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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Combining study and work

THURSDAY, 14 MAY 2009

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Thursday, 14 May 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: Mrs D'Ath, Ms Bird, Mr Clare, Ms Collins, Dr Jensen, Mr Sidebottom and Mr Zappia

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

WITNESSES

HOUSTON, Ms Renae, Director, Youth Transitions Policy Section, Careers and Transitions Branch, Lifting Educational Outcomes Group, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 1

MACPHERSON, Ms Wendy, Director, Youth and Transitions Section, Labour Market and Education Analysis Branch, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 1

McDONOUGH, Ms Louise, Branch Manager, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 1

RODDAM, Mr Mark, Branch Manager, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 1

SHANNON, Ms Robyn, Branch Manager, Income Support Policy Branch, Social Inclusion and Participation Group, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 1

Committee met at 9.47 am

HOUSTON, Ms Renae, Director, Youth Transitions Policy Section, Careers and Transitions Branch, Lifting Educational Outcomes Group, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

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SHANNON, Ms Robyn, Branch Manager, Income Support Policy Branch, Social Inclusion and Participation Group, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

CHAIR (Ms Bird)—I declare open this, the ninth 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 welcome to today's hearing representatives of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Do you have anything you wish to add about the capacity in which you appear today?

Mr Roddam—I am the branch manager of the Safety Net and Wages Branch.

Ms McDonough—I am the branch manager of the Employee Protections Branch.

CHAIR—We really appreciate the standard of the submission that the department has put to the inquiry. It has been extensive and particularly pertinent and useful to our inquiry, so I offer my sincere thanks to each of you and to all of your staff; you have put together a really useful submission for the inquiry. Would you like to make some opening comments about the submission? We will then go into a question and answer time. The committee finds the question and answer time most useful, so please just make a brief statement highlighting what might be the particular issues for us.

Ms Houston—Thank you for the compliments about the submission. We worked on it quite a lot. It will be interesting in terms of the questions you have to ask us. Basically, in general, we tried to set the submission up to be a little bit about combining school and work in the sense of young people going out and doing a part-time job, where it is completely separate from their schooling but gives them skills and things that they gain and helps them move on in their life; and a little bit about combining school and work in a more formal way, where it is actually articulated into a program of vocational education and training or into some kind of accredited thing where they combine school and work, which helps them onto a pathway into employment. Both of those serve different kinds of purposes in different sorts of ways and serve young people in different ways. So, from a policy perspective, we see them as equally important to support, in

that young people can do either/or. The pathway stuff is more formal than the curriculum based stuff—the conditions in employment et cetera that young people choose to go into, separate to their schooling pathways.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Firstly, I refer you to page 1 of your report, where it indicates—in the second section, ‘Students combining school and work’. It says it is about 37 per cent of young people doing that combination. Is that 37 per cent ‘informal or formal work’ or is it only informal employment?

Ms Houston—I might check with Ms Macpherson about that data.

CHAIR—It’s just that I noticed in your opening statement that you make the point that the data is very difficult in terms of those in the less structured and recorded sector of informal work.

Ms Houston—The 37 per cent, I believe—and I take it from Ms Macpherson, who might know more—is actually officially combining not ‘informal work’, but actual work and schooling.

CHAIR—But it is identified as ‘paid work’. It does not include—because the other thing your submission talks about is young people who are engaged in caring, volunteering and other sorts of work that are not paid work. So this is in ‘paid work’?

Ms Macpherson—This is people who responded to the survey saying that they are working at least an hour per week. My colleague has just told me that the answer is that most is only paid employment.

CHAIR—So it is the paid employment from the ABS data?

Ms Macpherson—Yes.

