



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Combining study and work

WEDNESDAY, 29 APRIL 2009

BRISBANE

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Wednesday, 29 April 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, Mrs D'Ath, Dr Jensen

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 9.33 am

DWYER, Ms Susan, Senior Policy Officer, Policy, Strategic Policy and Research Program, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

HALL, Ms Vicki, Manager, Strategic Policy and Research Program, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

HARCOURT, Ms Julie, Director, Strategic Policy and Research Program, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

MULLINS, Ms Sharon, Acting Executive Director, Schooling Innovation, Department of Education and Training

DICKIE, Mr Paul, Executive Officer, Federation of Parents and Friends Associations in Catholic Schools Queensland

NASH, Mrs Carmel, Assistant Executive Officer, Federation of Parents and Friends Associations in Catholic Schools Queensland

ANDERSON, Mrs Diane Mandy (Mandy), Executive Officer Education, Queensland Catholic Education Commission

CREAGH, Ms Theresa Margaret (Terry), Assistant Director Education, Queensland Catholic Education Commission

PERCY, Mr John, Executive Officer Education, Queensland Catholic Education Commission

CHAIR (Ms Bird)—Welcome. I declare open the seventh 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 would like to take the opportunity to thank you all for your attendance here today. Before we begin, I would like to place on the record the committee's thanks to Mr John Fitzgerald, Principal of Craigslea State High School, and to the school itself for allowing the committee the opportunity to conduct its proceedings at the school. We look forward to holding discussions with staff and students in the school later today. I also welcome students from the legal studies class, who have joined us to watch proceedings today.

This inquiry was referred by the Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP. Fifty-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 are available on the committee's website.

I remind participants that in order to maintain the structure of the proceedings it is important that all comments are addressed through the chair. I also remind 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 parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by Hansard and will attract parliamentary privilege.

The committee has had a number of hearings in regional areas. We have been to the suburbs of Adelaide, to Perth, to Burnie in Tasmania and to Holmesglen in Melbourne. This is our fifth school based visit. We are very committed to talking directly to students and young people generally, and we have found that that is very useful. We appreciate the efforts your organisations have made in making your way out here—though, I have discovered that the school is not all that far from the centre of town. So the distance is not too bad. We feel that it is very important to be here.

Another thing that the committee is doing that may be of interest to you is an online survey of students. I think it is the first time that a committee has done any sort of online survey. Committee hearings are usually submission based. We have had about 2,500 young people from around Australia complete the online survey, and it is giving us a good level of information.

The main focus of the inquiry, and why the minister asked us to look at this issue, is that data indicate that over 50 per cent of young people at school are holding down casual or part-time jobs. That is a significant increase in the last 15 years. As we are pushing for retention rates to be increased and as the requirements of matriculation become more rigorous, we need to understand what young people's lives are like, how they are managing the competing demands of work and school and whether there are things within the system that we can do better to support them through this.

I have read all three submissions in depth, and I think they are probably the most pertinent that we have seen for a good while. I commend the various Queensland authorities for them. Clearly this is an issue that you have been looking at as well, so we look forward to your evidence today.

I will start in the order in which the submissions are presented here. The Queensland Catholic Education Commission is the first submission. Would somebody like to make an opening statement, outlining the broad points in your report?

Ms Creagh—Needless to say, we are very happy to be here today and to have the opportunity to make our submission. In presenting today, we have crystallised possibly three major issues, and Mandy will outline those for you. They are in our report but they are the three major issues that we think would be helpful for the committee to consider.

Mrs Anderson—Chair, the first point is one that you have already alluded to, which is the number of young people who work. We recognise very clearly that work is part of life for the large majority of young Australian school students. The proportions vary. You alluded to 50 per cent. The experience of some schools may put it up as high as 70 per cent. We have just been discussing how that proportion varies according to locality and so on.

The second point we would make is about the distinction—and the inquiry's terms of reference pick up on this—between part-time work, which in some ways is quite extraneous to school, and workplace learning. Students certainly participate in part-time work, but it is not officially and formally linked to their schoolwork. Separate to that is workplace learning that is

attached to their schoolwork in some way. In Queensland particularly, school based apprenticeships and traineeships have a significant part to play in the learning of young people. I would have to say that that would represent a much smaller proportion of workplace learning and workplace experience than regular part-time work.

The third issue we wish to raise—and no doubt it will be picked up on—is striking a balance between how learning gained in the workplace from part-time work might receive meaningful accreditation. I think we have to look firstly at the demand for that accreditation, both by young people and by employers, and secondly at how meaningful accreditation could be gained. If it becomes just a piece of paper that is ticked off and not valued, it would be a worthless experience. At the other extreme, we do not want to turn it into such a massive, expensive exercise that it cannot be attained. They are our three points.

CHAIR—Thank you. We might get everybody's opening statement and then go to questions. The next submission that we received was from the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, so I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Dwyer—Thanks for the opportunity to speak. I would like to start by saying that one of the key messages in our submission was about engaging with children and young people in your inquiry, and the commission thinks it is terrific that that is the approach the committee has adopted. There are probably two key issues for the commission in relation to this inquiry. The commission strongly supports young people undertaking safe and appropriate work combined with their education and strongly supports protections for young people in the workplace. For example, a few years ago the commission undertook a review of child employment in Queensland, and that saw the implementation of strong legislative safeguards such as the Child Employment Act to regulate a working environment for young people. The commission also would like to see strategies targeted at the particular needs of the community as well as individual students, specifically in relation to vulnerable young people—teenagers who are parents as well as undertaking work and school, young people working on farms in rural communities and young people who are living independently.

CHAIR—Thank you. The third submission was from the Federation of Parents and Friends Associations in Catholic Schools Queensland. I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Dickie—Thanks again for the opportunity to participate in the inquiry. There are just a few points that we would like to make, particularly from a parental point of view. Parents see that part-time work is of importance and that students do it for various reasons. Probably a minority would work part time to survive, to purchase clothes and books and even to pay fees. The vast majority would, I think, be doing it for their own independence to subsidise expenditure outside school, such as socials, Schoolies weeks and things like that. So there are different motivations for working. Parents certainly appreciate the skills that kids learn from work. In fact, students of a very young age are given great responsibility in particular operations.

How do we recognise those skills? Should they be recognised? The students have a great deal of responsibility in enterprises, and should that be recognised as part of their education? There are also, and I think it has been mentioned, a vast number of students who do volunteer work within the community and do extraordinary work, but again it is not particularly well recognised.

There are also students who work in family businesses for little or no remuneration but are learning particular skills.

The whole area of work and school brings up the situation of school as an open institution, not a nine to three institution, and I think we still have a situation where schools are regarded very much as nine to three institutions, dependent upon the bus timetable. I think we have to look at opening up the schools and also developing not just skills for a particular vocational area but general skills for employability. So the relationship between school and work and how we interchange those things is very important.

Again, the issue is how much time the students work in relation to their school situation. A survey of a school I was associated with some time ago suggested that senior school students should be doing between 15 and 20 hours of study a week and perhaps they should be doing five hours a week of work. In many instances that was interchanged and school became quite incidental. I suppose this not the case so much now, but when work started on Thursdays they would probably do work on Fridays, they would have social events, they would perhaps do an extracurricular activity over the weekend and they would be working over the weekend. They would recuperate on Monday and then they would be ready to do some schoolwork on Tuesday. That is, of course, taking it to extremes, but there can be—

CHAIR—I suspect from all the evidence we have received it is not taking it to extremes. It is more common than we might anticipate.

Mr Dickie—That is right, yes. So those are a few of the point that we would like to make. We would also like to recognise the role that parents play, or should play, in the whole work-school interaction, because parents are the link between schools and the community. They are the entrepreneurs, the people who employ people, and I think we do not use those resources anywhere near as much as we should. So we should investigate that partnership much more.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Welcome, Sharon. Did you want to make an opening statement about the department's views on the terms of reference before we go on to questions?

Ms Mullins—I would like to do that, but can I come back in five minutes, when I have a sense of where you are up to?

CHAIR—That is fine, yes, when you have a sense of where we are up to. Thank you, everyone, for that. As I said at the beginning, there is some very useful material in the submissions that have been provided to us. I want to go first of all to the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. I note that you identify that it is possible in the Queensland system to do one unit of study which gives one credit towards the QCE. For young people who have a part-time or casual job, that can be a component of that. But you identify some concerns. Could you perhaps indicate to us briefly how that operates and what the problems might be there?

Mrs Anderson—To go back a little bit, under the education and training reforms for the future agenda, it was signalled that work experience in the workplace—and particularly it was noticed that 160 hours of structured work experience—could contribute to the Queensland Certificate of Education. I think the experience with this is probably what makes us a little bit wary of accrediting part-time work in some more formalised way. The other thing is that, as the

Queensland Certificate of Education evolved and developed, it is a big task to equate, in some legitimised way, workplace experience in a part-time job with, for instance, one unit of one semester's work in physics. So the coping work that developed within QSA procedures around that workplace learning, volunteer work or community work became quite extensive. The onus is on the young person not on the school. Quite often the young people, who may best benefit from that capacity to gain one credit point, are those who are probably least able to make their way through the paperwork involved. The notion is there and the reality is there. Last year was the first year that the Queensland Certificate of Education was administered and gained by year 12s, so we do not have a lot of experience yet, but the gut feeling would be that it is hard work to get just one credit.

CHAIR—Carmel, were you looking to make comment on that?

Mrs Nash—I would agree with Mandy in that the kids who would benefit most would be the ones who would be least able to get through the paperwork, and I also doubt whether the parents would be able to help them get through it. That is where the information lies in information for parents and information for students. I am not sure that many kids at all—and I think Mandy would agree with me—and we have not heard of any who have taken up the opportunity. We could be wrong and there may be a number of kids, but in the context of dealing with the Queensland Studies Authority we have not really heard of anyone who has taken that up. Then there is the issue of who is going to accredit it—who is going to be the delegate; is it someone from the school; is it someone from outside? There are all those issues. Then is the employer happy to go through the process of completing the paperwork for the student? For a small business it is an added job that they may not want to take and may preclude a student from getting the job if they need the paperwork completed.

CHAIR—It is interesting for us because you have hit on one of the big issues that we are going to have to tackle. I think it is almost common now that every young person at some point is required to do work experience, whether it is a VET in Schools program course or part of the year 10 curriculum two-week break of work experience. Wherever it sits very few of them are not required to do it. Young people say: 'Why do I have to go and do that? It is often artificial and I am just being given boring, repetitive tasks to keep me out of the way by some employer, who has been badgered into taking a work experience student. It is claimed that it is relevant to the particular vocational sector I am training in, but I am not. If I am doing carpentry all I am really doing is sweeping up or whatever. I got this part-time job where I am getting all these generic work skills so why do I have to do the work experience as well?' They are the sorts of things that we are responding to with that particular area that we are looking at.

One of the logical things would be to give accreditation for the skills, knowledge and experience they develop in their part-time jobs as a replacement for the requirements that are within the curriculum as it is. They would clearly be provided opportunity to have a credit towards it. One of the things that we have heard from a number of places with this sort of form is the resourcing and I am wondering if the difficulty actually is around the resourcing. You make the point that it is the student, the parents and the employer who are doing all this paperwork. But if we are serious about it, is it a resourcing matter? Do we need to get more dedicated to actually resourcing these sorts of things or do you think that at the end of the day we would be better dropping this sort of option and providing an alternative way of recognising the part-time work? Whatever we do, if we end up with a fractured lot of options, I think they will stay

meaningless. I am interested in the view about whether we should persevere with something like that. It is only in its infancy. There are no surprises that it has problems. Have you seen other things that you think might be useful?

Mr Dickie—In the curriculum you should be able to integrate employability skills—for example, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning, self-management. Those are generic skills that I think could be integrated into the whole learning situation. You have a three-hour, sit-down examination. If we had a more expanded view of what life skills area about, we should be able to integrate it into the curriculum. A number of subjects do. Again, it is that recognition: how do you recognise that within the academic situation within a school? It is very difficult. It is easier to read an essay and give a mark on it, but I think we have to assess someone's cooperation, initiative and things like that. Those are life skills, no matter what we do. In trying to recognise work experience or work outside, there are great disadvantages for some kids—where they live, for example, they may not have that opportunity. If I am in Goondiwindi or Stanthorpe, there are very limited opportunities. In Brisbane, I might have lots of opportunities. Where is the equity? I would more look at: how do we integrate those skills that kids are getting in the workforce? There will always be a discrepancy in that there will be opportunities in particular places for particular kids, and generally it is in the metropolitan areas, and there will be great disadvantages. If we want to look at it, then let's look at how we get those kids in the country and rural areas, and particularly disadvantaged kids, into a reasonable work situation where they can get the skills.

CHAIR—So you are saying you have capacity within the schools to do tasks and projects that develop similar sorts of work practices?

Mr Dickie—Yes.

CHAIR—I understand there is a certificate I and a certificate II available as well. I would be interested in some comment on that.

Ms Creagh—I would like to add to this debate. There is the whole issue of moderation of whether or not a student has those qualities. One employer in one position may tick all the boxes; another employer, perhaps who has staff to be able to work with those students et cetera, may be more demanding. In Queensland, we have moderation on all of our senior studies. There would need to be some sort of moderation process to ensure the comparability of standards or accreditation available. That adds to the complexity, the resourcing and the question of whether the outcome is worth the input. Perhaps from a Queensland perspective—and I just happen to know these statistics because I was at a rural and remote meeting the other day—half of the state schools are in rural and remote areas and a quarter of the state school students are rural and remote students. So there is a large percentage of students who could be in the situation that Paul was referring to, where perhaps equal opportunity would not be available.

Mrs Nash—Just in relation to that, it is a resourcing issue, but, in my experience, schools do whatever they can to help kids get over the line to get a QCE. I am not convinced of how many students are interested in having that actually accredited. In some ways I think they like to keep it separate. I am not sure. The fact that it has not been pursued is not because schools do not help kids. I just wonder how many kids are interested. I do not know, but it would seem that the

question that needs to be asked is: is that what kids want or is it something that we think they should have?

CHAIR—I think it is interesting. We were talking to a student outside before who was telling us that in years 9 and 10—I am sure he will come and give evidence a bit later—that he was working in a fast food outlet doing a traineeship. So he was actually getting a certificate. I have some hesitations about why they use traineeships in that industry; it is not always about qualifications. The other side of that is that they come away with a certificate and it is a good outcome but I am not sure that we necessarily need to impose that on every company, because that is a large organisation with a capacity to do that. Small employers who regularly employ young people have said to us, ‘Look, it’s just not going to be a possibility for me to do that.’ That is something we are really very conscious of. But there is also no doubt that when students leave school if they have had some paid work experience that will have credibility. We can talk about curriculum based work skills and volunteering but if you go to an employer when you want a job they will not give it any credibility.

We have had this discussion before. You are spot on in what you are saying. There is no use in setting up accreditations if employers then go, ‘Yes, that’s just a tick-a-box thing; we don’t think it’s worth much, anyway.’ So I suppose what we are struggling with, because we are talking about the balance issue, is that, as you say, students are saying, ‘That’s my part-time work; I do that to escape school. One of the reasons I love it is that it is nothing like school. One of the reasons I love it is because I make my own decisions. I am not being monitored and watched all the time with it. If you do this you’re going to kill it off for me.’

