



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Developments in adult and community education in Australia since 1991

BRISBANE

Thursday, 30 January 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Members

Senator Crowley (Chair)

Senator Carr	Senator Stott Despoja
Senator Colston	Senator Tierney
Senator Forshaw	Senator Troeth

Participating members

Senator Bolkus	Senator Bob Collins
Senator Brown	Senator Denman
Senator Chamarette	Senator Margetts

Substitute member:

Senator Sandy Macdonald to substitute for Senator Troeth from 12 July to 12 August 1996

Matter referred by the Senate for inquiry into and report on:

The developments in adult and community education in Australia since the 1991 report of the Senate Employment, Education and Training Committee entitled *Come in Cinderella: The Emergence of Adult and Community Education*, with particular reference to:

1. Describing the structural and policy changes at Commonwealth level in adult education since 1991, and assessing the impact these have had on the delivery of adult education in the community;
2. Examining any significant changes in the patterns and level of participation by adults in education and training over the last five years;
3. Describing the range of provision of structured adult education by community-based providers (including that provided by organisations such as libraries, museums, galleries);

4. Identifying those technological, demographic and economic trends which are likely to influence significantly the nature and extent of adult education provision in Australia, with particular attention paid to the impact of the rapid expansion of computer-based resources such as the Internet;

5. Examining the extent to which the training, professional development and role of adult educators has changed since 1991; and

6. Proposing guidelines for the nature and level of contribution which Australia should make to the forthcoming Asia-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education Conference to be held from 1 December to 8 December 1996 and UNESCO International Conference on Adult and Community Education to be held from 14 July to 18 July 1997.

WITNESSES

BAGNALL, Professor Richard Gordon, Convenor, Research Network of the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education, c/- Faculty of Education, Griffith University, Queensland 4111	346
BAKER, Ms Deirdre, Manager, Adult Education Network Support Unit, Division of TAFE Queensland, Department of Training and Industrial Relations, 'Charlotte Chambers', 35 Charlotte Street, Level 2, Brisbane, Queensland 4000	322
BUETI, Mrs Angela, Private Citizen, Unit 12, 84 Musgrave Road, Indooroopilly, Queensland 4068	365
KELLY, Ms Ann, Immediate Past President, Australian Council for Adult Literacy, GPO Box 283, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2601 ...	365
SWINDELL, Dr Richard, 24 Blackheath Avenue, Hawthorne, Queensland 4171	381
WALKER, Mr Andrew Kenneth, Executive Officer, Strategic Policy and Planning Directorate, Division of Training Queensland, Department of Training and Industrial Relations, Level 8 Forbes House, 30 Makerston Street, Brisbane, Queensland 4000	322

SENATE
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Developments in adult and community education in Australia since 1991

BRISBANE

Thursday, 30 January 1997

Present

Senator Tierney (Acting Chair)

Senator Carr

Senator Troeth

Senator O'Brien

The committee met at 12.03 p.m.

Senator Tierney took the chair.

BAKER, Ms Deirdre, Manager, Adult Education Network Support Unit, Division of TAFE Queensland, Department of Training and Industrial Relations, 'Charlotte Chambers', 35 Charlotte Street, Level 2, Brisbane, Queensland 4000

WALKER, Mr Andrew Kenneth, Executive Officer, Strategic Policy and Planning Directorate, Division of Training Queensland, Department of Training and Industrial Relations, Level 8 Forbes House, 30 Makerston Street, Brisbane, Queensland 4000

ACTING CHAIR—We will now begin the second part of today's hearing, the examination of evidence in relation to the committee's inquiry into the developments in adult and community education since 1991. I welcome the witnesses from TAFE Queensland.

The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but if at any time you wish to give any evidence, part of evidence or answers to any questions in camera, you may make the request and the committee will consider the request. Such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate.

The committee has before it submission No 43. Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

ACTING CHAIR—At this stage is there any other material that you wish to table?

Ms Baker—No, not at this stage. You have the submission.

ACTING CHAIR—You are welcome to make some brief opening remarks and then we will go to questions.

Ms Baker—Thank you. I have prepared an opening address which I have had authorised by Minister Santoro, so I would like to read that.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it long? You can just incorporate the document and then speak to it.

Ms Baker—All right.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

Ms Baker—I would still like to read it. It is only a couple of pages. Because I am representing Minister Santo Santoro, the Minister for Training and Industrial Relations, it is appropriate that it has been authorised by him.

Within the Queensland written submission, information describing policy, administrative arrangements and procedures for implementing these has previously been provided to the Senate inquiry. I would like to emphasise several of these and offer some elaboration in areas of current priority in this opening address.

The role of the national peak body for adult and community education, AAACE, the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education—and Senator Tierney just recently gave an opening address at a national conference here in Queensland—is praised for its contribution to the growth and future development of the ACE sector in Queensland.

The current situation in Queensland is that the definition of ACE is predominantly short, fee-for-service courses in TAFE. Around 70 per cent of TAFE ACE short courses can be described as delivering vocational skills. Mainstream TAFE, however, does not identify courses in literacy, tertiary preparation and pre-vocational as ACE. They are categorised within streams of study 2000 and 3000.

In TAFE Queensland ACE policies relating to full cost recovery, non-accredited courses, program dependent management arrangements, course fees and charges, concessions, priority for access and equity in rural areas, recognition of pathways for people who are educationally and socially disadvantaged, standards for teaching and research and data collection offer both advantages and disadvantages to the successful running of the TAFE Queensland ACE ‘business’.

The different structure for the ACE sector in Queensland, in relation to other states and territories, has enabled TAFE ACE courses to capture the largest segment of the Queensland ACE market to date. The community based providers of ACE are, as yet, underdeveloped in this state. A project is currently being undertaken by Queensland AVETMISS—which stands for the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard—to identify the number of community providers, and the volume of ACE-VET student contact hours delivered by community providers.

VET delivery by community based providers is demonstrated through recognised and registered training conducted by community organisations such as the Youth Sector Training Council, the Volunteer Centre of Queensland, Second Chance, and non-government community literacy programs. I understand there are three registered VET trainers in the community sector in Queensland.

The Queensland small business management skills strategy, approved in cabinet on

2 December 1996, has identified the complementary role of ACE to VET. The small business sector seeks training that meets a range of needs identified not only in terms of course content and delivery strategy but also in terms of preferred learning styles.

While small business training is currently being addressed by mainstream TAFE, the opportunities for small business training through adult and community education have the potential to strengthen small business in Queensland. Demands for training are not only for accredited courses but for competencies that meet standards within small business and that achieve outcomes that have an impact on the business.

Research into ACE has emphasised the potential for ACE to encourage return to formal education and training. I refer to an Australian National University study in 1994 by Evans *Does participation in adult education lead to further study?*, which shows that 33.6 per cent go on to do a formal education certificate or degree if they have undertaken two adult education courses, and it rises to 40.3 per cent if they have undertaken three.

Queensland has not conducted research to determine the extent of subsequent participation in a formal education tertiary degree. Preliminary analysis of TAFE data indicates that around eight per cent of TAFE ACE enrolments go on to mainstream TAFE study. Information on articulation to VET formal training has not been researched in the community based sector in Queensland.

When we look at the TAFE ACE and the TAFE VET relationship, we see that a feasibility study is currently under way to explore the potential for TAFE ACE to offer some VET short courses that are credentialled. This study was triggered by anecdotal evidence of demand for short courses that are informal in learning style, are skills based, are easily translated into the workplace and are accessible in terms of costs, which are around \$100. These are particularly geared for small business owners and employees, people on lower income levels and rural Queenslanders.

There has been an overall decrease in both offering of and participation in TAFE ACE courses, particularly in rural areas. A decrease in enrolments of around 16 per cent, with fewer people on concession cards enrolling, has been of concern to the policy area of TAFE ACE. Some of the rural community in Queensland reports a continued requirement for training and this has come through a review just recently conducted by TAFE Queensland on service delivery and policy for Queensland rural industry.

ACE developments in Queensland: in 1996, a report on *The relationship between ACE and publicly funded vocational education and training in Queensland* was compiled by Dr Helen Parker for Training Queensland. This report determined that the Department of Training and Industrial Relations requires policy and action for an appropriate government framework and support for ACE, and that positive discrimination be taken by DTIR in terms of ACE in Queensland. It recommended the formation of an advisory council to the Director-General.

Queensland has previously supported the formation of an ACE council in commitments to the national policy of ACE in 1993 and within the state training profile. Funding of \$120,000 has been set aside for this purpose by the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission, VETEC. VETEC has determined that the ACE council should sit outside the VETEC structure and will relate to government through the Director-General, DTIR.

