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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Combining study and work

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Thursday, 12 March 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, Ms Collins, Mr Irons, Dr Jensen, Mr Oakeshott

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).

WITNESSES

ADAMSON, Mr Andrew Foster, Associate Director, Centre for Youth, Employment Services and Educational Development, Holmesglen as part of TAFE Directors Australia..... 1

CARROLL, Ms Julianne, Director, Learning and Teaching, Tasmanian Polytechnic 1

CRAVEN, Mrs Diane, member, TAFE Directors Australia 1

O’HARA, Ms Kaye, member, TAFE Directors Australia; Deputy Chief Executive Academic, Canberra Institute of Technology 1

Committee met at 9.50 am

ADAMSON, Mr Andrew Foster, Associate Director, Centre for Youth, Employment Services and Educational Development, Holmesglen as part of TAFE Directors Australia

CARROLL, Ms Julianne, Director, Learning and Teaching, Tasmanian Polytechnic

CRAVEN, Mrs Diane, member, TAFE Directors Australia

O'HARA, Ms Kaye, member, TAFE Directors Australia; Deputy Chief Executive Academic, Canberra Institute of Technology

CHAIR (Ms Bird)—I declare open the second public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training as part of its inquiry into combining school and work in supporting successful youth transitions. I now welcome representatives of TAFE Directors Australia to today's hearing. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and, therefore, has the same standing as proceedings of the House. Normally, we invite you to make an opening statement. We have the submission from the TAFE Directors and several very excellent case studies. I think we are probably most interested in hearing about the particular project that you have outlined in the written submission. We might start with Ms Carroll. Could you refer us to which project it is.

Ms Carroll—In the submission it is referred to as Tasmania Tomorrow. I spoke to the roundtable about it. It is essentially the restructuring of all post year 10 education and training in Tasmania into three new organisations—the Tasmanian academy, the Tasmanian polytechnic and the skills institute. I am going to focus today on your subject matter on the Tasmanian polytechnic in particular, not only because that is the organisation that I now belong to but also because I think in terms of what you are looking at, it offers the greatest information and insight.

The submission outlines a little what we are aiming to do. Essentially through the whole of the Tasmania Tomorrow project, what we were trying to do was improve the skills shortage situation and the retention completion and qualification level in Tasmania and, through doing both of those things, improve the productivity levels of the state. So there is a clear mandate there for the polytechnic in particular, which deals with students from the age of 15 right through to 65, to focus on a transition to work for all of those people. So in relation to what you are looking at, what I wanted to talk to you today about is what we are doing in particular for young people.

I suppose the thing about the Tasmanian polytechnic is that its primary focus is on students. They are right at the centre of everything we do. So all of our systems and all of our processes need to support students to achieve successful outcomes. Those successful outcomes are defined as work outcomes or the achievement of the Tasmanian certificate of education or an equivalent year 12 qualification that might be a certificate III or higher. So doing that—in focusing on students with cause for transition to work and accommodating those students that might be in work already—is incredibly important. There are several ways we do that. We do it through the ability for students to, first of all, have an applied learning experience that is in vocational qualifications all the way from certificate I right up to advanced diploma. So there is a very broad range that has not been accessible prior to now. They can do that and achieve the

Tasmanian certificate of education at the same time. They can do that in various formats. So we are trying to build timetabling options, for example, that are flexible and do not tie students into particular nine to three type frameworks but might allow them to do their schoolwork, for want of a better phrase, in a shorter period of time during the week—cram it into Monday to Wednesday, for example, if they need to—and give themselves four days when they could be working. Indeed, it could be a different arrangement. Whatever they want, we want to try to accommodate. So the timetabling is one area and the ability to be full-time or part-time enrolled is another.

In terms of embracing technology and all of the potential it offers, that is another way that we are trying to offer students flexibility so that they do not actually have to be on campus in order to be able to complete qualifications. That way they can combine work and study in a different way.

In relation to things like their entitlement to education, that now spans between the ages of 15 to 19, which means they can continue to access a subsidised levy for that period of time. So we are trying to cut down on the cost imposts that might be there that would be a barrier for some students. I suppose things like actually recognising what they are doing in a workplace if they have already got one is also incredibly important. But just in the programs generally across our young people, we are ensuring that there is a strong element of workplace involvement, be it through placements or experiential places, and that industry is very involved in the programs.

