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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Vocational education in schools

WEDNESDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2003

SYDNEY

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Wednesday, 26 February 2003

Members: Mr Bartlett *(Chair)*, Mr Sawford *(Deputy Chair)*, Mr Albanese, Mr Farmer, Ms Gambaro, Mr Johnson, Mrs May, Mr Pearce, Ms Plibersek and Mr Sidebottom

Members in attendance: Mr Albanese, Mr Bartlett, Mr Farmer, Ms Plibersek and Mr Sawford

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The place of vocational education in schools, its growth and development and its effectiveness in preparing students for post-school options, with particular reference to:

- the range, structure, resourcing and delivery of vocational education programs in schools, including teacher training and the impact of vocational education on other programs;
- the differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern of industry acceptance of school-based programs;
- vocational education in new and emerging industries; and
- the accessibility and effectiveness of vocational education for indigenous students.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 9.06 a.m.

HEALEY, Mr William John, Chief Executive Officer, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation

SYRMAS, Mr Jim, Director, Policy, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education and training in schools. I remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. I will ask you to make some introductory comments and then we will go to questions.

Mr Healey—The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation is a Commonwealth corporation. It was established in January 2001 as an agent of government to promote reforms to the education and training system that assisted young people to make a more effective transition to adult life. We built on our predecessor, the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, which was established as an initiative of the previous government under Working Nation to promote structured workplace learning for students in their senior years of schooling, through a range of local partnerships.

Currently we have over 220 of these local partnerships around the country that support the coordination and provision of work placement. Last year that amounted to about 80,000 kids that have access to our local partnership support. Since the establishment of the ASTF, the Commonwealth has provided about $75 million to support locally based workplace learning opportunities for kids.

The role of ECEF was changed as a result of the *Footprints to the future* report that was undertaken by David Eldridge and his committee. David is a board member of our organisation. That report did foreshadow a broader role, because we were looking at not just workplace learning but a far more structured managed pathway process for young people. In many ways, the reforms and changes to ECEF mirror the reforms and changes to the whole evolution of this system that you are investigating. We have taken, in our submission, the broader concept of vocational education—which we have shown in the system contains a large number of different learning opportunities for kids—rather than a specific focus on VET, which is about industry based credentials under the AQF.

Prior to taking up my position last year—I have only been in the position one year—I was the CEO of an industry body and the chair of an ITAB, and had national responsibility for education and training. That was in the retail industry. I came to this job with a very strong understanding of the VET system. I started my working life as a teacher, so I have a very strong understanding of the schooling system. In many ways, I am in this position because I see that there is a need to question the way we do things with kids.

Our submission attempts to provide an analysis of what we mean by vocational education. Prior to joining us, Jim was involved in the MCEETYA transition to schools task force and developed a lot of the policy documents. To build on the submission, I would like to table a copy of the journal of the Australian College of Educators, which focused on vocational learning. That contains a lot of information that I think may add to the inquiry's work. From our point of view, I think we have made incredible inroads into transforming our schooling system to make it more responsive, but it is the end of the beginning rather the end in itself.

A lot of the questions are now about structural issues and how we question the systems and structures that we have in place that were part of an old education system and redefine those to take account of the new needs. That is already happening when you start to see the fusion between VET providers, such as TAFE, joining up with schools in terms of joint colleges. At the other end, you are starting to see collaborative approaches between higher ed and TAFE. One of the issues that I think will emerge from this will be some consideration of the new structural arrangements for our society to deal with the changing education system that kids need.

From our work, it is quite evident that the traditional idea of one size fits all for kids is no longer relevant, that kids are aware of and following multiple pathways and that what is happening on the ground perhaps is not reflected in some of the broad perceptions the community has. There is still a view that the high school certificate or senior certificate is primarily about tertiary entry. In reality, 70 per cent of kids are not going to follow that pathway and, in many cases, we know that those who do perhaps should not do it directly out of school.

A lot of the reforms mentioned in our submission that are happening on the ground have to be contextualised, because for a lot of people they are being presented in what may appear to be a random and ad hoc way, but they are a component of what is quite a transformational arrangement for our education and training system. One of the things that we can provide is some clarity as to how this stuff all fits together. Pivotal to that is the new concept of transition management for kids, and you would be aware that ministers have signed off on the Stepping Forward declaration that is looking at a pathway planning process for kids.

Our role as a change agent—and that is primarily why we were initially established—is to work with systems to implement that career in transition framework on the ground. Things are already happening, as you would have seen. There are significant reforms happening right around the country. We think that it is timely to have this inquiry: it is not about doing a few things differently; it is analysing how we prepare young people to live in a very different world.

To conclude, one of the major things we point out to people is that, when a young person who entered the schooling system this year leaves school in 13 years time, the labour market that they go into—apart from the structural arrangements of work at that time—in terms of sheer numbers and demographics, will be very similar to the labour market of the 1960s, yet a lot of our planning has been upon a large number of people and a limited amount of income earning opportunities.

As a nation, we have a very interesting challenge to make sure every kid fulfils their potential, because demographically we do not have a lot of them. There has been a focus on what is called a deficit reduction view of the world—and this is quite evident in Indigenous education—when we really should be looking at harnessing the potential of kids. That does require a far more targeted multipathway approach, and we think that a number of the pieces are in place. The commitment certainly is there from the Commonwealth and the state governments. The problem is how you push that forward on the ground. One of the ways we will be doing that is through this national network of local partnerships. One of the things that we do know is that this must be driven at the local level and it must be linked to broader youth and economic development of the local community. Education can no longer sit outside the square.

There are a number of things in our submission that I would flag that I think are particularly relevant. One is the quality issue for the VET component of this inquiry—the actual programs that lead to industry recognised credentials. We have raised the issue of employability skills, and we believe that, through the BCA-ACCI work, we have a framework of employability skills process, which we think needs to be universally accepted across the country rather than going back into individual institutions that are coming up with their own solutions and systems. We believe that we have to do more work to make young people realise that many of the multiple pathways that they are following that are legitimate are legitimate and that they do not feel that they are taking second-best options.

Finally, I want to raise the work that we have done in relation to Indigenous communities and the use of school based new apprenticeships as a means of keeping young people engaged in learning. We have had some success with that in Western Australia. We are piloting the idea of finding the work and meaningful activity, particularly in remote communities, and creating a school based new apprenticeship, and we have had some pretty good results. We have flagged discussions with ATSIC about utilising funds that would normally be allocated to CDEP to mobilise a more meaningful learning experience for kids. That concludes our opening remarks.

CHAIR—Bill, from the submissions so far and from talking to some of the witnesses yesterday, it seems that there are still really some significant problems in the area of the relationship between schools and industry. Those problems have a number of facets: industry's concerns with the qualifications of getting schools teachers, the lack of current industry currency and so on, and perhaps its lack of confidence in the students who are coming out. Particularly with schools, vis-a-vis TAFE trained students, in some areas there are problems in finding adequate placements for students, and there are problems of the opposite type in other areas: some industries cannot get enough students. Yesterday, representatives of the Australian Industry Group and the meat industry talked about problems in manufacturing—namely, in trying to get students interested. So there are a number of issues in terms of the relationship between schools, VET courses and industry. How significant do you see those being, and how do we address those sorts of issues?

Mr Healey—The issues are real issues, and we are in the process of finalising a partnership between the Australian Industry Group and a number of other industry associations in order to work with them to address this issue. First, it is evolution, and if you had said to people seven years ago that 40 per cent of kids starting their senior certificate in Australia would be doing a VET course, you would not have believed that it would have happened. The fact is, however, that 40 per cent of those kids did not do any workplace learning and, if you want to give an industry credentials, you have to ensure that, under the training package concept, the kids have capability and competence. In reality, you cannot be competent unless you apply those skills in a workplace setting.

It is timely to start to look at the learning opportunities and to try not to provide them as one option, which at the moment is a VET qualification that leads to industry recognition. The key to the formation of the ASTF was that kids learnt outside the classroom and in an applied learning context. We cannot lose sight of that, and we have to come up with several options for kids to learn beyond the walls of the classroom.

First, we have to sit down and not use the same term for what are quite often very different learning experiences. You cannot lose sight of the fact that, however, from our studies, which is

a survey of 13,000 kids, 85 per cent said that they had done a vocational course primarily because they think that it has credibility with industry. If you are going to promise that, you have to ensure that it delivers. As someone who has sat as an industry leader on boards of studies and has pushed that point, I think that the school system has to realise that it is not about just giving out pieces of paper, it is about giving out pieces of paper that have industry credibility.

CHAIR—How do they do that?

Mr Healey—There are two ways: first, you recognise that not all kids have to have a full industry certificate. For example, I can tell you that there are a number of trades that find it very difficult, when they have an AQF certificate III as a result of a four-year apprenticeship, seeing schools giving out certificate IIIs as a result of a two-year, two-unit subject. In a lot of cases, this is a debate about institutional learning as opposed to applied learning. The boards of studies have been heavily influenced by maintaining parity with the universities, and that is a major problem.

Secondly, a lot of kids do not necessarily need to get a full certificate, but they still need a learning experience which is outside the classroom and which provides tangible, vocational experience and recognition. That is why we are keen to see some formality in the employability skills. We believe that there are some issues in respect of a certificate I that gives a broad range of vocational learning experiences but does not deliberately go down a particular industry stream.

Thirdly, an understanding by all the players of their role is necessary. This is an evolving issue, and part of our deal with industry associations is to work with them so that they actively start to participate in the implementation of MCEETYA framework. There is just as much learning back into the organisation and into industry as there is out. Industry has to realise that this is not an issue where it is doing anyone a favour. We will be selling a message that this is critical to its own economic wellbeing—that if it does not start to look at career planning pathways that engage young people, it will not have a skilled work force.

The other way that this is achieved is by having legitimate local partnerships. You focus on the school recognising that it is a component of the community, and this is why a lot of this reform has to be driven at the local level. Education and training has to be seen as a component of a broader youth development strategy which, in turn, is linked to the economic and social development of its community. That is a lot easier in regional communities; it is a lot harder in urban areas, where community links are not as bounded by geography.

You are starting to see partnerships emerging—for example, the LLENs in Victoria. In our partnerships with industry associations, we would like to work with them to ensure that industry representation on those committees is an informed representation and that it is aware of the agenda. Ultimately, these local partnerships should be the community and the consumers asking schools and service providers to develop students who fit the needs of the community. I keep referring to the fact that this is evolutionary, but schools have to see themselves not as islands. Education learning which is not relevant to, firstly, the broader development of the community and, secondly, the broader development of the kid is not relevant.

The other area with respect to vocational learning that we have a brief to explore is the whole concept of what we call enterprise education—creating innovative and creative kids. We see that young people in general have an enormous potential to reinvigorate their community. We have come across some recent research which has shown that a lot of young people feel frozen out of the processes which can look at how they can revitalise their community. A lot of the old thinking in regional communities stifles their ability to be enterprising. We have just commissioned some work, in partnership with the Australian Foundation for Young Australians, in which we are looking at ways in which young people can have a part in creating a vision and implementing that for their kids.

Part of the agenda is to contextualise where we are at present. As I said, a lot of people are coming to this from different angles, seeing it from their perspective and not seeing it from a systemic level. One of the challenges over the next two to three years is to put it into context, and that is where the career in transition framework is a very valuable tool for us.

CHAIR—I am not sure that you have quite got to the nitty-gritty, in practical terms, of what I was after.

Mr Syrmas—The whole VET in Schools issue is that VET in Schools is the wrong name for what we are talking about, because it is VET that can occur in schools, in a workplace and in a TAFE institute. One of the issues is a quality and credibility issue at the moment that is out there in that whole arena. There is a perception from industry and, whether it is perceived or real, I think we have to deal with it because it is an issue that is happening. In terms of the VET in Schools area, we have to become more targeted and more strategic in the way it is delivered to meet the shortages that you talked about. That has been an issue for us.

CHAIR—But how do we do that?

Mr Syrmas—There is work currently being undertaken with ANTA to look at the whole issue of VET quality, including current coverage and how we can become more strategic. Riding on the back of that work, we will then do our own work in terms of how VET in Schools can become more strategic and meet skills shortages, how employers can become involved at the local level to look at their needs and so on. It has been recognised that we need to look at it.

Mr Healey—It is VET while at school, not VET in school. You have quite capable people sitting in TAFE colleges that can satisfy industry needs. I mentioned earlier a redefinition of structures. One of the issues with the reforms in Queensland is that the dollars follow the kid, so the learning may occur in a TAFE college. Part of the problem is that it has been perceived to be VET in Schools and has to be delivered by schoolteachers. We need to look at the structural arrangements. The successful programs have been where instructors that have industry credibility deliver the courses.

CHAIR—That is a key problem. One of the other submissions said that maybe we have gone the wrong way in moving away from the joint secondary schools/TAFE courses, where we had that expertise within TAFE.

Mr SAWFORD—Bill, in terms of VET, you said that we are at the beginning rather than the end. I would agree with that. I think we have wasted 25 years in VET, which is a bit sad. This is only the third day of public hearings, so we are at the really early stages, but I am getting a

confusing message in terms of the rationale of VET. I find it in the first page of your overview as well. People keep talking about diversity and multipathways, and you did that in your introduction, too. The New South Wales Department of Education and the people in Canberra said that you are on about 'integration of academic and vocational curriculum through models of general education'. I contend that we have done that for the last 25 years and it has been an unmitigated failure. I would have thought that we would have been looking at separation rather than integration. I would have thought we were looking at diversity rather than conformity. I am having difficulty with the rationale. I will come to the outcomes in a moment but, on the rationale, there is a confusing and contradictory message coming across. You cannot be diverse and integrated.

Mr Healey—Part of the issue is that you come up with a system which starts to individualise as much as possible the learning that a young person has in their development. One of the issues is about creating a system that supports young—

Mr SAWFORD—No, you are talking about outcomes. I want you to talk about the rationale. I will come to outcomes in a moment.

Mr Healey—In terms of diversity of options, part of the problem with integration is that at the moment you have a TAFE and vocational system which is different from a schooling system that has primarily been focused on generalist education. Your pathways have been not available in the same amount of time. You do your generalist education and then you move on to your vocational options. I see integration as providing a broader range of experience.

Mr SAWFORD—Now you are talking about structures. I do not want you to talk about structures or outcomes; I want you to talk about the rationale.

Mr Healey—What, of providing a broader—

Mr SAWFORD—Of VET in Schools. This is really what this inquiry is about.

Mr Healey—The rationale is to provide more relevant and meaningful learning opportunities for young people during their development period, up until 19 and even beyond. The rationale is that the current breadth of learning that is provided to young people has been insufficient, both in content and delivery mode, to keep the large number of young people who have remained engaged in learning productively occupied—to maximise the opportunity. That is the rationale.

Mr SAWFORD—I would have thought that is patently obvious. In Australia, New South Wales are regarded as perhaps being ahead of the pack as far as VET is concerned. I do not know whether that is an accurate statement or not, but I have a perception that they may be a bit ahead of the other states in terms of VET. Actually they admit it. Only a third of New South Wales students participate in accredited VET programs in the schools. Given that we have known for a long time that only a third of our secondary students go onto higher education, I would have thought that is a bit of a stark figure. I reckon we have known that for a long time. I am absolutely amazed at the admission that only a third of New South Wales students do an accredited VET course.

Mr Syrmas—You said that this inquiry is about VET in Schools. People were not sure if this inquiry was about specifically VET in Schools or the broader vocational education agenda.

Specifically, I think what we are coming to is that VET in Schools, as the sharp end of that industry accredited training, is not for all young people in secondary schools. Vocational learning, which is about the broader understanding of work culture and employability skills, perhaps is for 100 per cent of all—

Mr SAWFORD—You were saying multiple pathways. Maybe we need multiple structures. We went to Bradfield College yesterday. That is a one off. As an individual, I am surprised that that has not been duplicated in at least two or three other areas. I am quite surprised that the growth— the 20 senior colleges in New South Wales—has not been extended. I am amazed that we still call comprehensive high schools 'comprehensive', when they have not changed from the academic high schools they were 25 years ago. They did not change. We wiped out the technical schools. With most comprehensive high schools, we put the name in, but they are just academic high schools. For 25 years, we have destroyed VET in many ways, in the school context, and many of the people who were involved in VET in those days came from industry. They had short teacher courses and they had industry strengths, which is what industry has been telling us, isn't it, and you are saying the same thing.

Mr Healey—The reason the take-up in New South Wales is only 30 per cent is that industry based courses for the HSC have only been in place for a couple of years, and they are only in a narrow range of industries. The point you make about why Bradfield has not been extended is interesting, because we are getting kids disengaging from schooling. They might not be physically disengaging, but they are intellectually disengaging in those middle years of schooling. We have a real problem. In terms of industry credibility, one of the problems is that a piece of paper that does not reflect capability is of no relevance to industry. There has been an obsession with credentials as opposed to capability development.

You made the point about joint schools/TAFE programs. The issue in some cases is not about whether it is TAFE or school, but whether it is institutionally based or has an applied learning component. I do not think we want to go back to the days of technical highs and non-technical highs. I think you can have a range of options available to kids within a comprehensive network, if you use the broad range of resources that are out there to deliver the learning. That is one of the suggestions in the white paper in Queensland—that the school becomes, in effect, the organiser and the broker, but not necessarily the deliverer.

I was with a senior person from South-Western Senior College of TAFE yesterday and one of the things that struck me was that about 25 per cent of TAFE courses in New South Wales are generalist education courses, which were introduced initially as a second choice option. Of those courses out there, about 80 per cent of people doing them are under the age of 19. They might have been kids who had become disengaged and have come back, but in a lot of cases they are kids who have left the schooling system. You talk about structural integration. I do not think you can address this without looking at structure.

Mr SAWFORD—I agree. I do not think we have uniformity in our structure. We have a thing called a comprehensive high school that is not a comprehensive high school, and we all know that. We have been living a lie for 25 years in terms of the description of our public secondary schools. We have not acknowledged the reason that technical schools went by the by in the past. The honest answer is that many of the technical schools were doing very well but they were costing increasingly more money, because they were also, by competition, being forced to offer an academic stream. They were succeeding in both the academic and the vocational areas, and

the established high schools were the ones that were losing credibility in that period. Carmel's report established all that. People like to deny it, but it is in his report: it was the cost. It was nothing to do with second parity of esteem, or second vision that it was an inferior education; in fact, the reverse was occurring.

That may have been true when technical schools were set up initially, but they were doing extremely well. They were getting the enrolments, they were getting academic, because they were having both things, and they formed the trinity of what I think is a far superior school in that they certainly had vocational education, they had an academic stream and they also had extracurricular items, in terms of other quality programs, whether they be sport, drama, art, craft or whatever. They had all three going.

When you look at comprehensive high schools in this country, people involved will tell you that VET gets squeezed out of all the financial decisions in the school because they do not have the numbers; they are squeezed out of the credibility issue, unless they have a principal who goes against the mainstream and pushes vocational education. There are examples all around Australia of individuals—and they have been principals—who have gone against their departments, gone against the staff and, sometimes, gone against the community but looked after the kids in terms of trying to relate their futures and their work placements to a vocational end. Comprehensive high schools have never done that.

Mr Healey—One issue that has emerged from studies that we have seen is that, of course, the strength of vocational learning is, in effect, that they are normal adult learning techniques. We are seeing that, despite the take-up and success in a lot of schools, to traditional academic teachers it is still not teaching using some of the innovative teaching strategies. The issue is that this is the next iteration of that. One of the challenges is that it is not about focusing on VET or the academic curriculum; it is focusing on a learning program that will be fulfilling for a young kid and will develop a broad range of skills. One issue with the career in transition pathway framework is to start to acknowledge our service learning in sport, to see that learning happens in myriad places and to start to recognise that. Thirty per cent of our kids are doing part-time work; yet, when they leave school, there is absolutely no recognition of that learning in their senior certificate.

There was the sense that technical schools—and I say that a lot of good comprehensive schools still have it—had a connectedness with their kids and their community. They recognised that learning is much more holistic, and getting a kid ready to be capable to manage their life is the aim, rather than giving out a piece of paper. I think those schools are still doing that.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I conclude my remarks. It seems to me that, if you cannot get the rationale right, the structure is wrong no matter what you talk about in sets of outcomes. When I read through all these submissions, the outcomes that various groups in this country are putting forward to this committee are admirable. However, when I looked at them, I thought, 'What's the rationale for this? It's vague. It's contradictory. It's all over the place.' No-one has suggested the structures in which they work. They are almost saying that the existing structures will work. I might change my mind as we go through this inquiry, but I do not have any great faith in that.

Mr Healey—I do not think our submission says that at all. Our submission states that, rather than worrying about the processing, you focus on the kid. One of the suggestions of the Stepping Forward declaration is that you come up with a career planning pathway process that

focuses on the young person. There are issues about, for example, monitoring and tracking where a kid ends up, which we believe will be a major impetus in forcing supply schools and so on to be more responsive. In Queensland, you are starting to see recommendations, in relation to its senior certificate, that talk about schools being flexible enough to provide learning outside the walls of their institution.

Mr SAWFORD—I do not want to contradict you but, reading from your overview, the first section, 'Rationale', promotes integration; the second part supports structures; and the third part suggests processes but does not focus on the kids at all.

Mr ALBANESE—I was very familiar with ASTF—in part because it operated in my electorate pretty successfully. Is the transition from ASTF to ECEF just a name change?

Mr Healey—No. It is a broader charter that fell out of the *Footprints* report that looked at maintaining our local partnerships to support access to workplace learning opportunities. But we also have funding to support enterprise educational activities at a local level and to look at the broader issue of how to provide more effective career information and advice to young people. So it is a broader charter.

Mr ALBANESE—In terms of the enterprise, you mean that you are trying to draw a distinction between enterprise or industry based initiatives and local community initiatives.

Mr Healey—The local partnerships, initially, were about the provision of workplace learning to support school courses. We believe those partnerships should be performing a broader role and should be engaging industry with schools to look at a broader range of activities for kids.

Mr ALBANESE—ASTF was sometimes doing that as well, certainly in the inner west.

Mr Healey—They vary from area to area.

Mr ALBANESE—Yes, quite successfully, even to the point of local employers coming along to quite successful graduations, which is a really good way of involving the local community.

