



Speech by

Mr S. SANTORO

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (11.17 p.m.): During the past few months the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations has sought to convince this House and the general public that the record growth for traineeships has been ruthlessly pursued and promoted for their own personal and corporate benefit by registered training organisations.

However, the Minister will not tell honourable members that his department's research indicates that only 10% of apprentices and 7% of employers use an RTO to assist with the training sign-up process. As only 8% of apprentices and 10% of employers used group training schemes for this purpose, the "anecdotal evidence" that such training providers are driving the market towards traineeships is untenable—unless, of course, we believe that such small tails can wag such a huge dog!

These figures that shatter the anecdotal evidence fed to the Minister to make him believe that private providers are driving the growth of traineeships are reinforced with others indicating that only 4% of employers were influenced towards traineeships by RTOs and that the same percentage—4%—were influenced towards traineeships because of the availability of more flexible college attendance patterns for trainees.

I repeat my initial assertion that these figures are contained in departmental research reports, but the Minister and his senior officers are ignoring them because they contradict the preferred political agenda. If the system was driven by the desire of most providers and other agencies to maximise their returns for minimal effort, as some have claimed on the basis of anecdotes, they would not be promoting traineeships and getting half the subsidy they could get through apprenticeships.

The myth of traineeship growth being driven by greedy private training providers becomes even more intellectually unsustainable when the department's research shows that one-third of employers have indicated that they employ friends and relatives as apprentices and trainees. Such benevolent nepotism by one-third of employers would influence age trends amongst trainees as much as any Government policy.

The massive and expensive research project which has involved approximately 10 senior officers—many since April last year—together with the latest report by the Minister's favoured researcher, Dr Smith, are significantly flawed on the basis of their sampling methodology. Dr Smith, who last year heavily and frequently qualified his initial report on the basis that his statistical database was invalid, unreliable and inconsistent, attempted to avoid the same problem this time by using 88 interview subjects in a search for "perceptions" from which to derive a "feel" for the condition of the training system.

Unfortunately, those most intimately involved with the training system, whose "perceptions" would have been worthy of serious consideration—teachers, apprentices and trainees—were excluded from Dr Smith's chosen 88. Whilst Dr Smith points out that his sample of 88 was chosen at random, the fact that his sample is not representative of participants in the training system but is skewed towards bureaucratic and departmental respondents demolishes the credibility of his many generalisations.

Whilst omitting the most perceptive subjects from his sample, Dr Smith indicates that, whenever possible, his researchers had "informal discussions"—alias chats—with teachers, apprentices and trainees. On the strength of such chats with 11 of the State's thousands of apprentices and 21 of the State's army of

trainees, Dr Smith was able to report with some undoubted satisfaction that many of these 11 apprentices and 21 trainees "supported the belief that the great majority of providers, particularly those supporting on-the-job traineeships, lack sufficient professional skills as teachers and/or trainers."

Of course, such support by this exceptionally limited sample for such an all-encompassing belief is meaningless and does nothing to transform this belief into fact. After all, the earth did not become flat just because many supported the belief that it was flat, expressed their perception that it was flat, or developed a feel that it was flat. Much of the latest Smith report, upon which the Minister has based his decision to conduct an immediate inquiry, consists of unfounded rumour and innuendo. For example, page 30 alone consists of six allegations and an unsubstantiated allegation that providers will enter into an unholy alliance with almost anyone to extract Government funds with minimum training effort.

To make this report sound more convincing than his last report, Dr Smith does not rely on just a few anecdotes. He claims that—

"Almost every person interviewed had a string of anecdotes about providers who were virtually providing no training for their on-the-job trainees."

He does not reveal how many of his sample of 88 have direct contact with trainees who are undertaking their training on the job. How unfortunate that he chose not to include on-the-job trainees in his samples, as their perceptions would have been worth recording. Members should seriously consider why Dr Smith's sample of 88 deliberately excluded teachers, trainees and apprentices, particularly those engaged in on-the-job training, of whom he is most critical and about whom he produces hearsay evidence of strings of anecdotes.

Dr Smith is fortunate that his interview subjects do not have ordinary perceptions or beliefs. Just as they have a string of politically useful anecdotes, they have general or overwhelming perceptions and strong and persuasive beliefs—deep, general and widespread beliefs. I refer again to the most appropriate analogy, the flat earth theory. Not even the strength, breadth and depth of people's beliefs and perceptions or the fact that almost everyone had a string of anecdotes about those who went too close to the edge and fell off and made the earth flat.

As a lawyer, Mr Braddy knows that Dr Smith's latest report is built on rumour, hearsay, subjectivity and innuendo rather than objective evidence. However, as a politician, he has eagerly and quite cynically seized upon the politically useful quotes in the report that has been provided for him.

Time expired.
