



SUPPORTING TAFE

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light) (15:55): I would like to make just a brief contribution to this debate, particularly in the context of paragraph (a) of the motion, which recognises the importance of TAFE as a major education and skills provider not only in regional South Australia but also right across South Australia, and particularly in my electorate.

From where I stand, and certainly from the feedback I am getting from people in my electorate, people do question this government's commitment to the TAFE sector.

Certainly the view that has been put to me is that what people can see from this government's ongoing funding cuts to the TAFE sector is a dismantling and a deskilling of the TAFE sector. I will provide some examples of how it impacts on my electorate of Light and more broadly on the people in the northern suburbs,

because there have been a number of cuts to programs in this area that have, as the member for Frome has just mentioned, imposed additional costs on people who enter the TAFE system, and that is certainly true for people in my electorate. There are some courses in the building trades that have been shifted from Elizabeth TAFE, which services both the northern suburbs and Gawler as well as some of the Barossa areas.

Some of these courses have been moved down to the other end of the town, the other end of the city, on the premise that it is actually better for students to have these programs miles away from their homes, which incurs additional costs for them. One of the courses, I understand, is now being provided online through an interstate company. As some speakers have already mentioned, often a lot of trades require hands-on teaching. It is very important for these people to actually gain hands-on teaching.

Again, it has been done more cheaply through a company in Victoria, and therefore the students and our young people are the greatest losers as a result of cuts to the TAFE sector. That was particularly true and made very obvious to my community last year when TAFE, like many organisations, had to close its doors for a while.

They did their best to try to transfer some of the teaching to online teaching, and I acknowledge that the TAFE administration did do that and that the teachers were keen to do that. The biggest lot of feedback I got from students who do a trades type of training was that a lot of the training did not lend itself to online learning. A lot of the people who do trades studies do them because they like that face-to-face contact, they like that hands-on training, and that is how they learn. They learn through doing. They learn in the classroom, they learn on the job, they learn from actually doing things, and it is very hard to learn that sort of stuff online.

I understand why TAFE is moving more things to online. They are trying to reduce budgets and maintain their programs and support for students and young people in our communities. It is actually making it harder for our young people to learn. We are often told, and I have been to a number of places where we are often told that this government has decided to make TAFE more competitive, that TAFE now operates a much more competitive VET sector. We are often

given figures of how much cheaper the private sector can do it compared with TAFE. It is interesting. These figures are, in my view, quite deceptive. It is like comparing a medical course with a legal studies course, saying that the law faculty can deliver many more graduates than the medical faculty can in costs. They are two different things.

When you compare the costs of running TAFE—and this is the more important point to make—when the government guts TAFE and all the high-demand, low-cost programs are given to the private sector, of course you are going to shift all the revenue to the private sector and keep the costs in the public sector. I will give you an example. Business studies programs are no longer available to students in metropolitan Adelaide through TAFE.

For those who have trainees, previously they would send the trainee to do their business studies through TAFE. That is no longer the case. They now have to send them to a private provider. What this government has done is use some false justification. It is not creating competition; it is actually reducing competition in the marketplace by taking TAFE out of the sector for training courses in some really key areas, and business studies is one.

There are a whole range of other programs where TAFE can no longer compete on the open market for students. This whole story about trying to create a more competitive sector is

just nonsense. This government is not committed to the TAFE sector. It is keen to dismantle the TAFE sector. It is deskilling the TAFE sector, and our communities are the poorer for it. Not only are metropolitan communities poorer but regional communities would also be poorer for this. TAFE, as the member for Hammond said, has been the bulwark of education and skills training in regional areas, and quite rightly so.

I think it is very important to remember that, in a lot of areas, were it not for the TAFE system people just would not access post-secondary education. TAFE, as the motion says, is very important to our sector. I do not believe this government is committed to the TAFE sector. What I have seen from my own area is that they have done nothing but try to dismantle it, undermine it and deskill it. Also interesting, from a political point of view, is the undermining of the current CEO of TAFE. That is very interesting.

Why all of a sudden would the government be party to undermining its own CEO? I assume he is probably saying that some of this stuff is actually hurting our students. He is probably telling the government the truth. This government does not like the truth—we know that. It gets rid of people who tell it the truth. This undermining of the CEO is just part of the dismantling of our TAFE sector in this state, when we should be building it up to make sure that we have the skills and abilities in our community

for our young people and other people who want to retrain. There are a whole range of sectors that require additional people. We should be building and supporting the TAFE sector right across the state and particularly in our regional areas. With those comments, I certainly support those parts of the motion that indicate and recognise that TAFE is very important to the state.