CHAIR—You indicate that that data also shows that young people who are engaged in work are mainly from middle and higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This is of interest and concern to us because we have a lot of evidence of the value of being in work—obviously, up to a certain number of hours and within certain constraints about when those hours are worked. But clearly our evidence so far is similar to what your report reflects, that there is real value in that work. I suppose there is a concern that those people from lower SES actually are not getting those opportunities. So, while we acknowledge you say that it is maybe more choice than necessity that is motivating those who are in work, part of our concern comes from evidence we have had that they are less likely to have access to both the formal work components of schooling, such as school based traineeships or VET in schools and so forth, and less likely to be attractive employees within the casual part-time market and that, therefore, they may be missing out on what is seen to be a valuable experience during school years. I am just interested to know, from a policy perspective, whether we are looking at that issue or just focusing on income support keeping young people in school. Has there been any work on actually getting them into opportunities around employment?

Ms Houston—I think there is a lot of policy work about that idea, although not so much on the paid work side. I think the statistics around the socioeconomic status of paid work generally relate to choice. A lot of times, young people have barriers to their education and training, and then there is the idea of combining a formal work program with other things that they might have to do—caring responsibilities and things outside of school that might impede them.

From a policy perspective regarding in-school opportunities and that more formal pathway through school, we are very much focused on making sure that the breadth of opportunities is available to every student. There is a very strong push for the broadening of curriculum options. This idea of the VET pathway being an alternative pathway, having been very much pushed into the background, is now being brought to the forefront as a legitimate, comparative pathway and something that more young people should be doing because it gives those skills sets. Within the curriculum sense there is definitely a very important push to broaden that out.

CHAIR—In the VET in schools sector, do you distinguish between that part of it that is classroom based and that part that has engagement in a workplace? Because quite clearly the real advantage comes from the real-world experience, and my concern is that we make sure that in our recommendations we look at opportunities for these young people, given how having some sort of job—paid or unpaid—is a clear indicator of their ability to access the workforce after school. We need to make sure they get the real experience they need and that employers will recognise and value.

Ms Houston—From a VET perspective, the policy push is absolutely for more people to do the on-the-job training component. Often training packages will prescribe whether or not you have to do an on-the-job training component. In some packages you can do the VET component in the classroom and you do not have to go out into a work environment. However, from a policy perspective, we know—and certainly employers and industry prefer and believe—that there is a rounding out of the quality of the VET course if you go and do the on-the-job component.

In states like New South Wales, they have made the on-the-job work placement, the structured workplace learning, a compulsory part of doing all VET in schools. Other states and territories tend to let the mandating in the training package make those decisions, but there has definitely been a push over time to move towards more of the on-the-job placements as part of the vocational opportunities rather than fewer. The Australian government recently in its election commitment put another \$100-odd million into the system to increase the number of people doing on-the-job placements as part of their vocational education and training.

CHAIR—One of the other things we hear in evidence from young people is that what we call the work experience component in VET, which can sometimes be a week or two weeks with their employer, is actually pretty useless. They do not value it. They see it as some poor employer reluctantly agreeing to take them on to meet the requirement. They go in and they are just sitting around answering a phone. They really are quite cynical about the quality value of it. Are they looking at that side of it?

Ms Houston—That tends to be with work experience as opposed to the more formal work placements which are attached to vocational education and training. Formal work placements under vocational education and training, which is often known as structured workplace learning, is called 'structured' because it has a program of learning and competency based learning that

has to happen in the workplace and be assessed in the workplace. A lot of work is done with the employer before the young person enters the workplace to make sure they understand what the young person is coming in to do—that it cannot just be standing in the corner and mopping the floor or doing something like that for the couple of weeks.

That is where the quality aspect comes into on-the-job training if it is attached formally to some kind of program of vocational education and training. You tend to get the work experience or the taster stuff happening in the lower years of schooling, usually about year 10 level, as opposed to year 11 and 12 for VET. That is where there is a quality issue, because it tends to be seen as a taster and young people go out and do the work experience. But it is not necessarily taken seriously, because there is no assessment or formal recognition or requirement for it to have any kind of formal assessment around it. There is no quality check on that side of things.

