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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Vocational education in schools

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Wednesday, 9 April 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 Bartlett, Mr Pearce and Mr Sidebottom

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.

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Committee met at 8.58 a.m.

BARTON, Mr Robert, Assistant Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit, Queensland Department of Education

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McHUGH, Mr Bob, Assistant Director-General, Planning, Resourcing and Performance, Queensland Department of Education

ROBINSON, Mr Chris, Deputy Director-General, Department of Employment and Training

SMITH, Mr Ken, Director-General, Queensland Department of Education

WILLIAMS, Ms Jude, Acting Manager, Pathways Team, Queensland Department of Education

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education in schools. I welcome representatives of the Queensland government. Thank you for your submission and for your time here this morning. I remind you that proceedings here today are regarded as official proceedings of the House of Representatives and require the same respect as proceedings in the chamber. Ken, I invite you and your colleagues to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questioning.

Mr K. Smith—Thank you very much. Obviously, in speaking on behalf of the Queensland government, we are very pleased that this important topic is the subject of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training inquiry. There are a couple of issues that we would like to point out in support of our recommendations. Firstly, the participation in VET in Schools in Queensland is well above the national average. You would have seen from the submission that 60 per cent of years 11 and 12 students in Queensland are enrolled in at least one VET subject—that was in 2002—and that is up from 55 per cent in the year before.

Importantly, VET in the senior curriculum is now an option for a broad range of students. Since we put forward that submission, we have been looking at some other statistics about the issue. Of the top third of the academic achievers in Queensland in 2001, almost a quarter, or 24 per cent, were enrolled in at least one unit of competency of VET. One of the important things underpinning the Queensland system is that we are not streaming students down to disparate tracks of VET and academic achievement but bringing those tracks together. Given the reality of the world at work, people need skills and competencies in employment as well as theoretical

skills. Basically, our position is that academic achievement and VET achievement are not two separate highways. They actually continue to merge at different points within people's lifelong learning.

Of particular significance is participation in school based apprenticeships and traineeships. The submission clearly outlines the increases that have occurred over the last five years in SATs in Queensland. In 2001, Queensland accounted for something like 62 per cent of commencements and has consistently had over 50 per cent of the nation's school based apprenticeships and traineeships. There are some specific reasons for that and for that growth, one of which is my colleagues in the Department of Employment and Training who have maintained an incentive program, parallel to the Commonwealth's program, to grow school based apprenticeship and traineeship programs under the state's labour market program, Breaking the Unemployment Cycle. That is an issue that the committee may have some interest in.

In Queensland, there are very distinctive VET arrangements. They are operating according to the national standards. One of the specific issues that may be different to other jurisdictions is that each of the high schools offering VET is in fact registered as a separate registered training organisation under a delegation from the state training recognition council through to the Queensland Studies Authority. As I have said, VET in Schools is popular with all students and it is broadening their career options. That is also reflective of what is happening in the post-school environment, where large numbers of students are pursuing both VET and university subjects in, often, joint diploma and degree programs across sectors. Increasingly, people's pathways are not as linear as we once thought. There is some suggestion that, in fact, nationally, there are four times as many students who re-enter the vocational education and training system from university than who go from the VET system into university. Basically, we believe that our settings in the senior schools are right in trying to get some greater melding of those two issues.

The committee should also be aware that Queensland has embarked on some major reforms encapsulated in a white paper called *Queensland the smart state: education and training reforms for the future*, which was released last November. There is significant financial investment that will go into implementing those reforms. Fundamentally, those reforms are about increasing retention and achievement in the senior years of schooling, increasing investment in ICT in schools and the introduction of a trial preparatory year of schooling in Queensland to provide young people with the basics to enhance their educational opportunities.

In terms of VET issues in particular as part of those reforms, the goal will be for every young person in the senior cohort to proceed to complete 12 years of schooling or the equivalent. The objective would be that students would achieve a Senior Certificate or a VET qualification at a certificate III level. The Queensland Studies Authority have also been asked to do further work on reviewing the Senior Certificate to determine what should be counted towards a Senior Certificate with those changes. We are also aware that a commitment needs to be made on a local basis, and part of those reforms is to develop district youth achievement plans, where local industries, schools, TAFE and private training providers would work in partnership within their community to enhance outcomes for young people in those senior years.

