

Hansard

Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates Committee A

1 June 2010

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I refer to page 88 of the *Budget Statements*, and in particular to leadership development. What is the Public Sector Commission doing to attract, develop and retain talent in the public sector, particularly if it is considering a graduate trainee program across the public sector, recognising that the state Department of Treasury and Finance has one and that the commonwealth has one, but it is specific to departments rather than across the public sector? I wonder whether the Public Sector Commission is considering developing a graduate program across the public sector.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member is right; Treasury has a graduate program. In the previous session, Premier and Cabinet referred to the graduates that it employs, and I imagine the Public Sector Commission also oversees that. Mr Wauchope has been quite strident, I must say, in issues to do with recruitment and professional development of public servants, as he should, because that has suffered some cutbacks during the past year. I think it did; is that correct?

Mr M.C. Wauchope: Yes.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: However, with slightly improved financial circumstances, funding has been improved. Again, I will ask Mr Wauchope to comment, but I am strongly of the view, as I know the member would be, that the public sector should have a well-organised graduate recruitment program, which is not just recruiting, but also giving those recruits a program of development over a couple of years under which they can work in central agencies and line agencies and be developed. I know that happens, and I know that Mr Wauchope would probably like to take it further.

Mr M.C. Wauchope: Yes. The graduate programs have been in place in government on and off since probably the late 1960s. In fact, if I remember rightly, it was an initiative of Les McCarry. It died in the 1990s for some reason—government stopped going through the graduate program—and got reinvigorated in the early 2000s. Most agencies now look after their own programs.

They recruit graduates specific to their own requirements. However, in recent years the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and now the Public Sector Commission, has taken an overriding coordinating role and it has organised programs to run across all graduates. It is not compulsory. We encourage agencies to have their graduates take part in the programs.

There are about six or seven sessions during the course of a 12-month period, and they get exposure to central agency views and other matters relating to government that they would not necessarily get from within their own agency. That also gives them a very important network, so that they have contacts in agencies that they can go to when they are working, and it gives them a bit of an idea about just how wide the public sector opportunities are. It is an important program, and our involvement in it has been running for several years now, and we continue to regard that as a high priority. We see the graduates as the important recruiting source for the future of the public sector.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Further to that, what is the size of the intake?

Mr M.C. Wauchope: It is a little down this year. I think it is about 99 this year. Last year it was up around the 150 mark, so I think there has been some pulling back by agencies, which I am not particularly happy about, but that is their decision. However, we are encouraging agencies to obviously put resources into that area, because they are the people to whom we will be looking to assume leadership positions later on.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The comment is often made, I know, by some agencies, and I am referring perhaps to the electricity utilities, that they take on and train people—perhaps they are talking about trade skills—and then the private sector pinches them. That happens, but, in a sense, I do not think that is necessarily a bad thing. I think that one of the roles of the public sector is to recruit people and give them experience, and if they do move on to other parts of the community, the public, in a sense, bears that cost. It is not a bad outcome.