CHAIR—I will come back to that. There are two other areas I want to explore: the capacity to recognise skills and knowledge gained in the outside sector—so all of the work that goes on in paid employment outside school—and some of the industrial aspects that have been raised with us about young people not being appropriately handled as under-18-year-olds at school in the workplace. We might come back to those issues or others may have particular issues to raise about that.

Dr JENSEN—We seem to be getting different advice about the maximum number of hours a student could potentially work before it starts having negative impacts on their academic results. Has the department formed a view on this at all or have you done any research in that regard?

Ms Houston—I believe our submission does quote some of the research that has been done. Around the 10-hour mark seems to be the time when, if it starts to creep up over that, it becomes an issue.

Dr JENSEN—So you generally accept the 10 hours as well?

Ms Houston—We would—well, so the research says. You would probably be aware that they are trying to introduce some school based stuff where you do part-time schooling and part-time work. Of course, if you are going to a part-time model, that means that you are doing more work and that is completely acceptable. But the evidence suggests that 10 hours while you are a combining a full-time student load seems to be the threshold.

CHAIR—It is interesting that, when we ask students, they all say 15 hours. That is just for your information.

Dr JENSEN—I have a couple more questions. I know that this only relates to one student, but I am wondering if it is potentially more widespread. When we were in Adelaide, there was a student who had been working 32 hours a week, I think it was. The reason was that she had been basically sent away from home when she was 15 but the parents were still getting the supporting parents benefit. Do you have any further evidence of that sort of thing occurring? I mean, 15 is a very young age for a student to be aware of even where to go to look for information about potential support that might be offered. Do you have any experience—I will not say ‘widespread’, because hopefully this is very rare—of instances like these? What mechanisms could we use to better inform students about potential ways in which they could gain support?

Ms Shannon—Perhaps I will just give a bit of a response from an income support perspective. Generally a parent must have a dependent child to qualify for parenting payment (single) or parenting payment if they are partnered. If the student moves out of the care and control of the parent, it is not appropriate for the parent to continue to receive that benefit, but how that information comes to Centrelink's attention is really an issue. The policy and the legislation require that that parent still continue to exercise their legal responsibilities and have a dependent child to continue to receive a benefit as a parent in that context.

CHAIR—Robyn, before you go on, can you just explain to us what the mechanism is—whether it is the parent who has to say, 'I will not have anything to do with them,' or whether the young person can do that?

Ms Shannon—The parent actually has a requirement under law to notify of a change of circumstances, so there is actually an onus on the parent to report that within 14 days. But I guess the reality is that that kind of investigation into a change of circumstances within that family is usually triggered by the young person going into Centrelink to seek financial support in their own right. Obviously if their parent is continuing to receive a benefit but the young person is not getting parental support, they need some other way to survive. It sounds like in this particular case the young person moved into quite substantial work to be able to do that.

Dr JENSEN—Absolutely.

Ms Shannon—I do not know what the circumstances were, but I would think that in many cases the young person would go into Centrelink to see if they could get any assistance. Generally, youth allowance is not payable to young people under the age of 16. It can be paid to some 15-year-olds if they are independent and generally have reached the school-leaving age in their state or territory. There is a bit of a concern. There is policy tension between making youth allowance widely available to young people as independents at a very early age and the concern that this may potentially create more pressure around family break-up. Usually what happens in those circumstances is that, because it is an 'unable to live at home' assessment, a Centrelink social worker will be involved. In those circumstances, one would hope that the social worker would not only be trying to give advice about financial support that the young person might be able to receive but also be trying to use their local networks to connect that young person into other appropriate programs. In that sense, it is actually a professional contact that occurs with the young person.

Dr JENSEN—But I guess in a lot of these instances it is reliant on someone approaching Centrelink. When you are talking about young kids, that can be very daunting.

Ms Shannon—Yes.

Dr JENSEN—Especially in a case like this, I would assume that self-esteem would be pretty low when you have been thrown out of home and all the rest of it.