In 1997, support has been given for participation of ACE community providers in the VET training market by allocating funds to the equivalent dollar value of 100,000 student contact hours for the development of VET provision by community based training providers. This is to be either as delivery of training or as activity to increase the number of community training providers able to offer accredited VET in the near future.

Competitive purchase of training is open to all providers with \$41.448 million—equivalent to 5.805 million student contact hours—available. As the ACE sector in Queensland gains more experience in tendering it will be able to compete for vocational education and training funds through the competitive tendering process. But, as I have said earlier, the community based sector is very underdeveloped in this state.

In conclusion, the formation of a state-wide infrastructure for the ACE sector in Queensland, that has the support of government and a legitimate training response from the community, will both stimulate and challenge the future policies, administration and implementation procedures of both community based and TAFE ACE in Queensland.

The characteristics of TAFE Queensland's ACE policies are numerous and include offering a strong state-wide network and a long history of servicing the educational needs of Queenslanders. The requirements of the program to be fee-for-service and to fully recover overhead costs, while offering concessions to students who are disadvantaged, may have led to a decrease in enrolments state wide and may create barriers to access.

I am keen to further discuss with you any of those issues that relate to ACE in Queensland.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. Mr Walker, do you have any opening comments?

Mr Walker—I have no opening comments, thank you.

Senator CARR—Could you describe the relationship between Queensland TAFE and ANTA in regard to ACE and give us your view of the adequacy of the present ANTA arrangements for the funding of adult and community education?

Ms Baker—ANTA provides funding for state training profile of ACE. In TAFE Queensland, the courses are informal, non-accredited fee for service. So there is no ANTA

funding going to TAFE Queensland for the ACE short courses.

Senator CARR—Is there any ANTA support at all?

Ms Baker—No, not for TAFE Queensland ACE short courses.

Senator CARR—What is the Commonwealth's contribution towards ACE in Queensland? Are there any other sources of funding from Commonwealth services?

Ms Baker—As I have referred to in my submission, \$120,000 has been set aside for the formation of an ACE council and there is the equivalent of 100,000 student contact hours for community based providers to offer VET training. At the moment there is no infrastructure formed in Queensland. In other words, I am trying to say there is no council at the moment to coordinate and administer that. So, currently, no funds have gone into the ACE sector.

When we look at it in terms of literacy welfare services—which in other states and territories could be regarded or are regarded as ACE—there is funding going into the community based sector and, of course, TAFE Queensland does offer literacy programs and access programs through its studies—its stream of studies 2000 to 3000.

Senator CARR—Is it not the case, though, that the Commonwealth funds through ANTA are only available for these streams 2000 to 4000?

Ms Baker—That is right.

Senator CARR—That is the guidelines?

Ms Baker—The ACE type 2000 to 3000. That is right.

Senator CARR—In total, Commonwealth contributions to the community sector amount to how much? Can I just get that clear? You mentioned there were two sets of figures for the establishment of councils and various other things. But what is the total contribution?

Ms Baker—In dollar value? Student contact hour equivalent is how it is referred to. In dollar value it would probably be around \$700,000.

Senator CARR—Per annum?

Ms Baker—At the moment it has not happened. This is in its very—

Senator CARR—You are expecting this to occur?

Ms Baker—Yes.

Senator CARR—So the answer to the question at the moment, I guess, is none?

Ms Baker—Yes. Do you want to add to that?

Mr Walker—Just to clarify, the amounts of money that are referred to will not be directly paid by ANTA to the ACE sector in Queensland; they are not given to Queensland for that purpose. Those are decisions that have been taken by the VET commission in Queensland to make use of that money.

Senator CARR—Are you adapting your programs to fit the guidelines?

Mr Walker—We are not adapting programs. ANTA moneys will only be spent—when it comes to delivery of training programs—on VET accredited programs.

Senator CARR—Do you get accreditation for your programs?

Ms Baker—In the next three to five years through the development of an ACE sector in Queensland—there is not one at the moment that is recognised—we hope that more community providers will aim for registered and recognised training. At the moment there are only three that are registered with the state training authority to offer accredited training.

Senator CARR—Given the changes to ANTA funding that were announced in the last Commonwealth budget, what impact will those budget changes have on your plans?

Ms Baker—I need you to key me in on what some of those changes are.

Senator CARR—As I understand there has been substantial reduction in ANTA funding in terms of various programs that they are able to offer. Growth funding, for instance, has been reduced and support programs are being reduced to ANTA directly. You have no knowledge of those matters?

Ms Baker—Not specific knowledge, no.

Senator CARR—Is the Queensland government not aware of the impact of the federal budget on your TAFE sector?

Ms Baker—Minister Santoro would be, in his role.

Senator CARR—You are representing him from his department. I would presume you would have some understanding of those issues?

Ms Baker—Yes, I do have some understanding but I do not know the details of it. Let me refer to the competitive training funds that I mentioned that will be available for

the community sector to apply for eventually. Once they are able to compete with other private providers that money will be available. If that changes then it will affect them the same as it affects every other private provider.

Senator CARR—You can give us no indication of the impact of those changes?

Ms Baker—On the ACE sector we cannot really in Queensland because we do not actually know what the ACE sector is yet. It has not been monitored, it has not been coordinated, it has not been documented and there has been very little research done at all on the ACE sector in Queensland. Up until now ACE is a term that has been applied to short courses in TAFE Queensland which are fee-for-service.

Mr Walker—If the reduction in growth funds were to reduce the amount available in Queensland for competitive tendering then that would reduce the pool for which ACE providers could tender. But at the moment that is a very limited amount and, since there is no direct payment to delivery of ACE courses as such, the funding—

Senator CARR—Perhaps you could indicate to the committee how changes are occurring in the accreditation process. Are you looking at improvements in professional development, for instance, for the qualification of teachers offering short-term fee payment courses which are now being defined as ACE?

Ms Baker—In TAFE Queensland?

Senator CARR—Yes.

Ms Baker—Yes. But any enhancements to the TAFE Queensland program, which has to be fully cost recovered, must come out of the fees that are charged. Due to the social justice policy of TAFE Queensland, the fees that are linked to regulation are not able to be increased unless it is approved through cabinet. The fees that are gained that are of a slight marginal profit go back into developing the program—for marketing costs and management. We have just had an enterprise bargaining increase on our teachers' salaries, so all of those costs must be met. So, wherever professional development can be squeezed in there, it is.

Senator CARR—What do you anticipate the impact on student numbers to be as a result of those changes?

Ms Baker—Over the last four years there has been an averaging of about seven per cent decrease in participation in the TAFE Queensland short courses state-wide.

Senator CARR—As the quality of the courses improves, the numbers decline. Is there a linkage there, do you think?

Ms Baker—It is a difficult one. It is a challenge in that the rural areas are where

the largest decreases have occurred. There have actually been increases in the metropolitan areas, but the rural areas have certainly decreased. As I noted in here, it appears that 16 per cent has been the drop-off in the rural areas.

ACTING CHAIR—Over what period?

Ms Baker—That statistic was taken over a 12-month period.

Senator CARR—Is the department meeting these challenges by changing the nature of the personnel employed in TAFE short courses in Queensland? For instance, where there was once a teacher, you might now have a tutor; where once there was a manager, you might have a program facilitator. Is there a redefinition of personnel managing the programs?

Ms Baker—Yes, there has been. Since 1993 the TAFE Queensland short courses area has restructured itself in that it now has program dependent managers where their salaries are geared to the revenue that it is generated within that program, so they are all at different levels with different pays. The teacher salaries are, on average, \$26 an hour, whereas a mainstream TAFE teacher is \$40 to \$60 an hour. The tutor rate is \$11.50 an hour, whereas the mainstream TAFE is much higher. So when we are asking people to teach on \$11.60 an hour as a tutor, it is difficult to find people to do that. But people are actually teaching at \$26 an hour, and that rate is standardised, whether it be evening or weekends.

Senator CARR—What sort of teachers do that?

Ms Baker—Teachers who are very dedicated—

ACTING CHAIR—And very unemployed.

Ms Baker—No. In rural areas they will travel 100 kilometres to run a course for six hours.

Senator CARR—For \$26 an hour?

Ms Baker—And they do not get reimbursed on that money. Usually they are teachers who have a beginning human resource qualification, so it might be a train the trainer or an instructional skill. We try, in that program, to encourage all teachers to at least have that minimal human resource requirement. But, because the courses are not accredited, that requirement is not necessary.

Senator CARR—So you do not actually have to be a qualified teacher to work for half wages?

Ms Baker—You have to be qualified, but not qualified according to the standards of accreditation. Each teacher is interviewed by the manager of that ACE program in that institute and their program format is looked at. The manager of that ACE program makes a decision as to the qualification of that teacher.