Mr Healey—That still occurs.

Mr ALBANESE—Were you on the committee for the Pathways report?

Mr Healey—No, I was not. David Eldridge is on our board.

Mr ALBANESE—Eldridge was the chair. He is on your board.

Mr Healey—Yes, and Ian Spicer and Geoff Spring, who are also on our board, were on that committee.

Mr ALBANESE—Perhaps that is something we could do, if we are in Melbourne. We could get David Eldridge along to talk about that report. It seems to me that we are very good at reinventing the wheel. They have done a report about vulnerable young people and giving them pathways. There was supposed to be a response in the last budget to that, and it was silent.

David Eldridge, from the Salvation Army, is someone who I think is pretty impressive, particularly looking at that vulnerable end of the market. You jogged my memory that that was something that certainly fits within our terms of reference.

As you are probably aware, I have taken on the shadow minister for training portfolio. It strikes me that—and I am interested in your comments from your perspective and experience—there is a lack of a national framework and, in terms of training, a lot of the qualities are left to the states. As Rod said, this is very much the beginning of the inquiry but already it appears that there are very different systems in operation, which reflects the fact we are a federation rather than a nation. One of the jobs this inquiry could do is to point towards more uniformity, if that were appropriate. How important is a national framework, do you think?

Mr Healey—Can I respond on the *Footprints* report. We have done a lot of work—and there are calls for certain funding for *Footprints*—and we believe that a lot of the recommendations in *Footprints* have already been put in place, and a lot of the capacity to implement the rest are already on the ground without additional funds. We think that, given a broader charter of looking at youth in a joined up way that does not only include education and training but also youth services, the money is there on the ground. It is about making linkages. I want to make that point. Secondly, this is why I want to separate vocational learning and VET.

If you are going to talk VET, which are industry based credentials built around training packages—and as someone who was chair of an ITAB who developed seven of them—I will make some comments about this. The whole principle of offering young people, while they are still in their senior years of schooling, the opportunity of an industry based credential is an admirable feat. The quality issues you are finding in terms of whether those qualifications have currency with industry really depend upon the whole nature of the Australian recognition framework. This is not an issue exclusively for schools; it is an issue for the VET quality system, in part. As someone who was responsible for one of the first of the eight training packages to go up to the national training quality council at the time—and we sought to have an industry based influence over the registered training organisations that gave packages out—we were told in no uncertain terms that the accreditation of training organisations was a responsibility of the states and the Australian recognition framework that was around at the time would solve the problems.

If you look at the history of the implementation of it, there have been a great deal of strengths and there have been some failings. A lot of those failings have been because of a lack, in many cases, in the state systems to adequately police their registered training organisations. That is now being addressed by the introduction of a new quality framework, the national AQTF, which is an agreement on a national basis for the states to be far more vigorous in the registered training organisations which deliver credentials.

It provides problems for schools, if they are going to be a registered training organisation and give out their own credential, because they have to comply with the quality standards that go with it. Schools are somewhat frustrated by that. For example, one of the successes of Queensland was that they auspiced all their schools as RTOs. One of the things that we need to do in the next iteration of these reforms is that schools have to realise that the piece of paper they give has to have industry credibility. If they cannot do that, being an RTO, they have to have a partnership with a TAFE, but it is in the context of a senior certificate which integrates

generalist and vocational education. That is the issue: it is the integration of the learning opportunities into a single certificate.

The quality issues you are talking about are much broader. A lot of it goes to a supplier driven system. I keep coming back to where institutional based learning does not provide the requisite workplace experience to give true competence. That is not just in schools; that is in TAFE systems as well.

CHAIR—So the AQTF system does not really resolve the problem. If schools are giving out credentials, as you say, that industry does not accept or recognise on a par—

Mr Syrmas—That is one of the issues and why we ask: is it a credibility issue or is it a quality issue? Schools will say, 'Under our arrangements we have followed all the quality guidelines.' But the issue for industry is what Bill said earlier.

CHAIR—How do we resolve that, if they have the same training framework and they go through all the same hoops and everything else, but still their qualifications are not recognised?

Mr Healey—What you have now is the implementation of the new Australian Quality Training Framework. What you are seeing is that a school, if it does satisfy the requirements, will have the requisite expertise and credibility. The problem has resulted from the patchy application of the old Australian recognition framework. In terms of VET in Schools you have another problem, which is where the schools will be able to go through the process of compliance. The process is just being implemented. If every school satisfies the AQTF, many of the quality issues will be resolved. The question is whether a school needs to go through that process when they have a perfectly good TAFE college down the road. They are the structural issues we are dealing with.

Mr Syrmas—The other issue is that the AQTF might not require schools or schoolchildren to do a work placement because it was not designated in the training package. One of the issues we have, if it is an issue to do with work placement—which a lot of employers are saying is the issue with VET in Schools—is that the training packages need to be looked at and say, 'If this is a VET in Schools you need this amount of work placement in there.' That is an issue.

Mr Healey—One of the things I did suggest in my past life is that, as part of the training packages review process, there should be a school based delivery component providing greater guidance. There has been uncertainty as to what they had to do because they are competency based. There is an issue here with the new quality standards for RTOs, but a lot of the concern about credentials, wherever they come from, will be addressed. The issue will be whether schools will have the capacity to comply with the new standards and whether they should comply.

Mr Syrmas—Or should, yes.

CHAIR—I hope you are right.

Mr Healey—If they are going to issue an industry based credential they should be expected to comply. I made this point in my old days: we do not want second-class credentials. The whole credibility of this is that it has got industry currency wherever it is being achieved.

Ms PLIBERSEK—What you seem to be saying, and we saw it from some of our evidence yesterday, is that a lot of people call anything that is not academic learning 'vocational learning'. But it is not all vocational learning; some of it is just applied learning. It is learning to do practical things that will serve you well once you are in the workplace, but they are not specific competencies that you need; it is not how to use a particular piece of machinery.

Mr Syrmas—Exactly.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Isn't there a wider question about these types of practical learning? Bill, you earlier called it normal adult learning techniques. Why are they not integrated more into other subjects in schools? You also have a list, on page 68 of your submission, for Indigenous students. You need to meet the diverse range of Indigenous student learning needs. You need to ensure continuing participation and engagement in education and training. You need to develop administrative arrangements, establish good functional levels of literacy and numeracy and operate holistically by addressing health, juvenile justice, welfare and housing issues. That is true of any type of education you are seeking to provide to Indigenous students, is it not? That is not about vocational education. That is about a wider problem in our school system where we are not addressing the needs of kids who are not particularly focused on getting into university.

It is the point Rod made earlier as well. You have a third of kids going on to vocational education and a third of kids going into university. But for the third of kids who want more practical learning in the middle, but do not necessarily want to become a fitter and turner and start to do that when they are in high school, is there something lacking for them?

Mr Syrmas—That is the broad vocational learning we talked about.

Ms PLIBERSEK—The broad vocational, that is right.

Mr Healey—It is evident that young people have to remain engaged in active learning for 12 or 13 years. We have talked about 12 years of schooling, but it is actually engaged in meaningful learning.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes.

Mr Healey—The second thing is that the career and transition framework we have talked about is about a pathway management process for kids which is supported by education, but also is supported by other factors. It may not be in the submission, but we are moving down a process where we focus on the young person and not the processes that impact upon them. It is quite evident that kids are disengaging because the way they are learning is not supportive of their needs.

With Indigenous kids, for example, we know with middle schooling in general, if kids are in combined classes which have one or two teachers—similar to primary school, where the teacher focuses on the development of the individual rather than the teaching of a subject—their engagement is much better. There are issues about that. The question for many of the things you are talking about is: where does the learning, the vocational learning and general schooling fit into the broader youth development needs of the kid? It is an important component. In support of schools, they cannot bear the whole brunt of it either. The community, particularly at the local level, increasingly will have to take a more active part. That is what we are advocating.

Ms PLIBERSEK—What sort of more active part?

Mr Healey—In terms of the local partnerships, in terms of providing workplace opportunities for kids, as we mentioned before; in terms of going in and being mentors and coaches; in terms of providing guidance about enterprise education and things like financial literacy. We have a major issue in our community about how young people manage wealth. We have seen that recently with a report on financial planners. With the whole skill set of what it means to be a capable self-managing adult, we need to go back to first principles and see whether we can develop it in a more effective way. There is the role of teachers: are they teachers of a subject or developers of people? Good teachers have always been developers of people. The issue is not so much knocking things down and rebuilding them, but refocussing. It is also recognising that the pieces are there, but you have to look at it in a different way. That is one of the things we wanted to get across today.

The reforms, I think, have been quite stunning. There is still a long way to go, but the elements are there. The career in transition framework and the Stepping Forward declaration provide scope for that. What I would say about Stepping Forward is that it is not just about at risk kids; it should be about all kids. Going forward, given the demographic issue that I mentioned early, we do not have a lot of kids. We cannot afford to have young Australians not fulfilling their potential, because we need them. That does require a more tailored learning process at the local level, and good schools are doing that.

CHAIR—If we had more effective workplace learning happening in schools, do you think there would be less demand by students to get into two-unit VET courses? I was thinking in terms of the Australian Industry Group submission, saying that there is a much greater need for more generic workplace skills.

Mr Syrmas—I think that is what we said earlier, in terms of VET in Schools being the sharp end of the stick. The full certificate program is not for all kids, but the broad vocational learning is for all our kids.

CHAIR—Do you think, because that broad vocational learning has not been perhaps as relevant as it could have been, some kids have gone the other way?

Mr Syrmas—Yes.

Mr Healey—I think that everyone wanted to have the ability to get a full industry credential, and we are now at a point where we are working back. We are going to find there are several options. One of the options might be through the judicious use of school based new apprenticeships, where a kid can stay on in years 11 and 12 and do the first year of his or her motor mechanics course and still get a senior certificate, similar to the Dual system in Germany. The next tier might be that they do a generalist program that leads to some level of competence—recognition of units of competence—and provides open opportunities. Another tier might be that they do a broad range of experiences that gives them recognition under the employability skills. Another thing might be that you give credibility to science by taking very smart chemistry kids and plonking them in a business environment to learn that, when they get their science degrees, they have to take that knowledge and generate some innovative ideas. That is using workplace learning to add value to traditional academic learning.

The point we are making is that, at the end of the day, you need a system that is responsive to the needs of kids. We think that the career in transition framework provides the opportunity to do that, but ultimately the delivery mechanism requires very strong local community partnerships to do it. It cannot sit on the schools' heads and, conversely, the schools have to be open ended enough to become part of the broader community.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your time and your submission.

Mr Healey—As I said, I am very happy to provide you with access to our local partnership and some of the initiatives that we are offering, if you think that would be valuable. We think we have a good idea of what is working on the ground.

CHAIR—That would be helpful.

[10.04 a.m.]

CORNFORD, Dr Ian Robert (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I welcome Dr Cornford. I remind you that the proceedings here are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. I invite you to make some introductory comments, and then we will throw it open to questions.

Dr Cornford—In presenting my submission, I included a couple of fairly recent articles that I had written across a variety of themes which relate to this particular set of issues you are examining. It was my intention that they serve as some sort of basis for reading whatever I might present here. Last night, in preparation for this, I went back and re-read what I considered to be probably one of my more interesting pieces of writing—the revolution of VET in Schools article in the *Australian Journal of Education*—and, after I had read that, I then moved to yet again re-read the latest edition of *Unicorn*. What struck me very forcefully was that there was a great deal of detail in this which demonstrated very considerably the extent of the revolution of vocationalising the secondary curriculum. It is very easy to say that you direct the secondary curriculum in a more practical direction, but that of course means that you are in fact overturning what had become in most states a very strongly entrenched academic curriculum.

That has all sorts of major ramifications, specifically in terms of what you provide with your VET courses in schools and whether it is going to have credibility. You need to consider where that leads, what sorts of pathways might be involved, but above all, in relation to that credibility, you need to consider the issue of quality of education. If you are attempting a major curriculum revolution, which is what is really occurring, you need to look at how you provide the mechanisms to support the changes that are going to have to take place to carry the new ideas forward. In essence, that involves a great deal of change in terms of preparation of new teachers and, very specifically, in-service education for existing teachers. It is not popular in an economic rationalist climate, but, quite simply, if you want a quality output you are going to have to spend money on these things. You are going to have to ensure that the policy frameworks that you set in place in the VET area generally are supportive of your initiatives and not likely to hinder the process. I could go on for a long time, but I will stop there.

CHAIR—Thank you. I notice in your submission you have a number of times referred to the issue of needing to use TAFE teachers more effectively. I suppose that relates to what you have just said about the resourcing issue. You make the point that, because of timetabling and structural problems, schools, rather than going further down the path of the Joint Secondary Schools TAFE Program courses, opted to take on the teaching of VET themselves. Do you think that is a mistake? Do you think that, in attempting to use TAFE resources, TAFE teaches more effectively, and we ought to be trying to encourage that and discourage schools from taking on so much of that themselves?

Dr Cornford—Yes, and I think the research suggests that the students themselves—and possibly even the community itself—do not think that most schoolteachers have a great deal of credibility in this area. I am an ex-schoolteacher; I have a great deal of admiration for what schoolteachers do. But the painful reality is that many schoolteachers go from school to university or training college and straight back to school. That is not a great preparation for

training people in a whole range of broad work activities. I am not denying that what teachers do is valuable. Particularly in the basic skills and special knowledge areas, it is superb. But in terms of credibility and teaching kids about the real world of work, it is totally different from the world of schooling.

CHAIR—In terms of credibility and resourcing, there should be a greater use of TAFE rather than further expansion of VET in Schools?

Dr Cornford—Yes. As I see it, it would be more difficult to try and bring secondary teachers up to an industrial standard of teaching, because that requires trade qualifications and probably three to five years industrial experience. These are the normal prerequisites for TAFE teachers to come into the system. That would be a very long, painful and expensive process. What we have is a magnificent resource in terms of the TAFE system, although the government policies at various stages have not always seen fit to recognise the importance of TAFE in the Australian community. It is there as a substantial resource. It is a resource, however, that I believe is under a great deal of stress. I do not think it is pressing it too far to say that it is also in crisis because of underresourcing and a whole range of issues.

Mr ALBANESE—Given the failure of funding to keep pace with demand in TAFE and given specific changes such as the Youth Allowance—changes which have meant that more and more young people are going into TAFE not necessarily out of choice but because they have to financially—wouldn't what you are suggesting place further pressure on TAFE?

Dr Cornford—It will, but that is assuming that you do not attempt to rebuild TAFE from the position it has been allowed to decline to. Let us take a step back. I have a number of university degrees, but if I really want things to work in my household, I do not tinker with them myself. I get in properly trained people like plumbers, painters and so on to do the job properly. Historically, universities have tended to provide the management structures in society. However, a great deal of the productivity that keeps society turning—the nuts and bolts of cars, lifts, airconditioning et cetera working—occurs because of TAFE training. It is a vital, absolutely essential part of a society. It does not have the status and the kudos of a university education but, in terms of actual functioning of a society, it is absolutely vital.

Mr FARMER—One of the comments we made to a number of speakers yesterday was that maybe, as far as VET is concerned, we realise the need for it in the community and we realise the need for it in the schools. We found that, in order to make the system work properly, the teachers had to be specifically trained. That was happening, at a huge expense to resources in some cases. In some cases we were taking the TAFE teachers into the schools. We thought maybe a solution to all of that would be to go back to the grassroots level, to where the teachers get the training in the first place, and train some teachers specifically so that they could be specialist VET teachers within the school system, just as you would have your mathematics teacher specialist, science teachers et cetera.

However, hearing what you have to say and reading your submission, it makes a lot more sense to say we would probably be better off propping up the TAFE system, getting people that already have those skills and integrating them into the school system side by side with the teachers. Would you see that as a more viable proposition?

Dr Cornford—I see it as a more viable proposition. You are going to have logistical problems in terms of backward and forward movements between TAFEs and schools. What you really need is more of a system where those who want to go to TAFE go on certain days or certain evenings of the week and the rest of the time they are in more academic, general education subjects at school.

One of the problems we were talking about with VET is that it encompasses this huge area. One aspect of it is, clearly, quite specific specialist training. If you look at it realistically—and this does not really get brought out in the literature—even though I consider it very important that people be taught that there is a particular set of standards and expectations that go with any occupational area, it involves fairly hard work and skill learning to achieve those standards that are demanded. There are other aspects to this.

I think it is important that people who are going to continue in a professional area get the very best professional training from the day they start. It is assumed that, because it is early days, it is not terribly important. This is a mistake that is made at all levels of education. But, if you go back and look at the development of expertise research, where you have the development of expertise through a whole variety of stages, the basic skills, the frameworks and the mental structures that you lay down initially are very important.

However, not every individual who does hospitality training in, for example, a school with a TAFE teacher will go on and work in the hospitality area. In terms of general patterns of career change and so on, despite the way we like to set up nice clear pathways for people to move through careers and education systems in a very systematic way, we know that, in fact, there are a huge amount of changes and circumstances that occur that push people in different directions.

The classic is the old fitting and machining teaching in TAFE, if you go back 20 to 25 years; lots of people did it but, after about 10 years, only about 30 per cent of people were working in the area, because they had moved into other areas. Their skills had not, in fact, been wasted.

Mr SAWFORD—They went into management.

Dr Cornford—They went into management and all sorts of other areas. However, we are not just talking about specifically content knowledge. We are talking about attitudes to work, precision in terms of doing things and so on. I hate the term ‘generic skills’, but there is a whole range of generic skills embedded in these things. These are carried into other areas.

I am not convinced in any way at the moment that even retrained schoolteachers are, in fact, able to convey accurately to kids what the real world of work is like. In fact, there is a culture conflict in terms of schools and TAFE—a point which I think I have made in my submission or one of the papers. Schools bend over backwards to recognise that children are children, and they will invariably make mistakes; therefore, a culture and an environment is created to support them in their learning endeavours. Great! There is no problem with that. However, in the world of work, it is a totally different ball game. TAFE teachers are not unrealistic—they know they are dealing with young people—but they set their expectations much higher in terms of the reality of the workplace, and the kids respond to those realities. They know that the people who are teaching them have been there and done that. They walk the walk and talk the talk.

Mr FARMER—Referring to my previous question, everybody's first thought is that we need to have people from TAFE who are engineers come to speak about engineering at the school and teach students in engineering at school. We need people from medical science to come to the schools and speak about medical science, and so on. However, in summary, you are saying, and your submission states this, that there is an underlying different type of teaching out there that is learnt through the TAFE colleges. It is a completely different type of structure of teaching. If you get that base right and you get that type of teacher into the school to teach that base, eventually the kids can go off into the many different fields of employment, and those underlying skills will be the ones that will take them through into the workplace.

Dr Cornford—That is right. I am arguing that not only the teaching of subject content but also a socialisation process of adolescents for adulthood and the world of work is occurring.

Mr SAWFORD—First of all, congratulations on a lucid submission. It was very good to read. Right at the outset, in your summary paragraph, you say that the objectives of VET in Schools remain unclear. Why aren't they clear? We are only in the third day of this inquiry, but no-one seems to be able to come up with an unambiguous rationale for VET. You have acknowledged that here, and then you go through some delicious ironies. I will ask another question in a moment, but why is that?

Dr Cornford—The problem is that VET covers so many areas. For example, I have spent much of my life training TAFE teachers and trainers in industry. I teach them teaching techniques and a whole range of assessment evaluation and program design. I have a pretty good background on the whole educational VET take. But what you have, even within TAFE, is a huge range of quite disparate activities and specialisations, ranging from one extreme—a continuation of secondary school, a second chance for those that have dropped out—right through to a whole range of community programs which attempt things which are probably not related in any substantial way to hard professional or trade skills.

At the other extreme, you have the very solid professional training, such as plumbing, autoelectrical or whatever. There is this whole cross-section. VET seems to have always been the dumping ground for those who are not academic. It has been relatively easy to define those who are academic in terms of the social structures that have been set up in educational processes, but then VET applies to all the other activities that occur in relation to learning and preparation for life, work and whatever.

Mr SAWFORD—A couple of other witnesses have pushed this idea. A lot of propaganda that comes up, particularly from education departments, keeps going along this integration line. That is exactly the opposite of what you are saying, isn't it? They use, as part of the rationale, that they need to integrate everything. I would have thought that, in a disparate system, in VET, you would need to separate things rather than integrate them. What is your view of that?

Dr Cornford—You need specialisation, particularly in trade areas. You can teach a plumber word processing skills for bookkeeping if you want to but, if you want a good plumber, you do not make the main thrust of your teaching word processing skills. There are degrees of specialisation. One of my arguments would be that you have at least two sets—and this is pretty loose—of subjects that you are dealing with at secondary level. One is essentially—for want of a better word; I do not like the word—'academic' subjects, which revolve around reading, writing, critical thinking and maybe maths and those sorts of things, which are fairly readily

identifiable as being generic skills in the true sense, in that what is gained, with a little luck and a little push further along the line, can generally be applied much more broadly.

There are those subjects, but there are also the other specialist occupationally relevant subjects or, on the other hand, subjects that may be designed to prepare people for the world of work. There are two separate lots of subjects. The integration problem is hugely thorny in education. It is a little like the vocationalisation of education: every now and then things get too far out of whack, the system does a rapid turn, and you go through all sorts of quite loony phases where the English department and the school has to liaise with the woodwork department, as it used to be, and—

Mr SAWFORD—Are we in a loony phase now?

Dr Cornford—That is a very leading question. I think it is a very complex question. I would prefer not to really commit myself on that. I think some of what is being done with senior school curricula is in fact unrealistic.

Mr SAWFORD—In this area?

Dr Cornford—Not so much in VET subjects. In academic type subjects, it is in fact unrealistic, in that demands that are there on paper are probably not even achievable by many of the teachers who are teaching the subjects, or maybe even by some university academics. I think the expectations that are built into curriculum documents in many cases are, quite frankly, unrealistic—just as it is unrealistic to believe that, if you set up a good system with VET courses in schools, it is going to solve every social ill known to man. It is just not going to work that way, folks.

CHAIR—On loosely generic skills, if we were to go down the path of the specialist VET areas—using TAFE more effectively, but still somehow within the schools trying to work on those more basic workplace skills—is it possible that, through our teacher training systems, preservice, we could adequately prepare teachers to be able to cope with those, notwithstanding what you said previously about the different culture in the workplace versus the school?

