



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Combining study and work

MONDAY, 17 AUGUST 2009

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Monday, 17 August 2009

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

Members in attendance: Ms Bird, Mrs D' Ath, Mr Irons, Dr Jensen, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Sidebottom, Mr Symon 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

Andrew, Canberra Institute of Technology, Bruce Campus.....	2
BATTENALLY, Mr Michael John, Principal, Melba Copland Secondary School	2
Ethan, Marist College Canberra.....	2
Fiona, Melba Copland Secondary School	2
Hacey, Canberra Girl’s Grammar School.....	2
Hannah, Canberra Girl’s Grammar School.....	2
Maxine, Canberra Girl’s Grammar School.....	2
McDONALD, Mrs Judy, VET Coordinator/Careers Adviser, St Clare’s College.....	2
Natasha, Canberra Institute of Technology, Bruce Campus	2
REYNOLDS, Mrs Deanne, Careers Adviser, Canberra Girl’s Grammar School.....	2
SINCLAIR, Ms Gillian, Acting Education Manager, Canberra Institute of Technology, Bruce Campus	2
Stephen, Canberra Institute of Technology, Bruce Campus.....	2
Tabitha, St Clare’s College.....	2
Tim N, Melba Copland Secondary School	2
Tim S, Marist College Canberra.....	2
Vanessa, Canberra Girl’s Grammar School.....	2
WILLIAMSON, Mrs Janet, Careers Adviser/Vocational Education Coordinator, Marist College Canberra.....	2

Committee met at 10.01 am

CHAIR (Ms Bird)—Welcome, everybody, and thank you very much for participating in our forum. I welcome all students and support staff in attendance at today's hearing. As you are aware the committee is conducting an inquiry into how students combine school with part-time work. We are interested in hearing of your experiences and any views you might have about how to improve the situation for students trying to balance study and work commitments. We have been receiving feedback on these issues from students across the country via the committee's student survey, which I know many students here have completed. Almost 3,000 students have completed that online survey. While many students are telling us they are coping fine and that their employers and teachers understand the needs of students, others are telling us that they are doing it tough, particularly with things such as working late hours on week nights, and that they do not feel comfortable asking employers for time off when they need it.

Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I advise you that committee hearings are legal proceedings of parliament and therefore have the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. I also wish to advise that today's proceedings are being broadcast on the internet. We have some interest from WIN TV to do a report on today's hearing. Could I have a committee member authorise WIN TV's attendance at the hearing? It is so authorised.

[10.06 am]

Andrew, Canberra Institute of Technology, Bruce Campus

BATTENALLY, Mr Michael John, Principal, Melba Copland Secondary School

Ethan, Marist College Canberra

Fiona, Melba Copland Secondary School

Hacey, Canberra Girl's Grammar School

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McDONALD, Mrs Judy, VET Coordinator/Careers Adviser, St Clare's College

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Tabitha, St Clare's College

Tim N, Melba Copland Secondary School

Tim S, Marist College Canberra

Vanessa, Canberra Girl's Grammar School

WILLIAMSON, Mrs Janet, Careers Adviser/Vocational Education Coordinator, Marist College Canberra

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee received this reference from the federal minister to look at the youth transitions issue, in particular the different forms of work that young people undertake and how that might be a successful and useful thing for them in their transition to further study or work after school, and what the problems might be in managing that work. As you would appreciate, some of that work is voluntary work. A lot of young people have talked to us about the volunteer work that they do, including coaching junior teams and things like that, or it might be unpaid work experience through various programs at school or other places.

Significantly, it could be paid. We know that at least half the student body in Australia at some point hold down paid part-time employment.

This committee is particularly interested to hear directly from students. We did not want this to be an inquiry with a lot of experts who have done the research and with peak teacher bodies and academics telling us what is going on. We want to hear directly from young people. It would not surprise you to know that some of the best evidence we have had is from young people. That evidence has split into two broad groups. Firstly, where young people get great benefit from and really value their paid work and manage to balance it quite well. If you feel that it is your circumstance, we are keen to hear what you think makes that work. Secondly, where young people are having pressure put on them to do longer hours than they want to or unfriendly hours that could have an impact on their study. We would like to hear your experiences and what you might think are some good ideas we could recommend to the minister for managing that situation.

Your evidence is critically important because we do not want to make recommendations that are contrary to what young people want. We really appreciate you taking the time to be with us today. I will now ask somebody to kick off. First up, we would like to hear briefly from everybody about your situation. Are you working? Are you doing volunteer work? How many hours a week are you working and in what industry? Is it retail or fast food? Those are the sorts of things we would like to hear so we can get an idea of the sort of coverage of experience we have at this hearing. We might move along the rows. Would you like to start, Tim?

Tim N—I am from Melba Copland Secondary School. I am presently unemployed, so I have an outsider observer perspective on this whole situation. Almost all of my friends have casual employment at various establishments like McDonald's and that kind of thing. I actually inquired about this forum a little while ago. I called to ask if you were going to hold something and they told me to offer a survey, and that a forum would not be occurring. Then they said, 'Now we're holding a forum.'

CHAIR—That is great; thanks for that. The survey produced so many results it was difficult to get around everybody, so when we got such a strong result from the ACT it enabled us to hold the hearing. So thanks for your interest—that was no doubt part of that.

Fiona—I am from Melba Copland Secondary School. I am currently unemployed, like Tim, but I have had two part-time jobs before and I quit for various reasons—too much extracurricular work and that kind of stuff.

CHAIR—How many hours would you have been doing at the point when you decided it was too much to manage?

Fiona—Probably seven hours on both days of the weekend—20 hours a week.

Tabitha—I am from St Clare's College. I am currently employed as a waitress in a small Chinese establishment and earlier this year I worked two jobs—including another waitressing job—and I have previously held retail employment as well.

CHAIR—How many hours a week would you do?

Tabitha—I probably do about 10 to 15, and previously, at my old job, I was expected to work a nine-hour shift.

CHAIR—What do you think would be an optimum number of hours? Is there a point at which you think it is too much?

Tabitha—I think it depends on the school load that you have at the time.

CHAIR—Yes. What year are you in at school?

Tabitha—I am in year 11 now. When I was in year 10 I used to work about eight to 10 hours a week, and now I work more, which is probably not ideal because I have more work now that I am in year 11. But for me, when I was expected to work a nine-hour shift that took my entire Saturday and I got a very small break, I was exhausted and was not able to do the schoolwork I needed to do on Sundays. So I think it depends on the hours that you work and when the hours fall, whether it is on the weekend or whether it is weeknights, when you are supposed to be doing schoolwork.

CHAIR—So it is not just the total number of hours. You found it was when you were doing the hours.

Tabitha—Yes, the spread of the hours and how regular it is.

Maxine—I am from Canberra Girls Grammar School. I work about 18 hours every weekend—every Friday and Saturday—at my parents' family business. It is a restaurant. I have a managing position. It is sort of all-around—wherever they need me I go.

CHAIR—How do you find that many hours? Is that manageable?

Maxine—It is very hard—straight after school, going straight to work. We stand up. We do not get breaks, because it is a family business. We have no choice. What my mum says goes.

CHAIR—What year did you say you were in?

Maxine—Year 12.

CHAIR—And how do you balance it? Do you have to work on it in some way or cut some compromises?

Maxine—Well, I have no social life. That is about it. But I have all of Sunday and mainly weekdays to do schoolwork.

Hacey—I am currently employed by Coles supermarkets. I am part time there. I work around 12 hours a week. I think it is more about managing your time right. Sunday is an extra pay rate, so you can do fewer hours but work more on Sunday. So I think it is just about time management and how you use your time.

CHAIR—And you are in what year now?

Hacey—Year 10.

CHAIR—Do you think when you go into years 11 and 12 that those sorts of hours would still be manageable? Do you have some sense of that?

Hacey—I think I could maybe increase my hours a little, because I have worked at Coles for almost two years now, so I have got the hang of things now.