Senator CARR—Let me get this straight. You are saying that there is no state-wide registration process; it is up to the individual manager of a particular course to determine whether a person is qualified or not?

Ms Baker—In TAFE Queensland, ACE short courses are non-accredited, are fee for service—that is correct.

Senator CARR—This might account for the people working for \$11 an hour and \$26 an hour, rather than \$45 an hour.

Ms Baker—But you see, when you do a break-even analysis on a course where you can only charge a fee that government has regulated, there is not a lot of profit. And, in fact, the program did run at a loss of around \$350,000 last year.

Senator CARR—Given that that is the state of the situation, why should the Commonwealth fund these programs?

Ms Baker—There is a social justice argument, a community service obligation that 70 per cent of enrolments in TAFE ACE courses are for women aged between 20 and 40. One analysis has indicated that about 83 per cent of the courses are vocationally oriented and this particular client group uses it as a stepping stone into education and training.

Senator CARR—If the Commonwealth was able to fund these programs, do you think there would be an improvement in the quality—for instance, in terms of the accreditation, an improvement in the quality of teacher qualifications or persons undertaking these programs? Would the quality of curriculum improve?

Ms Baker—I believe there would be a flow-on. For instance, the concession cost to the program is in the vicinity of \$500,000 that is not reimbursed by government. If that were reimbursed, that money could be utilised in several other aspects of the program.

Senator CARR—You mentioned the student profile for the courses. There are very few working-class men who participate in these programs. Do you think there could be a means to improve the gender equity for men, particularly working-class men?

Ms Baker—The ACE sector nationally has that as a priority in that, traditionally, ACE courses have been highly dominated by women. It is a marketing issue and marketing can happen in many ways. It is certainly a priority of AAACE as well.

Senator CARR—Do you think the Commonwealth has a role in terms of funding to address those sorts of questions?

Ms Baker—Yes, I think there could be a role there.

ACTING CHAIR—Is the decrease in enrolments for vocational and for recreation courses happening because people are studying through other modes or is this an absolute decrease?

Ms Baker—TAFE Queensland short courses are quite different to the ACE sector for Queensland, so I will refer to this decrease in TAFE Queensland short courses specifically. Preliminary research has been done by TAFE Queensland to try to determine why that decrease occurred in rural areas. There is not a lot of funding for research, so it had to be done virtually on a shoestring. What has come out of that through the qualitative data—because it was both a quantitative and a qualitative exercise—is that participants who were already enrolled in another short course in TAFE Queensland were saying that they were not going on to do training through other providers and they were extremely happy with their TAFE Queensland short course training, but there was a 36 per cent drop-off in those who held a concession card. So it appeared that the participants who were being attracted were those who had an average of around \$100 to spend on a six-week course and who preferred to go to a TAFE provider rather than a community based provider.

ACTING CHAIR—You don't see any factor relating to conditions in rural Queensland affecting this drop-off?

Ms Baker—In terms of the drought and the overall hardship of rural Queenslanders, the anecdotal evidence is pointing to why they are not; they see a short course of adult education where they have to pay a total fee for service as a luxury.

ACTING CHAIR—When they go to other providers of adult and community education as an alternative to what you are providing in your 100 level courses, are they tending to pay fees for those?

Ms Baker—We do not have other adult and community education courses at the moment in Queensland, because the sector is very underdeveloped. So those people in a community based sector who are offering learning of a learning nature are funded through the department of families and youth care and they consider themselves to be welfare service oriented. So the formation of an ACE council in Queensland would, as one of its highest priorities, have to develop the ACE sector and to raise the profile and an awareness that the primary function of community organisations could be to offer training of an adult and community education type.

ACTING CHAIR—My recollection from the 1991 report we did is that

Queensland stood out as being very different from the other states in this regard. A lot more of the provision came through TAFE than it did in other states; and that is still so, I take it.

Ms Baker—But even then it was fee for service. There were full cost recovery, fee for service, short courses—unless the courses were regarded as literacy and numeracy and access, which were not considered adult community education.

ACTING CHAIR—Has the balance between TAFE and other providers changed significantly since 1991, since we did our last report? In which direction is it moving?

Ms Baker—Yes. Anecdotally again, it appears that the community based sector in Queensland has grown aware, and more aware, that there is something in the air to do with training. They would like to know more about it. There is not a coordinated unit for adult community education. For instance, in New South Wales they have a Board of ACE. In Victoria, they have a Board of Adult and Community and Further Education. There is not a centralised coordinating mechanism in Queensland for the community based sector to gain information about that. So the role of the council would be strongly a developmental role for the sector.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you have regionally based organisations that do that sort of thing, or is there no regional structure either?

Ms Baker—In ACE, there is no regional structure. I am sure that, through other government departments, there would be regional structures. Of course, TAFE Queensland has 16 institutes, but I have to emphasise how underdeveloped the ACE sector is in Queensland with, at the moment, no formal mechanism to develop it. But the government has shown, through its allocation through VETEC of the 100,000 student contact hours and the 120,000 hours for the formation of an ACE council, that it is interested in moving forward on that.

ACTING CHAIR—Given the high percentage of rural population in Queensland as compared to other states, and the fact you have more of a focus on rural education, could you update us on what is happening with modern technology outreach to rural communities with the use of telecentres, satellites, videoconferencing and that sort of thing? Where is that all up to, in terms of educational provision?

Ms Baker—Once again, I will be doing this in terms of ACE. In terms of the community sector, we do not know; because there is no way at the moment of accessing that information in a cohesive way. In terms of TAFE Queensland, there is an ACE program run through the Open Learning Institute. That program is beginning to reach the rural areas of Queensland. Unfortunately, the videoconferencing and the technology is expensive. Clients are paying full fees for cost recovery, and when you build in the fees to use that equipment, it is priced out of the market. So, at the moment, TAFE Queensland's

short courses piggyback on mainstream provision. Other than that, there is really only the traditional sending out of the correspondence type of material.

ACTING CHAIR—In your paper you have an international dimension, and you state that you would like to be a more informed participant. Could you expand on that a little, and on how you might see that coming about?

Ms Baker—Queensland has a representative on the MCEETYA task force for ACE, which is the ministerial task force. In fact, Andrew Walker is that representative through Training Queensland. The MCEETYA task force recognises the value of adult community education as a training vehicle—as, I guess, another form of training in Australia—and so does AAACE. So, when it is looked at in the bigger picture, particularly with Adult Learners Week being a national celebration which Australia has now taken on—1997 will be the third year it has been celebrated—Queensland should be there with other states and territories in terms of involvement and information.

Senator TROETH—I wanted to ask you something you may have already explained. Does small business provide any training outside the sectors that you have already mentioned in the sense of vocational training and that sort of thing?

Ms Baker—Small business as private providers?

Senator TROETH—Yes, as private providers.

Ms Baker—I do not think that I am qualified to respond to that because—

Senator TROETH—That would be more at the industry level.

Ms Baker—Yes, in the small business industry. The reports that I referred to, particularly the report that TAFE Queensland has recently done, indicate that training in rural Queensland is quite low. The small business training strategy indicates that small business is very keen to access training but is more interested in training that is of a less formalised and institutional long course way. I do believe TAFE Queensland is trying to meet that requirement, but it is often difficult. The ACE way of training is certainly well positioned to provide training there.

ACTING CHAIR—There being no further questions, I thank you for appearing today.

Luncheon adjournment

[1.48 p.m.]

BAGNALL, Professor Richard Gordon, Convenor, Research Network of the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education, c/- Faculty of Education, Griffith University, Queensland 4111

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the next witness from the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education. The committee prefers that evidence be given in public, but if any time you wish to give any evidence, part of evidence or answers to any questions in camera, you may make the request and the committee will consider the request. Such material may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate.

The committee has before it submission No. 73. Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

ACTING CHAIR—Is there any other material you wish to table at this stage?

Prof. Bagnall—No other material, thank you. A minor correction to the written evidence might be in order; it is totally minor. Should I draw attention to that at this stage?

ACTING CHAIR—Could you just give the correction to the secretary—if it is just a typo or something like that.

Prof. Bagnall—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—You are welcome to make some brief opening remarks, Professor, and then we will go to questions.

Prof. Bagnall—Thank you. I will take that opportunity. In summary, the Research Network, which I am here representing, is an Australia-wide voluntary association of approximately 120 individuals and organisations committed to strengthening and furthering research in adult and community education and its use in enhancing the quality of adult and community education practice.

The submission was prepared in consultation with the full membership through the mailing of a request for suggested input and the circulation of a draft of the submission to the full membership for comment. The submission was drafted and finalised by me, as convener. In so doing, though, I sought to include all suggestions and comments.

