



# **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people**

**CANBERRA**

**Thursday, 7 November 1996**

**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**

**CANBERRA**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Members

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Peter Baldwin	Mr Griffin
Mr Barresi	Mr Marek
Mr Bradford	Mr Mossfield
Mr Brough	Mr Neville
Mrs Elson	Mr Pyne
Mr Martin Ferguson	Mr Sawford
Mrs Gash	

Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

**WITNESSES**

**NEUMANN, Mr Claude, Assistant Secretary, Compensation, Rehabilitation and Superannuation,  
Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2602 . . . . . 321**

**O'BRIEN, Brigadier Kevin John, Director-General, Defence Force Recruiting, Headquarters  
Australian Defence Force, Russell Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2602 . . . . . 321**

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

*Factors influencing the employment of young people*

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Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Barresi	Mr Griffin
Mr Brough	Mr Marek
Mrs Elson	Mr Mossfield
Mrs Gash	Mr Sawford

The committee met at 9.11 a.m.

Mr Sawford took the chair.

**ACTING CHAIR (Mr Sawford)**—I declare open this public hearing on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The committee has received over 80 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

Later this month, the committee will conduct the first of a number of school forums in which young people will have the opportunity to voice their views and opinions on this very important matter. The purpose of this inquiry is to consult widely and produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of young people. I am keen to hear the views of all sections of the community about how we can better equip young people for employment. I am particularly keen to hear the views of people who are active in commerce and industry, for they are the potential employers and the creators of the jobs for the future.

This is a very broad ranging inquiry. Matters raised in submissions so far include the attitudes of young people, the work ethic of young people and their familiarity with the requirements of the workplace, the adequacy and relevance of the education and training systems, the importance of developing better linkages between schools and the business sector, the need for a more flexible industrial relations system, and the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs to assist young people to find employment. That is not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues the committee will consider or which might be raised. We are entirely open to the views of everyone who wishes to make an input to the inquiry. We are here to listen, to learn and to help improve the prospects of young Australians.

Today the committee will take evidence from representatives of the Department of Defence. It is the objective of this committee, as far as possible, that all sectors of the labour market can have the opportunity to participate. The view from the Department of Defence is one further step in achieving this. The committee regards employment in the defence forces as an honourable and viable alternative for young people.

[9.13 a.m.]

**NEUMANN, Mr Claude, Assistant Secretary, Compensation, Rehabilitation and Superannuation, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2602**

**O'BRIEN, Brigadier Kevin John, Director-General, Defence Force Recruiting, Headquarters Australian Defence Force, Russell Offices, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2602**

**ACTING CHAIR**—I welcome Brigadier Kevin O'Brien and Mr Claude Neumann from the Department of Defence. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Neumann**—Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on the employment of young people in Defence. We have defined young people as being in the 15- to 24-year-old age group. In terms of the labour force, the proportion of the Australian population in this youth category has declined from 16 per cent in 1991 to 15 per cent in 1995, and it is anticipated to decrease further to 13.7 per cent by roughly 2001. At the same time, more young people are remaining in education and many choose the flexibility of combining part-time work with full-time study. As a result, many young people tend not to enter the full-time work force until they reach the upper end of the 15 to 24 year-old-age group.

In Defence—and I am talking about only the civilian part of Defence—as at 30 September 1996, there were some 19,900 civilian personnel. In 1995-96 about 2,000 permanent staff separated from the department while there were some 1,100 permanent additions. Defence civilian numbers have declined by over 18 per cent since 1991 and are continuing to decline as a result of several efficiency initiatives such as the commercial support program. The immediate effect of this downsizing has been the loss of large numbers of lower level positions, particularly in the clerical, administrative and trades groups which historically have been the main entry points for young people. Despite the substantial civilian staff reductions, the department has maintained its proportion of youth employees at around the Australian Public Service level of just under eight per cent.

Selection for advertised positions is based solely on merit, and base rate administrative trainees are provided to the department through the administrative services test. The department, nevertheless, remains committed to recruit 380 base level entry trainees and some 60 or so university graduates in the graduate administrative assistants scheme in 1996-97. In conclusion, Defence remains committed to the employment of youth who are able to meet the entry requirements.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Brigadier O'Brien, would you like to add anything?

**Brig. O'Brien**—Yes. I want to add to what Claude said. The Australian Defence Force, of course, by its very nature is a young people's organisation. To be effective we require a constant stream of young, fit Australians of sufficient calibre to handle the jobs in the Australian Defence Force to join us.

We accept a turnover of people, which is actually very good for Australian youth. The level of that turnover varies from time to time, depending on outside conditions. Of course, we monitor very carefully. We generally have a healthy turnover rate of around 10 per cent per annum. So you see therefore that the Australian Defence Force typically takes in around about 6,000, to 7000 young Australians every year for

permanent positions. I am obviously happy to answer any general questions you might have.

**ACTING CHAIR**—In paragraphs 7 and 21 of your submission, you suggested that the ADF was not high on the list of choices of young people. Could you elaborate on some of the reasons for that and perhaps your solutions for making the ADF more appealing to young Australians?

**Brig. O'Brien**—Yes. It has been somewhat of a dilemma for us because we in the Defence Force know that we have got excellent jobs and phenomenal training. The people we train and accredit with that training get experience and those that leave early typically go out into the work force some four to six to eight years later to gain worthwhile employment in the Australian community. Yet at the same time it is fair to say that we have experienced difficulties in recruitment over the last perhaps two to three year period. Having said that, we have taken some steps in the last 12 months to analyse what the problem has been. Right at this very moment we are actually filling all our targets.

What was the problem? Our theory of employment is that every individual out there looks at the advantages of the career against the perceived disadvantages of the career. It is a 'Will I join?' equation, if you like. You are balancing on the one hand the benefits and on the other hand what they see as perceived disadvantages. We worked out that we need to articulate that and communicate those benefits and disadvantages much more clearly.