Hannah—I am from Canberra Girls Grammar. I am in year 12 and I work around nine hours a week every Sunday at a restaurant. I am a waitress. I find being a waitress really difficult. I have to try to stay on my feet and it uses up a lot of energy, which means that I cannot do schoolwork and stuff on the weekends, which is really difficult.

CHAIR—So how do you manage that? You try and get it all done on the weeknights—is that right?

Hannah—I work every Sunday, so I try to get it all done on Saturday, which means I cannot go out as much as I want to. But I try and do as much as I can on weekdays as well.

Vanessa—I am from Canberra Girls Grammar and I am in year 12 as well. I have managed to find a really good casual job in a fast-food place in a food court and I only have to work four or six hours a week. That works really well.

CHAIR—The four to six hours per week—is that one shift?

Vanessa—Yes, just one shift. Sometimes I work a bit longer, sometimes a bit shorter.

CHAIR—And what year are you in?

Vanessa—Year 12.

Tim S—I am from Marist College, Canberra. I am currently employed in the pharmacy industry. I enjoy working, which is why I work. I only work about 10 hours a week. I have been working there for a while now. As I have been working there, obviously my skills have increased and I have become a more valuable staff member. So I have got better shifts now, on a Sunday, whereas I did not used to have the Sunday shifts. I used to have to work more hours. I enjoy it and that is why I do it.

CHAIR—What year are you in, Tim?

Tim S—Year 12.

Ethan—I am from Marist College, Canberra. I work from 15 to 20 hours a week in both hospitality and retail. I think it is good because I am a barista in hospitality and when I do further study it will help out if I want to have a smaller job.

CHAIR—What year are you in?

Ethan—Year 12.

CHAIR—Are you studying hospitality at school?

Ethan—Yes.

CHAIR—So you are actually combining it—the work is not just an income; it is also connected to your studies?

Ethan—Yes.

CHAIR—Are any of those hours a formal part of the courses that you are doing?

Ethan—No, but I can accredit them to services.

CHAIR—So you can get some credit for the work as part of your course?

Ethan—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Andrew—I am from CIT. I have a weekend and morning job with Tennis Australia, coaching. I work 10 or 11 hours a week plus the first week of the holidays, from eight o'clock to five o'clock. It is pretty good.

CHAIR—What year are you in?

Andrew—Year 12.

CHAIR—Do you find that to be a good number of hours; it is manageable?

Andrew—Yes. It is really good and we have got a good team that works well.

Stephen—I have currently gone back to CIT to study years 11 and 12 after completing an apprenticeship. At the moment I am working 18 to 19 hours a week in fast food. However, I have just reduced my hours, with a different company, as the last company I worked for was making me do 35 to 40 hours a week. I really could not afford to do any less. I have finally bitten the bullet and I am on Centrelink and working less now.

CHAIR—That was definitely too many hours?

Stephen—I live 50 kays away from town, so I was finishing at two o'clock in the morning and driving home and getting up at five o'clock again to come back to school.

Natasha—I am a student in the year 12 program at CIT. This is my second attempt at year 12. This year I have alternated between two jobs, working somewhere between 20 and 35 hours a week, in the hospitality industry. I am a waitress at a restaurant. I do live out of home as an

independent student, so the responsibilities concerning rent, bills and other expenses are far greater. Just trying to balance study and work has been difficult, prioritising between the two. Luckily at CIT there has been a great support program for older students.

CHAIR—Would 20 hours be the minimum you would do, but you can do up to 35 hours?

Natasha—I have in the past, but I have been trying to cut it down to 20 hours. I have been on the youth allowance, which has been beneficial to me.

CHAIR—It has taken some of the pressure off earning?

Natasha—It has, yes.

CHAIR—Thank you. I think we have covered all our students. I might ask committee members to go to questions to explore some of the points that you have made. Mr Irons?

Mr IRONS—I have a question for Hacey. You spoke about selecting and managing your hours on the weekends. Does Coles give you the option to choose the hours you want to work? We have heard from a lot of students that they do not have choices in the hours that they work, but from what you said it sounds as though you have choice.

Hacey—Because I have worked there so long and I am part time, I am able to choose my hours. There will be fixed hours. I choose when I work, how long I want to work and what days I want to work.

CHAIR—Does anybody else want to make comment about the allocations of shifts? It is a common issue that comes up where people feel that they do not have control. It starts off, when they get the job, with the company saying, 'Tell us when you are available,' but then that never reflects when you actually get shifts. Has anybody had issues or problems or does anyone have a good story about shift management and when you do your shifts?

Maxine—It is not so much me, because I have no choice when I work. I interview a lot of waitressing staff for jobs in our restaurant. The management people do not really care what you have got on. They want you to do these specific hours and if you can't do it they don't want you. It really depends where you work. If it is in hospitality I know they do not care about your outside life; it is whether you can work. If you are tired, that is not acceptable.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. It is an interesting thing. You do not have to tell us only about your personal situation; if you want to give us some feedback on friends or family who have had similar experiences, without naming them, you are welcome to do that as well. We have heard evidence that the industries that have employed young people for a long time, such as big retail stores, tend to have better practices than the newer industries such as the fast food/hospitality area. We are interested in the variety of experiences. I started as a checkout chick at Coles when I was 15. They have got years and years of experience in employing young people and tend to have better practices, and perhaps the newer industries can learn something from that. I think that that type of information is good. Has anybody else had shift experience?

Vanessa—When I got my job I told them I could only work four hours a week and they were pretty much all right with that. They ask me if I can work longer and if I say no, they are totally fine with that. They sometimes ask me to work two or three days and if I say no, they are all right.

CHAIR—That is really interesting. The other piece of evidence we have had from young people is that sometimes they are frightened to say no, and that can be due to a combination of things. Sometimes people feel, ‘I have taken a responsibility with this employer; I accepted the job and I have a responsibility to help them out’ or, ‘If I say no, I will not get any more shifts,’ and that sometimes happens if you do not make yourself available. Has anybody seen evidence of that sort of situation?

Tabitha—(*inaudible*) We are expected to work. We were told we owed a favour. I had a friend and she was told that she would finish work at 10 o’clock at night. For three nights in a row during school term she was made to stay and work till one o’clock in the morning. There was no choice in saying, ‘Can I go home now?’ It was, ‘No, you have to work until we are finished.’ So when she was trying to do that she ended up missing days because she was purely exhausted and was not able to complete her school work.

CHAIR—What was driving that? Did she feel that if she insisted that she could not stay and had to leave that she may not get extra work?

Tabitha—She did. She needed the money; she needed to be able to help pay for things. If she had tried to leave she would have lost her job, so she continued to work because the employer had given her a job and she needed the work.

CHAIR—I will ask you to comment on this before we invite others. We have heard a lot of evidence about these long shifts: your shift is supposed to finish at a particular time and then you have to stay back to clean up or do whatever is required until the place shuts, no matter how long that is. I am interested to hear people’s experiences of those long shifts and particularly multiple nights. What was the situation there? Had she anticipated the shift was supposed to finish at a particular time?

Tabitha—Yes. She had anticipated that the shift would finish at about 10 o’clock at night and then she was made to stay until one o’clock in the morning.

CHAIR—What did she do for transport?

Tabitha—Her parents were waiting. She was made to call her parents and tell them to come back and get her later. I have known other people where the parents sit and wait in the car park until the child is finished because the child has no way of contacting them because they are made to continue to work without informing anybody.

CHAIR—One of the things we hear from parents is that if they attempt to intervene most young people say to them, ‘Stay out of it—don’t interfere, don’t ring my boss, don’t come into the workplace.’ In your experience of your friend’s situation would she have done the same thing? Do you think young people are reluctant for their parents to get involved?

Tabitha—Yes. I suppose employers sort of expect that as we have a job we are responsible for ourselves so then, if your parents step in, employers think, ‘Well, clearly you can’t look after yourself and you’re not responsible enough to have this job, so we won’t continue to give you shifts’, or ‘If you’re going to whinge and cause trouble for us, we don’t want you working here.’

CHAIR—Does anybody else have some comments on that sort of situation?

