Mr LUGG (Tertiary Education and Training): Mr Speaker, it is now some twelve months since my predecessor, the honourable member for Casuarina, introduced a bill to bring the Territory's vocational education and training system into the 21st century. This bill also facilitated the introduction of the new apprenticeship system into the Northern Territory vocational education and training system, or VET system as it is known.

Apprenticeships have been around for thousands of years and can be traced back to Ancient Egypt and Babylon. In fact, Babylonian Law enforced artisans to teach their crafts to younger generations in order to maintain an adequate number of skilled craftspeople. So you may ask what is new about the 'New Apprenticeship System'?

In 1988, Australia's ministers for education and training agreed to a major overhaul of the Australian apprenticeship system. This, and subsequent agreements, have come to be known as the National Training Reform Agenda. The reasons behind the agenda were many and included recognition that the VET system was:

- archaic, too regulated and inflexible;
- based on recognition by effluxion of time instead of competence;
- locked into a limited number of 'trade' vocations;
- not delivering the skills required by industry; and
- failing to replace trade attrition.

Features of the new apprenticeship system are:

- structured employment-based training, covered by a legally binding employer-apprentice training agreement;
- availability in virtually all industries and occupations;
- availability at certificate levels I to IV, diploma and advanced diploma;
- flexibility to structure the training program to meet particular needs;
- employer/apprentice able to choose the training provider that best meets their training needs;
- increased activity through group training schemes;
- availability of school-based and part time apprenticeships; and
- an overall increase in the number of registered apprentices in the Territory.

Apprenticeships traditionally combined on-the-job training with formal off-the-job training. However, the new apprenticeship system provides alternative pathways which include the traditional approach of combining on-the-job and off-the-job training through to pathways that are delivered fully on-the-job. New apprenticeships are bound by contractual arrangements that protect the parties and provide a wage structure while the apprentice is learning.

Apprenticeship and trainee numbers in the Northern Territory have grown by 20% over the past four years from a total of 1774 at 30 June 1997 to 2131 at 30 June 2000. New commencements have also risen from 1751 in 1997-98 to 1824 in 1999-2000. This is a major improvement over the numbers for 1998-99 which fell to 1634 new commencements. This augers well for the Territory because it means that employers are embracing the new apprenticeship system and giving our young people a real start to their working lives. It is also worthy to note that the growth in apprenticeship commencements in the Northern Territory is counter to the national trend of decline. This is another pointer to how readily
Territorian businesses respond to change. They know that a skilled workforce is their most valuable asset because it enhances their competitiveness and adds to employee satisfaction by opening up more career options.

NTETA is the Territory government’s lead agency which collates information about the training that is required and ensures that funds are available to purchase this training. They also develop strategies to look after the training needs of disadvantaged people, inform employers of changing policy and contribute to ongoing debate about identifying ways to improve the quality of the training outcomes. They are the essential interface between government and training stakeholders such as industry, business and training providers.

There are now over 380 different new apprenticeships available covering all industry sectors. School-based apprenticeships are available as well as part time apprenticeships in some industries where Commonwealth Award provisions allow.

Group Training Schemes, GTSs, now play a more significant role in apprenticeship training by expanding into new industries and offering employers more flexibility in apprenticeship training. GTSs were a joint Commonwealth, state and Territory initiative of the early 1980s and were set up as private companies under a joint funding arrangement. GTSs continue to provide a service to the community by employing apprentices and rotating them to host employers as opportunities present themselves. This allows small employers who do not have the capacity to provide the full breadth of training to participate in the apprenticeship system by sharing an apprentice with other employers.

Another initiative of the National Training Reform Agenda has been the introduction of User Choice. This initiative has been introduced in order to make Registered Training Organisations, or RTOs, more responsive to the needs of industry. This simply means that employers and apprentices can choose the RTO which is prepared to provide the services that best suit them. This includes module and unit options, delivery time and mode, as well as flexible delivery options.

The Northern Territory can be proud of its achievements and in particular our commitment to the National Training Reform Agenda. While the rest of the country is still discussing national consistency, we are two steps ahead. We were the first to change the apprenticeship system from a time basis to competency based. We were the first to change from indentures to contracts of training and now training agreements, and we were the first to legislate for mutual recognition and to tie new apprenticeships to qualifications from training packages.

All of these factors are designed to make the apprenticeships system more responsive to the needs of industry and the Territory is at the forefront of removing barriers to growth and flexibility in our apprenticeship system. The only barrier that remains is beyond our control and that is the Commonwealth Industrial Relations system of awards that have not kept pace with the National Training Reform Agenda.

The Territory can put another feather in its cap, since this is the only jurisdiction in Australia that has a truly one-stop-shop for apprenticeship support services. In all other jurisdictions, employers and apprentices have to deal with two separate agencies regarding their apprenticeship support services. In the Territory, the New Apprenticeships Centre provides both Commonwealth and Territory apprenticeship support services. This commenced on 1 December 1999. The New Apprenticeships Centre has taken over those functions previously undertaken by NTETA and includes:

- workplace inspections and approval of employers;
- registration and monitoring of training agreements;
- maintenance of apprenticeship records;
- resolution of disputes between employers and apprentices, and
- completion of training agreements.

The Northern Territory is making significant progress in reshaping our vocational education and training system to meet the needs of industry and business. Our ability to be able to respond to training needs is the envy of the rest of the Commonwealth. I would like to illustrate this capacity by reference to the way that we are dealing with the emerging training needs brought about by construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway.
Construction of the railway will really start the ball rolling in our efforts towards achievement of *Foundations for Our Future*, Part 4, in which we aim to foster partnerships in Aboriginal development. This project will give Aboriginal people an opportunity to take greater individual ownership of issues affecting their lives because it will ensure that they attain a range of translatable skills. Involvement in the construction phase will add to the momentum developing for an increase in Aboriginal enterprise and a greater realisation of development of their natural resources.

Completion of the railway will also mean opportunities for local people. Service centres will enhance the transport and distribution network. The very presence of a major transport network will mean additional opportunities for a wide range of industries such as arts and crafts and also tourism and hospitality. It will assist greatly our efforts towards achieving Foundations 2, in which we aim to foster, *inter alia*, the agribusiness sector and downstream process and value adding. Naturally, completion of the railway will further develop our capacity as a multi-modal transport and logistics hub.

Two of our regions will experience development opportunities not experienced since the halcyon days of gold rush and pastoral expansion. Construction and ongoing maintenance and operation programs are very much linked to Foundation 6 and will be prime movers in a new regional optimism and enhance regional capacity significantly to the point where they are less susceptible to the normal ebbs and flows of economic activity. These centres will build towards a critical mass that helps them become more focussed at self-development and less reliant on outside inputs.

Over 2500 people will be involved in construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway during the three years that it will take to complete the project. The core workforce will include approximately 1000 people and it is estimated that a 50% turnover rate of employees will occur each year. The construction phase will involve the establishment of major construction camps in Katherine and Tennant Creek with a number of 'flying camps' moving up and down the railway corridor as construction progresses.

It is a major project with significant employment needs and a skilled workforce will be required to ensure that the project is completed on time and to the highest engineering and construction standards. Construction teams will require high quality materials that meet international quality control standards so their suppliers must, in turn, meet stringent quality requirements. Most of the construction will take place in fairly inhospitable country and some attention to their quality of life has to be considered by Asia Pacific Railway Consortium and they will need a range of services that meet their living needs.

NTETA has been charged with the responsibility of ensuring that skilled labour is available to meet all these imperatives. The major implication for NTETA revolves around anticipating the needs of the builders of the railway, that is the Asia Pacific Railway Consortium, but also to anticipate the need to develop infrastructure to support the railway both during the construction phase and as the railway moves into operation. And, of course, NTETA needs to ensure that the services required by the consortium are not placed in jeopardy because skilled staff are not available.

The construction of the railway requires specific and specialised staff. While a great deal of employment and training will be handled directly by the consortium, NTETA has a clear role to help ensure that there is a supply of labour-ready people with the ability to be employed by the railway to then undertake specific training as required by the consortium. Some of the training must necessarily be completed outside traditional training centres. It is in these centres that peripatetic teachers will take up their craft and deliver the required training in the required format with a just-in-time approach.

It is a big task but NTETA is well on track and staff are working hard to contribute to the project. NTETA staff are involved in the Railway Employment and Training Network which involves liaison with key stakeholders such as government agencies, ITABs RTOs, and private training providers. Through this group and through consultation with Industry Training Advisory Bodies, ITABs, a number of training areas have already been identified. The first courses that were identified were hospitality and civil operations courses in both Tennant Creek and Katherine. I am pleased to announce that $130 000 has already been spent on entry level training in these areas.

Further areas of skills currently under consideration include road train drivers and cross-cultural training with other construction oriented skills obviously being dependent upon the specific
construction processes still to be finalised by the consortium. Members will be aware that job readiness programs must be organised now so that skilled labour is available right from the start of the project.