CHAIR—Robyn, a bit further on that: can I also ask you to describe for us a situation where the parent says, 'There is a bedroom here; they can live here and there is no problem,' but it is actually a completely dysfunctional situation where they are saying that to the authorities but the kid has actually been kicked out. I think this is the most common thing and probably the

circumstance in this case. How do we manage and handle that to avoid them having to take on massive numbers of hours of work to support themselves?

Ms Shannon—It is actually a Centrelink social worker assessment. They will get information from the parent and the young person and they will form an independent view. I do not have all of the factors in front of me that they would consider, but they look at things like any evidence of financial support or any suggestion of violence, of complete breakdown in family relations. This is a really difficult assessment for people to make because, on the one hand, you have young people who clearly cannot live at home and then, on the other hand, you have parents who say they are trying to exercise some parental authority over the young person—and the young person, for whatever reason, perhaps does not want that, so they move out. There is, similarly, criticism that there is a potential for benefits to assist young people to leave home contrary to parents' wishes. It is a really difficult assessment.

Dr JENSEN—My concern here is the issue of reporting, where clearly it is not in the parents' interest to report it, because they are doing something wrong. If a student feels unable to make the step to approach Centrelink or whoever, it goes essentially undiagnosed. What mechanisms do we have in place to attempt to identify those people where there is no reporting?

Ms Shannon—The Commonwealth does not have a formal mechanism to do that. I would think, at a local level, that often the young person would be having difficulty combining that level of work and the issues that are involved in the breakdown in family relationships. I would imagine that, in many jurisdictions, they would be in contact with school welfare officers, so the person performing the welfare function within the school may be across the circumstances that young person is facing. At a local level, there usually are quite good relationships between staff within schools and Centrelink officers and/or social workers. It will vary from place to place, but certainly if the young person is trying to get help, say, in the school environment, I think generally they would be provided with advice that perhaps they should go and speak to Centrelink about their entitlements.

Dr JENSEN—The issue of lower SES students concerns me quite a bit because what you tend to get is a cycle of disadvantage. You have parents who do not give a damn about their kids' education; therefore, the kids do not give much of a damn; therefore, the attitude at school is bad; therefore, you do not attract good teachers. Added to that, we have the situation where, as you have said in your report, there is a distinct advantage to doing a certain number of hours of work per week because it helps you both educationally and growing up and also in terms of work experience and knowing how to do things in a working environment. What mechanisms do you see that maybe we could introduce to facilitate getting some of these kids from lower SES backgrounds into employment—not necessarily formalised within the school structure but perhaps using linkages between, say, schools and local businesses and so on? What could we introduce to get these kids into some form of paid work to get that additional element of their life education, if you can call it that?

Ms Houston—One of the things that the submission tried to draw out is that there is a lot of work being done over a long period of time about the issue of engagement—an issue of a safety net for young people, in a sense. What we know about young people who do not fare well in the education system is that either the education system itself is not working for them or they are not interested in the pathways and the traditional schooling way of learning. So there is a huge push

on at the moment to make sure that it is not necessarily about combining it with formalised and paid work but about making sure that schooling becomes more relevant. That is about a few things. It is about multiple pathways in order to get your year 12 or equivalent qualification, so it might not necessarily be in a traditional schooling environment; it might be through combining vocational education in schools or even having some mentoring from significant adults in the community—adults who have been in trades or something—who can pass on knowledge about pathways into employment in certain areas. So it is about getting better career development, better mentoring opportunities and better engagement in the school environment and opening a school environment up to a broader community. Rather than young people being involved in a school environment just within a school's walls, it is about how you extend the learning beyond the classroom as a routine part of your educational experience, how you bring businesses in to improve the experience for young people and how you bring the community into that space.