Stephen—When I was in my previous job I managed between two different shops. A lot of the time I would start, open the first shop, on the other side of town from where I lived, at 10 o’clock in the morning and work there until nine o’clock at night and then transfer to the other shop and work till close there. The other thing I would like to comment on, relating back to that time, is that a lot of the kids I was managing were not told what time they finished; they were told, ‘You work from eight o’clock at night till close’—which was somewhere between midnight and 3 am. They did offer a lift home with the last driver, or the manager, but the parents did not know what time they were going to be home—they would be home somewhere between 12.30 and 3.30—and that also put a lot of responsibility on the manager or the driver to spend an hour after their shift driving people home.

CHAIR—You were in a supervisory role there, were you?

Stephen—Yes.

CHAIR—And how old were you when you were doing that?

Stephen—I was 19.

CHAIR—This is another thing we hear about: a lot of young people trying to negotiate. The supervisor does not have much power either, because they might be only a year or two older than their staff. Have you seen that quite a bit in the industry?

Stephen—Yes. You have your big boss, but most of the managers who stayed late were young. I think our youngest one was 16. If you get a customer complaining, they are not old enough to deal with that, in my opinion.

CHAIR—Thanks for that, Steve. Does anyone else have some feedback on the issue of those long shifts and irregular hours?

Tim S—This is probably not the same situation as the others but, in my workplace—which is, once again, in the pharmacy industry—by the end of the day everybody is so willing to get home that they pretty much lock the doors at seven and we all run out the door! So it is nothing like that where I work. I get definite shifts and I know when I am going to finish. Sometimes I have to do, say, a delivery after work, but it is only half an hour and I get paid for it. I get paid for the kilometres as well.

CHAIR—That is interesting. So you get paid the additional time plus the kilometres for your car?

Tim S—Yes.

CHAIR—Can I just go back to you, Steve. When you were talking about managers being asked to run people home, was that paid time? Was that compensated?

Stephen—None of that was paid, no. There was no travel or anything paid.

CHAIR—Thank you. There is another person here who I think wanted to comment on that.

Natasha—When I first began year 12 I was working full time in a supervisory position in a restaurant. That job required me to work from 4.30 in the afternoon until 9.30 or 10.30 in the evening, which was wonderful. As I started year 12 I was able to cut down my shifts but work the same hours, which required a lot of rushing back from school in order to get to work. I finished that job and started another job as a casual waitress, and my hours changed from 4.30 to 10.30 pm, to 7.00 o'clock in the evening until well past midnight. That is difficult on the weekends because you allocate time to study and you lose half your day trying to catch up on sleep, and later in the evenings it does not allow you time. So I think there is quite a difference. You might have a similar position to somebody in the same industry but your work hours can be quite different.

CHAIR—So the actual hours of the shift made a difference to your fatigue levels?

Natasha—Absolutely. It was beneficial to me to take a job where I was beginning at 7.00 in the evening and therefore my study was still fresh in my mind and I was able to keep up with it. However, working until quite late left me a little bit behind down the track.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you very much for your contribution so far. It seems, from comparisons throughout the world, that for students in Australia actually working whilst at school is unusual—that is, compared to other countries it is a bit of a phenomenon here. I want to know whether you know your rights at work; if you do know your rights at work, how you found out about them; and, if you do not know your rights at work, whether you think you should.

CHAIR—Mr Sidebottom is talking about your legislated, official rights and whether you are under an award or an agreement. Does anybody feel they could confidently say, 'I am employed under this particular award or agreement and I have a written version of what my entitlements are'? This is a bit grim, Mr Sidebottom; nobody is indicating they can. There is one. Steve, would you let us know what you know and how you found that information?

Stephen—I work for McDonald's. When I started there I was told: 'This is your rate. This is the award you are paid under.' I was given a booklet with information and various means to find out more information if necessary.

CHAIR—If you will excuse me saying so, you are obviously a more mature worker; you have come back to study. When you were younger, was that information given to you but you were not aware of it, or did you not get it? Do you have a sense of that?

Stephen—When I was doing my apprenticeship, especially, it was very much: 'You are an apprentice. This is it. You get paid not much at all.' I was told what award I was paid under, but that was it. It was—

CHAIR—very basic information.

Stephen—I was not shown much at all. A lot of the time pay was short—things like that. In my last job we were told: ‘You’re paid this much. If you want to find out more you can look for yourself, but we’re not going to tell you where.’

CHAIR—Has anybody else had experiences like that, or do you just generally presume the information you are given is correct?

Natasha—I think it is difficult. In my experience in the hospitality industry, while it may differ in other industries, I see a lot of casual workers giving their resumes to people who work in restaurants and people looking at them and asking, ‘What shifts can you work?’ They roster them on but they do not actually take them through safety or health procedures, tell them how much they are being paid and whether it coincides or contrasts with what they are meant to be getting paid. I have been very fortunate to work in establishments that give you an employment record, pay you correctly and give you a little manual as to your rights at work, but I do not see enough of that happening in other establishments.

CHAIR—Amongst the group, who remembers having an induction when they started their job? Six of you—so about half the group remember actually having a formal induction, which is, as you said quite correctly, not just about pay rates and conditions but also about safety issues. One thing we have heard a lot from young people is that when accidents and things like that happen they are not sure of their entitlements in those situations. Thank you for that point. Does anybody else want to comment on Mr Sidebottom’s question about pay and entitlements and rights?

Fiona—When I started my first job I was 15. I was working at a fast-food restaurant. My boss was desperate for employees. I handed in my resume, got an interview the same day and was working the next day. I did not have a formal induction and I was being paid \$6 an hour, which I now believe is less than I should have been paid. By the time I had been working there for eight or nine months I was working as a supervisor but being paid the same as everyone else, even though I was only 15 years old and supervising people who were maybe 18 or 19. I had absolutely no idea of my rights as a worker and I did not know how a boss should treat his employees. I know now that my boss was not treating us properly, because he was such an angry person and the way he was talking to us was not right, but I had absolutely no idea that it was not okay. Not to get paid for four weeks and then get paid at the end of four weeks was also not all right. I think it is important, particularly for a first job, that you know what your rights are before you get into it, because I just assumed that that was what part-time work was like.

CHAIR—That is really good feedback. A lot of young people say to us that your experience of the adults in your world is that they have responsibility for protecting your rights. Your parents, carers and teachers are the adult world and, when you go into the workplace, you do not realise that that person is there to run a business and, sadly, many of them are not there to protect your rights. Very often the feedback that we get from young people is that they did not know that the situation was not normal—let alone to ask questions about it. Do you have a sense of where you would go now? If you were concerned that things were not right at work, where would you go for information?

Fiona—I am not really sure. I think this time I would, first of all, go to my parents, because they are very big union people and really know about rights at work and that kind of stuff. I guess I would just take my parents advice and whatever they said.

CHAIR—Has anyone else got any experience regarding somewhere they might go to get information or to get some guidance? Does anyone have any ideas about that? Besides your parents, where else might you go?

Tabitha—I would go to my parents first. I am also a big fan of Google. Is there like an ombudsman or something like that?

CHAIR—Yes. So you would look up something?

Tabitha—I know that we have rights at work. I have had a positive experience where we were given a contract. So obviously my first port of call if I had felt I was not being treated right would be to check and see if there was something on my contract that says, ‘You can’t be treated this way.’ Other than that, I probably would turn to my parents or try to find something on the web, because there are lots of websites about your rights at work.

CHAIR—That is right. Obviously Google is a great facility and you could find something in terms of a government department or a trade union or something that would hold the information.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—If so many students are involved in work while they are at school, do you think it could be part and parcel of what the school also offers in terms of providing a service to you? I do not mean to overload the curriculum, but there seems to be such a relationship between so many students working and being at school do you think learning about your basic rights and a safe workplace is something you could do at school?

CHAIR—Has anybody done anything at school about the work world, your experience, how to record your skills and knowledge and where you can find out about your rights and responsibilities? It is not a subject at school?

Vanessa—In years 9 and 10, if you did commerce we covered that or about half a year. We brushed over the basics. We learned what you are generally allowed to do and what you are generally not allowed to do—just the general stuff; not deeply into it. So we have some kind of idea.