Dr Cornford—I think it is a really difficult one. I can think of examples that are absolutely classic in New South Wales TAFE, and are still there in various forms. In many of the old apprentice type courses, there is a communication component. All of us would agree that communication, in some way or another, is going to be important in the world of work, business or whatever. I do not think you can deny that it is important. The problem, very largely, was that many of the teachers who were employed, even within TAFE, to teach communication to trade students had no real understanding of how communication skills would apply within those specialist trade areas.

For that reason, it was often a disaster. Often what you had—it developed more perhaps over later years—was that teachers with some knowledge of the trade had worked in close cooperation with those teachers or, in some cases, that trades teachers had discovered a particular bent for communications subjects and had moved specifically into the teaching of those areas. Again it comes down to this credibility issue. Put blatantly, you do not learn from someone that you do not see as a credible model.

Mr SAWFORD—We saw Bradfield yesterday. As an individual, I was quite surprised that it has not been duplicated. We know there are 20 senior secondary colleges in New South Wales and are surprised that that figure has stayed at 20. Do you have a view about the structures that can deliver VET more effectively?

Dr Cornford—There is a whole complex of factors here. Part of it is policy, bureaucratic and administrative factors, and who you actually have running colleges to make them function effectively. Quite frankly, the person you put in charge of the institution sets the tone for the whole thing and either makes it work or does not make it work. It is a whole variety of things like that. The senior college thing I think has certain strengths about it. For one thing, it is going to allow perhaps more attention to be given to middle schooling years, which has been an area that for a very long time has been neglected in education. Hopefully, there is going to be some benefits from that.

The problem, though, that is there inherently is the way that you are then going to have to deal with teachers being classified as second-class citizens if they choose to work in, say, middle school rather than senior college or, alternatively, the status that working in a senior college actually gives people. I think you need some degrees of movement and flexibility between different schools and settings of that type to allow teachers some room for professional development and expansion.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Dr Cornford, what you are saying follows on from a number of our other speakers who have made similar points—that vocational education and training has become a grab-bag term for any sort of applied education or the development of practical skills, in contrast with purely academic skills. We are very interested to hear you make that point so succinctly. If you do not use the VET models which are being used at the moment to try and get kids to pick up some of those learning to learn techniques you are talking about, how do you do it? What do you see as other ways of developing those skills in young people? Can you elaborate on that?

Dr Cornford—It is a big area. I will try and be as succinct as I can. I think the learning to learn skills are essentially the true generic skills. What we are facing is massive changes in technology, with projections of people going through three, four or maybe five different careers in a working life. Ultimately, what is going to matter is the ability to learn, adapt and cope with new bodies of skills and knowledge and so on.

There are two essential approaches to these learning to learn skills. I think I have probably given you references to Weinstein and Meyer. Essentially you can either do a metacurricular approach, which is to integrate the skills with the teaching—the learning to learn skills with your presentation of conventional subject matter—or you can try and teach them as quite separate sets of skills. What we know from transfer of learning—and I would like to come back to this if you can give me a couple of minutes at the end to talk about transfer and generic skills, because there are major problems here with generic skills—is that, if you teach things divorced from a context where they can be seen to be useful, the chances of them being substantially learned are very much lessened.

This has been one of the problems with the old study skills approach, where you have a little isolated couple of segments or sections on how you are supposed to study, how you are supposed to write assignments and so on. That needs to be blended with what people are doing

so that they can see how to apply that knowledge. It is all very well for people who are knowledgeable, expert teachers to stand up and say these things, but on the other side you always have the learner who has got to understand and see what the applications are. If you integrate it, then, as well as learning the content, which is immediately seen to be relevant, you are, if you like, teaching people how to learn that content effectively at the same time. We are talking about a revolution in the whole approach to education with that, to get every teacher to recognise that they are not just a subject expert but actually a learning expert as well.

Ms PLIBERSEK—As you speak, I am remembering back to my own high school experiences. I think a lot of kids probably got to year 11, year 12 or even university without ever being taught how to write an essay, and that is even in the academic strand. Nobody ever sits you down and tells you the basics, even in the kind of context you are talking about, which is a way of applying those things to whatever task is at hand.

Dr Cornford—I am also talking here about a body of knowledge and skills which go beyond just mere essay writing. If I had the time, I could demonstrate in about an hour and a half that there are three quite distinct aspects of memory. You have short-term working memory, which can hold approximately seven, plus or minus two, units of information, for about 20 seconds, and then it is usually gone. You then have long-term memory. Apart from that, you have an executive system which is essentially involved in metacognitive skills, which are planning, monitoring and evaluating, which ultimately form the substantial basis of professional activities.

There is a body of factual knowledge, but you work people through it. This is what I do with my teachers when I teach them about learning. 'Here is a list of 10 words—common, ordinary, everyday garden words. I am going to read them out to you. I want you to just listen to these and then I want you to write down as many as you can remember.' Invariably the pattern falls and most people remember somewhere between five and seven. Occasionally you will get someone with nine. Someone who knows a little bit about proper use of learning strategies will get 10. But you teach about the learning process by making it an active experience.

The common jargon is experiential learning. All learning is experiential, but you need activities which point up the educational message in the activity. By the time people are doing this, you can go on and explain what are some of the characteristics of short-term or working memory and how you get around that. There are techniques. There are wonderful strategies to get around these limitations.

CHAIR—Going back to the issue of the relationship between TAFE and schools, you mentioned a couple of the problems there—the timetabling structural problems, transport problems and those sorts of things. Were there also funding problems with TAFEs reacting to having to provide that service for schools?

Dr Cornford—This is anecdotal, but yes. What you effectively had in New South Wales—and this is under the whole banner of economic rationalism which has pervaded policy for the last 12 or 13 years at least—were two separate departments: TAFE and school education. Everyone wanted a bit more money to make ends meet. In some cases I suspect it worked quite amicably. In other cases, though, there seemed to have been degrees of disharmony, shall we say.

CHAIR—If we were going to make better use of TAFE, there would have to be a greater understanding of the sharing of resources.

Dr Cornford—Yes. You have to make provisions. I will make a general plea which may be totally out of context and might have absolutely no impact at all. Seriously, there has been a major problem with policy formulation in Australia—for certainly the last 15 years. The problem is this—and I hope you do not find this too insulting. You can go into any pub in the world and find a drunk falling off a stool with grandiose ideas as to how to put the world right. Some of these people move to Canberra and get paid much more money and become formulators of public policy.

Mr SAWFORD—Or remain university professors.

Dr Cornford—Or remain university professors. There is a whole range of options here.

Ms PLIBERSEK—There are cab drivers in that class also.

Dr Cornford—There is a whole range of potential options and problems here.

CHAIR—Are there problems as well with esteem of TAFE? Does the academic focus of schools—and the fact that they are now incorporating two-unit UAI acceptable VET courses into schools—create a reluctance for them to use TAFE? Do you think TAFE is somehow seen, even for some of those two-unit UAI qualifying VET courses, as the second-best option?

Dr Cornford—Yes. What you still have left is the hangover. If you look at the demographic, the profiles of teachers, most of them essentially were brought up to believe that the right thing to do was academic work. Anything that was non-vocational tended to be frowned upon.

CHAIR—Within the VET courses?

Dr Cornford—Yes.

CHAIR—So there are two tiers for the same two-unit VET course. Doing it at TAFE is seen as a second-best option to doing it at school, do you think?

Dr Cornford—If you look at the research on this, even within the general consuming public—that is, the kids that go there—they see TAFE as second best. It is nice to see that Brendan Nelson seems to have been going out of his way very generally to say, 'No, TAFE is not second best.' This is what needs to have been done.

Mr ALBANESE—It is not providing any increased funding for the—

Dr Cornford—That is a major secondary reason.

CHAIR—How else can we raise the esteem for TAFE?

Dr Cornford—You know all about publicity, the media and all that when it comes to party election time and other things. You need to seriously look at how you realistically sell

vocational education to the community. There are figures around. I do not claim to be any sort of expert in the economic aspects of education, but certainly there has been costing which tends to suggest that, if you go into a trade and you really make a pretty good fist of it, you are really not too far behind in terms of total income over a working life by the end of it. There is a body of fairly hard evidence here that needs to be—

Mr FARMER—The general perception out there is that it is not really the dollars and cents at the end of it. We have had this alluded to on a number of occasions by other witnesses who have come forward in relation to this. It is easy to explain to parents out there that their children can get a very good sum of money if they go into trades or they do the VET courses. It is more the fact that the perception out there is that, if students go into some of these VET courses or they go to TAFE as opposed to university, even though they might earn the same amount of money at the end of it, they have to work harder in the meantime; it is more physical. There seems to be more of a push away from that physical side of things and more into the academic side of things. That is the general social perception of it. How do we overcome that?

Dr Cornford—A lot of it is misinformed in a sense. Sure, there are ultimately always going to be some people who have to sweep the streets. Let's get real.

Mr FARMER—We are not going to so much of an extreme. Let us say an engineer as opposed to a doctor.

Ms PLIBERSEK—I think a lot of people find a degree of physical work attractive. Many boys I know who went into trades did so because they wanted to be outside and they liked the idea of creating something at the end of the day and not just talking.

Dr Cornford—What is a major gap in the system—it is there in theory but it has always been done very badly—is the career counselling aspect.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes.

Dr Cornford—What you have to try and do is make sure you get round pegs in round holes, rather than round pegs in square holes. Unfortunately this is what you are combating. This is what you have to go back and undo. From the late 1980s there was a desperate push for everyone to get a university degree. If you repeat that message often enough to the general populace, they come to accept it because they can see that status has traditionally been associated with university degrees.

What you also need to build in and publicise is a realisation of the world in various ways. I think this is one of the relatively good things still about the Australian education system. Even though there are a lot of things that are bad about it, it does still give people the opportunity for second chances and to make career changes—not with total impunity, but there is certainly the opportunity there.

The people that I deal with and that I have chosen to continue working with are TAFE teachers and so on, who come in and do teacher education courses. Probably 10 or 15 years ago they would never have thought that they were ever going to set foot inside a university, and yet, because of the changes in career and their proficiency in their area, yes, they have finished up in university.

There are ways of taking case studies or life stories of some of these people, for example, and saying, 'Hey, look, because you decided to become a plumber doesn't mean to say that you're stuck with being a plumber for the rest of your life. You can become a plumbing consultant. You can go to university and do all sorts of things. You can do engineering if you want to.' Those things are not spelt out. They are the proper province of career counsellors, but it is not done very well, unfortunately.

Mr FARMER—Do you think that those things are not spelt out because the teachers are people that have gone from school to university and back to school, so they know no other—

Dr Cornford—Yes, that is part of it. Hopefully, it is going to change. It is going to have to change, because of the shortage of teachers. We are going to have to employ older people and get more older people into teacher training to make up for the shortfall in younger people coming through. That is certainly going to happen. As the characteristics of the teacher population change, I think you will gradually see changes in terms of what is valued, but I do not think you can just sit back and wait for this to happen. You have to be proactive and recognise that there have been policy decisions and selling of particular positions that have occurred in the relatively recent past that are in fact incorrect in terms of the ultimate wellbeing of both individuals and society. I get people at university who should never have got anywhere near a university.

Ms PLIBERSEK—You alluded briefly to careers counsellors. It seems to me that often people who are selected to be careers counsellors in schools are not particularly well qualified to do the work. Do you think that there is a substantial problem and that the majority of careers counsellors do not really have a very broad understanding of possible career paths for kids? How does a careers counsellor deal with 180 or 200 very different kids in a school?

Dr Cornford—This, I think, is one of the essential problems. I think most careers counsellors are extremely well meaning, but they are hugely overworked in that they are seen as a relatively scarce resource that needs to be spread fairly thinly over one school or, in some cases, many schools. That is a drain in itself. The other major problem is that the conventional occupational areas have changed so dramatically in the last 10 or 15 years that there is a whole range of new occupational areas that need to be highlighted in various ways. Actually being able to manage both the diversity and the complexity and to present this in meaningful ways to kids to give them options is a major problem. I think what really is strongest is the real life experiences that kids have, where they actually see people and they know people who are involved in these occupational areas.

Ms PLIBERSEK—But for plenty of kids, particularly working-class kids, that range is very small.

Dr Cornford—Yes, extremely small. That is a major problem, because they often have self-imposed limits in terms of the possibilities. These are some of the people that I get now who, in some cases, have left school at 15, do not have a formal secondary school qualification and yet, because they are highly motivated, genuinely want to teach. Quite frankly, in some cases, we work major miracles with these people in terms of improving their literacy levels and their thinking and critical skills—also, of course, their teaching skills.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Cornford, that has been very helpful.

Dr Cornford—Could I perhaps clarify my little joke about drunks falling off stools?

Ms PLIBERSEK—No, we didn't take it personally at all.

Dr Cornford—In terms of policy making, I think there are two things that have to happen. One is that we have to move much more to outcomes driven policies, which means a lot of research and trialing before we jump in the deep end. The other thing is that, to make substantial reforms occur in education—and, I suspect, in many others areas—you have to be able to translate the grand vision into all the intermediate steps down to the ground level to know where the problems are. In that way, when you try and implement it you have some idea of where the problems will be and you have emergency plans to deal with those problems rather than having one vision and saying, 'Try it out. If it doesn't work, throw it overboard and let's go on to the next grand vision.' That has been the cycle in vocational education for at least the last 15 years, and it is counterproductive.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 10.54 a.m. to 11.01 a.m.

PALLADINO, Mr Tony, Chief Executive Officer, EE-Oz Training Standards

TAYLOR, Mr Robert George, Network Executive Officer, EE-Oz Training Standards

THOMAS, Mr Brian, NETAG Adviser, EE-Oz Training Standards

CHAIR—Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Palladino—I have been with EE-Oz Training Standards for approximately 10 years. It is an industry training advisory body declared by the Australian National Training Authority for the electrical, electronics and energy industries.

Mr Thomas—I am here as a consultant to Tony's organisation.

Mr Taylor—I am the Executive Officer of the Utilities and Light Manufacturing Industry Training Board in the ACT. I undertook a national pilot in school based new apprenticeships on behalf of EE-Oz in 2000—a DEST funded project.

CHAIR—As a formality, I need to remind you that proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. I invite you to make some introductory comments, and then we will begin some questioning.

Mr Palladino—I have prepared a paper to be tabled today. We think it could be an attachment to the submission that we made. We had a discussion overnight about the way we want to present today.

The first part of the paper talks about the VET in Schools issues that we have as an electrical, electronics and energy industry. It is an issue particularly for us, compared perhaps with some of the other industries. Whilst we welcome the Commonwealth's initiative in VET in Schools, there are some particular issues for our industry about its management and implementation within the school system. We have some concerns about it. Bob was in a position to write a national pilot for us, about two years ago, putting kids in part-time apprenticeships over a period of two years at certificate I and certificate II level. We learnt a lot from that process for our industry, and we want to talk through that, if we may, over the next half-hour to an hour.

We have some concerns about some issues that I have mentioned in the paper. At least, we would like to consider the issue that the relevant industry VET in Schools program must be aligned to national training packages. We have already committed to the concept of national training packages and what they mean; we would like to see them become an avid part of the school system, if it is to move into the VET in Schools arrangement, not simply a curriculum based on some course that sits inside a school.

We see that there is a need to overcome the bias towards university entrance at the expense of VET and industry pathways. We see that as a major issue. We also see that achievement of energy and electrotechnology industry competency—as prescribed in the national industry training package—which are the areas that we cover, requires that the relationship between

curriculum hours and workplace experience hours is approximately the same for VET in Schools participants and the relevant mainstream trainees and apprentices. We see them as being equal; the same outcomes should, therefore, be applied.

Processes and programs need to be implemented to inform guardians and parents of the implications and issues associated with undertaking a qualification in national training packages, in particular, the energy and electrotechnology national training packages. We see this as a major issue. When children access the workplace, what does it mean for a parent as an acceptable medium if it is a contract of training? What are the obligations and responsibilities on the guardian allowing the person to go onto a work site? Should something happen? I do not know whether the VET in Schools system has considered that in great detail, particularly in our area, where the nature of the day-to-day work is hazardous. We see that as a major factor that needs some consideration.

Schools need to implement management and logistic measures; we certainly found that out in the pilot. Bob ran the pilot and was an intermediary in helping kids to be placed with certain employers. There needs to be proper management and logistical measures in place, such as placement pastoral care for students, contracts of training, industrial relations matters and occ health and safety issues, to name but a few. In some cases, you have to have induction programs to go onto a building site; you would never get on it unless you had it. That imposes a term of learning into the timetable—to ensure that internal processes are in place or relevant intermediary bodies are utilised. It has to be a systemic change to the VET system, not just a haphazard approach to placing young people into workplaces without some sort of management structure.

We need to improve the quality and breadth of advice to students with respect to industry programs on offer to ensure that informed decisions are made and that delivery of training appropriately reflects national industry training package requirements. This includes the introduction of dedicated and well-trained student vocational careers counsellors. I note that the previous speaker talked about this, and it is a major issue that has come up in all our research over the last five years.

There must be flexibility of school programming—the timetable that we are accustomed to—to accommodate, where appropriate, part-time traineeships and apprenticeships, targeting training package qualifications. Importantly—and this came out of a research project that we did approximately two years ago—if we are to have part-time apprenticeships in schools, why can we not have part-time school for full-time apprenticeships? If I, as a young person, were to take up a full-time opportunity in an apprenticeship or as a trainee—and a traineeship is about 12 months—why could I not complete my secondary school education and still obtain access to a university pathway in a part-time arrangement? I do not think that schools are well groomed to do that, and it is an option that should be considered, we think, from research that we did for an annual conference a couple of years ago.

We need to develop interschool, VET based, curriculum-only courses for qualification outcomes which are primarily developed for internal educational measures rather than the real world of work alignment to national training packages or AQF levels for respective industries. I will discuss that issue later.

The competencies required for the energy and electrotechnology industries require strong literacy, numeracy and abstract conceptual capabilities. Students should reasonably expect to be given accurate advice on the likelihood of completing successfully the qualification they intend to undertake. Appropriate advisory and remedial measures should be in place for the student. I do not know if you are familiar with the AQF structure. I am sure that you are, given your brief, but AQF II qualifications in the energy and electrotechnology industries are significantly more demanding than the AQF outcomes in other industries. This has been caused by inconsistency in interpretation of the AQF across national industry training packages and the endorsement processes that go with them that the foreman has to sign. That is a major issue for us—primarily because AQF II aligns with a fairly industrial outcome versus something in the retail area or some other industries that have much softer approaches.

We need to recognise and use VET in Schools programs designed by industry in national training packages without applying a one-size-fits-all criterion such as saying, 'All VET programs must be at least AQF II.' I know that is certainly the case in New South Wales. Boards of studies limit the VET criteria to an AQF II outcome. Anything below that is not even considered. We consider a certificate I very important to us in our industry and for access into the industry.

We also seek to recognise that entrance into a traineeship, apprenticeship or cadetship is a legitimate job outcome following a VET in Schools program. We have had some debate around the country where a student finishes, potentially, a certificate I and goes into a traineeship or accesses a traineeship or apprenticeship, but this is not considered a legitimate job outcome. A number of government policies take that position, as well as boards of studies that I have come across in my time. I do not know how you can say that that is not a legitimate outcome, but there are some policy decisions with respect to that that we would like to explore further.

There is a need for boards of studies to evaluate the content of industry national training package qualifications designed for VET in Schools, much of which would readily attract a UAI or TER score—and I am sure you are familiar with those—thus enhancing student future career options and promoting the value of VET to the community.

We would also like to discuss the disincentives, which we believe need to be removed, to employ a VET in Schools graduate. Somebody who does a certificate I part-time traineeship and enters into another related traineeship or apprenticeship at a higher level may not necessarily attract incentives from the employer, as it seems it might be double dipping, or whatever it might be. We see that as a major issue as well, given that it is a career enhancing process rather than a limiting one.

Those are the opening remarks I wanted to make; the rest are little points against the terms of reference that you have as part of your brief. I will leave it at that, unless my colleagues wish to add anything.

Mr SAWFORD—Thank you for your introductory comments, Tony. This is a big statement for me to make, given that we are in only our third day of hearing, but it appears that VET, in its current state across the nation, seems to have a confused set of objectives. You are pointing out one set of objectives; other people are pointing out others. How big a problem is that?

Mr Palladino—Quite large, in our view. The confusion really sits around the AQF, the value that parents might ascribe to an AQF level and the future pathway into a university. There is a lot of confusion, because people have different backgrounds. In our industry, AQF I is quite a strong outcome. We would probably find that many educators say, 'Well, that's a bit too low,' and yet the rigour in that probably has a UAI index. Your parents might say, 'Certificate I is a bit too low,' because of the notion we have in the community of the different levels and the haphazard approach to the endorsement of national training packages for industries. Industries have been allowed to have AQF IIs that might really sit at AQF I. You might have an AQF IV that really ought to be an AQF Internet. Nobody polices it.

I have written to the AQF advisory committee and initiated some discussion. From two letters, I have had no response from the advisory board in relation to this huge disparity that is occurring in cost packages. Schools that pick it up think it is all at the same level. That is where I think a lot of the confusion occurs. There is a confused state of endorsement about training packages. Nobody gives them the rigour of saying, 'This is an AQF II outcome; it is not a III,' when they may have been endorsed at III.

We have taken the traditional model—which is probably silly for us, as an industry—of saying that III is a tradesperson and we will work our way down and up. That is the sort of benchmark that we have adopted, because that is our industry culture. Each industry has its own culture. We do not object to other industries having different views, but it has an impact on ours, because those who become certificate I might be seen as lesser people—second-rate people in the community—when in fact they probably have more depth, breadth and effort in having got that CI than maybe a CIII in another industry. That is where I think the confusion sits.

Mr Thomas—There is also possibly a tension in year 12 retention rates and VET in Schools as well. If there is a general notion that people should go to year 12, there would be some underlying idea that they are going to use that year 12 stuff towards their future careers, which would imply that they are going to go to university. It is quite reasonable to say that people can go into a fairly demanding trade from year 10, provided they have very good year 10 results. Once we get people to go on, I think we are building into them a notion that they need to do something other than, for example, an electrical trade.

