



Speech by

Mr S. SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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TAFE QUEENSLAND

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (11 p.m.): Since it was elected in June 1998, the Beattie Government, the Premier and his Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations when challenged through a series of questions on notice have failed to provide objective, comparative evidence to back up their often repeated pre-election statements that the competitive agenda in TAFE Queensland proceeded three to five times faster in Queensland than in the other Australian States.

What they have provided is either Queensland-specific financial data or unquantified general interstate information about apprenticeships and traineeships. In his response to one question on notice, Premier Beattie makes the startling admission that Queensland does not record or maintain data relating to other States. This must make the development of interstate comparisons a real challenge.

It needs to be remembered that the Vocational Education and Training competition policy for which I was, and continue to be, criticised was a Labor creation. In Labor's three years of operation of this policy, the funds put out for competition increased elevenfold. The Opposition will claim that they were working from a low base. This is the case, but when they were running TAFE they sure didn't believe in progressing slowly and carefully so that TAFE staff could adjust to the dramatic change from a training monopoly to a competitive situation. An elevenfold increase in three years is a substantial change, irrespective of the base figure.

Though the rate of change over the coalition's two years was actually slower, Minister Braddy is quick to complain that we were hell-bent on some ideological policy of implementing competition three to five times faster than the other States. As I have already indicated, the ideological policy we were pursuing was their

creation; it is their ideology, their policy. They are attempting to distance themselves from their policy and blame us for it, yet at the same time they are committed to maintaining it.

If Queensland opts out of the competition agreement signed between all States and the Commonwealth, it could forfeit its competition dividend which is worth, according to the former Labor Treasurer, more than \$2 billion over 10 years. Labor forgets to tell TAFE staff about this issue.

As for the rest of their claim, it is patently false. When I left office the latest available Australiawide figures were for 1996. They indicated that the percentage of vocational education and training funds put out to competitive tendering in Queensland was 6.6%, compared with 5.5% in South Australia, 5% in New South Wales, 4.5% in the ACT, 4% in Tasmania, 2.7% in Victoria and 12% in the Northern Territory. Figures for Western Australia were not available at that time. These statistics indicate that 88.4% of funding allocation to TAFE Queensland institutes still occurred through traditional budget mechanisms, not through contestable mechanisms. The comparative figures for the other States were New South Wales, 95%; Victoria, 91.3%; South Australia, 91.3%; Tasmania, 94.5%; the ACT, 95.5%; and the Northern Territory, 88%.

So, whilst the ALP claimed that we were progressing three to five times faster than other States, the only official statistics available indicate that though Queensland was, on average, making more use of competition for VET funding, the claims made by Labor bore little resemblance to the available facts. Of course, Labor will say that, though their claims—about three to five times the rate of funding contestability in Queensland—were not supported by nationally recognised interstate comparative statistics when

the claims were originally made, later statistics have justified Labor's original claims.

ANTA's December 1998 newsletter Australian Training indicates that nationally more than 10% of VET funding in 1999 will be allocated through contestable mechanisms. The ANTA annual report for 1997, the latest available, indicates that in 1997 the States set aside 40% more for contestable funding than they did in 1996. Victoria budgeted 11.3% to contestable processes and plans to increase this to 30% by the year 2000. So the competitive training agenda throughout Australia is alive and well and will not go away.

The reasons are obvious and were obvious when the Goss Labor Party introduced the competitive training agenda into Queensland and include—

the indisputable fact that competition between providers—public and private—delivers more quality training for the same amount of dollars and individual private training providers deliver similar training to TAFE at a much lower cost per student contact hour; and

the growth of the private training market helps to bring the delivery of training closer to the marketplace and business enterprises which the training system is meant to be servicing.

It is for those and other reasons— including the desire of Government to maintain competitive pressure on TAFE Queensland in order to improve its efficiency—that the Beattie Labor Government when in Opposition made the commitment to maintain the level of contestable training funding at the levels set by the coalition and as they applied at January 1998 levels, the very levels which the Labor Party criticised in Opposition and is now criticising in Government.

In other words, the Government adopted the coalition's competitive and contestable training policies—I stress that they did not reverse them—yet they criticised them and by doing so it demonstrates itself to be made up of politically expedient hypocrites. Training providers in Queensland, and particularly training staff in TAFE Queensland are not fooled. They will judge the Labor Party for the hypocrites that they are.