When we went out and did some survey work, for example, we discovered that many of the perceptions on the disadvantages side were in many cases quite irrational. They were perceptions of, 'I will have to move away from home', and concerns about the discipline. They believe the communications more of the American *Rambo* movies rather than the actual reality of employment in the Australian Defence Force. Indeed, most kids have a very, very limited understanding of what it is like in the Defence Force. The perceptions on the negative side are that they imagine that it is all live in, day-to-day.

I have talked to many schools and school groups. When I say, 'Have you considered the Defence Force as a career?' They will say, 'Oh, I might get killed.' Yet the reality is that there has not been an Australian serviceman killed in action as a result of enemy action in 20 to 30 years. It is clearly more dangerous crossing the streets. Our internal safety record is much better than that in most industries.

What I am saying effectively is that the negative perceptions gained very much as a result of overseas media communications—the movie *Army Intelligence* with Danny Devito screened the other night—are very much imported perceptions, and it is very hard for us to communicate in a meaningful way to the youth.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You mentioned you did an analysis in the last 12 months of the processes of recruitment. Did you change any of your processes?

**Brig. O'Brien**—What we have discovered is that, first of all, you need to target any of your communications. It has to be targeted at the youth group. We have analysed what the youth group will believe. They do not believe the glossy ads. They are very cynical. In the culture they are in they are very used to watching television. We are competing in the marketplace against ads from very expensive companies—the Nikes, Reeboks and McDonald's of this world who have huge marketing budgets. We certainly do not have

that. We have discovered that the youth believe word of mouth more than anything else.

I have made a major investment in the last 12 to 18 months in establishing linkages between schools' careers councillors and my recruiting staff in the regions. Each state of Australia is divided up into a regional recruiting centre. Within that I have, say, a corporal that might own 10 to 12 high schools. That corporal establishes relationships with the 10 or 12 schools' careers teachers. We have provided them in the last 12 months with a computer package, which is called the Australian Defence Force careers explorer, which is on all their library networks and the careers teachers networks.

This allows the kids all by themselves, without being pressured and without anyone looking over their shoulder, to use the computer to track down where I would be posted, where I would be trained, what I would learn, where I would go, my conditions of service and what I would be paid. We have found that to be quite useful and very well received by the careers teachers. Indeed, we developed it in consultation with the careers teachers as a response to their request.

The corporal is providing the school with the careers explorer computer. He is providing them with any literature they need and he is the immediate point of contact should the teacher say that a young lady had expressed an interest in this. He will have given her my card and we could then communicate on a face-to-face level. We have increased our management time and my resources and manpower to get out to the schools.

Last year, on top of that, we did formal presentations to schools. This very much depends on whether the school will accept a presentation from the Australian Defence Force team. Interestingly enough, I was told when I started this job, which is almost two years ago, that a lot of schools would not accept the teams. I thought that was very interesting and wanted to examine it properly. There was anecdotal evidence that various teachers organisations had described service in defence as a harm industry. They would not encourage people to join the Australian Defence Force.

It has been quite fascinating on the personal level, having each region and each cluster of schools under a corporal and each bigger group with a regional person. If the corporal discovered that the school said they were not that keen on our coming, we would organise the person up the line—the major or the captain—to ring the headmaster and arrange for an appointment. In the end, almost no school in Australia was not prepared to accept us. The very few that refused are those in a very small religious group. Funnily enough, the youth in those schools are very good at joining. We keep track of every school and how many people join, and they are very good providers. We provide them with presentations on Saturday morning out of school hours and present their scholarships and so on.

Last year we asked the teams that went to the schools to take only voluntary attendances. We talked to 85,000 school kids in our presentations, and I forget the number of schools they went to but it was enormous. I try to hit with a presentation team 80 per cent of schools every year and 100 per cent of schools on a two-year period. That is a very costly business because many of the country schools have small classes and are not necessarily as cost effective for me. I could go around Parramatta and do 10 schools in a day versus driving to Broken Hill to Dubbo to Lightning Ridge or something. Nevertheless, proportionately country schools present very well. It is just a very costly business to recruit from them.



**ACTING CHAIR**—I come from South Australia, and we do not have a great number of schools coming each year. One of the highlights of the visits is to the Defence Force Academy. The kids come away from that very excited. Would one of you make a comment on the role of ADFA?

**Brig. O'Brien**—Our evidence would tend to indicate that the visits from our teams to the schools are very effective. We have just done a complete census of the new intakes at the Australian Defence Force Academy, and it is very interesting. One of the responses to our question asking when they first thought of joining the military was a mean age of 13.1. That has provoked a fair bit of surprise, because some of the more recent rhetoric about cadet corps and utility in relation to the youth joining the military would tend to indicate that that would be a very successful way to go.

Again, we asked the current ADFA class how many of them had been cadets. The answer was 39 per cent of the current intake to ADFA had been cadets, yet only 0.5 per cent of Australian kids have been in cadet corps. Again, that would tend to indicate that cadet corps movements tend to attract people. You go to join that organisation because you have a leaning that way. If you like it, you tend to take the next step and join the permanent forces.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Just taking your point of age 13, what sorts of connections do you have with primary schools?

**Brig. O'Brien**—We don't; that is the whole point.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Perhaps that is something you should look at.

**Brig. O'Brien**—We are.

**ACTING CHAIR**—This is probably a critical question. I had a young fellow come to me about a month ago, who in January went to the Currie Street office in Adelaide to be recruited to the army. The following month he did the test and passed with flying colours. Unfortunately, he was only 17 or 18 at the time and he had a bad case of acne. He was referred to a medical officer and a specialist.

Unfortunately, it took quite an expensive set of treatment, which went for, I think, six months. He went back, was cleared by the army medical officer and, I thought, rather cruelly about a week later he was told he was not wanted. He was hung out to dry for six months. I have written that letter, by the way, to Ian McLachlan because I think it needs to be investigated. What is your response to that?

