only goes towards making TAFE more accessible and affordable to Western Australians, but also means more people are coming through and contributing to the important trades in which they gain qualifications. This includes a number of construction-based apprenticeships, traineeships and pre-apprenticeships.

Our Free in '23 initiative is providing fee-free training in over 130 courses and skill sets across high-priority areas such as the care sector, the IT sector, cybersecurity, agriculture, construction, hospitality and tourism. The initiative is funded through the Albanese government's landmark 12-month skills agreement, which has injected more than \$112 million into WA skills and training. This delivers just shy of 19 000 fee-free places at our training institutions.

It is not just about what we are doing with training in TAFE and other institutions; it is about giving incentives to employers and supporting employers to take on more apprentices and trainees through a wide range of incentive programs. This is where the jobs and skills employer incentive program comes in. There are wage subsidy programs to boost the number of apprenticeships and trainees in construction. There is an adult apprentice employer incentive program providing support for businesses that decide to take on a mature age apprentice. We also provide ongoing support for the Construction Training Fund, which provides grants to building and construction employers to employ apprentices and trainees. Plus, there is the recently finished apprenticeship and traineeship re-engagement incentive that provides financial assistance to businesses that re-engaged an apprentice or trainee whose training contract was terminated or cancelled due to the pandemic. Our \$229 million Rebuilding our TAFEs program includes a record \$215 million investment to upgrade essential infrastructure across TAFE, the largest TAFE capital works program in the state's history. There are 14 major upgrades to TAFE colleges across the state and, as I pointed out before, half of them are located in regional areas. I will not go through all of them in detail because I am sure there are other members, especially on this side, who would like to talk about what is happening with investment in TAFE in their regions and what they have seen on the ground when they are out and about talking to people.

I am quickly running out of time, so I want to recap the seriousness with which the McGowan government takes the good funding of our training and employment services, and the key initiatives. I have already mentioned the freezing of fees the very second we took government and the reducing of fees for over 210 high-priority courses. I have talked about fee-free training for over 130 courses. There is also the partnership we are now forming with the Albanese government, which is a federal government that absolutely understands the importance of getting it

right in our TAFEs and training institutions and the financial and economic benefits that flow for the state and, indeed, the country when we get things right in that space. There is also the largest capital works program, which I have already spoken about.

I have so many pages of notes and not enough time to go through them, but I will go back to the very first part of this motion, because it is really critical that whilst we are in this chamber, we agree that funding for our TAFEs and training sector is critically important. We can never lose sight of the history. We can never lose sight of what we inherited when we came to government, especially what was happening with increased fees and everything else at TAFEs across the state. That is one side of the coin we should never lose sight of. The other thing that is really important, and it goes back to the first few words of this motion I have moved today, is that the Legislative Council acknowledge the state's strong conditions post-pandemic because it is due to the financial management of the McGowan government, the sound fiscal management and the way we managed COVID in this state both as a pandemic affecting health and economically. The budget has been turned around, and we have looked not just to pay down debt but to have significant surpluses so we can invest in what is essentially part of the future of Western Australia—the training and TAFE sectors—so that all Western Australians have an opportunity to go to one of those educational institutions and be trained in a skill or a vocation that then leads them to progressing their life and career with a skill set behind them that they would not have otherwise been able to attain had we not put this investment into TAFEs and cut fees.

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [1.25 pm]: I rise in support of the motion moved by Hon Dan Caddy. I am really pleased he has moved it for us to discuss today. Vocational education and training is very important in our community. It is a topic we probably do not discuss enough and one that really helps to secure young people's futures.

I start with a little anecdote about a conversation I had with my son just last week. He is a little uncertain about his own career at the moment. He has just turned 19. He never really liked school and I think he was a bit of a square peg in a round hole when it came to education, and that was always pretty complicated. I am a teacher, and many teachers in the room would tell us that their kids do not take instructions and advice from them. They seem to be the toughest audience of all. I am an English teacher and my daughter would not even let me read her English essays so fiercely independent is she. I was having a conversation with my son the other day, and he was talking about how it had been difficult to catch up with his mates lately. I asked him what was going on and he said that there were all these free TAFE courses and his friends were all off doing these courses. I thought that was a really nice insight into a couple of things. One is that he does not listen to me and the other is that there is some really great uptake, and there are people in the community talking about it and seizing upon those opportunities. It is a really hard time for young people. There is a lot of messaging and information about career opportunities, and there are some wildly unrealistic expectations in the world for them about what a career can look like, so they really need some supports, course guidance and all those things that help young people make decisions that are best for them.

The Free in '23 TAFE courses have probably been a bit of a godsend for many people. Across the nation the cost of living is impacting many people and sometimes it is hard for them to feel optimistic about the future when they do not even know what their career will be. Those fee-free courses do more than just teach skills; they provide people with a bit of optimism and confidence that they are bringing something to the world. I congratulate the McGowan government for that initiative and what it brings to the table for many young people.

Hon Dan Caddy spoke of a number of the vocational education and training initiatives put in place by the McGowan government. There are almost too many to mention, but it is really great to note that apprenticeship and traineeship numbers have reached new heights in Western Australia. In June 2022, 47 700 apprentices and trainees—just under 50 000—started training or were registered to be training. That is a fantastic indication of the support and of the people, probably young and old, taking up those opportunities on offer to train, learn and develop confidence in their chosen career pathway.

There have also been some new employment-based training pathways launched in WA in information and communication technology. We really need to focus on training and encouraging people to take up the skills and job opportunities available in the field. The certificate in cybersecurity, the diploma in information technology and the advanced diploma in information technology are great opportunities for people who are interested in all things technology, and, let us face it, a lot of young people these days are constantly engaged with technology in some way. Cybersecurity, in particular, presents a real opportunity for people to grow and develop, and it is really pleasing to see that one being offered for free. Cybersecurity is not only being extended to people, but also part of the existing worker traineeship program. It helps to reduce the course fees for a set number of existing ICT workers, which is really helpful for some of those smaller scale employers who want to upskill their current employees who are working in that field. It allows them to have those employees train and develop further, which enhances those employees' career opportunities down the track in a way that is not cost prohibitive. It is an enabling initiative, and it is an excellent government initiative as well.

Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Klara Andric

The other issue that I want to touch on is the job ready programs for the resources sector. WA is very much built on our resources and agricultural sectors. One of the initiatives that was spoken about in June last year was the new driller's offsider job ready program, which will meet the strong demand for drillers in the resources sector. A lot of these jobs are relatively unknown to people, so there is a twofold benefit to it. One benefit is that it brings job opportunities and training to the fore and the other benefit is that it provides a good short course, entry-level skill base for people who want to have a go at a driller's offsider job. The other great thing about that initiative is that it partners with industry so that industry gets the skilled workers it needs. Those partnerships with industry are vitally important. In fact, I spoke to some of the industries in my electorate of Geraldton. I have a specific example of one of our regional economic development grant receivers, JMH Group, which deals with heavy machinery. JMH Group has TAFE students come in and is across what TAFE delivers. One of the things that businesses like JMH Group are crying out for is stronger partnerships with industry so that those apprentices can develop the skills that they can then deliver to the workplace upon graduating with their qualification. This initiative recognises those partnerships, which are particularly important. Industry has been giving some very positive feedback about those partnerships and what they are offering.