CHAIR—Do you think you paid particular attention at that point or was it something that seemed a long way off?

Vanessa—Probably not. I probably paid a bit of attention.

CHAIR—I have just realised that we have had some more people join the committee. I will get them to let you know who they are.

Dr JENSEN—I am Dennis Jensen. I am deputy chair of the committee and I am from the seat of Tangney in Western Australia.

Mrs D'ATH—I am Yvette D'Ath. I am the federal member for Petrie, which is the northern suburbs of Brisbane.

CHAIR—Thanks very much.

Tim N—Although it is not part of the curriculum, in my legal studies class we have been doing some work on rights at work, unions and stuff. Also, from conversations that I have had with some of my teachers and people who work at the school, I am fairly confident that, if I had problems at work, if I was employed, I would be able to go to them and ask them about what my rights are and get help from them, because they seem fairly well educated in the field.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions?

Mr ZAPPIA—My question follows on from the question that Mr Sidebottom referred to but did not ask. Why do you work? Are there any amongst you who work because you choose to work, as opposed to needing to work?

CHAIR—So motivations for having these part-time jobs.

Natasha—I would like to mention that when I first attempted year 12, I did not finish at the end of the year for a variety of reasons, including the fact that I was working a lot and living out of home. When you have those responsibilities—the bills, the rent and all of those other things—you feel that, unless you are earning that money, you cannot support yourself. There is priority for your studies but also for the short-term how you are going to live.

CHAIR—So you were about 17 when you were doing year 12 for the first time?

Natasha—Correct.

CHAIR—Were you able to get government assistance. Did you know about youth allowance?

Natasha—I was aware of youth allowance but at the time I was living at home with my parents and I then moved out and there were a couple of discrepancies between where I was living and my parents and my age. So I was not eligible for it at the time.

CHAIR—That is not uncommon; it is a difficult transition thing and the system does not handle it well, does it? I might put you all on the spot here and get everybody to tell us why they work.

Andrew—I do tennis and my coach asked me to start helping—he said it would improve my game and help the kids as well. It is beneficial for the younger kids as well because they get someone who is younger helping them rather than 30-year-old people.

CHAIR—So you were a player yourself and you saw the skills development opportunities as good?

Andrew—Yes.

Stephen—I work because, after coming out of four years in a full-time job earning a decent amount, I have things that have built up. I also have to get myself into town each day. I am using about 100 litres of fuel—so about \$140—a week. I physically need money to get around and survive.

CHAIR—You mentioned that you are on youth allowance now. What has your experience been with accessing youth allowance?

Stephen—Fairly good. I think Centrelink need to understand that some people are in different circumstances than others. Because I am living at home, I only get the very minimum. However, I do have further bills to pay. It is a very long way for me to travel into town each day. I cannot work more than a certain number of hours per fortnight; otherwise they take the allowance away. I think things like that need to be thought about.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Natasha—I work to make ends meet. On the youth allowance subject, there were times when I was working 30 hours a week or more. I was on the youth allowance benefit but in six months all I received from youth allowance was something like \$60. Over the course of the year I would have to work to make the money and I would be getting the same amount of money by doing the work as opposed to not working at all.

Tim N—I do not work but, for the most part, the friends that I have who work do so to pay for the things that they enjoy. I have a friend whose mum provides him shelter, food and stuff but he pays for everything else. I was talking to him about it a few days ago, and he is really thankful that that has happened because he feels that he has a really good grip on the value of money and that kind of thing. So, for the most part, it is just for those luxuries.

CHAIR—That is good feedback. Thank you.

Fiona—I guess I worked to begin with because I wanted that kind of financial independence from my parents. But the more I worked, the more I think that there are a lot of things you can learn from it. I learned leadership skills, problem-solving qualities, customer service and that kind of stuff. I think that having a part-time job when you are this age, as long as the hours are manageable and that kind of thing—and you are balancing it fine—is a really good thing to do because you are gaining life skills.

Tabitha—Working does give you a lot of experience. From my perspective, I do a lot of work with young carers and I am a young carer myself. The reason that I and a lot of young carers work is because there is somebody with an illness in the family and there are a lot of extra costs there. We cannot always rely on our parents to provide extra things for us. If I wanted to, say, join a sporting team, I would need to be able to contribute money to do that. There are also the social things but there are also the everyday things that maybe everybody else expects their parents to pay for. I have friends who say, ‘My parents just bought me a new phone.’ If I needed a new phone, I would need to pay for it and I would need to pay for my credit, because it is not something that you can rely on your parents to pay for. So it does give you financial independence.

Ethan—I work because I kind of enjoy hospitality. There are also things that I think that my parents should not pay for, like my car and registration and stuff. It is good to have that kind of job.

CHAIR—So you run your car on the money you earn? It is financial independence for you.

Ethan—Yes.

CHAIR—And you also enjoy the hospitality sector; it is close to what your career interests are.

Ethan—A lot more than retail, I might say.

Tim S—I work because I want to be a pharmacist and so being a pharmacy assistant would probably be the first step in giving me very valuable experience. So I am getting experience, which is good. I also work because my parents do not pay for things. My friends go to their parents and their parents say, ‘Yes, here, have \$100 so that you can go out to the movies or whatever.’ Since I am able to pay for my own things I value them. Since I buy my own stuff, I value it and so it is teaching me things—whatever. And I enjoy working, which is pretty much why I work.

Vanessa—I do not have to work; I choose to work. Normally, my parents pay for stuff, but I chose to work. I do not mind working. You have friends at work and you are earning a bit of extra money for stuff that your parents do not want to pay for.

CHAIR—So you like the freedom of being able to decide how to spend your money, but you also make friends and have a different circle of people at the workplace.

Vanessa—Yes. You have other friends, and it is extra money.

Hannah—I would say that at the moment I am working because I enjoy it. It is really good to get out and meet some people who you would not normally meet. Going to school, you hang out with the same crowd. It is really good for the social side of things. Like most people here, I have to pay for everything that I want. Yes, my mum pays for my house and the food that I eat—although occasionally I will go and buy the groceries for her. But I pay for my car, my registration, my insurance, clothes, food that I want when I go out, birthday presents—all those little things that your parents will not pay for. It is really good to be able to do that by yourself.

Hacey—When I first started working, it was not really a matter of needing to pay for my things, because my parents were quite comfortable buying what I needed. But with the crisis going on at the moment, my dad wants less responsibility for paying for my stuff. Now that I am locked into a phone contract, I am working—as my dad says—for a phone. That is basically the only reason that I am working. I enjoy it and it is convenient. It is all right.

Maxine—I do not really have a choice about working. I was sort of born into the hospitality industry. As soon as I could talk to people, I was in there. It is also because I never saw my parents when I was younger. The only way that I could see them was to go to the shop and work. Now, there is no choice. If I am there five minutes late, I get the same treatment as everyone, and

my mum screams. Not that I think of it, I really enjoy working, because you meet so many different people and they talk to you about your life. Having that contact with people is good.

Dr JENSEN—I know that when I was not here you discussed how many hours you each worked. Could each of you say again how many hours you work and whether you think that your work experience has a positive or negative impact on your educational performance and why you think that is the case.

CHAIR—We did go around the whole room and do that, so can we also get people to indicate the perfect number of hours a week for a student studying in years 11 and 12. We will put the acid on you to pick a number and tell us what you think would be a sensible number of hours. Just indicate how many hours that you are doing and, if you had our power, what you would advise as being the optimal number of hours.

Tim N—That is another unfortunate question for me, because I do not work.

CHAIR—But you would have a perspective.

Tim N—Looking at the hours that my friends work, I have two friends who both work at exactly the same fast food outlet. They are both pretty much on call. There have been countless numbers of times when I have been with them and they have gotten a call asking them whether they can work. One of them refuses to work when they just get called and the other will not not accept work—they just have to go. He is very tired sometimes because he ends up working much longer than he expects to. I do think that I can really speculate as to what be the perfect number of hours. But I can say that from what I have seen and experienced with them, it has not really been detrimental to their school work in any way.