So there is a lot of work going on at the moment about how we do that better, because the research tells us that things like mentoring, better career development, more engagement in interesting things and even excursion-type visits that have an applicable sort of thing—'We've learnt this in the classroom and we've now gone and seen it; I'm starting to become engaged in my learning because I'm seeing relevance'—have a definite impact on young people's skills and experiences in being paired up with people and doing hands-on projects and things. A lot of the work that gets done is around Adopt a School sorts of things where businesses come in, build things and mentor students; it is not paid work, but it is very much about having something that is giving you some sense of worth, hands-on activity, seeing a product and all that kind of stuff. So there is a huge amount of work that is going on in that area now. It is definitely an area that requires more improvement and work and a lot more working with schools in the system to keep making sure that that is a fundamental part of every school—not just schools that do it well but every school.

The second part is the safety net. If a young person is starting to struggle, we should be identifying them early. Often they are not identified until they actually get to that income support stage, and then Centrelink comes in and picks it up and it becomes a formal mechanism. The idea is that most young people who are in trouble start to show signs of that way back in the middle years of schooling, before they have even reached 15 or 16, when they intersect with income support. There should be better mechanisms to identify those young people, pick them up, case-manage them and help them get back on track, work through whatever family issues might be happening and work out what their barrier to schooling is. Sometimes it is about a mental health issue and sometimes it is about a family issue, so sometimes you need to refer them to a specialist support service. Sometimes it is just that they are not feeling engaged in their learning. How do you then work with that individual young person to make a schooling plan that is more engaging, interesting and relevant to them? So the safety net service is the other area that we know will be of maximum benefit, but it does not happen as a matter of course. Every state and territory and the Commonwealth government have run programs attempting to make sure that the safety-net types of services are in place, but we find that more and more kids need it and we are not well resourced to make sure that every young person can have access to that kind of support.

Dr JENSEN—I am thinking here of linkages in terms of paid employment as well. People in middle and upper SES groups have the networks and linkages to go about getting a job, whereas in many cases in the lower SES groups they do not. So how do we help them negotiate that?

Ms Shannon—I think that also goes to the government social inclusion agenda. Much of what Renae has been talking about is the focus on the young person, and I think part of the policy push also needs to be for the parents. So it is about starting earlier and having programs where parents are reading to their children. There are examples. I think the home program that was funded in the last budget—which as I understand it is a parental literacy program run by Mission Australia—is about parents developing their literacy skills by reading to their children. So it has to be multifaceted, but at the end of the day I think you have identified correctly the problem that children growing up in jobless families, because their parents do not have those connections, do not have those sorts of social capital and connections. So, with a lot of the work that the government is doing around social inclusion and place based responses and with lots of the projects that we would expect may well be considered under the Innovation Fund as part of the employment services model and also the communities fund that was detailed a little more in the budget, I think it is about trying to tackle, in a place based way, whole communities or families, not just the young person or the parents. They are actually looking at projects that are innovative at a local level. A lot of those projects do need to come from the local level because they are about connections between schools, employers, families and welfare agencies.

Mrs D'ATH—In chapter 3, 'School-based training pathways', of your submission you talk about one of the obvious issues, which is 'the quality of the options available to students' for multiple pathways. In the last paragraph of that chapter you talk about the 'inadequate data collection on post-school destinations' and say:

Improved data collection for students engaged in school-based training pathways would allow more effective program and policy development ...

Is that collection going on now? Are there mechanisms to start collecting that data?

Ms Houston—There is data collection going on but as we have noted it is inadequate. A lot of it is around destination surveys and tracking individual young people through schooling. There is certainly a lot of work going on now to determine things like: could we have something like a unique student identifier that would help us to access better data? There has been quite a lot of work that has been going on around improving the data that we have and making it comparable across states and territories to strengthen these kinds of things. COAG has a number of targets which are attached to measuring numbers of young people who get certain types of qualifications, reach year 12 or its equivalent and so on. When you set targets like that you realise that you have to look at the data to find out if you can get to those targets. The first thing is to note where the data inaccuracies and inadequacies are and to do something to expand and better data collection, and that is really about working with states and territories.

CHAIR—One of the things that have been raised with us about the retention rate figures is that they tend to reflect up to 18-year-olds as opposed to, for example, somebody who might leave school at the beginning of year 11 and then enrol in uni as a mature age student at 22. Is it correct that they would show as not meeting the retention rates of year 12 or equivalent, when in actual fact they have, but at a later age? Can you clarify that for us?