Mr SAWFORD—In terms of the tenor of the submission, when I first read it—and I do not mean this as a criticism—it seemed defensive. Some of the language you use is very defensive. Is there a reason for that? Am I reading this thing wrongly?

Mr Palladino—It is probably culled from the experiences we learnt from young people having expectations that were not fulfilled because they did not have the appropriate literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers or counsellors suggested they should go and do it because they were not going to get into university. They are not the kids we want to attract. Yes, there is a level of defence in this, because the culture in our industry requires a fairly extensive literacy and numeracy base to start. It is a whole engineering field. You could probably move from a labourer in the industry to an engineer in the industry, largely based on numeracy and literacy skills. We are defensive, because we are not getting the right people. They are turned off by something else—culture, teachers, parents, a whole set of values—that is bigger than just the debate about VET in Schools.

Mr Taylor—As an example, we undertook a DEST project—we started in 1998 and went through to 2001—based on a part-time apprenticeship at AQF II in our area, which was called 'Electrical Worker Technical Support'. That is like a trades assistant, but it is a good pathway into the industry. The physics and maths required for that course should have attracted the people who were going to go to uni and did not quite make it. We found that, unless a person had good literacy and numeracy skills and abstract thinking type skills, they failed within the first three months.

The expectation was not fulfilled. We found that the only way we had success was to do an aptitude test on people in those types of fields. Then we found that they were the types of people that went from year 10 to year 11 thinking they were going to go to uni, and their parents thought they were going to go to uni because they were doing years 11 and 12. The expectation was that these people were going to go to uni and they were going to get a part-time job while they were at school. It turned out that, of the 20 kids we enrolled, 18 did not go to uni and remained in the industry. These kids in year 11 had the aptitude to be able to go to uni but, for whatever reason, did not make it. They are the types of people in our industry that we are trying to attract—people with solid literacy and numeracy skills that can do the physics part of our industry but, for whatever reason, do not go to university. That might be a career choice or maybe a lifestyle choice in years 11 and 12. You need that sort of basic level; otherwise you are setting them up for failure.

Mr Palladino—It is a hazardous industry, no matter what it is. All three of us have worked as electricians. The whole industry—gas, electricity generation, treatment, distribution and the work of the electrical-electronics area—has a hazardous nature about it; you cannot expose people who are not going to make it. What is required in most of our industries is about a certificate III entry. That is the only way you can work. You are not half a tradesperson; you are not anything unless you can meet those requirements. That is what employers are looking for.

To have people go into an apprenticeship and fail halfway through is a loss to everybody—the employer for paying, the VET system for putting it in place, the community for paying for it and everyone involves for having unfulfilled expectations. It is an issue for us, and that is why we are a bit defensive. As you are probably aware, there are IR issues and contractual issues. Occ health and safety is a major issue for us in going onto a work site. We have had situations where we have sent kids on site, there was no induction program and the site shut down. That is not derogatory to the people who shut the site down. They are talking about the safety of individuals on that site. They do not want somebody hurt. If we are about assuring life, property, commerce and infrastructure, we need people who can handle that environment.

Mr SAWFORD—From your industry's perspective, what is the best structure to deliver VET in its jobs or application sense, not the everyday sense? Is it seen as secondary colleges?

Mr Palladino—Yes, TAFE or the old technical schools—the schools who have competent teachers with the background to deliver the training.

Mr SAWFORD—What about a place like Bradfield?

Mr Palladino—I am not familiar with Bradfield.

Mr Taylor—That is a specialised area. From this pilot, we targeted three colleges in Canberra. They formed partnerships with TAFE, and that worked really well. These 20 hand-picked students all remained in the industry. The partnerships were with the schoolteachers and the TAFE teachers. The schools delivered some of the physics aspects of the course and the TAFE teachers came in and did the practical application type things. Those partnerships were terrific. If we get a specialist type school, particularly in the technical areas—I am not so sure about the others, because I cannot speak on their behalf —in partnership with TAFE or stand alone, we are on the way to getting the proper training that we are looking for in the industry and giving the kids an expectation of getting onto a good career path.

At the moment in Canberra, schools can put up their hands to be an RTO in anything they like, go through the RTO validation process and deliver whatever they fancy when it comes down to their scope. Instead of specialising with four, five or six schools or colleges, they can all say, 'We can do electrotechnology certificate II with minimal resources.' If you look at the resources that are in the schools, they just do not meet the criteria for the training. What we are doing is virtually dividing and conquering the system.

Mr SAWFORD—You would support specialist vocational schools?

Mr Taylor—Yes, we would.

Mr SAWFORD—You mentioned technical schools. The criticism often comes back that people are trying revisit the past. I do not think anyone is saying that at all. The world has moved on. In a sense, maybe the term that Robert used—the specialist vocational schools—ought to be extended. It is interesting in New South Wales. Bradfield is 10 years old and has not been duplicated. There are 20 senior secondary colleges—not expanded.

Mr Palladino—It comes back to the issue about being systemic. There is a school in Kewdale, Western Australia, that had an electrical trades teacher. He used to teach the first year of the electrical trade as part of the program. Kewdale is a working-class environment. Ninety per cent of the students finished up going into the trade. The teacher was integrated. He knew all the employers, and had a relationship with them. He left. Guess what happened to the program?

Mr SAWFORD—It finished.

Mr Palladino—Be cause it was not systemic. It is not part of the management. It is not part of the infrastructure of the schooling system. He was just one good teacher who had a great heart; when he left, it left with him. That is the issue for us.

Mr Taylor—Other than the teaching part, the real advantage of a school having contact with the industry, as Bradfield does, is that jobs fall out of that contact with the employers. That is the key to it. The key is the matching of the student with the employer. In my opinion, okay, get some basic skills at school, but the real outcome is when you make contact with the employer and they say, 'Well, this is the right type of person for me. I'll put him on.' It is a relationship. Out of the 20, I think two eventually dropped out of the industry, but 18, because they made contact with the employers and had an aptitude for our industry, have all gone on. Some have got scholarships in computer cabling and all sorts of things in America; they have gone on. It was a really successful program. But look at the resources required to run it—looking after

pastoral care, wages, different site allowances for every job they went to, dealing with 'I can't get to the job today because the bus has left me behind. How do I meet the boss?'

Mr Palladino—'I slept in'!

Mr Taylor—All those things. 'The public transport has broken down. How do I get to the boss?' We manage that out of the school system. I despair for any schoolteacher that has their teaching load plus the pastoral care that is required for these types of SNAPs—school based new apprentices. I despair for that system. The poor old schoolteacher is trying to give them a general education, he is trying to manage their vocational education, and he does not get the resources to do it. They have to do that on top of their teaching load. And it is not fair to criticise the teaching system when we do not put resources into managing that type of activity inside the schools.

Mr SAWFORD—How regular is your dialogue with the New South Wales education department?

Mr Palladino—I built a certificate I with the Board of Studies. I have dealt a lot with the Board of Studies with certificate I. Because of their policy position of an AQF II they are not likely to use our certificate Is. We built two good ones. I think they have built one. You were involved, Brian, in one. AQF was not involved but there was participation in a certificate II that they have developed, which has had a pretty low take-up rate around the schools, from what we understand.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you ever suggested specialist vocational schools?

Mr Palladino—It was in the recommendations.

Mr SAWFORD—What was the response?

Mr Taylor—No response.

Mr Palladino—It is all too hard. We know that in our industry there might be a school that has two young people, another one with two young people and another one with two young people. Unless you fill a classroom, you are not going to run a system. We like the idea of a lead agent school saying, 'Look, we'll look after electrical, electronics and energy. You look after retail. You look after whatever.' That allows the maximisation of efficiencies and cost efficiencies. It is just good practice to me.

CHAIR—In the absence, then, of specialist vocational schools, what about the idea of going back to better use of TAFE rather than schools trying to do all of that?

Mr Palladino—We say that is paramount because of the nature of our industry.

CHAIR—So in a number of these courses, rather than schools trying to run them, they ought to be plugging their students back into the TAFEs where the expertise and resources are.

Mr Thomas—One of the problems that has emerged with these programs is that teachers have been leant on to deliver things that are not part of their training. It might be only front end, where people might say it is more physics than it is electrical trades, or the applied aspects of it, but we have had teachers in schools say to us that the real place for this, as far as they are concerned, is in a TAFE college where the teachers do have the background. Throughout the Catholic education system and the school system there are at this stage a reasonable number of tradesmen employed in the industrial arts areas, including some electricians. It is quite appropriate that they teach those aspects of it, provided that, while they are doing that, we get the same sort of contact with the industry as a normal apprentice, or something approximating that. It can work when the person is there with the appropriate background and can talk the language and knows what it is about, but if someone is being leant on because they are a little bit under a program, they are asked to deliver electrical trades, carpentry or whatever, and their background is art, they are quite reasonably upset by that.

Mr SAWFORD—Isn't one of the problems, though, with TAFE that, with very young kids who do not have a good general education, they do not do that very well, and you create another problem? The schools as they are now constituted, as comprehensive high schools, cannot do it properly. But TAFE also cannot do the other part properly.

Mr Thomas—The demographic of TAFE electrical trades teachers is one where it is an ageing population—which I represent obviously. Most of us have taught students who typically left at year 10. It is not an unusual thing for us, and I have to say that in the trade the bulk of the kids that we get are of a very good calibre. It is not true for us that there is a lot of difficulty because of the age of the students and those sorts of things. It is a very responsible sort of an industry where the kids have to be careful about what they are doing. It is potentially quite dangerous and employers take a bit of care. They have to make a buck at the end of the day, they have to make sure the kid survives the four years, and so on. Typically, it is not a serious issue to deal with even the year 10 leavers. They are young, but the cohort that we get are quite responsible.

CHAIR—Are there enough students coming out of school with an interest in pursuing careers in your industry?

Mr Palladino—Not really. In fact, I had a phone call yesterday from a major labour hire company in Australia which has just commissioned a media advertising company to try and track down people to go and take up trades, because they cannot attract people.

CHAIR—Obviously there are a lot of reasons, but do you think one of the reasons is a lack of awareness of school career counsellors in terms of the opportunities available?

Mr Palladino—I think it is much more complex than that. It is not only career counsellors; I do not think it is their fault. Most people have said they are overworked. They are probably covering too many industries. There is a whole systemic issue about who promotes trades. I have not seen government promoting trades very well, in general. What is its responsibility? How can it uplift working people, so that they say, 'It is okay to have one of these. I don't need to be a graduate of a university'?

CHAIR—I thought we had been saying that until people were getting sick of it.

Mr Palladino—We were one of the fortunate ones that had early New Apprenticeships centre funding from DEST to try and promote our industry. We continue to argue that the NACs, as they are called, were not performing in our industry. We did not have our contract extended the second time around, probably because we challenged the issue of NACs in our industry. They were signing kids up in the wrong contracts and they were promoting the wrong training for the kids, because they do not know our industry. We had industry based NACs when I was around. They were very beneficial and we had growth in our numbers. You need to have context when selling our industry. It is not broad based. That is the dilemma we have.

Mr SAWFORD—It needs to be explicit, and it is currently implicit.

Mr Palladino—It is implicit. It works well at that level and it has been great for McDonald's, for instance, but in the traditional areas such as ours it is very difficult unless you have experts who can sit down and say to an employer, 'A certificate III means this in data communications,' rather than sitting down and saying, 'Would you like an apprentice? What sort of apprentice would you like?' The employer says, 'Well, I think I want one of these,' and they say, 'Oh, well, here's a piece of paper. Sign this.' We know that happens. We have had to recontract because the apprentices were in the wrong contracts. We think that area needs a little bit more work. I think the community generally sees the engineering fraternity as second-class.

Mr Thomas—There is significant youth unemployment whilst there are vacancies in the industry, but the problem is the match. It has to be the kid that can do the job. There will be people knocking on doors and asking to be placed, but the employers do not deem them to be appropriate. They would rather leave the vacancy there.

CHAIR—They do not have the mathematical skills or whatever?

Mr Thomas—Yes, and that is an issue. The other thing is that there is probably not a sufficiently clear understanding that there are a lot of jobs in this industry that do not involve heavy physical work. They are fault-finding type jobs. They are more conceptual jobs than they are manual jobs. I have a daughter who is an electrician. It is not hard manual work and there are very good rewards. Before she was 30 she was earning quite spectacular money. There is a misunderstanding, I think, about the nature of the work itself and the demands of the work. It does not mean that you are going to be climbing around roofs or under houses and those sorts of things. We need to draw out the differences in different industries, and different aspects within an industry.

Ms PLIBERSEK—It used to be that if you were a large employer, like Qantas for example, you would have probably hundreds of apprentices on the books at any one time. Big employers like that do not seem to have as many apprentices as they used to. Isn't that part of the problem?

Mr Palladino—It is a huge issue. The power industry used to employ hundreds in each state. ETSA, for instance, in South Australia, employed hundreds. They employ 20 line workers in South Australia alone—line workers only, nobody else.

Mr Thomas—Public utilities used to do it. It was part of their social—

Mr Palladino—And I think what has happened is a whole change in that. There was a community obligation in a lot of those companies to produce something for the community later

on, because there is such a lead time to train people up. We do not have that now. We have a whole bunch of contractors in the market now who are lucky if they think they have a contract for four years, lucky if they have a contract for three years. They think, 'Why put an apprentice on?' Group training companies to some extent have filled a little bit of that gap.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes, but only a bit.

Mr Palladino—But in our industries that is a small part of a very large issue. We have probably got about 4,000 apprentices in group training in one qualification, out of about that 20,000 employed as apprentices, so it is a very small quantity. I know, and all of us are committed. We know we can increase apprenticeship numbers, if people are targeted. The way we work with employers is to match kids to employers. We have a statement that says it does not matter if they learn basket weaving in a VET in Schools program as long as you put them with an employer somewhere, so the employer can actually see the individual, see what the aptitude of that individual is and say, 'Gee, I like this kid.' 'Would you like to work for me?' You are connected. It does not matter what they have learned; there is a connection. If we can overcome that and get systemic processes in place to allow for that, I think the take-up rates of employment will be higher.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Do you think that the reason that those big companies and public utilities are not putting on as many apprentices is just financial?

Mr Palladino—It is the accountant's bottom line. There is not a return on an apprentice in the short term.

Mr Thomas—They used to do quite good training, in-house training as well. The first year quite frequently was just full-time training; the outcomes were fantastic, but they did get a direction to focus on the core business. Their core business is the water board, the railway or producing electrical energy, and just having enough apprentices for their own immediate needs. That resulted in drastic reductions in the number that the industry would just pick up as the excess ones were spilled out of those utilities.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Do you think the only way of addressing that is to provide financial incentives to employers to put more apprentices on?

Mr Palladino—I think that is one way. If we look at the English model, we see that the incentives there are slightly higher. I think there is a whole range of strategies you can put in place. I think we can learn some stuff from New Zealand. We are very closely related to our New Zealand colleagues; they have some interesting practices there in the electricity sector that have increased apprentice numbers—quite drastically, by the way.

Mr SAWFORD—They had 1998, though, didn't they?

Mr Palladino—Yes, they did.

Mr SAWFORD—They had a bit of a wake-up call.

Mr Palladino—They did, and the government, to their credit, has come to the party and said, 'You're an ITO'—as they call them over there—an industry training organisation. 'You control the apprentice numbers in the industry. You work with companies.' We have a one-stop shop. In their system they engage the apprentice and put them in employment. There is a halfway group training company—NAC, ITAB. That is a one-stop shop. There is not this fragmented model that they have in Australia, with eight different state systems, all operating at a tangent to each other, and the Commonwealth trying to coordinate that. Then you have within the Commonwealth itself a whole bunch of tangential bodies trying to do something close together. We did NAC work before; it is taken away. All those things are not integrated. If they were integrated—and our experience from the New Zealand model shows it—you can actually increase your numbers. That is because you have a strategy about your industry—a collective strategy, a downstream one—that starts at the beginning, saying, 'We want to attract young people to the industry, from the labourer to the engineer. This strategy is taking place; next year we need a thousand line workers. We will go and employ them and we will get a commitment by employers to employ them, so there is a whole connected and integrated model rather than one that is fragmented.'

I think that is why it is not working. We have NACs in our industry who say they are promoting them, but it is much easier to sign up a retail trainee. We know that. That is not derogatory to retail. It is just that they can sign up more and they have processes. A thousand trainees in there are a good return, versus one in our industry. But we think we can do a lot better in our industry. With VET in Schools, there is the body that has been set up—the Enterprise Education Centre or something. I think you know what I am talking about. I approached them 10 years ago to have a national strategy for our industry. I think they just went straight to schools. I remember seeing a pilot they did; it was for one school. I think we got one apprentice. It was not a strategy; it was not a collective national strategy for the industry. I think we could do that much better.

Mr FARMER—I just have one comment and two quick questions. Robert, you mentioned how much of a load it puts on the teachers when they have to run these students around to the various workplaces to get them to work on time and all the rest of it. As somebody who has come from a TAFE background, I see that the sole responsibility of that really comes down to the student himself and the parents. When they are outside the school, it is not the teacher's responsibility. I think that is public perception. Instead of throwing money at teachers, saying, 'Here's a bus fare. Take your kid on the bus to get him to the job on time'—that is a blatant waste of resources—it just needs to really come down to the responsibility of public perception: you have a job to do, whether that be at school or whether it be in the workplace, and this is part of your schooling. You have to get there. It is all part of the responsibility that they need to be able to take up the jobs in future life anyway.

Mr Taylor—That is a good point, and the teacher was not given money to do this. We asked the students to do it themselves. When things did not go right, who did they go to? When the boss did not turn up to pick them up on the corner, what happened then? Did they drop out of the program? Did they get sick of it? We wanted to make sure this pilot worked properly, so in the end we took that responsibility ourselves as managing the pilot. I had my staff pick them up from corners when their boss did not. In the end, 10 out of the 20 were successful, but the actual pastoral care of getting wages right and getting them to the job when things just did not go the way you would think turned out to be a disaster.

Mr FARMER—But that is all part of what really VET is all about—trying to instil in the students this ability to think outside the normal way where everything is taught to you, everything is handed down to you and you just sit back there and you learn, as opposed to thinking for yourself and maybe lining up people to pick you up and take you to the job, conversing with the other people at the site, saying, 'I'm going to have difficulties getting to the job tomorrow. Can somebody pick me up from the corner?' or whatever. The whole structure goes together.

Mr Taylor—The problem is that the student is also trying to get an education. In the end, it is a competing force; if they find it too hard, what they say is, 'Blow it, I'll do year 11 and 12; I'll go back to school.' It is horses for courses. Our industry is very fragmented and is different from other industries. You can go to a store that opens at 8.30 and turn up—catch the bus and go to that store, and that is where your part-time apprenticeship is. That is compared with having to meet the boss to go to seven different sites during the day and then not knowing where you are going to end up. It is different in each industry. There is a case-by-case basis for part-time apprenticeships work in electrotechnology compared to hospitality or retail. I think in some industries they work fantastically. But the pastoral care in our industry is different. It is very fragmented in what you are going to do that day; you could be in eight different areas, in eight different building sites with eight different rates of pay.

Mr FARMER—As you say, that is the nature of the job, so maybe that is something we have to take into account.

Mr Taylor—Exactly. I think the case-by-case scenario is the way to look at it. I think it is good for some industries—terrific. Hospitality: turn up at McDonald's at 9 o'clock; go home at 12. In our industry you could turn up at nine and the boss not bring you back to your home until 7 o'clock that night because the job—

Mr FARMER—Yes, the same as many contractors. That was just a general comment. In light of the Bradfield example of things along those lines—and we see how that seems to work so well for that region—if schools were specifically set up as VET colleges and, as you mentioned, the teachers got employment for the students because of their contacts and their contact base in the local areas, would you find that what you were doing is creating a culture—and I am just playing devil's advocate here—where, if you have a school or a zone in a region that is highly industrial, most of the people you turn out of the area will go into those types of industries and there is not the diversity or opportunity in the normal curriculum there for those students?

Mr Taylor—That is a valid point, but I see the schools as still providing a general education. You are trying to make sure that, if somebody takes up a VET course in that school, for whatever reason, it will be a viable VET course. For me, schooling in years 11 and 12 is a general education. VET is something you do to get a taste for the industry or to set up some sort of career path after a general education. So school is still school. In my opinion, this is an add-on. If you start diversifying and the resource is spread so thinly that the VET course people undertake does not mean anything, you defeat the purpose of VET in that school.

Mr FARMER—What if we have that structure, and you have students who clearly want to do VET—say they want to work as an aircraft engineer at Qantas—but they are at Campbelltown or somewhere like that, where the VET school specialises in electrical work or

different types of careers because of its contacts? This mainly applies to the public sector, because they are usually encouraged to go to schools within their own areas, and that is that. Do you think that perhaps in that case we would need to look at giving them the option to attend schools outside their area so that they could get VET colleges applicable to the type of job that they want?

Mr Taylor—That happened in the pilot in Canberra. We had three colleges set up for the whole system. I think there are 22 colleges. People who wanted to do the VET course certificate for electrical work technical support travelled from one side of Canberra to the other to do that course in school. That is what they did, and that is the only way; otherwise you end up with a watered down version of VET courses throughout the country.

Mr FARMER—I agree.

Mr Palladino—The key issue is that somebody was sitting there coordinating it; it just does not work in a vacuum. You need a management coordinating model for those kids who want to go to this college; if you do not have that, it falls over. You need a systemic issue.

CHAIR—Can't that operate by clusters of schools?

Mr Palladino—Yes, clusters, lead agents, or whatever you want to call it.

Mr Taylor—That has come out of the pilot. Those partnerships with TAFE and other colleges work really well. Referring to a point made by a previous speaker, our TAFE system was involved with our colleges, and it was working really well until somebody in TAFE decided, 'There's some money to be made out of this.' The partnerships started to fade as soon as TAFE said, 'If we get into a partnership with schools, then we can charge them for the training of the VET students.' It worked beautifully when it was cooperative, but, as soon as the money people in the TAFE system decided that there was a quid to be made, it started to fall over. That is a real issue, and it was a valid point by the previous speaker. At home, it is managed by the department of education, the TAFE sector and the education sector; TAFE decided it was going to make some money out it, and that was a problem.