**Brig. O'Brien**—My response, of course, is we will investigate that. I take personal steps to make sure that the sorts of things you have just described do not happen. First of all, I run a training organisation. Essentially, we bring into recruiting volunteers from the Defence Force who might be a corporal who is an aircraft fitter, it might be an infantry corporal, it might be a dental technician from the navy who volunteered to be a recruiter. Of course, they might be very enthusiastic young people themselves but really are not geared up to be professional recruiters.

I run a four-week course here in Canberra to not only cover the process but also make them sensitive

to the wishes and aspirations of the young applicants. I make them realise just how important it is when dealing with the public and how each of those kids who come in are individuals in their own right, are very keen to get a job and are going to be bitterly disappointed if they do not get in. One of the sad parts of our business is that a number of the people who are very keen to join, some of the keenest, do not meet the standards that we set.

Quite rightly, we set high standards—and you alluded to one of them relating to medical—and we also have an aptitude testing organisation. Finally, where there are more people for a particular category or an officer entry we put them to a selection board and they are selected on merit based on judgments about leadership, motivation and various things like that. Inevitably, people miss out. It is the handling of them that I am very concerned about at the moment. Certainly, I will investigate the case you have just described.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I would have thought acne was a pretty common thing for young men at that age.

**Brig. O'Brien**—Unfortunately, currently it is in our medical requirements that we do reject people on the basis of permanent acne.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It was not permanent.

**Brig. O'Brien**—In that particular case what happens is, rather than stop the person and make them go through the expenses you just described from progressing through our system, we allow them to progress through the testing but, simultaneously, we declare them as being what is called 'temporarily medically unfit'. They are sent to a specialist, which, I may add, we pay for. That clears that situation up. So hopefully the medical side and our testing side move in parallel. Of course, if the category the person was going for was one where—and I obviously do not know the case—

**ACTING CHAIR**—It will come across your desk, I am sure.

**Brig. O'Brien**—In some areas of entry—for example, in some of the air force categories—I do not advertise at all and yet I am flooded with applicants. There might be, say, eight entrants for a particular category of entry for air force going into Edinburgh on a certain date and there might be four in Townsville, six in Brisbane, eight in Sydney and others from all over Australia. The records are then placed in order of merit by state, are sent into Canberra and then we go through a process to try to even out both the individual merit and a fair allocation to states because there are differences in state education systems and so on and so forth.

Equally, for example, we know for a fact that the pressure cooker atmosphere in education, say, in Sydney is higher than that, say, in Dubbo, but the kid in Dubbo might be equally as good and it is just that he has not had a chance to go through a school like Sydney Grammar School. So we do a degree of evening out to give a bit of proportional representation, if you like. So I am saying that there may be good reasons for the result you have described.

**Mr MOSSFIELD**—The question I want to ask relates to apprenticeships. What level of interest is shown by applicants wishing to undertake apprenticeships both in the civil side and in the armed forces side?

**Brig. O'Brien**—You want me to keep going on the military side of apprenticeships? We have three excellent adult training systems at the moment. We have gone away from what used to be called the apprentices school approach, and that was part of outside factors that hit the defence force. For example, you now cannot join the defence force until you have turned 17. We used to take people in the navy at 13 and apprenticeships at 15. In fact, even only a year ago we took people into the navy at 16. But, due to international pressures, the fact is that you cannot join the defence force now until you are 17. So we have changed our trade training to adult training systems. That shift has actually hurt us badly because we have three excellent schools, excellent training and great recognition, and I am having considerable difficulty getting enough applicants to go.

**Mr BROUGH**—What are the pressures that have come up?

**Brig. O'Brien**—The pressures I think came out in Rod's opening statement, and Claude mentioned them too. The fact is that we have moved up to 17. You would know better than I do that with the higher proportions of youth who go on with their education at school means that anyone who goes on now and does year 12—this is the parents' aspirations for them; we know that the parents are one of the biggest influencing groups, and I do a lot of targeting to parents as well—is to go on to university. Simply, if you do year 12, you do not want to join the army, navy and air force as a private. It is just a fact of life.

It is outside influences. In many ways, the sort of community norm which has seen Australians become better educated has actually meant that it has deprived me of a source of recruits. With senior warrant officers in the army—the bread and butter, the sole of the organisation—I used to do promotion boards for taking them to officer ranks, and they all said that as a 16-year-old they joined the army, got training and it was the best thing they ever did—it made them. Those people today who have the ability they had now go on to year 12 and do not consider us as a career.

**Mr BARRESI**—One of the policies that the government has announced recently, through Dr David Kemp, is a schools to work program—completing a couple of days a week in the school system and also perhaps doing an apprenticeship out there so that you actually catch those kids before the age of 17. Is there a place for the defence forces to be part of that, or is it just logistically too difficult?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I suspect it is the latter. We really are struggling at the moment to get those people. I have tried everything in the last 12 months. A number of pilot schemes have been conducted. I have conducted a scheme with Wollongong University, with Wollongong TAFE, funded by DEET—now DEETYA—and we took in a trial group who in all other aspects would be suitable for joining the military but did not have the prerequisite maths to do trade training. The prerequisite maths is only year 10 mathematics. They provided for us a bridging course. We started off with 300 or 400 applicants, we picked 20. In the end, eight completed the course, and of them only two ended up joining. So it was an enormous effort from my recruiting organisation to get effectively two people. It is just too hard.

**Mrs ELSON**—In paragraph 16, you commented that in the next financial year the ADF will be taking in around 6,000 recruits. In what fields of occupation, or in what groups, will these entrants be employed? What proportion of this group do you expect to be between 15 and 24?