Away from the direct construction related skills, the railway will have huge implications on the infrastructure of the regional centres through which the railway will pass. Supporting the largest construction project in Australia since the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme will involve a range of job opportunities and hence a range of training challenges. NTETA is anticipating these needs and is working with other government agencies to identify specific areas of employment and training. Additionally, the need to 'backfill' the jobs left vacant in regional centres while people take up work on the railway will present opportunities for local people that would not be available without the railway project.

NTETA has established a Client Liaison Officer, a CLO, network to develop and maintain effective liaison, communication and consultation with remote indigenous communities and community organisations. Client liaison officers have been strategically placed in Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek. This allows them to form close liaisons with training providers and those who need training so that they respond rapidly to their training needs.

Our formal network of industry service has been active, giving us confidence that we can purchase training to assist with current skill deficiencies and make plans to purchase further training that will assist to provide skills for future economic development. Existing practitioners can be confident that the programs will be available to assist them in upskilling or to move on to other career options that the railway might present. NTETA staff are considering not only the current needs but also developing strategies that will assist in long term employment, well after the railway is completed. The skills that local people will have the opportunity to acquire will be transportable across a range of industries and it is one of the benefits of the new apprenticeship system. Training does not have to be specific and limited to the life of a project. The new scheme allows people to apply their skills, have them recognised, and have this across a wide range of industries.

Mr Speaker, can you imagine the benefits that this type of arrangement will offer local Aboriginal communities? Civil operations skills needed for the railway can be translated into the development of their lands in agribusiness. Hospitality skills needed in serving the camps can be used in the expansion of their tourism industries. Skills obtained in construction of the camps may be used in housing maintenance programs and other transport skills may be applied to a range of industries. This training will increase Aboriginal economic development, which an important objective of Foundation 4.

The regional staff have formed close linkages with RTOs and are a real source of information to them as they attempt to lift their standards of delivery. Advice and support to RTOs and other stakeholders includes advice about registration and re-registration, registration of the training scope and extension of scope, the Northern Territory Quality Framework and also information about attaining Quality Endorsed Training Organisation status. Advice also covers funding sources, ANTA policies and programs, training package implementation, User Choice policy and referrals to the New Apprenticeship Centre, Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data entry and advice about use of correct codes for module outcomes.

Liaison with ITABs, industry and business concerning Foundations for Our Future is ongoing. Staff also have input into regional plans such as the Barkly Blueprint, they liaise extensively with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business and reply to requests for information arising from the TAFE of Course Hotline. Staff also take a proactive role in liaison with remote Indigenous communities and the high profile NTETA Employment and Training Strategy is assisting very much in this process, aligning this component of NTETA's effort to another objective of Foundation 4.

Regional staff have a crucial role to play in facilitating working with its partners in other government agencies to ensure a whole-of-government approach. They then link this information with that from the private sector in an attempt to ensure the 'silhouette' that permeates other governments is not an issue here. The process of distributing information and ensuring that the quality that a project of this nature requires is inherent in the training process has begun with a number of networks and strategies already in operation or undertaken.
While NTETA does not have a specific employment and training function itself, the primary role of the agency includes:

- the identification of employment and training opportunities;
- the identification of skills shortages in regional areas;
- the provision of funding as appropriate to our gazetted role; and most importantly
- the networking of almost 100 RTOs throughout the Territory to ensure that this information is efficiently and accurately distributed.

NTETA staff recently organised the Northern Territory Skill Base to 2005 forum at which a wide range of RTO and ITAB representatives were brought up to speed about the railway progress and some of the training strategies and opportunities that would be present in the construction phase. All participants left the forum with an optimism that this project provides real jobs and an unparalleled opportunity for those living in rural and remote areas to become part of an exciting development. Training that works is the key to a smooth construction phase and NTETA has a crucial role to play in this.

Let me now turn to the training strategies that NTETA has put in place to ensure that the Territory is skilled. I mentioned previously how important it was that skilled labour was available so that the whole quality matrix can be satisfied. This includes all aspects of the construction phases and also some assurance of quality is required of the suppliers of goods and services to the construction team. One of the components of this quality matrix is that training meets the standards required. The Territory is committed to the Australian Recognition Framework which sets the standards for the delivery, certification and recognition of vocational education and training across Australia. The Territory, along with other states has implemented a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation (QETO) Framework to give confidence about the training services purchased by NTETA. Any training organisation wishing to access VET funds through NTETA must achieve QETO status. So, the first job to complete is to identify the training that is required then the next task is to ensure that all training providers meet minimum standards.

I now turn to another exiting new area of activity, that is VET in Schools. The Northern Territory values the VET in Schools program as a pathway to skill development and employment. NTETA is working with the Department of Education to ensure that the vocational fields chosen in 2001 suit the industry's needs while concurrently meeting the individual student's career aspirations. Consolidation of VET in Schools program is closely aligned with Foundation 5 wherein the economy is diversified through service industry growth. Our VET in Schools program will add to the momentum now building for employment and training opportunities. We are able to program for school students that will give them credit for their VET study when they leave school. What's more, the training is the same as if they were enrolled in a new apprenticeship course. There has already been widespread support from industry for the VET in Schools program. Schools are enthusiastically taking up the challenge to extend student options. Currently there are plans to increase VET in Schools activity in the automotive training package, customer service skills for the business sector, training for the government sector and expansion of activity for indigenous students. Each one of these areas will add significantly to the skills base needed for construction and ongoing maintenance and operation of the railway.

An example of the exciting developments in this area is the part-time automotive apprenticeship program at Centralian College. Learners in this program study a senior school program for three days a week, they work at an automotive workshop one day and study for their automotive TAFE qualification on the fifth day. This latter cohort presents some exiting opportunities, particularly where new apprenticeships might be offered as a partial VET in Schools solution. This will provide a tool for delivery of employment based VET in remote communities.

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Ministerial Council has agreed to extend the VET in Schools funding for the calendar year of 2001. The amount allocated to the NT is $535 000. NTETA has set aside a further $240 000, bringing the total funds available for VET in Schools to $775 000. Further funding is available through the VET Infrastructure Program. This is a Commonwealth program that provides capital funding through the Australian National Training Authority to the states and territories for the vocational education and training sector. There are three sub-components of this program:

1. Skill Centres for School Children;
2. Industry based Skill Centres; and
3. VET Infrastructure for Indigenous People.

Skill Centres - A review of the Infrastructure Program was carried out in 1999. Unlike other sub-components of the program, the allocation of funding under Skill Centres for School Children is state/territory based, with a specific allocation set aside each year for each jurisdiction. For the Northern Territory there remained an allocation of $558 360. NTETA has received six applications under the Skill Centres for School Children Program. These applications have been assessed by NTETA and will be put forward to the Planning Advisory Committee of the NT ETA Board for endorsement and then to ANTA by 30 September for approval against the NT specific allocation.

VET Infrastructure for Indigenous People - The VET Infrastructure for Indigenous People sub-component of the Infrastructure Program will complement the Indigenous National Strategy and Blueprint. An allocation of $4m nationally is set aside in 2000 for the program. The guidelines outline a two-stage application process. NTETA sought expressions of interest from eligible organisations and has received twenty-one applications under this program. These applications will then be assessed, prioritised and sent to ANTA to be assessed by a national selection panel.

During 1999-2000, NTETA has developed an Infrastructure Master Plan for the Northern Territory. The plan identifies current training facilities and future infrastructure requirements in each of the major regions: Arnhemland, Barkly, Centre, Katherine and Darwin Regions. The plan will enable NTETA, providers and other stakeholders to identify priority areas for the development of infrastructure to support training delivery across the Northern Territory. An important component for consideration will be ensuring capability to conduct appropriate training for railway workers.

I now wish to talk about some of the specific programs that are managed by NTETA. Flexible Response Funding, the budget for this is $2.2m this current fiscal year, and it is used to purchase training for indigenous people in regional and remote areas. A Community Response Program, at $400 000, provides for ongoing funding of programs commenced under Flexible Response Funding. The Equity Program at $240 000 is a competitive tender program for disadvantaged groups. The Literacy Program at $70 000 is another competitive tender program as is Industry Priorities Program at $1.7m, and Pre-Employment/Accelerated Trade Training for $200 000. Innovative Programs Funding at $815 000 supports innovative ideas and developments that occur outside the annual planning cycle. Profile Funding - $27m - is the mainstream funding source. User Choice at $4.3m is set aside for the formal training of apprentices. In addition, NTETA allocates $600 000 for the purchase of equipment used to deliver training. Profile funding is based on the agreed delivery targets for the major VET (TAFE) and eleven other providers in the Territory and is based on identified priorities by industry while the competitive tender programs comply with national agreements on contestable funding of VET.

Entry level training has already commenced in Katherine and Tennant Creek, in anticipation of employment opportunities arising out of the railway project. Further areas of need have been identified and are currently under investigation. These include road train drivers and cross-cultural training.

NTETA conducted a very successful seminar on 1 September 2000 to address the NT Skill Base to 2005. The objectives of the seminar were to:

- inform major training organisations of future projects and their requisites in terms of goods and services;
- identify to training organisations the range of infrastructure training which must be covered;
- make training organisations aware of standards expected by major projects; and
- guide training organisations towards determining skills capabilities.