Members may also have heard that across industry a lot of our employers in the regions are telling stories of mining industry recruiters waiting outside the gates of their operations. I spoke to some boatbuilders the other day and they said that they are haemorrhaging employees because the mining industry wants more employees—there is nothing wrong with that—but it is a really competitive market. The best thing that we can do for all those groups is to enable those people to upskill to fulfil the roles in both the resources sector and the on-the-ground businesses in our regions. Training programs that allow people to learn entry-level skills—ones that are recognised by industry as being useful and of value—and be job ready when they walk out the door are fantastic.

In that same vein, the then Minister for Education and Training, Minister Ellery, announced the Career Taster program in schools. That program is also very important. It was fantastic to hear it being announced at the year 9 level, before students are in year 10 and are suddenly asked halfway through to make these massive life decisions: What subjects will I do? What will my future look like? A lot of these young people have never had a job or even a part-time job. These days the pressures of daily life for a young person does not allow them the opportunity to have a job. The Career Taster program is a fantastic opportunity to get young people thinking about what jobs are out there, what those jobs are like on the ground, and what they need to do to fill those roles. The program might even help them to eliminate some job pathways, which is also very useful, particularly with the cost of university. No-one wants to get midway through or towards the end of their degree and find out that that career is not for them, especially not these days with the cost of degrees as they are. The Career Taster program allows our young year 9 students opportunities. The program has been delivered to, I think, around 17 000 year 9 students so far, which is a really great opportunity for those young people to explore, think about and investigate careers. There is a portal that allows them to browse and experience the different jobs out there and to hear people who are in those jobs describe what their daily life is like. The program allows young people to analyse their own attributes and things that they like, which helps them to make choices about their potential future career.

The Career Taster program sounds very simple, but it is very important. I will again refer to my son; he will be the star of my speech today. He is a square peg in a round hole when it comes to education. His most common complaint about education is that it does not reflect real life. He asks who is teaching him about managing money, who is teaching him about all those stupid forms that he sees people filling out and who is teaching him about what careers are out there. As teachers, we often hear most from the students who are doing okay or the ones who are complex and are struggling for a whole range of reasons. I know that my son would have benefited greatly from a Career Taster program. I have argued very strongly, in an education context, that attending a Career Taster program should happen at year 7, the start of their secondary education. Young people should be starting to think about and explore careers right from the very beginning. Schools should be partnering with our young people, their families and industries in a collaborative effort to allow them to explore and design their future pathways. Therefore, I think the Career Taster program is a wonderful step towards that end, and I am really grateful that it has been introduced to schools and will continue.

In partnership with that program is the McGowan government's \$31.7 million investment in in-house career counsellors. In-house career counsellors are gold in schools when it comes to educating and informing young people. They work in collaboration with students, staff, parents, training providers, industry and employers to help identify what opportunities are out there. It is a beautiful collaboration between all those groups to help a young person choose or eliminate a career and think about what a career and a future might look like for them. This helps young people to explore who they are and what jobs they might be suited to. A career counsellor's role is very important within a school context because it allows young people to feel engaged and to know why they are there. They understand what they are heading towards. I definitely had that experience when I was teaching English at a difficult-to-staff public school. The entire class was a fairly disengaged group of students. But the ones who were doing TAFE programs alongside their education were far more focused and driven. They were far more likely to

sit and—not always do the work, but no student ever does—actually hand in and complete the work because they knew where they wanted to get to. They had a goal and they knew what they needed to do to ensure that they reached that goal, and they were participating in the real world as well. Career counsellors enable that participation, and their role will become increasingly important as education reflects on what it is offering, what it is trying to achieve and how it is partnering with young people to achieve what they want, which is really what is all about.

Last year, we had some really great evidence of the success of our vocational education and training programs. Three of Western Australia's 11 finalists were named winners at the Australian Training Awards, which was hosted in Adelaide. Those training awards are the biggest in the country. I will name those three people and what they won their awards for because it is quite a significant achievement to be recognised as some of the best in the nation. WA's Wayne Ryder, who is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Management WA, was named Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year for being a role model for others and for his work to promote health and wellbeing for at-risk Aboriginal people. That achievement is a direct outcome of vocational and education training efforts, which create flow-on effects in the community. Look at what Mr Ryder has achieved in what he has already contributed to the community.

Then there is Brittany-Leigh Wragg, one of the first students to study a certificate III in defence industry pathways. She took out the Trainee of the Year Award after trying out a range of different jobs while undertaking work placement rotations—all while building up a network of industry contacts. It is an outstanding outcome for a young woman to be recognised as the best in the country and for the work that she has done. She has moved through different opportunities and made connections. Everybody knows that it is a person's networks and the people they collaborate with that creates that collaborative effort that really lifts them up and helps them to succeed out in their community. I should mention that Miss Wragg mentioned that the support that she got from South Metropolitan TAFE and the program training services was the thing that helped her feel confident about choosing that training pathway.

In amongst that is a really important recognition of the work that the staff of our vocational education and training facilities do. They provide really vital real-world experience. Those trainers often come from a range of industries. We have an example of that in Parliament, with the member for Geraldton, Lara Dalton, who was a lecturer at TAFE. She had really good relationships with her students because she brought two things: one was that she was a very passionate and caring person and the other was that she owned a business in the very industry that she was lecturing in at TAFE. She brought lots of really fantastic real-world experience to share with students. Not only that, but also she brought connections with the other hospitality industry providers out in the community. She was able to assist her students to gain part-time employment and jobs after they had finished their study. These are the results of the invaluable contributions of our TAFE lecturers in the community.

The other winner was the WA Department of Justice. It won the Australian Apprenticeships Employer Award for its Raising the Bar Behind Bars program as a direct entry. It was a finalist in the same category in the previous year as well. It is really fantastic to see that we are also extending some of those programs to people who are experiencing challenges across the community. We really need to invest in people who are experiencing those challenges. That includes people who are in prison for various reasons. Those people still need to feel valued, learn their value and learn what they can contribute to society. That is exactly what the program does. I am really rapt to see it acknowledged for its efforts in that way.

Hon Dan Caddy also mentioned some of the infrastructure investment that is being made, particularly in regional WA. It is exciting to see that investment being made. Coming from Geraldton, I am painfully aware of the amount of young people we haemorrhage, because in the past we have not offered a full range of opportunities that young people would like to seize upon. Last year, former Minister Ellery opened a \$4 million visual arts and creative industries hub at Central Regional TAFE in Geraldton. It is a fantastic state-of-the-art facility. It is one that is a reflection of the McGowan government's record investment in TAFE infrastructure upgrades. This one in particular is really important in Geraldton and the region because Geraldton has a really thriving arts community. There are artists, performers, comedians, street artists, stand-up performers and poetry slams. We also have the beautiful Big Sky Readers and Writers Festival each year. It is delivered by the Geraldton Regional Library and City of Greater Geraldton.