Ms Houston—For the 'year 12 or equivalent', what has been settled on in COAG is that it will be measured by the proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds. It was originally set at 19; it has now been set at 20- to 24-year-olds to acknowledge that quite a lot of young people do not always

finish school or do not do their year 12 in a traditional way—they might take an extra year to get there or they might stop at year 10 and go into a VET pathway which ends up with a cert III qualification. Working through COAG, one of the practical things that were realised was that, if we just looked at 19-year-olds, we were missing out on quite a number of people who actually got those qualifications.

Mrs D'ATH—We asked right at the beginning what sort of hours you think are reasonable for a student to be doing while they are still in their education. What are your views on legislating or regulating not just the number of hours but the times that students should be working in the evening, as well as the supervision of the students? There are a whole lot of workplace health and safety issues around the sorts of hours young people are doing in the evenings during school.

Ms McDonough—From the perspective of the workplace relations arena, the government has been very conscious of ensuring that these issues are addressed. It has been long identified as an issue. In that respect there will be a national code of practice for young workers developed. That will be subject to broad consultation with stakeholders and the states and territories. While it will be voluntary, it will deal with matters exactly along the lines you have raised—rostering arrangements for children during school hours, training, mentoring in the workplace and safety for young people at work. It is very much a proactive effort to address the issues that are very much tailored to young people in the workplace.

In addition, and I think this picks up on some of the issues raised in some of the other questions, we recognise that for a lot of young people this is their first entry into the workplace, whether at school or beyond. Fair Work Australia, which is the new one-stop shop under the Fair Work Act, will have youth liaison officers in each of the states and there will be a youth tool kit developed. That will be a tool kit written very much for the young market. It will be delivered through organisations such as TAFEs, through Centrelink, through Fair Work Australia offices and online.

CHAIR—Can I encourage you to have a look at this. There is very good evidence. The New South Wales Teachers Federation have a website for young workers that actually provides them with a free Microsoft Outlook program, where they can manage their school and work commitments by getting alerts and balances. It was a really good thing that we saw and I think it would be useful.

Ms McDonough—We will certainly bring that to their attention because we are in the process of starting to think about exactly how that tool kit will look. It will focus on employment issues for young people and it will explain things in terms of the new industrial relation system—the common issues and questions that young people have, what they should be looking for in an employment contract and what their entitlements are in terms of unfair dismissal and age discrimination. All of those things have been very much a focus for where we see that tool kit going. There has been a very practical effort, I think, to address the sorts of issues that young people have encountered in the workplace.

Mrs D'ATH—Those issues have certainly been highlighted at a number of forums. A lot of that information is the sort of information that we want to get across to young people.

CHAIR—I endorse that and I want to take that a step further before we move on. The other thing I would really encourage you to do is to talk directly to young people. We have had the direct experience of talking to employers and organisations, who assure us that they have all of these things in place, in the morning, and then you get the young people rolling up in the afternoon and you hear a completely different story. I do not think it is intentional on the part of employer groups but I think they need to understand their need to talk directly to their young workers and find out how that translates the reality on the ground is really important.

Mrs D'ATH—I was going to suggest that, as far as distribution is concerned, every single school should stock these kits and not just have this available from Fair Work Australia and on a website in TAFE. That leads me to my next issue. With your knowledge of the schools and the different systems that operate across the states and the traditional role of guidance officers, do we see a place for guidance officers to take on more of a role in assisting students through pathways? This would be instead of them going off and getting their own job outside work and earning some money and not necessarily getting recognised for the skills that they are gaining from that.

This is along the lines of what Dr Jensen has suggested: that we have a guidance officer who not only has networks with various industries but can explain to students that there are various traineeships available in these industries. This is not necessarily to do the work on their behalf but to educate them, to say to them, 'When you go for a job, why don't you ask the employer if there is a traineeship or if there is some way of recognising the skills you learn?' This would give them some basic negotiation skills. The guidance officer would explain to them that when things get really difficult—such as when they have exams or essays, and they do not know how to deal with the fact that they need to get a shift off—there are some basic skills they can use.