The provision of hospitality and civil skills training in Katherine and Tennant Creek has been organised and implemented within the operation of NTETA's Railway Employment and Training Plan. The plan facilitated the establishment of the Railway Training Network. Of the eight foundation members of the network, four are based in regional centres: Centralian College in Alice Springs, Waikan Employment and Training Services in Katherine, Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs and Julalakari Council in Tennant Creek.

To support the successful operation of the network NTETA's regionally based staff will:

- provide support services for workers who have contracts of training, in collaboration with the New Apprenticeship Centre;
- support regionally-based network members in answering the railway consortium's requirements;
• support skills audits and individual training plans for skill advancement;
• participate with network members, other NT government agencies and indigenous organisations to maximise opportunities for local indigenous people;
• liaise effectively with training providers in order to minimise the time between identification of training needs and the provision of training;
• ensure effective internal communication between regionally-based officers to articulate needs that challenge conventional regional boundaries due to the speed of construction and environmental realities; and
• complement the programs developed and delivered by the Railway Training Network with the establishment of local programs specifically designed to increase access to employment opportunities offered by railway-related enterprise activities;

Once again, the Territory can be very proud of its achievements and in particular the way in which we are building a bridge to the future. Two years ago, this government committed to a five year national strategy called *Building a Bridge to the Future* which had five objectives:

- equipping Australians for the world of work;
- enhancing mobility in the labour market;
- achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training;
- increasing investment in training; and
- maximising the value of public vocational education and training expenditure.

I am pleased to advise the House that in the Territory we have a proud record of achievement against these objectives.

Mr Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the statement.

**Dr TOYNE (Stuart):** Mr Speaker, we can get a statement that refers very specifically to apprenticeship schemes, training strategies in place and training programs in readiness to support the railway project. I take it that we are now talking about not a general statement about NTETA and TAFE activities in the Northern Territory, although that is how the document as a whole reads, but we are talking about how these activities are going to relate to the railway project.

In looking through the 12 or so pages of the statement, I can only find one absolutely clear connection - at least in writing - between the types of activities the minister is talking about and the railway, and that is that two courses have been funded - hospitality and civil operations in Tennant Creek and Katherine, $130 000. Well, they are certainly welcome as activities, but if that is the extent of the railway training plan, God help us, because this is a $1.2bn project. The rest of the document courses around pretty well the meaning of life in terms of training and skill development for employment, all of which might have some general relevance to preparing for the railway but it is certainly not made apparent in the document.

I want to use my reply to build up the type of plan that I think should have been put in place some 18 months ago if there was going to be a serious preparation of the Territory workforce to take on the additional challenge of taking a full part in the railway construction. The railway project is coming into a situation in the Northern Territory where we have an economy that has had chronic skills shortages identified now for many years. You can read in the TAFE reports year after year of skill shortages in areas like child-care coordinators, electrical engineers, mining engineers, registered nurses, pharmacists, secondary schoolteachers, chefs, metal fabricators, welders, automotive electricians, motor mechanics, refrigeration/airconditioning mechanics, plumbers, bakers, pastry cooks, cabinetmakers, child-care workers and so on. Out of that very quick sampling of the areas of shortage, you could see many of those areas of skill shortage are actually very closely related to the type of skills that the railway project will be calling on. Welders, motor mechanics, automotive electricians, plumbers, bakers and pastry cooks involved in catering, the woodworking professions like carpentry and cabinet making, could all be very clearly related to the business of setting up construction camps and actually fabricating the components of the railway and keeping the plant going that the construction is going to be drawing on.

It is clear that the Territory is not in particularly good shape in those key areas of skills that the railway is going to require to provide the workforce directly from here under the existing conditions. So that is our first problem - where do we get these additional skills from within the timeframes that are
The second condition that the railway is coming into is one of high regional unemployment. The Treasurer often gets up and trumpets about our low unemployment rates and every time we have this same argument about being able to claim the official ABS figures and totally ignoring the fact that there are 7000 people on CDEP, spread in the areas where employment is in fact very hard to provide and is heavily under-provided, particularly when you are talking about the employment of young people in the Territory. In common with other parts of Australia, it is often our young who have the most trouble in getting any job, let alone a job that has good conditions and some kind of career path and some skill development embodied in it.

The main brokering organisation, the one that the minister has spent a fair bit of time talking about in his statement, the TAFE structure, NTETA, has been severely downsized in recent years. It went from 78 members of that organisation down to 46 some three budgets ago, I believe, and we are now dealing with a much smaller TAFE structure than the ones that I worked in when I was in that sector of our education system. We have seen not only the downsizing of that organisation but we have seen it drawn back into the urban centres. We no longer have the network of adult educators or adult education facilitators spread widely around the Territory, particularly in our remoter areas.

The minister claims credit for having client liaison officers in Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and Katherine. Well, we used to have them in 30 different places around the Territory in my day. There was someone virtually in any of the larger communities out bush, as well as the urban centres, who could be asked to take on the facilitating role of getting people into training and matching the training to the local employment economic needs. So we have quite an undersized TAFE sector to support this process that we have to embark on.

The lead times to produce the skills needed for the railway are short, basically because the railway is a fully-commercial, high-speed construction. Once this process starts it is going to go at 100 mph because time very much means money in this type of project. There will be no time to slow everything down and cater to extended training processes of the workforce. They are going to want to get in there and put those rails down as quickly as they can do it. Really, the time to produce the skills locally in our workforce that can be embodied into that project should have started 18 months ago. If you are going to talk about mechanics or cooks or plumbers or any of the traditional apprenticeship areas, with three years of training, you have to start well before on-the-job involvement of those trainees. It is all right for community-based work that can go at a slower pace and can be a bit more flexible, but this is not a flexible or slow project.

It has been recognised by both ISO and the business community here that in fact the railway project could suck skilled people out of our current business activities. Instead of presenting an additional level of activity in the Territory economy for the time the construction phase lasts, we could actually be getting competition for skilled people between the railway project and the existing businesses. It is not going to do the Territory's economy much good if places like engineering works in Alice Springs or in Darwin are finding that because of the offer of better money on the railway project they are losing key people out of their current activities.

Another issue that needed to be addressed with the railway project's inception is that there will not always be a net gain of jobs, as the minister is trying to maintain. What happens in terms of job gains or losses will vary a lot depending upon where you are. The advice I have had from the transport industry in Alice Springs is that we are facing job losses there as a result of the railway being continued on to Darwin. It will cease to be a railhead. The long-haul transport will drop back. The estimate I have had from all five firms I have talked to so far is that it could be in the order of about 150 jobs, not all directly in the trucking firms themselves but in the whole area of economic activity that is based around the transport industry. It includes things like tyre places, spare parts places, fuel depots - the things that feed off the operation of these long-haul transports.

That does not mean that the railway should not go ahead. It just says that if you are going to look at the impact of this project, you have to look at how either retraining or relocation of some of those jobs could occur within the Territory, or build up some counterbalancing activity down in Alice Springs. I am loyal enough to Central Australia and Alice Springs to say that we do not want to pay for the railway with jobs in our regional economy. We want to be sharing the benefits of moving forward
together and not in effect paying for an advance in Darwin or other parts of the Territory.

We are talking about initial impacts - maybe the first five to 10 years of the railway's operation. The longer-term effect of the railway - and this is why Labor supported this consistently - is that, yes, having a major transport route over time will gradually grow activity as it becomes available to the support business activity. But you are talking about 30 years, 50 years, for that kind of effect to be fully realised. In the meantime, we have a short-term problem in Alice Springs. We are going to lose jobs out of the regional economy, and that needs to be built into the response of the government to this project.

The railway skills profiles, if you look at just a sampling, they are not hard to find out because the railway consortium has given a very complete list of the kind of skills that will be involved in the project in their brochures - welders, mechanics, plant operators, cooks, fencers, construction workers of all type, plumbers. They are all going to be needed in large numbers during the construction phase. I am certainly not contesting the assertion that there will be a couple of thousand jobs out there. Our problem is how many of those we can capture for the local work force, compared to the people who are imported to the Territory for that project.

I would hate to see the bulk of the railway workers having just emigrated from the Homebush or somewhere like that - some of the other big construction projects around the country - that we get them for our turn, when they just come here, build our railway, and then go off interstate again. That is not going to provide any kind of lasting increment to our workforce here or to the skill levels that we have here in the Territory.

Eighteen months ago we could have said whichever way a welder was going to be employed, whether the welder ended up being employed in the railway or whether they ended up going into one of the local engineering works as a local employed worker in the local economy, what does it matter? We are addressing skills shortages within the Northern Territory economy to our future benefit, particularly if we can get the people who actually live here and have grown up here, trained into those skill areas and into those positions. Why didn't we start 18 months ago with a major effort in looking at those key areas that both the railway and our general economy needs, and get the people together that need to make that happen, the providers, the training brokers such as Group Training, New Apprenticeship Centre, and the potential employers? The employers are already there. The employers are crying out for skilled workers, so we have them ready-made in terms of the local economy. If they coincide with the railway skilled profile, then you are catering to both through the same process.