The other side of it is that we recognise that students are going to do more hours than they have done in the past. When I started, shops only opened outside normal hours on Thursday night and Saturday morning, and that was it. So if you wanted to employ students that was when you employed them. It was an eight or nine hours and in a week it was manageable. Students are now working 25 and 30 hours. They may be shifted on for 15 hours but they get phone calls saying, ‘Somebody’s dropped out; can you turn up to do a shift?’ These pressures are significant. One way you can go is legislative, around the numbers of hours. I understand that you have some experience of that, but only for those up to the age of 16, as I understand it. I will get people to comment on that.

For us the real pressure point that we are interested in is the age between 16 and 18. If we are pushing retention rates up and we force young people to make a choice between extra hours and study I think we might be a bit horrified at what they choose. It comes back to your survey, Paul. I am looking for ways in which we can get that balance right. One is through integrating work with study. One of the other options, if you are not going to do the whole recognition thing, is to have a more flexible enrolment pattern. I understand that here you can enrol in the QCE and do it over nine years.

Ms Mullins—Yes.

CHAIR—Can you give us a bit of background on that. It is probably fairly new as well, but could you tell us what that is about and what the uptake might be so far?

Ms Mullins—The advice we are getting from other people at the table is that the first cohort of young people eligible for the QCE graduated last year. It is a work in progress. Schools and other institutions are still learning how to expand options for young people and then how it can be counted. We know that completion of year 12 and certificate III or above provide young people with opportunities that are not afforded to those who do not. The policy intent of the ETRF was to give every young person an opportunity to complete year 12 and leave school with a certificate III or above or undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship. One-third of kids go to university, so the QCE was about engaging a broader group of young people. The QCE was designed to accredit a particular level of attainment. There are literacy and numeracy requirements. You cannot get a QCE unless you meet particular requirements. The approach was to capture depth and breadth of learning.

In terms of how workplace experience can be counted within a QCE—and I think that this issue is germane to the terms of reference of the inquiry—there is no homogenous workplace, and you have alluded to that. There is high-quality workplace experience, where young people gain both employability and technical skills, and then there is low-quality workplace experience, where young people are engaged in repetitive tasks and there is not necessarily a deep and broad range of learning. That is the notion around the paperwork and the Queensland Studies Authority's dilemma around on the one hand counting breadth and depth of learning and making sure that the QCE actually counts for something and on the other hand giving young people an opportunity to engage.

One of the issues—and obviously everything is a resourcing issue—is that we have got to a juncture where, unlike 20 years ago, we have acknowledged that there is a broad range of learning and that workplace learning is important but we have not done any stratifying work around describing the quality of workplace experience and what the student's goals are. I know that it happens at a school level—good teachers understand who their kids are and choose workplace experiences that match the young person's needs. But at a systemic level there is work to be done in quantifying and clarifying, and I do not think there is a homogenous goal for workplace experience.

We know from the Next Step destination survey that is conducted by the Queensland government—and we submitted this in our submission—that school based apprenticeships and traineeships strengthen young people's transition to, particularly, further training and employment. We also know that school based apprenticeships and traineeships do not suit every young person. But I think there are some insights into the composition of workplace apprenticeships and traineeships that give us some clues as to what good workplace experience for young people could be. There might be some clues in there as to how we can construct workplace experience for young people who may not want to undertake, or are not able to secure, an apprenticeship or traineeship or may not be able to secure an apprenticeship or traineeship.

We expect the labour market to shrink in the future. In the shrinking labour market in the last economic downturn, the youth labour market accelerated because employers were interested in casual employees and those who were less expensive. That is something that we need to think about. We suspect there is going to be a downturn in the uptake of school based apprenticeships and traineeships in the next little while. We have not noticed a dip in the momentum in

Queensland as yet, but we get anecdotal advice that there is going to be a downturn in particular industries.

In closing, notwithstanding the notions of what is a reasonable amount of work for a young person to undertake in addition to learning and the issues around whether or not that needs to be legislated—and I am sure the children's commission have views on that—in the discourse we need to make sure that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach and that there is some learning around some of the models that we have. That means we have to do some meaningful work with accrediting authorities. It is not just about employability skills; in the workplace young people acquire technical skills, cognitive skills and conceptual skills. How do we quantify those? How do we match them? Do we have strata of workplace experience for young people? For some people, it is just about engagement and being case managed to keep that engagement, because research tells us that the longer you can keep young people engaged the less tenuous is their grip on a life history of employment. For others, it is about gaining technical and conceptual skills that enable them to move into further training and further education. For others, it is gaining gravitas in the workplace that strengthens their transition to full-time employment after school.

CHAIR—Thanks, Sharon. I have one more question on the education side, and we might be interested in exploring to some extent the industrial side of the issue, which I know the commission has done quite a bit of work on. One of the issues that is interesting to us is that—and I know, as you said, Sharon, good teachers know their students—we have been struck time and time again by schools saying: 'We've never surveyed. We've never asked.' It is very ad hoc—and I do not mean this as a criticism.

It is so common in our culture for young people to have part-time jobs. It is not common amongst other OECD countries. It is a structure of our labour market that we do not have—heaven forbid!—cheap Mexicans or people in very dire circumstances in large numbers who are willing to take entry-level, unskilled, low-paid jobs. We turn to our young people to do those. That is a standard part of how we operate. So in some ways I think we have been a bit complacent about it just being there and being a structure. But, with the deregulated market we are in and the growth of the fast-food industry in the last 15 years, those young people, as we said, are not just working on Thursday nights and Saturday mornings now. We hear very, very different stories in general from young people in the retail industry—which has a long history of regulation—than from young people in the fast-food industry about the way they are handled and treated. With the best will in the world, I think that it is time that we had a serious look at what young people are doing.

The other aspect that I want to get your views on here—and perhaps the commission will have some views as well—is engaging parents, which you mentioned, Paul. It is a real challenge for us because we know the 15 to 18 age group silo their lives, as we have described it. They do not want to tell their parents that there is a problem because they worry their parents will say: 'Well, you'll have to give up the job. You've got to concentrate on your studies.' They do not want to tell the school because, they tell us, the message from the school is that the work is their choice and they should not be doing it if it is interfering with their studies. Across the board, that is the message young people are getting from schools. When we say to them, 'Do you tell your teachers you can't do that particular assignment tonight because you've got work?' they say, 'Oh, no.' Some do, but it is to a specific teacher whom they have a view about. One of the things the students say to us is: 'When you go into year 11 you're told you're going to have to spend 15

to 20 hours per week’—that seems to be pretty standard—‘studying out of the classroom. But our assignments and homework are not set by the week.’ It is not like at the beginning of the week the teachers say, ‘Here’s your 15 hours of work,’ so they can manage it. On Thursday afternoon in period 6 the teacher says, ‘Right, I want this back tomorrow,’ and the student might have a shift that night. We, as the adults in the workplace, the school and the home, with the best will in the world, are going to struggle because they are siloing because of the messages that they get.

So I am wondering what your views are and what the best way is for government to respond. My fear with a legislative response is that young people will simply ignore it—they will not tell anybody—because they want the hours, they want the job and they are not going to report it anyway. So who do they go to and what do they do when they struggle? It is quite clear they do not go to anyone at the moment. They think they are managing until it falls apart—they are at an age where they do not yet have the skills to self-analyse. It could happen to any of us. It is not until they matriculate that they say, ‘I’ve blown it. I didn’t get the marks I needed; I’m really disappointed.’ Or they collapse with glandular fever or they have a stress breakdown or massive anxiety attacks. It is not until it falls apart that they realise they are not managing. Some of you have talked about some national codes of practice. Are there other ideas that might be useful to consider as ways to help young people? That includes employers. I think they often mean well, but if they talk to the young people in the workplace they might find their procedures and policies do not translate. How can we all do better with that? Is there something useful that you have seen that could be used at the national level to deal with the issue of breaking down the siloing that young people do and help them manage it better? The commission for children made reference to some things around codes of practice and so on that could go to the national level.

Ms Harcourt—I think it is optimistic to think that you can get the industry to completely come onside from a goodwill point of view. You can organise it with individual employers and you may be able to do it through liaison at particular levels, but in the end industry is there to make a profit. As times are tough, I think they will take things pretty much to the level that they can legally take them. I completely agree with you about young people compartmentalising and not wanting their parents to ask them to make a choice. When we did the original child labour project, probably four years ago now, we did lots of consultation with the young workers advisory group, individual young people and schools. We got a lot of feedback, and that is where we had a lot of influence in reducing the maximum hours that students up to year 10 may work. It may be useful to look at reducing the hours that year 11 and 12 students may work. In a conversation this morning, a very impressive young person from this school was talking about Woolworths almost throwing a celebration when you go into year 11 because they can double your number of hours.

We have to be careful that we are not, conversely, penalising the even more vulnerable groups of young people. I totally agree with some of the comments that Sharon Mullins and Paul Dickie made about the fact that we do not have homogenous groups of young people or homogenous goals in employment and we have different levels of employer involvement and engagement as well. But for the vulnerable young people who are self-supporting, for instance, you have to look at the flip side: if you limit them to 10 hours a week, what are you going to do to their capacity to support themselves? Are they just going to drop out of school because they have to eat and pay rent?

So I think we have to be very careful that we look at the categories of young people. You have young people working part time for reasons of lifestyle—paying for their mobile phone or to have some independence—but you have other groups of young people involved in work more for reasons of survival. Then I think we also have to look at the young people for whom we should be doing absolutely everything to try to get some linkages to retain them in the system. For these young people, the parents are less likely to be engaged—there is not that link with parental support. These young people are very much at risk of dropping out of school. They are probably not even the prime employees of fast-food outlets, because you have to have certain skills, presentation and sociability.

CHAIR—They could be in the kitchen—

Ms Harcourt—Could be.

CHAIR—where most of the boys are because they are not as presentable as the girls.

Ms Harcourt—Your question earlier was, ‘Is it about resourcing and getting that additional work outside school accredited?’ I think for some young people that is important, but I would not like to see the focus being totally on that, because that, in a way, leaves it to the young person to get their employment: ‘Go and get a job at McDonald’s and then we’ll accredit you.’ The really vulnerable groups of young people I am talking about are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and people from really struggling families who have very few resources, educationally, socially and financially. It needs to be a lot more proactive for them, and I fully recognise that a lot of schools and education is very involved in trying to maintain that link.

From our perspective I think that we are very big on the protection but none of this is should be done in isolation. The other focus is: how can work and involvement be used to link with even basic skills like being on time, being reliable and leaving a workplace tidy? They sound like very basic skills but if you do not have them in essence your life trajectory is very low. We are particularly interested in any efforts to incorporate linkages for young people. There are some who are not really interested in school but if you can link work with school there is a lot of research that tells us that the more the young person can stay engaged in school, where there are support networks and they belong to a social cohort, the more time there is for them to mature.

So there should be training linkages or apprenticeships, even if it is not as high level as an apprenticeship—for example, linking them to the local mechanic and making a space for that in the school, even if that mechanic cannot give them an apprenticeship. If that is all a young boy is interested in there is not point in trying to force him to work at McDonald’s or trying to make him an English literature student. If you can keep him at school by allowing him to work with the mechanic two or three days a week and just have him come back he will have the mentoring, the nurturing and, hopefully, a teacher who knows his skills and strengths and weaknesses.

So for us there is a balance. Do not just focus on resourcing and getting accreditation. Do not focus on the industrial relations rules in isolation. Certainly look at them but be very mindful of the unintended consequences of changing hours for the older students. Also look at the workplace for the very vulnerable kids. A key message from us would be to look at any ways of keeping all of those sorts of things in focus rather than shifting to one area.

Mrs D'ATH—There are three areas I want to concentrate on. The first is: how can we make the balance between work and school better as far as flexibility goes? Paul, you made the point that we talk about flexibility and about moving outside of the standard school structure but we are not actually seeing it happen to any significant extent. That is one question. Another question is about accreditation of paid work. And I am also equally interested in volunteer work because, depending on what path a person wants to follow outside school, volunteer work may be just as relevant and important to recognise. One step down from accreditation, for future employment opportunities there needs to be recognition of what young people have done. The other area is about better transitioning from school and work into the full-time workforce.

Just on the first point of flexibility, do any of you see a benefit in having a trigger or mechanism whereby a student comes to the school and says, 'I now work a minimum of this number of hours per week,' whether they work Monday to Friday or whatever the arrangement is? The trigger is when they hit a certain number of hours or number of days per week. Then the school would move that person out of the standard Monday to Friday, nine to three structure and work on an individual study plan for that student to have more flexibility. A student may have been enrolled at the start of grade 11 and has two years to go, but they come to you and say, 'I'm working 30 hours a week. It's great for me. It's what I want to do. I hope to actually get into this employment.' We know the bulk of the work is retail and hospitality, but they may say, 'I've been doing this for a while. There's a real opportunity for me to do some management courses with this retail employer after I finish school,' and they might not want to finish their QCE in two years; they may want to do it over three years. I am interested in your views on that before I move on to the other two categories. Perhaps we could start at this end and move across.

Ms Hall—I like the idea of the triggers, but I would be cautious about how narrow those triggers are and what the triggers are, particularly for some of the vulnerable groups. The flexibility might be broader and actually involve the community. We looked at a couple of those, particularly for Queensland which has a big rural and remote area. As Paul was saying, if it is a period in a local community's farming cycle and you know the kids will be under pressure from their parents to work—whether it is hay carting or whatever—there could be more of a community response in working with the school for that flexibility. The trigger might be the needs of that community. Also, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities there could be some triggers.

As Sharon was saying, some might have a case management approach—the ones who might not have a lot of hours but need hours—and the young people would be better off out of the school for two days. They need to keep those connections. They need to have time to grow up. They need all the things that we know they need—their friends, for example. There needs to be recognition of the work that they are doing in the same way that a school captain of the rugby team in an employer's eyes might be recognised—that this young person is actually taking on a lot of responsibility, and they do turn up and things like that.

I agree: schools need some triggers. Those triggers, once they are in place, would help them see more and more of what is happening for some of the young people and allow them have the conversation. There could be young people who are doing 25 hours a week and you might say, 'Why are you doing it? Do you like it?' and they might reply, 'No, I don't, but I think I have to.' I have a daughter who was told to come in at six o'clock for a meeting and was told, 'If you don't come in you don't get on the roster.' I said, 'But you can't,' and she replied, 'But I have to.'

There are all sorts of things that kids do not tell you, but some of those triggers will help schools understand them.

Mrs D'ATH—You touched on the recognition side. I will take that one step further so that others can comment. A reference, if you even get a reference, does not carry much weight and you only ever show the good ones—a few lines saying: they were a well-behaved person of good character—but it does not really tell you anything about the skills that the person has learnt in that employment. Because of the nature of the retail and hospitality industries, a referee, if it were their immediate supervisor who worked with them at the time, will more than likely not be the supervisor there in 12 months time when someone is trying to get future employment. Under the state industrial relations laws there was a requirement to have a statement of attainment. Again, that was not something that an employer would give automatically. The employee had to ask for it, and most do not know they have the right to lawfully ask for it. Do you think it would be useful to have some sort of legislative requirement for a statement of service that states the type of service—that they have worked in reception and gained those sorts of skills? At the very least, a student can carry that with them to say: this is what I have done.