**Brig. O'Brien**—This is the break-up at the moment just between services for next year: navy, about 2,000; army, about 2,500; air force, about 1,500. That is a break-up by service. In terms of proportion of youth, whilst we are an equal opportunity employer, the fact is that the bulk of those people will be 17 to 25. We do get a proportion of people coming on the swing from a second job. In fact, the adult training scheme often will get 25-, 26-year-olds who have been out there and worked in Telstra—laying line, or whatever. I could not actually give you a hard figure, but I would have to say that my guess would be 85 per cent—in that area.

**Mrs ELSON**—What types of occupations will they be in?

**Brig. O'Brien**—The occupations are a complete range. In that 6,000, we require nearly 1,000 officers, and around 400 will go through ADFA. We offer a number of undergraduate scholarships, particularly in the fields that ADFA does not train, such as law, medicine and physiotherapy. We are also looking for top-ups of officers to join the ADFA graduates, and they typically come from two areas. One area is that of serving soldiers.

We have had a system which started in the First World War, where a high proportion of officers came from the ranks. All services still have the system to allow somebody who has not had educational opportunities to join the military as a private. If they do jolly well and are recommended by their CO for officer training, after three years they swing across. There are about 1,000 officers and 5,000 others. Of that 5,000, 400 to 500 would be tradesmen that we are looking to train, and the balance would be what we call the general enlistees. They would join a mustering from being an infantry private rifleman right through to being someone in the navy who operates signals and communications equipment.

**Mr BARRESI**—In your submission, you mentioned the use of work experience programs for each service. How extensive are these programs? How many young people are involved in the programs? More importantly, how effective do you rate the programs?

**Brig. O'Brien**—This is an area which clearly is worth investing in, in my view. The more work experience programs that we can be involved in, the better because of the point I made before about word of mouth communications. If a 15- or 16-year-old at school visits a defence base, is well looked after, sees meaningful employment and sees that it is for them, obviously they are going to join. Equally, if they are put in a corner peeling spuds or something like that, they will not join. So we see work experience programs as very important.

Last year the VCDF supported strongly an increase in our involvement in work experience. Work experience costs the employer in that, if you have busy people in a busy place who are trying to do a job, often they will not see the bigger picture that they need to take a 15-year-old for two weeks or a week and look after them. They see it as detracting from their main game. I think it is a penalty that we have to accept. Certainly we are trying to expand our programs at the moment.

It is not as easy as meets the eye, because of the period of time that the students are available and the access to bases. For example, there are no military bases in Dubbo and many country areas. So if someone wants to do work experience in Defence in Dubbo, they simply cannot do it. We do not have the ability to

send a vehicle out to pick them up to drive them to Holsworthy or Garden Island for example. That is a limiting factor. It is a logistic problem, but I am trying to do three things in that area. One is base visits rather than work experience. We would go to the schools and ask the schools careers teachers to nominate one male and one female from the school as representatives. We put them on a bus and take them to Kapooka, where they stay overnight and go through basic training. The idea of the payback is that they go back and pass on information to the school about what it is like.

We have found that to be quite effective. We have put about 10 bus loads of kids through that program in the last 12 months. Similarly, we bring kids across to ADFA in the same way. We are running a spring engineering school. In order to get elite youth to consider officer careers, we need to make sure that the Australian Defence Force Academy is seen to be elite, and it is. To that end, we discovered that in many of the so-called top schools the kids are chasing medicine and law rather than being an army, navy or air force officer.

In order to penetrate that, we have put on what we call a spring engineering school at ADFA. It is held in the September break, and we are taking 70 kids a year. We are rotating it between the schools so they can nominate one person who is expected to get a very high TER, who is interested in engineering and who, in the headmaster's opinion, would make a good army, air force or navy officer. We have run that the last two years, and it has been very successful.

**Mrs GASH**—Historically speaking, Defence has always been a career for young men. What is the ratio of young women as compared to the clerical positions?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I will have to get you the hard figures.

**Mr Neumann**—If I remember rightly, I think it is about 12½ per cent across the Australian Defence Force, but I can check that for you.

**Brig. O'Brien**—The total figure is about 13 per cent. About 80 per cent of the employment opportunities within the Defence Force are open to females. There is one factor which goes against it, and that is in the army infantry is not open to females, but infantry comprises a very high proportion of the army. In the areas where the targets are open targets, we get a very high proportion of female applicants today. For example, in the navy, where all officer targets in navy open, for the last two years the ADFA intake has approximated 50 per cent females.

**Mrs GASH**—That is good.

**Brig. O'Brien**—You find that at the moment the academy has a very high proportion of females. The officers of the future will be much more female dominated. That is not the case in the army because of the fact that there is an exemption on armour, artillery, infantry and engineers, and they are the bulk of the army. We have also commercialised a lot of the areas that females could have been employed.

**Mr Neumann**—In 1995-96 women accounted for 13.4 per cent of the permanent ADF population. In the reserves with training obligations it was 18.8 per cent. So there is quite a difference between the permanent

ADF population and the active reserves.

**Mr BROUGH**—I believe that you have a better chance of recruiting out of Queensland than you do out of other states; is that right?

**Brig. O'Brien**—Correct.

**Mr BROUGH**—Do you have quota systems per state?

**Brig. O'Brien**—No. It is a very complicated issue. Essentially, we go for an open target and we see who applies. When we were running the ready reserve scheme, which has now ceased, the ready reservists were predominantly based in Enoggera in Queensland, and the base of applicants were from Queensland. So a very high proportion of the ready reserve scheme came from Queensland. It made good commonsense.

With all other areas, such as officer entry, it is totally merit based. There are no quotas at all. However, for the small target areas, particularly in single musterings, it makes no sense to advertise nationally and then not have some allocation of targets nationally. If I was going to do that, I might as well say that I will get the women from Sydney, the men from Brisbane and the dental technicians from Adelaide. I cannot do that because it is not providing equal opportunity, so there is a compromise made between pure merit. Happily, in most cases the targets are such that we have not had to really fight the problem that much. Typically, if there is a single entry in the navy for seven signallers to go in the January intake, I might simply say there is to be one from each state. If they want eight, I might say one from each state and one more from the most popular state.