Fiona—When I first started, I was working only 10 or 12 hours a week, but it became about 20 to 22 hours a week. I found that in the end if I wanted time off to work on school work or something that my bosses would be so angry that I was afraid to ask again. Then I realised that I was putting a job worthy like \$6 or \$7 an hour on the same level as my school work. That is when I decided to quite. But the perfect hours to work would be completely dependent on your work load and what you do outside of school. But I do not think that I would want to do anything more than 15 hours a week. That would be my limit.

Tabitha—I work about 10 to 15 hours a week at the moment. I agree: I do not think that you can put a set amount of hours as the amount of hours that a student should be working. In year 10, I could have worked more hours than I do as a year 11 student because my workload is a lot higher. The minute that your work life starts to overtake your school life and starts to affect your schooling, maybe that is the time to look at whether it is as important. At the moment, I am a year 11 student. Schooling is the most important thing, because I do not want to be a waitress for the rest of my life and it is just a way of making ends meet. School is more important, and we need to focus on what is really important and this time in our life.

CHAIR—So you think that the range of hours that you are doing at the moment—that 10 to 15 hours—is a good balance?

Tabitha—Yes, it is all right for me. Sometimes, like when I am in the middle of an exam period, obviously I need to cut down the amount of hours. But then there are times of the year when you do not have as much school work, so you can work longer.

CHAIR—Do you find it easy to cut down? If you have exams, is it quite easy to say to your employer, ‘I’ve got exams on over the next two weeks, so I’ll have to cut down’?

Tabitha—I am really lucky. At the moment, I have a good employer who is quite understanding about the fact that we have school. But I know that a lot of my friends have employers who expect them to work regardless of school. For the employers, the work is their life. That is their job. They forget that the student has school as well and their school life is maybe more important than their working life.

Andrew—I work about 10 to 11 hours a week. It is good having a smaller number of hours, because I am doing year 12 again. It is easier. You can have a bit of moderation. Whereas next year or the after if I do a gap year, I will be able to work whatever number of hours I want. While I am at school, I work fewer hours. Later on, I can work more.

CHAIR—So you are in the 10 to 15 band?

Andrew—Yes.

CHAIR—You think that is a good number?

Andrew—Yes.

Stephen—At the moment I am working 18 to 19 hours a week. For most people I think that is probably too much. I got used to working from six o’clock in the morning till midnight when doing a trade. I think 10 to 15 hours is more than enough for most people but I also think the hours should be split up over two to three days. Working in fast food at the moment I have seen a lot of people try to do 10-hour shifts and then physically not be able to do anything the next day.

Natasha—I am working 20 to 25 hours a week. I do not think, much like everyone has said, you can have a set working week for students. There are so many variables involved as to how much they are getting paid—whether it be \$9 or \$20—and what days they work. I do agree with Stephen about time management. I think that is very important in balancing work and study. Maybe we could implement some ways or develop some programs through which students can understand more about breaking up their time throughout the week between their study and their work.

Maxine—I work about 18 hours between Friday and Saturday every single weekend, and I have since I was about 10. In the holidays I work every single day from about 12 in the afternoon to about 12 at night. So it is a lot of work.

CHAIR—Are you recommending that, Maxine?

Maxine—I am definitely not recommending it, no.

CHAIR—What sort of range would you say would be a sensible amount for weekly shifts?

Maxine—It really depends what type of work you are doing. If it is in hospitality then definitely less hours because you are moving around a lot more.

CHAIR—Yes, there is physical activity involved.

Maxine—Yes, and it depends on the stress levels as well. If it is not that stressful then you can do more hours. I think less than 15 hours would be good.

Hacey—I do not think it is really an option about how many hours you want to work. I would like to minimise my hours but I cannot because of the things that I need to do. I would only like to work six or so hours but I cannot because of what I need to pay for and the money I need for that weekend. So I think it is just a matter of having the hours that you need.

Dr JENSEN—There is also the question of the impact of working on your school performance. That seems to have been lost somewhere in the mix. It is something that I would like to get a handle on. I would like to get a feel for how many students feel that it has a positive impact on their schoolwork and how many feel it has a negative impact. As I said earlier, the number of hours worked would give us some ideas of what we are looking at.

Hacey—I do not think it really has a negative impact on my schoolwork because I have learned to work around it. I think that if I minimised my hours then it would probably have a positive effect on my schoolwork. But because I have worked for two years now I have learned to work around it. So I think it is just, as everyone else has said, a matter of time management.

Hannah—At the moment I work nine hours a week in a very business, so it is nine hours straight from 9 pm till whenever my boss says I can go. I think it is really hard to work that long without a break—without stopping and without resting—and then try to get up the next day and come to school. Every Monday I am pretty much dead for school. I think nine or 10 hours would be a good amount of work to do a week but I think it should be spread out rather than just doing it all in one shift.

CHAIR—What about the impacts on your schooling? You have just mentioned that you are flagging on a Monday.

Hannah—I think it has a negative impact because on Sunday nights I am tired. Saturday nights I try to go to bed early, so I do not have Saturday nights to do work. On Mondays I really cannot concentrate that well at school because my mind—

CHAIR—It is interesting that you say that because teachers have said to us in forums that students will say, ‘Oh, no, I am managing all right,’ but they notice that their energy levels are way down and they are tired in the classroom. So you are saying that you have noticed that in yourself.

Hannah—Yes, even my teachers have told me that I need to step up at school because I just cannot concentrate on Mondays.

Vanessa—Because I do not work that long a week it is quite all right. My work is really flexible—if I want to work more hours then they can put me on for two days for however many hours I want. If I need to leave early on a day then they are like, ‘That’s fine. You can go home as long as we’re not really busy.’ So it really does not have that much impact on my schoolwork. If I manage that with a job then I am better at time management because I have to work around the jobs so I have to plan better and make sure that I get my work done on time. Really I think that the right amount of hours is just to do with how you manage it. If you cannot manage it then you should not work for as many hours.

CHAIR—Do you have a sense of how many hours would start to be too much, no matter how good your time management was?

Vanessa—I reckon more than 10 or 12 hours would be a bit too much. It also depends on how seriously you take your schoolwork. Some people do not take it seriously at all so to them it would not matter if it was impacting on their schoolwork. But if you take it seriously, then it is important.

Tim S—I am currently working 10 hours a week. I work that over two days—so on Friday night for three hours and then on Sunday for seven hours. I do not find that I get tired or anything; I just find that I waste time all the time so I may as well be wasting time at work. If I am at work then I feel like I am actually accomplishing something, which is nice. Last weekend I did work Saturday and Sunday and I did notice that I did not have enough time for schoolwork. So I am going to be a bit pressured this week obviously. But usually I only work Sundays and that is perfect for me.

CHAIR—So that 10 to 15 hours a week is manageable for you?

Tim S—Yes.

CHAIR—It is interesting the point that you make in terms of taking on the extra hours. Often we hear people say, ‘I am managing. I am managing.’ It is like the story of the slowly boiling frog—have you heard about that?—where the frog does not realise what is happening. You just keep adding a bit more, a bit more and a bit more. So it is a real challenge. For some people it is just what you said—they will be dawdling away, wasting their time and putting off doing the assignment or whatever anyway--but having to work makes you more disciplined and organised with your time and you actually manage your school time better. But perhaps there is a point at which you recognise that you are starting to add too much.

Dr JENSEN—I was going to ask a question on that point. You have intimated that you are a bit disorganised. Has work improved your self-discipline in that regard?

Tim S—I find that I am definitely a lot more motivated at work. I am not sure why it is but at school I feel like I can just waste time for some reason.

Dr JENSEN—So it has not really translated—the discipline at work to discipline at school?

Tim S—No, actually at work I think I am a worthwhile employee and I do not waste my time. But at school, I do not know—

Ethan—For me I think 10 hours is a good number of hours to work a week, because I have worked in jobs where I have been required to work from 4 pm till one in the morning on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday nights. It does impact on school a lot, especially when I have to wake up at like 7 am to get to school. So I think 10 hours is a good figure.