This is certainly an issue. Time and time again students have said to us that trying to drop a shift, because they have got exams or an essay due, is extremely hard—and they do not talk to their parents about it because they think they are just going to get preached to. They do not talk to the school and, when they do, they just get told that if they cannot handle work and school get rid of the work. That is not the solution. I just wonder if there is a role for a guidance officer, or a position within the schools, that could provide this guidance and take them through the kits and the information that you are talking about.

Ms Houston—I certainly concur that a lot of students do not get that kind of advice and information. The other thing that we see, which I think is wrapped up in that in terms of guidance, is the lack of career development or a dedicated person in a school who is supposed to be there to provide not only advice about the practical 'how do I go about negotiating to get my first job?' and those things but also advice about how what the student is doing at school fits into their broader options into the future and the range of things that they could do. One of the things that is probably really lacking—and I think all states and territories would completely agree that it is an area for action—is that that needs to be done a lot better. Young people tend to stumble into pathways and jobs and things by luck or by accident or by thinking, 'My friend is doing this,' or, 'My parents told me to do this,' rather than having any real awareness about their own skills, their attributes, the kinds of things they like to do and having a bit of self-reflection and the ability to say, 'I could actually convert that into doing this kind of job or this kind of work'. We believe it is one key area of market failure of the schooling system. Where it is supposed in

place—where we have a career development adviser—sometimes they are not qualified; they are actually the librarian or the maths teacher filling in separately.

CHAIR—The person they do not want in the classroom.

Ms Houston—Yes, sometimes they have them but they are one career adviser to 700 or 800 kids, and there is a 15-minute or half an hour appointment once in a two-year period. The other thing that we also believe is that that conversation needs to start happening earlier than when they get to years 11 and 12. It needs to start happening earlier in the middle years so that they are actually starting to explore those things. So I absolutely agree. I think there is a definite role for it. It is a definite area of failure. As I said, we tend to use the term ‘career development’ in that area about the whole of life and thinking about yourself and everything. The questions for me are also: ‘Does that and should that take place directly in the school? Should it be outside the school?’ Sometimes young people have a problem with seeing someone inside the school as an extension of a teacher and, as you said, they then do not want to go and talk to them because the school’s attitude or their parents’ attitude is different. We have had a lot of experience with programs that run outside the school system, where it is a significant adult or somebody who gives out information apart from being a school person.

Ms COLLINS—During the hearings that we have conducted one of the things that became obvious was that it was very ad hoc about which schools knew whether their students were working and how many hours they were doing, and that, even if the school did collect the data, often the classroom teacher would not know many hours their students were working. I wonder if the department has a view on whether (a) the school should know and collect the data and (b) how they might do that.

Ms Houston—I am not surprised to hear that. Schools tend to concentrate on the duty of educating the young people, and it is not surprising—

Ms COLLINS—Obviously you cannot educate a student if you do not know that they are working 25 hours a week.

Ms Houston—Yes. It is not surprising that they do not know that, and I would agree that one of the things that we had heard—and, anecdotally, you do hear—is that they do not know that the young person has been working the midnight shift and has then had to come in and that is why they are potentially quite tired in class the next morning. I do not know if I can say that the department has a view on it, but I would say it is definitely an issue and you are quite correct that there is nothing at the moment happening in terms of addressing it that I am aware of. It obviously is a state and school system related issue but clearly one that needs to be looked at.

Ms COLLINS—Mr Zappia has asked me to ask a question on his behalf. He wanted to know if there have been any studies relating to school outcomes—that is, performance or TER ratings—comparing students who work part time and those who do not work at all.

Ms Macpherson—I cannot say, off the top of my head, that I am aware of any. I think all the focus of the work that has been done has been: if the student is working part time then what are their outcomes? I do not think we have commissioned a specific work without going back and looking in a lot more depth than we have looked at the issue.