**Mr BROUGH**—With 1RTB Kapooka being cyclic, you do not keep the same numbers punching through it all the time. Say for argument's sake that in Queensland you have filled all the places and have taken up some slack from elsewhere and you have good recruits. Is there some method in which to utilise that, particularly if you are going through a static period or a downsizing?

**Brig. O'Brien**—In the recruiting ops room—which is really just me and a telephone—we monitor as an intake is approaching and we put out rough quotas per state for them to reach. If, for example, Tasmania rings in two weeks early and says, 'We're going to have trouble meeting that quota. We are probably going to be two short,' and if we already know that Queensland will probably have three or four too many, we quickly switch that quota across to Queensland and they pick up the slack. So we go in full. We want to fill the training capacity on each intake, but it is a juggling problem done on a day-to-day basis. We just be as fair as we can.

**Mr BROUGH**—With literacy, you said five to seven per cent of your applicants do not meet your basic literacy. That is the experience. We have already taken evidence in other parts of the country that it has been over 20 per cent. What level of entry do you need? Is that failure rate higher in the under aged groups or is there some specific age group in which it varies?

**Brig. O'Brien**—One of the difficulties we have—and it is something we are handling at the moment—is that in the past the Defence Force typically did not set educational standards. We just relied on our

numeracy and literacy tests as a way of doing it. The drawback of that approach—and I am in the process now of essentially bringing education standards in—is that, again, the influence of groups such as mums and dads will say, ‘The quota for this is very small. You will have to get a TER of 99.’ They will then push young Johnny to go in that direction.

If they hear the army has no educational standard on entry, clearly we are going to draw from that part of the community who do not have high aspirations. So, although numeracy and literacy tests for, say, army entry—and they are different for the three services at the moment; I am in the process of trying to make them all the same—are typically supposed to reject about nine per cent, I understand, of the Australian community as a norm, we might find on a particular test day for army that 60 per cent of the kids who apply fail. In fact, for the trade training test resulting in one city—I will not name the particular town—which requires a higher level of maths numeracy, we are finding at the moment that almost 70 per cent of applicants are failing.

**Mr BROUGH**—Are you doing your testing before or after the medicals? Do they have to get through the numeracy and literacy and then do the medical, or is it vice versa?

**Brig. O’Brien**—No, it is cheaper to do the numeracy testing first.

**Mr BROUGH**—So everybody does those tests?

**Brig. O’Brien**—Indeed. If I could get army, navy and air force to have the same numeracy and literacy test, but interpret the results differently—and I am working on that at the present moment—it would be possible to place that screening test further out into the field, into our career reference centres. Applicants could then come in and say, ‘I would like to join the army. I would like to be a pilot.’ They would say, ‘Stop. Relax a little bit and do the test.’ We could then say, ‘You are suitable for this entry, that entry, or what have you, and we have vacancies in these ones. Which one would you like to apply for?’ That would actually produce considerable savings in my process, although it does not affect you. The other angle is that we may need to raise our educational standards, as they have done in the United States where you need your high school diploma to join the Defence Force.

**Mr BROUGH**—Finally, how does it go? Do you start with your aptitude test? Is it aptitude and then psyche tests?

**Brig. O’Brien**—The aptitude tests are administered by the psych organisation. Typically, at the moment, having done some preliminary screening questions—they are not no-go ones—we simply point out the medical conditions that we require and the educational standards. We let people know that they will be joining a disciplined organisation, that they will have to move away from home.

Unlike your sort of door-to-door salesmen, we actually require the applicants to show motivation by coming back. So, at the first point of contact to us, we simply give them brochures and information and a pro forma to fill in, which we scan in with the basic questions on it. We then invite them to come back in a couple of weeks for an interview to discuss a career in more detail. So, typically, about half do not come back.

The ones who then come back have saved us wasting resources and are obviously keener. At that point,

when they come back for that interview, we counsel them. First of all, we put them on the careers explorer computer program so they can work out which area they are interested in.

Secondly, we have made a series of eight- to 10-minute videos on every mustering and career in army, navy and air force. They can sit and watch those. Often the mums come with them. We invite the mums in. We give the pair of them headsets so they can work out which area they are interested in. If that is all okay, we then bring them back into the centre for testing, which is done regionally at a state basis.

On the test day, which I just described, they are brought in and given a briefing. They start off with their aptitude test. Clearly, if they fail the aptitude test, they are immediately counselled and they go home. If they are okay with the aptitude test, they do a battery of tests which check out their sort of psychological propensity to be in the military. Again, we are just trying to get normal people. We are trying to screen out people from the extremes. They have a chat to the psychologist. They then go and do their medical, which costs more money, so that is why we are screening down.

The results from the psyche test, the aptitude test and the doctor go to my enlistment officer, who then interviews them. He has the decision to enlist them or to not enlist them. Typically, though, if it is a national merit system, he will say, 'You're recommended. You meet all of our requirements. You are above the cut-off line,' but of course it depends on competition throughout Australia for the spaces.

They go away and two things can then happen. One is that the doctors may have discovered they are temporarily medically unfit for one or a range of things that needs further testing. Those tests are arranged, if it is worth while. At the same time, we simultaneously do police checks and security checks.

**Mrs GASH**—Brigadier, the failure rate of the literacy tests seem fairly low compared to other organisations. For example, 23 per cent of applicants between the ages of 16 and 24 failed aptitude tests conducted by the CES for Holdens. The different nature of the test may account for the difference in results, but are there possibly other issues?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I personally do not have the data on how many people we actually tested and failed. That is held by the psychology organisation, which, I may add, I administer but do not own. In fact, they are behind locked doors; they do not show me their data. I would have to take that on notice to get you the figures. I could only give you my conjecture, I guess.

