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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Combining study and work

MONDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2009

CANBERRA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Monday, 2 February 2009

Members: Ms Bird, (*Chair*), Dr Jensen (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Clare, Ms Collins, Mrs D'Ath, Mr Irons, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Sidebottom, Dr Southcott and Mr Zappia

Members in attendance: Ms Bird, Mr Clare, Mr Irons, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Sidebottom and Mr Zappia

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The impact of combined study and work on the success of youth transitions and Year 12 attainment, with a focus on:

- providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;
- identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;
- support that may be required to assist young people combining work and study to stay engaged in their learning, especially where work and study intersects with income support;
- the potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity); and
- the effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged young people).

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Committee met at 9.06 am

CHAIR—Welcome, and thank you for your interest. As you can see from the layout of the room, our anticipation of a reasonably small roundtable discussion to kick off our inquiry was expanded as people expressed a great deal of interest in it. That is very encouraging for us. We have some private business of the committee, around accepting submissions, to get through before we start the formal inquiry, so please just bear with us for the moment.

Submission Nos 1 to 42, as appear on the list which has been circulated to members, should be considered for evidence and authorised for publication. All submissions awaiting acceptance have been posted as parliamentary-in-confidence documents on CommDocs. Is it the wish of the committee that submissions 1 to 42 be accepted as evidence and authorised for publication? There being no objection it is so ordered.

Exhibit No. 1, also on the list which has been circulated to members, should also be considered. Is it the wish of the committee that the document entitled, *Making the working world better for kids*, a report for the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People, presented by Professor Andrew Stewart, be taken as evidence and included in the committee's records as an exhibit? There being no objection it is so ordered.

That concludes the private business of the committee, which I am sure was extremely exciting for you. I declare open this round table hearing of House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. Today's roundtable is the first hearing of the committee's inquiry into combing schools and work, supporting successful youth transitions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your attendance here today.

[9.08 am]

ANLEZARK, Ms Alison, Manager, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Branch, National Centre for Vocational Education Research

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VICKERS, Professor Margaret Helen, Board Member, Australian National Schools Network

WALSH, Dr Lucas, Director of Research, Foundation for Young Australians

This inquiry was referred by the Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP on 13 October 2008. Forty-two submissions have been received to date from various parts of Australia and from a broad cross-section of interested parties. Copies of these submissions will be available on the committee's website now that they have been authorised, which was the process we were going through.

The committee is holding today's roundtable for the purpose of generating open discussion on some of the issues arising from the inquiry's terms of reference. I ask all participants to be as succinct as possible in making comments so that we can make the best use of the limited time available. Please note that there will be future hearings conducted as part of this inquiry, so there is likely to be further opportunity for organisations to appear before the committee and give more evidence in detail. The day has been structured to commence with a presentation, including a short DVD, from the Australian National Schools Network, on some innovative programs currently operating across Australia which are already responding to issues under examination by the committee. Then there are four broad discussion areas based around the inquiry's terms of reference as outlined in the program which has been distributed.

To maintain the structure of the proceedings it is also important that all comments are addressed through the chair. You will notice that we do not have one microphone for every

participant; however, it is essential that you speak directly into a microphone whenever you wish to make a comment for the record.

I remind roundtable participants that, although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. The evidence given today will attract parliamentary privilege. Before introducing the witnesses, I refer members of the media who might be here to the need to fairly and accurately report the proceedings of the committee. Do any of you have any comments on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Frost—I am representing VETnetwork Australia, a peak body for vocational education and training in schools.

Ms Carroll—I am representing the Tasmanian government's Tasmania Tomorrow initiative.

Ms O'Hara—I am from the Canberra Institute of Technology but today am representing TAFE Directors Australia.

Mr Glynn—I am representing Sue Beitz, the head of the Skills Australia secretariat.

Ms Edsall—I am a research officer for the New South Wales Teachers Federation and am representing the Australian Education Union.

Mr Robertson—I am here on the invitation of the Australian National Schools Network.

Ms French—I am also principal of St Johns Park High School in Sydney.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. You are an extremely representative group, and it is very encouraging to see your interest in the terms of reference. The committee members present represent a reasonable spread of states, and of course in this national committee we look beyond state borders and interests, so we are very keen to hear about the variety of programs that are running. We are going to start the day with a presentation from the Australian National Schools Network. The presentation is a result of a meeting that we had as a committee with the network which identified some of the interests and areas of concern of the committee.

By way of a less formal introduction, I was interested on the weekend to be chatting to my cousin's wife, who has just started teaching. I was telling her about the inquiry and she said to me: 'About time! When I ask my class, "Why are half of you asleep?" they say, "We're working five nights shift work into the early hours of the morning."' It was interesting that she responded immediately, saying, 'This is an issue for us in the classroom, dealing with it day to day.' We are conscious that there are some great benefits and also some great challenges in combining work and study, and we are interested to see from a national policy and program perspective how we can maximise the benefits and manage the problems that those developments create.

This inquiry is particularly timely. I am conscious that the last time there was a large national look at the issue of work and study it was around the time of the 1990s slowdown in the economy. We are now facing a similar situation, so I think this issue is becoming even more

pertinent for young people. The increase in part-time and casual work may mean, for some of them, that they are more likely to be working and, for others, that they are less likely to get work and more likely to be back in the schools of all the sectors around the table here, looking for something to do with their time that is meaningful for them in the long run. So retention rate issues and the challenges they present will become even more pertinent over the next 12 to 18 months. Hopefully we can harness all of your brain power and all the things that you have already been doing to give us an informed range of recommendations for the minister.

I now invite the Australian National Schools Network to generate some interest and excitement in the group. We are all a bit quiet at the moment—I am conscious it is a large group, so it is hard to avoid that. We look to Ms French of the network to kick things off by talking about some interesting things that are already happening.

Ms French—I thank the committee for this invitation and for this initiative. For those people who have not worked with the National Schools Network before, we were set up back in the early 1990s. Our purpose in being set up was to try to identify solutions to the question: what is it about the way that our work is structured in schools that gets in the way of student learning? Over the years since then we have continued to ask that question in a whole range of ways. Over the last few years it has become increasingly apparent to the board of the National Schools Network, particularly through Margaret Vickers' work, that there are lots and lots of complicated and contradictory issues around students at work and at school. From her work we established a forum last August which was very well subscribed to. There are a number of people here who actually attended that forum, and I think it is fair to say that we were surprised, as were you, Sharon, at the response. It is a big issue in our community not only for schools but for families, employers and other support agencies within the community.

We followed that up with a briefing to this subcommittee of the parliament in September and as a result we have come to today's presentation. We have a number of people who are going to share with you some insights. We have a very short video to start with, then Margaret will talk about the research that she has done and then we have representatives from Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales who will provide some examples of innovative practice around managing students, their work and their education.

CHAIR—Thank you.

A DVD was then shown

Prof. Vickers—Those are just a few highlights from the Australian National Schools Network forum that was held in August last year. I thought it was useful to have that young man from Lake Tuggeranong College because I think that is the only student voice we have here today. It is an impressive piece of work. I have the document, about a 30-page report based on a survey of all 800 students in the college, and I think that student group is continuing to do this work. It interestingly forms a sort of peer-mentoring process. As they research what is going on with kids who are working, they are trying to work to help each other.

As John Spierings commented in relation to this work, youth transition is something we have been around and around—combining school and work is not a new topic—but what we are proposing today is a new take on it. Our focus is on intergenerational responsibility and

cooperation. That means different groups of adults who often do not talk to each other—employers, teachers and parents—working together. We have some examples here to share with you, and I will be introducing my colleagues who represent innovative programs around Australia as we get towards the end of this brief comment I am going to make now.

A number of references were made to my research. I would like to acknowledge Phil McKenzie's presence and the work of the ACER, which is hugely important—I have only done a couple of studies in that long sequence—and the work of other academics who have also made a massive contribution to this field.

Just to set the scene: we really face an interesting conundrum when we look at this issue. We know that 50 per cent of our high school students who are aged 15 and over are in part-time work. There is a conundrum because, above a certain threshold, this work reduces the likelihood that they will complete high school, so it is probably a negative thing. On the other hand, the chances of gaining employment after leaving school or the chances of gaining an apprenticeship are substantially improved by participation in part-time work. So what should we do about this? Is it something we should encourage or discourage? Should we discourage it because it reduces the likelihood of finishing school or encourage it because it does allow young people to establish a track record, create contacts and get into apprenticeships? Where are we going?

The answer is neither A nor B. It is not 'either/or'; it is 'both/and'. How do we do 'both/and'? It involves juggling—helping young people juggle this combination of activities. Apart from having the jobs that they have, many high-school students also have substantial family care responsibilities, and many are committed to community work and competitive sporting activities. I am referring here to an interesting research project carried out by Marie Brennan and Katherine Hodgetts in South Australia, who found that, in addition to the part-time work, there are also all of these other issues and that quite a proportion of students in South Australia who have chosen to do years 11 and 12 on a part-time basis have chosen to do that not because they have got a job but because of these other factors listed. As we move into a recession, we will see more students who will be staying into years 11 and 12 because there is not a job to go to, but they will be looking for more flexible and probably part-time schooling arrangements because of these factors. They will also be looking for assistance in skill development that will take them somewhere in terms of future work opportunities.

Young people's lives are now much more complex than they used to be, in that they are negotiating multiple identities and they are not just students. I refer now to Judi Buckley and Tom Robertson, who are sitting here representing Queensland. In Queensland it is well recognised that children learn in a wide range of different sites, and they will talk about how that works. Sociologically speaking, we say we are in a period of blurred boundaries. An intergenerational youth compact is what we are recommending. We say that the grown-ups are not doing enough to help. In other words, you have got employers who are imposing one set of pressures on young people and you have got teachers imposing another set of pressures on them, and these two groups are not ironing out the differences. They are in competition with each other for the hearts, souls, minds and working hours of our teenagers, and they do not resolve those differences; they leave it to the kids to try and sort it out themselves. It is just not fair.

What would it be? It is not as though we do not have innovations around Australia that already meet the criteria of what we think an intergenerational youth compact would be. The problem is

we do not have enough of them. The other thing is that what we are seeing is schools trying to move into this space and solve the problems but they cannot do it alone. Partnerships have to be at the core of this. I also want to emphasise that we are not advocating an IYC which is a new government program. We do not want to see, for example, the Commonwealth coming in with a separate strand of funding that sets up another infrastructure that competes with every other infrastructure. The IYC concept is one where any school, community or group of organisations that endorse the principles would sign on and badge themselves as an IYC site or event.

What are we talking about here with young people and the work they do? We know that 75 per cent of them work in fast food or retail. We know that many of them do not know their rights. An IYC would have what we call a protective side as well as a productive side. The protective side would focus on helping young people to understand what their rights are and would focus on helping communities to provide protection for young people. Very briefly—and I do not want to take away from the South Australian presentation—the teachers, the employers, and the parents in Mount Gambier got together in the one place and the employers were asked: ‘What are your peak trading periods? When are your shops and so on busiest?’ They were able to lay out that data. The teachers then said when they usually set the assessments. These were in conflict. This can be resolved. The schools were able to move the assessments around a little to avoid the peak trading periods. The employers agreed to roster changes. We need that sort of protection.

What do I mean by productive adaptation? Identify skills in demand. Fast food and retail are not necessarily the skills in demand that Australia is looking for. We bring in migrant workers with high skills in areas where we do not have enough skilled people. I will refer to a situation that I think we can observe where quite often schools and employers take the easy way out. Both the employer and the school can get additional cash if they set up a school based traineeship. A school based traineeship in retail is easy. The kids have already got jobs in retail. Why do not we look for fields where there is higher demand? Most people do not want these as their careers for the rest of their lives. I refer to some of the Queensland work where they went out and said, ‘What is it in our community that is not being supplied at the moment?’ Some of the paramedical areas, aged care and accountancy are fields where we need to build the school based apprenticeships and traineeships in order to create the social and economic capital that are needed for the future.

What would an IYC do? Hubs are places that are local where employers, students, teachers and others come together. It is not a new idea. There are lenses in Victoria. There have been managed individual pathways. We see this around Australia under different names in different places. Why a national IYC network? If you talk to my colleagues from South Australia, you will find they have gone a long way down the track with part-time schooling and all that it means—issues around the youth allowance activity test and how you can resolve those problems. My colleagues in some other states have not really looked at those issues in the same depth. A network would be a place where people from different jurisdictions can learn from each other.

We need a voluntary employee and union commitment to IYCs. I am not talking about heavy regulation. We have some exemplary employers already who do bring young people in, explain their rights, give them training and even give them recognised TAFE or VET certificates into the workplace context; not every employer does that. I am saying a voluntary organisation where

employers could say, 'We're IYC employers; we're youth friendly,' may be an interesting badging for employers and for unions who also support that sort of approach.

What are the principles? I think Sharon mentioned these. The whole community is responsible for the wellbeing of our young people and they have a right to live, study and work in safe environments. Quality learning opportunities are fundamental. Quality recognised, accredited learning opportunities both at school and at work and the recognition in a formal way through the school systems of learning that occurs outside of school is happening in some jurisdictions but not in others. Again this is a matter of spreading the learning across. That is all from me.

I would like to introduce Tanya Rogers and Katherine Hodgetts from South Australia, who will speak last. Graeham Kennedy will tell us what is happening in an IYC context in relation to Illawarra Senior Secondary College. The work of my friends from Queensland, Judi Buckley and Tom Robertson, is very exciting in terms of identifying skills in demand. I invite Graeham to the podium.

Mr Kennedy—Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity. Illawarra Senior College is one of a number of schools in New South Wales that is embracing alternative structures and delivery modes to better cater for the diverse needs of students. It is an example that we could use among a number of others. It was established initially to provide for second and third last chance students who had basically had extremely dysfunctional school careers and who had either been out of school for a significant amount of time or whose school experiences were usually short and unsatisfactory. It was set up as an alternative in the Illawarra and has been providing that sort of program ever since.

It caters for about 500 students, with multiple ages, from 15 through to 82—that was the oldest student who enrolled at the college. Thirty per cent of the students are part time and 50 per cent of the students are re-entering education after a period of dislocation from school education. Of the 15- to 19-year olds currently enrolled at the school, around 80 per cent would have had challenged or chequered school careers.

The school has changed over the period of time that it has been in existence by adjusting its structures and its delivery to better meet the needs of its diverse group of students. It is interesting that it is attracting a significant number of enrolments of what we might call normal or mainstream students who see the versatility and flexibility of the curriculum and delivery modes at Illawarra Senior College as better meeting their needs. So the culture or the demographic of the school is changing, interestingly, as it becomes as a school that students from the mainstream are choosing to attend. It now has the largest year 11 enrolment of any school in the Illawarra south-east region.

The course structure is quite diverse, with a traditional HSC being offered in the senior years but in addition to that a range of career pathways and vocational education options, which are put front and centre in the curriculum rather than being the tail of the curriculum. The vocational options are given identical status in terms of the programming of the school and are seen as preferred option for many of the students.

The school, as I said, has adjusted its organisation over the years to ensure that its diverse student population is able to engage productively in school while meeting those diverse other

needs that Margaret has so well identified and that were so well identified by the short DVD. These students often have competing work and family commitments and domestic responsibilities, such as aged parents or disabled siblings. As a result of that, the demands on these young people are often quite diverse.

The school has gone to a four-day week. That allows students to access work placement, full-time or part-time work, in addition to meeting other personal commitments. They run a four-day week, with the four days obviously being extended days. Students are provided flexible entry and exit to the school. The school does not have the restrictions that are often imposed in other mainstream schools in terms of access for students during the school day. They can pick their courses and have them provided part-time with the school trying to arrange the timetable to allow that student to engage at times that make sense for the student.