That is what we should have been doing 18 months ago. The fact that the task force for the railway to actually consider what training ramifications there are for the railway project only met, I think, in August this year, this was after the original announced date, that we thought we were going to get closure. I am not criticising the fact there have been delays. This is a very complex project and I think our leader has already said that, yes, you can expect delays because of the complexity of it, and you don't want to sign off on something where some of the detail is not quite right.

But the fact that we are only getting a training task force together in the same time period as we are expecting the financial closure and the commencement of the project is completely ridiculous. There is absolutely no way you could produce a broad-based training response within our TAFE system and within our business community capable of producing significant numbers of skilled workers for this project, in the kind of timeframes that you have allowed. I just believe it has been a case of extraordinary myopia to be shelling out the kind of money that both the Territory government and other governments in Australia have, for this project, without absolutely vouching the strong participation of local workers in the project is irresponsible.
Looking a bit closer at the earlier decisions that have been made by this government that are now making this task so hard, to have ignored these skill shortages for so long within our system here, keeping on talking about economic development, well, okay, where are the skills? That is the slab that it all has to sit on. If you do not have a skilled work force there is no point in talking about moving our economy on to new levels and so on. We are going to be constantly at the mercy of itinerant workers coming in, making a few bob, and then going back where they really want to be. We want to build a home-grown, stable, committed work force to the Territory economy itself. And you can only do that by a long-term commitment to those people, to recruit them, support them, both in their training and in their employment.

We were talking the last week of the sittings, where apprentices that had made a commitment to our construction industry are finding themselves having to battle for their conditions of training and employment. We cannot let that happen. We have to get a strong, dependable commitment to our young people so that if they make the commitment on their side, they are not being screwed over by the arrangements that are made around them for training. Apprentices are to be paying for their safety equipment, for God's sake. We have to do better than that.

I have mentioned the cuts to NTETA, and if you are going to talk about the benefits of the railway - and the minister makes much of the vast potential, the vast hope that we can bring off with this project and some meaningful employment into our remote communities and into the most, at the moment, disadvantaged groups in the country, whether it is our youth generally or the remote communities. You cannot do that through a centralised network. We have known that for years. You cannot send someone out every six weeks to a remote community and then draw a strong and sustained response to whatever training program you are talking about. We have seen that come and go for the whole 20 years I have been involved in bush communities. You have to have people out there sustaining the training effort day-by-day. You cannot just do it by occasional visits.

We do not have the network out there to actually link these communities into the railway project. We could have had it. We could have had it if we had gone out there a couple of years back. We all knew the railway project was coming, we all knew it had to be done anyway, because we cannot let the kind of levels of unemployment continue that we have in those remote communities at the moment. We have to do something anyway. This should have been done two years ago to build that base and connect into the railway project.

With the new apprenticeship centres, the brave new world of supporting apprentices, the minister's again saying that we are state-of-the-art on that. Well, I am yet to be convinced that this government is supporting the new apprenticeship centre arrangements to the same degree as the old apprenticeship support arrangements were bankrolled and built into the operation of NTETA as a public body. The new apprenticeship centre was given a $1m start-up grant by the NT government. Prior to the new apprenticeship centre being put into operation, we were spending a bit over $3m a year on apprenticeship support. From what I can see of the financials of the new apprenticeship centre, there is a $1000 payment per outcome for the apprentices that they are handling. I think 1500 clients was the agreed number for the first 12 months. Over half of that $1000 per head payment is coming from the Commonwealth government. So, on the face of it, it looks to me that the Northern Territory government is spending less on apprenticeships than it did before the privatised arrangements. The minister should get up and tell us whether we are, in actual fact, putting our shoulder into the support of apprenticeships and apprenticeship training to the same extent that we did in the earlier arrangement. It is certainly not the time to be scaling back the effort when we are talking about this sort of project about to arrive.

Going back to the centralisation of support, the bush has been neglected systematically for many years and it is all very well to say it is all too hard, you are miles from anywhere, how can you make employment out there? Well, you can. Every community needs at least one mechanic. Every community needs at least one plumber. All of those basic trades are immediately employable in our remote communities. Why aren't we sustaining a training effort of the type which has been proved out time and time again by trial training arrangements, the kind of flexible response funding work that we have seen in a lot of our communities. The earlier module, the training of mechanical in motor mechanics, all of those worked, it was just a matter of having someone consistently running the trainees through the modules of training that had been set up for them. With a will and with a proper delivery structure there is absolutely no reason why we should not have been producing trades
graduates out of apprenticeships based in bush communities in large enough numbers that they would impact on the railway project.

But the fact is that instead of increasing the effort out in the remote communities we have removed the adult education presence from most of them to the point that we now have vocational education training. TAFE centres in many of our communities, that are sitting either empty or are now being used for totally different purposes. I have personal knowledge of the ones in my electorate and it really peeves me to walk into a community and see perfectly good facilities like that with no adult education presence there at all. Usually it is Bachelor College, to their credit, that has moved a lecturer or a tutor into the community and they are maintaining some bush-based tuition in those buildings. Very rarely do you see an NT government program utilising those facilities. It is a waste of money with the enormous effort that has been taken to get those facilities in place, to not then put personnel in them, and even worse to actually withdraw personnel from most of these communities. It does not make any sense at all.

We need a plan to compensate Alice Springs for the job losses. There is no doubt, if the industry itself is saying that is what is going to happen, they are in the best position to predict the impact on their operations, and this is pre the fuel price hikes which have certainly made life even more difficult for them. We need a compensating plan for central Australia if we are going to lose 150 jobs, that is like half a suburb of Alice Springs, as a result of the railhead being replaced by simply a stopover on a longer route. We need to have a plan there to see if we can generate activities in other areas. Perhaps horticulture, I don't know. There are certainly ideas around and I know the member for Macdonnell would probably agree that there are some great things you could be doing in horticultural production in our particular environment, following his well known trip to Israel.

We also lack a flexible plan for the placement of skilled people once they have been trained up. As I said, if we had started early enough we could have had several directions in which you could take a skilled, trained person and place them within the Territory economy. It is no problem finding a job for a cook, or a mechanic, or a welder in our economy. We are desperately and chronically short of those particular skills. The general economy will always be there to take on some of those graduates provided they are prepared to work where the business is located.

The second thing is the railway itself. Obviously, if you had a workforce or workers who had the skills that the railway project is looking for, then all things being equal, they should get a job on the railway project out of the 2500 that are on offer.

The third area is the existing jobs or new initiatives in the remote areas. If we do not form a commitment to that, it is going to come back and bite us time and time again into the future. This could have provided a huge, new impetus in that someone could have been trained, a whole group of workers could have been trained, to take their place in the construction phase of the railway and once the railway work had finished, there were jobs available for them back home. If they were a mechanic who had worked on the railway and built up that kind of work experience, they would be welcomed with open arms in most communities because most times communities are battling to find and retain these skilled people. If it was a person who had actually come from that area, that community, then I think we would stabilise the situation enormously.

I suppose I am pleased that this statement has come out to the extent that we finally have someone on their feet talking about the railway and training in one statement. We have been calling for the needs of a training and jobs plan to be attached to this project for a long time and even though I am totally unconvinced that this statement places our training effort in close relationship to the railway project, at least we have the two words on the same page, so that is a start.

What I am looking for from this government, if you are serious about training, we have started far too late, our options are now much more limited than they would have been two years ago, but let's see a bit more detail. I think there is only one paragraph, as I pointed out, that specifically says here are some courses that we have funded because they are relevant to the railway. The rest of this document is a general blurb about NTETA and the general trends in our national TAFE system. We know all that, we have talked about that in many debates previously. What we want to know is specifically what training effort is being applied to prepare the Northern Territory and its economy and its workforce for the arrival of the railway project which could be as soon as the wet season is finished next year. We do not
have much time. There are not that many things that we can do in terms of long term training programs, but at least we can get a few more of our workforce ready for this project.

Mrs BRAHAM (Local Government): Mr Speaker, I rise to support the minister's statement, but I feel I must make a few comments on those remarks made by the member for Stuart.

I have listened to him and the doom and gloom he is coming out with over the railway project. I really cannot believe at this stage someone still would be saying the things he says, like losing jobs out of the regional economy. I have come to the conclusion that he really does not know what is happening out there as regards the railway. I really believe that you should take advantage of some of the seminars that are being held so you could find out. If you talk to the transport people, you carried on about their loss of opportunities, but if you talk to them they will say to you that within the railway project there is a huge opportunity there for haulage leading up to the construction and during the construction of the railway. If you talk to someone like Tony Smith from Territory Transportables, he will say to you there is a huge opportunity there for him and his type of firm to provide facilities for the camps. If you talk to someone like Independent Grocers in Alice Springs which has received a very big contract from Tanami, they will also say to you there is a huge opportunity for them to service the camps. So, I am saying to the member for Stuart there are opportunities, there will be jobs available and I really would invite you next time we have a seminar in Alice to come along and find out exactly what is going on and how the businesses of the Territory are going to take advantage of these opportunities as they are.