**Mrs GASH**—Roughly, can you estimate without having to be too detailed?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I would think that our literacy standards have not changed over the years. It may well be that we have not kept pace with the rise in literacy with education throughout the organisation. Our psyches tell me that the tests are the norm and, on average, each year the total pass rate is actually improving. As I understand it, it is going up by half a per cent every year in our tests, but I rather suspect that our literacy tests for general entry are lower than the sorts of tests you are describing.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Brigadier, could you forward that information to the committee?



**Brig. O'Brien**—Yes.

**Mr MAREK**—With reference to the education system in this country today—in particular numeracy, literacy competency and those sorts of things—have you recorded any trends or patterns in the educational skills and competencies of applicants during the last 20 years? For example, is the quality of applicants better or worse today than it was 20 years ago?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I do not have that data personally.

**Mr MAREK**—Would you consider that the current education system may in some ways be failing our students of today compared to years past?

**Brig. O'Brien**—As I said before, kids are staying at school longer. Therefore, they are less likely to join the military. That is the effect on me. The target audience that I have has actually diminished dramatically.

**Mr MAREK**—So you would consider that it is appearing to be of some benefit for students to stay until grades 11 and 12? Have you found that students might be just staying there to fill in time because they cannot get employment and the real case is that some of the aptitude skills, literacy and numeracy of grade 10 people may be just as good as somebody who fudged their way through to grade 12?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I alluded to this before. What happened in the past was that for our normal entry we had no educational cut-off, for our trade entry it was year 10, and for officer entry it was year 12. That worked fine when the bulk of kids left school at year 10. So the kids who left school at year 10 who had got their year 10 maths quite clearly had the capacity to go on and do their trade training.

I think that what is happening now is that the outside pressures from the mums and dads—I am certainly one myself—is to go on to year 12. Once you make that shift in your attitude towards that, the chances of you going back and accepting a level of employment that requires a lower educational standard are low. The kids who are leaving at year 10 now are the ones who probably do not have the mental capacity to do the maths that we need. So that is why they are failing at a high rate. We now probably need to change our trade entrance to up to year 11, I would say.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—On a question about application levels, and broadly on the question of the number of applications you get: are there any specific comments you would like to make about the number of suitable applications you receive versus the number of positions that are available? I am trying to get at the question: are we in a situation where it is a fact that positions are not being filled, or is it that you believe that, for recruitment, you can fill those positions with better, more suitable applicants?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I will give you the statistics first and talk on it later. In 1995-96, we had 104,000 inquiries, which resulted in 22,800 formal applications. Of those, we interviewed 19,700, and we enlisted 5,300 into the permanent forces. There is also ready reserve and general reserve on top of that as well, but they are the key ones that you are chasing. Looking at that, about only a quarter of people who ring us and give us their name and address actually get to the stage of filling in the application form, getting their birth certificate

and all the rest of the stuff together—which is a fair bit of work to do. Of those, only a quarter actually get selected.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—That is the available positions that there are; it is not a question of the position whereby you have another 100 positions but you do not have suitable applicants for them?

**Brig. O'Brien**—No, unfortunately there is a difference between that. In some areas, say, pilots, we would get 100 applicants for every position we have got. We do not do any advertising. But in other areas, typically in the last 12 months, just going to sea positions—a stoker in the navy; those areas—we have actually gone in short. In fact, we went in last year with about 400 positions unfilled.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Four hundred unfilled across areas such as stokers on ships; what else?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I will come down, starting off with doctors—22.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—There are plenty of young ones about at the moment.

**Brig. O'Brien**—But they are not joining the defence force. It is an area of great concern to us and the defence medical system that simply no qualified doctors apply to join the defence force. The only doctors we get at all are ones that we get for undergrad. scholarships, and we are currently getting only about five of them a year. I currently have 22 vacancies. So doctors is one deficient area. But, essentially, the remaining numbers, the great bulk of them, were for the technical trade areas of navy—marine technicians, electronic tradesmen, computer technicians—simply those areas where the kids who have the capacity to pass our tests and do the training are not applying.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Is it your understanding, in terms of the labour market, that the kids who have those skills are not applying because they have other options?

**Brig. O'Brien**—Yes, because they are going on to year 12 and aim to become a graduate.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Would you be looking to pick them up at year 10, then, is that what you are talking about?

**Brig. O'Brien**—At the moment, educationally we say the standard is year 10. But, typically, the kids who leave school in year 10 are failing our tests.

**Mr MAREK**—That reaffirms what I was looking for from you before about the education system in this country. Years ago grade 10 was sufficient, but now it is not.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—Years ago we would not be employing computer technicians.

**Brig. O'Brien**—If you left school at year 10 with a good maths mark, a good trade to have was computer technician. Now the good kids who do well at year 10 are going on to year 12 and they do not want to be computer technicians they want to be computer engineers.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—What you are really saying is that the kids who are looking for employment at year 10 now are not the ones you wanted before because they were—

**Brig. O'Brien**—They were the ones before when 60 or 70 per cent of kids were leaving school at year 10.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—What I am saying is that the year 10s you want no longer leave at year 10. There is always a percentage who leave at year 10. They are not the ones you would be looking to pick up for those positions because they were never capable of that.

**Brig. O'Brien**—Correct.

**Mr GRIFFIN**—You have got a pretty good education system within the defence forces where you take people through junior and senior or whatever we call it these days. Are you promoting that when you are in schools? Are you saying, 'When you come to us this is not the end of your education. You can actually be paid while you complete your education should you require it further down the track?'

**Brig. O'Brien**—We underpin all of our communications with a rational basis. We say, 'We will give you a good job and we will give you good training.' We have gone to considerable effort in the last few years to make sure all our training is accredited. The accreditation program is still rolling. It is not all accredited at the moment, but it is getting very close. We do communicate that. The trouble is that those messages there are very rational ones. Our survey data indicates that pay and conditions, a long-term job and superannuation schemes are not the things that are in the forefront of the minds of today's youth. Our youth surveys indicate that other issues are around.