I suppose what we are trying to do is to be as flexible as we possibly can around student needs and to ensure that there are strong links and bridges being built between either their current employment or their intended employment. The last part of all of that is to ensure that the door is always open in terms of coming back to the polytechnic to achieve further qualifications and further skills throughout their lifetime. We would like to see that we would be the home of learning for them or, indeed, that we would move them into the higher education sphere with some support and tangibility.

That is just a very quick snapshot of the sorts of things we are doing. What I would say to you is that it is incredibly challenging because this is not just a single program that is existing in one area of the state. This has been a complete state-wide systemic approach to addressing those issues and is based on success factors that we essentially gleaned from four overseas countries—Finland, Ireland, Singapore and New Zealand. So what we did was to have a look at other countries that had achieved a fast turnaround in all of those areas I outlined earlier and analyse what they had done to achieve those successful outcomes. What I have outlined to you is a model that we adapted to Tasmania from that overseas success.

We are nine weeks into the Tasmanian polytechnic so I cannot give you some fantastic statistics that tell you how wonderful it all is. But, anecdotally, we have a lot of stories of young people that are this year for the first time able to actually work in vocational fields that they have not been able to get into previously in year 11 and 12. Just off the top of my head, yesterday I heard about a whole range of young people that are enrolled in the diploma of nursing as their year 12 capacity, so that is fairly exciting stuff. I invite you to watch with interest, as the rest of Australia is, as we have our own little Tasmanian revolution.

CHAIR—Can you just clarify something for me. Students come out of year 10 and they make a choice between one of three options?

Ms Carroll—That is right. If they are really clear that they are going to university and they want to do that in what I suppose you would call the traditional way, they would go to the academy. If they want to combine vocational study with some of the more traditional subjects or just do vocational study, they would come to the polytechnic. If they want to go into a fulltime apprenticeship or traineeship, they go to the skills institute. But, having said that, the way that we have built those three organisations is not as independent silos but rather as interlinking or collaborative arrangements so that students can actually be co-enrolled or can shift from one to the other as they need to.

CHAIR—Are they institutions or three actual sites?

Ms Carroll—They are three statutory authorities. They are state-wide statutory authorities and each has multiple campuses around the state.

Mr Adamson—Holmesglen Vocational College was an initiative by Holmesglen Institute. I think they approached the Victorian government in 2005. We similarly spent a lot of time investigating models overseas. It opened in 2007. There are a few underpinning ideas driving it. Holmesglen has actually had a long period of about 20 years of catering for the needs of young people. We built on that. I suppose, as I said, the key driving ideas behind it were that there were a lot of students sitting in school for whom the schools really did not supply what they needed in terms of learning programs. Even if they did not drop out, they mentally dropped out. The other part of it was that it was unrealistic to expect young people at that age to make choices about their future career that locked them into particular career paths. I suppose a third leg to the stool is that we wanted to supply them with personal development programs. Wrap that all together.

What a lot of that was about was giving the students, I suppose, a sense of confidence. So many of them come in—it happens again and again—with their reports and they have ‘fail’, ‘fail’, ‘fail’ year after year. Really what our program has been about is not only reengagement but also giving them a sense that they can actually do something. Within the program, it is a Victorian certificate of applied learning, we have literacy, numeracy, work related skills, personal development and industry specific skills. It is a 1,000-hour program, and 40 per cent of it is focused on vocational skills. The students get the opportunity to do two or three different areas over a year. It is not taster programs. Some taster programs can be very brief half-day or day programs which do not really give the students skills. These are accredited modules. All of them have pathways into apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships.

For the work related skills, which I guess would be a focus of what you are looking at, we have a preparation period. We give them first aid. We give them occupational health and safety and a briefing on their rights and responsibilities. We take them out to work sites and big building sites and then they have a work placement. We visit them and assess them there. The other part of it is that they spend maybe six months one to one with our careers counsellor to work out, based upon their experience not only in the workplace but in doing those vocational skills throughout the year, those two or three. They have a choice of 20 so they can end up doing any combination, such as hairdressing and bricklaying, and it is fine.

Ms Carroll—Setting your hair.