Mr Palladino—That is an important issue for us.

Mr FARMER—Brian, you mentioned that there was a defining point between years 10 and 12. Your recommendations state that it is quite good for them to leave in year 10 and go directly into the type of job that they are looking for, if that is what they want to do, rather than wasting those two extra years going to school. We have also heard that the types of students who opt for the electrical field—electrical engineering and so on—are the types who would naturally go on to years 11 and 12 anyway. Of course, there is the dilemma that we have heard here as well—that they get to that stage and then they feel some sort of obligation from outside sources, whether it be their family or society, where, because they have achieved that level of schooling, it is a backward step for them to go into something that they could have achieved in year 10.

One of the purposes of this seminar is to draw a line in the sand and ask, 'How much basic education do we need before we transfer these students into their VET studies?' That needs to be defined; otherwise you will always have this argument. What will happen—and I welcome your input—is that the students who have gone on to years 11 and 12 obviously feel that they

have this extra education and that, with this, they are due a more noble career than, say, going into the trades. Until we are able to define it, we will not be able to overcome that stigma.

Mr Thomas—First of all, I am quite clear—and it is advice that I give to parents who ask—that, if their sons or daughters are doing very well in the appropriate subjects in year 10, the course is designed for those students to be able to deal with it quite adequately. As with all other educational programs, there is a notional entry point. You bring a basket of skills with you on the day that you come, and it builds on those in the same way as the years 11 and 12 maths and English subjects build on what the students have already done up to year 10. They need additional maths and some literacy skills, but certainly they need some of the abstract conceptual skills. That is because not everything we deal with is visible and physical; we have electrical and magnetic activities that the kids cannot see directly but they can see their effects. Those are things that are developed in the course itself.

We need to be able to say to the students at the end of year 10, 'The point for you is this: do you want to be a doctor, a lawyer or a vet or whatever it is that requires a higher school education?' They can do engineering from the trades, because there is a continuous career pathway from the trades through to engineering, if they wish. It is a longer pathway than going to university and being an engineer, but the person who does it through the trade and finds that they want to go further at the end of the day is a much better engineer, because they have got their hands dirty, and they know the grassroots level as well as the design and other aspects.

Mr FARMER—In relation to a government, to encourage that balance between years 10 and 11 and the getting of extra hands-on experience before moving on to maybe engineering careers later on, or whatever different levels up the ladder there may be, should there be more emphasis on the scale of pay for people who take that option so that that is an incentive? If it is proven that we are turning out better engineers at the other end of the line through this hands-on experience, maybe there has to be some sort of credit given for those years in the workplace before moving on—for example, a landscape architect who has done the job and then gone into landscape architecture, drawing the plans, as opposed to somebody who has just gone straight from school to university studies, has been accredited and is very good at putting the figures together on a piece of paper but does not have the ground knowledge. Perhaps those people should receive a better rate of pay.

Mr Thomas—The market will always determine the rate of pay. Very successful graduates in the trades area, particularly those who pick up a couple of additional skills on the way through—usually in relation to some aspects of communication with computers, data communications and so on— receive rewards in their mid-20s well beyond those of a great many university graduates in their late 20s and early 30s. If people are aware of that and are aware of the nature of the work—that it is interesting, that it is not in the same place every day, which a lot of people like, and that each job is a new challenge—it will also be attractive.

Mr FARMER—Do you see it as industry's job to advertise the fact that they are better tradespeople at the end of the line, or do you see that as government's responsibility?

Mr Palladino—I think that it is both, because who benefits? Not only do employers and industry benefit but also the community and the economy benefit. One of the dilemmas we have at this moment is a huge skills shortage in our industry. We have 60-year-old line workers being re-employed in Victoria, because line workers cannot be found. That alone is a community

issue, because ultimately we all pay more for electricity. Can we put a skills pool in the market that keeps pressure on the market price of labour? You can only do that with investments. Industry which has a short-term need as a contractor to employ somebody for one to two years does not have the wherewithal or the capacity to invest in individuals. Therefore, in the longer term, we all pay. The economy fails because of it. We have a combined need to work through that.

Mr SAWFORD—The issue I want to deal with is the significant change that we are now facing. If you look at your industry in, say, the fifties and sixties, and the education department, it was an expanding industry. Education had expanding numbers and expanding budgets. It is much easier to deal with an expanding budget. You can make mistakes and have flexibility. In 1979, you could draw a line in the sand, and it all changed. Some of the same people in both industry and education remained in leadership positions. One day they were dealing with expanding budgets and expanding work; the next they were dealing with diminishing work, diminishing enrolments and diminishing money. They were not good horses for courses.

We have had this for 25 years now, all over the place. Education is an incredible monolith to move. We have these people in education who have been dealing with diminishing numbers. Where is there going to be the catalyst for the change? Is the catalyst somewhere else? For example, is the catalyst in local government, where they have huge budgets? They spend 30 per cent of the tax dollar, and yet a lot of them—particularly in working-class areas—spend four to five per cent of their budgets on capital infrastructure, looking after their asset inventory and job dividends, when they should be spending 30 per cent. Everyone agrees they ought to be spending that.

To deal with this incredible change that is going to take place in the next five to six years—and is taking place now, as you point out—there is a dramatic rethinking going to take place. My view is that it is not going to come from the education bureaucrats. Where is it going to come from? Where is that change that you want going to come from, and where would you push it if you were trying to think out of left field in terms of creating a catalyst for change?

Mr Palladino—We have some great visions, but eight different states operating in eight different ways, with the Commonwealth trying to coordinate them, is not an easy model to work with.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there another model? Have you thought of another model?

Mr Palladino—The New Zealand model is a good one, but it is a unitary system of government. It is not easy to compare Australia and New Zealand.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you have any details on the New Zealand model?

Mr Palladino—We could get that, if you like.

CHAIR—If you could send us a copy of that, that would be helpful.

Ms PLIBERSEK—You and other people have identified that young people are not really exposed to a lot of career options. The question arises as to whose responsibility it is. Is it your responsibility as an industry? Is it the responsibility of the careers advisers at schools? Is it the

responsibility of a different section of government to lay out these options? One of the big problems, don't you think, is that, if you do not have a good careers adviser at school—and a lot of kids do not—there is nowhere else to go?

Here at Central, the old CES used to have a drop-in centre with touch screens. Not only did that go, about five years ago, but, more to the point now, if you are not on an unemployment benefit or a pension, you are not even allowed to go to Centrelink for advice about jobs. There literally is nowhere to go if you are unemployed but not on a benefit—if you are married and have been out of the work force looking after kids or whatever. There are a whole lot of people who just do not have any access to careers advice any more.

Mr Palladino—There is a considerable amount of careers advice in the market. DEST has a web site. It has a jobs guide. It has pumped millions of dollars into a scattered model of providing careers advice.

Ms PLIBERSEK—You think it is not usable? It is there, but is not usable?

Mr Palladino—It is not coordinated in a strategic way according to industry needs. What it says is, 'We'll take a one-step approach to everything, and it should work.' We know it does not work. I reckon if somebody gave me $1 million tomorrow, I would get the number of apprentices we need in our industry. We know that, but we need a strategic vision.

Ms PLIBERSEK—One million dollars is not much.

Mr Palladino—I know, but we are prepared to put—

Mr Thomas—For that much, you would make a special effort.

Mr Palladino—But there is a lot of support from industry. There is a lot of in-kind stuff. We need a strategy. If we take a dart approach to trying to find solutions, at the end of the day, that is what we are going to get. That is why I think we are in the mess we are in. There has been a dart approach to everything: 'There's a problem. Let's throw a dart at it. We've fixed it for now.' The ricocheting effect downstream is huge, and we are finding that in our industry now. The ricocheting effect of corporatisation and privatisation on the number of apprentices in those big industries has had downstream effects now. We are seeing skills shortages. How do we fill those gaps?

Mr Thomas—It is a matter of making contact with the people who need to know and of getting the advice. That is the difficulty. Interestingly, the married woman example is a good one. It would not matter how good the school careers advisers were, that is a target group that misses out.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Another example is a young mum who has been out of the work force, or never been in the work force, because she had a baby. She is not in school. Someone like that, theoretically, has advice through Centrelink, but only if they are on a particular back-to-work type of program. There are a whole lot of people who are not covered, because they are not on a benefit.

Mr Palladino—If you surf the Internet nowadays, ANTA is developing a huge portal. You have DEST doing the same; you have Job Guide and all these different departments. The state government is doing the same thing. You show them web sites and say, 'Go and look for a job.' Then you go and look at it and it pulls up an electrical fitter—which does not even exist in our industry any more. The job classifications that are sitting in a lot of those web sites have been put there by old ANZIC codes or ASCO codes or whatever they were when they there furnished. They are so outdated that, if I was looking for a job, I would not know where to start, because it is so fragmented.

Ms PLIBERSEK—You need a human to help you with that, don't you?

Mr Palladino—That is right. That is why I say give me a million dollars and tomorrow I can get 1,000 apprentices in place. I know where the contacts and the linkages are. We have state ITABs and a lot of relationships with TAFE. We have the networks and the industry associations to be able to get into the marketplace. That is a policy issue for governments.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to that supplementary information.

Proceedings suspended from 11.59 a.m. to 12.03 p.m.

RAPER, Ms Jeanne, Manager, VET in Schools Program, Worldskills Australia

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us today, Jeanne.

Ms Raper—I have to clarify that, though I am employed by VET New South Wales, I am actually on secondment to that other organisation. I am representing their views—the Worldskills views—not the VET New South Wales views.

Mr SAWFORD—Wholly funded by VET?

Ms Raper—My position? Yes, currently.

CHAIR—Just as a formality, I need to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of parliament. Perhaps you might like to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions.

Ms Raper—Thank you, yes. As you know, the national training packages form the basis for curricula in the secondary schools across Australia. Some years ago, the opportunity was recognised that a VET in Schools competition could augment the pre-existing Worldskills competition, which is open to young people up to the age of about 25. There was a pilot program in 1998. There were about 29 schools from about three states involved in that. It has grown steadily ever since, with funding and support from industries and from education departments in the various states and territories. The program has been now quite well embraced by all states and territories.

Mr SAWFORD—When you say 'program', do you mean the competition?

Ms Raper—Yes, the VET in Schools side of the Worldskills competition. All states and territories are now involved, except Tasmania, but they have indicated that they want to be involved next time. At the moment we are running 12 categories. Those categories are business administration, commercial cookery, construction, electrotechnology—so I was interested to hear the viewpoints of the previous speakers—food and beverage service, horticulture, information technology, metals and engineering, primary industries—that is general agriculture—retail, tourism and viticulture.

There are three tiers of the competition, and the students progress from one tier to the next tier to the next tier. The first one might be in their local school, college or ITO; then they progress up. At a regional level across the country there are regional committees which comprise representatives of education and the industry. In order to be eligible to go in our section of the competition, they must be enrolled in a secondary school in a VET course, and in year 11, in the first year of the competition.

It was thought by Worldskills that putting out this extra tier in their competition is like preschool—the Little Athletics, if you will—for the main competition. The main competition is international. It started after the war in Europe; Australia came to it late, in about 1982.

Australia has been a member since 1982. It is a member of the International Vocational Organisation.

The VETiS competition, it was thought, would introduce Worldskills to this wider audience of students while they were still in their early entry level of training and provide a recognised pool of excellence which we could build on in subsequent years. It would also complement what was happening with regard to the key competencies and the development of enterprising attitudes and that sort of thing.

We conduct these regional competitions, which are usually held every second year. In New South Wales, we hold them every year in the VET side of it, for the obvious reason that, if that was not the case, every other year would miss out. We do it each year and it becomes what the teacher does as part of normal class assessment. They are not written competitions; they are competency based competitions. There is a work simulation environment set up. Sometimes they are actually in the work environment—for instance, in retail they might be in Grace Bros in Armidale, Tamworth or somewhere like that. The best-recognised students go in there for the day and work on this predetermined, pre-existing competition, which is common across the country. What we try to do at all times with the regional competition is make sure that people are recognising the students—that all the students who get to each level are recognised—and that the skills that are involved are recognised.

The national competitions are held every couple of years. There is a host state. For instance, last time, New South Wales was the host state, and we had it in Newcastle. The next time it will be in Brisbane. It gives the state that sponsors the national competition for that year the opportunity to use the event to promote training and to promote the educational skill developments happening in their state. Of course, as you could appreciate, it also provides a benchmark between the states; people can see what is happening in each state, so students, teachers and industries are able to compare and contrast.

The national competition is run by the national office, and that is where I am currently located. Major resources for that come from ANTA, with the state government putting in a significant proportion as well. We also have a lot of other sponsorship that comes mainly from industry. It is conducted over a three-day period and there are over 50 categories in the main section. They include traditional skill areas, but also some of the new and emerging skill areas, such as mechatronics—and IT, of course.

The projects are assessed by industry experts. They work in teams. There are schoolteachers, TAFE teachers and industry experts providing the judging, and they are also involved in the making up of the projects. These national competitions provide a forum for industry development in vocational education, for the training authorities and for the government to look at what is happening in skills in particular areas and to see the relevance and where the changes need to be made. Bodies such as ANTA are then in a better position to provide advice, because they are looking at the actual skill levels being demonstrated rather than at some theoretical model that might be put before them.

Some of the young students in the main competition, the gold medallists, are then selected to go on and represent Australia in the international competition, which will be held next time in Switzerland—but not the school students; that is the first one.

The VET in Schools section of that Worldskills program has provided tangible evidence of exceptional skill levels being mastered by school students from all states and territories involved. The Worldskills VETiS program has helped transform industry's acceptance of the value of the VET courses. These VET courses are creating, in many instances, very work-ready employees. Industry has also benefited through its increased participation in the program, by being able to shape the training that is being delivered and through the fact that we are nurturing more competitive school leavers as prospective employees.

That is what I wanted to say to you briefly in my opening comments. I was, in a previous life, a deputy principal who had responsibility for administering VET courses in the school I was in.

CHAIR—Jeanne, how effective are the competitions in promoting an interest in VET amongst school students who might not otherwise have undertaken a VET option?

Ms Raper—It is a good question. It really does help. Students can go to a regional level competition—many of these are held under one roof—or they can go to a national competition. When it was in Adelaide two years ago, we had something like 30,000 school students through a three-day competition. There was an astonishing level of interest being shown.

CHAIR—In the competition?

Ms Raper—No, just through spectating. What they were able to see first-hand was what a particular industry was really like, being demonstrated by young people of roughly the same age in a real-life work situation. They could actually physically see it. That was the big thing in terms of bringing good career education to those students who were there as visitors.

CHAIR—Has there been any measured indication of the impact of that on subsequent enrolments in VET courses?

Ms Raper—Yes. Because that was so successful, what happened next was that some of the ITABs—particularly the metal and engineering national ITAB—were very interested in what was happening and how that could help provide a focus for their particular areas. This last time, we produced booklets that were given out to careers advisers beforehand to help focus the students, so before they came they knew what it was they wanted to look at. They had to look at that, focus their attention and get some follow-up later on. We are seeing that, from those schools that are involved, there is increased interest in pursuing vocational courses.

CHAIR—How do we compare with the standard in other countries when we go to the international competition? What is our level of performance?

Ms Raper—We do very well. Australia is currently holding up very well indeed, both in the new and emerging industries, such as mechatronics and NIT, and in the traditional hand trade industries. I have forgotten the medal count from the last international, but it was really quite impressive. That ability to be able to benchmark internationally through this is being seen as heartening by the various CEOs.

CHAIR—Are there any glaring areas of weakness, where we are not up to scratch?

Ms Raper—That is a difficult question for me to answer, because we tend not to take students if we do not think that they are internationally competitive. If the industry experts think that our best is not internationally competitive, we tend not to take that person. I really cannot answer that question, because of that—because they are not exposed if we think that they will not be up to the mark.

Mr SAWFORD—The competitions can be like an Olympic sport: they are not necessarily a reflection of the general populace in terms of their skills in sport or in VET.

Ms Raper—No, except that there are lots of levels of this competition; it is not just the final level. You are monitoring from the very beginning, so every class member—

Mr SAWFORD—But sport has the same sort of levels as well.

Ms Raper—Yes, of course it does.

Mr SAWFORD—So you cannot draw conclusions from the substance of VET programs across Australia from the competitions.

Ms Raper—No, but you can draw heart. Clearly, if you were not getting any success at all, there would be an indication there, too, wouldn't there? There is a converse indication.

Mr SAWFORD—You could also delude yourself.

Ms Raper—You could also delude yourself, yes.

Ms PLIBERSEK—I wanted to ask what mechatronics was.

Ms Raper—Mechatronics is an application of electronics in construction. In Worldskills, we are moving to having team competitions. They work in teams. Last time, in Korea, we won a gold medal in an electrical field, where a team of young people had to convert an existing wheelchair into an electrical wheelchair. We won that competition. We also won a gold medal in a new event, which was web page design.

Ms PLIBERSEK—In the national competition, which states perform best?

Ms Raper—In the VET in Schools competition?

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes.

Ms Raper—New South Wales, but that is because we have a very strong program in that area; the other states and territories do not invest as much and do not have as strong a program. With New South Wales, it was a matter of the cream being able to rise very readily, because we had something like 140 to 150 schools involved. To have got through and to have got to the end, our team was very competitive.

Mr SAWFORD—Is the focus on participants in regional areas, or is it urban and regional?

Ms Raper—It is interesting that in Worldskills there is more interest in the regional areas than in the cities.

Mr SAWFORD—Why do you think that is?

Ms Raper—I think that is because in the regional areas the people—the employers and the community—take their young people to heart and are more inclined to organise this type of event than in the city, where young people tend to become a little more lost and there is not as clear a sense of community.

Mr FARMER—Along those lines, I understand that you are full time employed with Worldskills. Do you see it as more of an incentive for young students to try to be their best, having something to aim for such as the glamorous event of an international competition in their chosen field, or do you think that we should place more emphasis on the fact that they can achieve higher grades and levels with their end-of-school studies if they just apply themselves to their VET studies?

Ms Raper—The big issue is that VET studies in schools are not generally regarded as glamorous options. Because of that, anything that you can do that enhances the status of VET within the school will help more students feel comfortable about their choice of going into VET, and that will have a flow-on result.

Mr FARMER—Let me take that one step further. What if the amount of money that it costs to set up Worldskills were poured into VET studies in the schools? We have heard of a whole range of programs, ways of promoting the programs within the schools and re-educating the teachers and so on. First, what does Worldskills cost that sector?

Ms Raper—The public sector or the private sector?

Mr FARMER—How much does it cost to set up?

Ms Raper—Overall, Worldskills in Australia?

Mr FARMER—Yes.

Ms Raper—It is very difficult to quantify that.

Mr FARMER—There is not a cost on it?

Ms Raper—Yes, but much of what we receive is in-kind sponsorship: industry will give us equipment, facilities and judges. It is very difficult to quantify. The amount of federal government purse money that comes in is approximately $1.3 million, but that is not the VET program. We have just attracted ECEF funding over the next three years, and there will be a series of meetings looking to match that from the states. That is $100,000 a year.

Mr FARMER—Is there interest from the states in doing that?

Ms Raper—Yes. A meeting will be held in a couple of weeks time. If you see it narrowly as a competition for the elite, you are missing most of the point of the benefit in terms of what flows through to VET. For example, when they are working up the projects, teachers, schoolteachers and TAFE teachers sit down with an industry person and collaboratively work up a project. That is really good staff training and awareness raising for all of the three people involved. That is just one example of how it is not just about a few elite people.

Mr FARMER—Yes, I understand.

CHAIR—As a more general question, asking for your impressions, do you think that it could be said that too many schools have rushed down the path of VET in Schools when more effective use could have been made of partnerships with TAFEs?

Mr SAWFORD—Too many schools have the guilts about their lack of effort, in fact.

Ms Raper—It is difficult for me to answer that, given that I am here in a dual capacity.

CHAIR—I am just asking for an impression, that is all.

Ms Raper—My feeling is that certainly more can be done in terms of forming better and more cohesive partnerships and utilising resources, but that will happen in the fullness of time. It seems to me that we are rolling towards that now, and things such as the project that I am working on can only assist, because they help break down the barriers and show people the opportunities and how it can be done. You are introducing them to each other. You are sitting them down together in the same facility.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Keep winning those gold medals for Australia.

Proceedings suspended from 12.22 p.m. to 1.45 p.m.

BARRON, Mr James Patrick, Chief Executive Officer, Group Training Australia

PRIDAY, Mr Jeffrey Wallace, National Development Officer, Group Training Australia

CHAIR—Welcome. The proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. Generally, of course, our discussions are on the record. If you think for any reason you need to make any comments or answer any questions off the record, just let us know. I invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will ask some questions.

Mr Barron—Thank you, Mr Chair. Group Training Australia is the national association that represents the collective interests and concerns of the group training network to government, stakeholders and the wider community. The network comprises over 180 group training organisations employing over 37,000 apprentices and trainees, making it the single largest employer of apprentices and trainees in the country. We welcome this opportunity to appear at this VET in Schools inquiry.

GTA and those in the group training network continue to be strong supporters and advocates for the creation of alternative pathways into employment or into further education and training. As such, we see many positives in the current VET in Schools program. As a network, GTOs are increasingly involved with schools through a number of avenues: the provision of careers advice, the management of structured workplace learning programs, and employing school based apprentices and trainees. This coalface interaction between many group training companies, employers, schools and vocational institutions often gives GTOs a unique insight into the workings of a policy. The VET in Schools program is no different.

Whilst we are very strong supporters of the VET in Schools program, we do believe that a number of issues exist that need to be addressed to ensure that the program reaches its full potential. Most of our observations are based on discussions and feedback that we have received from our GTOs in the network, and they seem to be in line, we believe, with a number of other stakeholders' concerns with this program. Our concerns are as much attitudinal and cultural as they are about specific policy settings, and they revolve around employers as much as they revolve around schools. They are as follows.

Whilst no-one is disputing the fact that vocational programs delivered in schools lead to industry recognised credentials, it is obvious that this has not meant automatic acceptance by employers on the ground. Indeed, it has been reported to us that a number of employers question the value of school delivered industry credentials, particularly when they subsequently discover literacy and numeracy problems with those same school leavers. Moreover, as many schools are now RTOs, delivering the off-the-job training component, many employers remain sceptical at best about the ability of teachers in schools to provide quality training.