The context of research in adult and community education since the 1991 inquiry may be seen as importantly characterised by the following features: the formation and development of research centres with a particular interest in adult and community education in a number of Australian universities; the growth of research in adult and community education, both in quality and quantity and in both the university sector and through adult and community education providing and funding bodies; the development of a research culture in the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education; the limited funding of adult and community education research by the Australian National Training Authority; the strong vocationalisation of the field, including its research, and the curriculum of its programs for the formation and professional development of practitioners; the professionalisation of practitioner preparation and professional development courses in universities; the fragmentation of research interests, activity and support; the accelerated pace of policy change impacting on research in the sector; the privatisation of research interests and support; the de-differentiation of sectoral interests in the public and academic realms; and the inclusion of adult and community education participation data in the NATMISS program.

Within that context, the recommendations in the submission from the research network may be summarised as follows: first, for the enhancement of research on the

impact of government policy on adult and community education; second, for periodic equity audits of government policy affecting research in adult and community education; third, for a social impact audit of government policy affecting research in adult and community education; fourth, for promotion of the public and academic profiles of adult and community education and of research in adult and community education; fifth, for the formation of a national information network, serving adult and community education research and development; sixth, for promotion of research into non-participation by adults in adult and community education; seventh, for enhancing the profile of adult and community education academic units in higher education; and, finally, for encouraging cooperation in teaching and research supervision among adult and community education academic units in higher education institutions.

Senator CARR—I am just wondering how you see the Commonwealth role in the adult and community education sector. How might it be improved? Can you paint a picture of what you see it as at the moment, and how do you think it could be improved?

Prof. Bagnall—At the moment there is a diversity of support for programs coming from the Commonwealth government. Because adult and community education is such a broad and diverse field, that is necessarily very disparate and, of course, it is limited substantially to the particular roles of government departments and agencies. I suggest it is most strongly evident in the public education area.

The highest profile impact of the government on the sector and research is through its support of the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education and through the office in DEETYA. What I would be arguing for would be greater recognition at Commonwealth government level—presumably through its Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs—of the sector, particularly through activity directed towards the sorts of objectives that we are outlining in our submission; in other words, focusing on encouraging appropriate policy impact analysis and supporting—through targeted funding—research to look at trends in participation, provision and involvement in the field. While it is not something that our organisation has debated—I am speaking more perhaps as an individual—I feel that that could be channelled sensibly through an appropriate office in the Commonwealth department.

Senator CARR—Essentially you see the main role for the Commonwealth is the funding of research. What about more generalised support for the ACE sector through ANTA? ANTA funding for ACE at the moment is very limited and it is particularly concentrating on the vocational aspects as I read the situation. Would you agree with that assessment?

Prof. Bagnall—I agree with the assessment entirely, yes. The only hesitation that I have is with respect to uncertainty about the Commonwealth's proper role in supporting education as distinct from state support.

Senator CARR—You see it as Commonwealth-state issue?

Prof. Bagnall—Not necessarily an issue but—

Senator CARR—But the Commonwealth plays an extensive role in TAFE generally.

Prof. Bagnall—Yes.

Senator CARR—An extensive role in funding of schooling. Almost 95 per cent of university is funded by the Commonwealth. Why shouldn't ACE be funded?

Prof. Bagnall—I am not arguing against it.

Senator CARR—I am just trying to understand the ambivalence.

Prof. Bagnall—It is just because I do not necessarily see it as my position to decide how that distinction should be drawn. But certainly support is appropriate.

Senator CARR—Given that there is an increasing emphasis on directing funding towards vocational aspects of adult and community education, what impact do you believe that has on the character of adult and community education? Does that in itself tend to change the character of adult and community education?

Prof. Bagnall—Certainly it biases or distorts it in favour of the vocational, and we are seeing that throughout programs. They are being reinterpreted and re-presented as vocationally oriented as distinct from paying attention to a broader range of potential goals.

Senator CARR—How would you describe those broader goals? What are they?

Prof. Bagnall—There are a large number of other functions that adult and community education can serve—more broadly individual development within civil society and public education directed towards individual and collective functioning within civil democratic society. There is more fundamental basic education, not necessarily vocationally oriented, but concerned again with individual development.

Senator CARR—But the profile of the ACE student tends to be for women—short-term programs. Are you talking about the hobby programs? What sorts of programs would you describe that meet the criteria in terms of their contribution to civil society?

Prof. Bagnall—The public education programs that are run through the AAACE, through a number of community based organisations, would be included in that. We felt that the broad scope of adult and community education was well captured in the report of

the previous inquiry—and we draw attention to that in our submission—which sees the concerns of the field being much broader. Traditionally they have been much more focused on individual enlightenment, individual cognitive and social and moral development through the historically traditional providers—the workers' education association, the university, extension or similar outreach departments and the state providing agencies and TAFE. So the scope of such programs was itself limited, but differently limited, to that which we have now.

Senator CARR—Could it not be the case that the Commonwealth could contribute towards broadening out the appeal of adult and community education, in particular changing the profile of students so that more working class men were able to participate or were encouraged to participate?

Prof. Bagnall—We would hope so. That is a difficult one. As you observed, the profile of participation tends to be fairly strongly biased towards those who have already engaged in education of some sort or another and have felt some sense of success from it—not entirely, by any means. But one of the greatest challenges that we face is seeing engagement in active learning for whatever purpose by those who traditionally have not succeeded in the education system. I have no ready answers to offer in solution to that except to observe that it is a problem and it is one that in itself could usefully be supported for further investigation, and hence our suggestion that there is a need to focus very much on non-participation in future research.

Since the last inquiry there has been a flourishing—and that might be a bit of an overstatement—but certainly a satisfying increase in the amount of research on the nature of participation supported by a number of bodies such as the New South Wales Board of Adult and Community Education, and we now have a fairly firm understanding of that—that is, of those who participate. Obviously there is room for more investigation and continued follow-up, and that will occur, I believe, but we still have insufficient information on those who traditionally do not participate and the reasons why and what could be reasonably done to encourage them to participate in education.

Senator CARR—This is clearly an area for the Commonwealth to be interested in, do you think?

Prof. Bagnall—Yes. I can be much more certain about that. This, I suggest, is an area of national concern and I take it then that that is an area that the Commonwealth could reasonably support. Research directed towards general community welfare is importantly supported in other areas, and, indeed, in this to a small way by the Commonwealth.

ACTING CHAIR—We are now revisiting this area after our initial report in 1991. Could you perhaps outline the way in which things have changed since 1991 in terms of research in this area: the number of institutions that are involved in it, the number of academics, the scale of the work they are doing, any sort of citation indexes or any measures of research publications?

Prof. Bagnall—Certainly. I am attempting to draw some general threads out of the contextual information that we present here. We have certainly seen the development of a larger number of units concerned with research and development in the field. That development, though, has been driven by the vocational education interest. The majority of those units, given the political and social context in which they are working, are focusing very heavily on the vocational, which is undoubtedly important—there is no question about that. That is a general characteristic of them.

Other units that have a more general focus are not noticeably more numerous, although the strength and volume of their work have certainly increased. For example, the unit at Griffith University and the unit at the University of Technology, Sydney, are both very strong research centres now in the country. The unit which is at the University of South Australia has suffered from university cutbacks in education and the strong reorientation towards the vocational.

There has been an expansion in the quantity and the quality of research through those units, albeit that there has been a shift in emphasis towards the vocational. Nevertheless, there is much more research in general adult and community education than there was at the time of the previous inquiry. It is much enhanced. That is being applied much more than it was in professional development programs through universities. We see the work being utilised in an encouraging fashion, there is no doubt about that.

There has been a strong professionalisation of the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education. It used to be much more of a gathering for the sharing of experience. It has now, through its annual conferences by way of example, become much more professional and is paying much more attention to the outputs of research and how they can enhance the quality of practice in the field.

ACTING CHAIR—Just to give us some idea of the scale of this—you mentioned three universities—how many academics would actively be involved in research?

Prof. Bagnall—At UTS I could not be sure now. Theirs is the largest program. At Griffith we have a full-time staff, aside from those employed on soft money for particular projects, of 13.

ACTING CHAIR—Thirteen academics?

Prof. Bagnall—UTS is very much larger than that but I am not sure how many of them would actually identify themselves as researchers. They have a small number of researchers. The UNE program has diminished with UNE's problems. At South Australia there is a small core, five or six. The other programs around the country tend to be of that order, in the single figures.

ACTING CHAIR—With the University of South Australia, just to clarify what you said about that, is that actually a reduction in this area or is it just a re-orientation into

the vocational aspects of ACE, in terms of their research?