Ms Harcourt—I think you have the issue of moderation, again—how easy is it to get that box ticked; what is it going to mean to an employer? I employ a lot of people over time. Yes, you have got to get your toe in the door to be seen. But I am not convinced about having the tick box—‘I have done this.’ I think it is the face-to-face presentation. It depends on the application process. If you have written applications and you have to select five out of 56 applications, I guess anything that you can put on paper is helpful. But it does not immediately strike me as enormously beneficial to go down that legislative path to require employers to tick boxes to give accreditation or to recognise the skills, because I think you could have that devaluing. People just go, ‘Yeah, I’ll tick your boxes.’

Mrs D'ATH—It is just another piece of paper?

Ms Harcourt—It is just another piece of paper. I am not sure that any employer would look at two people and go, ‘You have got your boxes ticked and you haven’t.’ I would have to be convinced that it would make a significant difference.

Mrs D'ATH—You make a very good point there. I am very mindful of the time. If I could ask just briefly for a comment on the flexibility issue, a trigger and whether you think recognition of volunteer work is important? I definitely want to put the question, because it touches on each of your submissions on the transition issue. Maybe if I hear from one from each group.

Mr Dickie—Can I just talk about the flexibility. I think the organisation of senior schooling is an important aspect. Having worked in a senior college situation, you have much more flexibility to combine school and work in that situation than you have in a normal secondary organisation. So the whole aspect of how you treat kids and the relationship that you have with kids is very different. They are treated like adults when they go into a work situation. Why don’t we treat them that way—we do try to treat them that way—in the schools? The organisation of schools is very important. If you look at the operation, what goes around, comes around. It was the trend of 20 years ago, it went out and now it is coming back again. I think the people who worked in those schools and the kids who went through those situations were able to have that flexibility. They were able to combine and they did get recognition. I think we need to look at that.

CHAIR—Paul, part of that was the timetabling flexibilities and things like that in a senior college?

Mr Dickie—Yes. If you say that school is going to start at seven o'clock in the morning, they will be there at seven o'clock in the morning. If you say that to a kid in year 9, it does not happen. It is that whole different perception of how you look at kids.

Mrs Nash—Could I just make a comment about the trigger. It is interesting for me that it is triggered for kids who are gifted in sport, the arts or whatever. We make those allowances for them. Why can't the same thing apply to others? I have lived it with my own child. I forced him to be organised to say, 'This is when I'm going to be away and this is when I'm going to be doing this, so what do I need to do?' The school was great, but other people did not realise they had the opportunity to do that and they saw it in a different light. I would say to them, 'Well, you can go and talk to them and reorganise.' Those kids do senior over three years and those sorts of things. It is triggered for those kids. Maybe that is what we need to look at: why is it triggered for them and not for those kids who need to work or want to work?

Mr Percy—There are a couple of issues there. One is if you do set an amount, if you are expecting students to come forward, how do you know that? One of the useful things, though, is that it does open up a conversation at schools with students and with working with them. From my experience, one of the most effective things is the pastoral systems that schools have. Coming back to a point you made earlier, Sharon, about study and that sort of thing, I have not been in a school yet that does not have an assignment and assessment register. There is a time line. If the schools publish it—and the schools that I have been in have published it—the parents are aware of that and that does make that awareness and communication happen.

Where the conversations then happen is in the pastoral area. You can pick it up in a school when a student is not meeting the timelines, or is looking tired or falling asleep in class. If teachers have those relationships with students, then they pick that up at that stage and then we have got access to counselling, perhaps on skills of timetabling, or you can have conversations with parents coming in to have a talk with the student about what is possible. Some students cannot negotiate with what is acceptable in the employment field, and they often need an advocate like the school. Even though it might not be school business, it does impact on the school because they bring that to the learning environment, and I think that is where this inquiry is rightful in addressing that issue. I think that if we can reinforce those sorts of expectations then we will get a more effective outcome.

CHAIR—One of the pre-emptors of this study was a report done by the Australian National Schools Network, who have done a lot of work in this area. One of the things they said, John, was directly about partnerships. Say, for example, you have a high school in an area where there is a McDonald's, a KFC and a Hungry Jack's. Why don't we as bodies go and talk to them and say, 'We know you'll be employing our students; can we have a bit of a discussion and a partnership around that?'

Mrs Anderson—May I address that right now? I have just come from a breakfast meeting conducted by a local community partnership where there were a number of speakers—university lecturers and so on. It was held at a local leagues club, and the manager of the club spoke about how, at the beginning of this year, they engaged 20 young people from one school, Ferny Grove

State High School, to do traineeships with that leagues club. He talked about the capacity for the students, who had to work seven hours 40 minutes per week, to work more time in holidays and to bank that time so that, when it came near assessment time, they could have the time off. That is an exceptional employer who has formed an excellent partnership. At the other end of the spectrum, we would have some employers in the fast-food industry who tell young people when they apply for a part-time job, 'We will only employ you if you sign up for a traineeship,' and the reason for that is the government incentives that sit behind the traineeship. So employers sit at both ends. The validity and the usefulness of those sorts of partnerships that you talk about are very clear. Whether those partnerships are open to all schools in all areas is another question. It is great where you have a range of employers available. I am not sure how it works in Tara and Mitchell and those sorts of places. Certainly it can work.

CHAIR—It is good to hear that.

Mrs D'ATH—One issue very close to my heart, on transitioning young people into full-time work or out of the school system, is this. If they are working more hours they are earning more money, and I think each one of you said that, in addition to good communication skills and having to manage time and all those sorts of things, that young people learn financial management. I wonder about the accuracy of that statement. They are learning that if you work you earn money, but employers do not teach you how to manage money, and, whether you are 15 or 50, people do not necessarily have good financial management skills. Sharon talked about how things were in our day—

CHAIR—I am so glad you include me in that!

Mrs D'ATH—and when we left school, the only debt you would possibly have is that you may have had to pay mum and dad some board or, if you were moving out of home, to pay rent. Yes, you would have had those additional responsibilities, but you did not have personal debt. You had responsibilities; you did not have debt. Our young people today are very different. They have phones. They have phone plans. They are living in a society where they see many people living off credit. I wonder whether—if we are allowing them to work more and to earn an income while they are studying, and they then move out into the full-time workforce—are we doing enough to assist them with their financial management? Could we be doing more in the schools to teach them those sorts of life skills?

Ms Harcourt—I feel very strongly about that. I do not think the link is necessarily because young people are working or are not working. I think we are a consumer society that targets young people from when they are about four years old. When I was at school the first magazine targeted at us was *Seventeen*. I can remember being in secondary school and they had *Seventeen* in the library. I think we were 16 and we wondered if we were allowed to read it. But now we have teen and tween magazines that are targeted at the eight- to 12-year-olds and the six- to eight-year-olds. There is a very big focus on being a consumer. I think people are doing it to their children from infancy. There is OshKosh. Instead of kids having hand-me-down Target clothes, you are who you present yourself to be. There are enormous issues for us. Previously we used to celebrate a culture of character, but now we celebrate a culture of celebrity. It is all about your appearance, your external looks, what you own and what you do. It is about being seen in the right places, wearing the right clothes, having the right phone and doing the right thing. I

think we are putting enormous pressure on children to be consumers from a very young age. It is a very cynical approach.

The whole marketing world knows that children in this age group control family expenditure—and even the type of car that families buy. I think it starts a long time before children start working. We have created a consumer monster in what we are doing with young people. We think we can be restrained and have delayed gratification, but all the marketing says that there should be no delayed gratification. It says: ‘Have it now. Have it looking like this. Update it. Upgrade it.’ I think it is an enormous issue. We need financial management and financial planning for young people, but it should not be taught as a maths subject or a social skills subject in year 11, year 10 or year 9. I think it is a problem that starts very much earlier. I despair at times about how we can turn this around.

We have four-year-olds who want to be Britney Spears or Pink or somebody, and that all requires clothes, that all requires purchased trappings. We are asking children to have the maturity to deny themselves that. But in denying them that, you risk that they will be ostracised. It is very challenging and we are at a critical point in that area. But I see it as a very separate issue from employment. I think employment is part of trying to get the phones and trying to get the latest look, or even hire-purchasing a car or whatever. But I think they need to be treated as separate issues. Financial management for young people needs to start very early in primary schools with analysis of marketing: ‘What are they trying to get you to buy? Why? What do you think is the pressure behind this?’ But you are asking for a lot of maturity and sophistication for them to be able to resist those messages.

Mrs D’ATH—I am not necessarily suggesting that the school system should try to deal with that problem, but once students are earning an income they need to know how to manage that money. The issue of how they spend their money is a much bigger issue in the consumer mentality. Should it be part of the school’s responsibility to give students life skills in financial management?

Ms Creagh—One of the things we need to be conscious about is the role of parents. I think we are placing that incredible responsibility on the schools. I would really appreciate it if your inquiry could ensure that the work that is being done by schools on preparing students for work is recognised. The role of schools is to ensure that young people are educated. For some students, part of that education is in work in those latter years. I think we need to recognise that the core business of schools is the full education of young people, including transition into work through traineeships et cetera. In the fullness of life, the pastoral care of those young people is part of the schools’ responsibility. The partnership with parents and with business and industry is a role that schools play, but schools cannot be the answer to it. So I think we need to keep a very full picture of the responsibility. It is a societal responsibility to bring young children to adulthood. The school plays a vital role, the family plays a vital role and society plays a vital role. I completely support the statements made about the incredible pressure society puts on young people and how all of us can work together to educate them to be citizens of this country of whom we can be very proud.

Dr JENSEN—Flexibility is a very interesting issue, but it comes with grave risk. If you become too flexible, school simply becomes a choice among a whole variety of other issues. There is a thing called choice fatigue. You can try three varieties of jam and have the opportunity

to purchase, or you can try 30 varieties of jam and have the opportunity to purchase. The thing with having 30 varieties of jam is that more people try them but fewer people purchase them. My concern is that, with all this flexibility, we are almost forgetting the fundamental thing—that is, schools are about education and they are core and central, and that should be the focus. I would like to explore your views. How flexible should we be? Where do we draw the line? The message we are sending out is that school is just one of the choices students have. They have work and their social life and all the rest of it, but school is just a choice. We are saying that if a few more hours of work come at the expense of attending school, that is okay; it is one of the choices. But where do we draw the line?

Mrs Anderson—The dilemma you have raised is very significant, and it is one that we need to acknowledge in Queensland. The terminology under Education and Training Reforms for the Future, or ETRF, is that young people have to be ‘earning or learning’. After the age of 16 or having completed year 10, they can legitimately be continuing school to the end of year 12, or in a training organisation or working full time. The reality of the situation is that 80 per cent of young people in Queensland complete year 12. That stat sits fairly well in comparison with other states—though the ACT is above that. So we are trying to accommodate issues for a few that might not sit there at a larger scale. We used to talk about the 10,000 disengaged—the young people who were at risk of leaving before the end of their schooling or training. The majority of young people combine school and work quite successfully. There are some who are at risk and who are disadvantaged. That is where our attention needs to be focused and that is where our flexibility needs to lie in addressing the specific needs of those young people.

But I do not think schools have the capacity to make it too flexible, nor do I think there would be much research that says we should make it open slather—that we should make it so flexible that students can go to school when it suits the employer or when it suits them. Schools have a core business to deliver education. For some young people, work as a part of that can be the carrot that keeps them at school. But do try to build your school timetable around students moving in and out of school on a daily basis is economically impossible, particularly for small schools. It costs you just as much to run your English class whether there are 20 students, 25 students or 17 students. To do back-up classes for those students who are out—and often it is one or two students a day—and to try to run second-level classes and give one-on-one attention with that particular teacher for each class is not possible for schools. So I think we have to separate the issue of regular schooling and attending to year 12 and how successfully that happens for a large number of people and the issue of students who are disadvantaged because of their situation in life or their experience with schooling and their particular needs and how we deal with those. I think we have different clientele that we are dealing with. One is a regular population who happen to work. The other is a special population who might need work and other special assistance to keep engaged with education.

Ms Mullins—Dennis, you are interested in how much choice we give young people and whether we provide some structure around the choices they make or whether we give them carte blanche. There are also issues around the economic pressures on young people who are not buying mobile phones but are bringing income into their home. I think we have all got examples and the research tells us that some 15- to 17-year-olds are required to earn money to pay the rent and put food on the table. In the senior qualifications which have been introduced around Australia, it is acknowledged that people have to have a particular group of learnings in order to get their certificate of education. In essence, an ideological decision has been made about what

comprises a reasonable suite of learnings for a young person. How we manage that within the broader social environment is, I think, where the issue lies. I think there have been decisions made by educators and governments about what comprises a reasonable suite of learnings for younger people.

Mr Dickie—Also, as Mandy has pointed out, the size of the school and the quality of its teaching resources determine very much the curriculum you can provide. At city schools you have a large number of resources and you have the ability to operate with employers. At small high schools in the country you have a very limited curriculum because you just do not get people going to the country to teach maths and physics. So it is very much determined by what resources are available. But is that a disadvantage to kids? What is the curriculum kids really need? The National Curriculum Board tells us what the subjects are—and you might disagree with those subjects. But it very much depends upon the resources that are available for the curriculum that you provide.

Dr JENSEN—I think you have raised a very valid point there. As to the issue about individual learning programs and so on for kids who may be worth a lot of hours, that comes at the price of increasing teachers' workloads significantly. I do not know what the situation is in Queensland, but in Western Australia we are getting a lot of teachers baling out of the education system because of workload issues. So the last thing we want to be doing is loading them up some more, because we will lose some good educators. Do you have any comments on that?

Ms Hall—I do not think flexibility suggests a laissez-faire approach. I would be interested in what young people have to say. I think they would say they like structure. It is about some of the groups on the extreme. Too rigid a system is not going to suit them. It is about schools' willingness to work collaboratively with other groups. For some cohorts of kids they need to work with some of the youth agencies, who often do a great job of case managing, to see how those kids can stay engaged and continue to learn but not fit within a rigid school system. The other thing I think there is a capacity to do is to provide a broader community education that supports these kids. We have seen what happened with Darrell Lea due to public pressure. You should not be asking kids who are trying to finish school to work exorbitant hours. People will vote with their feet. Parents want to be advocates. But kids are very cautious, as you have mentioned. The kids say: 'Don't ring them up, Mum. It'll be tough for me and the school will say this.' Parents and communities must work as a group to say that it is not on, particularly for the fast food groups, to give kids that number of hours. It is not about legislation. It is about the fact that we all want our kids to get a good education. I agree that it does have to stay structured. I did ask some young people: 'What happens if you work? Can't you just do your study?' I have a concern that we will start to see online learning because we cannot pay for the teacher. But that is not the way to go for young people, except for some exceptional ones.

Dr JENSEN—So essentially what you are saying is that there should be some structure and rigidity within the system with some flexibility around the edges for the outliers?