Mr Adamson—That is right. They get a real sense of what these particular areas are like and can make a really good, firmly based decision at the end of the year. Our success rate has been pretty good. We have had 80 per cent of students going on to what we call a successful outcome. That can mean anything from six months they will stay with us and they might then go and do an apprenticeship. That is fine by us because a lot of students will come in and they may have missed out on a pre-apprenticeship or missed out on an apprenticeship and they are nearly ready. Others are staying two years and they can do nested pre-apprenticeships in that. So it has been a good program and it has been recognised by the careers counsellors in schools that we really do fill a pretty good niche in our area where there are a lot of very academically focused schools.

CHAIR—So you are a school within a region that has been converted to this?

Mr Adamson—I was not clear. We are actually nested inside Holmesglen Institute. The vocational workshops—

CHAIR—Pardon my New South Wales ignorance. What is an institute in Victoria?

Mr Adamson—A TAFE.

Dr JENSEN—It is a college of TAFE.

Mr Adamson—So we are nested inside that. We are part of the organisation. That is another big plus in that we can negotiate pathways for students very, very easily and have a very good sense of what the institute can offer. The students also get to use the facilities inside the institute.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms O'Hara—The CIT Vocational College is also within the Canberra Institute of Technology so it is not a school. It does not come under schools legislation. It is under the CIT Act. I think the model we have moved to, and the CIT Vocational College as such, has been in existence for one year—this is its second year—in terms of this branding and structure. It has been strongly supported by the ACT government, with additional funding for the pastoral care that was talked about at the roundtable for some of the sorts of students who need extra scaffolding and career advice and personal support and study support in terms of finding direction.

I thought it would be interesting to start with the models that have come from programs that were first developed and first offered for adult students. So our year 12 program has been what you would traditionally call a second chance year 12 program. Most of our students traditionally for 30 years have been post 18 and probably more around 20 or up to 50 or 60 in age, but mostly around 20, and doing it to get a UAI. It is their second chance at getting university entrance. For about I would say seven or eight years, the percentage of people who are coming not to get a UAI but coming to get a year 12 certificate and look at different pathways has increased significantly and the age group has dropped. We have been offering an alternative for those people who have not completed school but have wanted to be picked up or needed to be picked up before they become post school. So we have had to change the program and look at what our offer is because the client group has been changing.

Similarly, at the year 10 level and at our literacy and numeracy levels, it has been traditionally adult students—women returning to the workforce and older people, who really found that they did not have functional literacy and numeracy and ICT skills. Again, many people wanted that important benchmark of a year 10 certificate. But very much so at the year 10 level the client group is around 15, 16 and 17.

Traditionally, and even now we do not take people under 16 without referral and agreement with the schools—from a school principal, counsellor, youth worker or community services worker—or Justice. We do get people who come to us from the youth detention centre and we are part of their transition support. So the numbers in that age group have increased significantly. Again, we have changed the program. We have a whole offering very clearly for young people for whom school has not proven to be the best option. I do not see that we are competing with schools. We are working in a very collaborative way with them.

Traditionally, our ultimate goal with those people who came to us to get a year 10 certificate was to get them back into the schools system. Since establishing the vocational college, our goal now is to move them within the vocational college through CIT, mainly because it does not seem to have worked having them go back into the schools system. So what we have come up with is programs and offerings that move them into work, into apprenticeships, into our year 12 and into traineeships. It is offering them pathways with us. That is proving to be a much better option, a more successful option, for them.

In terms of the characteristics of the CIT Vocational College, it is not just for young people. If you are happy, I will leave a brochure. I can leave a few. It picks up the philosophy and, I guess, the range of the sorts of things that we are offering. Our vocational college is for the full range of people for whom there are barriers to progress. So we do include in there the adult migrant English program, English as a second language, literacy and numeracy, year 10 equivalent and year 12. Our year 10 equivalent is our own curriculum. It is not a schools year 10 certificate. It is called the certificate II in Access 10. It is self-directed and self-paced and has flexible learning resources—online, paper based or whatever is needed. It includes vocational programs as well as personal development, literacy, numeracy, language, maths and a whole range of customised things so that people can put together a program to suit their needs, their goals or their directions or to help them find out what their goals and needs are.

We do a year 12 program. It is the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies year 12 program. So we are balancing, I guess, the tensions in terms of fulfilling policy that is around full-time students and the client group who might need something more flexible, more part time and less attendance based. Because ACT year 12 is based on continuous assessment, not a final exam—and that is in the schools and colleges as well—inputs is an important measure and attendance is an important policy requirement. So we are managing the tensions and creating as much flexibility within broad policy as we can for this new client group.