The school does not have uniforms. Students and staff are on first-name terms to try and break down some of the formality that sometimes is a disincentive for students returning to school, often after previous negative school experiences. The entry interview for students is based around what the student's needs are and how we might best redesign the curriculum or the timetable to meet that individual student's needs. There is a very high focus on case management.

The point that I would like to finish on is that Illawarra Senior College is, as I said, only one example but a very good example of a school that has turned itself on its head in order to ensure that the diverse needs of these students are being catered for in a creative, flexible, student oriented curriculum, which very much has a multiple pathway focus, enabling students to transition from the school into work in a seamless way which genuinely means that schooling is part of an ongoing learning program.

A PowerPoint presentation was then given—

Mr Robertson—Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I value the chance to share with you one example of a range of senior phase programs we have operating in the Brisbane North district. I also acknowledge that with me is Judi Buckley, who is our senior phase project manager. She is the energy and focus behind a lot of the projects that we have in place.

The initiative came out of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future launched by the Queensland government. Out of the ETRF agenda came the very strong focus on senior phase, legislative requirements about children remaining at school and a mantra about students 'earning or learning'. Through Pathways funding we secured coordination and project management, and we looked at some innovative models of delivery so that we could actually put the project forward to see if we could get some traction around some delivery models for young people. The program's focus was very much on trying to raise some awareness of opportunities and pathways for health and allied industries in the area.

A scan of our local area undertaken through data obtained from the Queensland University of Technology through meetings with the regional manager of the department of industrial relations and training and through some of the meetings with the industry advisory boards at that time indicated to us that our particular area, health and allied industries, servicing some 58 schools all

up—and, of that, some 20 state schools with a student population of 16,000 to 18,000—was actually the second largest employer in the area. However, students certainly were not engaging with that. Skilled industry partnerships with those industries were limited to nonexistent. There was a view that to get into health one needed to have strong tertiary qualifications or tertiary entrance, which was precluding the opportunities for a number of students. When you talk about aged care it is certainly not an attractive proposition for young students. Looking after grannies did not feature strongly on some of their career options. I think the other issue was that our industry partners were saying to us that they had difficulties with recruitment of staff and difficulties with an ageing workforce and bringing a new generation of interest into the industry.

In 2006 we started work with two key partners: Masonic Care, based at Sandgate, and metropolitan north health district, which has as its centrepiece the Prince Charles Hospital. In our area we have three key hospitals: Prince Charles Hospital, Wesley and Royal Brisbane. So certainly the health industry has had a strong footprint within our particular area.

The other aspect that went forward was some of the aspects of the program. We put in a very strong preparation phase. Students had to have an awareness-raising aspect before they actually embarked upon work in the area. They had to take a mentor to work placement experience before they could join the program. They had to go through an application process for the advertised positions, and they were identified by the industry partners. They had to commence their program, and they were supported both at work and at school. The other issue is that we tried to build a whole range of pathways with TAFE and universities to make sure we had some training aspects and some training in employment programs available to them.

I suppose the last thing is that participation in the program gave you credit points to contribute to the Queensland Certificate of Education or, as we now know it, the QCE. Our first cohort went through at the end of last year for that new qualification. It is a statement of attainment rather than a statement of completion, but it does allow for students to create a program of learning which they can bank and contribute to over a nine-year period. They can meet different program aspects to satisfy their credit points for the QCE. There are a whole series of credit tables. They are fairly complex diagrams, but from them students can select from four areas. It is a matter of having the core, the preparatory, the enrichment and the advancement. Our students undertaking the Healthy Futures Program automatically gain eight credit points in core for their participation and work through the program.

Some of the outcomes that we are finding are as follows. Initially we had 36 students signed. That has now led to 35 having completed the program and successfully graduating. We are delighted with that rate of retention and completion. Our last data set tells us that all the students who went through that have remained in the industry through either employment or continuing with further study. We have built strong programs and partnerships with TAFE, the industry and universities, particularly the Australian Catholic University, who also have a footprint in our area and are prepared to take articulated programs. We have made those articulation arrangements fairly explicit so the students have defined career pathways.

Another outcome is the real sense of community engagement that we have built. Our industry partners are saying to us that their staff who are participating in the program, mentoring and bringing the young people forward, are gaining new insights and regeneration of interest, spirit and attitude. It is also building some strong social capital, particularly Masonic Care—the aged

care residents really enjoy having the younger students around and the young aspect of it. I think the other spin-off has been for our teachers, who have had new insights and gained awareness of other industry areas. For Masonic Care for next year we have 20 signed up for metropolitan north, and I think for the Wesley we have 12 possible places coming forward, so we have some future potential.

I will describe some of the key features of the program, just to leave you with some closing thoughts. The first is some high-quality learning opportunities. The next aspect would be that we have some committed partners who have worked with us. One aspect that we believe is critical is the matter of strong coordination, strong project management and having someone to drive and lead. Curriculum development has also been critical and articulation arrangements have been important against future success. Thanks very much.

Ms Rogers—Thank you, Graeham, Tom and Judi. You have helped in my preparation for the presentation that I am going to give about South Australia's efforts in dealing with the same kinds of challenges that you, and indeed Margaret, have outlined. In South Australia we have an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Learning and Work that provides the governance and coordination of programs that are intended to do the kinds of things that Tom referred to and to scale up activity from some of the examples of excellent practice that we have into policy and programs that are able to meet the needs of a great range of young people across South Australia. Our government has the policy objective, like the Queensland government, of all young people learning or earning, or combining both. We have been much informed in our policy and program development by research that was carried out under an ARC grant, involving the University of South Australia and the Department of Education and Children's Services, to look at what was happening to part-time students. Katherine referred to that research. It is aptly called 'Pathways or cul-de-sacs'.

The programs, which I am going to skate through very quickly this morning, are in fact a result of us knowing that, as Margaret said, the blurred boundaries between institutions are in fact very advantageous to building pathways for young people, but, unless there is a coordinated approach and the kinds of partnerships that Tom referred to, those pathways actually become cul-de-sacs. So the interministerial committee, which involves ministers across a range of portfolios, is very important in governance to help agencies work together. We also have other structures to bring in industry as well as other non-government providers at the local and state level.

We have legislation which has just come into being which we deliberately did not call 'raising the school-leaving age'; rather, we called it 'raising the compulsory education age', to represent the fact that we know that young people are productively involved in a range of learning and working combinations. Then we have a series of programs that sit beneath that that provide secondary mentoring and case management to young people who are most at risk. We also have a network of trade schools for the future—not a stand-alone trade school as such, rather a network of schools around a hub—and to those schools have been appointed apprenticeship brokers to achieve some of the outcomes that Tom talked about.

We have a new SACE, which, similarly to the Queensland certificate, is there to improve flexibility and to help young people address literacy and numeracy issues. In particular we are working hard to raise a level and range of vocational education and training opportunities for

young people in schools as part of their senior secondary curriculum so that it has parity of standing for those young people with other areas of the curriculum. To that end we are working on industry pathways programs with industry skills boards and employers across South Australia in order to expand, as I said, the range of learning opportunities for young people in schools, beyond the ones that Margaret referred to, to those areas where there are very sharp skill shortages, notwithstanding the current economic circumstances in South Australia.

The apprenticeship brokers provide case management and connection with employers and actually help move that through to pathways rather than cul-de-sacs. We have local innovative community action networks. They are there for those students who are most at risk and they provide flexible learning options and case management. None of these things could happen without the coordinated approach at the local level and considerable industry and community commitment.

The last program I want to mention very briefly is called Learning Together, which in fact is a program for families of nought- to three-year-olds who come from areas of severe disadvantage. Generally young mothers are part of those programs. Those young mothers recognise their caring role. They learn about caring as part of those Learning Together programs. They have those programs recognised in their senior secondary certificate and carry out companion work in the VET sector. The industry pathways programs, by the way, enabled young people to combine what has been previously known as 'academic with vocational' and have included, as part of the SACE requirements, recognition of some of the work that they do in part-time employment and in their homes.

Dr Hodgetts—Following on from Tanya and still in the South Australian context, I present in relation to findings of an ARC funded project that Margaret mentioned which looked at the phenomenon of part-time study in South Australia as a means of supporting students who work and have other out-of-school commitments and helping them to stay engaged with school. This came out of the background study that found that part-time study in the senior years has been available in South Australia since 1992 but is now taken up by more than 40 per cent of learners in the senior secondary years. These students were more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and were found in schools at the lower end of the index of socioeconomic disadvantage. We found that students who study part time often report that they chose this option to balance paid work demands, but even more of them reported that they chose part-time study as a means of managing stress, anxiety, health issues and caring commitments.

In our project we found that the option of studying part time was provided in South Australian schools in one of two ways. The first was a kind of reactive part-timeness in which schools allowed students who were struggling with work demands to reduce their study load only as a last resort if they were at risk of failure or of leaving school. Within this kind of reactive part-timeness, students were often treated as a problem by teachers who had to go out of their way to chase them up. Students had to sign in and felt they stood out at school. They began to feel disconnected from their peers and teachers who did not understand their experience. Then the students would feel reluctant to ask for the help that they need. This was not the case at proactive part-time schools, of which the school in Mount Gambier, in the south-east of South Australia, was an example. At this school over a third of all students complete the senior secondary certificate over three years part time rather than two years full time. This is a considered choice

as the rates of part-time study have risen at the school and so have senior secondary achievements.

At the school in Mount Gambier, teachers meet one-on-one with students before the year begins to discuss their in- and out-of-school commitments and the time that they can sustainably apply to study while maintaining their wellbeing. They say part-timeness often results from these discussions. The whole school is structured to support part-time students. Staff make use of communication strategies that are quite innovative. Also, assignment hand-up methods are quite unusual and do not actually require students to be on the premises every day. Timetables are completely restructured so as to not assume a full-time norm and subjects are combined and offered offline and after hours. Discussions are facilitated between staff and students so that teachers are aware of students' out-of-school experiences and can draw those into the classroom, respecting students' out-of-school expertise. As Margaret mentioned, the schools invite local employers in to talk to the school about when employers' and the school's peak times are so that they can be negotiated. Part-time students in this school are very carefully case managed and have their progress monitored.

For a number of students who simply cannot afford to attend school more than once or twice a week, be that because of work commitments or because of the cost of transport, part-time study is essential in supporting their completion. For others at Mount Gambier, as this is a rural school, spreading out their study means they are able to work enough hours to qualify for youth allowance, which enables them to move to the city for further education. It also means that they finish school and attain work experience, which, as Margaret has said, is hugely important.

One particular hallmark of Mount Gambier and other proactive part-time schools is the emphasis on individual case management—teachers brokering in- and out-of-school learning and acting as advocates for their students in relation to employers. This takes time and resources. A half-time student does not need half the resources of a full-time student; often they need more in the way of counselling and case management because they are negotiating much more complex lives.

Also hugely important is the training and time given to mentor teachers and case managers to do the work that keeps part-time students connected to school, which would also mean networking these teachers across schools in order that they keep abreast of best practice.

Prof. Vickers—Thank you, Katherine, Tanya, Judi, Tom and Graeham Kennedy. Just to conclude this little section that was brought to you by the Australian National Schools Network, we have placed some folders around the room. The DVD that you saw is in this folder. There is also a very small brochure that says, 'If you are interested in purchasing a kit of materials that helps you deal with these issues, or run in service work with these issues, please fill out the little slip and pass it up in our direction during the day.' Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Margaret. I should indicate to people that, while it is true that we do not have any young people around the table today, in the morning tea break you will be able to join us for the launch of, I think, the first ever online attempt by a committee to get feedback from young people. We will be writing to all schools letting them know that the committee has a website and encouraging them to use whatever method—I would be keen on a particular class

using one class time to take them online and show them the work of committees and the parliament and to fill out a feedback form.

They will be dealt with in groups, so the students will not be individually identified, which is a change in protocol for committees for the production of evidence. We have gone to great lengths to make sure that they can give us honest feedback that can be collated in a way that does not individually identify them. So we are very proactively seeking their views through that particular mechanism. Sadly, we were not able to get the peak national parents organisation with us today, but we will also be pursuing them.

The presentation has hopefully sparked some thoughts for us in addressing the criteria of the committee. I was at one of my own local high schools about a year or so ago, chatting to a group of about 20 students who were fundraising for overseas aid. Generally speaking it would be safe to guess they are not at-risk students. I said to them, 'How many of you actually work?' Of the 20, probably 15 said they had a job and then were very keen to engage in conversation with me about what that meant and what their experiences were. Afterwards the teacher said to me, 'You know, I had no idea.' I thought back to when I was teaching. I never engaged in conversation with my students about that either other than, 'Why isn't your assignment in?' 'I had too many shifts at work' 'Well, you have got to work your priorities out.' That is a conversation I think we have been having with young people for a long time. Perhaps it is time we had a look at that.

I am glad you also identified health. It has been raised with me by doctors in our local area that we are increasingly dealing with anxiety disorders in young people and that to some extent some of the school withdrawal is actually young people not being able to manage those health issues around full-time engagement at school as well. There is a lot there for us to think about and look at some of the ways we can respond. Thank you very much for that.

The first criterion the committee is keen to have a look at is around the issue of recognising that around 50 per cent of young people actually have part-time employment and the ways of accreditation for the skills they develop from that. We have had indicated to us that there is a wide variety amongst employers. I think many of us know some of the big chains who do quite good stuff around this area, but how can we translate that to small businesses in ways that enable them to participate in that as well? There is also the quality issue that has been raised: how can that be made a useful and meaningful experience rather than being a tick-a-box or giving them a certificate that young people feel is not meaningful and that employers will then say does not mean much to them either? I am keen to encourage those of you who have some ideas to put them forward.

I suppose this is partly a recognition of my age, but when I had part-time work when I was studying it was Thursday nights and Saturday mornings. That was pretty much the standard for what was available. While I had no intention of a retail career in my long-term prospects, I think it was a really valuable experience. For young people now, it is about balancing the much more deregulated and extensive hours that are available and getting something meaningful out of that. For employers, I think most of them would feel they get a real benefit out of being part of that compact with young people in their region. The idea of a badge to they can label themselves as youth friendly is one of the ideas there that we are keen to discuss. Would somebody like to kick off on this? I would like to go perhaps to some of the unions in the field or the employers who might have some identification from their members.

Mr Gavrielatos—I will try and address the specific question before us, but before I do so I want to establish a bit of context, which we have been helped with this morning by the wonderful presentations and also by some of the comments you have made in introducing the session and this topic. You mentioned that when you were at school you worked on Thursday nights and Saturday mornings, as many of our generation did. In many respects that regulated the hours of work for young people. The world has moved on. We have also moved on in the sense that we are achieving higher retention rates in our schools, which is a very good thing and there is still a way to go. What we have seen is the development of two areas that do not necessarily intersect and that pose certain contradictions for us—namely, the need for higher retention, to year 12 or equivalent, recognising the importance of that for the individual child or student and for the economy, but also the fact that students are working longer hours as a consequence of a more deregulated labour market and retail environment.