Ms Hall—I am saying there should be structure, not rigidity. Some schools have a long way to go. We know that some schools do some fantastic stuff. There is a school in Queensland where an external group actually provides the school. The kids are enrolled at the high school. The guidance officer works in an external area. They provide the curriculum and they provide some of the teachers. It has got to work for these kids. Some schools would not entertain the thought

of that. As I said, in rural areas there might be other issues. It is not about throwing the baby out with the bathwater; it is about looking at where we can be flexible and asking where we as a group of parents and the community and the schools can put some pressure on some of the big national groups such as Subway and McDonald's. We should tell them: 'We want our kids to finish school. You do a great service for us, and we know kids like working.' We hear stories of how some managers in those stores really do respond to that. They say: 'Would any of your friends like a job? Instead of doing 10 hours, do you want to do five hours?' So I think we need to do some community education around that, as well as legal or structured school things.

CHAIR—We will have to wrap it up, though we could talk for a long time. As Dennis has said, part of the challenge we are dealing with is not just about offering choices but about the fact that young people are taking choices whether we offer them or not. I think it would be a great mistake to assume that it is only about the vulnerable kids. In many cases the ones who are doing the most hours are the most functional. So there are some dangers there as well. We have met students who are very high performers but are doing 30 hours of work and then collapsing. So there are some challenges across the board. We have had some really interesting evidence and submissions from all of you today which will give us some food for thought. Thank you all for your attendance here today. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence, to which you can make corrections of grammar and fact.

Proceedings suspended from 11.01 am to 11.29 am

BLIGHT, Mr Andrew Thomas, Head of Department, Middle and Senior Schooling, Craigslea State High School

CAMERON, Ms Lisa, Guidance Officer, Craigslea State High School

GREEDY, Mr John, Head, Special Education, Craigslea State High School

HAY, Mrs Gail, Vocational Education Coordinator, Craigslea State High School

KRAATZ, Mrs Catherine, Member, P&C, Craigslea State High School

MILNE, Ms Genevieve, Teacher, Craigslea State High School

PICKERING-SMITH, Mrs Sharon Leigh, Member, P&C, Craigslea State High School

Amelia, Student, Year 12, Craigslea State High School

Ethan, President, Student Representative Council, Craigslea State High School

Leah, Student, Year 12, Craigslea State High School

Luke, Student, Year 12, Craigslea State High School

Monica, Student, Year 12, Craigslea State High School

Stephanie, Student, Year 12, Craigslea State High School

CHAIR—I welcome representatives of Craigslea State High School 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 respective houses.

Luke and Amelia, thank you both for your wonderful efforts in looking after the committee and our guests here today. Obviously, your training is going very well because we very much enjoyed your hospitality.

We are particularly keen to have a talk to schools and students directly about how students are managing to balance work and study. We have a mixed panel here today, so I will indicate to you that students will often say to us, 'I'm doing a certain number of hours and I'm managing fine,' and the teachers will say to us, 'They're falling asleep in class and struggling to get things in on time.' We are trying to get a sense of this situation. One of the issues which we have to deal with is: what is a reasonable number of hours for students to work and how can we best support students in managing that? I am very interested to hear about your experiences within the context of where we are today as a society and as a community on this issue. What are your observations? We might hear evidence from you in the same order that your names were put forward. Cathy, what is your experience and observation of this issue?

Mrs Kraatz—I have a daughter in grade 11 who works part-time. She works for AMF Kedron Bowl. Her hours of work vary between two and 10 hours a week during the school term. During the school holidays she works extra hours. Her employer is very good because she cannot work after 9 o'clock on a week night; they will not allow that. I have only recently found out what the state laws are on this after reading my child's student planner. At no stage did my child tell me what it was, and obviously she knew.

CHAIR—Is there some contradiction between these two things?

Mrs Kraatz—I think students tell you what they want to tell you, and it is up to you to find out the rest. I do not think she is any different from anyone else. Currently, she balances work and study well. If she has an assignment or something else that needs to be done for school, she will tell the people at work that she cannot work, and that is very good. Hopefully, my other children will do the same thing. Currently, I have no problem with her working. However, this is grade 11 and so we will see how she manages as time goes by.

CHAIR—You say that students are able to work only until 9 o'clock. Is this place open later than that and it has a policy on it?

Mrs Kraatz—Yes. Its work policy is that, if you are a high school student, you cannot work past 9 o'clock, Monday to Thursday. I think they are allowed to work later on Friday nights.

CHAIR—Perhaps the people who run that particular business are parents and they have been there themselves.

Mrs Kraatz—I think it is a multinational company, because they are connected with Dreamworld and those sorts of places. When she started work there, I had to sign paperwork and they told me what the guidelines were.

CHAIR—Thank you. That is useful.

Mrs Pickering-Smith—My daughter is in grade 12 this year. She started working at the end of year 10, because we encouraged her to get a job for the Christmas holidays. That was good for her; it gave her more confidence. But, unfortunately, she could not keep it up this year. She did it again for the Christmas holidays but she was just so stressed, and something had to go.

CHAIR—What sort of industry was it?

Mrs Pickering-Smith—Toys'R'Us. She was on the check-out, doing the sales.

CHAIR—What hours was she working?

Mrs Pickering-Smith—She was working two shifts a week. It was usually on the weekend and Thursday night. This year we scaled it back to one shift a week, but she could not cope.

CHAIR—Was the employer amenable to her scaling her hours back? There was no negative feedback?

Mrs Pickering-Smith—No. They were quite cooperative. I think there were other children who would take on the extra work. She could not keep it up, so she had to resign. They were pretty good about the minimum hours that she could work. I think they said in the guidelines that students were allowed to work for only 15 hours, or something like that—I am not sure now. So they were pretty good.

Mrs D'ATH—I have a quick question on your comment about work becoming too demanding for your daughter. Was that something that your daughter acknowledged? Did she say, 'I need to give this up.?'

Mrs Pickering-Smith—Yes. She was crying with stress.

Mrs D'ATH—I was not sure whether it was the parent who saw the situation.

Mrs Pickering-Smith—We probably encouraged her to do work for the life experience and also for later on when she would be at uni. It would give her a bit of experience to get part-time employment. She is driven to do the best that she can, but she could not juggle doing the two things.

CHAIR—Gail.

Mrs Hay—Three of my four children did not have part-time jobs. They all participated in school based traineeships or apprenticeships here, at the school. That was an easy way out for me. That was better trying to juggle school work, plus working late at night.

CHAIR—Have they finished? And did they follow through in those career areas?

Mrs Hay—Yes.

CHAIR—We are getting evidence that school based apprenticeships and traineeships are good paths.

Mrs Hay—They definitely are. One daughter started hairdressing one day a week in year 11, and then she went to two days a week. She is still working at the same salon. My son did a business traineeship certificate II and certificate III. He ended up doing the certificate III with a criminal lawyer, and today he is working for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. My other daughter started a traineeship certificate III in horticulture in year 11 and followed that right through. She is nearly 24 and has only just changed careers.

CHAIR—To what?

Mrs Hay—To business. She had to change her career because of her back injuries.

CHAIR—You have raised an issue that is of quite a lot of interest to us. We saw this in Melbourne at Holmesglen, which is a vocational high school within a TAFE. Staff said to us that they were a bit surprised that students were coming there to do accountancy or assistant nursing, for example. That students were doing these sorts of TAFE diploma courses indicated that they were quite capable academically but were not interested in staying on at school to do

matriculation. When we spoke to those students, they expressed the view that they would eventually end up at university but they did not see going from school to university as a direct pathway. They were looking for an alternative. The TAFE based option allowed them to get some work. They wanted to travel a bit before they committed themselves to going to uni and so forth. So it is interesting that the experiences of your children reflect that as well.

Mrs Hay—My son, who is working for Justice and Attorney-General, is now ready to go to uni to do law. He did not want to carry on with school after the end of year 12.

CHAIR—Do you think it is particularly so for young men?

Mrs Hay—No. I just think it is different personalities.

CHAIR—Andrew, what is your observation? Do not feel constrained by that view.

Mr Blight—I see this issue in two realms. You have two definite groups of students—one is academic and the other is non-academic. It is certainly the case with this school, but also with others, that they cater for the non-academic group more and more every year. There is an increasing number of courses in schools that are certificate based that involve work experience, or work placements. The pathways for non-academic students are tightening up more and more.

My observation of the academic students is that, if they have an assignment but they also have work to do, the work always comes first. That is what I see. If work gets in the way of an assignment then the assignment does not get done. How students manage this is very dependent on whether individual teachers will be flexible and help them. Some will not. Some will say: 'That is the due date. You've known for four weeks that you need to get that done.' I do not know which one is the better approach, but that is the reality.

I think that some students have the ability to be able to speak to teachers and negotiate that, and that for some it is too intimidating. They just do not tell anyone and they are the ones who tend to fall over. Perhaps there is a third group, who are the ones who are falling over on the academic side because they have not got the ability to talk about what is getting in their way. So they drop out of the academic side and we pick them up in the vocational subjects whereas perhaps we do not need to.

CHAIR—In talking to young people, one interesting thing is the wrong presumption that all of those who are dropping through are trades focused. We met quite a few young people, who are overachievers in some ways—and perhaps this is what you were indicating, Sharon—who put so much pressure on themselves, and then try to add work to it as well, that they tend also to be at risk under this system. We heard from them that the 'at risk' was not dropping out but illness. They are quite often the students who get glandular fever and things like that. Or they get through, look back, and say: 'I'm so disappointed I didn't get the results I wanted. I'm not into the course I really wanted to do.' And they make a whole lot of second-best choices in what they might do at uni and so forth. Have you seen that side of it?

Mr Blight—We have a huge number of students who change subjects during year 11. They change from academic subjects into vocational subjects. Part of that is their realisation that they do not really want to go to uni. Perhaps their mum had said they were going to go to university,

and that discussion is eventually had as their results fall away and they then make the change. Sometimes it is just: 'It's not really what I want to do.'

CHAIR—You are saying that it is not always ability; it is inclination?

Mr Blight—Yes. Social and community studies, which we started in 2006, is a good example. It was a very definite type of student that used to do that. Some of them were special needs and some were lower level. That is no longer the case. We still have those students but now we have a huge range. We have students in there who could quite easily cope with an academic timetable but they choose not to.

Dr JENSEN—You have brought up a point that is very valid and it is something that I would like the entire panel to think about and maybe respond to at a later stage, which is the issue of negotiation. Are negotiation skills something that should, in effect, be a prerequisite in high school? They are something that is critical right through life, yet you were pointing out the diverse outcomes because of people's different abilities in negotiation?

Mr Blight—Definitely. We have processes, for example, for when students need extensions on assignments, but numbers of students do not even do that. There is a form to fill out, hand to their teacher and then put in to make it official, but there are plenty of students who just do not go there. They just take the bad mark.

CHAIR—From direct personal experience, one of my observations is that if students, regardless of capacity, do not want to engage then they are expert at just not engaging. And you have just given a perfect example of that. You put a regulation in place that says that you can apply for extensions, there is a form and there is a process, and they just ignore that. Part of the challenge for us in terms of this is that, if we give regulatory recommendations about hours, types of work and so forth, they will just ignore it and do what they want to do anyway. In the direct experience from the classroom that you are talking to us about, what have you seen that does work well in this area?

Mr Blight—I think the kids that actually develop those sorts of skills are the kids that get into the vocational programs and go to work. We run a volunteer program and in being involved in that they are forced to talk to adults and talk to the public. That in itself—being virtually forced to deal with situations in which they have no option but to talk—I think is really successful.

Immersing students in work in a safe environment where, if it does not work out, we can always pull the pin and say, 'Well, that's it; we'll close this one off and maybe look at another one or at something else,' is something that works. All the processes are already there for them to do that. But it is very difficult to put something like that in place for ancient history. How would you do that?

Ms Cameron—Kids come to me as an advocate, in my role as guidance officer. They come to me and say, 'I am not coping; I need an extension.' I say, 'Have you done the paperwork?' They say, 'No.' They know they have not done the right thing, they know that this process exists but they need to be walked through it. What I do, in my role of teaching them how possibly to negotiate and advocate for themselves, is to walk alongside them to the teacher or the head of department to tell the teacher and explain why they need the extension and, in a sense, practise

the process. If they stumble, I will come in. To walk them through that process and give them support in the first instance means that they then think: 'Okay; this is a process. The teacher didn't jump down my throat and say, "You're just lazy"; they were supportive.' That then builds up their confidence to be able to negotiate that for themselves the second time, if needed.

I think tracking kids is a big support role, and we do that very well here with year level coordinators and through the absence system line. You do need to know your kids and you do need to think, 'This kid has been away for a couple of days.' We do talk about the kids in the positive sense of where they are at—that is, tracking them to make sure they are back on task if something is wrong. We spend hours readjusting programs. It is a big job. Something we do really well here at Craigslea is to support kids to make those flexible arrangements and adjust their programs to meet their personal needs, whether it be because they have a big timetable load, or because they have health issues, or because of other things in their life.

Dr JENSEN—Do they year level coordinators follow the kids right through high school?

Ms Cameron—They do. They start with a cohort at year eight level.

Dr JENSEN—We have the same thing with a lot of schools in WA. It is excellent

Ms Cameron—It is fabulous, because it means there is a significant adult in those kids' lives. We put time and effort into picking the right person and making sure that it is a teacher who is not on a contract, who has that longevity and who is going to be at the school to take them through. It is a really significant role.

Mrs D'ATH—I want to comment on something that Ethan and your other school representative raised with us at our recent school summit. It was the very relevant point that, when we talk about the importance of engaging with young people and asking their opinions on important issues like work and school balance, the kids who put their hands up to participate in those sorts of processes are the ones who already have those skills. I thought it was fantastic that your students said, 'But the ones who do not volunteer to participate in these sorts of events are the ones we need to engage with.' I am really interested in how you think we can engage with those kids and build their confidence and negotiation skills. It sounds like you are already doing some of that at this school, but I would be interested to hear that.

Mr Greedy—The first comment I would like to make is that school is the only place I know of where we send a young person for 12 years and expect them to stay there with very little payment at the other end for some of them. As a community we have opened up a whole new world to them by allowing them to do traineeships and work experience in their senior schooling. That has been wonderful, and Andrew has already pointed out the positives of that. Some of the negatives are that we now have kids going to work experience or traineeships who probably see that as more important than being at school. I think that is a big issue. The big issue is that they can see the money side of things on the business side whereas at school they still have to wait for that to occur through their studies.

Dr JENSEN—A slow process.

Mr Greedy—Yes, a very slow process. We are in a world where they are telling us that we should possibly spend, I think, about 10 minutes on any one subject with the young people of today before they get very bored with us and want to move on to something else. That is probably not a generalisation, but if we only work on the 50 per cent principle then we are in big trouble.

Added to all this, we have the idea that we can do all this within the school setting and that all of the communication processes that have to be put in place work. The problem is that the young people we are sending out to traineeships and work experience are those young people who are seeing the world of moving through year 12 and into university as not being the one for them. Therefore their skills are sometimes a little lower, and therefore filling out bits of paper and conversing with their subject teachers is something they are just not going to do, because they do not see it as being important.

Even though I pick up on what you said in regard to them possibly not wanting to do that, Sharon, I do not think it is always about them not wanting to. I think it is a lot to do with them not knowing and being very shy. We sometimes forget that they are in years 11 and 12 and just do not have the skills. So the tracking of kids is very important in years 11 and 12, and the amount of information that has to pass between teacher and student in regard to that tracking is huge. The trouble is that that particular child is doing it with six different teachers and each teacher is not necessarily talking to the other teachers about what they are telling the kid to do. That is not in all cases, but you can imagine all the meetings that would need to take place among six different teachers in relation to one student. That would have to be going on pretty well once a fortnight, and we all know that is not going to happen.