Prof. Bagnall—There has certainly been a reduction in staff. There has not been an overall reduction in the number of staff actively involved in research in this area. There has certainly been a re-orientation towards the vocational—indeed, a movement of some of the staff entirely out of the area and to an identification with business management. That is another tendency, a trend in this country, as in others, with the transmogrification of units concerned with research and development in adult and community education into those focusing on human resource development, as is happening in overseas countries now—and we fear that it might happen here—with a movement into business faculties rather than a location and faculties or units of education. Elsewhere—it is not here yet—that is having an adverse effect on the amount of attention that is paid to this field.

ACTING CHAIR—Six years ago we made 33 recommendations in this area of adult and community education, and two-thirds of them were never implemented. One of those that was not implemented related to the establishment of a national research centre. Is such an approach—to have a focused research centre—still appropriate? Or, given the very diverse nature of this sector, and its diverse geographical nature as well, is it better to spread this out?

Prof. Bagnall—It is important to have a focus, a channel, a source of advocacy within government for the field through an office, a council, or whatever entity it happens to be; an office that will work with persons in the field to establish research priorities, to recommend to the Commonwealth government appropriate areas for support and to serve as a clearing house for dispersing that through contract research and other ways. I am less inclined towards the setting up of a research office in the sense that it employs full-time researchers to undertake the work, and more inclined towards having an office that serves those functions on behalf of the Commonwealth government. The research would then be undertaken elsewhere in the country through private and public research bodies, but within the parameters set by the government.

ACTING CHAIR—If we did end up with one major research institution, if the committee decided to recommend that way, dare I ask where you think that should be?

Prof. Bagnall—Do you mean the geographical location?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Prof. Bagnall—It should be in Canberra—no question. It must be close to where the decisions are made so that it is sensitive to the influences on government thinking and is in a position to put its case. There is no question about that.

ACTING CHAIR—With the number of institutions that are now involved in research in this area, you suggest that there should be more collaboration between institutions, more networking, yet universities are tending to become more autonomous.

What sort of combination of carrot and stick do you think the government should apply to develop this sort of cooperative arrangement between universities?

Prof. Bagnall—That is a difficult one. It is a problem that we have noted, without making any constructive suggestions for its solution. The trend towards greater autonomy in universities is, in this sense, certainly a worry, because we note particularly the thin spread of expertise around the country. While these research units are quite numerous, most of them have staff numbered in single figures. There is a desperate need for collaboration and cooperation. As a university person, I would say it should be done through incentives, rather than disincentives.

The present and recent Commonwealth governments have shown a high degree of expertise in using incentives and disincentives to ensure collaboration—the disincentives being threats of minor cutbacks in overall support and the incentives being targeted funding for which we bid. There could be general mechanisms of those sorts, I imagine, but I have no simple answer.

ACTING CHAIR—Finally, given the small number of people involved in research in such a vast field, could you identify any areas where there is a need for research to be done but which no-one seems to be looking at, at this stage, because of a lack of people in the field and a lack of resources? I am just trying to get some idea of what needs to be done.

Prof. Bagnall—We have not, in this submission, sought to identify areas of research weakness beyond those of a policy impact nature—there is a set of recommendations to deal with those—and beyond the non-participation ones.

ACTING CHAIR—I was thinking more beyond that. It would be useful in terms of informing policy debate to have research done in certain areas.

Prof. Bagnall—I would be reluctant, off the cuff, to seek to name those. If the committee wished a listing to be put together I would rather do it consultatively.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, certainly. That would be very useful. Later would be fine.

Prof. Bagnall—If you would find that useful I would certainly be willing to do that. What sort of time line could I put up?

ACTING CHAIR—We are reporting towards the end of March. Some time in the next three weeks or so.

Prof. Bagnall—I will certainly attend to that.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for appearing today.

[2.18 p.m.]

BUETI, Mrs Angela, Private Citizen, Unit 12, 84 Musgrave Road, Indooroopilly, Queensland 4068

KELLY, Ms Ann, Immediate Past President, Australian Council for Adult Literacy, GPO Box 283, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2601

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the witnesses from the Bremer Institute and the Australian Council for Adult Literacy. The committee prefers evidence to be given in public, but if at any time you wish to give any evidence, part of evidence or answers to any questions in camera, you may make the request and the committee will consider the request. Such evidence can subsequently be made public, however, by order of the Senate.

The committee has before it submissions Nos 25 and 32. Is it the wish of the committee that the documents be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there any other material you wish to table at this stage?

Mrs Bueti—No.

ACTING CHAIR—You are welcome to make some brief opening remarks and then we will move to questions.

Mrs Bueti—I am representing myself rather than Bremer Institute of TAFE. I have worked in workplace adult basic education for the past three years and that is the area that I am coming from today. I provide training in literacy and language issues to various industries. I really value the importance of literacy and language education because there are widespread literacy and language problems in Australian society. Statistics tell us that one in seven Australian workers has literacy or language difficulties, and about half of those people are from English speaking backgrounds. The cost to the Australian economy is about \$6.5 billion.

My paper specifically addressed the participation rates of adults in training since 1991. Specifically, I looked at adults participating in training in the workplace. I am pleased to report that I have seen a major increase in adults participating in workplace education since 1991. I believe this has mainly been due to the implementation of WELL funding—workplace English language and literacy funding—which became available in 1992, and not only the introduction of this funding, but also the increased funding that we have seen over the past five years. Unfortunately, we saw a five per cent reduction in that funding last year.

Queensland started with four workplace projects in 1992 which increased to over 42 last year, so that is a pretty good indication that we are increasing the participation rates of adults in education. Also, in the training I conduct, I see many people who are undertaking formal education for the first time ever since leaving school.

The benefits I see are not only for organisations in terms of higher productivity, but also for individuals in terms of increased self-esteem and confidence. Many of these individuals are accessing other training outside of the workplace, so workplace education has had an ripple effect, as it were.

I believe that there are a number of things that we can probably do to further increase the participation rates of adults in education. I will just mention a few of these briefly. Firstly, we need to raise the profile and awareness of literacy and language education amongst industry and amongst the public. Secondly, we need to encourage private providers to apply for WELL funding and to provide workplace adult basic education. Thirdly, we need to ensure appropriate qualifications of educators. Fourthly, we need to use WELL funding in more diverse ways than we currently do. Fifthly and lastly, we need to provide continued ongoing support for organisations to undertake this type of training.

In essence, I believe we have come a long way in providing adults with more education in the workplace, but I also believe we can further tap the potential of our people in workplaces. We can do this by looking at how we organise our training and our funding. That is about all I have to say in my opening statement. Thank you for your attention.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Ms Kelly?

Ms Kelly—ACAL appreciates the opportunity, firstly, to provide a submission, short and brief though it was, and, secondly, to add to that submission rather than amend it. In our submission, we noted that there had been recognition that the provision of adult basic education is fundamental to social justice and is an essential measure for national economic prosperity, although we do know that that is difficult to measure.

We support the notion of life-long learning in a range of contexts to meet a range of demands. Literacy provision or basic education has been available essentially in three different areas: in workplaces—and Angela has elaborated on that at some length; in pre-employment—and in labour market programs that is what has commonly been known as SIP projects and other areas; and in the community.

We note that these three areas, although for convenience organised discretely, contain skills that can be contextualised in different ways and there are multiple literacies involved. The sorts of literacy that you may need for pre-employment have some relationship with those in the community and the workplace, but they are not necessarily the same.

I would like to talk a little bit about workplace provision. ACAL welcomed the continued efforts that have been made and the increases that Angela spoke of. We support the continued flexibility of arrangements for workers to access education from basic education to more sophisticated managerial skills. We welcome the recognition of skills gained—what has commonly been called recognition of prior learning—that may or may not have taken place within educational institutions. We welcome portability of skills and the recognition of those and the fact that learning is coming to be seen as responsive to learner's needs themselves.

However, we see some dangers if all training and education becomes available only in workplaces or even if the majority is available in workplaces and not in the community. We see for instance that people may be replaced rather than trained in employment if they do not have the necessary skills to adapt. We see a problem with MAATS in that after one year people may be reappointed rather than continued. We see a problem with lack of breadth perhaps, if employers themselves are responsible for choosing the training or if the employees themselves are responsible for that.

I would like to turn now to pre-employment. This has been one area where adult

literacy has also had a vital role in the last couple of years. We are very concerned that there are still almost 30 per cent of young people who are unemployed. Many of these people have limited literacy skills. We see it as being really important that provision remains available to these people.

One of the developments since 1991 has been the increased competition that operates for providers. One result of that has been—and is likely to continue to be—a lack of available infrastructure and other services that will be available to people. For instance, in TAFE institutions making libraries, counselling services and job placement services available. There is an infrastructure built up over many years that is likely to be discontinued or not funded to the same extent if such institutions are not supported. One of the other problems with competition is that a limited range of skills and options may be available and limited provision of literacy. In terms of pre-employment, we also welcome the links that are being developed between school and private providers, although we would be interested to ensure that basic literacy skills still remain an important part of that training.