I am not sure whether the member for Stuart understands the railway employment and training plan that has been put together that is linking the Aboriginal organisations within the southern part of the Territory. I have to congratulate the efforts of Tangentyere, Julalikari Council and the Central Land Council for becoming actively involved and, indeed, very proactive in their relationships with the railway consortium. It is those kinds of relationships that have been built up that will ensure that this railway project is a success and the Aboriginal organisations will be able to take advantage of them. The member for Stuart should also be very aware of the Employ Alice strategy that the Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce has sponsored, which aims to identify indigenous people for employment in mainstream, and I think he may have even been part of that original idea. The regional systems program funds have been approved by the Northern Territory Area Consultative Committee, and this Chamber is hoping to receive funding for the setting up of a business incubator as well. But to complement that Employ Alice initiative, the trainer has received funding for a project officer, who, under the Indigenous Education Employment Program will work with all the stakeholders in education, training and employment to foster and promote indigenous participation in the economy and, particularly, where possible, within the railway. I would just urge the member for Stuart perhaps to get a little bit more au fait with what is happening within the business sector regarding the railway project. I think he might be surprised at the interest and the high level of negotiations that are taking place at the moment.

I wish to add a few other examples of good things happening in the employment and training area in the Territory. For instance, last week a very special competition took place at the Northern Territory University. Seventy young people from all around the Territory competed in the first regional work skills competition held for a long time in the Territory. The work skills competition was established nearly 20 years ago to challenge young people, teachers, trainers and employers to achieve world class standards in all industries and promote the status of vocational education and training across Australia. It was very pleasing that NTETA had taken the initiative and hosted this competition so the cream of our vocational talent of young Territorians had the opportunity to compete against the best in Australia at the national work skills competition in Adelaide in March.

There are eight gold medal winners from Sunday who are eligible to go forward, and they represent some of the traditional apprenticeship areas of cookery, electrical, hairdressing, plumbing, refrigeration, cabinet making and welding. I am sure the member for Stuart will be pleased to hear those areas represented. As well, the competition took place in the new age area of Information Technology and what was particularly pleasing about this competition is that these young people are supported by their employers in preparing for the competition. It is not an easy thing for a young apprentice to test his or her skills against others from different work places and training institutions. I am very proud to be able to say in this House today that competitors came for the weekend from Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Alice Springs and, what is more, they were among the medal winners.
Sean Hanson and Warren Thompson from small plumbing businesses in Central Australia won gold and silver, Candice Edwards from Hair Raisers in Alice Springs won the silver medal in hairdressing and David Humphries from Morris & Ellison won a bronze medal in cabinet making, and I guess that is a credit their employers that these young people from Alice Springs were able to gain such good awards.

Another fascinating aspect of this regional work skills competition was that 40 senior school students took part in a schools competition in the areas of retail, office administration and consumer electrics. Nine medals were awarded and a demonstration Internet challenge event is underway and in this event a team of six students from Casuarina Senior College are developing a web page about work skills. I know the members will want to join with me in congratulating these very talented young people and wishing the gold medallists lots of luck in Adelaide. Best wishes also to their trainers and employers who will be working with them in the lead up to the national competition to sharpen their skills and prepare them for the strong competition that lies ahead.

This government recognises the importance of support for apprentices and vocational training. As the minister has outlined, increasing the skills base is very important in growing Territory businesses and enterprises, and to this end I want to make comment about the hospitality facilities that are being built at the moment at Centralian College, and they certainly are a first class facility. From early next year, apprentices in cooking, waiting, butchery and tourism will have the chance to practice their skills in a brand new facility designed to meet the training needs of Central Australians for the next decade. The College was proactive in developing a hospitality consortium to address the low number of apprentices being employed in the local industry and we all recognise that these industries in particular have a very transient population, so to be able to train locals and hopefully retain them was a very important aspect when this hospitality consortium got together. The consortium which is now operating was achieved by bringing together the industry and the College to develop a training methodology that meets industry needs in relation to training times and outcomes. The agreed outcomes were based on a significant shift to workplace training and assessment with set blocks of College based delivery kept to an absolute minimum. The outcome was that 13 apprentices commenced a Certificate IV program where previously there were no Alice Springs participants.

The consortium consists of the Alice Springs Vista Hotel, Rydges Plaza, Lasseter's Casino Hotel, Aurora Resorts and Hotels and the Alice Springs Resort. I commend that consortium and Centralian College for the great step they have taken in developing this program for the young people of Alice Springs. I am quite sure that it will be to their advantage. The idea of rotating these young apprentices through the different hotels in Alice provides them with an experience that perhaps they would not get if they were attached to one employer only, but being flexible and having them able to rotate through the different hotels will be a great advantage to them.

NTETA recognised and responded to the changing training agenda over the recent years and there is a need to be proactive and develop a rapport with industry, government, community and, of course, providers. Centralian College is one such training provider who has responded to industry requests for a variety of delivery and assessment modes to meet industries specific requirements, whether they be in the workplace or at the college. I am very pleased to say that Centralian College received nomination as the training provider of the year and will go on at the end of the year to compete in the national training awards, so it is a very big honour that they have. I believe that it is well deserved because they have certainly responded and the variety of training programs they have, I doubt whether people really understand the depth and breadth that is available. They basically have provided identifiable employment and career path opportunities and that is something that we must always keep in mind - that when we are training people, at the end of the day, we hope there is a job there for them. And not just the hospitality course that I just mentioned, but there have been initiatives also with many of the local organisations and the college strives to be very flexible in the provision of training and recognises the need to stay flexible in its responses. The where, when and how philosophy is practised and is the reason behind the success of the remote delivery programs that span the Territory and the initiative to establish programs in Darwin, nationally and internationally into Papua New Guinea, so they have a very wide vision.

The member for Stuart mentioned what he felt was the loss of adult educators within the bush system. Well, I really believe that those days are over and service providers can provide employment and
training into Aboriginal and remote areas in a way that we have not seen before and with a great more success than perhaps we did in the past. Centrallan College's success is reflected in the fact that they do have a 30% growth in student hours and it would not have been achieved if they were not flexible. Their indigenous programs have met with high praise and I might make mention of the MALU unit, the Mobile Adult Learning Unit, which has been exceptionally well received in remote communities and the outcomes have been extremely rewarding to the communities involved and the participants. The programs have led to potential enterprise development and employment outcomes in many remote areas, particularly horticulture and the indigenous arts. The college operates two pantech units that provide manual skills to remote communities. The first unit was commissioned in 1985 and the units that are being used at the moment are certainly up to date. I was at Mount Allen and there was a unit there, Steve (I'm not sure what Steve's other name is) is highly respected by community people and he does provide a great service to them because the need for manual art skills has not diminished. This MALU unit delivers programs in welding, mechanics and steel fabrication. Some of the remote communities that have benefited from this MALU are Laramba, Yuelamu, Ntaria, Areyonga, Titjikala and Mount Swan to mention just a few.

It has been such a success that in 1998 there was a second one commissioned as a complementing unit. It offered local government courses, retail operations, office skills and business studies. This unit is basically a mobile classroom and is equipped with computers to teach the modules from the remote area local government and retail courses. As most communities do not have appropriate teaching space, this new classroom has been very well received already at Santa Teresa, Titjikala, Laramba, Ampilatwatja and Yuendumu. That is one way Centrallan College has addressed the needs of remote communities in providing the training opportunities for the people out there.

The other area that I believe we should mention, and which is growing, is the horticultural and land-care courses that are being conducted. One in particular is being conducted at the Alice Springs Correctional Centre. I commend the people involved with that because they are doing a great job with those inmates providing them with training that they can take back to the communities. It is interesting to know that the students from the Alice Springs Correctional Centre were successful in both the Olive Pink Flower Show and the annual Alice Springs Show taking out 68 awards. They are currently propagating grapevines and they intend to put several large plots under table grapes at the prison centre. It is a very proactive, positive training and learning situation for these prisoners to be in. I know that many of them are quite committed when they do leave to introduce such things within their own communities.

I must mention Laramba, a community at Napperby, 210 km north-west of Alice Springs. They have been extremely proactive in setting up their market garden. They have long-term produce as well as short-term, and are able to supply their community and the communities around there. Their students are able to complete the Certificate I and II in horticulture, so there is an end-point, an outcome, for them which makes the whole course worthwhile. They have set up vegetable gardens which really we have not seen in communities for years. I remember many years ago seeing one at Ali Curung, but when I recently visited Ali Curung the people there said: ‘Yes, we remember, but we are the old people. The young people are not as interested in doing it’.