So, as we open up the can of worms into the business area—and I think it is a wonderful thing, especially for the kids I look after, the special needs students at the school—the problems that occur at the school are huge. I do not think it is any one person's fault. I do not think it is the teachers' fault—I think the teachers are doing a wonderful job trying to keep up with it—but you might have a student who is all of a sudden cut down to two lessons out of three a week. The student wants to stay in the course. There are assignments set. The assignment that was set on this particular day was spoken about in a period the student missed. How are these young people all of a sudden on an equal playing ground with the others, who have been there for three lessons a week? There are a whole lot of other issues that come into play with this. I come back to what Lisa said. For me it is about that relationship building between the students, their teachers and the rest of the community and the time that is needed for that relationship building to take place.

CHAIR—Can we bite the bullet? You are actually talking about resourcing there, aren't you?

Mr Greedy—Yes. The thing about it is that it is big. A lot of these young people are making it. I was speaking before to one of these young people, who was at TAFE for two days a week and was still holding down four subjects. That is commendable. Think about the processes that were going on for her and her teachers. Probably she has the skill to do that, but on the other side of things there are a number of young people we deal with who just do not have those skills. They will end up doing very well with the traineeship, but for the four subjects—

CHAIR—It is a waste of their time.

Mr Greedy—it just will not happen.

CHAIR—Thanks, John. Genevieve? We are on a paper ration here!

Ms Milne—I was just looking at my notes. As a classroom teacher, I feel very keenly concerned about the kids missing a third of the course. The other thing is that I feel that schools—

CHAIR—Are you saying to us that, if the students are enrolled in a vocational subject and it takes them out of the school on a particular day, the programming can still mean that the third lesson in English has to be on that day, so they are missing it?

Mr Greedy—That is right.

CHAIR—Is that the structure?

Ms Milne—It is pretty hit and miss. It is just whatever is on the day. Schools offer kids a window of opportunity to do certain things that are also life skills, like rock eisteddfod, instrumental music, choir, sporting things, and those kids who do vocational courses do not tend to go into those things—they cannot fit it in. So I feel that affects their ability to achieve a rounded education. But at the same time skills do a lot to support students to make life choices, such as careers, as Andrew and John have said, so it is about finding the balance and the support for the kids.

CHAIR—We might ask the students about this. Do you have part-time jobs? You do not have to tell us your employer, but is it fast food or retail? What sort of hours do you work in a normal week? When do you do those hours? Is it five till nine in the evening? You are all in year 12, so how you think you manage balancing that with the school responsibilities you have? Do you miss time at school or do you get pressured to take time off school for work and things like that?

Monica—I am doing Certificate III in Hairdressing at the moment. I work Monday 9 till 5, Wednesday 9 till 1 and then Saturday 8 till 4. I find it fine. I still do my five subjects and the only one I failed was art because I was not ever there. It is awesome. When I am sick of school I am at work and when I am sick of work I am at school, so it works out really good.

CHAIR—Monica, is it your intention to continue on with hairdressing?

Monica—Yes, definitely.

CHAIR—Why do you choose to carry the other subject load? What makes you interested in continuing?

Monica—I want my year 12 certificate in case I want to do something further later on.

CHAIR—You want to keep options open for yourself.

Mr Greedy—I teach Monica and she does our Certificate II in Active Volunteering. Where we can, we get students out one day a week for 10 weeks—30 to 40 hours of volunteer hours as part

of this. Monica's program is so full she is now going to have to do that in her school holidays because, while everyone else is doing it pretty much in school time, she cannot even fit that in.

CHAIR—There are other costs.

Monica—That is all right.

CHAIR—Monica says that is all right. One of the things we hear from students is that it is horses for courses, too. Some people are super organised, very mature and well and truly ready to balance a whole lot of things. But, Monica, sometimes they regret that afterwards. They do look back and say, 'I really ran myself into the ground a bit.'

Dr JENSEN—You need to smell the roses.

CHAIR—Yes. I am not saying you are doing that, but it is a good warning. Other young people might really be struggling and really unhappy, and we know there are issues about depression and anxiety among young people and so that would not be manageable. It is interesting that you are looking at keeping options open. That is a very mature attitude.

Mrs D'ATH—Monica, when did you start your apprenticeship?

Monica—I had been working there for a little while and I think I signed up in February last year.

Mrs D'ATH—You had been working for them before that as well?

Monica—Yes, I had worked for them for probably five months, and then I signed up.

Mrs D'ATH—In grade 10? You had been working for them and you started your apprenticeship at the beginning of grade 11?

Monica—Yes.

Mrs Hay—She started off with a placement for work experience and then got a traineeship.

Mr Greedy—That is how a lot of young people at our school get started in traineeships. They start off with work experience and then the employer sees that they have a good product and go from there.

CHAIR—Leah, what is your situation?

Leah—I work up to maybe six hours a week waitressing at a local restaurant which is 15 minutes away from home, so I can easily get to and from it. I am also part of the START QUT program, which enables me to do two core subjects at uni. If I pass those two I get guaranteed entrance into university, so I will not need my OP. But at school I am still doing OP subjects just in case that does not quite work out, so I will still have an OP. I have support at school and at home from my parents. My brother did the same program, so I have lots of support. On some

days I do get a bit overwhelmed by everything and I think, 'Too much school.' But you get through it. In the end, it is worth it.

CHAIR—Leah, what are you doing in the university component?

Leah—In semester 1 I am doing accountancy. In the second semester I will be doing economics.

Dr JENSEN—Do you want to do business economics or accountancy or something like that at uni?

Leah—I am going to QUT, so those are part of the core subjects which eventually branch out into majors. I think I might major in marketing or management.

CHAIR—I am interested in exploring that a bit. It is quite unusual to be able to enrol in university while you are at school. We are quite familiar with joint school and TAFE programs, but university and school are a bit different.

Leah—Yes. The START QUT program is pretty new, but it is very well organised. I even have support groups at uni.

CHAIR—Let us get down to the nuts and bolts. Do you get a HECS debt for those subjects?

Leah—No. The two subjects that I will do will be completely free, so I will not pay anything.

CHAIR—Who pays for those subjects—one of the schools?

Ms Cameron—They are free. The university picks up the cost of them. It is part of their marketing because they will get Leah's bum on a seat next year.

CHAIR—So the federal government pays for it.

Dr JENSEN—The taxpayer does.

Ms Cameron—All the universities in Queensland offer this opportunity, predominantly for students who are B average at the end of year 11. They go through a selection process at school level first and get signed off by the principal. Their application goes to the university, then each of the faculties determines which students it will take in. Some universities require them to do two semesters—one subject in the first semester and one in the second—while others just do half a year. There is no cost. It makes their first year load at uni lighter because they do not have to repeat one or two subjects. To accommodate that for Leah, she does one less subject here at school, which gives her a bit of extra time to study.

CHAIR—So those subjects are counted towards the QCE.

Ms Cameron—Yes. They are one credit point towards the 20.

CHAIR—I am interested in it because in my region we have a retention rate of around 62 per cent and a teen unemployment rate of over 40 per cent. One of the things that came through was that probably a third of these young people were not trades focused; they were creative stream type students. They were turning up at TAFE to do things like multimedia, music, art and design. They did not like being a square peg in a round hole in high school. They found the curriculum boring. It was not that they were not capable of doing it; they were just bored to tears by it. I was talking to one of those students and they said, ‘I reckon if I could have enrolled in astronomy at uni that would have given me enough that interests me to keep me engaged.’ They were watching astronomy shows on the Discovery Channel all the time. So I am interested that you have got that going. Do you find that you really enjoy it, Leah? Do you do it at the uni?

Leah—Yes. Every Thursday I get a day off and I go to my lecture. It is a three-hour lecture and then I get the rest of the day off, so I usually catch up on other schoolwork or maybe lecture homework. It is a really good program because the transition from high school to uni is easier. There is not too much uni, so you are subtly getting inside, which is good.

Mrs D’ATH—I know that Redcliffe State High School are doing a similar program, I think with UQ. They are starting the Bachelor of Education in grade 11, so students will have a full year’s credit by the time they finish school. They are actually delivering it at the school, after school time—so at 3.30 in the afternoon. Do you think that would be of any benefit or do you believe that actually going to the university assists you more in that progression?

Leah—I think that might create a strain on the students, especially if they have to stay after school and do it. I like to go to the uni because you get to know what uni life is like and what you are preparing for in the future.

Mr Greedy—Could I just add to that. Part of the push, part of the appeal, of going to university, TAFE or other environments apart from school is that the rules are all different and the clothes they wear are different. The real hanging out around people is really pushing—

CHAIR—I must say, in the states we go to where there is no such thing as a years 7 to 12 high school that everybody goes to—a college—one of the real problems is that a lot of people drop through in the transition and get lost. One of the great advantages is that students are at an age at the end of year 10 where they need something that says: ‘Your world’s expanded somewhat. You’re more independent.’ It is interesting. Stephanie, what is your situation?

Stephanie—I go to TAFE every Thursday and Friday and study a cert. IV in fashion. Also, with social and community studies I do at school, I have to do 40 hours of community service. Every Monday and Wednesday, from two until five I work in an op shop. And then I have a part-time job and I work around 10 hours.

CHAIR—And then!

Stephanie—I work two days a week. I work from four until 9.30 on a Thursday night and either Saturday or Sunday from 11 until five or 5.30, depending on the day on the weekend. I only do four subjects at school. I go for three days.

CHAIR—How do you find balancing all that, Stephanie? What is the reality? Does it have its moments?

Stephanie—Yes, it has its moments. I normally take it as it comes. I do not really know how I do it; I just do it.

Dr JENSEN—Where do you want to go after school?

Stephanie—I want to do something along the lines of fashion. I am not exactly sure which area, but I like clothes.

Mr Blight—I did a bit of work in getting Stephanie into the volunteering course. One of the reasons she has gone down that road is that doing four subjects on their own would not have given her a QCE. By doing social and community studies, effectively two courses in one, allows her to score enough points to get a QCE; otherwise, all the other things she does means that she does not get it. It is a tragedy that the system works against someone like Stephanie. It almost backs her into a corner to do particular subjects.

CHAIR—To make a choice?

Mr Blight—Yes. I think that is horrendous.

CHAIR—That is really interesting. You have outlined for us some of the things that I think we have to open our minds to. We tend to say: it is uni, academic or trades—traditional pathways. Stephanie, what you are talking about is a professional stream—fashion design, the fashion industry and things like that. We have had students talk about nursing, saying: ‘I don’t want to go straight from school into the degree of nursing. I want to be an assistant, get some work, earn some money, travel and then I might come back and go to uni.’ Bookkeeping and accountancy are other areas where people will often go the hands-on TAFE type of way and then go to uni. You are the living proof of that—that people are looking at different pathways rather than the traditional ones. You value the fact that your school has been able to be flexible and make that happen for you.

Stephanie—Yes.

CHAIR—Do any of you think that you would not be completing your QCE if those options were not available? Stephanie, you said, ‘Probably’.

Stephanie—Yes. I just moved here this year. I am from the coast. My options were to drop out of school and just go to TAFE full time—because I really wanted to do that—or stay here and do the social and community studies to get a QCE.

CHAIR—You made that decision to keep your options open?

Stephanie—Yes, to keep my options open. I did not feel like I was ready to leave school yet.

CHAIR—Monica, you nodded as well. You probably would have—

Monica—I probably would have dropped out or something too, but I am happy.

CHAIR—Ethan, can you fill us in on your situation?

Ethan—I am in year 12. I study six OP subjects and participate in numerous extracurricular activities. I have a part-time job in retail. I am lucky enough to only have to work 10 hours a week. My employer was very lenient in understanding my situation. I work Friday nights, 4.30 to 9.30, and then I have all day Saturday to work on my assignments, and Sunday mornings from 6 am until 11 am, so I have the rest of the day to work on my assignments.

CHAIR—No late Saturday nights with a 6 am start, either.

Ethan—No, unless I am studying. I am quite lucky to have the rest of Sunday to work on any assignments, so effectively I do not work on a day that directly follows a school day. I have a Certificate II in Hospitality, which I completed in grade 9 and 10, working in fast food. I used to do 25 hours a week in grade 9 and 10 while completing that traineeship.

CHAIR—When would you do the shifts? How did you fit in the 25 hours in the week?

Ethan—With difficulty. I would start at 4.30 and I would finish at about two in the morning. I would get home at 2.30 and then I would be up, ready for school, at 7 am.

CHAIR—How many nights a week would you do that?

Ethan—Two or three school nights, and I would work either Friday night or start at 5 am on Saturday, and I would work Sunday mornings. It was a minimum of 25 hours a week that I was working.

CHAIR—How did your parents feel about that?

Ethan—Like me, they were not aware that that would be happening when I agreed to take part in the traineeship. It was not school based, so there was nothing the school could do about it. I did not plan on leaving fast food while I was in grade 9 and 10—I did not think I would leave at all, really, until I finished grade 12. For a while I thought, ‘Why not make use of my time while I’m there?’ and I got my traineeship. But after doing the 25 hours a week I completely burnt out and thought, ‘No way am I staying here.’ My parents obviously were not too happy that I was finishing at two in the morning—someone had to come and get me—so I suppose we just took it as it came and then I finished up and pretty much quit immediately.

Dr JENSEN—And what do you want to do next year?

Ethan—I want to go to university and study business.

CHAIR—The issue of traineeships, particularly in the fast food industry, has been raised with us. We have talked to students who did not even know they were signing up to a traineeship, and you are also reflecting that the level of information was not great. We have also heard from students that they were not aware, for example, that it might lock them out of other opportunities post school, that government funded programs would provide a certificate II or III to people, but

when you have already got one you do not get access to that. You say, ‘Hang on, I only did it because I was signed up by’—whatever the fast food company was. ‘I just wanted a job.’ So what sort of information do you think is out there, and what problems do you see with young people doing it that way?

Ethan—I definitely understand what you are saying. I was only in grade 9 and 10 when I did the traineeship. However, I was unaware of the fact that I could do a school based traineeship in grade 11, even though it would obviously have been a much better pathway for me not to enter into a traineeship but to study six OP subjects and get the best possible OP I could get to go to university. I was definitely unaware that I could start a traineeship in grade 11 that would be school based and obviously funded as well. I was quite lucky through fast food that I did not pay for the traineeship either—it was an initiative of the government. I had no idea at all that I could come to school and start a school based traineeship. It was not really something I wanted to do. It was not what I aspired to do. I did not think, ‘I’ll start a traineeship,’ or that sort of thing—I just took advantage of the opportunity that was in front of me while working in fast food.

CHAIR—Thanks. Luke, tell us about what your experience is, what you are doing at school and why you are doing the course you are doing.

Luke—I am doing a cert III in hospitality. That takes a day off school. Last year it was Wednesday, and it was good for me because they were not important subjects that I was working on then. I do mostly hands-on subjects like cooking, woodwork, sport and stuff. When I was choosing my subjects I chose tech studies—designing what I should make—but I dropped that because I was doing hospitality and I thought it was too hard. Also, I do music. I am in four bands at school, but it will drop down to two. Two of them will be ending soon because next holidays we will be going to New Zealand for a competition.