Apart from the importance of talking about the accreditation of employability skills, which we consider is important given the large number of kids, we also need to talk about how to best support those students. A lot of our colleagues spoke about the need to support students and for our schools to be resourced and structured in such a way as to maximise that support. Whilst we experienced the explosion in increasing retention rates across Australia—and, as I said, that is a positive thing and there is still a long way to go—what we did not see happening concurrently in our schools was staffing, resourcing and funding to recognise that much broader cohort. In fact, we went from retention rates of 30 per cent to currently—and it varies from state to state—70 or so per cent, but staffing for schools in fact declined, not increased. You cannot sustain rich programs aimed at meeting the needs of students in an inclusive way, offering them support, when your staffing levels are declining. Examples were given by some of our presenters, and the presenter from South Australia said a part-time student does not need less staffing, they require more staffing. I will just give one example. We talk about pathways and celebrate pathways, but in New South Wales a school loses staffing if their students are concurrently enrolled in a TAFE course or other courses, yet we know that case managing the needs of those students often requires more staffing rather than less staffing. So, by way of context, there are two policy areas here which do not necessarily intersect and are antithetical, if you like, in some of the needs that are associated with each of them. We are certainly grateful for this conversation because we have to marry those two things and recognise the resourcing pressures that exist for our schools.

I will finish with this point: a couple of years ago, MCEETYA commissioned the schools resource task force. The schools resource task force looked at areas of funding need and retention rates for our schools, and they studied successful programs that were aimed at achieving an increased retention rate. They concluded that if as a country we want to increase our retention rates to a 90 per cent level, we require in 2008 dollars a further \$1.4 billion investment in our schools. With all due respect to all levels of government, we have not seen anywhere near that amount dedicated to this specific issue, which would allow us to develop and expand on the great programs that we should be celebrating—those isolated programs around the country—so that we can really talk about the necessary support and increased retention whilst offering a broader, richer curriculum for all students to excel.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Blandthorn—I would firstly like to thank the people who made the presentation. I thought that there was a lot of interesting and valuable information in that. If I can go back to the

video that was shown, one of the comments that the young fellow in that video made was that young people are looking for learning in schools to set them up for the future. That is a critical factor here. It is all very well to deliver programs and deliver learning, but a lot of people just simply want to work to earn money for various reasons and have no intention of working for a long time in industries like retail, hospitality and the like. But there are other people who do have an intention of working longer term in those industries if in fact they can build a career there. I think that several things flow from that. One is the quality of the learning. Unfortunately, that varies greatly between schools and between programs. It seems to me that one of the things that are worth looking at here is that there needs to be a conscious alignment between schools and the programs they do with the training packages that apply to the various industries. That probably also then leads to a closer collaboration between school organisations and industry skills councils, which are responsible for the development of the training programs.

A second factor that also becomes very important here is good career advice. Again, I think that is a very variable factor. I think back to one of my children a few years ago when he was struggling a little bit at the time at school. I suggested he look at an option in the TAFE system. The career advice that he got at that particular school effectively led him to conclude, 'If I go to TAFE, Dad, everyone will think that I'm dumb.' They are just a couple of thoughts I will put on the table.

CHAIR—Thanks for that.

Mrs Tobin—One of the issues here, as Ian has alluded to, is equity. It seems to me that the young people in our schools who probably most need access to part-time employment opportunities are not the ones who are getting those employment opportunities. The ones who need it least in terms of experience are getting overloaded. Some sort of regulation may be required to limit the amount of opportunities that those young people have for the hours that they work. We would like to see a fairer opportunity for part-time employment for all young people in schools, particularly Indigenous young people. We do not have exact figures, but we do know that the numbers of Indigenous young people who have part-time employment is much lower, relatively speaking, than non-Indigenous Australians. So that cuts down their opportunity as well.

CHAIR—Thanks for that. Michelle.

Ms Bissett—I very much support the comments that have been made by the three previous speakers but, just getting back to the question of the recognition of the skills that young people are gaining in that employment while they are at school, we know that employability skills, as they are defined in the sector, are extraordinarily important from an employer perspective in terms of future employment opportunities for young people. It seems that what we need to have in place in the school system is the capacity—and this goes very much to the resourcing question—to actually assess and recognise those broad employability skills that young people are gaining in the workplace so that when they move into ongoing full-time employment they are taking something with them that is valued by the employers. That gives the young person moving into the workplace some credit.

We know, from some of the work that has been done in the VET sector, that the assessment of employability skills is actually quite complex. In the VET sector we assess employability skills

as embedded into the other skills that people are developing. The problem we have with young people in school and work is that the areas they are working in, as we know, are retail and hospitality but we also know that that it is not where those people are most likely going to end up in their full-time employment outcomes. So the assessment of the employability skills that they are gaining in employment as embedded in the skills in retail or hospitality is perhaps slightly more difficult, and a mechanism of being able to unpack appropriately those employability skills, I think, needs to be examined. But it becomes very much a resourcing issue in the school sector—and an issue of the capacity of teachers in the school system to actually undertake that quite detailed assessment of those employability skills that are being picked up.

Mrs Potter—The viewpoint of our organisation—the Australian Council for Private Education and Training—is that all learning should be valued. Ms Bissett has probably led into our point that to do recognition and assessment of any sort of learning takes a lot of time and effort, and there is a big lack of investment in people who can actually do that job. So if we are talking about an approach where there are a whole lot of different adult groups, then within those adult groups you need those people with skill sets. Obviously, there are mentoring skill sets and that type of thing but, if you look at the requirements of the qualification in the VET system under the Australian Qualification and Training Framework—the Certificate IV Trainer and Assessor—there are a lot of valuable skill sets within that qualification which people could be trained in; it is not necessarily the whole qualification. So we are talking about a team approach. We need that same approach to the methodology to actually gather up the evidence, to make judgements and to give credit—knowing that it is quality assured—to any learner. I am talking about the whole Australian workforce. But if we are going to start in schools, let us keep it going. So if we invest in this, we are also then investing for our workers.

Ms Gould—I am from the Independent Schools Council of Australia although, because I am based in Perth, my comments will actually come from WA. A number of years ago we tried to put a process in place—and I used to work for our curriculum council, our board of studies—where we actually did recognise part time work as part of structured workplace learning which contributed to secondary graduation. There is now a new program, starting this year, which actually links to the employability skills so that it picks up very well on what Michelle was saying.

The main reason the first one fell over—and this picks up Angelo's point as to resourcing—is that for these students to be in part-time work, be it in retail or hospitality and fast food, the employer had to be willing to give up time to assess the skills and also to give them experience in a range of things. You could not just have them flipping hamburgers the entire year and hope they would pick up a range of skills. Often these students did not have the wherewithal to talk to their employer about doing an assessment. Teachers were willing to support them but they got absolutely no time allocation to do that. If it is going to work it really comes down to this: just because they are doing part-time work and therefore are not in front of a classroom, they still need that support. That would be the same across all schools and all states. It is hugely time consuming, but I think we have to remember, particularly as to those students that might be the ones who do not graduate and do not have successful transitions, that students are going to cost us an awful lot more in the future if we do not get it right when they are in their early years. I hate to say it, but it still comes down to resourcing, as so many good things in schools do.

CHAIR—We have a whole point in our inquiry as to that, so we will certainly have a look at that.

Mr Coleman—The business members of our organisation, the Business Council of Australia, very much support recognising and giving credit for employability skills in two ways, and these ways have been mentioned, through a stand-alone certificate recognising those skills and by the learning of those skills to the greatest extent possibility in the classroom, in the way that Michelle Bissett has just mentioned. We agree with that very much.

This goes to the reason why employers do support strongly the teaching of employability skills. What I want to say is that we think we should also be talking about the employability skills within school education in a way that complements workplace experience. The reason why businesses are emphasising these skills so much is that the combination of employability skills and the knowledge and skills that students acquire about particular areas and particular fields is what will enable them to make a greater success of their career. The opportunity to learn more in the classroom about the importance of these skills is significant because often the importance of employability skills can be missed by the individual young person. They can be participating in the workplace but perhaps cannot fully understand that the way they communicate with the people that they work with, the way that they work as a member of a team or their ability to solve particular problems can make a real difference in advancing their individual career. Therefore we think that if there can be, through some of the partnerships and some of the other very good partnerships that have been described in the presentations this morning, a greater system-wide approach to achieving more of these partnerships then there can be an opportunity for young people to be able to reflect on and to gain a better understanding of just how important these skills are.

We hear a lot of them mentioned. We hear communication skills mentioned, but there is a lot to communication skills. It is very important that young people have the opportunity to understand that different situations in the workplace perhaps require a different approach to communication and that the levels of understanding can be missed. For that reason we do support an approach to the teaching of employability skills as well as the assessment of employability skills, not as an overwhelming component of what is taught in schools but as a greater component of what is taught in schools than it is at the moment. Therefore I would also support the comments that Michelle and Angelo have made: that this does become a resourcing and professional development issue and perhaps a teacher education issue as well. That is an important aspect of it. We also recognise that there is also an important role for business in contributing to this through feedback to a school as to what individual students are learning.

CHAIR—Thanks, Patrick. As a former communications teacher at TAFE, I heartily endorse your comments about communication. In fact, I refer to the fact that you identified that the other skill that young people pick up is assessing their own skills. That is valuable in its own way too.

Ms Cross—I want to support what a number of people have said about the importance of recognising employability skills. I think the Australian government also feels that this is an area in which work has really lagged in terms of finding practical ways of doing that. One of the Australian government's commitments is to develop a Job Ready Certificate, which would look at practical ways of recognising those employability skills. It would initially look at students at school undertaking structured workplace learning as part of the vocational education program—

and potentially students undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships. But work that is done on a Job Ready Certificate would have broader applicability to any students who are involved in work.

I really want to make sure that people are aware that we have put out a discussion paper. There was a discussion paper issued in January. The work is being led by Professor Richard Sweet. A number of people around the table would be familiar with him. We are holding public consultation forums from February. So this is an area where the government has put out its discussion paper and will be moving forward in 2009. We see it as an important area where not enough has been done yet.

CHAIR—Thanks.

Ms Edsall—I would like to take up further the matter of assessment of student skills and leadership. One thing that needs to be recognised is that students are not a homogeneous group within the workforce. In the study that the New South Wales Teachers Federation undertook in 2007, where we talked extensively with students across metropolitan and regional New South Wales about their experiences, we very quickly learned that those who are in management positions in a vast array of workplaces are indeed students and that students are supervising other students, at least by the time they are 17 or 18. We heard many stories of students who are now spending their weekends at private training facilities, undergoing management training with retail and fast food outlets.

Employers, in that case, cannot also be seen as a homogeneous group. When students talk about their boss and they are aged 15 they are often talking about their peers in another setting. So at school, if they are in years nine and 10, those people whom they interact with in years 11 and 12 are often 'the boss' in the workplace. In fact, the bosses, aged 17 or 18, revel in the capacity and the opportunity they have. They most definitely regard it as an opportunity to articulate their skills and experiences into leadership positions and would like to be able to see that recognised further. Often teachers have absolutely no clue about their students' capacities and skills outside the school. Students who are expert in one area may well be usurped by other students who indeed are watching and following and assessing even in an informal sense that group that we would see as their peer students.

CHAIR—Thanks. That is an interesting perspective. I had not thought about them supervising each other and so forth. There are four people still to speak. Could I ask you all to keep your comments to pertinent points, as you all have been doing.

Mr Frost—I think it is worth noting that paid part-time work is only one of a range of models that deliver experience to the workplace. They do vary qualitatively. They include school based apprenticeships and traineeships, where you have paid training. Training is an important part of it. Those young people get paid and stay at school. In the VET in Schools program young people have up to 30 days a year in the workplace unpaid. In good old work experience, young people spend one or two weeks of the year, often in year 10, in workplaces. On top of that there is paid training.

They do vary qualitatively. I think that in terms of recognising the value of learning that occurs in workplaces you have got to ensure that accredited training is a part and parcel of that.

Paid work varies enormously in terms of the quality of what actually goes on, from very ordinary experiences for young people—poor experiences, poor treatment of young people—all the way through to first-class training opportunities that are provided, for example, by some of the big retailers in Australia.

Ms O'Hara—I guess that in terms of innovation, diversity and flexibility, which are key themes coming out from nearly every speaker this morning, the policy implications there become really important. TAFE institutes across Australia see themselves very much in partnership with schools in engaging youth in meaningful programs that lead on to further study or further work and which certainly integrate school learning, vocational learning and work learning.

The scaffolding around that is really important, I think, and the policy environment is really important. I think there still remain a number of policy environments within state boards of senior secondary studies in terms of fundamentally asking the question: what does a senior secondary studies certificate mean? Using terms which I just used and did not mean to, there are things like: there is general education and there is vocational education; there are board courses and there are vocational courses; rather than seeking a much more integrated paradigm in which to try and manage the incredible diversity.

Once you have a student body that is really preferring and seeking to some extent part-time learning, there is a whole range of policy and management logistical issues that surround that and need to be owned and addressed and admitted. I think that partnerships are incredibly important. I do not think that schools have worked in isolation for a long time but I suspect that a lot of their policies are still around full-time study and that notion that every student, every young person, has a right to full-time, publicly-funded education until they are a certain age, whatever that age is, and that work and other things get in the way of that, rather than saying that work and other things contribute to it and how can we manage.

I agree that there are huge professional development issues around that in terms of redefining and re-questioning what teachers' work is and what partnerships teachers need to be in. I think that the TAFE directors' submission really indicates a whole range of flexible programs, the same as the ones we have heard from schools, where TAFEs and schools, or TAFEs alone, or TAFEs and other RTOs, or TAFEs and industries, are really trying to build some of the flexibilities that allow people to get senior secondary study qualifications in a whole variety of ways.

Ms O'Connor—Firstly, I would like to reinforce the point made by the Dusseldorp representatives here today that however we think about the opportunities that are available in metropolitan larger areas for students we also need to consider those students in the small rural communities and remote communities where only one in five is likely to complete year 12 anyway. Add to that that they get no opportunity to be involved in part-time work that perhaps builds a pathway. So we really need to look very carefully at those groups that they do not increasingly suffer disadvantage purely because of where they live and the nature of the communities that they are in.

As to the success stories, we do know quite a bit about them really in relation to vocational school to work pathways, such as the Lake Illawarra college and the Mount Gambier examples.

What contributes significantly to the success of these is that you have a commitment from the large body of staff. We know that you need to get a critical majority of staff—and most of us say is roughly 66 per cent of staff—actively supporting a program that is at the forefront not just something there for the students who cannot be good, clever or compliant, and that when that happens then the chances increase. The greater proportion of staff backing this, the greater the chance that this will indeed be a successful program.

I support the ideas that Angelo and others have put together, that it is a resourcing issue to get the people with the key skills for this very fiddly, time consuming, diplomatic task of bringing employers and students together in a way that is helpful. But, until we get enough key people on the staff working cooperatively, they are always going to be struggling, and students are going to be struggling also. Where you put the success stories together, where it is at the forefront, where you have trained and committed staff, overall your chances of success improve. I think we need to bear that in mind. We can bring in more specialists, but until we get most teachers understanding the employability skills that employers are asking for—I might add that they have a huge contribution to make themselves in relation to this—and get them working actively on that, we are always going to have pockets of success rather than generalised success.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr O'Neill—May I just say that, quite apart from being with ACSSO, I am a director of a licensed club here in the ACT, and our staff turnover is directly related to university graduations. It is very right that of the areas that students tend to go into the hospitality area is a very big one. I have found it very helpful listening to everyone this morning, and I have been contemplating and reflecting on certain issues. One of the things I am concerned about is that in the year 2020 a quarter of the jobs that will be available then do not exist today. This is going to be the challenge. When we are talking about employability skills—training people—that is today. Those people going into the workforce today will certainly be alive and working in the year 2020, and their work careers will be a lot longer than that. The challenge I see to us as stakeholders is ensuring that we assist our students and young people into the workforce and that we assist them to work while they are getting an education, because it is important that their education allows them to change direction at any time of their choosing. We need to educate our young people so that if they decide that they no longer want to be a mechanic, they can go into another area, another job, and we have given them skills to allow them to do that—to make a change. It is an evolving world; nothing is constant.