CHAIR—And not those late shifts?

Ethan—Definitely not.

CHAIR—The only other thing we would like to explore with you today, the other thing we are looking at, is that we do not feel that your work is recognised in formal ways that are useful. You have all talked to us about the things you are learning at work—networking, dealing with customers, and organisational and time management skills. Yet often when young people leave school and have to do their first CV or resume for permanent work they do not describe their previous work well and do not clearly understand the benefits or the skills they have got. They will say, ‘I worked in retail or hospitality and I do not want to do that for a career so it doesn’t really count.’

So we are looking at ways that might be good to actually formally recognise that and in some way integrate your work experience with school so that when you leave school you can perhaps get some sort of certificate or something that recognises your paid work. I would just like to know if people who have completed jobs have actually received documentation at the point when they have left to identify the skills and duties that they had at the time. What is your view about how useful that would be to you? Has anyone actually received something like that when they have finished up at one of their jobs?

Ethan—The most I really got was just a reference. There was not really any kind of certificate, although at the job that I am working now I have done bar courses and gained certificates and course recognition for that.

CHAIR—They are the RSA and the RCG—those recognised courses?

Ethan—I did those by myself, but I also did barista courses as well.

CHAIR—So they have actually sponsored you to do further training?

Ethan—Yes.

CHAIR—How available do people think it would be to get something every time you finished up a job, even if it was a casual, part-time job? The employer could just have a quick document where they could identify, ‘These are the skills I think this person learnt while they were here.’

Stephen—Throughout high school I wanted to do a trade and I was working part time as a labourer for an irrigation company, hoping that it may be able to help me get into the trade. Apart from a very, very basic reference, I did not get anything at all, even though I had completed over 150 hours work with this company. I had learnt a lot through them but I have no certificates, nothing recognised.

CHAIR—So some sort of system would be good?

Stephen—Yes. I wanted to get into plumbing, and since I have been working for two years part time doing rural irrigation and plumbing work, I thought that could help me get my first job.

CHAIR—One of the things we have heard from employers is that, particularly in small businesses, they do not themselves have the skills to know how to assess what you are learning and to refer to it. So often, with the best will in the world, all they can do is say, ‘Put me down as a referee,’ because they do not know. So do you think a simple form where they could just sit down and say, ‘Teamwork? Yes, he was working in a team of four doing this job’—something to provide them with quick and easy guidance—would be useful? Would you have felt confident to approach that employer and say, ‘I would like one of these formal certificates filled out. Would you mind’? Do you think they would have been amenable to that?

Stephen—Now that I have finished my trade, it would not be useful now. But 3½ years ago, when I started, it was extremely hard to find a trade, to prove to an employer that I am not just someone who wants to drop out of high school because I do not want to do work, that I have done this for two years and I am valuable. I went through 20 to 30 different interviews and got one response of, ‘Yes, we’d like you to start.’

CHAIR—Do you think the employer that you were doing all those hours with, in trying to better yourself and to put yourself in a better position, would have been okay if you had been able to offer them something simple and say, ‘Could you fill this report out for me’?

Stephen—Something simple, yes. He was willing to write out a reference with basic skills, but apart from that there is not much that he knew about. He was willing to put his number down, let anyone phone him and explain that I had done this, that I had done certain aspects of the work and I knew what I was doing in different parts of it. But a simple form would be a lot easier for small employers.

CHAIR—Has anybody else got a comment? Has anyone else actually got something when they have finished a job?

Tim S—At the moment I am working, so I have a certificate that says I am trained in over-the-counter products. So no matter which pharmacy I go to with this quality care—QCCP or whatever it is called—they will acknowledge that I can sell the restricted items over the counter because I know the information about them. Also, I have been to probably about 50 trainings over the time that I have been there and they have said that I can now sell Benadryl, I can now sell Codral and all that stuff. I am not sure if those certificates mean anything, but I have definitely got something from where I work.

CHAIR—And do you value the fact that obviously the industry itself has set in place good training programs and recognition of them? Do you value that yourself?

Tim S—I do. I enjoy knowing things. Despite the training having been completely ‘sell Codral’ or ‘sell Benadryl’, when you go to a product it is very valuable knowing the different ingredients inside the drugs, the side effects and so on. So, not only has it helped me in the

pharmacy industry but I find that I am now able to have a conversation with my brother, who is doing med at uni at the moment. I can actually understand stuff now, which is exciting.

Tabitha—I used to work with the Coles Group. We had to do safe work practice training. I was with them for about 12 months and I would have done 20 or 30 hours worth of training. It was all valuable stuff and it would be valuable in other workplaces I went to, but there is no recognition of that and there is no way to prove to other employers that I did that. I got a reference when I left and that was great, but there was no way to show that I was trained in a certain unit. If there had been a set standard for the training you were on so that you could pass that on to others.

CHAIR—With entry level jobs there is a standard range of things, and you have touched on one of them—safety in the workplace and things like that. So, you have that but you do not have anything to show for it.

Tabitha—I have done it and if my employer were to be referee they would say that I have done it, but there is no way I can put that on a resume. So they ask, ‘What kind of safe work practices do you mean?’ because there are so many variations.

CHAIR—It is very important. I have dealt with young people who have done courses three or four years ago and when they going for a job at that point they cannot remember what exactly the name of the thing was that they did. They have gained the knowledge and skills, but under the system where you have to have particular things, such as Certificate I and Certificate II, they are a bit lost. So it is important to get the information at the time.

Andrew—With my job I am really lucky. I had to get my NCAS coaching certificates. I have already got all of them for junior level. I had to get my first aid certificate and police check certificate. So for any job I go for now I already have this done. It puts me at a higher level than some people.

CHAIR—That is right. It is funny that in some ways we often hear that the volunteer and sports sectors are better than the employment sector in regard to qualifications and recognition of what people have achieved. So your’s is an interesting example.

Could I ask you to put your hand up if you feel pretty confident that you could describe the range of skills that you have developed from your work. I note that about half the group have their hands up. I think it is a really important thing for us to look at because they are very important skills. Even some of the stuff you were talking about, such as handling adults and working with them, is a good thing.

During the last 15 minutes of this session I will ask you to reflect on how your school responds to your work demands. One of the things we have heard from young people is that they say to a teacher, ‘If you are going to give me this today as I have to work tonight,’ and the response is, ‘You have got to decide where your priorities are.’ Then on the other side we hear from students that there are teachers in the schools who are really flexible and understanding of the situation. Without trying to put you too much on the spot, perhaps a friend or family member has had an experience you would like to share with us! Do you think that our schools are given

the flexibility they need to support you in your work, and what things could we perhaps do better from the schools' perspective.

Mr IRONS—To add to that, we had some evidence given to us that the students did not want their teachers to know that they were working. They thought it was none of their business. What are your thoughts on that?

Tim N—I really think it differs from teacher to teacher. When we first started at the school, it was mentioned by certain people that as far as the school was concerned schoolwork came before all other activities. I have a few friends who go to teachers and they might say, 'I'm working tonight, can I leave?' or 'I'm working tonight, can you give me an extension?' and certain teachers will say, 'Yes, that's okay.' On the whole, I think you cannot define their stance. It just depends on the teacher.

CHAIR—The other thing we have been told is that teachers vary on how well they schedule the homework and assessment. With some teachers you are confident when you get an assignment because you know you have three or four weeks to do it and everything will work out fine. Other teachers tend to do it ad hoc and add homework and other things, and that can make it really difficult. It is all right to talk about time management skills, but some employers might ring you up and ask you to work on a certain day and some teachers will say, 'I want this done for tomorrow.' Does anybody want to make some comments on how they feel schools manage that?

Natasha—When I was in college I did not feel there was enough support from the school about work and study. Basically, the only thing I was aware of that they had was a counsellor, which everyone goes to when it all starts to hit the fan. But it should not get to that point before you are aware that you need help and assistance. I am very fortunate now at CIT with the year-12 program where there are a lot of older students who are independent and have more responsibilities. CIT offer programs for different types of students that are flexible—programs that allow students to complete it in one year or two years, part time or full time. They also offer a range of support networks that assist them. On Mr Irons' question about whether we are making the teachers aware that we are working, I think teachers are aware that we are working, but I do not think we necessarily make them aware of the pressures that build up as a result of it.