Utopia, for instance, in conjunction with the Central Land Council and the departments of primary industry and education, have also undertaken these courses and Injartnama community in the Western Macdonnells have done it. Of course, there is a very active town camps program run through Tangentyere. I know that Territory Health are supporting such initiatives through small grants to purchase some tools and equipment for these market gardens. At the Titjikala graduation, students used the produce from the garden to prepare salads and desserts for the crowd of 200 people who attended. The nutrition of indigenous people has improved dramatically in these communities. That is a training course that Centrallan College is offering to the different communities that not only provides employment but has the spin-off of improving the diet and health of that particular community.

There will be a workshop run in Alice Springs in November on this. It started as a small idea because the work that was being done has been so successful in some communities. I was speaking to Bill Ivory from the Office of Aboriginal Development yesterday and he tells me the workshop is snowballing. There are more and more people wanting to come along to see what is happening and how they can be involved in this horticultural course and how their community can reap the benefits of being able to set up their market gardens and provide the produce that can benefit them.
There is also the opportunity of business enterprises. Table grapes are becoming a priority in some areas, and short-term cash crops will supplement the diets of the communities and also provide a small business industry to those communities that undertake it.

The spin-offs from training now happening in remote communities are not as they were in the past. These courses that NTETA are providing are grass roots, beneficial courses that help the lifestyle of the people. They can benefit everyone in that community rather than just the one individual who has done the course. So I commend NTETA for taking on that program, and most importantly Centralian College for being responsible for that program. I think it is one that can only benefit all.

I really believe the minister has much to be commended for in his statement. We all understand how very important it is to ensure that we have people who can carry on in future years in the areas that we need, particularly in the Territory. It is sometimes not always easy to attract people or to retain them. Too often employers tell me that they do go through an apprenticeship period with a young person only to find that as soon as they finish they shoot through or they set up their own business. But as long as we keep them in the Territory, I guess that is the important part of providing any program.

The flexibility and the different types of programs that are being offered are far vaster than I have come across in past years. We are certainly responding to the needs of the community rather than saying to the community: 'These are the courses we are offering - you do those'. Instead it is now the opposite way around. We are saying: 'What do you need? How can we do it? What is the best way to do it?' I think that is the important part of our training for the future of Territorians. I commend the minister for his statement.

Mr STIRLING (Nhulunbuy): Mr Speaker, I welcome the minister's statement today. It gives us an opportunity to pick up a number of issues in training. I think it is a very comprehensive overview of training within the Northern Territory as it stands at the moment, although I share my colleague's view that the heading is a bit misleading in talking about 'readiness to support the railway project'. It is much more an overview of the current systems rather than particularly addressing training and readiness for the railway.

The strength of the new apprenticeship system - and the minister has gone into some detail to outline the salient features of it - lies in its flexibility. I think I am right in saying that the first moves towards flexibility in apprenticeship training came with the moves to competency-based training quite some years ago, which gave those who could the opportunity to move through and become fully-accredited tradespeople within their respective trades more quickly than the standard four years' training had allowed, the traditional lockstep method up to that.

The other strength of that, of course, is that it worked the other way. In Aboriginal communities where other skills or other prerequisites were required in order for the trainee to get through the apprenticeship, such as additional work or remedial work in literacy and numeracy, it allowed the trainee to take longer than the traditional four years because you were relying on a competency-based measure to get through the system rather than, as I said, the lockstep four years.

Many other of the features that the minister spoke about earlier on his statement add to that flexibility, efficiency and effectiveness of training overall. I welcome the figures that the minister provided on the second page that were up 20% over the past four years in apprenticeship and training numbers. If you consider that in the past 12 months the construction industry has not been in the greatest shape - we saw that just a couple of weeks ago with 32 apprentices in question - I think it stands the Territory in good stead to be in a growth phase now when things are not all that good. That would equip us for the future so that when things do eventually turn up we will be well placed in terms of training and readiness to have more tradespeople coming through to pick up the growth in work and the growth in the labour market that will occur.

The VET in Schools program is something that we have looked closely at in terms of our own policy development. We are strong supporters of VET. We think that more could probably be done, bringing VET perhaps down lower in the high school situation than it operates today. It reminds me in some ways of the old technical school system that operated in Victoria in the 1960s when I was at school. You could go through the normal high school pattern right through to form 6 or to year 12, to
matriculation or Higher School Certificate, but for those with a technical bent who wanted to get into the manual trades, there were options. I remember the school - it was some 20 miles up the road, Castlemaine Technical School. You would do your first couple of years at the normal high school, and if you were headed, or pretty sure you were headed, for a career as an apprentice, you could go on and do your year 9 and 10, the old third and fourth form at tech school. You would then get exposure to a whole range of activity and experience that you would be utilising on going out into the workforce as an apprentice. Mind you, you did not get any credit off your time to serve as an apprentice. You still had to do your four years.

How I see VET is a culmination or a marriage between that old style of the old tech school development and bringing them all together in the one mainstream school system, so that you are continuing with your mainstream studies. You could be doing VET studies, and you could be, of course, working for the employer, all at the same time. I remember the former Minister for Education and Training, Minister Finch, some five or six years ago, talking about those very things and how advantageous they were going to be when they were in place. As I said, we are very taken with it. We think that there is a lot more that can be done. I have no idea of when you talk about a figure of $775,000 for calendar year 2000-01 just how far that goes. I would need to seek further advice and obtain further information on it. But it is an area that is going to serve and underpin the whole apprenticeship and training system well into the future, and an area that we would like to see further expanded and, perhaps, as I said, even brought lower into the end of the school system.

Last week, I asked the minister about the 32 apprentices who lost their jobs with the company Construction Industry Skills because of the downturn. They were told their contracts would be transferred to another company, Building Skills Pty Ltd, and they demanded that each of the 32 apprentices sign Australian workplace agreements, and if they did not sign, they did not get the job. I asked the minister for a response to the point that the Australian workplace agreement stripped away many of their employment rights and conditions that they had had in their former positions, and what he sought to do about it.

He did say that he was not aware of the detail of those particular arrangements, and he would look into it. So I thought I would take the opportunity to put some of those concerns on the record. I am reading from an Australian workplace agreement between Building Skills Pty Ltd - that is the employer in the company - and the employee. Now, if you just look at 7.1: 'No allowances are payable in respect of this agreement unless expressly contained in this agreement.' And of course, nowhere else throughout the document has any heading of allowances been put forward. I am told that in the previous awards these apprentices had, there were allowances in respect of working conditions such as exposure to toxic fumes and different health and safety concerns that may have existed.

The hours of work under 11.1 shall generally be 38 hours, worked Monday to Friday between the hours of 6am and 6pm. Notwithstanding 11.1 above, there may be times when the employee will be required to work less than 38 hours in the week due to falling work volumes. Where this is the case, the employee will be paid on the number of hours worked, and the employer is under no obligation to pay a minimum of 38 hours for the week.

Of course, the strength of the group training system is supposed to be - and I recognise and everybody recognises that if an employer in one situation is a bit down, that you ought to be and are unlikely to be, if they are completing a contract, they do not have anything on the books, that you scout around and you get them placed with another employer who is going to use them to the fullest extent.

Further on, payments: 'No other payment with respect to overtime shall be made. In particular, no payment will be made for crib time and meal allowances'. Again, I am advised that their previous conditions included meal time where they were applicable, where they worked through meals. Where the employee works in excess of 38 hours in any pay week, they will only be paid for 38 hours. Gross pay for hours worked in excess of the 38 hours will be banked in a trust account operated by Building Skills Pty Ltd, and paid out to the employee during periods of down time, or to make the hours worked up to 38 hours in the week, or as described in clauses 13.8, 9, 10 and 11 net of tax. I will just go through a couple of those:

Where requested by the employee and with the employer's consent, banked pay may be paid to the employee to cover the purchase of tools or to pay course fees or associated equipment and materials.
Where it is not utilised in the way described above, it shall be paid out to the employee at the end of the financial year, and when the employee is in the final year of their apprenticeship, their banked pay shall be paid upon completion of their apprenticeship.

It is a bit like the old jockey apprenticeship, where the master used to bank and hold for the apprentice any of their winnings over a certain amount, to make sure it did not all get blown on the night of the big win. That is a pretty paternalistic sort of approach here.

Under 14.7:
*Leave with or without pay will be taken when there is a downturn in the work at hand, or in periods of shutdown, due to either fall in work volume, or the Christmas holiday period.*

Again, that situation of if you know you are going to be down for an extended period of time, surely under the group training system you should be trying to place the apprentice or the trainee with someone who is going to be able to carry them through.

Under 19.6:
The employee will provide all necessary safety equipment; safety equipment will be maintained in good condition.

And going further through the document:
*It is not solely the responsibility of Building Skills Pty Ltd to seek work for the apprentice. The employee will also be expected to search for work in periods of downtime.*

I do not particularly have a problem with that clause.

Clause 25.4:
*Where the employee is required to undertake external courses of training, the employee shall be responsible to pay for their training. The employee will pay all fees and administration charges levied by a registered training organisation, associated with their apprenticeship formal training college.*

So if we take that as a collective, where before, it is my understanding the employee's training charges and costs were being picked up, their tools and their safety equipment associated with the job were being picked up as part of the conditions of their employment, under this Australian workplace agreement with Building Skills Pty Ltd, it all becomes the cost of the trainee. And of course, we know that they are not on a great deal of money in the first place.