For my generation, when I left school, one of the greatest things that ever happened to us in our lives was the transistor radio. Now you see everything else that is going on, and the world keeps moving. Technology keeps moving and the requirements on job skills changes. There were jobs available when I was a young fellow that just do not exist anymore. That is the challenge that we face, and it is the challenge that this committee has to face.

CHAIR—Thanks for that. I will just make an observation. I think to some extent we have had an introductory session across introductory comments rather than specifically the issue of accreditation of skills. I think that is not unusual in this sort of environment, in that people need to put some context around their contributions. So I would identify for you that you might, over the coming sessions, want to revisit that, particularly as Rebecca indicated to us that the government is introducing the Job Ready Certificate. That is currently under discussion and is

part of the impetus for this committee's reference. So you might want to give a bit of a consideration of that.

I cannot remember whose submission it was but I do remember reading one submission that talked about developing a matrix of skills that can contribute to that, coming from part-time paid work. I acknowledge that there is a lot of work happening in VET in schools. I am a former joint schools TAFE coordinator myself. It is not new; it has been going on for quite a long time. There are lots of developments there and there are lots of developments around reassessing work experience—which, as a parent, I suggest is by and large a waste of time and that students do not come away from that with a really good experience. What they are doing is low-skilled, narrow band work for two weeks, because the poor employer who has been dragooned into taking a work experience student says, 'I'm busy, it's hectic. I'll give them something manageable and they can tick it off.' I know there is a lot of review going on about that as well.

As economic times get tighter and employers get more pressured, the danger is that the quality will decrease across the board. There are some real challenges there in introducing a Job Ready Certificate that acknowledges skills and how we actually manage that. We have never really wandered too far away from the generic employability skills, so whether or not you are planning a career in retail or hospitality, the self-management skills, the communication skills and the technology skills are often very generic.

As a committee we are keen to see that in the Job Ready Certificate we do not miss the boat by focusing on the areas we are all comfortable discussing—that is, VET in Schools and indeed school based apprenticeships and traineeships, which also have a fair level of shelf life—and do not ignore the fact that young people will say, 'Why do I have to do work experience in this VET model when I already work, why do I have to go and do something else to meet a curriculum requirement when I already have a part-time job?' The other side, which we have had identified to us, is that they are not going to go to their employer and say, 'It would be really handy if you could do a skills assessment on me and put that forward so I can submit it.' In our future sessions, think about some of the feedback you might want to provide to us about managing the Job Ready Certificate. That would be great.

Item 3 is alternative approaches to the senior secondary certificate attainment, and I think we have had a fair discussion of that. We have heard of some of the models in the presentation at the beginning, and we have heard of some of the issues that the unions, employer groups and some of the other peak organisations have raised around resourcing. I particularly appreciate the significance of that. I am telling you that honestly. As a former joint schools-TAFE organiser, from the TAFE perspective I was very conscious of the release from face-to-face teaching that I got to do and the fact that my school based colleagues often did not get to do the same thing. I think we have touched on some of those matters. I will ask if people want to expand on that with a comment and then I am going to ask the committee members to follow up some of the issues and tease out some of the things that are of interest to them.

Ms Hicks—I will provide some bridging information between the last topic and this current topic by not repeating what others have said but by trying to add a bit to the discussion. I will just take a couple of minutes to quickly explain about employability skills, because it really does impact on what we are looking at in terms of how you would record the attainments of students.

There are two aspects to employability skills. My colleague Michelle Bissett, from the ACTU, and I both sit on the National Quality Council where we look at employability skills in training packages, how you would identify those and then how you would assess those. It is a very complicated area. Generally, they are assessed in a holistic manner.

There is also another part of employability skills. There is a formal part where you can identify and record what a person's attainment is or which particular employability skills apply to a certain competency, but there is another part of employability skills which relates to self-reflection. As you rightly pointed out, in your former role as a communications teacher in TAFE, a lot of the learning that goes into employability skills is that ability of what we call 'thinking to think' in the metacognitive domain.

That intersects with career development and lifelong learning. When we look at how you record all that and how you can identify whether a student has attained it, the thinking behind it is: 'How can we make this a positive experience for students?' not 'You have failed at employability skills.' We think it needs to be integrated into student outcomes from secondary school. We support the idea of a job ready certificate as an introduction to that but we would like to see that concept extended to every school student because just about every school student will be employed at some time in the future.

The other thing which we put in our submission, and which has not been mentioned so far, is that for self-reflection and to make it easier for students to collect a bank of information, as identified by others in the room this morning, we would favour the introduction of a skills passport. Again, we agree it needs to be supported by appropriate levels of resourcing if it is going to be done properly. It is something that could be done in conjunction with a statement from school on an exit certificate—a skills passport which incorporates a self-reflection component.

Mr Burgess—I want to comment on the senior certificate and the breadth of curriculum I think is necessary within it. In Victoria we have moved from a VCE that was quite broad in the early nineties. It was narrowed over time to a more exam based program, and then the VCAL was introduced as a separate certificate. VCAL, for those who do not know it, is the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, which has more of a VET in Schools component to it. That program has enabled a lot more students to participate in the senior certificate and has been quite successful. Issues come with it, though, in terms of recognition in the community. The comment was made earlier about the student who goes to TAFE being thought of as 'dumb'. Therefore, there are issues around how we present these certificates not only to students but to teachers, schools and the general community. Perhaps the notion that has been raised recently of separating the senior certificate from university entrance may be one way of doing that to give value to the certificates that are trade based. I think we also need to be cognisant that programs like VET in Schools are not 'one size fits all'. In fact, some of the programs are highly effective in having students continue on that pathway. Building and construction is one example; the TAFE that is now my school had 70 per cent or 80 per cent of the kids go on into that industry. The industries that do not go so well are more the retail and hospitality type industries. Aggregating data for these things is sometimes a bit dangerous, so we need to be careful about that. I agree with the case management type approaches for senior certificates. I think that is very important, but the resourcing issue is the main one and is very difficult.

The final point I would like to make is that, in all of these things, having kids going to VET in Schools programs—in Victoria at least—has been very problematic in terms of what provision is available. If the local provider is quite limited in their provision, particularly in rural and regional Victoria, then the opportunities for students are quite reduced and the cost to students for transport and for the course itself is actually very high, even in metropolitan Melbourne, so kids tend not to go into those courses. Costs for setting up the programs within schools are very expensive, so schools tend to offer the ones that they can afford. So what we are getting is more like elective programs than actual vocational pathway programs.

CHAIR—Thanks for that. I am going to open it up because there has been so much covered that I am sure some of my colleagues are keen to explore further some of the particular issues.

Mr ZAPPIA—Professor Vickers, in your presentation you highlighted the conundrum of kids going to school and taking on a job: on the one hand the job will assist them with employment later on and on the other hand it interferes with their study. You also suggested that there might be an alternative balance to get that right—in other words, that it might be neither one of those two options but another. Can you expand on what you think ought to happen?

Prof. Vickers—Yes, I think so. Basically, students are juggling: ‘What’ll I do? How much benefit is it to me to go through to that final crunch exam-time and sit those papers, in terms of my future, and how important is it to me, on the other hand, to hang in there with the job and continue to build my track record?’ We do think in very instrumental terms in Australia about what is important about education, and most students would think, ‘I am getting my year 12 so I will get a better job.’ So they tend to see these two as being in competition with each other. One partial solution to this may be the part-time schooling approach taken in South Australia where you do not have to give up your job in order to continue with your study. I mean, I do not think there is a middle-class family that does not completely reorganise itself when kids are going to do year 12, so we know it is a big, stressful thing. It could be less stressful if it were done over three years rather than two. That is one way to go. I think the other way to go is to actually do some of the work that has been discussed around the table today and that is to ensure that work that is done by students out of school is accredited and counts as subjects within the structure of the year 12 certificate. Those are just two ways around it.

Mr ZAPPIA—Thank you.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I take on board a number of the issues that have been raised, particularly the resourcing one. Could I ask Ms Carroll from the Tasmanian government to enlighten us briefly on its systemic approach to dealing with this issue—in part, because it is also dealing with retention rates, and also its relationship to years 10, nine and eight, if it is related—and whether additional resources are being applied to this systemic model. You have made a submission to that effect, so would you mind enlightening us further?

Ms Carroll—In Tasmania we have been dealing with many of these issues from a project point of view over the last 18 months and have come up with a new process for all of our education and training for everyone after year 10 which, I suppose, to some degree, focuses very much on the needs of the student and on their preferred learning style and the personal circumstances that lead to that preferred learning style. So we now, as of 1 January this year, have three organisations that deliver that training on a state-wide basis: the Tasmanian Academy,

which is focused totally on students who want to learn in a more traditional, academic way, and who are intent on going straight to university; the Tasmanian Skills Institute, which is focused on the needs of business and will deal with full-time apprentices and trainees as well as the sort of professional development opportunities that businesses will need; and then, finally, the big one that is in the middle, the Tasmanian Polytechnic, which deals with students from the age of 15 through to 82-plus—it reminded me very much of the Illawarra model that was mentioned earlier—and deals with those students both in terms of vocational education and training and also the traditional Tasmanian certificate of education subjects.

I suppose the connection that I see between what we are trying to do on a systemic basis and what I am hearing around the room is that there are a huge range of disconnects that face young people, particularly these days. There are disconnects in terms of the workplace—you mentioned working on Thursday nights and Saturday mornings, and that is not what they do anymore. There are disconnects in terms of their personal lifestyles and aspirations, and groups like Mission Australia pinpoint the shift in those sorts of things with their annual research. There are disconnects in terms of resourcing, as you have mentioned. And there are disconnects in terms of—and this is, I think, at the base of all of this—the content of what we teach our students, and the way that we tend to want to have curriculum sitting over here and vocational education and training sitting over there and the two of them being brought together only with great difficulty, which affects things like employability skills as well.

Part of what we are doing is trying to look at those disconnects, particularly in the polytechnic, and bring answers to how we might focus on the needs of the students and not have their world segmented: ‘Am I a worker at the moment, am I student at the moment, am I a carer at the moment or am I a person that just wants to develop?’ So we are trying to bring that holistic view to our approach to students, one that begins not at year 11 or 12 but actually a long way back. You asked about the earlier years in high school; certainly, in Tasmania, we are reaching back and starting on a pathway planning process with students in year 8 that continues into years 9 and 10 where they look at themselves and where it is they want to go and what it is they want to achieve and how they learn et cetera. And I dare say, from the sorts of conversations that we have had and anecdotal research that we have done through the project, it actually goes much further back than that. It goes back to programs like the Learning Together program, which I heard mentioned earlier, that prepare students right from the very beginning to embrace learning as a lifelong process, not something that just happens in school and finishes when they leave school but something they will engage in forever and ever.

From a resourcing point of view, with those disconnects we have been talking about in relation to curriculum and the approach to students, what we are trying to do is to do a lot more—so, keep adding on the VET stuff, keep adding on the workplace stuff—and stretch the resources that we have already got that we apply to traditional teaching processes. We are trying to stretch all of that to cover it. One of the things we are attempting to do through the Tasmania Tomorrow process is to actually look at what we can stop doing and look at what new stuff we need to start doing, so that success is not always reliant on our resources, so that we are actually using our resources more wisely.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thanks.

Mr OAKESHOTT—Just picking up on Professor Vickers's comments in regard to that relationship between work and study, reference was made to a tipping point, and how much that was. Can I get an answer as to how much is too much and any other details that go with that? I think that is interesting.

Prof. Vickers—Phil might have a partial answer to that as well, but the data that I put together with Steve Lamb in one study suggested that working more than 10 hours a week was the threshold for when the negative effects on the students started to cut in, and we found students worked up to 30 hours a week. The relationship between increased hours and dropping out was linear—in other words, from 10 hours up to 30 hours, it was a linear relationship, increasing—

Mr OAKESHOTT—So you can show it directly?

Prof. Vickers—Yes. I should say that we were looking at year 9 students who worked those numbers of hours. If you did the same study with year 11 students, you did not find that, because they were already survivors.

Mr OAKESHOTT—Okay.

CHAIR—Dr McKenzie?

Dr McKenzie—The most systematic work that we have done was by my former colleague, Lyn Robinson, going back a number of years. Ten hours was about the tipping point. That was at a time in the early to mid-nineties when the average hours worked were much less than now. When Lyn was looking at the issue, around 35 per cent of 16- and 17-year-old students were working around an average of nine hours; 70 per cent of them were working less than 10. Those above 10 were a bit different. One of the ways they were different is that they tended to be the less successful students—perhaps students from lower SES backgrounds, so there may have been more of a financial incentive to work longer—and the working longer hours may have been part of a move away from school. It was not necessarily just the impact of the part-time work that made it less likely they would finish, although that clearly did contribute. Now we have over 50 per cent working at any one time, and because of dynamics in the youth labour market, it is probably a much higher proportion that experiences some part-time work at any particular time. Some work I have seen recently from NCVET suggested that among the youngest group now coming through, the average hours per week are up around the 12 or 14 mark, so it is quite a different phenomenon than perhaps the earlier research was dealing with.

While I have got the floor, I want to make a point about where Australia sits internationally in this regard. We are one of the high student worker countries, among the OECD group anyway. We have over twice the proportion of our school students working than the OECD average, but we are not alone. This is a phenomenon of the English-speaking countries—the US, Canada and the UK; we all have quite high proportions working part-time. Why is this? One reason is that we have the sort of job market that demands this. As a number of people have noted we have deregulated retail hours, we have a strong service sector, people eat out a lot, they go on holidays, so there is a need that employers have to fill jobs out of regular hours and students are very attractive in that respect. But I think there are also some issues on the supply side. Why is it that so many young people want to do part-time work? If you look at the countries that I mentioned, they are countries that have what you might call traditionally very weak vocational

orientation or applied learning in their senior secondary school systems, so I think part of the drive to part-time work by students is looking for a different type of experience than they are getting within a school.

Ms Anlezark—I would like to comment on the work that Phil mentioned that NCVER have been undertaking. We used some of the recent longitudinal surveys data. You get different results for boys and girls. Girls seem to be better able to handle working and studying than boys. On year 12 completion we did not really find much effect of working for girls. We got equal completions irrespective of whether or not girls were working, but not so for boys. Looking at TER scores, those who did not work tended to have had better at TER scores, but that may have been a conscious decision they made that they were pursuing an academic pathway and that work was not for them at that time. But for people who want to go on to full-time employment and not study after they leave school, we found positive effects for combining school and work. It is not one size fits all, it is horses for courses. If people are not intending to go to university, then perhaps working is more beneficial for that group.

Mr OAKESHOTT—I want to pick up on a related point about retention rates and conceptually whether that is still the end goal in what looks to be a conversation about a more flexible work environment. I really want to tap into the research arm of it as well with regard to whether there has been any longitudinal studies done on those who are the non-survivors and where, in particular, they have ended up and whether it is still true—and I hope it is because I repeat it to death—that you study for a job and there is that link between length of stay in education and employability. Or are we starting to see some changes with regard to that? If so, that then raises the question of whether retention rate is an end goal in itself. Is there anything you can give me on that front?