The arts sector in the community is strong. Yamaji Art in Geraldton is delivering some fantastic work to identify the Yamatji community across the region. Having that facility helps to instil confidence in people to participate in those industries. We know how important the arts are to the cultural identity of a place. It really helps a place to express and identify itself to the world. That centre being available in Geraldton has enabled the community to experience a state-of-the-art facility to explore what their creative genius is. It is lovely to see that. I know that the member for Geraldton was particularly happy to see that a facility like that was allowing for some hands-on experience.

I want to reiterate a couple of important points that Hon Dan Caddy has touched on; they bear mentioning again. The McGowan government invested \$121.4 million in training initiatives in the 2021–22 state budget. That was

Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Klara Andric

a huge investment in education. I think education is the single most important thing we can do to support the future of young people and ensure the future of communities.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [1.44 pm]: I rise to make a few comments on the motion that has been moved by Hon Dan Caddy. I make these comments, perhaps not in the self-congratulatory tone of the motion, which members opposite would expect, but rather to quite sincerely recognise that training absolutely does play a very significant and valuable role in terms of employment, the development of a skilled workforce and, quite obviously, in terms of economic growth and opportunity. When I talk about opportunity, that is in terms of the individual, employer, the community and the state as a whole.

I will acknowledge that the government has implemented a number of initiatives within the training portfolio. The Leader of the House is out on urgent parliamentary business. I was her shadow in the opposition for the first four years of this government. I think she particularly enjoyed her time as Minister for Training. I acknowledge that. Of course, I will say that there are still outstanding matters. I will focus my attention on a couple of those matters today. I will say that some of the matters are not necessarily matters that the state government can resolve in isolation. However, they are matters that whenever there is an opportunity to raise issues around training and vocational education, we should take the opportunity to raise.

First and foremost, one of the biggest issues that remains in the context of training is that despite various reforms that have been undertaken by various governments of various political persuasions at both state and indeed federal level, the training space still continues to be incredibly complex. There is a lot of red tape, rules and regulatory reporting requirements that can sometimes be quite confusing and onerous for organisations and there is a lack of flexibility. As I said, that is not necessarily a criticism of the state government. There is, obviously, very much a role for the federal government in that space. It very clearly reflects that there are multiple layers within the training sector.

Whilst I think there have been some improvements—certainly as I have spoken to people—in the context of making the system easier for participants to gain information about training options and the like, there remain complexities for employers and other stakeholders. I have to say that when I was the shadow training spokesperson, it was one of the biggest annoyances and gripes that was raised to me, generally by employers, but certainly not just them. Their biggest gripe was the differing layers and approaches to issues. It is appreciated that we still very much have a regulatory regime here in Western Australia and the commonwealth as well; it is not the case in all states. I think we need to recognise that when it comes to it, it involves a lot of people and organisations. It is both federal and state governments and both state and federal regulatory bodies. We have TAFEs, registered and group training organisations, employers, industry associations, unions and schools, and, to be frank, they do not always work in sync. I think there are initiatives that have been underway to try to improve that, but it still sits there.

I have heard some of the comments with regard to the State Training Board. I want to acknowledge the work of the board and, in particular the chair, Jim Walker, whom I know. He is very well respected, both within this sector and outside of it.

The State Training Board's report *Strategies to grow apprenticeships and traineeships in Western Australia* states —

Many employers reported their frustration in trying to navigate the numerous bodies and websites to obtain up-to-date, relevant information including the rules, regulations, the availability of courses, government subsidies/financial supports available or the fees or costs of hiring an apprentice or trainee. Many small and medium businesses, the bulk of employers of apprentices, advised that don't have time and don't have dedicated HR departments to get the information they need to make informed decisions. These businesses need to be able to obtain accurate information in a timely manner.

The complexity in the current apprenticeship system lies with the perceived lack of coordination between the various agencies and different tiers of government. Employers reported that they were being over-served by the current administration arrangements with one employer reported being visited by two separate agencies on the same day to discuss the same issues. Employers are frustrated by being pushed between the various agencies because there is a lack of understanding about which agency is responsible for each part of the apprenticeship journey.

As I said, this is not an issue that can be easily resolved overnight. I think successive governments have had to deal with this problem. But if we are going to debate training, we need to acknowledge the complexities that remain within the system.

I listened intently to Hon Sandra Carr, specifically to what she said in the context of schools and vocational education training. I agree that the career taster program is a really good initiative and it is important that we have those types of initiatives earlier. I think year 9 is very good and appropriate, but it would be nice to have it a bit earlier. We all go to graduation ceremonies and inevitably when the students rock up to get their graduation certificate we hear about what they want to do. Most of them want to be AFL players. I think that is what my son will say when he graduates year 6.

Hon Dan Caddy: Didn't we all!

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I am focusing on the cricket side. Anyway, I will move on.

Children are thinking about these things. It is one of the first questions that people ask students: "What do you want to do when you leave school?" We need to provide more opportunities for students to think about the options available to them and not just the traditional jobs and occupations because there are thousands and thousands of opportunities available for students. Giving students opportunities to learn more about what might be available and things that they might not have even thought about is a really good thing. Certainly, I am supportive of that. In saying that, I continue to have concerns—I am certainly not alone in having these concerns—about the continued perceived value of taking a vocational pathway. It is interesting that two out of the eight priority areas in the State Training Board's *State training plan 2022–23* specifically focus on this issue. It is a priority for the board.

Members may recall that last week Hon Martin Pritchard moved a motion on education in this place. It is helpful that it has been a short time between debate on these motions. I raised some matters in that debate that I feel the new Minister for Education needs to investigate. I raised them because of comments made by Minister Buti about an examination of the declining number of students undertaking ATAR courses. I specifically focused on that aspect because of the context of education and his comments around ATAR, but I remind members that my comments were in relation to the need to assess the impact of the reforms that the previous education minister announced back in 2019 that provided new options for year 11 and 12 students to achieve their Western Australian Certificate of Education; principally, the ability for students to select a third pathway of five general courses to complete their certificate.

In the context of ATAR—I do not intend to go through what I said last week—there certainly has been a decline. That has been acknowledged by the minister, the Premier and many others. That is a concern. Equally, there is a concern that there has been a decline in the number of students achieving their WACE via the vocational education and training pathway. I have been tracking this since the former minister made her announcement on the general pathway option. In 2020, 10 928 students achieved their WACE through the VET pathway. In 2021, coinciding with the introduction of the third pathway, that fell to 9 001 students achieving their WACE through this pathway. That is a significant drop. I was provided with answers in the house just last month that in 2022, 9 070 students achieved their WACE through the VET pathway. It is quite clear that there has been a decline not only in respect of ATAR, but also the VET pathway. It was certainly quite a significant decline between 2020 and 2021, and we cannot ignore that. There might be varied reasons for that but I ask the education minister, who seems very keen to investigate the reasons for the decline in ATAR, and I support him on that, to examine the reasons for the decline in VET.

I reflect on an article published in *The West Australian* of 3 May 2019 that quotes then University of Western Australia senior lecturer in education Glenn Savage. He said that the third option could become a "catch-all" program for students without clear goals. The article continues —

"It runs the risk of creating a pathway that's seen as inferior to the ATAR pathway," he said, "But potentially not as effective, in terms of getting people where they want to go beyond school, because it doesn't provide them with a direct university pathway and it arguably wouldn't provide them with strong vocational training either."