The hospitality studies takes off one day because we run the restaurant at school, and once we accomplish that and pass, you get a certificate for hospitality. I miss out on a few subjects because they have changed subjects for this year. I miss out on my HP subject on Thursdays because I just got notified by my teacher on Tuesday that, not really a handwritten assignment or paperwork, I have to teach a grade 6 class in sport so they can see how I teach people. I have to get a competency to teach others and teach them how to do stuff. Pretty much all Thursdays I have to do those things, but hospitality is on Thursdays now because they have changed the subjects, so it is pretty hard doing that.

CHAIR—You have to balance them all because of the demands.

Luke—I have HP subjects and assignments to do but I also have hospitality that day and I cannot really do it, so that hospitality comes first.

CHAIR—Are you working with somebody outside the school as part of that?

Luke—Like a job?

CHAIR—Yes.

Luke—Not yet, but I used to. I was working at Hungry Jack's. I had to balance that out too but my availabilities were changing every now and again so I had to inform my managers and others. The bands take place either in the mornings or afternoons so that cuts off some of the day as well. For the hospitality it is not really a lunch restaurant; it is more dinner. My school day on a Thursday is from 2.30 until nine o'clock at night. Pretty much I have just the morning and then the rest of the night is doing hospitality. That is my school day on Thursdays.

CHAIR—Do you think, if that option was not there, you would have continued with school or would you have pulled out to be looking for something else?

Luke—I like doing the restaurant because it is fun, but if it was not there I would just have a change of what times I have.

CHAIR—If the hospitality course and that option to be doing a school based apprenticeship was not there, would you have continued on or would you have pulled out and looked for an apprenticeship?

Luke—I would have done whatever was best.

CHAIR—Yes, weighed it up. Do you want to do hospitality in the long term or music?

Luke—I am looking for hospitality mostly in a restaurant somewhere. I reckon that would be fun.

CHAIR—Amelia, do you want to have a chat with us? We are not that intimidating. Just tell us what you are doing and why.

Amelia—I work at Woolies normally 10 or 15 hours a week. I do the social and community studies so that takes Wednesday away.

CHAIR—Where do you do that?

Amelia—Oxfam down at Chermiside. I do the hospitality cert III on Thursdays. That is really it.

CHAIR—Are you doing the restaurant as well in the evenings?

Amelia—Yes. That is really just three jobs and I do five subjects.

CHAIR—Five subjects?

Amelia—Yes, English communication, communication in maths, business cert I, hospitality and social and community studies.

CHAIR—How do you find balancing all of those? Does it have its moments or is it pretty manageable?

Amelia—It does not matter. There is really not much homework.

CHAIR—The subjects are more practical orientated anyway so it is not such a heavy study load?

Amelia—Yes.

CHAIR—Okay, thank you for that.

Mrs D'ATH—Ethan, you said that you engage in a whole lot of extracurricular activities. We are looking at academic students who do want to go off to university and are working as well as those who are pursuing vocational streams. What sorts of extracurricular activities are you involved in?

Ethan—I am obviously the president of the student representative council. At the moment I am part of a mooting competition, through legal studies, where we get given a false case. We act for the appellant. We go to the High Court of Australia and sit in front of Bond University law professors and present our case with an opposing counsel, and the judges deliberate and deliver their verdict. I am involved in pretty much anything that comes up. I attended the schools summit we recently had. I take part in the school's open for inspection day and in all parent seminar information evenings. From now on one of the student representatives from the school—most likely me—will be attending the P&C meetings. Your district has just launched the essay and public speaking competition. I will be entering that, of course. In general, I take part in pretty much any extracurricular activity that comes up if I can fit it in. I am a member of the social justice and amnesty group. I attend the Amnesty International conferences every year, plus all the little things that go on with those.

Mrs D'ATH—Wonderful; thank you.

Ms Cameron—Ethan doesn't slack off.

Ethan—I really don't!

CHAIR—I was going to say—I'm exhausted! I have just realised we are massively over time and we were supposed to visit some classes; we will have to put our sincere apologies to them. Students who are here, if you are talking to your colleagues in their classes, please indicate to them there was no intention to snub them; we just got so engaged in our conversation with you all that we went over time.

Ms Cameron—I will let them know we are running late; we could just pop in on the way to lunch.

CHAIR—Okay; that is a good way to handle it. Thank you all for your attendance here today. We have not asked for any additional material. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence. For the students, it will come to the school and they will let you know that it is there. You can check the copy and make corrections of grammar and fact. You cannot change what you said but, if there are errors in there that need to be corrected, you can let us know about that. Thank you very much for your evidence and your time; it is really appreciated by the committee

because the direct experience of teachers, parents and students is the most important evidence we get in terms of advising the federal minister. Thank you once again.

Proceedings suspended from 12.23 pm to 1.59 pm

McCDONALD, Mr David, Cabinet Making and Teacher Training, Australian Technical College, North Brisbane

NEEDLING, Ms Judith, Year 12 Coordinator, Grace Lutheran College

TILLEY, Mr Stephen, Year 12 Coordinator, Southern Cross Catholic College

Adam, Student, Australian Technical College, North Brisbane

Mitchell, Student, Australian Technical College, North Brisbane

Tomas, Student, Year 12, Australian Technical College, North Brisbane

Hannah, Student, Year 12, Grace Lutheran College

Maddison, Student, Year 12, Grace Lutheran College

Matthew, Student, Year 12, Grace Lutheran College

Paige, Student, Grace Lutheran College

Ashlee, Student, Southern Cross Catholic College

Lincoln, Student, Year 12, Southern Cross Catholic College

Nick, Student, Southern Cross Catholic College

Zuzanna, Student, Southern Cross Catholic College

CHAIR—I now welcome all students in attendance to today's hearing. We have to say some formal things now for the official record. As you are aware, the committee is conducting an inquiry into how students combine school with part-time work. We are interested to hear about your experiences and any views you may have about how to improve the situation for students who are trying to balance those two demands. We have been receiving feedback on these issues from many students across the country through our student survey on the website—some of you may have participated in that. Many students are telling us that they are coping fine—their work commitments are reasonable, they manage it quite well and they can balance the demands—but there are a significant minority who are telling us about real issues they have which make it tough. These are things like late working hours—doing shifts that finish at 12 or one o'clock at night; and long shifts—so three or four nights in a row. There is also some discomfort about asking for time off or talking to employers about not being available for shifts in things like that.

The committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, but this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and therefore has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. We have Hansard recording the proceedings today. I would ask, as I indicated earlier, that each of you when you are making a contribution just repeat your first name before

you make a comment into the microphone. To make it easier we will start from the end. I will ask each of you to indicate your name, your school and year and what your experience with part-time work is: have you got a job, how many hours it would be, and whether it is in fast food, retail or any other sector? Please give us some information about your situation.

Dr JENSEN—And whether you are coping with the number of hours that you are working.

CHAIR—Yes, how you find the balance.

Mitchell—My name is Mitchell. I attend the Australian Technical College, North Brisbane. I am currently employed as a school based apprentice for Brisbane CityWorks as a signals apprentice electrician. We do four weeks at college and four weeks at work. We keep rotating. I find I am coping extremely well with that, because while you are at work you are not required to do any college work and while you are at college you are not required to do any tasks for work. So it is broken up really well.

CHAIR—So when you have done your four weeks of college and then your four weeks at work, you do not carry over assignments or anything like that during that time?

Mitchell—I have once, but it was only a little bit of work. It is nothing that will impact in a major way.

CHAIR—Okay. Thank you.

Tomas—My name is Tomas. I also attend the Australian Technical College, North Brisbane. I currently have an apprenticeship at Kedron-Wavell Services Club as an apprentice chef. I am currently coping extremely well with going to school and going to work at the same time. There are no real difficulties because of the four-week blocks.

CHAIR—So you are in the same pattern of four-week blocks?

Tomas—Yes, we are all in the same pattern. It is fine. We do not usually have any problems with anything.

CHAIR—Neither of you have part-time jobs outside of that?

Tomas—No, because of our apprenticeship. You cannot really get another part-time job as you are only at school for four weeks and then you go back to work.

CHAIR—Okay. Thank you. What do you do?

Adam—My name is Adam. I attend the Australian Technical College, North Brisbane. I am a year 12 student and I am studying cabinet making. I am currently employed at T.M. O'Brien Cabinet Making in Clontarf. I am fairly happy with the hours that I work there.

CHAIR—You are in the same pattern of four weeks on, four weeks off?

Adam—Yes, for weeks on, four weeks off. It is good.

CHAIR—You like that pattern?

Adam—Yes.

CHAIR—Okay. Thank you very much.

Paige—My name is Paige and I currently attend Grace Lutheran College at Rothwell. I have a part-time job at Woolworths at Redcliffe. I work between nine and 12 hours per week.

CHAIR—When would you do those hours? What is your usual shift?

Paige—Friday night and Saturday.

CHAIR—So four hours on a Friday night?

Paige—Five hours on a Friday night. On one week I have more hours than the other on a Saturday night.

CHAIR—How do you find that number of hours?

Paige—They are fine. They are good.

CHAIR—Is there any pressure to do additional hours? Do you get calls to do extra shifts or anything like that?

Paige—I do, but my boss is really good—I do not have to do them if I do not want to.

CHAIR—So you are quite confident to say, ‘No, I can’t do it’?

Paige—Yes.

CHAIR—Good. Thank you.

Hannah—Hi, my name is Hannah, and I go to Grace Lutheran College, Rothwell. I am currently in year 12. I work at Prouds Jewellers, Peninsula Fair. I work maybe three to seven hours a week, depending on when I get put on shift.

CHAIR—When would your shifts normally be? What is a normal week?

Hannah—I might work a Thursday night and get the weekend off, or I will get the Thursday night off and have to work on the Saturday.

CHAIR—Right. Is that a good number of hours for balancing work and your homework and stuff?

Hannah—Yes. I have talked to my boss about it, and she is only putting me on for that many hours so that I can do all my studies and all my work, yes.

CHAIR—So you do not get calls from her to do additional shifts or things?

Hannah—No.

CHAIR—Not at all? Okay. Thank you.

Matthew—My name is Matthew. I attend Grace Lutheran College at Rothwell. I am in grade 12. Currently I do not have a part-time job. I had a part-time job for a year and a half at a fish-and-chip fast food restaurant, but I finished that at the beginning of grade 11, last year.

CHAIR—When you say you finished it, did you decide that you could not keep doing it, or what happened?

Matthew—Yes, I decided that I would stop working at the fish-and-chip restaurant because I could not keep it up.

CHAIR—How many hours were you doing?

Matthew—During school time I was doing probably 12 to 15 hours a week, but with sporting commitments it was too hard with senior school.

CHAIR—So you made a decision to stop at that point in time?

Matthew—Yes. I have done a holiday work, and that works fine.

CHAIR—Okay. So, when the holiday break is on, you pick up some work then?

Matthew—Yes. I did a part-time job over the Christmas holidays.

CHAIR—Okay. Thank you.

Maddison—My name is Maddison. I am a student at Grace Lutheran College, in year 12. I do have a part-time job at a chicken shop. I just work a Saturday every week and sometimes every two weeks, and that is just for nine hours—and I do not have any additional shifts.

Dr JENSEN—So they do not put any pressure on you to do anything else?

Maddison—Not at all, no.

Ashlee—My name is Ashlee and I am a student at Southern Cross Catholic College. I do not currently have a job. I did have a part-time job at the start of the year but due to school commitments and sporting commitments I decided not to work there anymore, because it was just too hard to fit everything in.

CHAIR—What sort of work were you doing?

Ashlee—It was in retail.

CHAIR—And what sorts of shift hours were you doing?

Ashlee—I would do a Saturday and a Sunday, so I did not really have any weekend time, because it was probably from nine till five on both those days.

CHAIR—Yes. Thank you.

Lincoln—My name is Lincoln. I am in year 12 at Southern Cross Catholic College. I currently work at the local convenience store, and I work about four to seven hours a week—just two afternoons a week and three-hour shift on a weekend.

CHAIR—So they must be quite short shifts in the afternoons.

Lincoln—Yes, they are two-hour afternoon shifts.

CHAIR—Straight after school?

Lincoln—Yes, 4.30 pm—so I have got an hour and a bit to get home.

CHAIR—And is there much pressure to do additional work, or are they quite comfortable with the hours you do?

Lincoln—Yes, they are quite comfortable with the hours that I do.

CHAIR—Okay. Thank you.

Nick—My name is Nicholas. I am at Southern Cross Catholic College and I do part-time work at McDonald's at Peninsula Fair Shopping Centre. I do anywhere between three and 12 hours a week.

CHAIR—What sorts of shifts do you do?

Nick—Since we are in a shopping centre, we close pretty early, so I would work from about four o'clock till 6.30 on a school day and then, on a weekend, I could do a shift from nine till one.

CHAIR—Right.

Dr JENSEN—Any pressure on you to do additional shifts?

Nick—I told them I would rather work just one school night a week but I am happy to work if they actually need someone to fill in, because it is not a really big shift.

Dr JENSEN—So do they pressure you with that?

Nick—I might get called in to work once every three weeks or so, so it is all right.

CHAIR—And, if you or one of your work colleagues cannot do a shift, do you have to replace yourselves or does the supervisor follow up on that?

Nick—If we need a shift, we can call work and ask them to help out, or we tell them when we are working that we need to swap a shift, and they will invite us to stay back and they will help us find a replacement.

CHAIR—Okay. Good. Thank you very much.

Zuzanna—Hello. My name is Zuzanna and I attend Southern Cross Catholic College. Currently I work at a cafe. I work an average of 10 hours a week, and it is pretty good.

CHAIR—What sorts of shifts are you doing?

Zuzanna—On weekends I do half-days—say, from seven to one, normally.

CHAIR—Okay, thank you. I think we also have teachers here with us. For the record would you like to indicate who you are?

Ms Niebling—I am Judith Niebling from Grace Lutheran College. I am the year 12 coordinator.

Mr Tilly—My name is Steve Tilly. I am the year 12 coordinator at Southern Cross Catholic College in Scarborough.

Mr McDonald—I am David McDonald, cabinet making teacher/trainer with the Australian Technical College in North Brisbane.

CHAIR—Thank you. Most of you have indicated that the system is working quite well. Some of you are doing paid work as part of your training and qualifications. Others are doing paid work outside your school commitments and study as an additional thing in your life for income. We are interested in some of the experiences not only ones that you have had directly, but ones that your peers or friends may have had as well. So if there are particular things you can tell us about that from either direct experience or from amongst your group of friends that would be really useful for us.

Mrs D'ATH—I guess I am just interested to hear what you think can be done to create more flexibility. Do you believe there needs to be more flexibility in the school system to allow for work and school? What information can be given to students to know their rights more when it comes to work?

Tomas—I think it is fairly fine at the moment, but we should be informed a lot more about our rights and the regulations. Because we are new to the workforce it is a little bit frightening to know what your rights are at work.

CHAIR—Do you think that is best for the school to do or should we be supporting employers to do it more? Where do you think would be the best place to have that conversation?

Tomas—I think a bit of both. Our school does it a bit but I would not be sure about other schools. We do not get to bring it up a lot because usually when we are at school we are doing a lot of schoolwork.