Prof. Vickers—I think this is another shared conversation. I notice Jack Keating is there, with Lucas as well. They were also researchers on this topic. If you wanted to say, 'Let's increase the retention rate,' one of the easiest ways to do that would be to say, 'Let's just count it after 14 years rather than after 12.' The Australian Bureau of Statistics standard measure looks at who completed year 12 12 years after they were in first grade at school, six years after they were in year 7 or three years after they were in year 10. That figure is the lowest figure you can get. Take the South Australian case, where 40 per cent are taking three years. In New South Wales, students walk out of school and complete in TAFE. We can have a much higher retention rate on a conventional measure of doing a year 12 certificate if we just push it out a few years.

Second, a large proportion of students who appear to leave school and not study initially are found to be enrolled in some form of VET up to seven years later. Phil probably has these figures in his mind. One story I picked up from a recent ACER release is that, seven years after they would have been in year 12, 50 per cent of non-completers had an apprenticeship certificate. If you say that an apprenticeship certificate is just as good as a year 12 certificate then by the time people are six or seven years out of school you have a much larger overall retention figure. Yes, the longitudinal data is there and it looks a lot better if you include these things and package them together.

What is really important is that students do not lose their preparedness to learn. What is really important is that they do not disengage from learning. People who just say, 'Look, I don't ever want to be in a classroom; I don't want ever to have to sit a paper or have to write an assessment

because I just feel lousy when I do it,' are in trouble. Interestingly, particularly girls who turn off learning completely are in the worst trouble. They just leave the labour market altogether. On every indicator, if you can remain attached to some form of VET based post-school learning—complete year 12 slowly, go back to uni when you are 23—you will end up in a better situation in earnings and labour market participation. If you do not ever re-enter, you do not have that second chance. Failure is never final. But some people are so turned off when they are in school that it is pretty final.

CHAIR—Having a 20-year-old who has just completed his HSC on the third attempt, through a variety of entry points, I heartily endorse those comments. Does anyone else want to comment on Mr Oakeshott's question on the retention rate issue?

Dr McKenzie—I will add a further point to what Margaret said. I guess the big picture is that keeping engaged post-school education and training—and it almost does not matter at what point the post-school education and training occurs—is very important. The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth program has shown quite consistently that, while on average to complete year 12 is better than not to complete, there is quite a large number of young people—particularly young men—for whom if they can get a job quickly after leaving school or, even better, an apprenticeship this is a very productive pathway. By their mid-twenties they are considerably ahead in job status, continuity of employment and earnings than those without any post-school education and training.

So what is the message here? The message is partly to encourage all of those who can to complete year 12, but not necessarily to complete in the same way. As Margaret has said, there are a variety of important ways that young people can learn and indeed want to learn. I think the young person's demand for types of learning must be very much front and centre here.

What else do you need? You need to monitor those who leave to see what they are doing, to make sure that there are effective intervention and support structures for those who appear to be at risk early on. Again, our work plus a lot of others shows that those who leave school and become unemployed or who are out of the labour force altogether, not even looking for work, are the ones who have the most trouble. I think we are getting better at that in Australia. We are not as good as we should be but some states, and Victoria is one, and I know there are others, with their On Track survey that goes to every school leaver in April-May asking them what they are doing, what are their views of their experience and so on and so forth. Importantly, it offers a referral service to those who are not employed or outside the labour force or only working part-time. Nationally we should be doing something like that.

The third ingredient that I think is important is to ensure that the post-school education and training system is an open one and keeps the barriers as low as possible for entry and re-entry. Australia internationally does pretty well in that regard, although I think there are some issues around student financial support for those from low income backgrounds that need to be addressed.

CHAIR—It is an interesting point you make about monitoring leavers and what that actually means in terms of retention. I think too many students go out the school gate for the last time and think, 'Thank heavens that is behind me,' and have no conception that it might be an ongoing thing. So it is a worthwhile point to make.

Dr McKenzie—If I can just put this in a slogan, I do not think schools should have to do all of this. We should not get the message across to young people that if they do not do well in school that is it. That is not the reality, but I do not think that is widely enough recognised.

CHAIR—You make an interesting point too and it is something I am keen for us to explore. I come from a region with a persistent teen unemployment over 30 per cent, the measure that says ‘not in education or work’. Graeham Kennedy will know this from our region the challenges we have. One of the interesting things for me is that we had the regional information service do a full report on that. One of the things that came back that shocked me is the number of people out there doing things across the sectors, different levels of government, programs available. There were things I did not know existed, and I am the federal member. I thought, how does a kid coming from a family with parents who are trying to navigate this with very limited skills ever manage to understand the variety of things that are out there? I think you quite rightly identify that one of the things we have to be careful with is that we do not respond by creating massive choice without providing the navigation tools for young people and their families to get through that, because then they are thinking increasingly, ‘I don’t know what that is, I don’t know what that group are who are offering training, I don’t understand it,’ and it becomes so overwhelming that they withdraw from it.

Mr CLARE—My question is a follow-up to Rob’s first question that Margaret answered. You talked about the number of hours that year 9 students work, and a lot of discussion this morning has been about extending the learning period or timeframe, particularly part-time schooling, to give people the chance they need both to learn and to earn. Is anybody around the table today thinking about, or did anybody at the workshop that you conducted, Margaret, talk about, capping the number of hours that, for example, a year 9 student can work?

Prof. Vickers—We did not exactly talk about it, but I think it is an issue. Basically what we did talk about in our forum is that schools, as environments, are almost entirely silent about what their students do in workplaces. It is not a topic that is discussed. So there is an opening there for schools to have both teacher supported and peer supported activities, where there is a discussion around hours of work. When I say ‘peer supported’ I mean the sorts of surveys that student representative councils can do and that students can get into groups and talk about—that sort of thing. I think it also requires—and I think the South Australian people may have done some work on this—a closer example of the financial needs of families through case management.

CHAIR—Does anyone else want to make a comment?

Mr Burton—I think regulating the student about the hours of work is problematic or challenging. If you go to postsecondary and look at students who come here on student visas and have their hours regulated and capped at 20 hours a week, the impact of that is not to stop them working but it drives them into unregulated employment or away from their study. You have to address the causes rather than the symptoms; otherwise, it is a bit of a risk.

Ms Edsall—It is about not only the number of hours but also the times that students are working. In the research we did we correlated the hours worked and the times of the day that are worked. I think the most shocking thing we discovered is that, at any given hour of the day or night, a significant proportion of high school aged students are working. They pack shelves in supermarkets throughout the night and they work in a whole range of things. The other thing is

finishing your formal shift in a fast food restaurant. Another thing is the hour that you are then expected to spend cleaning up. If you are a manager, as I spoke about before, you have to make sure that everything is cleared away, that management responsibilities are taken care of and that lock up occurs. That can be anything up to two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning.

The most corrosive effect on school performance is for those students who are combining long hours of work with late and unusual shifts. Of course they are related. If you are working very long hours you are often working unusual shifts in order to fit those hours in. So I think we also have to think about that. I too see that regulation would be fraught with difficulty, but I do not see any reason why there should not be some kind of guidelines, some sort of advice, backed up by statements from governments and other authorities coming together to talk about what is beneficial. I think that kind of thing fits squarely within the intergenerational compact, because it is about people who can effect and influence these things taking a stand and making a decision about it and providing significant advice backed up by properly documented research.

CHAIR—You have reminded me that one of the submissions talked about the development of a code of practice—that within a compact, at a community level, there would be a code of practice developed for employers.

Ms Bissett—We did raise issues about a code of practice. It was certainly in our submission, but I recall that it is also in the paper that Andrew Stewart wrote for the New South Wales government. In terms of regulating the hours of work, the issues that Troy from the LHMWU raised are quite pertinent to the issue. But there are some other issues that need to be considered, and one of them is why students are working the number of hours they are. For some students it is an economic necessity. That is an issue we are not going to resolve by measuring employability skills or looking at how many hours we should be regulating. That is only going to be fixed if we can look at the appropriate support being given to students so that they do not have to work out of economic necessity as part of survival in the school system.

But there are clearly some substantial occupational health and safety issues that arise for students who are working particularly unsociable but also long hours. They are not just the traditional health and safety issues that we think about in the workplace context; they are much broader, student centred occupational health and safety issues. I am not aware of any work that has been done that looks at a student centred approach to occupational health and safety for those students who are combining school and work. It is another area that needs to be given quite detailed consideration, along with the economic necessity of employment for those young people.

CHAIR—It is an interesting area. As a parent of someone who worked in the fast food industry, I am very conscious of waiting outside in the car park because their shift was finishing and they had not wandered out yet because they were still tidying up. I think it is true. Perhaps we need to get parents engaged in that conversation as well, because the last thing young people will let you do is intervene, as a parent. On some of those issues, if you actually talk to the managers, it is not that they are meaning to be awful; it is just that that is the way work operates until you engage with them. So there are some important issues there.

Ms Bissett—The other critical issue is students who are working actually understanding what their rights are in a workplace context—not just about health and safety but the general rights

most of us expect to have as workers, wherever it is we work. I think one of the students in the video spoke about the lack of knowledge that they have of their rights as workers and the need to address those issues as well.

Ms Cross—I want to follow on from some of what Michelle was saying. I will be joined by colleagues from the workplace relations part of our department later on, but there are a couple of things that the Australian government is working on in this regard. One is a voluntary national code of practice for young workers that will cover rostering arrangements, training and mentoring and safety for young people at work. We will be working with states and territories and other stakeholders to develop that national code. We are also working on a young workers tool kit which will be distributed to young workers through TAFE, Centrelink and Fair Work Australia offices and online. That will give young people information about the sorts of issues that Michelle was raising—about employment, common questions which are asked and some of the industrial relations issues which they are not otherwise familiar with. When my colleagues are here, they will be happy to outline more of what is happening.

CHAIR—Thanks.

Mr IRONS—I have a question for Mary Hicks, because she was the last one who mentioned the Job Ready Certificate. As an employer—and I have been an employer—it goes back to an assessment of how the Job Ready Certificate works. If I have got an ad in the paper and six people apply and they all have a Job Ready Certificate, how do I differentiate between them? I just go back to the old system, I guess, of their education. The other situation is: if you advertise a position that requires a Job Ready Certificate, are you going to preclude students or people who are available for work from applying because they do not have a Job Ready Certificate? I just want to get your thoughts on that and how the system will work.

Ms Hicks—That is a very good question. I think that is one of the reasons why we will be putting a submission into the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on this issue. It needs to be very carefully thought through. There were two ads in the paper last weekend—one for Brendan O'Connor and one for a senator, looking for staff for their electorates. Both the ads wanted communication and teamwork and those sorts of employability skills. When we talk about a Job Ready Certificate, I suppose there has been concern from employers in the past about minimum standards. Research that we have done in the past indicates that one of the main reasons that employers engage in VET in Schools programs and other work placements and those sorts of things is so that they can teach young people the standards that they think should apply in the workplace.

If you go back to a lot of small and medium enterprises as well as a lot of family-run enterprises, you will find that they are basically concerned with things like: 'Do they look neat; are they respectful in the workplace; are they tidy; will they turn up on time?' Those things cannot be taught in a school system, and they are not things that we are advocating should be taught in a school system. I think in most employers' minds, a job ready certificate would mean those sorts of things. Employers would be looking for things in a person such as: 'Are they going to turn up on time, are they going to do a full day's work?' Maybe we need to have a bit of a think around the term 'job ready certificate' and what sort of message that might convey to an employer and how we can get something along those lines that is really going to be meaningful to the student and to the employer. It is another thing that could be fraught with difficulty where

the intention is very good. The intention is to assist the student and to indicate to an employer that, yes, this person is at a certain standard. We will certainly be giving that more thought and working with the department and the minister to provide some feedback on it.

Mr IRONS—Just to add to that: if every student gets a job ready certificate, it does not differentiate between any other qualifications they have?

Ms Hicks—Yes, I agree that is a problem.

CHAIR—This has obviously generated some interest. I think the challenge is significant for us because, as I have discussed with my local employers, they used to expect to do that when they took on young people. They expected to teach them the work culture and things like that. Nowadays, they expect them to be more productive when they take them on. Certainly in our area, large companies such as BlueScope, the mines, the electricity boards and the railway authorities used to have big intakes of people for entry level jobs, and then the small and medium companies would pick them up when they were to some extent productive. We have lost that. Perhaps we need to find ways to intervene so as to provide that, because it is important.

Ms Tobin—Many years ago, I worked on a project with Richard Sweet, the Career WorkKeys project. Part of what Richard was doing was developing those employability skills. He came up with a way of differentiating between those who have just got their employability skills and those who have got them at a higher level. He worked on a project called the Key Work Skills, which we have reincarnated in a new project that we are doing with Green Skills. Basically, that project was about working with employers to come up with a range within each skills set. Instead of saying, ‘Yes, the young person is punctual,’ it went from a scale of ‘Arrives early, leaves late, makes sure that they get their work done’ to the other extreme of ‘Often late, will not stay to finish a task, often has sick days’—things like that. So, within those 15 key work skills, there was a range. I think that is possibly a solution that could be woven into what you are doing.

Mr Barron—My question is not about that. I want to go back to what Michelle was saying and raise a point of clarification. Michelle, when you were talking about student assistance, were you saying that the reason we should come up with an additional package is so that students do not have to work these alleged long hours, or did I misunderstand you?

CHAIR—I will take that through the chair. I will discourage debate around the table. Michelle, do you want to respond?

Ms Bissett—What I was saying was that, if students are working because they have to work to live, we need to look at the social security system. We need to look at the systems of financial support that we have to families and students to ensure that they are not forced into the workplace out of absolute economic necessity. That is what I was talking you about.

CHAIR—Angelo, did you want to make a comment?

Mr Gavrielatos—Yes. On the discussion arising from the question asked by Mr Steve Irons with respect to the job ready certificate or whatever it may manifest itself in terms of a title, while there is merit in obviously considering the further development of that, I make the point that it involves things that are not easy to deal with. They may be a good sound bite; they may be

a good slogan or a good newspaper banner, but they are complex areas. Do you get a nine out of 10 for loyalty or an eight out of 10 for loyalty? What does that mean—loyalty to whom and under what terms? Do you get an A-E grade for team work? How do you define that? On punctuality, I thought ‘punctual’ was punctual. It is not a bit early; it is not a bit late. It is not being prepared to stay and work for nothing. These are very complex things, which, while worthy of much further consideration, I hope that there is not a predisposition—as there often can be—to embrace them just because they may sound sexy in terms of announcements or pronouncements.

CHAIR—So you are advocating that we stick with the schools and not the values stuff to some extent?

Mr Gavrielatos—Quite frankly—and I think you mentioned this, Sharon—at present and in times past, often what contributes to the best form of learning for young workers and our students in the workplace is employers modelling appropriate behaviours and appropriate work patterns and developing an ethos and a culture in a workplace.

CHAIR—I am conscious that morning tea is here. The discussion is very stimulating, so we might need some caffeine or non-caffeine drinks to keep us going.

Proceedings suspended from 11.32 am to 11.47 am

CHAIR—I should just indicate to participants that not only are we broadcast on the web but we are being recorded for A-Span, the new current affairs channel linked to Sky News. So, if like me, you are keen not to be seen stuffing your face with a muffin during this time, I thought I should let you know that that will be underway. It is a good initiative and I think the fact that they have decided to cover this committee meeting is a recognition of the broader work of the parliament. As I understand it, the first hour has been recorded and will probably be broadcast now. This part of the session will also be recorded to broadcast on that station.

Welcome back to the second part of our session today. As you would be aware from the first few items, we have covered some broad contextual issues around school-work balance, about making both those responsibilities in young people’s lives manageable but also meaningful and about the ways in which we might do that through accreditation and recognition of the multiple involvements in life. Indeed, some of you have mentioned in your submissions and comments the non-paid work they undertake in terms of community service and also community participation. As well as recognising that, we have discussed providing supports to enable them to meaningfully manage that around flexible schooling and enrolment issues, flexible achievement of postsecondary education qualifications or gateway qualifications, if you like.