CHAIR—It is a common thing that Mr Irons touches on. As we said, people can be reluctant to tell their parents because they are worried they will be told, 'You'll have to give up the job.' Do you want to make a comment on that?

Stephen—Yes, about what Natasha touched on. CIT really does help if you are organised. They might say, 'We need this done,' and the day they hand it out you tell them you are working or, 'I have this on,' and they are very understanding. Whereas if you turn up to the next lesson and say, 'I didn't do it because I had to work,' they are less understanding. Going through high school it was the complete opposite. It was: 'Don't care what you have on. Whether it is sport, family commitments or work this needs to be done.'

CHAIR—Many of you raise time management and organisational skills and then the criticism you get trying to balance work and school commitments. Do you think schools should look at having policies for the student body for managing part-time work? Is anyone aware that their

school has a policy or a session where they talk about managing work and school commitments? As an ex-teacher, do not be embarrassed. I am shocked to think back to when I was teaching that it never occurred to me to deal with this. I think we are a little in the dark about how much students are doing and how much pressure it can put them under. You are not being critical of the system. We are trying to find out what we need to do to make it better. Does anybody have some views on that?

Tabitha—Speaking to my parents and my friends' parents, they say times have changed since they were at school and the pressures have changed in regard to what is expected, the hours you are expected to be working, and the amount of homework and the amount of assessments. At my school we are lucky because the assessments are planned out, so we are quite organised. But, even so, I have ten assessments and to try and do all those assessments plus work puts a lot of pressure on me.

A lot of teachers can be understanding but there is the whole thing about, as you said, 'Do they know that you're working?' A lot of them do not care. You are expected to do your schoolwork. What I do in my school time is important and is relevant for them to know, but they just expect that, if you have not done something, work or whatever is just an excuse. They expect that you are just out having a social life. But when people do actually have work or commitments with their family and things that do take up their time, it is not often accounted for. It is just, 'You're asking for another extension. That's just not good enough. You need to be managing your time better and it is all your fault,'—when really you are just trying to do the best you can with the amount of time you have and the facilities that you have available to you.

CHAIR—That was a very useful answer, thank you. Does anybody else have some comment?

Tim S—I do not generally get extensions, because I do not generally have a reason to, but the one time that I did try to get an extension where I just had not done the assignment, I do not think it was me not having enough time to do it. I just had not finished it. I did approach a teacher and say, 'I have a job and I need more time. I haven't had enough time'—but I do not know if that was the truth or not. He was actually very negative towards me. He said, 'No. It's not my fault if you have a part-time job. Everybody else is balancing it; you didn't manage to, so screw you.'

CHAIR—That is the difficulty, isn't it? You just said that you are not convinced that the job is what caused it to be late—

Tim S—It probably wasn't. But I think that schools do need to acknowledge that we do have jobs and that it is not just our choice to have a part-time job. We do not need more time on the assignments, we just need acknowledgment. This is from my perspective. We need them to acknowledge that we are doing something that is necessary—not just something that we want to do so that we can have fun. I guess that is what I am trying to say.

CHAIR—And particularly if you see the value in your long-term career from that job.

Tim S—Yes. I do value it.

Dr JENSEN—On that, you touched on an interesting point. You mentioned the fact that this teacher did not actually give you the benefit of the doubt, so to speak, and you acknowledge that it was possibly because you had not managed your time effectively. Would you say that it was your teacher that recognised that about you individually, or was that a policy of his? More generally for other people, how many people have had experiences where you have legitimately not been able to complete some schoolwork in the given time because of work pressures, and were you given benefit of the doubt by teachers in those cases?

Tim S—I would not say that I am a particularly bad student. I do the work, pretty much, so eventually it gets done. So I would not think that he would have had just an automatic reaction to say, ‘No, you’re lying,’ but he did. It is just the one experience that I have. Maybe not all teachers would do it.

CHAIR—Has anybody else got experiences with that?

Fiona—This is a bit opposite of what everyone else has been saying, but I am 100 per cent confident that if I went to a teacher at my school and said, ‘I’ve had too much stuff on and I really need more time on this,’ they would be okay with it. I do not know whether that is just the way teachers are at my school or because generally I have a good track record of getting my work in on time and that kind of thing, but I think that the most important thing for a school to be is flexible. Fair enough, if a student in general never gets their work in on time and you can tell that they just do not manage their time, you may not trust them, but if you have no reason to doubt a student, I think it is really important to give them the benefit of the doubt and just be flexible and understanding with students.’

CHAIR—Good point. The track record of the students is an important component to be looked at. You said you are pretty confident that all your teachers would be okay with you negotiating extensions with them, and it is very clear that whether or not you get one depends on the individual teacher rather than on the school’s policy. Do you think it would take the pressure off that one-to-one negotiation between you and the teacher if there was a policy around applying for extensions because of work and things like that?

Fiona—It definitely would help if you were confident that you could approach a teacher and they would have to follow a policy that meant that they would have to give you a second chance and that kind of thing. It is also really important to have that one-on-one discussion with the teacher so that they understand your pressures and you understand their time limits and that kind of thing—so that you are more aware of each other’s situations.

CHAIR—Please do not take this the wrong way—because it is my impression that you are a very articulate young woman who can speak well for herself—do you think your own skill level contributes to how well you negotiate those things at school and indeed at work?

Fiona—It probably does. For me, it has a lot to do with the fact that my teachers are understanding people. They are understanding of the fact that I have commitments outside of school that occasionally get in the way.

CHAIR—So you think that confidence allows you to negotiate in a fair way?

Fiona—Yes.

CHAIR—Has anybody else had experiences or views on this?

Ethan—With our school, the extensions are given out by the studies office, not by the individual teacher. With them, you kind of have to plead your case and they are not really into giving out extensions, especially for work—it is more for sickness.

CHAIR—So there is a policy but it tends to emphasise ill health as opposed to—

Ethan—Yes, being away from school, not so much work. I do not think they really accept work as an excuse, and it really should not be. We are only at school Monday through to Friday from 8.30 am until 3.10 pm—there is all that other time, if you do not work every single day, to do the assignments. It is just that you might not have as much fun or as big a social life. I do think you have to compare them and decide what is a higher priority.

CHAIR—Many young people acknowledge that you should be able to get advance notice of things and you should be able to work out a timetable to manage school and work. Do you think there are many situations where people are organised and have everything set out but then things change? How flexible are both the employers and schools to those situations?

Ethan—I do not know. With our school, we have late penalties as well for handing assignments in late. If I run over time, I sometimes try and negotiate, but I usually just accept the late penalty. If things change, I think you just have to cope with that. There is not much you can do to change it yourself.

CHAIR—Were there some other comments?

Stephen—I would just like to make the comment that it is not always just the teachers or the school. I was ill once and had to miss an assessment item, a test. When I later went in to see them about trying to make up that test, they said, ‘That needs to be done today because the results need to get into the BSSS.’ I had to go to work that day; therefore, I could not make it. So it is not always just the teachers.

CHAIR—It is between the two.

Stephen—Yes. The other thing is that, throughout the holidays, a lot of work is set for us because we are doing year 11 and year 12 in one year. I do not know how other colleges work, but a lot of teachers assume that in our holidays we are going to be sitting around doing nothing; whereas my holidays alternated between working 40 hours a week as a brickies labourer and working 35 hours a week, nights, at a fast-food restaurant. Then I had to try to catch up on schoolwork after that.

CHAIR—Have other people had that experience? We hear a lot from students that during school holidays employers often want you to do a whole lot of extra shifts. Many young people say that is a great opportunity to earn a bit of extra money for bigger items, but they might have been allocated quite a bit of schoolwork as well, so they have to balance the two. Does anybody

do extra work during Christmas holidays or times like that? Indicate by putting your hands up if you do extra shifts. Again, it is a bit over half of you.