So the things I think are important are that transition support is quite complex and quite important. That is where the ACT government has put in extra funding. We now have five staff who are around career and personal support—pastoral care and whatever is needed. They are mostly youth workers or career counsellors. There is a mix. They are not teachers. We have had—there is a brochure inside that folder—a YARDS program for probably about five or six years. It is about people seriously at risk referred to us from the justice system. They have had

two youth workers who are around transition and support. Again, that transition and support really is quite resource intensive. But it does require systems that are flexible. I think that came out quite strongly in the roundtable. Some of these people cannot cope with full-time learning. It is too challenging not just because they are busy—some of our students might not have part-time jobs; most do, but many do not—but because they just cannot cope with full-time sitting still, learning or moving about, even active learning. Some of them need to be able to come in and out.

The students who come to us are not necessarily less abled. We might even get people who have chronic fatigue. Progressing through the school system, with its time based requirements, is too hard whereas with our Access 10 they can stop and start and pick up where they left off. It is not difficult at all. They can be working at home or wherever they need to be.

So I think it is that notion of really thinking about transition and support. It needs to be individual. The more we can customise programs, the better. I cannot pretend that we are totally customised because the resources are not there to have that. But essentially at the year 10 level we can be pretty customised. We have a flexible curriculum. We are pushing the barriers all the time to come up with flexibility within the curriculum programs. Even at the year 12 level we have a really good relationship with the Board of Senior Secondary Studies, where we are often working together to come up with solutions. We come up with the problem. We work together to come up with a curriculum solution that will fit within policy.

I chair the vocational education and training subcommittee of the Board of Senior Secondary Studies. That subcommittee has industry representatives as well as CIT and other organisations. Again, our job is to look at where Board of Senior Secondary Studies policy could be improved to facilitate more vocational learning and vocational pathways. So we have had some significant changes in the last couple of years that are opening up options, including—and what is on our agenda this year—the counting of work and how structured workplace learning, including if it is paid, is counted and how that can be enhanced.

The big thing that we bring to the table is connections—I think that that is a big thing that TAFEs can bring to the table for this client group—with a very wide range of programs. Many TAFE institutes are very broad based. We have strong links with schools, so that is a pathway if it needs to be, and strong links with industry workplaces and with work. But also with these people—this is even with migrants—we have strong links with all of the support networks. If someone needs referral to alcohol and other drug rehabilitation, we have those links very strongly at our fingertips. Some migrants might need trauma counselling. Those sorts of organisations are very much part of the vocational college's network, so I think that is quite important. I might leave it there and see what the questions are.

Mrs Craven—The case study in your document is the Sydney Institute St George Trade School. I will just give you a context. St George College is a TAFE college in the southern part of metropolitan Sydney. We have over 11,400 enrolments, but the St George Trade School is just one very small program that we have on offer. Like the other people here who have made a presentation, we also have year 10 and year 12 equivalents in terms of our offerings, but I am not going to refer to those today.

The background of the St George Trade School is that the New South Wales Premier made an announcement about trade schools being a state government initiative back in about 2006-07. St George was one of the first announced in the first 10. There are 25 that will be set up. We were the first TAFE college that was awarded a trade school, basically a funding of money with a particular focus on vocational areas. The vocational areas that we are focusing on is year 11 and year 12, so we are working in the senior secondary cohort. We are working with the schools. We are focusing on electrotechnology and nursing.

In New South Wales, you may be aware that there is across all Australia a very large relationship between schools offering vocational education and that they can actually have fee-for-service arrangements with TAFE colleges. We have that as part of our provision at St George. But what made the trade school different? That was a question that we grappled with for quite a while because it was basically a label that was given to us. We actually had to work out what it meant.

What we did was we thought, 'How can we actually look at making this a really relevant and different program?' I guess the feature that we decided to progress was really about working with apprenticeships and traineeships. It was incorporating paid employment into the senior secondary program. So we are working through the HSC and the Board of Studies under that particular framework. But it was also very much about looking at working with clear industry partners. We sought out partners that had a clear direction in terms of their workforce development. We wanted to have a very strong connection with schools. They recognise that part of their workforce development program really hinged on engaging potential employees early. So as part of the initial framework we looked around at models. We already had a very successful program in the T3 program, which started originally in southern Sydney and actually has moved out nationally. That is where Toyota recognised that they were having significant trouble attracting people to become their technicians through the trade pathway. Through that program we saw that that was a successful model, where we had strong industry connection. They were offering a pathway through a certificate II to a trade qualification but, more importantly, beyond. There was actually a career with that organisation.