The next session is identified as assistance and support. You can see that, while that clearly is about some of the payments that are available to young people through study support payments, there is also the opportunity there for us to go back and make the point, which you may have wanted to make—and I am conscious that we were constrained by time and general conversation—about some of those support issues, whether it is in relation to accreditation or physical resourcing.

I welcome you all back. I hope somebody is keen, after the conversations over morning tea, to take the opportunity to address these issues.

Ms Rogers—I want to try to wrap together accreditation alternative approaches into assistance and support, and I will try not to make it too long. I mentioned in my presentation that in South Australia we had quite deliberately moved from a language of raising the school leaving age, and therefore retention in schooling, to raising compulsory education age as a notion of some kind of ongoing provision. So it was more than semantics—a deliberate government commitment and a policy perspective of our department and other departments that we work with—to recognise that penning young people up in school was of no avail.

We are particularly mindful of the work of Richard Teese, who talks about young people wanting to stay at school and/or work in those kinds of combinations for two driving forces, economic benefit and intrinsic benefit. For some young people, working has its intrinsic benefit more than what we sometimes can offer in the benefit of schooling. The kinds of programs we have been talking about have been trying to intervene to keep more young people in productive learning and then into pathways to work and have always been about retention. So the question for us is, ‘For what?’

Some of the research that Katherine referred to was looking at some of the data that spurred the review of our secondary school certificate which said that we were retaining young people because of economic reasons—in other words, they had no jobs to go to—but they were not benefiting from anything and we were penning them up. In fact we were damming them up, because that is what retention walls do. Around Australia we have all made efforts around attainment. In that effort, our board of studies—I can speak from our experiences—have really had to recognise and grapple with the diversity and complexity of young people and the kinds of things they are achieving. Katherine referred to the considerable effort that some of the schools in the case studies made to recognise what young people learned.

In the programs that we put in place, which I referred to briefly, particularly the innovative community action network, we have come to talk about two different things, case management for learning and case management life. They are provided by different kinds of people for different purposes. The first one is the considerable effort that teachers and people from RTOs and people from our board of studies have put in to take a range of different things that people are doing and try to find a place for that to get accreditation. That is the big challenge and the hard work. The other one is the case management for life, which goes into the issue of income support, housing support, personal support, family support and those kinds of things.

Our overriding concern in South Australia—I think I probably could say for all schooling sectors—is: what are young people learning, how is that helping them and how is that helping the economy and society of Australia? So I think we must continually focus our discussions on that rather than on retention and what helps young people hang in there, which is what the discussion has been. We need to always home back in on that.

Mr OAKESHOTT—This relates to the question I asked earlier. In what is a pretty complex area, if you had to benchmark three things as far as whether you as a department and the government are successful in assisting and supporting a successful youth transition, what would you do? If your retention rate is not the way to monitor those things, what is?

Ms Rogers—I will beg for help from other people around the table on this one, but one of the things clearly is monitoring and tracking. People have referred to the On Track survey. One of the things that we as MCEETYA task force, in a former life for a former government, really worked hard on was to have some kind of national system so that we could know what is happening to young people at the individual level. As to the kinds of interventions, the first one is the curriculum—how we can find ways to recognise what students are learning in a national curriculum through the VET sector, or at least at the state level. That means taking the pieces of what they are learning and finding a place for how it fits and how it can be recognised in assessment. That issue also goes to the previous discussion about having levels of complexity in those assessments—for example, employability skills is about recognising that there are levels of complexity but that you still have to get base 1 before you can get to base 2

Then, absolutely, there are different levels of mentoring or case management. I think the Dusseldorp Skills Forum really demonstrated that levels of case management are really important. But there is also the need to be very careful about case management, because that term becomes a catch-all for everything. We need to be clear about the fact that different young people need different things at different times as they progress through their schooling; therefore, we need to have a portfolio of solutions at the right time and the right place for different young people.

We talk a lot about the ‘student at risk’. We know there are categories of young people in Australia who are at more risk than those in other categories—for instance, there are young women in poverty, Indigenous young people and students with disabilities. Apart from those risk groups, there is a range of young people who slip in and out of risk categories and, therefore, we need a number of interacting strategies which will combine all of those I have just talked about. Clearly, none of that happens without very good school, RTO, tertiary sector, industry and local community and local government partnerships—those kinds of partnerships that we have emphasised. The schools cannot do it alone, because a lot of the issues are outside of schooling.

CHAIR—Thank you. Ms Tobin, would you like to make a comment here?

Ms Tobin—Thank you. I want to reinforce Tanya’s comments about the types of support required in order for young people to make successful transitions. Our experience has been that school based mentoring is a very effective strategy if you start at the right point. Programs like Plan-It Youth and various other programs around the country which support young people in their decisions about what they want to go into and which help them make those transitions are very effective. Another is the idea of the transition broker or support worker, or whatever you want to call them. This is somebody who will work with the young person and be the sole contact who will follow up to see whether they have achieved what they wanted to achieve. So the young person might have an appointment for an interview at TAFE. Did they go? What was the outcome? This person is the transition broker who will support them in doing those things and who will provide the other connections that they need in order to make those successful transitions. The Whittlesea Youth commitment in northern Melbourne has just celebrated 10 years of doing that kind of work and they have made a huge difference by introducing the notion of transition brokerage.

CHAIR—That is interesting, because the presumption that parents have the negotiation skills is profoundly flawed. Even parents in employment and in reasonably good socioeconomic

families often reflect a single experience of the workforce. There are often generations of families in an industry or type of work, and if you have a young person who wants to do something outside of that industry they do not have the knowledge or the networks. That brokerage type of arrangement is interesting.

Ms Tobin—And the federal and state and whatever other benefits that are available to those young people can all be coordinated through a transition broker so that they get the best support and advice that they can get.

Prof. Keating—There are just a couple of contextual factors here in terms of the issue of support, and what has been described is obviously fairly expensive. Australia has arguably the most highly school centric model of provision for this age group that we are talking about. Of those students in full-time education at age 17 something like 96½ per cent are in schools, if you take out those in full-time university. There has been some movement towards TAFE but it has been very small despite lots of talk about it over the years.

As for the issue of resources, which Angelo and others have raised, in some ways it is somewhat inaccurate. In fact of all the areas of education and training in Australia over the last decade or more that have had increases in resources, it is probably in secondary education and there have been really increases there compared with the university sector and TAFE, which have had real decreases. Those real increases have both been in public and private education.

But at the same time we have had a very high increase in the rate of private investment particularly in secondary schooling in two forms: non-government school fees and also in voluntary fees in government schools. In Victoria, for example, in secondary education the fees are now about eight per cent of revenue. Clearly, they are not distributed evenly across schools. Both patterns of public investment and private investment have gone to the schools that are not dealing with the sorts of students we are talking about, on the whole.

There is another contextual factor which we need to take into account as well. Over the last 20 years particularly in the large states—Victoria and New South Wales—there has been a very strong trend of bipolarisation of high-socioeconomic students into large schools and a corresponding movement of low-SES students, who have a much higher concentration of needs we are talking about, into small schools. So we have a pattern of the schools that we are talking about in the highly school centric model that most need to deal with these kids being least equipped to do so because their overall resources level at best is about average—in fact, on the whole, it is a little bit less than average—but they do not have the economies of scale that Brian and others referred to before to deal with this. If you are talking about these programs you have also got to talk about the resources, and the idea of just tipping more money in, particularly in the current economic climate, will have its limits. You are going to have to address the structural issues as well.

Ms Cross—Going back to the question of the benchmarks for support in this area and picking up on the concept of students who are at risk of poor outcomes from schooling, I think that that often happens very early in schooling. As for the idea that a lot of what we are talking about is in the senior secondary years of schooling, it is important to understand that it is actually a lot earlier than that that you often need to intervene. One of the biggest predictors of a student's outcomes is their literacy and numeracy level and often the biggest transition issues arise moving

from primary school to secondary school. So there is a lot that you can do with at-risk students before they are in years 9, 10, 11 and 12.

The other thing I would add and it picks up on comments other people have made is the importance of individual learning plans for the students and their need to have access to good career development initiatives so that they can make informed career decisions. A lot of what needs to be done to improve transition and outcomes from schooling has to start quite early with that individual career planning and individual support for students particularly the ones that are at risk.

Mr OAKESHOTT—In response, I was trying to place some boundaries on what success is in what we are talking about and how all of you, as the experts, define that and then monitor and track your own performance and the performance of us all. I am still not quite clear what that answer is.

CHAIR—I am very conscious of not wanting the inquiry to slip into a ‘what do we do with at-risk kids’ discussion. Of itself, I think that is problematic. There is a clearly a component of it that we are looking at. About 52 per cent of kids who work and balance school are not at-risk kids, so I ask you to keep that in mind. I think we all carry in our hearts such a concern for those at the very hard edge that sometimes we can slip our whole conversation into that. As well, recognising that this is a generational problem, I hope, destigmatises some of the issues that we are dealing with. I was interested that in their submissions some people made some observations about young people taking gap years and so forth to qualify for income support and things like that. I am interested to know if you have some observations about how that operates: whether there are inequities, whether it creates problems and whether it is a good thing. Is there anybody who has looked particularly at that issue of students’ decision making?

Prof. Vickers—I have had a bit of a look at the youth allowance issues in preparing for this session, and someone in DEEWR has actually done an allowance—and maybe you could comment on it, Rebecca. A rather large proportion of total youth allowance revenues seem to go to young people who come from families that are quite well disposed and could easily be covering the living costs of those young people. I am referring to people who are in tertiary study. So that is an issue if you are looking at where we are going to get the resources from to cover some of the issues that we are dealing with. The other side of it, which I think is really critical, is that we have approximately 50 per cent of all 15-year-olds and over in high schools in work, and that means it is cutting across all groups. In fact, if you ask the question, ‘Who is working?’ you find it is equally distributed by SES background. So you have a lot of anxious people who are not poor whose kids are doing a lot of juggling. Maybe the parents are not aware of that, so we keep it at that level of looking at it as a general issue. But if you look at the students who are eligible for youth allowance in school, the activity test requires that they are completing at a 75 per cent rate. If they take three years to do years 11 and 12, they are not completing at 75 per cent rate, so that is an issue that needs to be looked at. There is a way around it, because if an activity is defined as a school endorsed and school accepted combination of study and work then it can sit inside the youth allowance activity test. That creates another reason for schools and employers to engage in intergenerational compact arrangements where the different stakeholders are genuinely operating together because it ties in with this youth allowance issue.

CHAIR—Thanks, Margaret. Do others have experience with that?

Dr McKenzie—As to the deferrals, the gap year issue, the Victorian On Track study has some interesting data. Last year around 11 per cent of year 12 completers or their equivalent in April-May said that they had deferred taking up a tertiary place. This proportion had pretty much doubled since around 2003. So they are pretty big numbers: one in 10 of those who were offered a place were saying that they are not taking one up immediately.

Not surprisingly perhaps, it is much higher in rural and regional areas. I think the average for Victoria was well over 15 per cent in those locations compared to seven or eight per cent in metropolitan Melbourne. The reasons given by those young people in rural and remote areas were largely to do with questions of accessibility of study options and needing to save enough money or to qualify for financial support for tertiary study later on.

What are the deferees doing? Ninety per cent of them are working. There was a time, I think, when deferring—the gap year—was more the classic UK gap year of relatively well-off young people—

CHAIR—The continental tour.

Dr McKenzie—getting experience somewhere else. I think that is no longer the case. There is an element of that, but it is much more mainstream now. Some work by John Polesel from Melbourne university looking at following through the deferees indicated that around 80 per cent of them do eventually take up a tertiary place but often not in the place that they have deferred from. Part of the experience seems to be that they change their ideas about what they may want to do—partly from that experience of taking at least a year away from study.

CHAIR—Would people like to comment? It is interesting information and I think it reflects the fact that many of us would anecdotally know that time off is actually a really beneficial thing sometimes at that point in life. But does it have implications that create problems that we could look at identifying and addressing?

Ms Shannon—To just follow up on the question about whether young people are taking a gap year to be able to establish their financial independence and therefore access youth allowance, I would just refer to the fact that this was one of the issues that was examined in the Bradley review into higher education. Certainly the conclusion of the panel there was that the need to establish independence in that way might suggest that youth allowance was perhaps being received by some young people from relatively higher income families. The review's report certainly questioned that and made a recommendation in relation to whether or not some of those criteria might be removed. At the same time, though, the report also made a recommendation that the age of independence for youth allowance might also be lowered. So clearly there would be some transferability between some young people who need to establish their independence through going out to work and those actually attaining an age that would qualify them for youth allowance in their own right. Certainly that report and that recommendation are things that the government is considering.

CHAIR—The thing that worries me with the conversation is that young people might genuinely take a year off because they want to experience something else and earn some extra

money. If they are from one of those families, the thought that going back to university means they are no longer independent—they have to go back to their parents and ask for support—may actually discourage them from doing exactly that. Is that aspect considered in that?

Ms Shannon—I do not know that the Bradley review made any comments about whether that would change young people's behaviour. I think that the issue is essentially one of balancing relative need. Because we have a targeted income support system and there is, in the student income support space in particular, an expectation that parents, young people and the government each play a role in trying to support young people in their studies, there are decisions that have to be made about where effort is targeted and where assistance is most appropriately received. One of the other related recommendations in the Bradley review is to examine the parental income test thresholds and the operation of the parental income test more broadly for youth allowance. If the government were to adopt those sorts of recommendations, that would actually extend access to youth allowance to a range of families who fall just over the line at the moment in what is a fairly tightly targeted set of arrangements. It would also mean that some young people and their families who are receiving a part rate of youth allowance at the moment might actually receive more youth allowance. Those recommendations are not without considerable cost, as the review points out. Part of that balancing and targeting of assistance is to look at whether or not the independence criteria are subverting to some degree the targeted nature of the payment.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You might be able to enlighten me a bit more in relation to that. Several times in this parliament over the last few years the issue of people taking a gap year and the youth allowance has been discussed. If you look at students who come from rural and regional Australia—and I am not necessarily talking about the totally isolated areas—who come from families that are relatively well off, there is the added discriminatory effect that they have to move away to study. That is a question of accessibility. That means that it could end up being a \$10,000, \$12,000 or \$15,000 difference between living in rural and regional Australia and urban Australia—discrimination. That should be factored in when we are looking at the income test. I know that that is a government policy issue, but I would be interested in some of your views on this. I know that it affects a lot of families, and yet it is sometimes dubbed as middle class welfare. Many families find it too difficult, and so do kids. So they defer and defer and defer. I am interested in that.

CHAIR—I suppose that you have touched on an aspect that I want us to keep in mind. We are not branching now into postcompulsory education income support. The reason that this links in to the school inquiry that we have is that if we are talking about extending the period of time in which young people can get their final qualification and providing different pathways then some of these issues might play into that. Some submissions raised concerns about part-time work. Young people get a foot in the door and need some time off from study because they know that they have a job and that then might qualify them for youth allowance and so forth. They might be thinking about going back to a re-entry school or TAFE or some where like that to do their HSC or equivalent—and pardon my New South Wales bias. We need to see whether they do that and look at some of the issues around once they become independent and earning an income to see if there are barriers to deciding to go back. I think 23 is the current age for independence.

Ms Shannon—It is 25.

CHAIR—It is still 25—okay. Did some people want to make some comments about that?