Finally, we believe that the community provision must be maintained. Not everyone who wishes to have literacy training necessarily wants to have a position or be re-employed at a particular time. We see that it is important that there are a range of providers available and a range of options for people.

One of the initiatives that has been funded by the government has been the national policy on literacy. We understand it is still in draft form and has been presented to the minister. We have had some part in developing that and we look forward to the next stage in its development and then perhaps its implementation. That is all that I would like to say at this stage.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. You mentioned \$6.5 billion as being the cost to the community of poor levels of literacy. Could you just explain that a little further in terms of what that is based on and how it is calculated?

Mrs Bueti—That is actually a statistic that was available from the ACTU submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into literacy needs. I do not have the details that you are asking for. I only purely have that statistic.

ACTING CHAIR—You do not have any idea of what elements make that up?

Mrs Bueti—No.

ACTING CHAIR—I had heard figures on loss that were not quite that high before, so I was just wondering what the basis of that was. Anyway we can chase that document down. Are there any areas of the work force that are in more need of these sorts of courses than others? Where should the emphasis be perhaps?

Mrs Bueti—Predominantly the emphasis is on baseline workers, that is predominantly unskilled workers, factory workers or workers on production lines within organisations. They would predominantly be the people who have the literacy and English language needs within an organisation.

ACTING CHAIR—As to your definition of literacy, of course these days people also have to be computer literate to survive in society. Something came out the other day about banks having a differential charge on people who walk to the teller and ones who access automatic teller machines. Some people cannot operate automatic teller machines. So, even at that level, there is a literacy need. Are you addressing that broader question?

Mrs Bueti—It is a two-sided coin in terms of literacy. We have workplace literacy which is specific to the particular culture of the workplace that the person is working within. There are all sorts of demands placed upon them in terms of print—what they have to read and write—and also verbal instructions that they need to understand to be able to participate in their employment.

We also look at literacy on the other side of the coin: functional literacy. When we go into a workplace to assess the literacy and language needs of their employees we would do what we call a literacy assessment and this would give us some idea of what their functional level of literacy is, not only within the workplace but also outside the workplace. There is a whole varying scale. I term ‘functional literacy’ to mean being able to do all those things in everyday life that help you get by—being able to read an article in a newspaper, being able to read a book to your child and being able to fill out a form; I know some of us have trouble with lots of forms—the sorts of things that enable people to be able to participate in society to some degree.

ACTING CHAIR—From your experience in moving around the workplace, how much of this type of problem is generated by lack of ability to comprehend as opposed to perhaps people who have spoken other languages and need to develop English literacy skills?

Mrs Bueti—I am not sure I understand your question. Are you asking what percentage of people are from English speaking backgrounds who have literacy problems?

ACTING CHAIR—No, I am saying that some people in the workplace have difficulty because they never learnt to read or write properly. Of course, there are others who come out with another language and they just have not learnt English yet and over time they probably will. I am just trying to get a sense where the larger problem is in terms of numbers of people.

Mrs Bueti—A lot of the people I deal with from English speaking backgrounds their literacy problems are not due to intellectual impairment. They are due to a lack of schooling, not using those skills and having lost them and their social circumstances. But I

would not be able to give you a ratio in terms of people with literacy needs and people with English language needs and the difference between those, because every workplace is vitally different.

ACTING CHAIR—If we can divide it into the two categories that we are talking about, what is the main problem you come across in most workplaces that you have visited?

Mrs Bueti—I would say that the main problems that I have seen with people from English speaking backgrounds who were born here and have lived here all of their lives, but who just have not attained basic literacy skills. I see more of those people than I see of people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Does that answer your question?

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Ms Kelly, ABS surveys have been done on literacy. What information can you provide the committee on what that sort of material shows about literacy in Australia?

Ms Kelly—I probably need clarification about which surveys you are talking about.

ACTING CHAIR—The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey.

Ms Kelly—I actually have not seen the results of that yet, I am sorry. I understand that the data has only just become available. Are you talking about adults?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Kelly—I understand it was going to become available in January, and somebody told me a couple of days ago that it was available and I have not seen it; I am sorry.

ACTING CHAIR—Any comments on the previous published survey?

Ms Kelly—The survey that was done previously was one by Rosie Wickert. There was a problem with that, from my point of view, in that the size was very small. Although it did provide an indication that there were difficulties in particular areas, it is hard to know just from that one survey the extent of the problem. There were certainly some trends but, because the size was so small, it is hard to really know. What happened was extrapolation to some extent by the media and by literacy people, and I think that is a real problem. I am really looking forward to analysing the data, but I understand that it is only largely demographic data that is available now—if you are telling me that it is available—and the responses will be available in May.

ACTING CHAIR—It is that far away, is it?

Ms Kelly—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—That is after our reporting date, unfortunately. Is adult literacy training generally conducted on an accredited basis?

Ms Kelly—I think so. Certainly, pre-employment literacy training, for the most part, was. Workplace training—and Angela would know this probably better than I do—was a mixture, and is moving now to much more accredited training.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is the WELL program a totally funded program, or is there some contribution required from participants or employers?

Mrs Bueti—There is a contribution required by employers or the workplace, and that is on a sliding scale. The first year is 25 per cent; the second year is 50 per cent; and the third year is 75 per cent.

Senator O'BRIEN—And how long has that circumstance existed? We are talking about development since 1991, so I am just trying to place it in time.

Mrs Bueti—I believe they did not have very strict guidelines on employer contribution prior to last year. I was speaking with the WELL representative here in Queensland, Vicki Beldan, who said they have just implemented that and they are going to stand fairly firm on employer contribution.

Senator O'BRIEN—So, in the past, there was not an employer contribution. Is that what you are saying?

Mrs Bueti—No. I am sorry. There always was an employer contribution. A workplace would never get total funding for any initiative. They always made some contribution to that.

Ms Kelly—I managed a state WELL program in Queensland in the early 1990s. It was quite big: \$600,000. One of the conditions was that employers would contribute 25 per cent. If they applied again, in fact, that percentage was expected to increase substantially. So I think that employers have always contributed, and that has been helpful in terms of ownership of programs and the negotiation of a lot of aspects of the program.

Senator O'BRIEN—So the funding issue is not the reason for the increased participation in the program. If I understand your original submission, there has been some increase in participation in adult literacy through the WELL program.

Mrs Bueti—Yes. I believe that to be true, because WELL funding only became available in 1992; and I guess we are looking at participation rates since 1991. I was dealing specifically with workplace education. Prior to 1991—and I guess I am speculating

here—I am assuming, because there was no funding prior to that time, that there was not a lot of workplace adult education going on.

Senator O'BRIEN—In terms of literacy and numeracy.

Mrs Bueti—That is right.

Senator O'BRIEN—Ms Kelly, you say in your submission that the inclusion of adult literacy and numeracy in labour market programs, amongst other things, has led to improvements in various industrial outcomes, access to programs and pathways to further education and employment. Given that the scale of labour market programs has been diminished to a great extent, what outcomes do you see occurring in that area?

Ms Kelly—We are very concerned about the development of new arrangements. I guess they are still relatively new and being put into place. We have written a number of submissions to Senator Vanstone, both at the state and national levels, to ensure that there is still literacy provision for people who are not employed. If there is not it seems to us that there will be continual cycles of employment and unemployment.

Senator O'BRIEN—Have you looked at this issue in the context of the proposal to introduce a capacity to benefit test for the unemployed?

Ms Kelly—Yes, but not to a large extent. As a committee we are looking at what that might mean. It is very hard. I was interested in the question that Senator Tierney asked earlier of Angela: how can you tell whether people will benefit from such provision? I think it is very hard to tell. I have a personal view that, if people have had provision for a long time that is considered to be of high quality and they have taken that up and they still have very limited literacy skills, then it seems to me that it is perhaps possible that they have some fairly serious intellectual problems.

But how that can be identified in a face-to-face, one-off interview situation I do not know the answer to. We have had IQ tests that have been considered questionable in the past. Because literacy is valued so highly in our society, those who fail have attending problems that accumulate. If they do not go to school, for instance, they do not have access to the sorts of learning that perhaps are available. If a particular teacher dislikes somebody, for instance, that student may not learn at their optimal level.

There are just so many contingent factors that I think it is going to be very difficult to be able to ascertain whether somebody is likely to benefit. I think that is a really tricky issue. I can understand why there is a move to do that, and I think we would welcome accountability. I do not think we have a problem with seeing value for money, we would support that, but how that is done I think is difficult to work through because of the other attendant factors.