Certainly, at the time of the announcement, I met with a number of principals and deputy principals who, it is fair to say, raised quite legitimate concerns about the impact of the third pathway, particularly in the context that they did not want to see students not take the VET pathway. It is quite clear from those figures that that has occurred and it is important that that is addressed.

Going back to what I was saying earlier, sadly there seems to be a prevailing view, not from everybody, and at times a stigma, as it is referred to by the State Training Board in one of its reports, that somehow VET is not as valuable as a university degree, despite the fact there are huge opportunities, as we have talked about today, in terms of employment outcomes and those opportunities other members have reflected on. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research did some research that found —

Just over 90% of younger and older apprentices in the trades and just under 80% in both categories in non-trade areas were employed after training ...

That is significant in terms of employment outcomes. The State Training Board's *State training plan 2022–23* states that under those priority areas that I have identified —

Despite so many individuals and employers engaging with the VET system, and indeed dependent on it, VET still battles poor public perceptions and a lack of awareness of the value it brings to individuals, employers and the economy.

The Board encourages the State Government, public and private training providers, and industry to work together to increase the community's understanding and appreciation of the value of training. The VET Sector builds a skilled and productive workforce, and gives individuals the capacity to engage in a vibrant and successful career.

By better advocating for VET, we can shift the narrative to emphasise its many strengths. Training is agile, industry endorsed, and has employment outcomes and earning capacity comparable to university. VET supports career development and professional growth by enabling workers to quickly upskill and by supporting continuous learning to keep up with today's ever evolving technologies and work requirements.

That is certainly something that Hon Sandra Carr referred to and I agree, but it goes on to say —

In particular, it is important that both industry and the school system better acknowledge and promote VET pathways.

A clear message from the Board's work on youth engagement is that more needs to be done to raise awareness and understanding of VET among young people. Young people frequently reported being discouraged from taking a VET pathway at school, with an ... (ATAR) pathway often promoted as the preferred option for students. Students reported experiencing stigma around their choices, with VET viewed as a second-class option to university.

School culture, peers, parents and educators all have a fundamental influence on young people's decision making about their future education, training and employment. These influencers should be the focus of targeted information and awareness raising campaigns on the value of VET.

I would certainly encourage the government to focus on that particular priority area. There has been discussion about career counsellors and I agree that they are incredibly important, but in addition to that and what would be enormously beneficial is greater support and awareness-raising campaigns for parents. Parents play a critical role in relation to this. Whilst we read many reports that say that as children become teenagers they choose not to listen so much to their parents, the fact is that there is an equal amount of research that says that despite that, the single biggest influencer for many children continues to be their parents. Increasing parents' understanding and awareness of the value of vocational education and training and the opportunities that come from a VET pathway is really important. I have spoken to career counsellors and others and there is a bit of a challenge in this area, but if there is an opportunity to increase the understanding of the opportunities for students, and that information is fed back to parents so that they can help the student to make informed decisions in and around what they would like to do when they leave school, then that is really important.

I will leave my comments there. I know that a number of members would like to say a few words on this motion. As I say, training is incredibly important. Its importance cannot be underestimated. Notwithstanding some of the initiatives put forward by the government, longstanding matters continue to need to be addressed and there are opportunities to do more good things.

HON PIERRE YANG (North Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.02 pm]: Firstly, I want to thank Hon Dan Caddy for bringing this important motion to the Legislative Council today. I also indicate that I am responding on behalf of the government. TAFE and training has been a cornerstone for the McGowan Labor government. We have put in place many measures over the years to ensure that Western Australians can gain employment, industry has access to the skilled labour it requires and the state's economy can continue to grow. I want to thank Hon Donna Faragher for her conciliatory tone, her measured response and her suggestions. I want to quickly respond to a point she made about the complexity of the vocational education and training space in the state and across Australia. We do not deny that complexity. The McGowan Labor government's response to that structural issue has been the creation of Jobs and Skills Centres across the state. As it stands, there are 17 Jobs and Skills Centres across Western Australia from Geraldton to Kalgoorlie, Bunbury to Albany and in the metropolitan region as well. They have brought together job-related services that previously operated in isolation, creating a one-stop shop for all the support needed by jobseekers and employers. These centres provide free professional and practical advice on training and employment opportunities, including career guidance, apprenticeship and training information, help with job searching and direct links into work.

This motion is a very important one because it brings us back to where we were when this government came to office in 2017. We faced a dire economic predicament and the sheer wreckage left by the former Liberal–National government in the training and TAFE space. Let us not forget that back in 2017, the state was in domestic recession. In Western Australia around 80 000 people were unemployed. In 2017, state debt was skyrocketing to \$31 billion and the forward estimates predicted that debt would reach \$43 billion in the next few years. When the McGowan Labor government took office, we talked about this time and again, the last time being in early October last year. We took the hard decision to rein in public sector expenditure. We froze the remuneration of senior executives,

members of Parliament and the judiciary for four years. We took those hard decisions in order to get the state into better shape and to make it ready for the recovery that was needed. We had an unprecedented rate of youth unemployment at 10.7 per cent and from 2012 to 2017 there was a 26 per cent drop in the number of people starting an apprenticeship or traineeship. That was the situation we found ourselves in.

If we fast forward six years, we are in a much better place because the McGowan government has done the hard work, despite the opposition—the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party—fighting tooth and nail every step of the way against the measures that we put in. We are now generating economic growth year on year. State debt is not \$43.7 billion, as predicted. At the end of the year, state debt will be \$29.2 billion. In fact, there is more good news on that front. The *Quarterly financial results report 2022–23* published in December 2022 stated that we were able to pay down another \$807 million in state debt, so we have brought state debt down by a third since we inherited it in 2017.

When we had this debate about the state’s economy in October 2017, Hon Dr Steve Thomas talked about the fiscal economy and the state economy. I appreciate that he attempted to provide me with an education because he was of the view that I was confused. There was no confusion about the state’s economy and the fiscal economy. The McGowan government had to rein in public sector expenditure to have fiscal discipline. It was important that when we had income from the mining sector and other taxes, that we invested those operating surpluses into the state’s economy and into the services that Western Australians needed. The opposition, when it was in government, did not do that. It spent a huge amount of money from the state’s coffers and it had the royalties for regions coffer on the side. It bought singing toilets and plastic cows, but in respect of training, the previous government was of the view that it was a good idea to rename all the TAFE campuses, at huge cost to the taxpayer, but to no benefit; there was no benefit in that at all. That was the situation we were in. I thank Hon Dr Steve Thomas for bringing that to our attention in his contribution on 13 October 2022.

We are looking at a situation in which the Liberal–National alliance in the upper house more often than not strikes a conciliatory tone, but the party alliance itself still plays politics. I say that because five days ago the Leader of the Liberal Party, Ms Libby Mettam, wrote an op-ed for *The West Australian*. It states, in part —

At the same time, we saw a 17 per cent drop in training numbers between 2017 and 2020. We are now feeling the effects.

Firstly, the Leader of the Liberal Party failed to talk about the figures when the Liberal Party was in government; it was 26 per cent, as I mentioned earlier. Again, she conveniently omitted the figures after those years, when there was a huge increase. I will touch on that.