We could go on chatting with you for ages but we have to bring things to a close. We want to finish up by providing an opportunity for the teachers who are here. Would anybody like to provide feedback or comments?

Ms Sinclair—For a number of years I worked in a government senior secondary college. We had pastoral care groups, and at the beginning of year 11 and several times during the year we would interview those students to find out what their lives were like and how many hours they worked. We would always advise them that 10 to 15 hours was a good amount to balance, whether that was work, volunteer work or caring.

CHAIR—So that survey would combine the same sort of work criteria we have used: volunteering, caring and paid work?

Ms Sinclair—And sport.

CHAIR—You would then talk to them about what a good way to manage and balance those would be.

Ms Sinclair—We would say: 20 hours of classes would need 20 hours of homework per week, so you are thinking about 40 hours per week of school then perhaps 10 to 15 hours of extras.

CHAIR—It is interesting. For your information, we have on occasion talked to students who have completed their final year. Their observation was that during that period they had thought they were managing fine but then they got their results and realised it had not actually been managed all that well. The concern for us is that you are developing those skills, and that is great, but as the adults in your life—whether we be parents, teachers or employers—we do have a responsibility to understand what is an unreasonable expectation of you so that you do not get past the final exam and look back and say, ‘I haven’t got the marks I wanted; I really didn’t manage it as well as I would have hoped.’ So the feedback and information you have given us today is invaluable. I think the one clear message we always get is that you really value your work and that for us to say, ‘Just give up the job if it is a problem,’ is not realistic.

Would any of the other teachers like to say something?

Mrs Reynolds—I have worked as a teacher of mathematics for over 20 years and now have retrained as a careers counsellor. I am also a parent of two grown children, who have gone through the mill of working after school hours and so on. In my experience the school pressures come in fits and starts. I am sure the students will agree. It is when the school pressures coincide with the pressures at work that it is most challenging for students. The time management issue has been brought up, and most students handle it very well. We teach exceptional young people who are managing their lives in an exceptional way.

I do take the point that more could be done with educating young people as to their rights at work. As a careers adviser I have taken on that role in my school, and we have institutions here

in Canberra that are set up to visit schools to speak to that point. The Student to Industry Program will come out and do an excellent presentation. But making young people aware of their rights and where they can find information about their wages and conditions and what is expected of them is generally not well done in schools.

As a supervisor of work experience I know there is a very simple form on which we ask employers to tick a box for work experience—that is, unpaid work experience—and it probably would not be too difficult to adapt that for use out there in the workforce.

CHAIR—We are interested in the careers adviser's perspective. One thing employers say to us is, 'There are all these different forms and certificates that have been developed but we don't know how to compare them. What's the value of them; they're all different?' What would be your view on having a standardised form like that, which students could use for work experience, volunteer work or paid work?

Mrs Reynolds—I think that we could use something that is standardised and very, very easy. Small businesses, in particular, do not have the time to do this for all their employees. Again, it varies. We have heard that teachers vary in their expectations; employers vary in their expectations—particularly small businesses, which are large employers of young people. The big businesses and big companies do it very well but they still do not provide all the documentation that we need. For a small business owner it needs to be very clear, very simple and very easy for them to access and use so that it does not take up too much of their time.

I would be loath to over-administer a lot of this and loath to see legislation come in that put too much emphasis and too much onus on students, schools and business owners. But it would be nice if there was a level playing field and some recognition of the wonderful work that these young people do.

Mrs Williamson—I am the careers and vocational education coordinator at Marist College. I would like to follow on from Deanne. In terms of the paperwork or documentation that could be very beneficial for all students, I think it would be good to have some way of starting with the employability skills that chambers of commerce and so forth have devised. They could be put into a handy form—a presentation—for employers, perhaps combining what many of the registered training organisations do in terms of vocational education qualifications. It could try to link employability skills and point out the skills that students who are working at Coles and Woolworths—the larger organisations that do a lot of training—come out with: something that relates to the vocational education qualification as well as the employability skills. To move on—take to the next employer or to an educational institution so that they can get recognition—the students need the vocational certificates or competencies.

CHAIR—Okay; that is great.

Mr Battenally—I am a principal of Melba Copland Secondary School. I am here because I have a great deal of interest, as many principals do, in understanding how students have to balance their world or work, social life and study. I want to say a couple of things. One is that we reflect, as principals, on the success of school based apprenticeships. That is where students earn and learn during their learning period—those very busy years. Through our boards of study we are able to accredit that performance and that undertaking. For students who work in the

hospitality industry and a number of other areas, we do not have the same flexibility. We do recognise the involvement of students in work experience programs where they are unpaid. That is allowed. Somewhere in between there are a few gaps. I know how we like to close the odd gap.

But having said that, the other thing is that the retention of kids in school is continuing to increase. In the ACT the age of continuing students for schooling is now 17. So we have the challenge of being able to provide opportunities. I know that students here are from a number of different settings but they are looking for things that are similar, where they can have the fruits of the time. Many students in year 12, at the age when they are learning to drive, get access to vehicles, and things like that add other social dimensions and pressures on the need to have another. I speak partly as a principal and partly as a parent of a number of teenage kids. The pressures and the balance is very important.

Through our boards of studies there are opportunities to listen and to create some flexibility in how we address and support the kids. I would have to say that the teaching profession—including those colleagues here today—would be very committed to supporting that, as long as there was not an overtly greater level of compliance. Certainly, with the flexibility of ownership and developing those relationships with the kids that I have heard about today, I think we have some terrific opportunities. Thank you very much for taking the time out for this because it is important.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Williamson—I just wanted to make the point that there are a lot of year 11 and year 12 students who make the choice not to work. While the discussion today has been about those who are managing time and the whole balance, there are a lot of students who decide that their priorities are at school. The priority may be with school and sport or community service, but there is a whole group who are perhaps not getting the extra things or the necessities. They are going without but their priorities are quite different.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Could I just say something there. It is interesting that, when we were talking to students in other areas, a number of them said their schools did not know anyway. So a lot of schools thought their students were not at work, when they were. And when we asked the schools, ‘How do you know whether a student works? Is it on their enrolment forms?’ they said they did not know how they know; it is only through their individual teachers. So it is an interesting one. It will be interesting to know how many actually do work.

Mrs Williamson—Yes. As both careers advisor and voc ed coordinator I deal with the cohorts from years 10 onwards, where they all do work experience, so I have a fairly good sense of those who are choosing to do extra, or to take almost a vocational path at school and pathway out of school. But for those who do come for careers advice, who are looking at further studies and are very focused on their academic side, we do know that they are not working.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Interesting.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. On that final point, I think the really important thing for us as a committee is to recognise that young people who want to complete their high school

education, whether they are coming back to it at a later age, coming back for a second chance, or doing it the standard way in progression through the age groups, should actually have the capacity to do that and we should not be judgmental about the fact that you might want to earn discretionary spending. I have talked to lots of parents about this. They say they think it is really valuable for the young person in their family to earn some money. Many of you made comments on this—‘I earn my own money; I value what I buy in a way that I would not otherwise.’ So there are some real challenges for us in how we manage that. But at the same time we must make sure as many young people as possible complete their higher education, because we know that is a good indicator for how well you will do in life. If we are going to get that right, we have to hear it from you. If we put in place ideas that you resent or which do not work in your lives then we know what will happen—they will not work. So the information and feedback you have given us today is really invaluable, and we really do appreciate it.

Thank you all for your attendance here today. A copy of the transcript of the evidence today will be sent to your schools. It will also be published on the committee’s website. If, after you go away today, something else occurs to you and you think, ‘I really should have said that’ or that you should have given particular feedback, or you talk to your friends at school and they say, ‘I would have liked to have given some information on that’, you can go to the Parliament House committee website and fill the form out to give us some additional information. So you still have the opportunity to provide feedback. Once again, thank you very much for your time today. I look forward to being able to provide you with the final copy of the report and our recommendations, which we are aiming to release by about November. Your schools will get a copy of that as well and you will see what recommendations we have developed from the advice that you have given to government.

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

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 11.44 am