Mrs Potter—I understand that this is a school to work committee, but the fact that we are undergoing education reform means that we have to look at the whole pathway, journey or whatever you want to call it of the learner. When we talk about the income support, whether you are 15, 25 or 35, that is still a noted barrier to going back into further education and training. I suppose that I would like to see this committee do its work in the context of looking at a learner going through life in various roles and moving about. Then it should look at all the policies—funding policies as well as regulatory policies—that are possible barriers to people being able to access the education and training that they really need.

Prof. Keating—To try and answer the question about rural students, following up from Phil's point, there is a similar survey in Queensland, the On Track survey. The deferral rate is nine per cent there, so it is below the Victorian rate. It also appears that the gap between the city and the non-metropolitan regions is less. In some areas, such as Townsville, it is actually about the same—in fact, Townsville might even be a little bit below that. There is also a lower percentage of students from outside of the city being in part-time work compared with metropolitan students. That is as you would expect. The reason is, I assume, that they are moving to the city and do not have the network, so it takes them a while to get part-time work. Once again, in Townsville, we found that the percentage of tertiary students in part-time work was much the same for both groups. With this question, there is the issue of whether part-time work then becomes a substitute for youth allowance or conversely whether the youth allowance is a substitute for those students who find it hard to get part-time work. I do not know what the answers to those questions are, but they are worth looking into.

CHAIR—It is interesting—the intersection between state and federal jurisdictions. I am conscious of a young lady I know who wanted to enrol in TAFE to do a course having to go back and do her HSC. Having not got Youth Allowance, she had to pay the fee until she got the Youth Allowance, when she could apply to have the fee refunded. So some of those intersections affect young people when we are talking about broadening what can be included as a compulsory schooling qualification. I know some of you in your submissions identify some real practical issues around the challenges students are trying to manage between costs and support provisions and so forth. Robyn, did you want to start us off?

Ms Shannon—I have a bit of information which might be helpful in the discussion in terms of the number of young people aged 15 or older who are completing secondary schooling. There are approximately 97,000 young people who receive Youth Allowance as students completing school. I guess some analysis of our data would suggest that around 23 per cent of those young people actually recorded earned income or reported that they had income from earnings as of June 2008. Obviously that is a skewed sample because I can only tell you about young people receiving Youth Allowance, but in terms of, if you like, youth from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds, because by definition they come from low-income families, that gives you a sense of the proportion who are actually undertaking part-time work in combination with study.

The department has done a bit of analysis of looking at young people who recorded earned income at age 16 and 17 to see what we might be able to say about their longer-term outcomes from an income support perspective. The data indicates that those who did combine some part-time work with study generally had better outcomes than young people who did not do that part-

time work. Again it is probably a bit of a self-selecting sample to some degree, young people who have perhaps better connections through parents or social networks to employment opportunities or perhaps have a bit more initiative or whatever the case may be, personal characteristics. But, for example, we know that for those who combined work and study when they were 17 they were more likely to not be receiving income support five years later, they were more likely to take up post-secondary study and receive a continuation of student income support and they were less likely to be particularly on unemployment benefits. So I guess it gives us a bit of a sense that for some of these young people the combination of part-time work and study can assist in their transition, certainly in terms of their welfare reliance five years out from that point in time.

CHAIR—The other interesting thing, Robyn, is that you have identified that a quarter of them are actually combining earned money with income support and so clearly it is not an either-or situation for many young people. I have to say that I do not think we make it any easier for them. My electorate office regularly deals with people trying to deal with our bureaucratic requirements for reporting earned income when you are on income support. So for young people it is probably a real challenge. Are there other particular aspects of the support? I am conscious that you might also want to talk about mentoring and advice and the funding and supply of that.

Mr Gavrielatos—In respect of the statistics and figures just provided to us by the officer from DEEWR, are those figures broken down by way of geography and location? If it is only 23 per cent of those 97,000 students who are receiving Youth Allowance that are involved in some form of work, I would imagine that many who are not might not be able to access any work because of geographical factors such as isolation, rural remoteness, or even work opportunities within urban environments as well.

CHAIR—I might ask the department whether that more detailed analysis is available.

Ms Shannon—We have not done a geographical analysis but I can undertake to have a look and see whether we can at least do a split by metropolitan, regional and remote.

CHAIR—Gender would be interesting as well. One of my observations is that because entry-level retail and hospitality tend to like younger women as workers rather than younger men, that often at that point there is a split as well. Certainly in my area I am very conscious of that. Pimply, gangly guys at 15 or 16 are generally not seen as meeting front of office criteria.

Prof. Vickers—I have a question about the youth allowance which Robyn might be able to help us with. It is a concern that I have in relation to young people who live in rural areas and who, as this economic downturn looms, will find it more and more difficult to find any paid employment. There are many small country towns in which this is difficult, and we know that experience of part-time employment is important for future employment, as you have already pointed out. One thing that happens is that, even though they may be under the age of 18, if they are really turned off school and there is no local employment available, the youth allowance in effect becomes an unemployment benefit.

One of the things that I am interested in the committee looking at is the sort of arrangement that exists, for example, in Victoria through community based VCAL, where you have what is, in effect, a non-school provider providing an alternative year 11-12 program where students

could meet the eligibility requirements for youth allowance by being in that program, as distinct from simply being at home and collecting youth allowance as an unemployment benefit. I suppose I have actually partly answered my question: yes, it is possible but what would be the procedures for encouraging a greater use of that approach—because we will see a lot of rural youth basically collecting UB?

CHAIR—So, broadly, if we are asking schools in our system to be more flexible in dealing with this, we also need to look at how our income support—which can be quite prescriptive in what will qualify and so forth—becoming more flexible?

Prof. Vickers—Yes, I think there is that, and I think there is also an all-of-government issue where you look at municipal councils receiving special grants to do infrastructure work in the context of the economic downturn who may in fact target school-age students through some program like community based VCAL. Some states do not have anything like VCAL and therefore cannot run non-school provider programs, because they do not have the structures do so.

CHAIR—So targeted employment subsidies as well to encourage engagement with young people?

Prof. Vickers—Yes.

CHAIR—Thanks. I will not ask the department to respond to that. Mr O’Neill, did you wish to add something?

Mr O’Neill—In talking about youth allowance et cetera, I was just wondering if there is any data on students who are on a disability support pension. Are we aware of how many of them are out there in the schools? Are we aware of the implications for a lot of those people who are on a DSP or things like that in relation to the fact that quite a few of them are from low socioeconomic circumstances and there are added imposts upon the families because quite a few of the local governments and housing authorities deem that as assessable income in relation to requirements for public renting and public housing rents. It has been my experience through my dealings at the local school level that that happens a bit more than what we actually realise. I am wondering what that sort of impact is and what other things we need to do to get students with disabilities through their schooling and then into the workplace—the added effort that it requires to get some of these people into a meaningful occupation.

CHAIR—You have touched on a huge area which we really have not discussed today; that is, the transition through schooling for young people with disabilities. Certainly the way that income interrelates with that is a challenge. I understand from providers in my own area with transition programs that it is easing and getting a bit more realistic in terms of providing support and places and taking caps off places and things like that, but it is absolutely a significant area. I am hoping that there is some combined brain power around the table and others might have some contributions and suggestions.

Mr Burton—I would like to take a slightly different perspective. There has been a lot of discussion about the support required for educational and training providers and for the individuals participating to make the school and work balance function. If the support to ensure

that the work that students do is not part of the development process, there is a risk that all of that support really is simply a subsidy to an industry that cannot compete in the labour market. I think it is really in focus when you look at the industries that attract the students to come and work in them. I speak mostly of hospitality. I do not pretend to speak for retail, but they are not industries, by and large, that I would say value skills and career development in and of themselves. They do not invest in their own industries, whether they be student workers or otherwise. They have business models that are predicated on a high turnover of low-age workers. So to just expect for those employers, particularly small to medium employers, to invest the time and resources necessary to make sure that the work experience has a development component to it is, I think, a dangerous expectation. Whether there is general support for making students job ready for careers, if it is not a direct benefit to the employers employing those people, they are not going to invest the resources to consider, when they are rostering and giving work allocations, that they are not putting some 16-year-old on to flip hamburgers for 12 months and that there is a development practice there. Our experience with hospitality is that, unless there is a regulatory stick or a commercial carrot to ensure that that happens, it is probably not going to. As uncomfortable as saying it makes me, part of the support for the process needs to be delivered to the employers rather than to the educational providers or to the students directly; otherwise the development component of the work will not be there.

CHAIR—I think that is a very pertinent comment in the current circumstances. Those who are seeking to place young people, either in paid part-time work, as parents might be doing, or in work experience type options and so forth, can get increasingly desperate to get those positions and will perhaps make compromises. I am aware of a student enrolled in an apprenticeship at an ATC who was working extraordinary hours, and the parents and trainers were too intimidated, because of the desperation to get a spot for the student, to address that. There are some issues around what is expected—the employer might say, ‘I wanted an apprentice; these are the hours.’ So, yes, I think it is particularly timely to be addressing that issue.

Mr Bullock—I endorse what my colleague from the LHMWU has said, but I think there is an extra point to add. What often concerns us is that people finish up in work experience positions or in part-time positions and do not get any effective training, as Troy just said. But one of the reasons for that is that there is no effective monitoring or supervision at any level to ensure that those things happen. Too often we see young people put out in the workforce and there is an assumption that everything will be okay. There are lots of good employers out there who do the right thing, but there are also lots who do not.

CHAIR—Yes, you think of the young person who is a petrol station attendant, for example, and often by themselves for hours. I am certainly conscious of that in my own area. Who is going to supervise and monitor what they are doing? I want to put a rider into the conversation in that the committee in discussing this is not necessarily presuming that if you do part-time work you will be required to monitor your skills development and record and report it. It is more looking at the opportunities for doing that. I think it is important that we understand that, because we do not want to be putting employers off young people as employees or putting young people off who just want to do a part-time job and buy an iPod, not tested and marked and reported upon. We are not looking at that sort of perspective but at the young person who does want to and the employer who is able to.

Mr Gavrielatos—A quick reference to the question about transition to work amongst students with disabilities: if I am not mistaken, there was an inquiry, conducted by either Minister O'Connor or Parliamentary Secretary Shorten, looking at programs aimed at the transition of people with disabilities into work. It might assist the committee to look at the submission we put in and, I am sure, those of others about the good work that is occurring in some of our special schools settings in an attempt to make students with disabilities work-ready. It is a very resource-intensive operation, and there are some very good models that should be considered for expansion by the government beyond this committee as part of that ongoing work.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. It is certainly a good reminder about that current inquiry. As any chair of these inquiries and as many of you giving evidence in previous inquiries will have found, it can grow and grow to 'the answer to every problem in education' type of thing. We are quite keen not to do that, but the particular aspect of the disabilities transition inquiry is well worth it. If people have put submissions into that, you might like to think of doubling those over to us as well. While submission dates have closed, we are going to continue to take submissions, so that would be very useful to the committee.

Ms Hicks—Before we leave this area, I would like to make a general point about the type of support that students receive. There is absolutely no doubt about the role of mentoring and how important that is, and I think we need to be exploring innovative ways of entering mentoring into the whole equation. I know there is the trade mentor program that the government has introduced. I will give you one quick example from Queensland, where a person was employed. This was for a group of apprentices. It was not to provide advice on skills; they just sat outside the classroom. They were able to achieve a 98 per cent retention rate just by having a person sitting outside to talk to the students, not about anything in particular but just what was on their minds. I think the value of mentoring cannot be overstated.

The other thing which is of critical importance during transition times—and our advice to the government regarding the economic downturn—is that there should be consideration given to appropriate career development intervention. It is something that perhaps older generations are not au fait with. I think most people sitting around the table probably fell by serendipity or whatever means into the roles that they are currently undertaking, but it is very important, when we are thinking about planning and giving people the best possible assistance that we can give them, to look at career development as a lifelong thing, particularly during critical times of transition. There is a whole other inquiry in that area, but we certainly consider that to be something which we would like to see the government actively considering.

CHAIR—That is very useful. I think someone was talking about the year 10 assessment, and I was sitting there at the time thinking how many parents there would be who say, 'If you don't get a job over the Christmas break, you're going back to year 11.' There are those reluctant returners in year 11 who are desperately trying to find a job along the way to withdraw from study. Some of the submissions talked about that critical point and how we spend a lot of time discussing subject choices and things in years 10 to 11 but not a lot of time discussing how that links to longer-term options or other pathways. I think it is very useful to recognise those critical intervention points and how we might best resource that advice.

Mrs Tobin—By way of information, Dusseldorp Skills Forum is in the final stages of preparing a report on school based mentoring and what resourcing it needs from the federal

government. As previous speakers just said, we really recognise the value of school based mentoring. You have a captive audience of young people who are there. They are happy to work with somebody that can give them those connections out into the community, because many young people do not have those connections in the community. They do not know anybody that can help get them a job. A mentor can be the one person that does that.

Ms Gould—Just picking up on the mentoring, there is absolutely no question about student mentoring but there is also the support that a lot of employers need. I know we are not talking about students at educational risk, but if there are challenging students in the workplace many employers are not trained to cope with them. In WA we have an Aboriginal school of 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds—about 60 kids—who are out in the workplace one day a week. There is a teacher that visits for a couple of hours each time they are out there, and that is to make sure that things go well and everything does not go fairly pear shaped and they therefore lose the employer. It is about that support to employers because they may think they are getting someone who knows all the rules and regulations but, in reality, often they do not. So it is that support as well.

CHAIR—Or, as you indicated, if there is a problem they do not have the skills and knowledge to intervene with the young person to address it rather than just saying, ‘Sorry, don’t come back again.’

Ms Gould—Absolutely, because you want to preserve those employers.

Mr Robertson—Just as a comment and to build upon what we presented this morning, I totally endorse the view about mentoring. We believe that has been one of the key aspects that have led to some success we think we have enjoyed with our Healthy Futures program. The other aspect that we are finding in our limited sample is working for us is that we have deliberately tried to target industries where there is some demand. Certainly we have not had that footprint within the local area. We have also tried to build in that higher order and higher level articulation. We mentioned Healthy Futures this morning where we managed to build the articulation through with TAFE and university and students leaving their program with certificate IIIs.

The other area we have moved into has been accounting. We are doing that through a blended delivery model, again with TAFE and some university interest, particularly through QUT. We have expanded that program now to some 350 to 380 students across 17 schools. We are also in conversation with the Institute of Chartered Accountants and others who are prepared now to take students coming out of those programs. We are currently working with the Queensland Police Service on justice studies and, as a subset of that, Indigenous justice studies, which will be pilot program we are starting this year to give young Indigenous students career prospects and opportunities through the justice and legal related areas and fields. So the issues we have had have been areas of demand, high-level pathways that can be articulated through and also significant partners who really have some employment and industry demands.

CHAIR—I know in my own area in health and emergency services the ambulance officers have a similar program running with young Indigenous people. You are quite right to identify that. Tom mentioned the percentage of careers that these young people will be looking at that do not even exist or have structures around them now, so we should not limit our thinking only to

the traditional pathways. In fact, in my area a lot of middle-class people cannot get their kids through to year 12 because they are creative sector dropouts—kids who have a whole different perspective on creative types of activities. They are musicians or artists, they are often quite independent thinkers and they are finding the options and pathways not appropriate for them as well. So I think it is important to remind us about the concept of the higher order aim for those pathways.

