



Speech by

**Mr SANTO SANTORO**

**MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD**

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Hansard 24 August 1999

### **TRAINING; RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

**Mr SANTORO** (Clayfield—LP) (7 p.m.): The Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations has frequently and vehemently criticised the coalition for allowing existing workers to upgrade their vocational skills through undertaking traineeships and he has frequently and vehemently criticised the coalition for allowing existing workers to acquire formal qualifications for their workplace skills through the recognition of prior learning—RPL—process.

Minister Braddy claimed that we had wasted up to \$20m by allowing existing workers to secure their jobs through upgrading their skills or obtaining RPL. According to the Minister, our policy in regard to training existing workers through traineeships or recognising their skills through RPL constituted abuse or roting of the system. In an about-face of similar magnitude to that experienced by his namesake two millennia ago on the road to Damascus, the Minister recently announced, via media release, an extra \$12m in training funds, which can be accessed by the two categories of existing workers he criticised the coalition for assisting—those who wish to seek, through use of RPL processes, to obtain what the Minister previously and disdainfully referred to as "paper" qualifications for their existing skills.

The Minister has attempted to hide his policy backflip by including such existing workers in a wider group which also encompasses the unemployed. This policy backflip has been necessitated by the Minister's failure to create an "existing workers" policy which is both practical, enforceable and just. The original idea, that existing workers could pay for and access the training incorporated in industry-specific traineeships by going to TAFE in their own time, no doubt collapsed when it was realised that such training simply was not available at nights or

weekends, divorced from the workplace and the traineeship.

The Minister will seek to save face by claiming that his scheme differs from what the coalition was doing. These differences may mask but cannot hide the two essential facts: Labor is now paying for existing workers to be upskilled; and Labor is now paying for existing workers to be assessed and issued with formal qualifications for existing skills. Yet again we see this Minister surreptitiously reversing a hasty and ill-conceived decision. He has done it in relation to funding grants for agricultural colleges, he has done it in relation to the abolition of TAFE head office and now he has done it in relation to existing workers.

His announcement of this additional \$12m worth of training for existing workers may well herald a decision to break his previous pre-election commitment to freeze contestable funding at the January 1998 level for three years. Of course, when announcing this three-year freeze, neither the Minister nor those who warmly greeted his promise considered that inflation over the three years would erode the value of the "frozen" funding.

I again turn my attention to the Viviani report. Like the Bannikoff report into TAFE, of which it forms part, the Viviani report is flawed by internal contradiction. As the report is only three and a half pages long, it must have been a challenge to fit self-contradiction into the document, but this its author accomplished with admirable efficiency.

Two major recommendations the professor makes in her brief report are no new legislation and no new structures for or restructure of the department. However, she then recommends the establishment of no fewer than three new structures. The first is to be a small, intellectually powerful policy specialist group to give strategic development and policy advice to the director-

general. The second is to be a policy arm for TAFE Queensland. The professor does not specify whether this group is also to be intellectually powerful, but she does indicate that TAFE should pay for it. The third is a tripartite committee to be attached to the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission to devise means for testing the quality of educational outcomes.

The professor's report, like the others produced for Minister Braddy, states that there is evidence that the quality of TAFE's services has declined in recent years. However, this evidence is not produced for scrutiny, nor is it indicated where objective evidence of quality decline, either in TAFE or throughout the training system, can be found. So much for intellectual integrity, which is missing from this report as it is from almost every other report which has been put forward by the Minister.

On behalf of the Opposition, this morning I again placed a question on notice to the Minister requesting that he table the evidence upon which Dr Viviani based her conclusions and recommendations. As was the case with previous similar questions and requests on notice, I am sure that this question will remain unanswered because this evidence simply does not exist.

I again place on the record the Opposition's total disappointment with the quality of reports which the Minister constantly brings into this place. The latest is the Schofield report, about which I will have a lot to say very shortly. In that report we have a regurgitation of a few sensational examples of abuse or alleged roting by private training providers—examples that have been reiterated since day one of the life of this Government and which simply do not stack up against the overwhelmingly professional and ethical service that has been provided to the training market of Queensland by the vast majority of private training providers.

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