A consultancy company designed our new communications based on the youth of the 1990s. They tried to contrast a child of the 1960s with a child of 1990s. They said with the kid of the 1960s, the son or daughter of the baby boomer, that the ethic was, 'Son, get out there and make sacrifices and get yourself a job. In time you will own your own home and leisure time will come in due course. You will retire and live happily ever after. You will tour Australia or whatever.'

They contrast that with the youth of the 1990s where, in their view, many of the things that the 1960s' youth were prepared to postpone are an attraction today. I would no more have left year 12 and gone to schoolies and gone to Europe for a year than jump over the moon. Today, typically mum and dad send them to Bali. The attraction of joining the navy and seeing the world is not there. You can go to Bali for \$800. You do not have to join the navy for seven years.

There has been an attitudinal change that very much impacted upon us. That is why we were failing with our communications. We were communicating at the rational level and they were not listening to that. Our new caption is 'Not just a job'. That is because joining the Defence Force is not just a job. You are not going to sit behind a desk. You are going to travel, you are going to have adventure and you are going to have excitement. All the rational underpinning is there. It is not a nine to five job. We do not want nine to five people. Since the start of this financial year we are filling all our targets across all services except for doctors.

**CHAIR**—That sounds fascinating. Could we have a copy of that? Nobody thought to offer us an analysis like that.

**Brig. O'Brien**—I think they drew on the generation X study from America. A book was written on generation X which describes the 1990s kid in America and their change in attitudes. It is fascinating.

**CHAIR**—It would be.

**Brig. O'Brien**—They are basically saying that 1990s kid is not 1960s kid.

**Mr MOSSFIELD**—We are looking at the armed services side of it. Can you give us some information on the civilian side relating to apprentices, the educational level and the trades you are looking at?

**Mr Neumann**—I said before that the number of positions regarded as lower level positions have decreased substantially.

**Mr MOSSFIELD**—Would you see trades as being lower level?

**Mr Neumann**—If you are talking about general service officers, such as storepersons, because it is being tested for the commercial support program, a lot of that is now being contracted out to private industry. To answer your specific question about apprentices, I just had a quick look in this book, and for 1994-95 we only had 12 that were categorised as apprentices on the civilian side, and they were all in the navy program. There was one apprentice electrical tradesman; an apprentice carpenter; an apprentice electrical, third year; four apprentice electronic, first, second and third year; and, five apprentice mechanical. That is not many.

In our submission we have gone through the cadetships and the undergraduate administrative assistants program. If you look at page 7 of our submission, you will see that they tend not to be at the lower end of the youth level. If you look at the PAT program, 69 were permanent and 19 were temporary, but only 5 per cent were aged under 18. So it depends where you are looking in the youth group. But clearly most of them are older. Only about 55 per cent of graduates were under the age of 25. We are finding that we are getting people who are older, who have work experience, and also who are better qualified.

**Mr MOSSFIELD**—Is there still a fairly large defence establishment at Garden Island?

**Mr Neumann**—It is Australian Defence Industries now.

**Mr BROUGH**—We all know it was so wonderfully successful with the 'appy' school. You have had to move away from that. Are you going to move back to it? It seems to me that you cannot get them, and they are badly needed. I know it was incredibly hard to get into—

**Mr Neumann**—Unfortunately, the outside pressures on the Defence Force—

**Mr BROUGH**—I do not think we got to that before. You said that there is some international pressure that we cannot have people in the defence forces at 15 years of age.

**Mr Neumann**—I think if you look at it more globally, there is pressure now—as Kevin has already indicated—to go to university. I would not like to say that that is the be all and end all, but I think there is a lot of pressure now for people to go on and get a tertiary education. You are drawing in off the pool of people who would formerly have left maybe at year 10. Certainly in the 1930s they would not have thought of going on to university, because very few people did. There is pressure for people to go and do more and more education and more and more training. When we set a test—it does not matter whether it is a military test or a civilian education test—we find we are getting people who already have quite a lot of life experience, if you like. They are now in their 30s, whereas before they would have been 18, 19 or 20. We are finding now—even at the bottom end of the clerical stream—that we are getting people with degrees. In some cases we are getting people with two degrees and, in some cases, with honours degrees.

**Mr BROUGH**—You have no problems recruiting for apprentices; is that correct?

**Brig. O'Brien**—Correct.

**Mr BROUGH**—And then you changed the system so that you had to be 17 and 18, and suddenly you had a problem?

**Brig. O'Brien**—Yes.

**Mr BROUGH**—The argument you have just given me would suggest to me that you were having a problem before, so therefore you had to change the criteria. So either I am missing the point here altogether or I am just not with you as to what these international pressures are which are causing you to go to a higher age group.

**Brig. O'Brien**—It is quite clear that there is an international pressure. We are signatory—I am not aware of the name of it—to something that says that you cannot have people in military who are under the age of 17. In fact, they want us to go to 18.

**Mr BROUGH**—If you did not have that pressure, would you go back to recruiting 15-year-olds?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I do not know if we would now. I think what Claude says is probably right. The solution now is to move up the educational cut-off. One of the reasons we are doing a lot better with it at the moment is that I have changed the direction of my communications to people in service—so people who have joined, serving as a private somewhere. We are actually going out now and seeking them out and saying, 'Do something better for yourself. We'll give you adult trade training.' The ones that we are pulling out and going down for training at the moment are passing it at a 99 per cent rate—almost 100 per cent success.

**Mr MAREK**—Just a quick statement in line with what Mal was saying. If you talk to a lot of students and parents, they all say, 'Get into the army or get into the armed forces while you're young. Get through a career and then you will have something for when you turn 25, 28 or whatever.' Doesn't this really in fly in the face of what a lot of people are really thinking if they cannot get in until they are 17 or 18? That is what Mal was really getting at.