Because we have touched on that we might segue neatly into the last session for our last 15 minutes. I am going to be fairly broad here, so if there is something you really want to put on the table and have not had a chance to do so, please indicate you want to speak and I will try not to be too strict on the topic areas. I also indicate that if there is anything you want to explore in more detail or something you would like the committee to look at, please let us know because this is just the first of a series of open inquiry sessions and we will be happy to do that. So we will continue from Tom's comments and broaden it out a bit, if people want to speak.

Mr Barron—To paraphrase the Prime Minister: mentoring, pastoral care and navigation, on behalf of employers, are the 'DNA' of group training organisations. But it is very resource intensive. On the issue of pathways in schools, the key word is how 'effective' they are. Some clearly are very effective. School based apprenticeship pathways have obviously been very effective, but again they are resource intensive. I think the best pathways are ones that start with an idea in mind and finish with a concrete conclusion—for example, VET in Schools, try a trade, school based apprenticeship, leave the school and finish the trade. That is a genuine pathway out of school. Too often, though, the pathways are more hopscotches, or roundabouts, in that they do not lead anywhere. I sincerely hope that the infrastructure provided by the trade training centres in schools will create pathways, not just one-off visitations to a particular area of interest. Tanya raised a very important point a while ago. She said that, in her program, they were looking at creating parity between all versions of the school curriculum. I would like to ask Tanya how she actually does that. Clearly, part of effectiveness is promotion of the pathway, and I think we still have a long way to go to effectively promote the alternative pathways in a lot of school systems.

CHAIR—Absolutely, Jim. In fact, if people do not even understand them—which I think is where we are at the moment—it is even harder to promote something until there is an actual understanding of what they are. So you are spot on.

Mrs Potter—I want to pick up on Jim's point about pathways. We have been discussing this recently. We have to be careful with pathways that they are not funnels that lock people into areas. Our colleague Mark made a comment about the constant changing. Also, with an unstable economy, we are going to have a lot of people who will become unemployed, maybe for the first time in their life. My other point is that we need to have multiple entry points but at the same time develop individuals who can recognise what their skills and the best way for them to learn further and have portability. Obviously we have a recognised framework in employability skills, which they can use to build on. They can take that with them to a different job. At morning tea we discussed the fact that there are probably a lot of teachers in this room who are not teaching, yet we are all doing good jobs. We have taken our skills elsewhere and learnt and added on to them. If we can do this with a lot of young people coming through now and allow that ability to hopscotch then that is okay, so long as you can have that portfolio and recognise it. Going right back to my very first point: in our workforce, schools and RTOs we lack people who are equipped to help, recognise and quality assure learning. We really need to invest in that. We

cannot have one career person, one VET person, in a school. We cannot have one workplace trainer who assesses in workplaces. It has to be a team approach and we need to invest in the people who are doing that particular job.

Prof. Keating—I think something the committee should endeavour to address—and this will be a very tough assignment—is the broad question of the curriculum. I think Margaret first raised this and it has been referred to in various ways throughout the discussion. What I mean by that is a very broad point. There is a lot of talk about generic skills, work schools et cetera. The history of the credentialing of them is very poor. It is 17 years since the Mayer report on key competencies. They were never successfully embedded in the school curriculum. There was a lot of resistance to them but there were also design problems—how do you do it? I go back to Angelo's point about that. The international experience is very weak as well. Personally, I feel that unless key competencies are somehow embedded in what schools do—and you have to think about the role of schools; schools have a particular role; they are not a basis for all learning, which is largely about knowledge, which the national curriculum exercise is demonstrating—then they will not get anywhere. That is the first challenge.

The second area is that, as I said before, Australia has a very school-centric model and it is dominated by the academic qualifications—arguably as much as any other OECD country. Correspondingly, the vocational curriculum comes from the VET sector, which is designed on an industrial training model. In its genesis it did not include the school sector; it was not seen as part of it. Now we are trying to bring the two together. The array of things around the country, including VET in schools, on the whole is weak. VET in schools, on the whole, is one subject in year 11 for a bit less than half the kids. If you are now trying to bring in the question of recognising the part-time work the students are doing, it has to be addressed in a mainstream rather than a peripheral fashion; otherwise we will have the certificate of work readiness, VCAL, key competencies, transferable skills et cetera, which, as Brian said, will all be in the shadow of this academic curriculum. There, I think, is a big challenge for the committee. If it can get its head around that, it will do a good job.

CHAIR—I absolutely endorse that. Having taught English in secondary school and then taught communications at TAFE, I found that it was one of the key experiences in my life. Communications are high-order skills, highly valued in our workplaces, yet I do not think I had ever really taught them as an English teacher in school, because the curriculum was not designed around them in that way; it was designed around literary assessment and so forth—which is valuable in itself. But, yes, I think there are some real challenges for us there in the curriculum implications—you are absolutely right—and therefore there is standard and increased recognition of some of those skill and knowledge areas.

Dr McKenzie—I have two points. The first one is that, because the part-time working experience has become the common experience for the majority of students, there is a very diverse group of young people engaged and a very diverse group of workplaces they are working in—a very diverse group of employers. We have to be cautious about generalisations. Our work suggests that for the great majority of young people the part-time job is a very positive experience. We know there are problems for some with adversely affecting school outcomes, but as a public policy position you do not want the solution to the problems of a minority to, if you like, jeopardise the benefits for the majority, including by making it harder for employers to take on young people. Personally I think it is good that in Australia we have relatively low barriers to

part-time work for youth. Working is a very positive experience in the main, as long as it is not an unreasonable number of hours or in an exploitative situation.

The second general point is more looking forward to after the inquiry—about the inquiry ensuring that its recommendations are taken up, monitored and evaluated and that there is feedback. We have a lot of inquiries in Australia in this field. Some of you would remember the big *Footprints to the future* inquiry in 2001, which, I have to say, canvassed much of this territory pretty well. A number of those recommendations were taken up and followed through, but many were not, so part of your thinking needs to be about ensuring ongoing success in this area.

CHAIR—That is why, in my experience, I am very determined to be very specific about what we are looking at and what we are recommending on. I think one of the inherent dangers is that you can feel pressured to take on the whole plethora of issues in a field of inquiry and then have to make a whole plethora of recommendations across it. We are particularly keen to look at the angle and aspect about the 52 per cent who are combining school and work and what it is that you have to put around that to make it meaningful, valuable and more integrated and to address some of the problems that might arise from it. So I think it is important to recognise that. Nobody is more conscious than my colleagues and I, as we take time away from our electorates to travel around the country to look at things, that we want them to be meaningful. That is a very pertinent point, and my response is that I think the answer to that is to be very specific about what you are looking at and to make very specific recommendations.

Ms O'Hara—We should reinforce the importance of curriculum in terms of the priorities it sets, the messages it gives and the barriers it sets up. We have a national curriculum council for schools and colleges that is now looking at English, maths, history and science, and the committee might like to influence whether it also looks at employability skills and other broader outcomes. The second point is that I think the notion of combining school and work is more about combining learning and work. The notion that we are school centric is more in the language we use than in the actuality on the ground. I think that what we traditionally call postcompulsory school providers are very much in there as part of the solution in partnerships with schools and separately in terms of engaging young people in an incredibly flexible and diverse range of ways. TAFE systems in every state have set up programs and structures in order to accommodate school-age people for whom school is not the best option. They are not youth at risk necessarily and they are not dropouts; it is just a group of learners and some of them are artistic people for whom school is not the best option. We have vocational colleges and technical colleges across the country that are doing the most incredibly diverse and flexible things, so I think that the notion that there are schools and work is too limited in terms of language. I think that the other sectors in the partnerships are the key to the solution.

CHAIR—That is an interesting observation. The other thing young people say to me is that they go to TAFE because it is more flexible in managing a work-learning balance. They look for TAFE options quite often for that reason—and other providers.

Ms Bannan—I want to spend a few moments contextualising for the committee some of the issues facing remote and isolated students. It has been touched on a couple of times. The challenges that are presented to those groups often mean that the types of things that we have discussed here this morning run parallel to what is happening in those locations. The extreme

cost of delivery and assessment, the problems in recruiting and retaining quality staff, continuity and any sort of pathway preparation are often simply not happening in these communities. As an aside, I would like you to understand that, with regard to Aboriginal communities, a lot of cultural learning takes place and, because of the cultural appropriateness of this learning, we may not actually be able to capture the assessment data. I think this has to be taken into consideration when national programs of capacity building or intervention are designed, because the problems that are faced by the students are often not addressed by the capacity building programs. As an example, students might have to travel three or four hours to get to some training, which means that they have to travel for three or four hours to get home again. Transport and accommodation simply are not built into these projects.

Another thing I would like you to consider is that young people who do not have a pathway have extremely limited access to mentoring, workplace experience and real jobs. They are aware that there are a number of programs in place for them, but there is a confusing array of programs, and I would suggest that perhaps a single badging, with a range of products and services under that single badging, might streamline the process for them a lot better. Also, in the middle years in my region, quality career development is taking a high priority but, especially in Indigenous communities, I would suggest that these sorts of career pathways development discussions really do need to be accessed by students at a much earlier age.

Mr Burgess—I want to make a couple of comments on schools. We have talked a lot about the things that schools should be doing, but what actually drives a school's behaviour and what reasons do they have for putting in place the courses that they have? I think there are a few things that drive this. In the Victorian reporting mechanism, all sorts of things are published in the areas that the federal government is talking about at the moment—where we have retention rates and destination. But what are actually published in the paper are the median study scores. That is what we actually look at. So the breadth of information that we have is not really used very well. In terms of driving a school's behaviour, if you are in the leafy green suburbs what drives your behaviour is the median study score. It is not your retention rate. And speaking of retention rates, we mentioned earlier about how limited that is. My schools are judged on their retention rates as far as the department goes, and then we have a very narrow definition of real and actual retention rates. So I think we need to be conscious of what incentives need to be put in place in order to give a school an incentive to change their behaviour, and if we do not think about that then—

CHAIR—Before you move on, can I ask about that? If you are judged on retention rates, would that be a disincentive for the school to organise alternative pathways?

Mr Burgess—Yes, it is.

CHAIR—Because you are creating a retention rate for somebody else?

Mr Burgess—The school that I was principal of had a low SES so a lot of kids would get work in year 11 and year 12, and often if those kids got a job we thought we had done well. But in terms of how my school looked, it did not look good. So I think we need to think about the incentives that are driving schools to make these sorts of decisions. And you can have it working the other way in that I know that the schools in the leafy green suburbs will not have VCAL programs because they do not think they are the sorts of kids that they want. Is that appropriate?

I think we should be demanding more of our schools and certainly, whilst I am speaking as part of the government system, in the private system it works even more. So my point is that we need to consider the drivers that form the decision-making process for schools.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. We have one more speaker. I will say to speakers that if you leave the room and you do what I do and cogitate over what you have said and think, ‘Why didn’t I make that point?’ or, ‘Why didn’t I raise that issue?’ please keep the conversation going.

Ms Buckley—I would like to make a comment about the pathways and talk about the school to work issue, and how if it is embedded or included in curriculum it becomes more meaningful. With our Healthy Futures program—which is only one of a range of programs we have but I will refer to that industry area—the students eventually, after a strong preparation phase, are enrolled in a certificate III. This could be in allied health or as a nurse care assistant or some other certificate course where the organisation has identified it wants students in a particular area. The students can range from OP students or students who are university bound and they actually want to be a nurse. So they use this experience to build their portfolio and, because of the relationships we are building up with the universities, they can now articulate straight to ACU—and we are in discussions with UQ about articulating straight into the nursing program—if they successfully achieve their certificate III and gain a pass in senior English. We are trying to break the barrier down between VET and academic learning because it is really just different types of learning, and students are getting exposed to those different learning styles and what is possible. The workplace is being exposed to it as well. So we are hoping that we are having success there.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. We might wind up there. I will say a very big thank you from the committee members for your participation in the discussion today. I am conscious that we must be on oxygen rationing. It is quite warm in here at the moment, so I appreciate your ongoing attention. As I said to you, the committee is very keen not to repeat work that is being done or has been done in this area. We are very conscious that there is a lot of work out there, but we really want to augment our standard thinking. We are conscious that, over years of development of these issues, sometimes we get into silos of thinking about it. I particularly want to thank the Australian National Schools Network, who performed that task for me when I had a look at what they had done. They improved my understanding of how the world of young people has changed—it is about to change again significantly—and how education providers, employers, parents and community organisations need to respond to that.

We are looking to get some really innovative and, I hope, practical recommendations rather than just going back over recommendations that are already out there and that the government will already be looking at. So I encourage you to put those thinking caps on, to think outside of what you normally do and ask what you would really like to see and to pass that along to us. That is what we are hoping to achieve in the inquiry. We do not just want to do another report.

I am conscious of your contribution today. I will take away with me your comments and your written reports, and my colleagues will do the same. We come from a variety of communities and locations, so we are very conscious that one size does not always fit all. Many of the issues that you have raised about rural and remote students, Indigenous students and students with disability have the potential to be very interesting and innovative for our recommendations as well. Thank you for that and for your written submissions. If you have not had the chance to put a written submission in as a follow-up, I encourage you to do so.

Please have a look at the committee's website. The feedback on there for young people to use is up and running. We can show you a screenshot of that. I am pushing that because every one of you has some link to young people, and it would be very valuable if you could take that information back and encourage them to use that function. I think it is really important that we hear from them. In this job, you hear about wonderful initiatives at the top level, then later you ask, 'why isn't that flowing down?' and you find that it is not. If you go and talk to students, they will say, 'I don't know about that' or 'it is not having any effect.' So we really want to hear from them as well.

This is a picture of the website. Owing to the wonderful joys of dealing with parliamentary procedures, it is not a particularly exciting-looking website. We are working within what we are able to do. It is not something that young people will naturally find, so we really need to get the word out there and tell them that it is worthwhile having a say on this. We have tried to keep it fairly free as to what they can write and what they can tell us. There is some statistical stuff there about how many hours they work and so forth but also about why they are doing it and what problems arise from it. Generally speaking, you can see that they are all open questions. I hope it is the sort of thing where a class or a group in a youth refuge could sit around and say, 'Let's have a look at this today; let's have a talk about these questions amongst ourselves,' and then go on and actually fill it out and provide feedback to the committee.

We are very keen on this. We really want to hear from young people. My experience is that if we go to peak organisations of young people we will be talking to a particular demographic. It is well-intentioned. It is like us: you can come and talk to me but I am a particular demographic. We really want to get young people themselves who are directly living this to tell us about that experience. Hopefully we will be quite successful and get lots of submissions. This is a bit of a sell job to all of you to help us participate in that in any way that you can so that we get lots of commentary.

That is the website. If you are dealing with a group of young people say, 'We know it is particularly boring but boring does not mean unimportant; have your say and tell the committee.' We are hoping that when this sort of submission process works and we get it running better that it will actually be a good way to collect feedback from young people—particularly for committees like ours that are often about them.

Ms Nielssen—When does it finish?

CHAIR—The website is going live this afternoon, but we will keep it open as long as we can fundamentally. The link is through the committee's webpage—the committees of the parliament are other sites that I am sure every young person is regularly looking at! It is there and we will keep it open up until we are drafting just so that we can continue to facilitate it. We are writing to every school through the principals asking them to also engage with this. We toyed with using MySpace and Facebook and those types of sites but, from my own experience of my 19-year-old son, young people engage with each other on those; they do not engage with organisations like us. So we are putting the call out.

Thanks very much for your attendance. There is a light lunch provided if you want to stay and have something to eat and a bit more of a chat with all the participants. I sincerely appreciate the time and energy you have given us today. It is invaluable to us. You will be sent a copy of the

transcript of your evidence today to which you can make corrections of grammar and fact. Thank you.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Clare**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.12 pm