Hon Darren West: Member, that’s why she’s not Leader of the Opposition.

Hon PIERRE YANG: Correct.

We have seen a huge increase in the numbers of apprentices and trainees in training—47 000 of them at the end of June 2022. That is a huge increase on the situation in 2017 because of the then Liberal–National government’s lack of interest in the training space. I say that because between 2008 and 2017 there were five ministers for training, or ministers for training and workplace development. I will name them: Hon Peter Collier from September 2008 to June 2012; Mr Murray Cowper from June 2012 to March 2013; Hon Terry Redman from March 2013 to December 2013—not even a year; Hon Dr Kim Hames from December 2013 to December 2014—just a year; and Hon Liza Harvey from December 2014 to March 2017, during whose reign we had a 510 per cent increase in TAFE fees and 467 job cuts across TAFE—467, which is more than 300 full-time equivalent positions.

Hon Darren West: She was the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon PIERRE YANG: Yes, for a time—before the then opposition decided to move on.

We need to set the facts straight. The economic situation that we were in was untenable. The people made the right choice: they voted in the McGowan Labor government. We set the work in place and we have started the journey to recovery, and I want to talk about that, very, very briefly. I may not have enough time to talk about all the measures we have put in place, but I will try my very best to do so.

When we came to power we tackled that issue. We froze TAFE fees immediately and significantly reduced the fees for 410 high-priority courses by up to 72 per cent. That was all under the leadership of the then Minister for Training, Hon Sue Ellery—a fine minister who cares about this state, cares about training, cares about students and cares about the future of Western Australia. We now have fee-free training for more than 130 courses in Western Australia, thanks to the McGowan Labor government and the federal Albanese Labor government. We have invested \$215 million in the largest TAFE capital works program in this state’s history, upgrading 14 TAFE campuses. We have invested in fee-free TAFE short courses and job-ready programs; provided \$25 million for state-of-the-art, modern TAFE equipment; conducted a review of skills, training and workforce development; significantly reduced fees for existing

Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Klara Andric

worker traineeships in child care, aged care and disability care; and undertaken civil constructions. We have also introduced the Western Australian jobs and skills employer incentive scheme and, as I mentioned, we have created jobs and skills centres across Western Australia. We expanded to the construction training fund levy to cover construction work in the mining sector. We worked with industry to develop qualifications that suit industry's specific needs. We introduced the enterprise training program, which has provided funding for more than 3 500 training places since 1 July 2019. We also invested \$5.1 million to support the introduction of a new apprenticeship pathway for the civil construction sector; provided \$4.5 million for a new tool rebate to support apprentices and trainees purchasing trade-related tools and safety equipment; and delivered a \$1.3 million initiative to assist young people to gain the experience and skills they need to obtain a driver's licence to enter a construction trade apprenticeship. We built the Metronet training centre to support the Metronet build and the broader rail industry in Western Australia. Who could forget that the Liberal Party said that rail was from a bygone era? That is its attitude. We also launched an \$18 million defence initiative package to create a pipeline of skilled workers to support our upcoming defence projects and enhance WA's capacity to secure future defence work. The list just goes on and on.

To compare this government's attitude with that of the previous government, I want to take members a little further back into history. In 2015 Hon Stephen Dawson moved the following motion in this place —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for continuing to undermine vocational-based training by imposing further fee increases, cutting staff and reducing funding to the sector.

In his contribution to the motion moved on 26 February 2015, Hon Stephen Dawson stated —

Why is the Barnett government smashing students who are attempting to improve their skills and get jobs? Why is it doing that? Why this attack on students? One of the reasons for the massive TAFE fee increases and job cuts is the attitude of the minister responsible for the portfolio. Another reason is the contempt shown by the Liberal and National Parties to the TAFE system in this state.

He then referred to the previous Minister for Training and Workforce Development, Hon Terry Redman. He stated —

When he was questioned about increases and fees on the record, he said that this means that these students will appreciate their studies more and take them more seriously.

Such was the attitude of the then minister, and such was the attitude of the Liberal–National government when it was in power between 2008 and 2017. Hon Peter Collier jumped to his government's defence and stated —

It is all well and good to lambast the government about massive rate hikes that are destroying the structure of training. The evidence I presented thus far about what the government has done across the board over the past seven years in the area of training is comprehensive and emphatic.

I could not disagree with Hon Peter Collier more on that because the record of the Liberal–National government between 2008 and 2017 was nothing but pathetic. It wrecked the TAFE system. It wrecked the training space. It made a lot of courses disappear by increasing fees and cutting training staff, and the attitudes of the relevant ministers at the time were quite unsatisfactory.

I think it is important that we all realise—I agree with Hon Donna Faragher—that training is very important. It is not inferior to other pathways. I agree with the honourable member that we need to work together to make sure that there is no stigma for people who choose to go down the vocational education and training pathway. Training changes people's lives. When people have decent career prospects, they can change their life for the better. They can be meaningful and contributing members of our community and have better lives for themselves, their families and their children.

I want to give a shout-out to the current Minister for Training, Hon Simone McGurk. I think Hon Dan Caddy talked about the exchange between Hon Suzanne Ellery and the State Training Board about the lack of contact or interest by the previous government and its ministers. I want to put on the record that Hon Simone McGurk was a member of the State Training Board for five years when she was in the union movement. This minister understands training and the importance of training to our state and the young people in our state. I want to commend our two wonderful ministers, Hon Suzanne Ellery and Hon Simone McGurk, for their input into the training space in Western Australia.

I want to conclude by saying that the McGowan Labor government cares about the training sector. We listened to the industry and the people and we came up with a range of measures and an unprecedented historic level of investment into this space; we acted decisively. I want to thank Hon Dan Caddy for bringing this wonderful motion to the house, and I commend the motion.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.22 pm]: It is nice to stand to talk to yet another great motion moved by Hon Dan Caddy, and this one touches a bit on my life experience as well. Acting President, you would be surprised that the very academic and articulate person you see standing here today was not always that person! I struggled in high school and probably did not take advantage of education. High school

was more of a social hangout; I would go to the cricket nets and run amuck instead of going to class. However, there was a turning point when I was in about year 9 or year 10, and it was good to see that the school probably recognised that, after many phone calls to my parents and letters home and everything else. A student counsellor by the name of Troy Bell managed to talk me into a traineeship and connected me with the local TAFE in Mount Gambier, South Australia. I had always said from a young age, probably due to my grandmother, that I was interested in cooking and being a chef. I think from about 11 or 12 years of age I said I wanted to do that. In hindsight, I would have looked at something else. It was a passion of mine and it was activated by the counsellor then putting into motion a traineeship through the local TAFE that worked in with my school program, so that I still managed to get by on the classes I needed to get by on, and my employer at the time, Charlie's Diner, where I was washing dishes.

It was definitely a turning point for me because I engaged in that program. We have to acknowledge that some kids get more out of doing something and accomplishing something with their hands in a field that they are interested in than being put through, time and again, the same school system that is working for other kids. We must realise that it does not work for everyone. In my case, it absolutely was a turning point and it felt like it was designed for me. I went on a journey from there. I went to TAFE with about six or seven other kids from around the south east of South Australia. I met a good friend of mine there whom I still talk to today, and I got to do the first year of an apprenticeship to become a chef. I was not getting the value out of school. I then got booked into a traineeship at Charlie's Diner, where I was working, and stepped up from washing dishes to food prep and learning the different stations and hanging out with chefs, which is always dangerous. I completed parts of the theory at school, rather than going to other classes like English or mathematics. It meant I was getting a TAFE accreditation and also completing year 10 at school.