So we unpacked that and looked at what criteria and what aspects of it worked. What we recognised was that there was a very strong partnership with the schools and very strong commitment from the employer organisation. We had a very strong framework of support in the TAFE institution. More importantly, it actually fitted in and the students were walking out with an HSC. So they had their senior secondary qualification as well as the additional vocational qualifications and a clear connection through to the industry.

Nursing was a different kettle of fish. Nursing did not have a trade or an apprenticeship pathway. It was seen very clearly as basically a university pathway. Yet Ramsey, a large private health organisation, and the St George Private Hospital, which is literally only across the road from us, recognised that they were having a problem with attracting appropriate staff. They recognised that they actually wanted to have, again, an early connection and were looking for a way to do that. Our challenge was the IR arrangements. While there was no apprenticeship, there was a traineeship. So through that traineeship pathway we are now offering a program for students to undertake and commence their nursing training. They are employed as assistant nurses at that level. They will be doing their academic studies at school and their off-the-job training at our organisation and then be paid to do work with the hospital.

That sort of model has now just commenced in 2008 and is getting very, very good outcomes. Again, the feature there was working with an employer that had a very strong workforce plan and a very strong commitment and has made a significant investment in supporting these young people. So partnerships are probably the key aspect that we all recognise, with industry as being a contributor to successful outcomes for young people combining school and work.

With the trade school and part of the New South Wales system, the paid employment contributes academically. They actually get so many units for that. They are supportive and they are released from school to undertake that training. That is the theory. Sometimes the reality is also a challenge in that sometimes employers want them to work weekend shifts because that is the nature of the work. We have to have, I guess, a lot of support mechanisms put in place to ensure that the parents are informed that the students are actually aware of those requirements and getting them to those locations, especially in the electrotechnology area. In electrotechnology, they do not work in an institution. Their work is not institution based or location based. It is project based. So they may have to travel quite extensively.

For the electrotechnology area, we went down the apprenticeship pathway. I have to say that has probably been the most challenging for us, partly because of the flexibility that is required by the employers. We have made the arrangements through a group training company. I have to say that the current economic environment has created some very serious implications for these young people. A number of the host employers have not been able to continue. The good thing is that the partnership is so strong between the way we have set it up that we are now getting quite a good support through the Board of Studies to still provide recognition, and we are looking at simulated training to support. That is, I guess, the value of being involved in a TAFE organisation, because we can have that opportunity to simulate. As Kaye and Andrew were saying, you have a very large support framework that allows these students to still be able to achieve what they originally set out to.

I guess that is a brief snapshot of St George. It is a very narrow and focused case study, but it provides those highlights.

CHAIR—That is great. Thanks, everybody. Clearly, one of the things for those who were either at or watching the roundtable that is of particular interest to the committee and one of the things we discuss is the transitions and the implications of paid work in particular. Do you have an idea of what percentage of your students are in paid work? I am conscious that that falls into two areas. It falls into part of the structured learning program if they are in apprenticeships and traineeships. But more specifically there are those who have paid work that is not part of their structured program. They are working in fast food outlets and so on. Do you have any idea, in each organisation, what percentage of your students would be doing that?

Ms Carroll—I am doing the maths.

CHAIR—You are trying to add it up in your head. One thing that prompted this inquiry was the fact that the ABS indicated that 52 per cent of young people in years 11 and 12, wherever they are enrolled, are actually undertaking paid casual work and that that has been an increasing number. It is quite unique to Australia because of the nature of our casualised labour force in retail and hospitality in particular and probably the lack of an adult population that is interested in undertaking, or willing to undertake, that sort of work. It has developed a tradition with young

people, while they are studying at university or TAFE, whereby we always presume they will quite often be undertaking part-time or casual work. But it is increasingly the senior secondary students. We were talking before you arrived. My background is in teaching. I was at my local school last week. I raised this issue with a group of students. The teachers were surprised at how significant an aspect of their life it was. We are not having conversations with young people. We treat it like two silos in their life. I am particularly keen. If young people have paid employment through a structured apprenticeship or traineeship, are they unlikely, then, to have a second outside job?