Other VET in Schools issues identified by us in our submission that we believe this committee should pay attention to include difficulties within some jurisdictions in establishing suitable industrial arrangements; opposition by some in industry to school based arrangements in the traditional trades; schools not seeing VET in Schools as core business and therefore allocating it a low priority; increased OH&S risks arising from a high-risk group being in the

workplace; covering costs of travel, supervision and insurance; the tension between casual after-school jobs and genuine school based traineeships; the management of duty of care between the many interested parties involved in rolling out VET in Schools; and, importantly, the ongoing tension between schools and industry. As I have said, VET in Schools has been a success but it, in many ways, is at a crossroads. The issues identified by us need to be examined closely if we are to move on and achieve a truly functional program embraced equally by students, schools and industry.

CHAIR—Thanks, Jim. You have touched on a number of the issues that other witnesses and submissions have. In relation to the point you made there about the scepticism, to use your term, of employers about school based training for the off-the-job component where the schools are the RTOs and what seems to be a very clear disparity between the acceptability of school based training versus TAFE based training, in your view how do we address that problem? How do we raise employer and industry acceptance of and confidence in school based training? As a precursor to that, should we be trying to do that or should we perhaps be trying to focus more on TAFE? But if the answer to that is no, then how do we raise the confidence?

Mr Barron—Jeff might want to make a comment, but I think one of the key things that has to be done is to change the attitude that is prevalent in many schools about priority— where VET in Schools is placed in their program, in their timetabling; how they teach it internally to their own school students; what priority the teachers give it; and the quality of those teachers. All those issues go back to the capacity and ability of schools to carry off VET in Schools programs to the extent and quality that employers are looking for. If we are still producing VET in Schools graduates, so to speak, and many employers question their capacity, then the issue surely must rest primarily with schools and the ability of the teachers to provide the appropriate training. It is a real cultural attitudinal issue that is endemic in many schools around the country.

Mr Priday—There are a couple of issues. It is not just the RTO. In cases where the school is the RTO, industry probably has a fairly jaundiced view of the quality of the training, given that many teachers are not trained to industry standards. The facilities are very often not up to industry standard and not up to the standard that they might be in TAFE. Secondly, with institutional pathways, even if it is TAFE delivered, without a serious component of work placement industry probably still has a fairly jaundiced view about the value of a credential achieved at school. If someone comes out with a certificate II in something, having done that pretty much entirely as a school based pathway, even if there is a component of structured workplace learning I think industry still has a fairly consistent view that that credential is not particularly robust.

CHAIR—How do we address that?

Mr Priday—You could put greater effort into school based New Apprenticeships and make more of those available and remove some of the impediments to them. That is still a fairly modest component of the VET in Schools agenda, as you know. Queensland is probably still far ahead of anybody else.

CHAIR—Five thousand out of 170,000.

Mr Priday—Yes. Or you could find some way of making the structured workplace component of a VET in Schools subject more robust. That presumably means giving them more

time to go out into the workplace. That assumes, of course, that you can find the workplaces for them to do that and that you can manage that process in terms of arranging it with the school system and timetabling and so on. It is a massive logistical exercise.

CHAIR—As I understand it, one of the problems as well is the doubts about the industry currency and industry experience of the teachers themselves. There is a real problem there in getting the schools to release teachers into industry and to still pay their salaries. Would it be true to say that industry would welcome the opportunity to have those teachers for a period of months in the workplace to develop a currency and an awareness of what is going on? If so, would they be willing, do you think, to contribute to the cost of that?

Mr Barron—You have to ask them, I guess.

CHAIR—Do you think that would be desirable?

Mr Barron—In general terms it would be an appropriate avenue to investigate. I am not saying that it would work or it would be embraced widely across industry, but I do not see anything wrong with it being tested in some capacity to see what the views of industry would be if schools wished to release these teachers. The other side of the coin is that there could be far greater investment in teacher training and additional funds being provided for a different in-house approach to teacher training.

CHAIR—Do you mean preservice?

Mr Barron—Yes, preservice, and having more of a focus on this particular area before they go in. That needs to be investigated and more funds need to be allocated to that. It is a priority—what a teacher learns prior to coming into this environment. I do not think all the weight should be on industry to fork out the additional funds. It needs to be a partnership arrangement. Again, it needs to have an attitudinal shift and a cultural shift so that the schools are willing to say, 'Okay, this is a genuine and fair dinkum part of our agenda and our timetabling will indicate that on a week by week basis.'

CHAIR—If it were to be addressed as part of preservice training, presumably that would mean that the undergraduate course, or even the Dip. Ed., however it was structured, would need to involve a fairly large slab of industry experience and, preferably, a variety of industry experiences. Is that the sort of thing you would be thinking of?

Mr Barron—Yes, that is a component of it. Training should involve a greater aspect of the VET side of the equation than is happening at the moment and then those teachers coming on stream would be far better placed to provide the quality teaching that industry is looking for, before it becomes a problem.

Mr SAWFORD—Is that ever likely to happen, in terms of universities running teacher training?

Mr Priday—That is unlikely at the moment.

Mr SAWFORD—We used to train tech studies teachers once. An implicit part of their course was a pretty strong relationship with the industry that they worked in. I understand that things have changed, but the relationship of industry to teaching and being up to the mark in terms of current equipment, strategies, et cetera, is still there. That has not changed. We don't train people, do we?

Mr Barron—No, we do not. People in government have as much responsibility as anybody to talk about the need for the culture to change. It is all right for us at our particular level within the VET sector to talk about these issues, but you do need that political support—the importance of teacher training, the need to revisit this issue—because it is affecting so many different aspects of the capacity to deliver a quality VET system. It should be in everybody's interests to highlight the importance of this and not just always say, 'Well, it's industry. Industry has to pick up the tab.' The employer industry would be happy to partner whoever fits in this, but I do not think we should put the weight completely on industry.

Mr Priday—That said, some programs, such as the Teacher Release into Industry Program, are working well, aren't they?

Mr SAWFORD—When I read the submission, Jim, I reflected on it and then had another look. The thing that struck me about your submission was the conclusion. You said it again in your introduction this afternoon: 'VET is at the crossroads.' This is only the third day of the public hearings in this inquiry and for us to come to conclusions at this stage would be ridiculous, of course, but there is a feeling that we are not at the crossroads; we have never got going in the past 25 years. When the department came in here yesterday they were saying that one-third of New South Wales students have access to accredited VET. When you realise that two-thirds do not attend university, that is not such a great achievement.

If you compare the leadership of education departments, industry and training, you seem to draw a line in the sand about 1979 and 1980. Prior to that you were dealing with expanding budgets, increasing numbers, new initiatives. Almost overnight it becomes decreasing enrolments, diminishing budgets and the same sort of leadership that went from one group to the other who did not handle the decreasing budget. We do not seem to have the structures to deliver VET. Even now, I have the impression that the senior colleges do it better, TAFE does it better and places like Bradfield down the road do it better. I do not have a strong impression that comprehensive high schools are doing it very well at all, partly for the reasons that you are suggesting.

Do you think there is a need for a cathartic change at the leadership level—political, departmental and industry—and a need to be looking at a different vision? I do not have a clear vision from all the submissions that we have had so far. In fact, a previous witness, Dr Cornford, stated, 'No-one seems to have any clear objectives, first of all, about what VET is and where it's going.' If you do not have the appropriate rationale, then it follows that you will not have the right strategy and outcomes. How do you change that mix? Do you feel sympathy for the view that the rationale for VET is confused, although there may be some good things happening?

Mr Priday—It's confusing in his mind, is it, despite all the frameworks and principles that have been elaborated by MCEETYA and others? They seem fairly straightforward to me. The problem at the moment is that it is still too much like an adjunct or add-on to general education.

It is not integrated and it is hard to see that happening quickly because of a whole range of issues which I am sure you are all well aware of. It gives the appearance of being secondary and that is a difficulty. To that extent, it is at the crossroads. You have to wonder where school based New Apprenticeships will go. Will that take off in any meaningful sense, or is it just a very small subset of the VET in Schools agenda, which itself is problematic? There are a number of issues.

Mr Barron—There is no easy answer for this. You have to change not only the commercial culture but the people culture as well—everything.

Mr SAWFORD—It is a big ask, isn't it?

Mr Barron—It should not be. We have been talking about the importance of VET and the change in the political and policy landscape in the past 30 years, but only 28 per cent of kids move on to higher education. Governments have been attempting to address this in different ways for 30 years, but in 2003 we are still at the stage where culturally, in an educational sense—from schools to parents, to politicians; everybody—the 30 per cent who do progress to higher education still corner the market in respect of support: media coverage; the focus on aspirations; what is worth while; what is a noble profession. It all seems to reside in the campuses of universities. What is happening with the hundreds of campuses, TAFEs, et cetera where 70 per cent of kids are working on their futures? Until and unless we change our approach on how we talk up VET, rather than in some cases still talk it down, we are always going to be behind the eight ball and wondering why we are struggling to have it on centre stage.

Mr SAWFORD—Jeff, you made a comment earlier about the term 'integrated', which is part of the spin and the propaganda you often see in submissions of people who are involved in the training aspect, as in your part of it. Other people are questioning that and saying that the delivery of good VET will take part in a separated system. Would you like to make a comment on that?

Mr Priday—I am not sure what they mean by 'separated system'.

Mr SAWFORD—Specialised vocational education; maybe kids at years 11 and 12 attending at TAFE or in a specialised college like Bradfield or a senior college. They have accepted the fact that comprehensive high schools cannot deliver it or will not deliver it.

Mr Priday—I am not sure which is the best method. Again, I am not sure what 'truly integrated with general education' means. It is hard to imagine because of a whole range of difficulties—logistical and otherwise. There is an ideological notion attached to that, because anything else smacks too much of streaming kids into an alternative pathway and a sort of inferior pathway—whether it is done in the school or in specialist schools that are set up for the purpose. Indeed, there are some people who think we should go back to technical high schools. I was at a conference in South Australia in 1998 that was addressed by the South Australian minister at the time, who announced that he was proudly reopening or setting up a technical high school—I think one had been closed previously, like most of them around the country.

There are people who object to that because it is a form of streaming. I do not know. Many of our people would like to go back to a form of streaming. They are not convinced that the

attempts to keep integrating it with general education are achieving a great deal. It is a kind of deskilling process at some level in their eyes. Nonetheless, there are some good things happening for us. To that extent, we are speaking from self-interest, but our interests are also the interests of the kids. We are seeing kids do VET in Schools as a general subject. It is acculturating them, giving them exposure to the workplace, giving them some general skills and helping to cull those who decide that it is not for them. As we mentioned in our submission, those kids are then going on in year 12 to a school based new apprenticeship. This is happening in the building industry, particularly in Queensland. When they finish year 12, they are then being converted full-time as apprentices with our companies, and that is working very well. The company in question has found that they are getting their best retention ever by creating this pathway.

Mr SAWFORD—In a number of the submissions, the term 'parity of esteem'—an interesting spin really—has been mentioned. It goes back to the view that technical education is regarded as second rate or of a secondary nature. It was interesting at the time of the Karmel report, which was the significant Australian report that got rid of our technical schools, that that was not a correct view of what was happening in many of our technical schools in Australia. They were often superior to the academic high schools. They were doing very well academically, with academic streaming, and they were doing very well in a vocational sense. They had a lot of teachers who came out of industry and were doing their tech studies areas. In other words, they had the credible people in front of the kids. There may have been examples of the home science school and nothing else, but most of the technical schools, particularly in my state of South Australia, were superior to the high schools.

The significant factor was when the mathematics, physics and chemistry prizes were being won by technical school kids. That really shocked them. Then there was envy in the departments. Technical education was more expensive to deliver. It is all in the Karmel report, even though no-one seems to take much notice of it. The envy was there that the high schools were getting less money than the technical schools, obviously because they were delivering much more expensive courses. Most of the comprehensive high schools since then have not changed from being the academic high schools they were before. They have done what you suggested and just done the add-ons. They have not integrated vocational education with extracurricular activities and academic education. They have not done that at all. They have never been challenged to do that. The successful VET in individual schools—and some of it is quite remarkable stuff—often can be traced back to a principal taking on the system, his own community, his own staff, for the benefit of the kids. Peter Turner is one such principal. There are a number of these principals around Australia. When you talk to them, you find they have had pretty big struggles. They have credibility now, but they went through hell in order to get progress. They did not get any support, so the balance was not there.

Mr Barron—You have to have a coalition of the willing—

Mr SAWFORD—That is a terrible phrase to use in the current climate!

Mr Barron—in local communities and, where you do have it, it works really well. There is no question about that. When group training companies partner and work very closely with the local schools and the local industry, it does work very well in some areas, but you cannot say that across-the-board.

Mr SAWFORD—For 25 years we have been plodding along on this line. You acknowledge crossroads. I would go back a bit further and say that—like another of your training colleagues said this morning—it is the beginning. There is an opportunity for a new beginning. He perhaps was not using similar sentiments to you. For that to occur, what sorts of strategies would you be recommending to government?

Mr Barron—If it is going to get beyond a series of inquiries and tweaking and twisting at the edges at every second MINCO or MCEETYA meeting—very small steps—I think something has to happen from the government level down. It has to trickle down. There has to be an acknowledgment and a recognition that it is fundamentally important for this country's future to bring it to centre stage, embrace it politically and make it a significant and serious policy objective for anybody who is in government, not just an add-on and afterthought.

Mr SAWFORD—What about the bureaucracy?

Mr Barron—Once you get that political support, I think that bureaucracy has to follow. It is remarkable what happens if a prime minister or somebody starts to talk about the importance of a particular issue which has not been raised before. Suddenly things start happening. Bureaucracy starts putting it on its radar screen. It is in their frame. They have to start taking notice of it.

Mr ALBANESE—A la Working Nation.

Mr Barron—I could not comment on any particular policies. It is a long time ago, Anthony. If you do not talk about it, nobody is going to know that it exists. Once you talk about it—once it is embraced more at a political level—everybody else starts taking notice and things happen after that. It may not require a lot of extra dollars, but I think that is fundamental. That has to happen. There has to be not only a cursory acknowledgment but a fundamental acceptance that this has to be placed as a significant policy priority, not only for education but across-the-board.

Mr SAWFORD—The last time vocational education got a real lift in this country was through the short-term tenure of a director-general of education called John Walker, who had international significance. Unfortunately, he died. Some of the people for whom he provided training opportunities took over education departments around this country. The difference between now and then is that he did that when budgets were expanding. It is a different challenge now.

I am thinking of the Western Australian academic Peter Newman, who encouraged the Western Australian Labor government at that time, against all the authorities of all the academics everywhere else in Australia, to invest in a new railway system. In other words, there was an academic credibility. That was done in a diminishing budget scenario. What is your view? Do we need someone who can think a bit more laterally and has a little bit of a vision for the future in relation to VET? Do we need that as well as the political will? As I said, the rationale coming to us so far is very confused. I think we need somebody to grab the damn thing and put together some coherent rationales, strategies and outcomes.

Mr Barron—I agree with that, but I also think we have to be careful. In this area of policy, I think we have had too much vision and a lot of it has not made much sense.

Mr SAWFORD—That's not vision though, is it, if it doesn't make sense?

Mr Barron—It is presented as vision at the time. Its objectives are very noble as to what we want to achieve as a sector, but it has not been realistic on the ground. We need are fewer visionary statements about what is going to happen to VET in the next 20 years. We need to recognise what is happening now and see how we can improve it on the ground. Talk to the VET practitioners. Talk to those who are thinking about it in language they can understand. A lot of kids still do not understand what we are talking about when we talk about VET. They cannot reach out to it. Again, it is cultural and attitudinal. We are not talking about radical shifts in policy, but simple changes in approach that could have a huge impact on the ground.

Mr Priday—I thought you might have been meant to get some of that visionary change agent stuff from the former ASTF, now ECEF. I see the card on the table in front of me.

Mr FARMER—James, you mentioned earlier that industry is very sceptical about the credentials of teachers. With that in mind, do you think there is a better way for us to go, such as employing TAFE teachers in the school sector instead of trying to educate their schoolteachers to TAFE? That way they already have the credibility with the business sector for having those skills, but we are taking them from there into the school environment as a bonus to the school; as an extra to the school. Of course, there would need to be financial remuneration to the TAFE colleges, but is that the type of teacher that will get us that sort of acceptance?

Mr Barron—I could not comment across-the-board, but I think it would be the type of teacher, hypothetically, that a lot more people in industry would take notice of and regard more highly than some of the teachers who are undertaking the work at the moment. This is not a criticism of individual teachers; it is just a fact of life.

Mr FARMER—We acknowledge the difference.

Mr Barron—Hypothetically and in general, yes, I would agree that that is something that should be looked at.

Mr Priday—I was going to suggest earlier, in response to a question that was asked over here, that it might be useful to look to TAFE to supply some of those teachers, but I imagine TAFE has lots of problems of its own now. A lot of the teachers are sessional teachers—tradespeople who presumably have done a diploma of education or something and who come in on a sessional basis—so there might be logistical difficulties.

CHAIR—Overall, is there a shortage of qualified teachers with industry experience?

Mr Priday—I suspect there is, yes.

CHAIR—Be it in TAFE or in schools.

Mr FARMER—Yes, so obviously that seems to be the track that we would need to go down, at least to get credibility with the business sector, and working in with the schools would probably solve a lot of the problems there with the teachers trying to be everything to everybody.

Mr Priday—But that will only solve one part of it. Notwithstanding the fact that we have a competency based system and you are supposed to be competent or you are not competent, irrespective of how the competency was gained, it does not solve the problem of an institutional pathway where there is little or no work component. Industry has a fairly jaundiced view of a kid coming out at year 12 and waving a certificate II in whatever it might be, delivered at school by schoolteachers, even if we said, 'No, it's delivered by TAFE teachers coming in on a sessional basis. No, they didn't go into the workplace.'

Mr FARMER—Obviously you believe in that integration, but that on-job experience is all part of the course, anyway.

Mr Priday—Not necessarily. Most do not have an on-job component. The brief of ECEF is to try and get more.

Mr FARMER—The strong point that you are advocating is that, in order to make this a success, it needs to have on-job training as well?

Mr Priday—That is right, and that is why we make a point in our submission about training being left out, and it is probably just an oversight, but there is a big difference between voc ed and vocational training. The educational component is the underpinning knowledge, and that is fine, but there is still the acquisition of the skills. As I said, I know theoretically in a competency based system you are competent or you are not competent, irrespective. You might simulate a workplace or whatever, but the reality is that there is still a big distinction between the off-the-job component and how that is acquired and actually having any real skills that have been demonstrated in a workplace.

Mr FARMER—It would take strong support from industry to be able to get those placements. What is your suggestion along those lines?

Mr Priday—It does take a lot of support from industry, and industry does support it. There are lots of work placements being made available to kids doing VET in Schools subjects. VET coordinators are constantly looking for those placements. Group training organisations, using their vast networks of host employers, often make those placements available.

Mr FARMER—But obviously nowhere near enough.

Mr Priday—Not enough, no. I can remember in 1994, I think it was, the ANTA inaugural conference in Brisbane. Alan Ruby, who was then in the federal department, got up at one of the presentations and did a back-of-envelope calculation of some millions of work placements needed. With all of the institutional training going on in a competency based system, there was a need to have access to a workplace, and he came up with the number of meaningful workplaces that would need to be made available. This is a huge logistical exercise and problem. Yes, a lot more are needed. How we are going to get them I am not quite sure.

Mr FARMER—That was what I really wanted to know. With your knowledge, from your field of expertise, what would you see as the recommendation in order to achieve that goal?

Mr Priday—To get the number of work placements that might be needed? Mr Ruby did not have an answer; it was purely thrown out to us. I am not sure. That is why we have done work

with ECEF and others to try and get our organisations to encourage their host employers to make more work placements available, and that is happening. Many more have been made available. A range of programs might have to be implemented to try and get more industry involvement.

Mr FARMER—Can we get down to absolute basics then. You say you have had a little bit of success along those lines. Exactly how? Is it incentives based? Is it through monetary gain for the industry? Is it through just a phone call? Tell me exactly how it works.

Mr Priday—Most of our organisations are involved in the clusters that are funded by ECEF. VET coordinators in schools and working with clusters of schools are using group training organisations who are on management committees, or contracting them and paying them to provide the work placements. To some degree we have been working with our companies to try and help them understand that it is in their own interests to cultivate this pathway and to work with schools and to help provide work placements, because the kids who are coming through are, as I said before, the clients. They are going to go into apprenticeships that our companies can offer. That is starting to develop momentum. All of that is happening. It is probably just not happening fast enough.

Mr Barron—And it is resource intensive. A lot of GTOs do it in spite of the fact that they know it is actually a net cost to them. More and more across the VET sector, those who are providers in it are being asked to do more and more for less and less, and you can only stretch the rubber band so tight before something snaps. The group training companies that we hear from on a regular basis wish to be involved in this program, but they are also saying they cannot be expected to keep on doing this and putting in without recognising that it is a cost and someone has to pay. It pushes their own capacity to do something else out the other end while they are doing this. Again, it goes back to recognition. This is not easy work. To make it work you have got to partner, you have got to go out and use a lot of shoe leather in making the partnerships stick and making the schools do the right thing, and it is a cost.

Mr Priday—And managing it and monitoring the work placements and making sure something meaningful is happening during a structured work placement is labour and resource intensive.

Mr Barron—And you do not see that when you read the words '170,000 people involved in VET in Schools'. People say, 'That's good.'

CHAIR—Jeff, you made a point earlier about the success of the school based apprenticeships in years 11 and 12. What about the extension of those school based apprenticeships to years 9 and 10? Have you had much to do with those?

Mr Priday—Not a great deal. You may be able to correct me, but I am not aware that any are happening. It has certainly been suggested that they should be happening as early as possible, and of course kids once used to leave school at year 10.

CHAIR—Do you see any reasons why the success you have experienced at years 11 and 12 might not translate to years 9 and 10?

Mr Priday—We are having enough problems at years 11 and 12. I am not sure how we are going to go if we push it back to year 10.

CHAIR—Would there be problems in terms of work placement?