**Brig. O'Brien**—Although we have 100,000 inquiries, we are not being flooded with applicants. For an organisation that had 6,000 vacancies, 100,000 inquiries is not really a lot. Coles-Myer, who advertise for a casual position or something or other, will get hundreds of people queuing up, and we are very severe.

**Mr MAREK**—You do not think students are being a bit delusional?

**Brig. O'Brien**—In relation to the point I was making about the career equation before, the perceived disadvantages of the defence force looms very high in young people's minds today. They are going back to that youth attitude opinions I described before. The attitude is all about save the environment and hug the trees. All of those sorts of issues are counter to being in the military with guns. There is a very emotional thing against defence forces, whether you like it or not.

**Mr MAREK**—You do not think that students or young people are getting a bit delusional owing to the fact that they may say, 'I won't get in there, so what's the point of applying?'

**Brig. O'Brien**—No, I do not think so.

**Mrs GASH**—Once, if you could not achieve anywhere else, you would go and join the army and make a man of yourself.

**Mr MAREK**—And they do not want you.

**Mrs GASH**—Kids, when I ask why they—

**Brig. O'Brien**—Of course we do not want it to be the last choice. We want the quality Australian youth to join us just like everybody else.

**Mrs GASH**—Over the last five or six years I have had a fair few children go through school so I am always talking to parent groups. They perceived that you had to have a very high standard to go into the army, so they did not bother. In the last few years that is what they have been saying—that the standards are so high.

**Brig. O'Brien**—It is not actually true.

**Mrs GASH**—You may have had a lot of applicants at that time, but—

**Brig. O'Brien**—The fact is that, as we alluded to over the year before, the sort of kid who drops out of school early and who does not have self-discipline and who does not want to be achieving is not going to get into our organisation either. That is the problem.

**Mr MAREK**—Can't you give a student that? Can't you give a student discipline and, in some ways, skills and a degree of attitude?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I would suggest that we do do that, but the problem if not is it gets to open competition and you have five kids chasing three positions, say. If the school reports say, 'Johnny would have

done better if he'd put his assignments in on time; it's a shame he wasn't at class more often,' we are not going to take them on. It is a risk. It is going to cost a fortune to train the people.

**Mr BROUGH**—You said you had 17,000 or whatever it was that completed all the testing and of that you offered about 6,000 positions.

**Brig. O'Brien**—Yes.

**Mr BROUGH**—If you had 17,000 positions, would you have taken the 17,000? Or were there 10,000 that were suitable or 9,000 or what?

**Brig. O'Brien**—No, you could not make that deduction. In some areas such as pilots, as I said before, we might have 1,000 applicants. By the time you get through the testing and the final eyesight and hand-eye coordination testing, you are down to some hundreds.

**Mr BROUGH**—But just in general enlistments?

**Brig. O'Brien**—If we had more positions, we would take more people, yes.

**Mr BROUGH**—Say there was a 12,000 disparate figure, but there were a lot more that were capable, that passed everything in aptitude and were suitable?

**Brig. O'Brien**—This is another issue with the Department of Defence. Is the role of the ADF in peacetime to turn more people over? You could drive an argument as the American system does. The Americans—I just came back from a visit to see how they did it—typically accept about a 20 per cent turnover whereas we are aiming at about a 10 per cent turnover. The difference there is that we say it is very costly to have a higher turnover because we have spent all that money training the person and then they have left the system.

The Americans, on the other hand, accept that cost. They say that, although our training costs are high, it means that we are mobilised better for war; we are turning more people over. Of course, if people are leaving early, they are not going to become married and require married quarters, child-care centres, superannuation schemes, and so on and so forth. They actually argue that it is cheaper to turn them over at a higher rate than the other way around. So there are two ways of looking at the same picture.

**Mr Neumann**—Just to go back to the earlier point, do not forget that the Defence Force and the department are also becoming more sophisticated. So the level of training and education required is much higher. For example, there was a time when there were warships, stokers and a few gunnery officers and that was about it. But now you have got naval combat centres and data centres and all the rest of it, so we need computer people and electronic tradespeople. I think that starts to drive the difference between having apprenticeships in the traditional sense, if you like, and what is occurring now.

**CHAIR**—Brigadier, this committee visited both Wagga and Bonegilla in 1991-92, roughly. I recall that both organisations—we were looking at skills—told us that you got a very high proportion of your

apprenticeship intake off the farms. Has that all changed since then?

**Brig. O'Brien**—That, anecdotally, is the story. I actually do not know, to be honest. I could do an analysis by postcode and work it out. But we have not actually done it. We know that, anecdotally, the kid from the bush generally joins up more than the kid from the city. But in fact the most apparent malapportionment at the moment is that Queenslanders are tending to join up more than anybody else.

**CHAIR**—I understand, because my son went through part of it recently, that your applications for officer training are extremely high with respect to your final intake. Can you tell us roughly what percentage it is?

**Brig. O'Brien**—I have done the research on ADFA. Last year, of the—I think it was—178,000 year 12 students, only two per cent inquired about ADFA.

**CHAIR**—But of those who apply, you only take a tiny fraction?

**Brig. O'Brien**—We are only taking about 400 into ADFA a year. Typically we put about a thousand to board. So of the people who make it through the numeracy, literacy, the medical and every other aspect, only about a third to a half of them are then selected on leadership and other aspects. So it is still quite hard to get in. But from our point of view, that is what we want. We want to have the Australian Defence Force being led into the future by some of the best Australian youth. We do not want to have another disaster and have people being led blindly. It is a very serious business.

**CHAIR**—Exactly. If there are no further questions, I thank you very much for appearing before the committee. Please accept my apologies for being late; that was absolutely unavoidable.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Marek):

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

**CHAIR**—Thank you once again for appearing. I call the committee hearing to a close.

**Committee adjourned at 10.20 a.m.**