Mrs Craven—Yes. It is very unlikely.

CHAIR—So that is meeting their need?

Mrs Craven—Yes.

CHAIR—So that is clearly a good option for many of them. But others are going to be doing—

Mr Adamson—I can give you some information. We actually had a survey done of a whole lot of things about our students. It was 110 out of about 200 students. Just over half of them had casual part-time jobs. Thirty-three per cent were in retail, and 27 per cent of those were in cafes, restaurants and takeaway food. In terms of hours worked per week, under five hours was 12 per cent; six to 10 hours was 45 per cent.

CHAIR—Sorry, can you just go a bit slower. Twelve per cent are under five hours?

Mr Adamson—Under five, yes. Six to 10 hours was 45 per cent. Eleven to 15 hours was 16 per cent. Then it sort of drivels off after that.

CHAIR—Within your college, are they enrolling part time or are they full time?

Mr Adamson—No. They are full time.

CHAIR—So they are adding this on to the top. So that would be a similar model to high school straight enrolments, I would imagine.

Mr Adamson—Yes. That is right, yes.

CHAIR—Did you quickly do your figures?

Ms Carroll—I did a few figures. We think that state-wide the enrolment of school based apprentices in the Tasmanian polytechnic will be something like 5 per cent of our 15- to 19-year-old cohort. I have not got firm figures for you on those that are in the casual workforce, but I did ask some people what they thought. The response I got was that they thought at least 50 per cent of the 15- to 19-year-old cohort were involved in casual work, mainly hospitality and retail. They thought most of those people would be doing something like three shifts a week and be enrolled as a full-time student.

CHAIR—It is of particular interest to us because I think to some extent there has been a lot of work done on the pathways in the sorts of areas you have just described. While many of you are in new projects, I think they have come out of an awful lot of discussion about the apprentices traineeship pathways and breaking down that old ‘leave at year 10, pick up a full-time apprenticeship’ type model. So what we are particularly interested in is some of the stuff that we are looking at around skills passports, recognising the skills that the young people develop, and giving that some identification.

I have one more question and then I might ask Dr Jensen. Many of you are from the vocational sector and have enormous experience in assessing skills and knowledge attained through RPL processes and so on. The difficulty seems to be that it is really around funding models—who actually is paid to say, ‘You are working at the café three shifts a week. Why don’t we work out what skills you have actually achieved?’ It is unrealistic to think that a little café owner is going to be ticking off boxes and measuring that. I would be interested in the perception of each of you of what might be a useful way in which we might look at some formalising of that. You get the first call, Ms Carroll.

Ms Carroll—It is my downfall. I suppose the move towards outcome based funding actually starts to get around some of that in that then you are not forced to measure the inputs and attach dollars to them. So I think for us that certainly is part of the solution that we are looking for. The other part of funding that keeps on coming from employers is that they actually feel they should be funded to be participating in assessment and training processes. I think enrolled nursing is one area where we are continually facing that question. I do not know whether there is some potential in that sort of area. But if we want to try and increase the importance of the work element, we may need to look at how we get the employers—the café owner—on board with some of that.

CHAIR—I think part of the downfall of our models is that we assume that the work being done is part of the career path. So you work in the café, which you are really just doing to earn an income. You have no interest in a long-term career in the hospitality industry. It is difficult to fit into what might be your studies. Yet young people, I think, would very much like to say, ‘Why do I have to do work experience as part of my VET subject on customer service and money handling when I do that in my part-time job?’ So is anyone conscious of any moves to start, perhaps in part, if they are already enrolled in VET, getting some of those generic work skills connected to their part-time casual jobs?

Ms O’Hara—I think there is a range of curriculum responses being developed around work transitions or certificates in work readiness that are reasonably flexible and can bring in a lot of experience. I think the better model is to look at the current training package curricula and incorporate them so that they are getting those units of competency in workplace communications or customer service that are transferable, especially at the certificate I and II levels. What we have been fighting for for 20 years is transferable learning—deep learning—with people. I think there are even some arguments around OH&S that what you really want people to learn is the principles of awareness and specific applications in specific environments. But the learning you really want off the job is that OH&S is really important. You need to know about health and safety wherever you are and work safely, whatever that means. So I think there is a lot of potential for really looking at transferable learning across all levels of training packages, but if we are looking at this age group, it is in certificates I, II and III.