I do not think that at the time I understood the value the experience would give me when I left school. I remember a huge event was held in Naracoorte where we had to cook for a couple of hundred people. For someone who wanted to be a chef, that experience was a welcome challenge. It was exciting and motivating. I did not want to go and hang out with my mates; instead, I wanted to prepare myself for what was going to be such an exciting experience that has stuck with me to this day. Funnily enough, the student counsellor ended up being the Liberal member for Mount Gambier. Then he got caught up in some fraud allegations and became the Independent member for Mount Gambier. He managed to get re-elected whilst on fraud charges, but he clearly knows his stuff! He was a far better student counsellor.

From there, I continued through school. I did not quite get to the end of year 12. When I turned 18 years of age, I decided I wanted to move to the Gold Coast and experience real food, different from the food in a small town like Mount Gambier, and learn a trade and start my apprenticeship. When I got to Queensland, with everything I had done from year 10 to year 12, it turned out that I was a second-year apprentice when I started. I started halfway through the second year of the apprenticeship, which not only gave me better job opportunities because I went into a restaurant with some experience behind me, but also set me ahead because I did not have to start from scratch. I managed to achieve something in school that was beneficial to the trade I was going for, and that showed me the value of TAFE. It put me on a path that got me employed, motivated and driven, and then gave me the best gift ever: it got me a job at a better restaurant in Queensland, which served Mediterranean food. That drove me further along in my career, which then turned into working offshore on the oil and gas boats, which was another huge highlight.

That all stemmed from TAFE. That all stemmed from acknowledging at an early stage that some people will not be able to continue through the school process but can absolutely achieve something that will give them skills to apply in their community and provide to the economy and provide for themselves. We often hear about the mechanics, hospitality, hairdressing and rangers sorts of programs; they are some of the main ones I have seen on the trainee side. The ability for kids to get that first year out of the way also means that they can potentially have a gap year when they leave high school, which our kids who go to university can also have. They take a gap year before they go to university. Coming out ahead of the game is critical. That will always stick with me around TAFEs, which is why I am so passionate about TAFEs in the regions in Western Australia and why I am so proud of the McGowan government's record in TAFE, training and education. Without a doubt, I am very proud when I walk into TAFEs in regional WA and say that I am part of this government. I do so with 100 per cent pride. The rebuild and reinvigoration of the TAFE system has set up our economy and put us in a position, which will continue in the future, that I believe will be ahead of a lot of others because we got ahead of the game in ensuring that TAFE was accessible for every single Western Australian who wanted it and not just for the people who could afford it. That was critical.

When I was doing my traineeship, I was getting paid \$5 an hour at the restaurant where I was working. My employer benefited no end because I was probably working 40 hours a week as well. I got a trade out of that. My employer got cheaper labour out of that. I acknowledge that that happens. I do not feel that I was completely ripped off because I managed to get ahead in my apprenticeship, which meant I finished earlier than a lot of other people who started their apprenticeship after high school. I acknowledge that some employers out there continually put on trainees to

try to lower their costs, and I do not think that is acceptable. Giving a kid an opportunity and them taking it is absolutely what the system is there for.

I want to touch on the awesome investment in the TAFE sector. I know the parliamentary secretary covered it very well when he spoke about the amount of investment in the TAFE sector across Western Australia, but I want to focus on my electorate. In the Kimberley—the amazing Divina D’Anna’s area—we have invested \$6 million in a health and hospitality training centre in North Regional TAFE’s Kununurra campus to provide specialist training spaces for nursing, NDIS and hospitality training. These funds will go towards the critical frontline work that is needed in that area. People will have the ability to train at home instead of having to travel to Perth. For regional towns, that means there is a likelihood that that person will stay there. They will give back to their community far more than if someone came out for a short two months or two years. That is an amazing investment in Kununurra and much needed.

We have seen \$11.8 million invested in a hospital and student services centre in North Regional TAFE’s Broome campus to expand training to support Broome’s extensive hospitality and tourism economy, with a focus on supporting Aboriginal businesses. Once again, we are connecting the dots in regional WA. TAFE does that. TAFE is critical. We have also seen funding of \$43.2 million for a major upgrade to North Regional TAFE’s Pundulmurra campus in South Hedland to provide a new workshop facility and expand training for plant, mechanical, engineering, automotive and electrical trades and a new commercial cookery training kitchen. Everyone knows about the heavy industry in Hedland and that there has been a constant struggle with FIFO and residential workers. They are screaming out for workers. This investment is the government, TAFE and the department acknowledging that TAFE can play a significant role in ensuring that teenagers and people in their twenties and even older can gain skills at TAFE to get employment in a highly paid industry in their local town.

Port Hedland, as we went down from Kununurra, changed what it needed to offer locals to ensure that business benefited. We have spoken about business and TAFE. Hon Donna Faragher touched on it. Despite some of the challenges, we have seen the benefits that come back to a business that puts in the time to work with TAFE. I have seen businesses go to TAFE and say, “Maybe we need to go this way a little, and we need to do a few more of these courses.” TAFE listens and generally engages with businesses. Although some onerous paperwork and everything else that comes with it might be involved, I feel that businesses step them through that process.

Hon Donna Faragher: I’m hearing what you’re saying but I’m also reflecting on the fact that there are different parts of the state at a different level, and I think it is that bureaucracy that causes quite a lot of challenges.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: That probably leads me into another area, which relates to the different states. When someone does a certificate in Western Australia, they could have a challenge in South Australia. When I transitioned from South Australia to Queensland, I found it quite easy, but when I tried to transition in my fourth year to finish it off, it was very difficult. I accept that. That is definitely something that needs to be looked at on a federal stage to make it even better around Australia. Our TAFEs need to be able to talk to each other, which would only make it even better for everybody in WA.

The other investment that I wanted to touch on is being made where I live—\$10 million for a heavy plant and engineering trades workshop at Central TAFE’s Kalgoorlie campus to expand training for plant, mechanical and engineering trades and support the resources industry’s workforce needs. This amazing commitment was delivered by the McGowan government. It was much needed. There was much excitement around the town. Industry and mining companies were ecstatic to see that TAFE was offering heavy diesel courses to give people the skills they needed to whack them onto the mine sites down the road, though as we know, the Super Pit is pretty much in Kalgoorlie. It was really well done. Something even better occurred as a result. As members may know, I spoke in this chamber, particularly in the last term, about starting to seal the Meekatharra–Wiluna road through an Aboriginal road-building contract. That all started through a man named Mac Jensen, who went out to a TAFE facility in Wiluna that was full of woodworking machinery. There were no cabinetmakers in Wiluna and there was probably no prospect of a cabinetmaking business in Wiluna because everything came from IKEA and ended up at the post office and was then put together. I will not say that I can put IKEA products together, but some people can put those products together without a cabinetmaker.

