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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2014-2015

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Andrews, Karen, MP

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Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (11:02): I have a question for the minister in relation to vocational education and training, the reforms to that sector and also the establishment of the VET Reform Taskforce. But let me start by saying that I am very positive about the changes that are being proposed and being talked about in this sector. I could not be more pleased that this government has been especially proactive in the area of VET.

Our national competitiveness, in my view, and our productivity is very dependent on us having a very strong VET sector. We need to make sure that our workforce of the future has skills that make them job ready so that when they enter the workforce they are ready to be productive and to be contributors on the first day that they enter the workforce.

Across Australia our VET students deserve to know that they are receiving quality training and that what is being provided to them is going to meet their needs and will also meet the future needs of their employers. The providers need to know that they will be treated fairly in the provision of the training that they will be delivering to the sector. So we need to take this opportunity to put a magnifying glass over the VET sector and look at what reforms are needed to make sure that this sector is viable in the future. It is certainly no easy task, but I must commend the minister on the action that he has taken to date in that sector. He has been especially proactive and has set up a number of mechanisms where he can get support and input directly from those who know best—those in the industry. He has embarked on a consultation process, first hand, with the sector by establishing a number of workshops throughout the country to engage with the people who actually know best—training providers, industry representatives, employers and students—to find out what is needed to reform this sector in the future.

I attended workshops in Darwin and in Brisbane and also had the opportunity just recently to facilitate workshops with the member for Grey in Port Pirie and Whyalla, with the member for Forrest in Bunbury and also with the member for Robertson in Gosford. The workshops that were run were certainly eye opening. At each of these sessions in different parts of the country we heard of similar problems with the VET sector relating to the duplication in regulations and administration amongst jurisdictions; inconsistency in auditing; the capacity of the system to meet the current skill needs of the industry; and what was particularly concerning was what seems to be an increased focus on qualifications rather than the quality of the training in the sector and, as a result, the quality of the qualifications.

These sessions were not just about understanding what the issues are, they were also about finding ways for the sector to grow and to prosper. The outcomes—the information that came from those sessions—have been forwarded through so they will be part of the changes for future consideration. I would certainly like to thank everyone who was involved in those workshops. I would like to thank all of the members for the work that they put in to make sure that those who attended were quite representative of the various parts of the sector.

So my question to the minister is: can the minister outline for members the action that the government is taking to ensure that the future of our nation is not just about building infrastructure and building the systems to support that but is also about building the skills of our people, particularly those in the VET sector?