Dr JENSEN—Ms Carroll, you were saying that your college has a lot of flexibility in terms of its courses and so on. It allows students considerable flexibility. My question is about contacting employers and their flexibility. How do you find that side of it? Obviously it is better if you have flexibility on both sides. That leads to an additional question that I have about something Ms Craven had to say. She was talking about problems with host employers and the economic situation. The question is not only the issue of dropping away with potential host employers but also how that is impacting on the potential for flexibility in the system as well. Are you getting the double whammy, where some are bailing out but some are saying, ‘Well, we’ll stay in it but we’ll tighten way up on what we want out of them in terms of hours and input and so on?’

Ms Carroll—You have hit the nail on the head. It is an incredibly delicate balance in terms of encouraging employers, particularly given that many of Tasmania’s employers are what you would consider small companies with less than 20 employees. Asking them to put in the extra effort to take students on work placements et cetera is a big ask. I suppose that is where the funding question came from. But the other side of that is that you also have to sell to them what is in it for them. How will this actually affect your bottom line by taking students on work placement or by being flexible around assessment et cetera? How is this actually going to lend to the long-term viability of your company? That is often a link they do not make naturally that you need to make for them. So it is incredibly intensive in terms of the work of polytechnic employees in going out and recruiting employers and convincing employers and then, once they have agreed and the work placements or whatever take place, being there consistently and making arrangements for things like workplace mentors and training for those people. It is incredibly intensive. It is not something that just happens off the side of your desk. It is certainly not the same as, I suppose, the old work experience that many of us would have witnessed in our lifetimes. It is something much more meaningful that you have to set up in order for them to see the value in it.

Ms O’Hara—It is very sophisticated learning, and I think people underestimate the complexity of it and the demands on employers and teachers.

Mrs Craven—I support exactly what Jules is saying. As I indicated with the electrotechnology school based apprentices, today there is a meeting with the employers, the schools, the parents and the young people to actually work out what the pathway will be. So in terms of intensity of resources, you have to really engender a lot of goodwill and trust and try and keep the student at the centre. For employers, there is a tension there because they have a bottom line they need to work through. So there is an education process and support process. Often we as institutions are working with the employers as well. Unfortunately, there may be some cases where those apprenticeships will actually not be continuing. But what we will be able to do in terms of flexibility is provide alternatives for those young people so they can still fulfil their qualifications for the HSC and we will be able to support them through looking at their competencies that they are still going to need to achieve in electrotechnology. What they will miss out on, in the worst case scenario, is potentially the paid employment.

Dr JENSEN—I want to return to the economic situation. I think you said that you have been in business, so to speak, since about 2006.

Mrs Craven—Our first cohort was last year, 2008, yes. But we were involved in similar projects in 2006-07.

Dr JENSEN—Given what employers expect in terms of flexibility or a lack thereof, have you actually seen a change with the economic downturn, or is it a case of, ‘We can take someone on or we can’t’ and there are flexibility issues?

Mrs Craven—The number of school based apprentices and trainees in the electrotechnology area for the 2008 new intake was only one compared to last year, where we had eight. That is a year 11 student who has a school based apprenticeship. In the nursing area, we have actually maintained numbers. But, overall, in other industry areas, it is usually, to allude to what Jules was saying, very small organisations. Sometimes it is the family. So we have actually maintained. It is the electrotechnology area that is probably being hit the hardest at this point for those young people and their options.

CHAIR—I am just conscious of the time. Thanks very much. It is very useful information for us. I certainly invite you, on going back home, to encourage the young people studying in your institutes to consider popping online and filling out our survey of young people. We are very, very keen to hear directly from young people and their experiences. It is on the parliament’s committee website. On our website there is a link to the student survey. We would really value their feedback. If they are doing an ICT subject, it is not a bad little task for a teacher for a class. If you could pass that on, we would greatly appreciate it. I really thank you for your time today. A number of you have travelled from interstate to be here today. I thank you for your attendance. If you have been asked to provide any additional information, could you please forward it to the secretary of the committee. We may also have additional questions following the hearing. We will forward them to you for your response, if required. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence, to which you can make corrections of grammar and fact. Thank you again for your participation today.

Resolved (on motion by **Dr Jensen**):

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 10.41 am