Mac morphed it into what is important in this area. The local Aboriginal people said that cars were constantly breaking down. He created a workshop to work on cars. That started the conversation about the road. The road had not been funded for 30 years. There had been arguments around tourism opportunities and economic drivers, but it never seemed to get across the line. We put some add-ons into it and said to the council, “Let’s make this an Aboriginal road-building contract. Let’s make it that Aboriginal people who live in Wiluna are going to seal the road to Meekatharra. We’re going to train them at the TAFE facility.” Mac Jensen is unbelievable in what he does to engage with First Nations people. As a result, 15 people come out with certificates. They sealed the road using \$1 million that we originally put in. The government turned around and said, “How great is that! We’re going

Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Klara Andric

to prioritise that road and put \$20 million into it.” Now \$20 million will be spent on the next 17 kilometres, which is fantastic. Guess what? It will be focused on Aboriginal contractors again. That is an epic outcome from a small TAFE centre.

Mac moved on to working with Australian Potash Ltd in Laverton. Getting back to the Kalgoorlie TAFE, it has a huge dome that students worked under on their cars and everything else. It was worth quite a bit of money. When they were building the new shed with the government’s \$10 million, they managed to relocate it to Laverton, where they have now set up an Aboriginal training school. Last year, Hon Alannah MacTiernan and I went out there. The regional economic development grants also played a part in it. That is another fantastic program that this government runs. There was 100 per cent attendance. We got to shake hands with between 15 and 20 people who received certificates, white cards for construction, driver’s licences, chainsaw pass outs, and verification of competency cards. Our mighty Kalgoorlie TAFE was working shoulder to shoulder with Australian Potash, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and Mac Jensen and his team. It was fantastic. It was exciting. It was really good to see.

We all know the road being built at the moment between here and Queensland. We have heard about it for long enough. The Outback Way will go from Laverton all the way to Queensland. There is over half a billion dollars’ worth of investment. Who do we want to see building that road? I know who I want to see. I want to see First Nations people do it. The road infrastructure in this state is so vast that it constantly gets money spent on it. Aboriginal roadbuilders, Aboriginal road contractors, could be the next big ranger role model for Aboriginal people in Western Australia. It is constant. Local governments do roads, state governments do roads and federal governments do roads. It is always going on. The opportunities of the Outback Way are so amazing for the people of Laverton, Leonora, Wiluna and all the way up to the border at Alice Springs. They are the same opportunities presented by the Meekatharra–Wiluna road. They are just such great opportunities. Instead of bringing a whole team from Perth to do it, we are better off training local people, and using our TAFEs is one of the best things we can do.

I will touch on the jobs and skills centres the parliamentary secretary mentioned. Kalgoorlie was lucky enough to get one of those. It has been pretty well received. There is up to \$8 500 worth of financial assistance to see people on track to getting a job with the skills required to get it. It is important for businesses in the goldfields to understand that there is a shop they can go to to look for workers, and that is the jobs and skills centre at the TAFE. I applaud the former Minister for Education and Training, Hon Sue Ellery, for getting the task done. She put in a lot of work. It was needed at the time because employers would constantly ask where to go for direction. Now the jobs and skills centre can lead in that space, and a lot of businesses tap into it, including the local chambers of commerce, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, mining companies, hospitality businesses and cafes. I think it is fantastic. I could talk all day about training and TAFE. It is easy to say that regional Western Australians are now benefiting from a government that understands the value of TAFE, that a 500 per cent increase in fees was unsustainable and that working class people and kids who might not be academic need an opportunity. TAFE gives that opportunity. TAFE gives people a chance to turn their lives around, just like it gave me that chance in years 9 and 10. Luckily, it steered me in the right direction to becoming a member of the Labor Party in Parliament, rather than that of my counsellor, who became a Liberal turned Independent. Thank you members, Acting President, and thank you Hon Dan Caddy for moving this motion. It is the type of motion we should debate almost every single week.

HON KLARA ANDRIC (South Metropolitan) [2.42 pm]: I begin by thanking Hon Dan Caddy for the motion. Hon Kyle McGinn is right: this is an area we could talk about every week. Last week we spoke on the motion on investment in education and schools, an area that the McGowan government has done so incredibly well with since forming government in 2017.

A lot of members in the house today have spoken on a number of areas, but I particularly want to focus on TAFE and the industries the McGowan government has invested in. A fun fact, and the reason I feel very strongly about making sure our government invests in TAFE and training, is that in the past, in my previous life, from 2013 to 2017, I was the campaigns officer at UnionsWA. We had our Save Our Services campaign, and a massive part of that campaign was to stop the cuts to TAFE and the decimation by the previous government. We campaigned on the fact that jobs are for the future, and how important it is to secure jobs for the future. As a former employee of UnionsWA and campaign officer, I was incredibly pleased when upon forming government in 2017, the McGowan government very quickly decided to freeze TAFE fees.

I know there will be some repetition in my speaking of record figures today, but record figures should go on the record more than once. As members will know, skilled workers in the trades industries are crucial to keeping our commercial and residential construction projects operating. Workers in the mining industry are also crucial to stimulating economic growth. Skilled workers in the health and aged-care sectors are crucial to providing all Western Australians with the health care they need and rights they deserve. Workers in the tourism, hospitality and entertainment industries are vital to delivering positive experiences, building community and fostering connections. Workers stimulate the economy, and education is paramount to providing the workforce required to fuel the growth

that WA needs. It is not only important, but also crucial to ensure that education is affordable and accessible for all Western Australians. As I have said, in 2017 I was really pleased to see that the McGowan government knew this and invested heavily in training and TAFE in our state. Since the McGowan government's election, WA has seen approximately 167 000 new jobs created. This substantial growth in employment is a credit to the appropriate funding and countless schemes put in place by this government.

I mentioned to Hon Dr Steve Thomas this morning that I was a little grumpy, so he will have to excuse me for some of the facts I will talk about today because they involve the former Liberal–National government, but they need to be stated, particularly those about TAFE and what occurred during the previous government's time in office. Under the members opposite, we saw the derailment of the TAFE system, with funding cuts and skyrocketing fees, and plummeting enrolments as a result. The Barnett government slashed support for TAFE by cutting more than \$100 million from TAFE institutions collectively between the years 2008 and 2014. In the period I talked about earlier, which is 2013 to 2017, TAFE fees, as mentioned by many members today, increased by over 500 per cent. What that meant is almost unfathomable, as is what it meant to the people who wanted a career path they simply could not afford. These increases to the magnitude of 500 per cent obviously resulted in massive drops in enrolments. To put this into perspective, annual enrolments at that time fell by up to 25 000. Most reasonable people in this house would agree that the training sector was an absolute mess. The previous government trashed the TAFE sector. This financial mismanagement saw thousands of aspiring students, many whom I knew and spoke to at the time, left with no option but to walk away from preferred courses and preferred jobs and industries that they were hoping to get into, simply because of the massive financial strain the TAFE fee increases imposed on them. It would be fair to say that this loss is still felt to this day. Those people would now be fully qualified workers. I am sure everyone in this house would agree how helpful that would be right now with national, state and international skill shortages. It would have been incredibly beneficial if those who decided to enrol back then, under the Liberal–National government, could have afforded it and had not faced those fee increases with the removal of the fee caps. We would have those people in the construction and mining industries, and in many other sectors across the state, as fully qualified workers. They would be qualified workers who, as I said, would offer great relief to our need for skilled labour.