Senator O'BRIEN—Has your organisation looked at the issues of case management and employment placement enterprises in the context of this matter?

Ms Kelly—Yes, we have, and we would support particular assessment measures. I was on a committee that developed a program for CES personnel, for instance. Bill Corcoran at QUT developed a little course—its abbreviation was LAMP—and that really was not taken up by the CES. That was a disappointment to us because it had value. It is not an easy issue to address and we are very conscious that there is a need for this.

Senator O'BRIEN—Given that the literacy issue seems to have been highlighted—and addressed—in terms of a workplace situation, have you had any thoughts about the new employment placement models that are coming into effect and what effect they might have on the efficacy of the WELL program?

Mrs Bueti—I see a lot of restructuring within industry, and the demands placed on individuals with literacy and language difficulties are enormous. Working in a workplace you need to be aware of many of these issues and work towards not only achieving a literacy for their environment now but also achieving a literacy for their environment in the future.

Senator O'BRIEN—But if people do not get into the workplace—if people are not being involved in employment programs and therefore not being placed in a workplace where they are going to access these skills—do you believe that the community education facility will be taken up by the people who in the last three or four years have been picked up by, say, labour market programs in the workplace?

Mrs Bueti—I have mainly dealt with people who have been established or who have been working in that workplace for some time. I think there is a role the employer needs to take in providing that sort of training. Whereas it may have been provided previously in a community setting, I think the employer should look at providing that type of training for that person once they are in that workplace.

Senator TROETH—What is the minimum number of participants needed for a WELL course?

Mrs Bueti—That is a good question. To answer that you need to look at how financially viable it is. You could have a couple of people in a workplace but if the organisation and WELL are prepared to put the funding into providing some one-on-one tutoring for those people then that is a possibility.

The other possibility is that if there is a number of smaller organisations that have a couple of individuals with needs then they can amalgamate or work together to get their numbers up in putting together one workplace program.

Senator TROETH—So it is a reasonably flexible arrangement?

Mrs Bueti—In my experience I have found that WELL funding is pretty good in that respect.

Senator TROETH—How are the individuals who are going to participate in the course picked up? Are they picked up by the employer or by people like yourselves?

Mrs Bueti—That is an interesting question. Sometimes the workplace will identify some people with these needs and contact you but more and more it is a matter of going through an awareness raising not only within the workplace management but also with individuals who have literacy problems. For example, there is a bit of a stigma sometimes attached to people from English speaking backgrounds with literacy problems. Often these people are not likely to come forward very willingly so, in my experience, what we do to try to target these people is to have information sessions within the workplace—invite the general population of the workplace to attend an information session.

We normally find that we will pick up a few people who have these needs. There will always be some who will not come forward, but we tend to pick them up once a program starts running when they realise it is not as scary as they first thought it might be. Then we tend to pick up people after courses actually start. So it is a real education process within the workplace. I believe that we are getting better at it. We also need to look at the terminology we use when we are promoting these types of programs, because when people hear the word ‘literacy’ there is the stigma attached to it, as I said, so the way we promote our training is very important.

Senator TROETH—Taking the process back a stage further, when you make the presentation in the workplace has someone invited you to do that when the need has been identified, or do you circularise workplaces that you are available to do this? How does it work?

Mrs Bueti—That is another good question. The normal process would be that, as a training provider, you would have contact with somebody in a management position in that workplace. You would contact them and tell them what sorts of services you can provide. If they are interested and think there may be a need in their workplace, we would normally say, ‘Would you like to apply for some WELL funding?’ and then we would try and identify our target group within that organisation. From there we would do some number crunching and put in an application. Once we have funding approved we would go into the workplace and do awareness raising and information sessions, then we would do literacy assessments on individuals.

Senator TROETH—Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for appearing today.

[2.52 p.m.]

SWINDELL, Dr Richard, 24 Blackheath Avenue, Hawthorne, Queensland 4171

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. In what capacity are you appearing before the committee?

Dr Swindell—I am from Griffith University, but I am not representing the views of the university. I appear as a private citizen.

ACTING CHAIR—The committee prefers evidence to be given in public, but if at any stage you wish to give any evidence, part of evidence or answers to any questions in camera you may make the request and the committee will consider that request. Such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate.

The committee has before it submission No. 29. Is it the wish of the committee that this be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

ACTING CHAIR—Dr Swindell, is there any other material you wish to submit at this stage?

Dr Swindell—No, thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—You can make some brief opening remarks and then we will go to questions.

Dr Swindell—Thank you very much. If I could just establish my bona fides first, I am an academic and an adult educator. My research is predominantly in the field of late life adult education, with a specific interest in university of the Third Age—U3A—types of organisations, so I have made my submission along those lines. I am also interested in another term of reference, about the Internet, but did not make a specific submission on that. I could make some comments later on that, if you are interested, but I do not have any hard data.

Before I launch into a very brief spiel, senators, you have been on the road for a fair time and I wonder if other people have presented evidence to you relating to U3A? I do not want to rehash old ground in presenting background information.

ACTING CHAIR—We have not all been at all the hearings. We certainly did in the first set of hearings in 1991, so any update on U3A and the whole area of learning for people who are in the third age would be most welcome.

Dr Swindell—I would be very glad to. Very briefly, as we are all aware, the ageing adult population is the fastest growing sector in society. It is growing very much faster than any other sector of society. In particular, the 80-year-old plus sector is growing extremely rapidly. This is probably a celebration of the great amount of money and resources that have been devoted by society to improving health, education and other resources, and we are now reaping the benefits of this vast expenditure in the past, in the form of the extremely rapid rate of ageing. Regrettably, a number of people do not see it as a benefit, and we are continually hounded in the press by terms such as the ‘burden’ of ageing, aged care, pensions and the like, and I think that presents a very negative and incorrect message to society about the older population.

I want to talk specifically about U3A, because I see U3A as being a very exciting opportunity for society to develop some new approaches to the ageing population: ones that could probably lead to a considerable saving on welfare demands by the later population. Briefly, there are two distinct models of U3A which people talk about. The model that we in Australia followed is the British model; and the remainder of the world followed the French model of U3A developed in 1972. What happened was that some universities in France saw an opportunity to make their resources available to the ageing population, and the ageing population took up the idea with great alacrity. The idea spread very rapidly from country to country, associated with universities.

As you would all understand from your backgrounds, universities probably tend to present a fairly negative connotation to a number of older members of society: negative not in terms of their position but in terms of their supposed prestige. It would turn off a number of adults who were interested in late life education if they thought they had to behave and act like university students. That is the French model.

In 1982, it went through a very considerable about-face when it reached Britain: instead of U3A, the University of the Third Age, being associated with universities, it actually became very strongly a self-help movement where people started to do things entirely for themselves. Peter Lazlett, a sociologist, recognised the fact that people from all backgrounds retire and that that represents a huge reservoir of resources and talents which are significantly underutilised by society. U3A developed with the idea of promoting the abilities of older people to develop themselves.

This is the model that developed in Australia. Probably it was the only model that could have developed in Australia. I do not think the French model could have happened here, because in the early 1980s, when people were first thinking about this in Melbourne, senators of the ilk of Susan Ryan—from memory—where making statements to the effect that we had very few university places and it would be a tragedy if older or mature students were taking up valuable spaces instead of leaving them to our younger students. That view has changed very considerably now. Be that as it may, that was the only type of model that could have developed.

The self-help approach to U3A has grown so rapidly in Australia that it is akin, really, to a social movement. It started in Melbourne. It was introduced to Melbourne in 1983 and, without any formalised support from government, adult education agencies or the like, the movement has proliferated through all states and territories; and now there are in the order of 120 independent U3A groups, each operating on its own resources and making no demands on outside agencies for support at all.

I believe that this is the commendable way for a late life adult education organisation to operate. People are using their own talents and resources to develop themselves rather than relying on the goodwill or expertise of second age people and funding agencies and the like. Unfortunately, the history of adult education is littered with the corpses of excellent ideas which were centrally funded or relied on the expertise of a paid educator and when times got tough and the funds were withdrawn so the adult education enterprise crashed.

During 1991 to 1993, when we were purportedly going through one of the worst recessions we have had in our history, U3A actually grew quite rapidly in Australia. We now have somewhere around 33,000 members throughout the country, each relying on their own resources to develop themselves. I have been looking at the U3A approach, and, just to remind you, the U3A approach in France and on the continent and parts of China and most other continents is one that depends on access to universities and university

tutors and their goodwill to assist. I do not think that is a good way for adult education late life to develop because as the financial constraints have impacted on universities we can see the situation in the home of U3A—France—where they are now actually starting to ask older people to pay to attend U3A courses, or they have thrown them open to the wider public—the unemployed and underemployed and so on. That whole philosophy is changing and we must—talking about the development of U3A in Australia—bear in mind that the self-help movement is really the only way to go.