What we have to address is if the Australian workplace agreements are going to be used in a way to shift the cost of these particular requirements for an apprentice or trainee, if they are going to shift the cost from the employer onto the employee, and the government is quite happy with that, and the government wants to see that shift occur, let them stand up here and say it. Let the minister get to his feet and say, 'This is part of the flexibility of the new system applying to trainees and apprenticeships. From now on, we will, wherever possible, shift the costs of that training from the employer, from the business, onto the trainee'. Then we will all know exactly where we stand. But it is simply not good enough, where 32 apprentices have had all these conditions covered by their former employer, through no fault of their own are displaced through a downturn in the construction industry, and are subsequently placed with another employer, on vastly inferior conditions of work, and responsibilities under the Australian workplace agreement.

That is not my understanding of the flexibility that I spoke about and commended the minister for picking up all those points about the new apprenticeship system. It is not my understanding that that is one of the flexible points, that we are going to shift all the costs from the business and the employer onto the employee. The minister did take the question on notice the other day. He has had a bit of time to get across it and consider it. I certainly hope he has the opportunity to reply to some of those concerns, in reply closing debate, and I hope he takes the opportunity.

Mr BALDWIN (Industries and Business): Mr Speaker, I rise to briefly make some comments. In relation to the railway project and the readiness of Territory business - and I outlined some of that this morning during Question Time - but just to go over that: This is an enormous project which will bring enormous benefits to those businesses which are ready for this type of work in the Northern Territory and that has been the role of my department along with other agencies and industry organisations to ensure that our businesses have had every opportunity to prepare themselves for the work that might come from this great project.
It is an enormous project as we know. I talked this morning of the work that the Rail Corporation has done in ensuring that they have assisted my officers, particularly in the Department of Industries and Business in being involved as much as possible in negotiations over the recent times and how those negotiations would impact on the Territory's private sector. I applaud them for having that initiative. There has certainly been a great relationship developed between all agencies and officials working on this project which I am sure will lead to many business opportunities being accessible to the Northern Territory private sector.

As I have said, we have provided briefings, seminars, forums - in fact, we have reached over 1700 business people throughout the last year, some in generic forums, others in very specific forums to ensure they have the information on hand they require to bring themselves up to speed of the requirements of the Australia Pacific Transport Consortium, the company which will build this railway.

It is important that all enterprises seeking to work on the railway understand the enormity of the project and the importance of the key issues that AD Rail will be looking at. As I said, on a project of this size all of the things that become important are those standard industry things like occupational health and safety and the quality assurance, industrial relations plans, surety of delivery and all of those aspects that will be required of Territory businesses to have the opportunity to seek work on this project. That will become even more important as we move into the oil and gas industries and the railway is a great opportunity for our businesses to gear themselves up for that next major project and that is oil and gas.

The Department of Industries and Business has put in place a number of mechanisms which provide Territory businesses with the opportunity to participate in the project. It is going to be incumbent on every business to do their research and understand entirely the requirements of AD Rail and its prime contractors and be proactive in identifying and seeking opportunities. We have made sure that the consortium people have been accessible throughout this whole process of negotiation so they can articulate their requirements to the business sector.

It is important also for Territory businesses to have a very close working relationship with the NT ISO. I articulated this morning the work that we have been doing in very close collaboration with the ISO people and the additional funding that we have provided them for the work that they are doing in the design centre of the project. This means that we will know at the time of the release what the packages of work look like which will enable businesses to obtain early information on how they might take advantage of those packages. It is very important that they know how the design work is going to come out for tender at the end of the day, which prime contractors it is going to, so that they can make themselves available to those prime contractors. And, importantly, that those capability statements that have been done by the local businesses are in the hands of ISO so that they can forward it on to the prime contractors when those packages are revealed.

The other thing that we do as far as providing information, which is a very simple thing but it has been very effective, is that we have had for a long time, a fax stream operating from the Department of Industries and Business to over 1100 recipients. All of the information that becomes available, whether it is from our own government agencies, whether it is from the consortium themselves, whether it is information gathered by NT ISO or the Chamber of Commerce, is put on the fax stream and immediately sent out to all Northern Territory businesses. Over 1100 recipients enjoy that information and can act on very timely information as far as their own business position goes with regard to work on the rail.

Certainly, the Territory Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as has the TCA, been very much involved in what has been going on. We have funded the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to help companies throughout the Northern Territory develop company profiles and recently, in August, there were seminars held up and down the track and they were well attended, two here in Darwin as well as the other regional centres. That list of attendees is currently being followed up to ensure that what they were learning from those seminars about developing their own company profile was being put into practice and that they are indeed registered with ISO. This is just another case of the ongoing work that has been happening in regard to Territory businesses being prepared.

I spoke earlier on how the project has encouraged the development of stronger relationships between my department and a number of key associations. I am pleased to say it is an avenue by which we are ensuring that those business opportunities can be identified and maximised. The minister in his
statement talked about the Territory Construction Association and how they have been working with AD Rail to develop training requirements which will be required for the project. He stated also that NTETA, working with the TCA and appropriate training providers, has been developing those packages and positioning themselves to work cooperatively to deliver AD Rail's requirements as far as training goes. NTETA is to be congratulated for their work in establishing job ready placements in the areas in Tennant Creek and Katherine.

There are obviously going to be a good number of jobs in places like Tennant and Katherine with the camps that are being set up. Those sites have been identified, as we speak, going through planning approval processes and what have you, and with sleeper plant sites under location there will be quite a few employees required, not only on the civil operations in the sleeper plants and the butt welding plants for the rail, but obviously in the hospitality trades to ensure that those additional personnel are well fed and looked after.

The sleeper factories are significant areas of construction and employment, as I said; Tennant being the larger one, Katherine a little bit smaller, but they are significant in their own right. There will also be, obviously, a need for trades in demand to maintain those main campsites and then all of the individual campsites along the track as the track makes its way up and down, north and south along the route. It really is a project that will provide business opportunities to all Territorians in a range of areas, not only in general contracting, but in the supply area and accommodation and service area as well as the trades areas.

We will continue to work with the consortium through the Department of Industries and Business. We will work with the NT ISO to provide, wherever possible, those forward works programs as they come out of the consortium to give business an opportunity to understand the nature of the contracts. The business community has been well informed as to the requirements and preparation they need to undertake in order to bid for work on the railway.

On the work health side of things, to assist the industry in updating their own information and practices in the area of work health, my department and the work health unit within that department, in August, delivered a series of seminars up and down the track. They have been very helpful and have brought up to speed many companies that now have the latest information and the assistance from my department on gearing up so that work health practices are first and foremost. It is an area that the consortium said they will be very strict on. Obviously, they do not want to have any workplace accidents or as minimal as possible and as few hold ups as possible. It is interesting to note that since running those seminars quite a number of businesses have come along to our generic programs in the work health area to continue to better educate themselves as to work health practices, which is a spin-off, I guess, of elevating our whole business capability in the NT and will pay big dividends in the long run as far as oil and gas and that industry when it further develops.

The Department of Industries and Business also delivers a number of programs under its business growth area and they are designed to help companies look at their organisation and determine whether or not they are adequately meeting the requirements of the criteria that is going to be set down for getting business opportunities from the railway. It is a program that they can apply for funds to get the relevant people, whether private or public sector people, to help them elevate their capacity. That is a funding program that has been specifically designed and enhanced to help businesses get themselves rail ready as well.

As well as providing information to help up-skill our business operators, we have always, over the last year or so, given them the opportunity, and facilitated the opportunities, for looking at alternative ways to compete for business in the railway. One such way is to consider joint venturing and we have had a number of programs running so that businesses can network and look at how their capability could be enhanced by joining with either another or several other companies to increase their chances of getting work on the railway.

There should be no illusion that it will be easy to get work on the railway, but the Department of Industries and Business, along with all agencies and NTETA in their training area and the industry associations, have been working in a very cooperative fashion to ensure that when the opportunities arise, the Territory and its businesses, under the proposal of the agreement, can maximise the work that will come to our own businesses. I look forward to continuing that work on behalf of the Northern
Territory government through the Department of Industries and Business, to realise that undertaking and keep that commitment going. I commend this statement to the House.

Mrs Hickey (Barkly): Mr Speaker, clearly, as a member of an area which stands to benefit considerably from the establishment of the railway, I have a keen interest in this particular aspect of the development in terms of employment and training. I was interested to hear what the last speaker, the Minister for Industries and Business, had to say. I have been to several of the seminars that have been held in Tennant Creek. In fact, the last one that Mr Hornsby was present at and gave a briefing to a very large number, the minister talked about the large numbers attending these seminars and I agree with him. Certainly in Tennant Creek they have always been well attended and I was impressed to see the wide range of businesses and service providers who were present at those meetings.