CHAIR—Just following up on Tomas's point, those of you who have part-time jobs put your hand up if you can tell me whether you are employed under an award, an enterprise agreement or a contract? Put your hand up if you actually know what your employment type is—so just under half are confident about that. Put your hand up if you know where to go to check whether you are being paid the right amount of money per hour? Four of you.

This is one of the big issues and why Yvette asked about this. Now don't be particularly concerned. We could have a group of adults sitting here, who have been working for 20 years, and ask them the same question and they would probably have the same response. But for you, being under 18, there are specific rules and requirements around your employment that you should know about, and if you are going to say no or have to talk to your employer you can do it with more confidence if you know the facts and what is reasonable or not reasonable. So I think your point is important, Tomas. If it is structured in schoolwork we tend to be better at providing you with information, don't we, about your rights and responsibilities? Whereas, when you are working outside school maybe we leave it a bit too much to your own connections and ability to get information. It is a good point.

Mrs D'ATH—I am interested in anything that you want to say on this topic of work-school balance. Don't wait until a specific question is asked. Please put to your hand up as we want to hear from you. Do any of you participate in volunteer work? One of you does. My question is whether you think it would be beneficial to have the school or a future employer recognise the volunteer work that you have participated in.

Paige—Work are pretty good with that kind of stuff. I told them that now netball has come back on I volunteer down there, and also with Rotary and things, so they know I cannot work every Saturday morning because I have other commitments. Generally work are pretty good with that kind of thing. I know my supervisors pretty well. They do not really speak down to us per se, as I know they do in a lot of workplaces. I have friends who work, and they get spoken down to.

Mrs D'ATH—Do you think that with the activities you participate in, like your volunteer work with Rotary and also netball—I noticed your badge of the Lions over there, Matthew—it would be beneficial to have the skills you have learned through your volunteer work recognised so that you could show future employers the types of skills you have learnt?

Matthew—I think it is a really good idea, because with Paige's volunteer work and other activities that we have been involved in you do pick up a lot of life skills and general things that you can use in the workforce that they may not be aware of. So there should definitely be a section on your resume that you could pop that into.

Zuzanna—I would add to that that it would depend on what type of volunteer work you do for what type of job you want to get into. For instance, if you wanted to become a vet then you might volunteer at the RSPCA, or if you wanted to be on radio then you might volunteer at local

radio stations. I guess jobs should focus on your volunteer work but on their specific areas in that volunteer work.

CHAIR—One of the reasons that we are looking at this is that one of the issues is recognising the skills, knowledge and attitudes that you develop in your paid work. In structured work programs, you would have folders where there are a whole lot of things being followed and ticked off in terms of the skills that you are developing and that sort of thing, but the presumption of young people in casual jobs is, ‘This is irrelevant; I don’t want to do this for the rest of my life, so it doesn’t matter,’ whereas in fact what employers say is, ‘We want people who can prove they can turn up on time and do a full shift, that they are reliable and that they have customer skills.’ No matter where you are working, they want to know that young people can talk to the clients and have some maturity. So some of the things you are getting in your part-time and casual jobs are really valuable skills and knowledge even if that is not the industry you want to end up in, but it is not captured. A lot of your teachers would know this from teaching job interview skills. It is really difficult to get young people to understand that it was not just some entry-level job where you did not gain much; you actually learnt a lot in doing that and gained a lot of skills, and you are not really good at describing it. So we are a bit interested in those aspects.

Adam—I think it is important that an employer recognises volunteer work, as it is an experience.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mrs D’ATH—I would be interested if anyone has any comments they would like to make generally about what you think can be done to assist students in balancing those work commitments with your study commitments.

Maddison—I believe that it should be compulsory—the government should print a handout or something like that—for all employers to give information to their employees. I know that when I started I was just given a couple of sheets to fill out, and that was just tax sorts of things; there was nothing about my rights or any future things that I would need to know, such as the age when my wage rate changes and things like that. I really do not know any of that, and it should be compulsory.

Hannah—I agree with Maddison. I had a job before this job, and I was working eight-hour shifts and did not realise that I was allowed a break. I was the only junior there, and I was left alone for a section of time, whereas at this job they gave me a leaflet on all the rights that I have. That has shown me, and my workplace makes sure that all those rights are followed through every time I work.

CHAIR—Is that a booklet that is specific to that employer or is it a general one that they are using?

Hannah—I think it is just a general one that they are using. There were two of them in there. At Prouds, they have their own and they write it all out.

CHAIR—Good point. Has anybody else got any observations?

Zuzanna—Just about that booklet: maybe it would be a good idea to include how much employers should be paying their employees—like, is there a set minimum—

CHAIR—You have hit on exactly the problem. There are so many different awards, payments and places. We need to make sure that you know where to go to get the correct information. You are exactly right.

Mitchell—You asked about balancing work and school life. Within our college, we do it really well. But to go to our college you need to have done work experience in previous years and to have picked what job you want to do. If you are just doing a casual job outside of school, not actually as part of your training course, it would be a lot harder to balance.

CHAIR—So part of the balance help for your structure is the fact that the paid work is structured within the school's planning and arrangements?

Mitchell—Yes. Our college has built itself around work. It has gone out to industry and seen what industry wants and then built the college around that.

CHAIR—I hope you have all made decisions about which careers you want to follow through with. One of the things that is often raised with this is that young people—particularly in the trades—make a decision and then, six months down the track, find out that it is not what they thought it was and that they do not like it at all. Are you telling me that you have to have had some work experience in it before you undertake it, to make sure that you do know what it is about?

Mitchell—Work experience in that industry while you are in year 10, before you decide, is a great help in making a decision, rather than just jumping straight into it and not knowing what you are in for.

Adam—We also do work experience compulsorily in year 11, before we actually start our apprenticeships, so that we get a taste of what the field is like. I know people that have done the work experience and then changed their trade because they had had a taste of what the trade was.

CHAIR—Yes—their perception of the trade was so different to the reality.

Adam—Yes.

CHAIR—One of the other issues that we are quite keen to have a think about is the number of paid work hours outside a full-time program—not the sort of paid work that you guys are doing, within a full time program, but paid hours outside your full-time program. What do you think, in years 11 and 12, is the maximum number of hours you should be doing, after which point it is probably not manageable and there is too much pressure? You have all got some level of experience in the workplace, so I might just ask you to think, on the basis of your experience, about what would be the maximum number of hours you should be doing, after which it starts to become a real burden, a real challenge and too difficult to manage. Has anybody got a view on how many hours might be a reasonable number? I will just get you all to give me a number. You will notice on the sheet that there is no wrong or right answer, so just have a go at it. Mitchell, what do you think?

Mitchell—They have brought in a maximum of 12 hours for students up to grade 10. I think that it would be a big help if they continue that through to the end of grade 12.

CHAIR—You reckon around 12 hours seems to have worked well?

Mitchell—Yes.

Tomas—For normal school students, I think eight to 12 hours is probably a good number, because you are not doing too much, but you are not doing too little. So you can complete an eight-hour shift on a Saturday or you can do the extra four hours on a Thursday night, which will not impact on your schooling and education as much.

Adam—I had a previous job at Pizza Hut when I was in year 12, studying at Mueller College. I found that it was good, because my employer told me that I was not legally allowed to do over 10 or 12 hours, I think. That was good because I could balance my schoolwork and my job at the same time.

CHAIR—Do you think that, if that law had not been in place, you would have ended up doing more hours?

Adam—My boss was reasonable with me. She spoke to me and asked if I did want more, and I said I would like to keep it as it was. But on my weekends I did do longer shifts.

CHAIR—Thanks. Paige, what do you think?

Paige—I think about 10 to 14 is reasonable for schoolchildren. Up to 12 is fine for kids up to grade 10. It is fine as long as you are not doing consecutive nights during the week and you are not spending your whole weekend at work; maybe a day at work is all right, but two days is a bit excessive.

CHAIR—Beyond about 14 hours you are probably doing consecutive nights or whole weekends. Is that what you are saying?

Paige—Yes.

CHAIR—Okay. Hannah, what do you think?

Hannah—I think eight to 10 hours. Our school has also recommended that much.

CHAIR—So the school itself has a policy.

Hannah—They do not have a policy as such but there is a recommendation.

CHAIR—Okay. Would most of your friends at school be complying with that or is there some pushing of it? What do you reckon?

Hannah—I know some of my friends make sure that they do under 10 hours, but I was talking today to a girl who does 20 hours a week, plus sports commitments. I know that I personally could not handle that.

CHAIR—When they are doing the extra hours, what are they telling you? Is that because they really want to because they are saving for something and want the money, or are they pressured by their employer to do extra hours? What do they tell you?

Hannah—I think that because they have not said, ‘I don’t want that many hours,’ their employer just thinks that they can do that many hours and that is that.

CHAIR—So there is not a lot of speaking up? Even if they do not want to, they just comply and do it anyway?

Hannah—Yes, pretty much.

CHAIR—Okay. Thanks. Matthew, what do you reckon?

Matthew—I would probably have to agree with most of the people down the line that about 10 to 12 would probably be a safe limit to have. I think that something that needs to be looked into is the sports activities that people are undertaking as well. I am sure a fair few people here would have them as well. They can take upwards of six to eight hours a week or whatever it is. If you try and couple that with working, it does not always come out okay. I think that around that is a safe area. You have your two nights and a short shift or a full shift and a shorter shift, so it gives you a bit of variety and not too much in the end.

CHAIR—Matthew, you have talked about your sport and how you stopped working because of those commitments. Do you think too many young people sacrifice not so much the school and the homework but having a life in order to work?

Matthew—Yes, definitely. A number of my friends have given up a sport that they have played previously for eight to 10 years because they had to get a job—or did not have to get a job but decided that they would get a job. When it got too tough to keep both, they kept the job. So it happens. I chose the other way—I guess I loved the sport too much—but it is a tough choice about whether you want to get the money and try and save for a car or something. That is really important to a lot of year 12s.

CHAIR—Yes, the car is the big one we hear about. Tomas, did you want to make a comment on that?

Tomas—Yes. On the topic of sacrificing a lot, if you are doing a trade as well you sacrifice, I guess, 90 per cent of your social life. It may not be as much with other trades, but as a chef I give up pretty much everything.

CHAIR—Were you prepared for that? A lot of people think they want to do hospitality and—

Tomas—Social life was my life before I started, so I gave up a lot. On my work rotation I will usually work pretty much all day or all night with split shifts, five days a week.

CHAIR—What about the four weeks when you are back at school? Do you use the opportunity to catch up with the social life as well?

Tomas—Yes, I try to now. I try to get out a lot more.

CHAIR—It is a good point. Where was I up to? Maddison?

Maddison—My opinion is that it should be about 12 hours. I think it is important to recognise that it is only a maximum, not really recommended. I think schools should acknowledge that work is an important part of growing up. I do not think it should be seen as such a bad thing. When setting a maximum, it is important that it is just a maximum. There are some students who do like to do 14 hours a week because they are earning money and they have their goals in life. Sometimes they already have their foot in the door. I know this sounds awful, but they do not need to concentrate on school as much; they already have work for them there. Others may only work four hours a week. So I think a compulsory maximum for all businesses, companies et cetera should be enforced.

CHAIR—And there should be more recommendations and guidelines for people?

Maddison—Yes.

Ashlee—About 10 hours a week, I think. But everyone is different and they have all got different outside commitments which determine how much work they can handle each week.

Lincoln—I think it should just be a maximum of 10 to 12. It is up to the individual how much he or she wants to work, but, for the majority of people, it would be pushing it a bit to go for more than the 10 to 12 hours, because school in years 11 and 12 is pretty hectic at times.

Nick—I am happy to do about 10 to 12 hours. But, when it is leading into assignment and exam time, I will ask my work if I can get my hours down to about four a week, and they are happy to do that.

CHAIR—That is one of the things that we hear is a real challenge—in workplaces, you may have four or five people doing casual work who are all in year 12, and, when the exams come up, they are all competing for time off and trying to juggle shifts and things. It becomes a bit of a challenge. I see many of you nodding—this is a common experience among your friends. Or there is an excursion, and everybody from the school is going. So it is a good point—the timing of it matters as well.

Zuzanna—I would say around 10 hours a week. But I guess that depends on what people are doing outside of school as well—their extracurricular activities and things like that—and on where the 10 hours fall in the course of the week. For example, is it the whole weekend gone or just nights, so they cannot study at night or something like that?

CHAIR—You all seem to agree that the arrangement of the hours, and not just the number of hours, is important. It is very interesting—we did the same exercise in Adelaide, and in South Australia they do not have any regulation of hours of employment of young people up to the age of 16. They suggested to us that 15 to 20 was a good and manageable number of hours. So the

experience you have of the hours being controlled up to the age of 16 and having a realistic view has perhaps made you more aware. Do you think, just from observing your friends and colleagues, that young people are well positioned to know and to judge when they are doing too much, or do you think they juggle, juggle, juggle until it all falls apart? What might be some of those things that you see happen when it all falls apart? You do not have to name names, just circumstances where you have seen things happen.

Hannah—A girl at my work decided to work too many hours last year. She was finishing year 12 and, because she chose to work too many hours, she did not get into the subject she wanted to do—she failed to reach the prerequisite for it because she juggled too much with work and school.

CHAIR—She said to you that that is the mistake she made?

Hannah—Yes. She has been telling me not to work as many hours. She said it was just too hard.

CHAIR—But, at the time, she thought she was managing?

Hannah—Yes, she thought she was fine. But, in the end, it did not turn out for her.

Matthew—About a year and a half ago now—when I was back at the fish and chip shop—I was only at the end of grade 10, but the other workers there were at the end of grade 12. A guy and a girl there were both doing up around 20 hours a week. One of them was going to Grace Lutheran College as well, and they both had aspirations to go to university, but, unfortunately, neither got the OPs they expected—both of them got scores in the mid-teens and higher teens. Their opportunities got cut down a bit. It is just annoying to see them trying to juggle it all. You wish someone would sit them down and say: ‘There is a life after this year and you should try and keep your eyes focused on the future as well. It is great to make \$3,000 this year, but how is it going to impact on you for the rest of your life?’ You just wish that you could help some people who are struggling and give them a hand.

CHAIR—Matthew and Hannah, these experiences are probably good to have observed and learned from, but, sadly, people seem to keep repeating that pattern.

Nick—One of my friends was a smart person but was struggling at school because they were doing too many hours at work. As a result, they failed school. Rather than quit work and go back to school, they thought it would be simpler to stay at work and leave school.

CHAIR—When you say that they failed, do you mean that they did not get the results that they wanted or needed for something they were looking to do?

Nick—No, they failed grade 11. If they wanted to finish their high school education, they had to redo grade 11.

CHAIR—Do they recognise, in their observations to you, that it was the excess work that had that effect on their results?

Nick—Partly.

CHAIR—So it was a contributing factor?

Nick—A big one.

Maddison—In my opinion, there are a lot of kids out there who do not realise that they are doing too much. It is important that they know their limitations and that they are told they do not have to be working that much. It has happened to me before that I have had to work a whole weekend, full-time on both days, and the only reason I actually worked is that I felt bad saying no to it. Maybe if they knew that they could say no and if they had a voice, they would not be doing this many hours.

CHAIR—A lot of young people say to us, ‘I don’t dare say no because I won’t get on the roster for the next week.’ Many of you are nodding, so this is a common experience and concern among young people.