That has painted the background. In my brief submission I painted the idea that some very exciting developments appear to be occurring through late life intellectual challenge. There are a number of researchers now coming out and overtly stating that late life cognitive challenge actually leads to good health and perhaps even greater longevity, although I am sure the latter is probably something that we do not necessarily need to focus on. The good health is something that we could really focus on because with the increasing numbers of the ageing and the increasing numbers of unemployed people, the demands on the welfare budget can only escalate. We have to look for some alternative in later life to see if we can reduce that demand.

Some of the suggestions are that intellectual challenge may actually, as I say, be associated with good health. I doubt whether they can directly prove it but there are some interesting findings. I say they probably will not be able to directly prove it because you do not know, when a person's health perks up, whether it is perking up because they are being cognitively challenged or whether it is perking up because someone is taking notice of them or they are developing a network of friends and like minded associates, which is also associated with good health. The social networks and the good health then are something that I think are an exciting possibility associated with late life cognitive development.

ACTING CHAIR—Dr Swindell, on that last point: were you aware of the Russian research on this where they did take three groups? I suppose you can conduct this sort of research only in the old Russia. They had a group of older people who were left more or less to their own devices, a group who did craft-like activities and a group who did high level intellectual activity. They tracked it through quite a period of time and found quite dramatic results on that. Has any other research along those lines been done in America, Australia or anywhere else, to actually validate what the Russians found?

Dr Swindell—I think you have pointed implicitly to the difficulties of research like that. The ethical problems I doubt—

ACTING CHAIR—I am not saying you replicated the experiment exactly, but have you tested groups that are involved in different activities—not necessarily forcing them into three different groups?

Dr Swindell—No. I am not aware of anything else like that. I was aware of the

research but, as you mentioned or implied, it does need lots of replication before they can make some of the statements that the Russians were suggesting.

ACTING CHAIR—It was very promising in what it said about how intellectual activity holds off a whole lot of different conditions that people come across in later life. On the recommendation you make that there be public campaigns like the quit smoking type of campaign to get people involved in these sorts of courses after they retire, to what extent would the success of that depend upon peoples' earlier life experiences? I was wondering if you tend to find that the type of people who do these sorts of courses are the ones who tended to do them when they were younger.

Dr Swindell—Yes, that is it exactly. I think the most important correlation they have found in late life studies is that the people who get into late life adult education tend to be the types of people who have followed education throughout their earlier lives. But we are becoming an increasingly better educated society and, if that is a precedent to late life adult education, you can only suggest that the numbers of people seeking late life adult education will increase.

ACTING CHAIR—You emphasise that U3A type programs tend to look inwards for resources and people. What is the effect of that on cost of provision and ease of provision? Are there any problems with that sort of an approach where perhaps there is just a sort of drawing off from systems that already exist?

Dr Swindell—The only problem that I have seen associated with the approach is U3As finding it difficult to offer sufficient numbers of courses from among the membership to cater for the burgeoning demand. Also, the membership cannot handle courses, by and large, on new technology—the Internet, e-mail, computers and the like—so they do need to look outside for that. But the greatest difficulty associated with the rapid proliferation of the U3A actually relates to the second recommendation that I suggested, and that is the need for greater opening up of opportunities to assist people to take these late life adult education steps.

ACTING CHAIR—Voluntaryism is a great tradition in this country. Do you find much of that occurring with the provision of these courses—people who are experts in their field providing it for people in older groups, just for the love of providing this sort of thing?

Dr Swindell—Yes. That is, of course, the premise on which the self-help movement is developed. But we have done a study on several groups of ageing and, unfortunately, we find out the ethos of volunteering appears to be dying out among the new generation of older population. It appears to have been something which was ingrained among the older groups. I hope that that is not going to detract from the strength of the self-help movement in the future. I do not think it will, because it is an opportunity for people to continue to develop themselves while developing others, so I do not think

that is going to be a real problem.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator CARR—Could you indicate to us what you think the Commonwealth government can do to assist the expansion of community education for older Australians, particularly through the universities?

Dr Swindell—Yes. I am not sure whether universities are the right way to go. We have an excellent model here in Queensland, in Brisbane, with Griffith University. The U3A here is associated with Griffith University, and Griffith University provides resources like access by tutors to the library, free access to computer resources and the ilk. They also provide auditing possibilities, which means that the 2,000 members of the U3A campus in Brisbane are able to sit in on graduate or undergraduate lectures, just for the joy of the learning there, without any examinations or any other constraints on them.

That is a positive move and, although it is positive, it has been very poorly taken up by most U3A members. We have 2,000 U3A members and this auditing has been going on for four years now at Griffith, and we only get 10 to 15 to 20 people bothering to take that up. So I do not think the idea of actually physically going to a university is what is needed. It requires the support to allow people to continue to learn, but the learning should continue to take place within the community itself—free halls and suburban church halls and establishments, even members' homes and the ilk, where people do not have to travel too far.

Senator CARR—I acknowledge what you are saying—universities may not be the best place—but to come back to the point, what practical measures could the national government undertake to assist community education for older Australians?

Dr Swindell—I did allude to the Internet before, and to my mind that is the most liberating educational medium that has ever appeared on the horizon and I think it is going to have enormous ramifications for self-education of people of all ages. But just free-wheeling at bit here with this idea: if U3As had access to the computer technology—and I see that the federal government has a strong push to push the Internet out to isolated rural properties—there is no reason why U3A should not be able to spread through the media—through the Internet and e-mail and the like—to isolated properties and help older people in that particular way.

The concrete answer to your question is possibly making the type of computer resources available—one to each U3A in Australia—which would allow them to start to communicate with each other via the Internet and start to take their ideas and outreach to members who have still got good minds but are frail and elderly in supported accommodation, the homes, the rural areas and so forth. I would see that as being a positive move if they saw that themselves as being a useful thing to do.

Senator CARR—Is that all the assistance you see? What other things could the Commonwealth undertake?

Dr Swindell—The important thing is that once someone starts doing too much, a self-help organisation like U3A, the danger is that people will say, ‘Someone is going to do it for me; I don’t need to try quite as hard.’ Or there is some level of bureaucracy imposed on the freedom and the free-form type of education they have got. Any support that would be given would have to be given in a way that in no way interferes with the self-help nature of the medium, otherwise there would be a great potential for harm there. It is not asking for much. It is asking for probably recognition, technology support of the type that they believe will assist them to meet their objectives and advertising—as I was suggesting—at a national level to suggest to older people that it is good for them to continue to challenge their minds.

Senator TROETH—I would just like to ask you about the way in which U3A is organised. I take it that each U3A is totally autonomous and that there is no bureaucracy as such associated with it.

Dr Swindell—That is dead right, Senator. From my position as a researcher, one of the difficulties I see with what is otherwise a very good movement is the fact that, apart from in the state of Victoria and a little part of New South Wales, the U3As are not talking to each other and are not sharing that great pool of expertise. I believe once they do start to talk to each other and start to act as a community of resource learning, that is when these open-minded people are going to reach out in the way I was suggesting. The long answer to your question is yes, they are entirely autonomous groups and a number of them want to make sure that they remain that way.

Senator TROETH—I take your point on the possible uses of the Internet and e-mail. I suppose the only limiting factor of that would be that physically it would be an isolated type of existence, communicating with your friends, and the one thing they would miss out on is social interaction even though they are getting the mental stimulation.

Dr Swindell—Absolutely. That is an excellent point. In a survey I did I found that social interaction was rated equally as important as intellectual stimulation as their reasons for joining. But the point is that there are isolated people who cannot get the social stimulation. They are isolated in their homes or they are isolated by geography and an alternative of reach out and sharing this interaction via e-mail, I think, would give a semblance of social communication that is otherwise lacking in their lives.

Senator TROETH—Is there any intellectual limit placed on the course that can be provided through a U3A or does it depend entirely on who is available to teach anything and who wants to learn it?

Dr Swindell—Yes, absolutely open bailiwick. An emphasis tends to be on the arts

and the history and languages type of subject, but anything goes. There is bridge, there is chess, there is hydroponics, there is photography, there is walking for pleasure—the whole gamut of activities which anyone feels is suitable for the U3A ethos.

Senator TROETH—Thanks for that.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for appearing today. Your information has been most valuable.

Dr Swindell—Thank you very much for your time.

ACTING CHAIR—That concludes the hearings for today. The committee will adjourn and reconvene tomorrow in Adelaide.

Committee adjourned at 3.15 p.m.