He talked about the scope of work, he talked about capabilities in that area and the work of the ISO and his own department and the interaction between those two departments and how they could provide information to businesses, who could access work and contracts through this rail effort. But, of course, in order to have the capability to do that, size and experience and reputation is one thing. Qualified personnel is another. And that is really what we are talking about in terms of this debate today.

It is specifically training that the Minister for Tertiary Education and Training addressed - or he purported to address in his speech - though I agree with my colleague, the member for Stuart, that in fact he ranged far and wide over areas to deal with the ITABS, with NTETA and with VET. But in terms of specifics about what training is actually going on, on the ground for the railway, the detail really was not there and that concerns me. I know it concerns people in the area that I represent too because they are very keen to see that once the rail becomes established that we have people who are trained and able to access this work.

I was interested this morning when the minister answered a dorothy dixer about the railway project. The minister for employment had this to say, and I quote from the Hansard of this morning:

The training programs have been throughout the Northern Territory, in Tennant Creek, Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs and they have been well attended. They have been training people in work placement areas, driver training, plant operator training, catering training and a variety of other jobs, and they have been adequately funded through my department, NTETA.

I would suggest that the minister has misled the House in this regard because I was very interested to hear that we have had training going on in all of those areas, in Tennant Creek, for instance. So I checked this morning after Question Time and I was interested to learn that far from having training in place with regard to drivers, plant operators, catering and a variety of other jobs, we have but one training program that is actually about to commence - it is not in place yet - it is starting on 30 October in fact, and that is training in civil construction, Certificate I. It is a four week course - not exactly a full blown apprenticeship - and, indeed, in Katherine my understanding is that there is a hospitality course that is to commence on 6 November, not directly connected necessarily with the railway, although of course the spin-offs could be there in that regard.

I would venture to suggest to the minister that the answer that he gave this morning should have included training program seminars because I think that is what has been going on. People have been talking about training and they have been talking about options, they have been talking about opportunities, but the actual hard yards of getting the training underway has far from commenced. It has not commenced and here we are on the eve of the signing of this very important project for the country and these programs are just not on the ground.

My colleague, the member for Stuart, talked about it and I reiterate his comments: 'These programs should have started, not months ago, not weeks ago, but years ago, in fact, a year and a half ago it would have been probably adequate in order to prepare people'. And as he rightly said: 'Many of the skills that are listed by the consortia as being desired skills are not different from the ones that we desire every day in the Northern Territory and every day in the Territory we have to send an advertisement elsewhere to fulfil opportunities in those jobs because we do not have the people trained in the Northern Territory'.

If we are going to be putting an enormous amount of public money into the physical construction of the
railway, and we have already spent hundreds of thousands - quite rightly, I very much support the project - in getting this project to this point, surely to goodness we could have expended an adequate and decent amount of money with regard to training people in our own communities in order to ensure their readiness for these jobs.

I think of the instance of the construction of the McArthur River Mine in my electorate several years ago. Because of the lack of skills in the local community around Borroloola and the Gulf, people had to fly in and fly out on that operation. We lost the opportunities to develop the community in the Borroloola region simply because the skills were not there. At that time, programs were started with local people, indigenous and non-indigenous people, but it has taken five or six years for those programs to be refined, for them to become appropriate to the activity at the McArthur River Mine. And that project is going on for many more years. What we are talking about with the railway in terms of its construction is two to three years.

We had a huge golden opportunity to provide jobs and to provide experience-gaining for young people in the Territory on the railway. The biggest fear that I have, and I am sure I am not alone in the House in being concerned about this, is that we have missed that opportunity or we are likely to miss that opportunity simply because we have not put the money or the effort or the planning in early enough to ensure that those young people are job-ready. Just-in-time training is all very well if you are talking about very minimal basic skills. But it is not good enough if you are talking about the kinds of skills that will sustain those young people through work with the railway and will then enable them to go on to other things later on.

I take the minister back to what the Minister for Industries and Business said in his address when he talked about the oil and gas industry. I agree with him. That is another huge area - probably in fact bigger in terms of the opportunities for Territorians - and it will make an enormous and long-term difference to job opportunities and skill development in the Northern Territory because those will be highly skilled areas. Well, wouldn't it have been good if young people could have gained some expertise, some work experience and some work ethic, if you like, and some work skills on the railway so that they could have then gone on, if they wanted to, into other areas?

Again, taking members back to what my colleague, the member for Stuart said earlier, these skills would never be lost in the Northern Territory because they are not skills that are just needed for the railway nor just for the oil and gas industry. They are needed now. They are needed in every community in the Northern Territory. We know that because, especially in remote areas, every day we face the problems of lack of skills.

The VET programs are very worthy. I agree with my colleague, the member for Nhulunbuy, and with the minister that those programs are going to provide a very appropriate vehicle for kids to get into early training in conjunction and cooperation with industry. That is happening with McArthur River and it has certainly proved to be a happy alliance, and one that will provide specific skill acquisition for students who have an industry on their doorstep.

I just hope that we have not missed the boat on this one. We have put in so much effort. I think of the former member for Blain and the work and the hard yards that he did in ensuring that this project did not fall off the end of the good ideas pile. It kept going, but it cost. It cost us a lot of money. Why on earth haven't we put some money into the opportunities for training that were there?

My colleague, the member for Nhulunbuy, alluded to the issue of the Australian workplace agreement. Again, there is that issue and that problem. The government here, if it is serious about job opportunities and training opportunities, needs to make sure that those traineeships are underwritten to the degree that can be supported by government. There is obviously a fine balance between what the taxpayer is going to put into training and what the employer is going to put into it. But for an employee, a young person on basic training wages, to be faced with the added burden of protective equipment and all of the other concerns, safety equipment and so forth, that are listed in the Australian workplace agreement is another issue. We must address these issues. We must make sure that we are not providing disincentives to business or to young people so that they get the training that they need and so that this railway project is not just something that flashes past us. In two or three years it is built; people come from somewhere else and go away, and we do not see the benefits accrue with regard to having a trained workforce in the Northern Territory. I hope it is not too late.
I ask the minister in his response to address the issue of these training programs that he says are in place down the track. If I am incorrect about that, I would be interested to hear the minister give some specifics about these training programs - not just rhetoric but some specifics. Who is providing the courses? How many people are accessing them? How long are the courses for? What accreditation will accrue? Just what will people be trained for at the end of it?

Mr LUGG (Tertiary Education and Training): Mr Speaker, I am happy to respond to that. I can tell you that the first group of trainees in Katherine have already completed their training in catering and a second group have now commenced. I accept your point that the civil operation is starting on 6 November in both Tennant Creek and Katherine but these are only the tip of the iceberg of the support services that are offered by the government to get training under way.

I guess it is debatable at which point you commence some of this training. Some of the more skilled training really will take of the order of traditional apprenticeships, three to four years to complete. Three or four years ago we were not in a position really to throw money at detailed training programs for a railway because it simply was not as firmly committed as it is today.

Mrs Hickey: But we have always needed apprentices.

Mr LUGG: Apprentices need jobs. You have the jobs first. Rather than be accused of training people to go nowhere, you create the conditions that create the jobs and then the training follows.

Now we have the railway to the point where the Chief Minister has had to leave the Chamber to travel to Adelaide to sign up for it. These training programs have been in place. We have been that sure that all this is going to work to the point where three departments - DIB, Education and Mines and Energy - are giving training. We are cooperating, we are getting this organised and we are delivering. Just-in-time training - I guess again it is debatable. Do you train kids up to the point and say: 'This is very valuable training. We always need these skills. But at the moment no one can actually give you job. Don't you worry about that. Just wait there - wait a couple of years, if you will'?

I also point out that this is working closely with the needs of the railway consortium. As such, they are preparatory training programs in these particular areas, to then get them job-ready for further, ongoing training. That is part of the government's platform. Training does not start and stop in discrete packages. It is lifelong learning, ongoing. You start here and who knows where you will end up? But it certainly gives you more choices. The types of activities which NTETA are primarily funding are preparatory access training strategies aimed at providing an employment base from which AD Rail can hire. The indigenous content for these training programs is a minimum of 25%.

If you take those things into account, then the government has been prudent in both its timing and in its commitment. It is rather facile for the member for Stuart to say, 'Well, is that all it is?' I mean, that really is not doing the program and the hard work of the public servants involved here adequate justice. But, suffice it to say, this government will deliver. We have not been working for so many years to get this project up, that we are going to sit by and twiddle our thumbs and see it strangled at birth. That is not the way we operate, never have operated, so the members opposite can take the assurance that things are happening here and we will deliver. But there will be more as it goes on.

I do take the point it would be a great pity if we trained people for this particular project and then it stopped. But there are other big projects on the horizon. It would suit everyone - including this government - to have the skills in constant demand. Yet the normal business cycle is that there are times when the demand is high and times when it is not as high. But we cope the best we can. It is not government that creates the wealth in our society. We create the opportunities for the private sector to create the wealth and the real jobs, rather than meaningless training programs. My department is not into training for its own sake, but training for real outcomes and real opportunities for Territorians.

I thank members in the Chamber for their comments, and I commend the statement to the House.

Motion agreed to; statement noted.