



Speech by

Hon. P. BRADDY

MEMBER FOR KEDRON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Hon. P. J. BRADDY (Kedron—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (9.43 a.m.), by leave: One of the key employment issues to confront this Government when it came to power in June was the situation with apprenticeships and traineeships. We knew there were problems in some industries, specifically the construction industry, but of course we did not then have the full picture. A major review by Dr Larry Smith from the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations of the true situation regarding the apprenticeship and traineeship system throws new light on the system's deterioration.

The number of apprentices in training reached a peak of 25,637 in 1996, but fell by 6% in the following 18 months. Financial year figures show a decline in apprentice numbers in the construction trades of 24%, from a high of 6,402 in 1995 to 4,844 in 1998. While Queensland continues to perform well compared with other States in the area of apprentice training in terms of gross numbers, the fact is that apprenticeship numbers have declined. Apprentice cancellations increased 60% from 1992 to 1997, and the retention rate fell from 74% in 1994 to 52% in 1998. Queensland now has the highest cancellation rate and lowest net retention rate in Australia.

At the same time, some employers have been forced to seek to recruit tradespeople from interstate and overseas. Evidence suggests mismanagement and inadequate resources have allowed the system to develop to a stage at which—

- language, literacy and numeracy skills are below standard;
- inadequate learning support processes and structures exist;
- teaching standards among some VET providers are under question;
- inadequate vocational preparation exists in our schools; and
- many learning resources are inappropriate or of low quality.

The picture for trainees is even worse. Figures show that numbers have escalated at a phenomenal rate over the past four years to the extent that there are now more trainees in Queensland than apprentices. While this may be seen as healthy growth from one perspective, a closer investigation shows real problems in the traineeship system. There are three issues of major concern with respect to trainees—

- most of the growth in numbers has been in the 25 and over age group, with evidence that traineeships are used too often as wage subsidies for existing workers;
- many people entering traineeships are not vocationally ready; and
- teaching standards may be in decline.

The fact that the number of trainees completing their training has fallen 28% from 1994-95 to 1997-98 is alarming. This Government has sought to investigate these issues. We know that people already in jobs received traineeships under the former Government at the expense of young people seeking employment. Now Dr Smith's review provides a valuable overview of apprenticeship and traineeship training trends in Queensland. The overriding issues to emerge from this review are—

- evidence that 15 to 20-year-olds are being locked out of training;

poor program completion rates; and

the need for training issues to be addressed on an industry basis.

This report has raised critical issues which the Beattie Government is addressing and will continue to target. The drain on TAFE funds under the coalition, which also cut teacher numbers and increased the number of bureaucrats, has been stopped.

An important way to help address the skill shortage in the building and construction industry is through the Government's Building and Construction Industry Training Fund. The Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives will boost apprentice, trainee and job placements by 24,500 over four years. Traineeships will no longer go primarily to those already in jobs at the expense of young people seeking to enter the work force.

The department is preparing a comprehensive training strategy to counter the decline in the system which has been highlighted by Dr Smith.