CHAIR—In the evidence there was some comment that there may have been an impact on TER results if students do excessive numbers of hours. In evidence gained from talking to students they assured us that they managed perfectly well and there was no problem. Then we talked to some older sisters and brothers who came to some of the forums, who said, ‘Oh, I did not get the numbers I wanted to get into the course I was aiming for and, now that I look back, I think maybe I was trying to do too much’. So, to articulate it, that TER data is really just a link between how many hours were worked and what the TER result was, not what they were hoping to get?

Ms Macpherson—We do not collect information about goal that they might have and what TER score they could aspire to. Essentially, as that longitudinal survey of Australian youth data is collected, it asks them: what are you doing now? What has changed in your life this year? What educational course were you doing last year and what are you doing this year? So it is more that kind of an iterative process of the pathway they are passing through.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I have just been looking at your submission. It says:

... the Australian Government’s primary role is to help young people get the most out of workplace experiences by managing structured approaches to attaining work-related skills, as a part of formalised education.

We realise that up to 60 per cent of kids in high school have part-time work, and we found out from our submissions that a lot of the schools do not know what they are doing. You talk about toolkits for students, which I strongly support. But what about things like so few of them knowing their rights at work? I find it extraordinary that we have 60 per cent of our high school population engaged in activities that affect their school, their schooling and good transitions to work but they do not know their rights and their schools do not know they are doing it. I find it just extraordinary. We are one of the largest countries in the world that have young people involved in this labour trade. I find it extraordinary that all of this is going on—like a potpourri of experiences—and we have no idea. I know this is not just your jurisdiction.

CHAIR—We are about to solve some of that, I hope, with this inquiry.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—These toolkits and things that are available to parents and young people in high school to give them this information are so important.

CHAIR—Just to follow up on that point, one of the other things we have been discussing with young people is the area of actually getting some sort of formal acknowledgement of the skills and knowledge they develop in paid employment outside of the school structure—that is, in their casual jobs. We have received a variety of evidence saying that, yes, that would be good but we do not want to make it so onerous for employers that we get a meaningless tick-box certificate which everybody will get—that would mean nothing to employers; they will say, ‘Oh yes, they all get that’—as opposed to young people saying, ‘I don’t want to be a McDonald’s staff member for the rest of my life. This is not my career. I do not even want to be in the hospitality industry or the fast food industry as a subsection of it.’ They may fail to recognise themselves the skills they have developed that are transferable to jobs where they may want to head. I am conscious you are doing some work on a jobs portfolio or certificate or so forth. Could you just give us an update on where that is at so that in our future conversations we can keep that in mind as well?

Ms Houston—The Job Ready Certificate consultations have covered that range of issues and have been held around the country. They have just closed. The report has been drafted and has been handed to the department just recently. So we will be looking at it now and working out what it says. I would definitely agree that, again going back to the career development link, it is not just about being able to say a young person is job ready because they have ticked boxes; it is actually about getting them to recognise, ‘My work at McDonalds actually might be useful and the skills I have gained are something an employer will want from me when I go to another workplace’. They do not see that link and that is a failure in a career development sense that they do not get the experience or the opportunity to do that.

CHAIR—It will be interesting to see that. Do you have a time frame for that report? Perhaps you could report to us on the findings of that.

Ms Houston—If they come in before the committee has finished its deliberations, by all means. I do not have an actual time frame; I know that we have just received the report.

CHAIR—Would you mind contacting the secretariat when you are able to come and give us a report on that? I think we would be most interested.

Ms Houston—Yes.

CHAIR—I know some of you have travelled quite a way to be with us today and we really appreciate you attending the hearing. It sounds like we are both working on some really important areas which, as Mr Sidebottom indicated, cover major aspects of our community and workplaces which have grown up unregulated over decades. It is perhaps most timely that we are all looking at what the realities of that are—so I do appreciate your time here today.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 10.35 am