Adam—At a previous job, I was working six till five. I was getting pressured into working those hours—they made me feel bad if I did not.

CHAIR—Is it a guilt thing? Is that what you are saying?

Adam—Yes, it was a guilt thing. They said, ‘If you don’t work, you just let everybody else down.’

Dr JENSEN—One of the things that was highlighted to us earlier was the issue of negotiation skills. Some young people have got very good negotiation skills and others, basically, have less confidence. I am interested in opinions from everyone here. Can you relate some good and bad experiences that you may have had in negotiations with employers or, indeed, teachers?

Matthew—On the negotiation skills: I suppose that they are an important thing to have, but when a 15-year-old is sitting in front of a 30- or 40-year-old employer who, at the end of the day, is paying them and giving them the money, their ideas tend to bend significantly to suit the employer’s way of thinking. So I do not think negotiation skills help you too much, because, at the end of the day, you really want to keep the job. If they really want you to work, you either have to have a nice employer or have to sacrifice the other commitment that you wanted to go to.

Dr JENSEN—The thing with that is that you may not end up with an idealised sort of situation, but at least if you negotiate and are a relatively confident negotiator then the employer knows what the situation is from your perspective. If you are not a confident negotiator—or, indeed, if you do not negotiate at all—they are guessing at what is okay for you but they do not know.

Matthew—Exactly. I think an open line of communication is probably what is needed there. As you said, confidence does help to portray what is going on in your life and your point of view. If I just say, ‘Look, I can’t work five nights a week,’ they are going to take a very backwards approach and think: ‘What is going on here? Do I want an employee who’s never going to work?’ But if you say, ‘Look, this is just for two weeks,’ and have the confidence to get

your point across and to try and work out the scenario, it can be as you said. But it can be both positive and negative, I suppose.

Maddison—I agree with what Matty said before: you will never be able to really get rid of feeling bad when you are sitting in front of your employer, feeling a little more inferior. They will always be your boss, I suppose. I know that, as an employee, I feel that I should listen to my employer more than I do already. It is confusing me. When I talk to her I need to take her ideas more seriously and listen to her more just because she is my boss. I do not think you will ever be able to get rid of that as such, but maybe employees' points of view and confidence levels can be improved.

Zuzanna—I found that when I started my job I did not really know my boss that well. Then, when I got more used to it, it was a situation where I did not know whether, if I asked my boss for fewer hours, more hours or something, he might get angry at me. I think a lot of people go through that. I know they do not want to do that. But when I eventually said 'I need to do this' and I asked him, he was really good about it. He pretty much said, 'You should have just told me this straight away.' I think that, with a lot of bosses, people just do not know how nice they are. They just think, 'It's a boss; I can't be against them.'

Dr JENSEN—Not realising that they are people as well.

Zuzanna—Yes.

Lincoln—I used to work at KFC and one of our managers was a really intimidating lady. She used to bully us into working and stuff like that. If you did have other commitments and you told her, during that shift you were working she would get you to do the least favourable station. We have little stations like burger making or working on the counter. That was pretty bad.

CHAIR—Was that an adult or was that another young person who was a supervisor?

Lincoln—She was a lady who had been working at KFC since she was 15 and she is 40-something now, so I guess she was taking out her rage.

Nick—My experience is a bit like the opposite of Lincoln's. I work at McDonald's. It is probably a better environment. Everyone gets along, and the managers are mostly young people—under 40—and remember that they are working with mostly teenagers and people at university level. Occasionally, before the school holidays we would have a crew meeting where we would sit and all get to have a say about how many hours we wanted to be doing over the holidays. We get to do things like that. During school time, they also ask us whether we want to be working one or two school afternoons, whether we want to work three hours minimum on a weekend and things like that. They pretty much let us have a say.

CHAIR—There is a good manager there, by the sounds of it.

Paige—At work, we have a lot of give and take with our main supervisor. We just had a changeover, so we have just got a new boss. She does not really talk much—she grunts a lot—so she is a bit intimidating to some of the younger girls that have not been there as long. I have another boss, because I work upstairs in the cash office, and she is really good. If I cannot work

one shift, I say, 'Would you be able to work my Saturday night and I can work your Friday night?' and things like that. Downstairs it is predominantly young supervisors. The only really older person is our new boss. She is intimidating to some of the younger kids, and a lot of them feel as though, if she rings them, they have to say yes.

CHAIR—Are you saying, Paige, that it is not necessarily that she is intending that to be the message but they take that as the message?

Paige—Yes. She does not really verbally communicate.

CHAIR—Perhaps we should be doing negotiating and communication skills with the supervisors.

Lincoln—Just about shift swapping: at KFC, if you needed to swap a shift with someone at the last minute, the lady would not help you out with it. She would give you the phone book of all the people that work there and make you do it. She was not accommodating at all about things like that.

CHAIR—That is a very common story we hear and which the committee has been quite shocked about, to be honest—this idea that it is 'normal' if you cannot make a shift that you have to find your own replacement. That is not a normal practice at all. It is interesting you have had the same experience as well.

Adam—I have made that compromise with my manager before, too. I said, 'I cannot work this shift but I will find someone else to do it for you.' So I did that.

CHAIR—Why did you feel you needed to do that?

Adam—Because I was not working for them. I thought I would do them a favour.

CHAIR—Is part of your thinking about being a good employee that you do those sorts of things?

Adam—Yes, because the manager has work to do themselves and they have given me a shift. I have thought, 'They have given me that and I can't work it, so I will do them a favour and find someone else to work the shift for them.'

CHAIR—If you had made an honest effort to do that and could not find someone, do you think it would have been an issue?

Adam—I have had that before when I could not find anybody and they said, 'That's fine.' But I have had bad experiences at a different job too where they asked me to work Saturday and they intimidated me, and made me feel I might lose my job. So I have worked Saturday as well.

CHAIR—Mitchell?

Mitchell—In grade 10, I had a part-time job at McDonald's. If you could not work a shift, you would ask a couple of people you knew if they could work it and if you could not find someone the manager would find someone for you.

CHAIR—So you would make an initial attempt amongst your mates you worked with to see if anyone could do it but, at the end of the day, it was okay with the manager because the manager would look after it?

Mitchell—Yes.

CHAIR—Hannah?

Hannah—At my work if we cannot work a shift, we just tell the manager and usually someone will say, 'I'll take the job.' That is all we do. But when I was working at a restaurant about two years and it was my birthday and I wanted that shift off, she made me feel really bad because I took that shift off. It was an eight-hour shift and I was the only junior, so I was made to feel it was all my fault if something was to go wrong in that shift.

CHAIR—Some people say they end up doing lots of hours because they are a good friend. The good friend is the reliable one whom all their mates know. 'Ring so-and-so. They always do an extra shift.' Because no-one is overseeing this, it is not the supervisor who is allocating the extra shifts and that is how they end up with 25 or 30 hours a week. They are helping a mate out or whatever by doing the shift for them. That is part of the reason we are concerned about that model.

Mrs D'ATH—I am very interest to hear from you all. Just about everyone of you have a story about a bad employer at some point and how you felt intimidated and had to work extra hours or had difficulty changing shifts. Also, there are those of you who have worked previously but found it too much on top of your school work, especially when you are in grades 11 and 12 and made the decision to leave. How much did you discuss these sorts of situations with your parents, such as when you wanted to miss a shift and you tried to negotiate with your employer? How much of these sorts of issues have you discussed with your parents prior to making your decision?

CHAIR—Have you initiated any discussion, as opposed to discussion initiated by your parents?

Tomas—When it comes to that, I tend to not talk to my parents about it. I guess your boss is intimidating enough that when you try and get time off and you have to tell your parents they would take it the wrong way. It is hard to say, but I would rather not tell my parents if I have to have a day off to do something. I would rather just say, 'I'm not working today.'

CHAIR—Adam?

Adam—I tend to do the same but I have a better employer, so I do not really need to talk to my parents about it. Previously with the long hours that I worked, I asked my dad what to do about how to ask my boss to cut the hours from six to two, which are normal working hours, but have no overtime. He said to work the hours to keep the boss happy. My dad never went to year

12. He finished year 10 and then went straight into the workforce. In my situation it is a bit different, so I do not think he was the best person to be asking for advice, at that stage.

CHAIR—But it is a common attitude that if you have a job, the boss is the boss and you do what they ask. That is not uncommon. Does anyone else have anything to add?

Hannah—I always say that I tell my parents everything.

CHAIR—Is that because you are on the record?

Hannah—It is actually the sad truth. When I had problems at work at the restaurant, I would always talk to my parents about it and they would always tell me what to do. My dad and mum have been in situations like that, so they would tell me what they did. In the end, I quit that job because it was too hard anyway. They were the ones who made sure I did it because they did not want me going, ‘No, I don’t want to say that to them.’

Nick—I do not need to get rid of shifts for schoolwork. It is normally when I have got an event or a jig to go to and I have been rostered on at that time. I prefer not to tell my parents that I am trying to get rid of a shift because it is always the ‘I told you so’ thing. My mum might have said to me two months before, ‘Why don’t you say that you are unavailable for this date?’

CHAIR—They are making the point about organisational skills and sometimes it is not what you need to hear—is that what you are saying?

Nick—Very much.

Maddison—I am lucky that my parents and my boss actually know each other—

CHAIR—That is lucky, Maddison, is it?

Maddison—Yes. We are all locals. My boss is just up the road from me and so are all my co-employees so I can talk to my parents about that, and if I do not talk to them my boss will. But I think it is a good thing in a way because they get on well and I get on well with my boss. I do not feel bad talking to mum and dad about that.

Lincoln—I work at the local convenience store. My parents have been going there for quite some time and they are pretty good friends with the employer. That is how I got the job; we were friends with them. I feel bad telling my parents that I am having problems or stuff like that at work, for example, that I do not get pay slips, that I get paid out of the till and things like that. When I tell them they get kind of funny towards me because they are good friends. But other than that I can speak to them about most things.

CHAIR—But it does have some challenges.

Mrs D’ATH—Matthew, you made the decision to give up work because you were going into the senior years. Did you discuss that decision with your parents?

Matthew—Yes, it was a pretty lengthy discussion, really, and it spread over a number of months. I had the feeling at the end of year 10. I was not completely happy and fulfilled in the job that I was at; I was not enjoying it and there were always issues going on. When we discussed at home it they always fell back on saying, ‘Give it a try. Go back and ask them whether you can just do one shift.’ But the employer I was working for stated quite clearly that they wanted a certain amount out of me and it just was not going to work.

I suppose there is a guilt trip also that they would sometimes try to put on you with things like, ‘You can’t slack off; if you are not going to work, you have got to do more stuff around the house,’ and things like that to try to convince me. But in the end I think that once they understood my point of view, that I was only doing it because of school and wanting to keep my sporting activities up—because I realised that it was just not going to work, keeping school up to where I wanted it to be—they understood and they supported me through that. If it had not been for schooling, then I think that they would have looked upon it a bit more negatively.

CHAIR—One of the things that has been raised with us is that sometimes there is a conflicting message between parents and school in that parents will give you a message that they value you having part-time or casual jobs. They actually encourage it and they think that it makes you a bit more independent—it stops you nagging them for money—and there are some other things that they really value about you having a part-time or casual job. Whereas from school you might be getting the message that years 11 and 12 are serious and you should not be doing the work. There has been a little bit of evidence that has taken us a bit by surprise in that I do not know that parents and schools always recognise that they are sending different messages. Would you comment on that?

Matthew—I personally agree with the school’s thoughts about the importance of years 11 and 12. I am completely for working. I had the job for a year and a half up to the end of year 10 and I think that that is a great experience. As you said, it gives independence and you learn to work hard. In whatever industries people here are in, I am sure they are working at what they do.

It does teach you to work that three or eight hours solid, that you do not get a lot of breaks and that it is hard work. Some of it is character building. It is great for the younger years of schooling when you can take on a few more hours than you normally can in senior school, because of the lower level of study. But I do believe that, once you get to years 11 and 12, it should be cut back a bit. The importance of schooling should be emphasised to students more regularly—messages like: ‘Your job now isn’t the be-all and end-all. It’s not going to make or break who you are.’ I am not saying anything bad about working at a fish and chip shop, a KFC or McDonald’s—you might want to do that for the rest of your life, and that is a great thing—but if you have higher aspirations then you should try to put your time and effort into what could help you get there.

CHAIR—Does anyone else want to comment on the conflicting messages?

Zuzanna—I am not sure if this answers the question, but I think it would be a good idea for schools to give students, for instance at the Australian Technical College, the opportunity to go into a part-time job at a workplace similar to where the students want to end up.

CHAIR—To facilitate them finding that sort of work?

Zuzanna—Yes. I think it would be a good idea to do that.

Maddison—Just to reiterate, I actually have the opposite opinion to Matthew. I believe schools enforce the whole ‘work takes up your whole time’ thing a bit too much—that is, at my school, anyway. They are always saying ‘no more than eight hours’. But I think it is important to recognise that it is an important part of a teenager’s life. It is unavoidable that they are going to want to save for their car or for their uni next year. Actually, just yesterday we were talked to about uni and they spoke about how much it costs and how much living expenses are. Where are you going to get that if you are not working? So I think it is very important that schools and parents alike enforce the message that it is important to work but it is important to keep the balance, so that children should know their place.

CHAIR—The balance is the key factor?

Maddison—Yes.

Nick—This is about the schools enforcing. Earlier I said I had a friend who was failing. Her grades went from being As and Bs to being Ds and Cs, and the school was not helping her out with it. She approached the school and asked about things such as tutors and they said, pretty much, that she should be leaving work. But sometimes work provides a better environment than schools do. When she failed school, the school was not able to help other than to say, ‘Redo the year,’ whereas work was able to provide things such as traineeships and degrees in—

CHAIR—Management type courses?

Nick—Not management courses. I am trying to think what it is called.

CHAIR—Diploma?

Nick—Yes, a diploma in things such as food service.

CHAIR—They were a more attractive option to her because they were more flexible and understood the need to have an income and so forth?

Nick—Yes.

CHAIR—I think there is some really useful information in all of that for us. I will just make a comment on the process. We have these hearings and we get submissions. On the Parliament House committee website there is survey for students. Some of you may have filled it out already, but if you are talking to other friends and colleagues at school about today and they say, ‘I’d really like to tell them about this’—perhaps they have had a particular incident happen to them and they want to tell us about their experience—they can just go on the website and fill out that survey. I am pretty sure your schools will have the information about where the website is. It is really important, if we are going to make recommendations to the minister about national rules, national guidelines or whatever we are going to do, that it actually works for young people. That is why your talking to us today is invaluable, because we need to hear what is really going on. As parents, we will say one thing. As teachers, we will say: ‘We think this is happening.’ Employers will tell us that everything is rosy; they are all lovely people. But talking

to you and getting the real picture is what helps us make good recommendations. So we really appreciate your time and your honesty with us today and the information you have provided.

Thank you all for your attendance here today. A copy of the transcript of your evidence, which is what Hansard is doing, will be sent to your schools and it will also be published on the committee's website—you are permanently part of the record of the federal parliament now. Thank you very much for your evidence. When we do the final report we will make sure that your schools get a copy of it so you can see from all of your evidence what we have decided to recommend to the minister in this area.

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 3.00 pm