Mr Priday—The questions of duty of care are that much more complicated; they are that much younger. There is transport.

Mr Barron—Insurance.

Mr Priday—Industrial issues. I can foresee all of these things being that much more in focus than they already are, and those issues are difficult enough in some jurisdictions. The need to start VET in Schools, including school based apprenticeships, earlier than is currently available to kids is an issue that has been around for quite some time.

Mr Barron—And, again, if that were to happen, that is part of a bigger debate about whether everybody should be encouraged to have 12 years of schooling. Do you have to have 12 years of pretty much mainstream schooling? If it started in year 9, how many days or weeks would a kid be out of school? What types of students provided by schools should be sent off to school based apprenticeships? Some schools may well use it as an easy way out not to deal with the most difficult students.

CHAIR—One would hope not.

Mr Barron—They may well do that.

CHAIR—On another issue, one of the points you made in your report was about the paucity of careers guidance and adequate counselling for students. That strikes a chord with other submissions we have had and evidence from other witnesses. You made an interesting recommendation, though, that consideration ought to be given to outsourcing careers advice in schools. Can you elaborate on how you would see that working.

Mr Barron—The UK example.

Mr Priday—I am not sure that I can elaborate, except we understand it has been tried in the UK—as reported to us—with considerable success. Exactly what that involves I do not know.

Mr ALBANESE—It is part of the New Deal arrangements for young people.

Mr Priday—And presumably it is exposing kids to people who have a lot more industry understanding of career options than are available through the current work.

CHAIR—Who provides the service? Would it be an industry organisation or representatives of a cross-section of industries?

Mr Barron—It could well be. What they have done is to take it out of the 'usual suspects' environment. It is not done under the total control of the school system so much—it is more industry owned. That is the attraction about it.

CHAIR—Do you have access to further information about the example in Britain?

Mr Priday—No. I probably could retrieve a web site, but the federal department, DEST, is probably best placed to give additional information.

Mr SAWFORD—A lot of people in industry earn a lot more than teachers. When you outsource your careers person they may be coming from an industry earning double the amount a teacher is.

Mr Priday—They won't have the holidays!

Mr SAWFORD—Probably not, but they might be earning twice as much. It is not really attractive to become a teacher these days.

Mr Priday—Yes, that is a big problem.

Mr SAWFORD—Prior to 1965, teachers were paid very poorly. Then in Australia they became paid very well in comparison with other people, but they are well behind the eight ball now—well behind. A semitrailer driver at Mobil earns $120,000 a year and he is home every night. You might get more satisfaction from teaching but you have a huge problem with remuneration. Teaching has become, for many people, a part-time occupation.

Mr Priday—I appreciate that. If you are looking for an answer, I am not sure, but clearly teachers need to be better remunerated.

Mr SAWFORD—Your idea about outsourcing has come up in every inquiry we have done for the last 10 years. People are highly critical of it.

Mr Barron—It would be one less thing that the teachers themselves had to worry about.

CHAIR—Even if they have been in careers guidance and so on for a number of years, they do not always have the knowledge of what is going on in industry. They might have a list of all the jobs that are available and the entry requirements and qualifications needed but, without having had a bit more hands-on experience, you just wonder about the accuracy or effectiveness of the advice they give.

Mr Priday—I wonder how many do refer people to apprenticeships. It would be interesting to know. They have all heard of it and, of course, it is getting more complicated in terms of the number of structured training arrangements now available in the industries and occupations in which you can do a traineeship or an apprenticeship or a new apprenticeship, even traditional apprenticeships. I often wonder how many kids it is suggested try an apprenticeship. It is probably getting better. We have been working a lot more with careers networks, careers advisers and schools. Our people say it is getting better, but they still report a lot of prejudice.

There is a push to tertiary education because there are now more tertiary places available. The emphasis is on encouraging the kids to aspire to tertiary education, anything else being a second-best option. That was not the case 25 to 30 years ago—maybe it is a poor image of the trades or a range of things. I can remember the days when some of our people reported that

schools would simply not allow them in, saying that the kids in their school would not be interested in that kind of thing. I am sure that has improved.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We certainly appreciate your time.

Mr Priday—You are welcome. Thank you.

[2.31 p.m.]

YATES, Professor Lyn, Professor of Teacher Education, University of Technology Sydney

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us today, Lyn. Thank you also for your submission. Do you have anything to add to the capacity in which you are appearing?

Prof. Yates—The University of Technology Sydney is an institution formed originally from a technical training institution and a teacher education institution. The main involvement I directly have is in research in postgraduate areas rather than in undergraduate areas.

CHAIR—Thank you. I remind you that the proceedings here are legal proceedings of the parliament. You have been through all this before.

Prof. Yates—Yes.

CHAIR—Would you like to make some introductory comments?

Prof. Yates—One of the things I raised in my brief submission was, first of all, a request that this inquiry take good account of the demands that are being put on schools in terms of both the number and the range of things they get them to deal with. It is the strong reality of the current times that parents themselves are very competitive and concerned about UAIs and things like that. Take account of that.

I was doing some research looking at a year 12 VET class last week. To give an example of how difficult it is even within a subject area, in order to teach this IT course which gets certificate II accreditation and can also be done for HSC, the teacher first of all is given a course document from the board of studies which comprises about 270 pages. She then has to design a course that meets the requirements of VET competencies and outcomes and also teaches to the exam, so that the students do well in the exam. She has to fill in individual competency records for the students for the VTAB qualification and for the exam. It is a huge amount of work. That is the first thing.

The second thing is the issue of schools and TAFE. I am happy to talk more about this. Obviously they have had a different history. They have been funded differently. At times people have been encouraged to go to TAFE if they wanted to do year 12 and so on. The things that I also wanted to draw attention to were the different cultures of the two institutions. They mean different things to the kids in them. That is something that needs to be taken into account. I am happy to talk more about that.

The third thing I talked about was the issue of different aspects of vocational education in schools. I was at a national forum in the middle of last year and it seemed to me a lot of the discussion was not being very productive because it kept sliding between different things that are part of the vocational agenda. One of those questions was: where is work going and what should all kids in school be learning? Should it be certificated or not? There is a big question about competencies to prepare for work. There is a separate issue about dual accreditation and

certificated competencies and how they should be offered, the issue about young people turning away from schools and also possibly building new industry based school partnerships. They are all important issues, but you get nowhere discussing them if you are sliding back and forth between the different issues.

The other matter that I mentioned was the three different research projects that I have been involved in related to this inquiry: one was the 12 to 18 Project, which was a 7 Up project, where we followed girls and boys at four different Victorian schools every year from the ages of 12 to 18, ranging from an elite private school to a technical school, both city and provincial. In relation to this, I caught the end of the last witness's submission. It seemed to be that specific vocational advice was not having much effect in terms of what schools did, but different schools do produce quite different orientation towards work through their broader form of teaching. We also saw specifically what a provincial school did in terms of setting up work placements for kids and trying to arrange apprenticeships and so on.

The second project that I am involved in is looking at new technologies in schools, and that is raising for me the issue that, to quite an extent, we do not know what we are trying to teach kids today. Equipment and so on is being sent out to schools but, in terms of what teachers are meant to be doing with respect to competencies for kids in the future, there is a lot of scrabbling around going on.

The major project I am involved in at present is one on pedagogies of the new vocationalism. It is called 'Changing Work, Changing Workers, Changing Selves', in the sense that we think that a lot of the literature in relation to work today talks about the fact that, in a whole range of areas, what is being sought is not only specific skills but also, in a way, identities, ways of being able to work with other people, communication and who you are as a worker. In this project we are taking two industry types—hospitality and IT—and we are looking at how they are being taught in university, TAFE, school, the workplace and by private providers. We are looking at issues such as what is being conveyed about the industry and about the type of person you need to become; how that is conveyed in terms of whether it is book knowledge, practical experience or modelling; teaching and assessment, and whether the industry or exams are being taken as the point of focus; what knowledge and capacity is expected of the students; and whether the knowledge of the students is being drawn upon.

We are at the beginning of the second year of that project, but it is a very interesting comparison looking across those different levels—looking at, for example, what the certificate II program in hospitality looks like when it is taught in TAFE compared with when it is taught in schools. In the last couple of weeks, I have been looking at two school programs in relation to that and, if you want me to, I am happy to talk briefly about those, because I think they raise some interesting matters about the issues that come up for VET programs in schools.

Mr SAWFORD—Can you name the two schools?

Prof. Yates—I am not sure whether I should. They are the same school, and it is a Sydney northern suburbs school.

Mr SAWFORD—The reason I ask is that we may come back to New South Wales in the future—and I think we need to—to see a few schools in action. That might be an example to consider.

Prof. Yates—I imagine that they would be happy for me to do so, but I would prefer to get their permission before I name them. It is interesting, because it is a school that, in a way, has made a speciality of this as part of its offerings and has obtained special funding, and so it is better equipped than a lot of schools. That is obviously one of the big issues. Seeing the two programs—one in hospitality and one in IT—in a way, they were almost two faces of the same coin. The hospitality program had industrial type equipment. The teacher had trained in TAFE, and she insisted on the full chef uniform, standards of discipline, and yelled at the students in the way that employers and TAFE trainers do. She did not accept any laxity and, all the time, took TAFE outcomes, competencies and industry as her points of reference. She spent her own money in the holidays going to restaurants, and I know that that is not such a hardship, except that she really took it seriously. The top chefs showed her around their kitchens, she arranged placements and she took the kids there.

In that class, only one student was also going to sit for the HSC exam. The teacher said that she recommended, if they were not going to do that, not to do the exam. She was annoyed with the board of studies for trying to shift the emphasis towards theory and towards the exam, and she argued that a number of students doing this course had been, in her own words, 'real little buggers' all of the way through school. The passion that she and the kids shared for the cooking and so on was really obvious, and she said that she felt that it only worked if she did not have too much up-loaded theory, too much exam pressure and so on.

That was the hospitality course. The teacher also had some interesting things to say about the difference between the school and the TAFE situation for that course. She tried to keep the TAFE standards, but she said that one of the differences was that the school had to take all-comers, and not all of these kids wanted to go on to work in the industry. The TAFE courses are mainly taking those who already have the apprenticeships, so the students are committed and they have much more chance to practise their skills, so she says that their skill levels are higher and that the students have a better communication level. She says that if employers take students who have done the school course, they are taking a known quantity, rather than taking on someone at the beginning of the apprenticeship. That was the hospitality course. The teacher's whole orientation was towards the work, the workplace and the competency standards.

In the IT course, it was the reverse: it was not only the difference between the teachers but also the difference between the group of students. They were advanced students, and all except two in that class wanted to go to university. The pressure was on for them to do this in a way that got them a good HSC score. Although, as with the hospitality teacher, the teacher was juggling both sets of outcomes, competencies, exams and so on, her emphasis was on the HSC exam. In the class that I was observing, a lot of it was about learning the right definitions that you would get in the exam, rather than a hands-on skill, which did not mean that these kids were not getting the skills but the point of reference was the exam. It is not that one of those styles was appropriate or inappropriate, but you can see that they were trying to do their best for those different kids.

CHAIR—That highlights one of the dilemmas, doesn't it—trying to allow access to the UAI for students who do vocational education courses but not wanting to compromise the competencies and the industry expectations?

Prof. Yates—It does, yes.

CHAIR—I think that is a dilemma that is somehow always going to be there. The need to still provide access to UAI and university is necessary to prevent two tiers developing within the school system; yet, if that compromises what you can do in terms of practical skills development, there is a little conflict there.

Lyn, early in your presentation you said schools are being asked to do too much and this seems to be yet another expectation put onto schools. Is it your view that schools are going too far down the path of VET and that some of this would be better handled by TAFE? This morning one of your colleagues, Dr Cornford, was here. He made the point that we are not fully utilising the human and physical resources that TAFE has, in terms of developing VET and training young people. Are we asking or expecting schools to duplicate what is more readily, more appropriately and perhaps financially more efficiently available in the TAFE sector?

Prof. Yates—I have not worked on this area at length but I do think there is something in that. I do not think it is a good use of resources to have every school trying to get the levels of equipment and teaching required in this area. Whether it is a good idea to have no schools do it and to have it only offered in TAFE, I am not so sure. I do think that for a number of students it is better for them to go to a different institution. The school I saw in New South Wales, though, thought that offering this proper training in the school was getting students to do it then and to go on to TAFE in a way they would not if they had left school at that point.

CHAIR—Did this school have students coming from other schools for years 11 and 12?

Prof. Yates—It did have some, yes.

CHAIR—Did you see much potential there for clusters of schools working, where each one provides perhaps one VET course and students move to whichever school it is for years 11 and 12, according to what course they want to do? That provides greater economy of resources.

Prof. Yates—Yes. Some schools specialising in these sorts of areas would be a good thing.

CHAIR—Is that happening much, do you know?

Prof. Yates—I do not know.

Mr SAWFORD—Getting on to my bandwagon about specialist vocational schools, is there a need for these? Comprehensive high schools have not been very successful in vocational ed. They were academic high schools before they started and they are still academic high schools in the main, with voc ed often in many of them just an add-on. Is it time to bite the bullet and, not go back to a technical school system that no longer exists but to move onward to a vocational specialist school?

Prof. Yates—The question is: what do you mean by 'vocational specialist school'? One of the reasons that the techs—and I come from Victoria—began to struggle was that the nature of work changed a lot and a large amount of the machinery and so on that workplaces used was not of a level that schools could any longer have. It is both a matter of expense and a matter of what the work consists of. With automated equipment and things like that, it is not simply a matter of learning manual skills once and for all, which is to some extent what the old style techs built up. I am quite in favour of some schools specialising in different areas. I am not so sure about

whether you could have a vocational school from, say, year 7. It makes more sense at the senior levels.

Mr SAWFORD—We have academic high schools from year 7. What is the difference? We have only had one-third of kids from comprehensive schools go on to university. Why is it so simple to have an academic high school? No-one questions that. I take your subtle difference between vocational education allied to industry and vocational education which is allied to sort of growing the person. What is the difference?

Prof. Yates—I am not sure why you say that what happens in years 7 and 8 and so on is only academic. You could equally say it is vocational. What employers often say they want are people who can communicate well, people who are flexible, people who can be lifelong learners—cliche. It is precisely the sort of thing we are trying to look at in our research, because just training people narrowly from the beginning does not necessarily make it possible for them to keep jobs.

The reason I am not sure what to say to your suggestion is that in that longitudinal 7 Up type study I did, the school that I thought was doing a really good job of trying to find more appropriate forms for their kids was the ex-technical school. It was in a provincial town, it had good equipment and it did very interesting things. It found them workplaces. It had good relations with local employers, it set up apprenticeships. But when we went back and interviewed some of these boys at 18, they were out of work. There was no work in the areas that they wanted to be in. It is a quite complicated issue. I am not against it. I am just not sure what it would look like.

Mr SAWFORD—It is interesting that the superior voc ed secondary schools are all in industrial heartlands and maybe that is a big contrast to the school that you were indicating, which is in a rural area. Is that what you are saying?

Prof. Yates—Yes, that is right. It was an area where there were problems with unemployment, I agree.

Mr SAWFORD—In terms of your research, it is interesting that you mention qualitative. We do not do a lot of comparative studies in this country, unfortunately, but you mentioned that and also longitudinal studies, which we are not very good at either. But there is no reference to quantitative. Why is that?

Prof. Yates—That is because I am mentioning the research that I have personally been doing rather than the research that is around.

Mr SAWFORD—Is that because of the money that is available?

Prof. Yates—No, it is not. I am specifically doing this sort of research as a complement to the fact that bodies like ANTA mainly fund quantitative studies. It is not that there is a lack of quantitative material. The ABS does it, DEST does it. I do not think you can say that quantitative research is being discriminated against. ACER has a whole empire doing it. The reason I have been involved in these different sorts of studies is specifically to be complementary to that. In doing qualitative and interpretive and longitudinal work, you draw on the database evidence as well. I personally have not been doing original researching.

CHAIR—Lyn, in your submission on the third aspect of the 12 to 18 Project, you mention that across all schools specific careers advice and work experience seem to have little effect on students in the study. As we discussed, our previous witnesses talked about the paucity of that advice as well. What are your recommendations on how we ought to improve that?

Prof. Yates—I am not sure. I heard the discussion about outsourcing and that might be one possibility. I am not sure that making it universal is the way to go. One of the things that I think is underestimated in bringing in new policies for schools is where the students are in their own minds at different points. One of the reasons we were following them through from 12 to 18 is that each year we would be asking them about their sense of self, their future in the school. It was not that schools were not trying to do things; the issue was whether they were at a stage where they wanted to hear it.

CHAIR—One of the other points you made is that students would benefit from more lateral, mature age teacher recruitment—I think they were your words—and you acknowledge that it is very difficult to recruit and to retrain teachers. How do we go about doing that? What do you see are the barriers to those courses? Is it cost of training? Is it reduction in salary? Is it lack of information?

Prof. Yates—It is probably a bit of everything. I heard the last discussion, and relative pay levels and conditions are an issue. You often find that teachers who go out and do work placements stay out, because it is an easier life. On the other hand, there are plenty of people who work in jobs for 20 years and would like to be a teacher. I do not think it is made very easy for people to have their training year, for instance, without a loss of salary. There used to be more opportunities to train part-time. The forms that you offer the training in are important and, when people do it, often bureaucracies do not do a good job of matching people's skills with areas.

CHAIR—What if education authorities trying to recruit mature age workers as teachers offered them full pay while doing their training course or something like that? Is that loss of pay during training a significant barrier? I suspect it is.

Prof. Yates—I am sure it would be, yes.

CHAIR—Do you think there is a capacity to do that?

Prof. Yates—A capacity to add to the cost?

CHAIR—Do you think it would be beneficial or a sufficient incentive to provide those sorts of salary subsidies?

Prof. Yates—Yes. I am certainly worried about the parity with other people coming into teaching, because I have to think about other teachers too, and everyone is affected by the cost of it. An alternative might be to make more opportunities available to train part time.

Mr SAWFORD—Would it be easier if the universities did not have teacher training? That's a loaded question! Universities do not take teacher training seriously. In these inquiries over the last 10 years people in faculties—like yourself—have complained to this committee that their

needs and their visions for what can happen in teacher education have not been taken seriously by universities. That is a common complaint.

Prof. Yates—I do not think it is an across-the-board issue, but it is certainly true that education does not have the status of some other areas in the ways that universities get assessed. I do not think that the big problem is the preservice area. Some time ago at the old Hawthorn Teachers College, people used to come in with industry training—I think it was a two-year part-time course—and they were paid while they were doing it. It is not an issue of whether universities offer training or not; we do not expect people to come in and spend four years training if they already have their vocational certification.

Mr SAWFORD—You got out of that, Lyn, didn't you?

Prof. Yates—Got out of it? Quite seriously, we do need to value getting some diversity on all sorts of fronts in terms of who teachers are. People with different sorts of knowledge are really important. It is a mistake to think that universities do not do anything that teachers need to know. In relation to this issue of where work is going, ongoing changes to work and people needing to retrain themselves, there are currently a whole lot of things in which you need people who are thinking about and able to educate people appropriately. I am not an advocate of universities going out of the business of teacher training.

CHAIR—Pursuing that further, one of the common criticisms or concerns by industry has been a lack of confidence in the background and the industry understanding of teachers, both for those who are teaching industry based VET courses and those teaching the more general work skills. Do you think there is room within preservice teacher training perhaps not so much to be turning out people with expertise in particular industry areas but to have a better grasp of industry skills—generic skills, for want of a better word—or, in Dr Cornford's terms, 'learning to learning' skills? Is there a greater capacity to do that in the undergraduate preservice training, by putting trainee teachers out into a range of industry experiences so that they have a degree of conversance and knowledge of what goes on across a number of industry sectors?

Prof. Yates—Yes, I do think there is some scope for that. One of the things of particular interest in my faculty is the whole issue of work based learning, what it looks like and how it happens. On the other hand, in my experience employers might say things about students or teachers not being properly prepared, but when they employ people they often vote with their feet and will take someone with an academic qualification over someone with a vocational qualification. That applies both to school leavers—HSC or non-HSC—and university courses. I remember a talk-back radio program last year where the phones ran hot with employers saying they liked people with general arts degrees. I am reluctant to put too much emphasis on what people say.

Mr ALBANESE—Lyn, you were here for the previous discussion with Group Training Australia. A theme over the last couple of days has been career advice and in what way you can provide incentives for people to go into VET as opposed to the tertiary education mantra—that that is the future for young people. Your study showed that basic career advice had little effect on students. We wish you had been here yesterday morning, because that would tend to knock out some of what we have been discussing over the last couple of days. Do you want to elaborate a little bit on that?

Prof. Yates—We got the students' perspective on it. I must say it was a bit of a surprise to me, because when I started the study I thought that compared with when I was at school there was a lot of serious effort going into it, and it certainly was not that the schools were not doing things. Following people through, they are very influenced by family and peers and the general culture of the school. It is not that schools have no effect. If you go to a particular sort of school, you orient to, say, higher status university courses. We followed two ordinary high schools through. At one high school, the students chose either vocational tertiary courses or went into work. They were planning their next steps. At the other school, which had a similar demographic intake—

Mr ALBANESE—Had a similar, say, UAI result as well?

Prof. Yates—Yes, a similar UAI average. At the end of it, the kids were dropping out of courses. Schools have an effect, but it was not the specific effect of careers teachers saying, 'Do this course or do that course.'

Mr ALBANESE—At the risk of using an unfashionable term, were the schools of a similar class base?

Prof. Yates—Yes, that is why it was interesting.

Mr ALBANESE—You did not use that term. It's dirty these days!

Prof. Yates—No, I did not use that term.

CHAIR—It exists!

Mr ALBANESE—I accept it exists very much. It is the basis of my politics.

Prof. Yates—That is why I was interested with, in some ways, similar cohorts. They have different overall effects. It is not that having vocational or careers advice available is not important. The fact is that people need it at different times. That is the problem with offering it in some sort of locked step universal way.

Mr ALBANESE—How do you break that down? Do you have any suggestions arising from your research about how that might be broken down in a non-individualist, non-opportunistic way—if someone happened to have the right teacher at the right time? How do you break it down structurally? Maybe there was nothing in the research suggesting that.