The McGowan government was focused on repairing this damage. I repeat, for the third time, that I am extremely grateful for this because repairing the damage to the training sector was incredibly important. The McGowan government delivered on its election promise by immediately freezing TAFE fees to give Western Australians a bit of certainty on fee prices. Increased TAFE fees and the removal of the cap on fees led to the disaster we found in the TAFE sector when we formed government. This government slashed fees by up to 72 per cent on 210 courses in key industries. What a difference! There had been a 500 per cent increase in fees. We slashed fees for 210 courses in the industries we need, which included 17 construction-related apprenticeships and traineeships and 13 pre-apprenticeships. The fee reductions were targeted to align with the emerging skill shortages and provide relief for key projects and industries, because one thing our government does really well that the previous government did terribly is talk to industry.

Some of the industries that were provided relief by the fee reductions included Metronet, aged and disability care, civil construction, defence, hospitality and tourism. The trades and sectors that benefited included plumbing, agriculture, construction, electrical trades, health services, fabrication, and mental health and disability services—all of which had their fees reduced by 50 to 67 per cent. I will say once again, an increase in fees of 500 per cent resulted in a reduction in key areas. This government reduced the fees for key industries by 50 to 67 per cent. Six diploma courses, including diplomas in nursing, early childhood education and care, and community services, had their fees reduced by a phenomenal 72 per cent. Our government showed no signs of slowing down the push for TAFE reform and invested \$229.2 million in the capital works program. Fourteen major upgrades were made to TAFE colleges across the state, with half of those allocated in regional areas, as some regional members have talked about. This marked the largest capital works program for TAFE in the history of Western Australia, and I am proud to be part of a government that holds this record. This funding benefited campuses across the entirety of our state, and I will mention some of the examples in WA, particularly the South Metropolitan Region.

An amount of \$39 million was invested in a brand new training centre at the South Metropolitan TAFE Armadale campus that delivered programs for the following—community services, child care, mental health, business, education support and general education, as well as new specialist training for warehousing, logistics, information and communications technology, emerging industries and cybersecurity. An amount of \$16.87 million was allocated for a hospitality and tourism training centre at the South Metropolitan TAFE Mandurah campus to provide commercial cookery and apprentice chefs, front of house staff, baristas, and tourism and events management professionals. An amount of \$4 million was allocated to replace the maritime training simulator at the South Metropolitan TAFE Fremantle campus. The government also delivered \$25 million to provide free short courses to prepare young people and jobseekers for their immediate skill requirements as the economy recovered. In 2021, there were more than 8 000 enrolments in free short courses and skills sets. These short courses gave

Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Klara Andric

Western Australians career opportunities in a number of industries, some of which I will mention today. They include civil construction, agriculture, hospitality, logistics, cybersecurity, small business, green jobs, heavy haulage, health and community services, warehousing, meat processing, and swimming and water safety. In March 2022, more than 4 000 apprenticeships and traineeship registrations were received, which, I am very proud to say, was the highest number of monthly registrations on record. In June 2022, Western Australia recorded 47 700 apprentices and trainees in training—another record high. That was the first time the number reached beyond 45 000 in a decade. That streak continued with two more records broken in the months following. Over 10 300 people completed an apprenticeship or traineeship in 2021–22, a 16 per cent increase from the previous year.

With TAFE becoming more accessible than it has ever been, TAFE colleges identified areas of need based on local demand and emerging industry training needs. To resolve this, in November 2021 the McGowan government announced that it would put a further \$25 million into state-of-the-art equipment at colleges across WA, including in the South Metropolitan Region. Another member mention this earlier today. I will read out what some of the south metropolitan investments included. The South Metropolitan TAFE Carlisle campus received large high-tech spray painting booths at an estimated cost of \$1.4 million. South Metropolitan TAFE Rockingham campus received welding equipment valued at an estimated \$100 000, including a complete multi-process welding inverter with all the accessories. They are listed in detail but I will not go into that today. The campus received a simulated sewer pump station valued at \$70 000. The list goes on.

I notice I am running out of time and want to give Hon Dan Caddy an opportunity to reply. In summary, these improvements to TAFE campuses statewide will ensure apprentices and trainees receive industry-standard training experiences and create a pipeline of job-ready graduates. I will very briefly touch on the McGowan government's promise to fund intake and traineeship endeavours.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): Order, member. Your time has run down. I give the call back to Hon Dan Caddy.

HON DAN CADDY (North Metropolitan) [3.00 pm] — in reply: Thank you, Acting President. I thank all the members who spoke today. I will start by recognising that all members across the chamber understand the importance of investment in training and education. The investment that we or any government makes is an investment in the future of Western Australia.

I will thank members individually. I thank Hon Sandra Carr. She spoke about her son. It is always a great pleasure for all parents in this place to be able to get up and talk about their kids when they can. The kids usually enjoy it, too—but not always. She spoke about her experience in Geraldton and the TAFE in her electorate.

Hon Donna Faragher, as I stated in my first contribution, has shown a continued passion and commitment to training and education. I begrudgingly acknowledge her reluctance to sound as congratulatory of the government as I am when it comes to its achievements, but I acknowledge the challenges the honourable member outlined.

I congratulate my good friend Hon Pierre Yang on his first government response in his new role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Training. It was another outstanding contribution. Hon Pierre Yang went over the fiscal history of Western Australia since the dark days of the Barnett government. He also quite subtly reminded me of an omission in my opening remarks. In my haste to fit everything in to my contribution I went straight from the former Minister for Education to the current Minister for Education and left out training, failing to mention my very good friend Simone McGurk, member for Fremantle, who is the new Minister for Training.

Hon Kyle McGinn told a personal story. It is always fascinating to hear members get up and tell a personal story about whatever we are talking about in the chamber and how it has affected them. He told us about the way he benefited first from an apprenticeship and then from a traineeship. He discussed the value of TAFE in his life and gave a regional perspective, following on from Hon Sandra Carr.

My good friend Hon Klara Andric started talking about the Save our Services campaign, which brought back some memories. I remember that well. She went on to talk about the quite prominent link between education and economic growth. A few members touched on that for certain things every dollar spent—education and training is one of them—has an absolute multiplier effect in real economic terms to the economy of whichever jurisdiction it is put into. The McGowan government's record funding of training will absolutely have an ongoing effect on Western Australia and our economy, not to mention the individuals who it will help out as well.

In closing, when I look at both limbs of the motion, albeit they are both in one sentence, a central theme is that good financial management and making sure the state is in a good place allows investment in many areas, and today we talked about investment in training. Good financial management is a hallmark of the McGowan government as is investment in TAFE and in training. We have absolutely worked hard in the first iteration of the McGowan government and now in this McGowan government to make sure that we keep the state on a good financial keel—

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 22 March 2023]

p1238d-1252a

Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Donna Faragher; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Klara Andric

I am going to use a sailing term! We will work as hard as we can to repair the damage that was left to us and put Western Australia in the best possible position moving forward.

Question put and passed.