



Speech by

Hon. P. BRADDY

MEMBER FOR KEDRON

Hansard 3 March 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Unemployment

Hon. P. J. BRADDY (Kedron—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (9.48 a.m.), by leave: When this Government came to power we immediately set about putting in place a range of programs to address the State's No. 1 problem: unemployment. We are therefore increasing the number of apprentices and revitalising the TAFE system, but we are still wrestling with the debacle created by the previous Government on traineeships.

We introduced the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, designed to create 24,500 additional jobs and training opportunities for both young and long-term unemployed people. We also introduced other measures, including a Building and Construction Industry Training Fund, to employ up to an additional 1,000 apprentices a year in an industry which has been experiencing severe skill shortages.

Honourable members will be pleased to hear that our initiatives are already beginning to bear fruit, and large numbers of young people are taking up new jobs, many of them in industries with skill shortages. The number of apprentices employed in Queensland in the year to 1 February 1999 jumped 9,832, an increase over the previous year of 2,552.

Mr Borbidge: Then you came along.

Mr BRADDY: Yes, we replaced the member's Government. In the year to 1 February 1999, there has been a 35.1%—

Mr Santoro: Are you taking credit for that?

Mr BRADDY: Yes, we are. There has been a 35.1% increase in the number of approvals for apprenticeships in Queensland.

I have on earlier occasions informed honourable members of the major difficulties faced by TAFE Queensland as a result of the ideologically driven agenda of the former Government. We acted immediately on taking office to inject \$10m into the TAFE system to overcome immediate financial problems, and we have subsequently written off \$30.8m in loans. We have acted to improve apprenticeships, and we have acted to fix TAFE. But there is one outstanding issue: traineeships and, in particular, the funding of existing workers.

I have previously informed the House of the scandalous waste of public funds on providing training for existing workers, which in 1997-98 was estimated to be as high as \$20m. Funds which should have been earmarked for young people and the unemployed were diverted to provide computer training for the likes of doctors and senior RAAF and police personnel. All this was happening at a time when Queensland was the only State in the country to allow existing workers to take up publicly funded traineeships.

I have recently become aware of yet another example of why this policy had to change, and should have changed under the previous administration. On 26 November 1998, the Maroochy Shire Council signed up 82 existing workers in traineeships—26 in horticulture and 56 in office administration. This contract had a potential value to training providers through the council of \$322,560 to provide professional development to existing staff, as required under the council's enterprise bargaining agreement—\$322,560 paid for entirely by the taxpayers of Queensland. This is over \$322,000 which

could have been spent on young unemployed people on the Sunshine Coast and elsewhere to help them get a job, to help them get a start in life.

The council acted in accordance with the Government policy and guidelines of the day—the policy and guidelines of the previous Government, which we could not alter until user choice contracts for 1998 expired. Until the training is completed we will not know exactly how much the contract will cost. What is certain, though, is that this arrangement will not be repeated. Ironically, the very same council—the Maroochy Shire Council—last week axed 87 jobs.

As of 1 January 1999, the new existing workers policy was introduced with a primary focus to help the young and the unemployed to enter the work force. This Government is determined to ensure that every dollar allocated for training will be used to provide training for those who benefit from it most—school leavers, new entrants to the work force and the unemployed. We have implemented a policy which will encourage employers to take on new trainees who will both increase available skills and reduce unemployment in the community.

However, when providers were advised in mid December that the policy was to change, many rushed in for a final dip in the trough. The result was that approximately 6,000 training agreements were received in the last two weeks of December, compared with a monthly average of approximately 3,000. Unfortunately, the flood of agreements and their overall quality resulted in a backlog which affected the department's capacity to process the payment of some providers with legitimate traineeships in place. The Beattie Government has had to clean up this mess and has acted to help the Training Division get on with the job.

The new position of Deputy Director-General (Training) will oversee this resurgence and ensure internal operations and external services meet the very high demands of hardworking staff and the public. The department will continue to audit registered training organisations to ensure quality provision of training. And it will maintain the integrity of Queensland's training system while protecting public funds. We will concentrate on placing in traineeships people who need them, and not look at traineeships as a means of artificially boosting figures, as happened under the previous administration.