Prof. Yates—I do not know. I do not feel confident enough or that I have thought it through enough to suggest what would work there. I have looked at this professionally and in relation to my own kids and nephews. In some ways there are some mysterious and biographical elements in how people get to the point of deciding what they are going to do.

Mr ALBANESE—Sure.

Mr SAWFORD—Yesterday morning we went to Bradfield College. A very articulate young woman explained things as she took me around and we did the tour of the school. She was a

pretty prolific participant in the debate with the students. I am talking about Melina. It was interesting that she identified Bradfield in the sense that I would regard it as a good school. I found it very insightful that a young person like her identified it. She came from a comprehensive high school where she said basically she could not cope, or did not fit in with the academia. She could do it, but did not fit in, did not like it. It never fitted in with vocational ed and she complained that there was no building of the person.

She travels a long way, an hour and a half each day, to get there. She is attracted to Bradfield because she has access to academic subjects, she has access to vocational ed—which also has work placement, so the accredited vocational ed. The other thing that often gets overlooked—and it is particularly important that the kid actually says so—is that she has access to tutorials in non-examinable areas—in other words, she has the trinity of what a good secondary education is, and she knew it. She was not prompted. I do not think she got it from the school. She got it from her own insight about what education is.

There are very few institutions at a secondary level, certainly not comprehensive high schools, which have that trinity of quality voc ed with both the extracurricular activities—I do not mean the fill-ins, I mean quality—and the academic stream: all three things. They are the three things which were the original idea for comprehensive high schools. She found that in Bradfield College—a single entity probably set up for political reasons—and it is fascinating that it is not duplicated. She may also have felt comfortable if she had gone to a senior secondary college; she may have had a similar experience from that. Yet in New South Wales, in the VET system, where vocational ed is supposed to be thought of as a bit superior to the rest of Australia, there are only 20 of them. What is your view about Bradfield College? Are you familiar with Bradfield College?

Prof. Yates—No, I am not.

Mr SAWFORD—What about the senior secondary colleges?

Prof. Yates—I do not think they all work the same. In some places they have worked well and in other cases not so well. One of the schools in our 12 to 18 Project did have that form: it was a different school for years 11 and 12. It was a school which had a fairly disadvantaged intake generally. I am not sure that it did major things in arresting the problems. They did what they could but the odds were stacked against them.

Ms PLIBERSEK—In the 7 Up study you did, where you found that specific careers advice and work experience had little effect on the students, do you think that is because careers advisers are duds?

Prof. Yates—No, I do not.

Ms PLIBERSEK—You have usually one person for 800 students.

Prof. Yates—I do not mean that I am necessarily arguing in favour of strongly retaining them one way or the other. For instance, of the four schools in our study one was a very rich private school with very everything professionally set up, including careers advice, and even the students at that school were changing their minds back and forth between year 10, year 11 and year 12. They were going to outside private careers advisers. Different things were happening in

their lives. It is a mistake to simply blame it on the input end rather than the receiver end as well; to not think about the whole thing.

Ms PLIBERSEK—What seems to happen in most schools is that careers advice is quite separate to other pastoral care, like school counsellors and so on. Yesterday at Bradfield I noticed they had three counsellors/careers advisers for 700 kids, which seems to me to be way above the average for most schools. But they also combined those two roles which meant that people were getting careers advice but, if they were having other problems impacting on their ability to find work placements outside school, some of those issues could be dealt with in an environment that did not stigmatise the kids. Very few children would voluntarily go to a school counsellor, even if they had problems that were not—

Prof. Yates—I strongly agree. I totally agree with the point you are making, yes.

Ms PLIBERSEK—But you do not see that very often, do you?

Prof. Yates—No. The problem is the expense and the cost of schooling in general. There is the problem of what teachers are paid. There is the problem of how many teachers. There is the problem of funding counsellors. There is the problem in terms of work placements and funding the proper conditions to do that. There is the problem of funding of equipment. They are the problems it all hangs on.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you, Lyn, that has been very helpful.

Prof. Yates—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 3.12 p.m. to 3.25 p.m.

ALLEN, Ms Jeannette, Executive Director, National Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Council

BLANDTHORN, Mr Ian, Chief Executive and Co-Chair, National Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Council

CHAIR—For the record, I advise you that proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament. I will ask you to make a few introductory comments, and then we will open to questions.

Mr Blandthorn—The National Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry Training board is an organisation that is funded principally by the Australian National Training Authority to provide advice to ANTA and the government on training matters relating to the industries that we cover. The principal industry, of course, is retail. As I am sure the committee knows, the retail industry employs almost one in five people in this country and employs almost 50 per cent of those in the 15- to 19-year-old age cohort.

What is not perhaps quite so widely known is that, of all enrolments in all training package qualifications, the two highest enrolments are in the retail certificate II and the retail certificate III. That indicates that in recent years the retail industry has embraced structured, formalised training in a way that, traditionally, it probably had not. Traditionally, the retail industry was an industry that either did not train or that trained informally, in house. However, in recent years, that has significantly changed.

While the industry has embraced structured training, by and large it has not embraced VET in Schools. There is a range of reasons, of course, why that might be the case. But, essentially, the reason the industry has not embraced VET in Schools is the concern with a quality outcome. While we are told constantly that it is very difficult to quantify this—and perhaps it is—at the end of the day there is a strong feeling among the various players in the industry about the level or quality of outcome from VET in Schools programs; therefore, it flows that there is a reluctance to engage in them.

In summary, the reasons are as follows. First, there is either the lack of structured training to accompany VET in Schools programs or inadequate structured training to accompany VET in Schools programs. There is a strong view in the industry, as a result, that too often students complete a retail VET in Schools course and turn up to an employer looking for a job and expecting to be recognised at the same level as somebody who might have done the same certificate through a normal traineeship or New Apprenticeships course. The reality is that they are not at the same level at all.

There is a concern about a lack of monitoring of the structured on-the-job training when it does occur, and there is a concern regarding the accountability, or lack thereof, for the outcomes of the system with both RTOs and schools. Another issue that flows from the general concern of the quality outcomes, or lack thereof, is that in some cases there is what might be almost described as a flippant attitude by RTOs and some schools towards training package qualifications—the desire to do things with training packages and the associated qualifications

that were never expected by the industry when it first developed the training package qualifications.

For example, in the retail industry there is a retail certificate II, which is an entry level training course, and there is a certificate III, which is for people at a supervisory level. Clearly, to work effectively at that level, it requires some sort of real workplace experience, but there is a desire by some schools in some states, and some training or education authorities in some states, to deliver a certificate III retail through VET in Schools. The industry's view, generally, has been 'How could you possibly do that through a school system without the person having had adequate levels of workplace experience first?' That leads to a general disenchantment with the whole concept of VET in Schools.

There is a concern that not all teachers in all schools, or all RTOs, have adequate workplace experience—or at least current workplace experience. Again, a disenchantment with the whole process flows from that. Of course, overlying all this is a lack of consistency between the states. We have a constant issue with employers, particularly the major national employers, who say that it is just too hard when there is so much paperwork, and the paperwork and the requirements in every state are different.

I will contrast that general attitude with enrolments in New Apprenticeships in schools, which, in a sense, is a subset of the overall VET in Schools area. While total enrolments in New Apprenticeships are fairly limited, on the MCEETYA transition from schools task force figures released last year, almost 40 per cent of the total enrolments in New Apprenticeships in schools are in retail. The reason is that associated with New Apprenticeships is a training contract and structured on-the-job training; therefore, there is a greater confidence among the industry players that the people who engage in and qualify from a New Apprenticeships program in schools, as distinct from a normal VET in Schools program, are more likely to have adequate workplace experience.

The other side of the issue is the students. We have always seen VET in Schools as having two roles: first, to provide people with workplace skills, and, secondly, to develop the person as an individual. Again, by and large, students have not embraced retail VET in Schools. Again, there is a range of reasons for that: in part, it is the industry's fault and the low image or status of the industry and also there is the issue of the approach of careers teachers.

In a number of cases, careers teachers tend to give students the view that retail VET in Schools—or any VET in Schools program, or any program at all, or any educational process at all that does not lead to university—is a second-best option. We probably need to have a good look at how we train and deliver careers advice to overcome the problem of students seeing anything that does not lead to university as a second-best option.

Students are concerned about workloads, and they are concerned about timetabling so that they can cope with doing a VET in Schools program and a normal educational program at the same time. There is obviously a range of issues there for schools, but there are also issues for students. In at least some states, retail VET in Schools is not counted for the purposes of university entrance, and that again only exacerbates the issue of people seeing this as a second-best option; in fact, it leads to de facto streaming of the educational process.

In short, we say that retail VET in Schools, and VET in Schools generally, is a wonderful idea. There has been a preoccupation on numbers, and the hard issues have not been dealt with—and need to be dealt with—if there is to be a greater take-up of VET in Schools.

CHAIR—Thank you for that very cheerful overview! What you have said, Ian, really echoes what every other industry group has said to us so far about the lack of confidence in the school based qualifications. You said that it is worse where the retail VET in Schools does not qualify for university entrance. In which states does it qualify? Does that totally overcome the problem of employer cynicism or scepticism about that qualification?

Mr Blandthorn—No, it does not. For example, it does not qualify at all for university entrance in Victoria. If you look at enrolments, Victoria probably has the lowest level of enrolments. In fact, retail VET in Schools at year 12 is not delivered because of the lack of cohesion between university entrance requirements and VET in Schools. I think it is a little bit better in New South Wales, where retail VET in Schools can be counted for university purposes to a limited degree, but there is a clear linkage between where it counts and where it does not count. We can provide the committee with a detailed breakdown state by state, if that is helpful.

CHAIR—That would be helpful. Ian, you have certainly identified one of the key problems. How do we address it, though, in retail? How do we address this issue of employer or industry confidence?

Mr Blandthorn—The fundamental issue is that, while most players in the system would now say that they are committed to delivering training package qualifications, what that means in practice varies greatly between the states and even within the states. I think what industry is looking for is some sort of demonstration that a person who has done a retail VET in Schools course has practical workplace experience. The only way that can be done is through building a requirement into the school system to ensure that the student does get practical on-the-job experience—and structured training as well as practical workplace experience.

CHAIR—Doesn't the option of the AQTF system require that, though?

Mr Blandthorn—That is where I think there is a breakdown between the theory and the practice, in that the requirements around the states vary greatly as to what meets workplace experience.

Ms Allen—The AQTF refers more to the teacher having recent relevant industry experience rather than to the student being given experience. It does not really refer to the student, other than references in terms of flexible delivery options that might be available. Structured workplace learning might be there, but it does not specify times or anything like that.

Mr SAWFORD—It is interesting in terms of the inconsistent approaches in schools—and I think we recognise that, too—and by the states and by the territory. But it is also true in the industry, isn't it? Thinking of the two big retailers in this country, one has a very positive and a very praiseworthy attitude to career structures within its area; the other one has a non-existent policy. Even kids can recognise that. I do not want to embarrass you by naming them. You know who I am talking about. Does that complicate the thing even more? One is going pretty well in the share market and the other one is not going too well. That is interesting, too.

Mr Blandthorn—It becomes a little bit of a dilemma as to whether I answer it as the chair of National WRAPS or whether I answer it as a union official.

Mr SAWFORD—You choose. You can do both.

Mr Blandthorn—I can do both. I do not think there is a huge difference between the two major retailers, however I look at it. What we have both of the major retailers and a lot of other retailers saying to us is that there are kids turning up on their doorstep looking for jobs and looking to have a qualification recognised and, when they put them out into the workplace, the kids are not at the same level as those who have spent the previous 12 months undertaking a traineeship or New Apprenticeships course at the same level. Clearly there are major employment differences between the two companies, but I think that is a little bit different from how they perceive the impact of VET in Schools.

Mr SAWFORD—To come back to VET in Schools, why do you think there are inconsistent approaches? We have had a so-called integrated version of vocational education for 25 years. It is not as if it just happened yesterday. We are in the third day of this inquiry. There is a part of this inquiry, even at this early stage, that is a bit hard to get a handle on. What is an actual rationale? When various groups come to you, they have plenty of strategies, there is plenty of process and there are plenty of outcomes. You mentioned those three as well. But an actual rationale is the one thing that is totally overlooked or that no-one seems to explore. We had one person this morning who actually acknowledged that there is no rationale.

Ms PLIBERSEK—There are several rationales.

Mr SAWFORD—But it is confused. That is right, there are several rationales, but they are confused, and that is part of the problem. He identified that—bang, right in the first sentence. It seems to me that that is the case as well. Do you agree with that? You have to get the rationale right in order to get the strategies, the processes and the outcomes right. If you don't get the first part right, there is no way you can get the next two right.

Mr Blandthorn—I do not think the VET in Schools situation is materially different to the broader problem we have in the VET area, where there is a huge lack of consistency between the states. I think VET in Schools is simply one manifestation of that, and that goes across all state boundaries and across all political complexions. At the end of the day, it comes down to the perennial problem we have in this country, of federalism or states' rights. That is the root of the issue here.

The other thing, however, that becomes a major issue here is a preoccupation with numbers. It seems to me that, from the earliest days of VET in Schools, the preoccupation has been with getting a good return in terms of numbers. That is all very well, but where are those numbers actually leading?

Ms Allen—My only comment here would be that, when you talk about VET in Schools, you initially have to try and clarify exactly what you mean: whether you are talking about a program developed within the school that is supposed to be vocationally oriented; whether it is a short course that has been developed with a vocational outcome that has been state accredited; whether it is based on a training package qualification or a composite of training package qualifications; or whether it is a New Apprenticeships course, a part-time New Apprenticeships

course, a school delivered program or a public or private RTO delivered program. All of that compounds against what we are trying to achieve with the outcome here. They are all different, and each state has a different way of delivering that.

Mr FARMER—In relation to most of the subjects that we have touched upon with VET and with the various associated industries, the students who are coming out of the school sector for their training are hidden away. They will work in an office environment or they will work in an industry environment, but they are not really at the coalface, whereas with retail they are out there. From a training basis point of view, you say that obviously the preferred employee would be somebody who has already done a VET course or has been involved with retail, but right at that initial stage, when they are doing that with the schools and the employer, how do you go about doing that best without putting them under the added stress of being out there and being heavily involved with the customer right at the coalface?

We are looking at almost two completely different scenarios here, but VET covers everything. I need to get a handle on how that works. We have spoken about the colleges that are set up specifically for this program, or one in particular. How does that apply to something that is more or less completely different from anything we have discussed before?

Mr Blandthorn—The retail industry has large numbers of young people working in it. It is an industry that is structured to cater for young people. I do not think we should see placing school students in the industry as atypical of employment practices in the industry generally. The industry has the capacity to cope with giving structured, formalised training to young people who are undertaking VET in Schools courses, whether they are in year 10, year 11 or year 12. I think there is a willingness among a lot of employers to give young people those opportunities.

The fundamental problem we have is that too often it is too hard, for a variety of reasons, for the schools and/or the RTO to structure into the overall training program adequate levels of workplace training. I do not think there is any way around it, except to say that, when a training program for a VET in Schools student is being drawn up, part of that program has to involve adequate levels of structured on-the-job training.

Mr SAWFORD—If VET is too hard or is inconsistent in schools, should we be looking at VET in TAFE, VET in specialist vocational schools, VET in senior colleges or VET in places like Bradfield? Should we be going down that track?

Mr Blandthorn—That is one of the things we do have to seriously consider. One of the problems we have at the moment is that a lot of schools are not equipped to effectively manage VET in Schools. It is partly a resourcing issue of whether you have sufficient numbers of teachers with the appropriate skills, and all the other things that flow from that. I think we do have to recognise that not all schools can deliver an effective VET in Schools program and that maybe it does have to be restructured so that a group of schools or some part of the system has this program, rather than to expect that it can be done across the board as part of the normal school system. That puts unrealistic strains on schools and the end result is the sorts of outcomes that I have talked about here.

CHAIR—On the issue of not having enough teachers with industry experience, could the problem be partly resolved if some of the course teachers were released from some blocks to work in industry and retail?

Mr Blandthorn—It depends on where the teacher comes from in the first instance. The last thing I want to engage in here is teacher bashing, because teachers generally in this country are underrecognised in terms of their performance. We have an unrealistic outcome from them if we think on the one hand they can deliver science, maths or English and on the other hand they can also teach retail, hairdressing or something else. You need to have teachers who have a grounding in the industry in which they are going to deliver skills, not somebody who has it added on to their normal school requirements.

CHAIR—How do we effectively achieve that? There would be very few teachers who have detailed or prolonged experience in any of those industries.

Mr Blandthorn—Generally, we have found them in the TAFE system over the years.

CHAIR—As Rod said, instead of trying to implement these courses in schools, maybe it should be through TAFE.

Mr Blandthorn—If you look at retail training today, there are a lot of TAFEs and private providers delivering training with people who have come out of the industry—whether it is in retail or in other industries. I do not think you can expect a sound outcome from teachers unless they have that proper grounding in the areas in which they are delivering skills.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Couldn't we move the teachers around and not the kids, so that a part-time teacher in the TAFE system could teach the other half of their job in a local high school or a teacher in a specialist area could teach that subject at three different high schools?

Mr Blandthorn—An industry trained person?

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes, an industry specialist could teach it through schools. Following on from that, we had some evidence earlier today about people in a particular industry perhaps finding it hard to retrain as teachers because they have to take a year off with no pay to learn to be a teacher. Do you think that giving people the ability to learn to teach part time while they are still working in whatever industry might be a way around that?

Mr Blandthorn—I do not claim to be an expert in teacher training, but it might well be a way around it. We have to be innovative in the way we recruit people out of the industry and give them the teaching skills. There is a world of difference between having teaching skills and having industry skills; somehow they have to be brought together. It does require training but we have to be innovative about how we do it.

Ms Allen—I would support that. I came out of industry into teaching. I think the sandwich program was the most successful—teaching and university based theory. Something like that could be done part time.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Did you have to take a year off to do that?

Ms Allen—No.

Ms PLIBERSEK—How did you do it?

Ms Allen—That was done through a state government funded program for teacher training. The industry experience allowed you to enter it. I did not have tertiary entrance and I would never have been accepted into university to do teaching.

Mr SAWFORD—Did you receive your equivalent salary while you were training?

Ms Allen—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Your previous salary?

Ms Allen—No. It was called the 'Beginning Teacher Program' and I received a beginning teacher salary.

Mr SAWFORD—You received a beginning teacher salary while you were being trained?

Ms Allen—My word.

CHAIR—For how long?

Ms Allen—Two years. You worked for six months in the classroom and then went to college for a full-time semester. You were paid for the whole lot.

Ms PLIBERSEK—Do you know if that is still available?

Ms Allen—No.

Ms PLIBERSEK—It is not still available, or you do not know?

Ms Allen—It is not still available.

Mr FARMER—What was the name of that?

Ms Allen—It was a Queensland based program for entry into the TAFE sector as an industry based teacher.

Mr SAWFORD—What year was this?

Ms Allen—It was 1986-87.

Ms PLIBERSEK—They were desperate for people in your area and that is the way they got them.

Ms Allen—They ran that program from the late seventies right through until probably 1995-96. That would have been the last intake of teachers into that program.

Mr SAWFORD—How did you become aware of that program?

Ms Allen—That had been a career goal—to be a teacher—so I became aware of it. Having also applied directly to a university and being laughed at because I did not have tertiary entrance, it was also the only option.

CHAIR—Was that training you to teach at TAFE or to teach in the industry?

Ms Allen—It was to teach at TAFE. It was a diploma of teaching technical and further education.

Ms PLIBERSEK—James, could we follow that up to see if any states still have such programs?

Mr SAWFORD—They were called the sandwich courses.

Ms Allen—Yes. They were excellent and they produced very good teachers.

Mr SAWFORD—In fact, all states of Australia did it for primary and secondary teachers. There were three- and six-month courses in the fifties.

Mr FARMER—Jeanette, in the retail sector would you prefer a student who came from year 10 or a student that was studying in years 11 and 12?

Ms Allen—If we are realistic about it, a large number of students in year 10 are already working part time, so putting restrictions on when they enter these programs would not solve any problems.

Mr FARMER—One of the things we have heard loud and clear from a number of employers is that there is a stigma attached to VET, which is that students who progress to years 11 and 12 would be ideal for many of the positions, but once they get into years 11 and 12 they would much rather go to university. They feel there is an obligation to society, to their parents and even to their school and the teachers, if they have done years 11 and 12, to attain some other type of employment as an end result. The year 10s are the ones that the employers do not really prefer. It is a catch-22 situation. The employers are saying, 'We would prefer these ones. We need to break down the stigma attached to the job.' How does that work in the retail sector?

Ms Allen—There is a culture attached to working in retail and there is a perception that if you work in retail you are a shop assistant. It is a bit like being a hairdresser—that it is a second choice or a last resort; it is not a career of first choice. Careers of first choice are those that have some status, high-level pay, university qualifications. They are the ones that careers advisers will direct people to. They will not say, 'Look, you'd do very well because you've got people skills, and retail is an option for you, and there is a pathway to university, if you choose it'—not necessarily straight out of school, though. One of the mistakes that we make with kids leaving school is that we direct them to university when they really have no idea what they want to do. We then have an enormous attrition rate in the first year at university. If they were able to take some time to do some vocational work, start to get a feel for what the world of work is all about and then make some decisions, we might create that pathway a little bit more smoothly.

Mr FARMER—They would be a lot more decided about what they wanted to achieve at the end of their university course as well.

Mr Blandthorn—Can I respond with an anecdote here about a young person I knew who was, at the time, doing year 11, or perhaps year 12. The young person was clearly better suited to do some sort of VET training but was given a clear indication from the school that it was a second-best option. When I raised the issue with this particular individual and said, 'Why don't you look at TAFE?' the response was, 'But everyone will think I'm dumb if I go to TAFE.' That is a clear message coming through much of the school system.

Mr SAWFORD—And parents.

Mr Blandthorn—And parents, yes.

Mr FARMER—We are hearing that loud and clear through this.

CHAIR—Even though it is the same course?

Mr Blandthorn—Even though it is the same course.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That was very helpful.

Mr Blandthorn—Thank you.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Sawford**, seconded by **Ms Plibersek**):

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

Committee adjourned at 3.57 p.m.