It is important that there be a total community commitment and that there be full involvement of industry and the community in driving increased achievements at a local level. Our objective would be that every student in year 10 across the public, Catholic and independent systems

would have a senior education and training plan when they leave year 10 to guide their personal achievements over years 11 and 12. There are some extra grants that will be available for expansion of school based apprenticeships and traineeships, and my colleagues from DET can elaborate on that. We are looking at flexibility across schools and TAFE institutes to get the most out of the public investment that has been made in that system.

The second issue I wanted to raise was the quality of VET in schools. Clearly there are some concerns by employers that some aspects of VET in Schools are not meeting requirements of industry. One of the problems in this area is the lack of evidence of what particular components of VET in Schools may be accepted or not accepted by employers. There is no doubt that areas associated with school based apprenticeships and traineeships or areas where there are industry placements have higher industry acceptance. That is commonsense in many ways, in terms of industry being involved and real workplace experience coming from those involvements.

We would, however, argue that what might be classified as 'embedded VET in schools' is important as part of the total VET in Schools arrangements to give people often a foothold in a low qualification level—for example, most of the delegations through the Queensland Studies Authority are for level I and level II certificates that really are not, if you like, a licence to then move straight into the work force. It is important not to have too high an expectation of the qualifications, the certifications, that are being delivered through the embedded VET in Schools process, and to understand that many of those qualifications are in fact preparatory to obtaining higher-level certificates that are then linked in to work force requirements. Obviously they need to be relevant, but they also need to be seen as not the finishing point of that engagement with VET.

You probably will not be surprised to see from our submission that a major issue for us is the funding of VET in Schools, given the growth in those opportunities within Queensland. Our submission outlines a comparison between jurisdictions in terms of investment arrangements by the Commonwealth in that area. We believe that the ANTA funding of \$20 million a year needs to be increased. This funding expires in 2004 so there needs to be some certainty with respect to that funding. The other fundamental issue is that other aspects of the Commonwealth's support for, say, school based apprenticeships and traineeships are demand driven—that is, the subsidies to employers; and the reforms that Commonwealth has made in this area have been very important to encourage the growth of SATs—and not driven by an allocative model based on per capita distribution across Australia; whereas, the brokerage funds and the support for schools and the training component for SATs is not distributed on a demand basis but on a per capita basis.

The primary problem for Queensland as a growth state is that we are falling behind because of the initial base allocations and the fact that, whilst there is major growth in this state, the growth, for example, in the 15 to 24 age category will account for something like 50 per cent of the nation's growth in that age cohort. So our concern is that the major demand factors are acting to potentially disadvantage Queensland schools and students in comparison with other jurisdictions. We realise that that is a major problem. Our submission points out that, for example, if you simply look at the number of students involved in VET activities, you will see that the ANTA funding to Queensland represents about \$75 per student whereas it is about \$357 and \$303 per student respectively in the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Be careful!

Mr K. Smith—Yes, I will be careful on those issues of comparison. Clearly that is an issue for us and I know it is a difficult one. Obviously, in any areas where there is growth in a cohort, those changing demographics will put pressure on discussion about those funding issues. Finally, but importantly, I think Queensland has the highest number of Indigenous students in Australia. Something like 25 per cent of the nation's Indigenous students are educated through the Queensland system. Along with both Western Australia and the Northern Territory, we have a very high proportion of Indigenous students. VET is very important as part of those arrangements and we have involved Robert Barton in this meeting as the person responsible for those Indigenous strategies.

We are attempting to get greater flexibility in some of the provision of Indigenous education and training, particularly in the Cape York communities and in some of the isolated communities, so that we can significantly improve the number of students staying till year 10 and, hopefully, to year 12 or equivalent. There will need to be quite unique and tailored strategies put in place to deal with the circumstances that exist with respect to the Indigenous population. We can provide further details on some of the initiatives that we are implementing in areas like Weipa in the western cape. They are done very much in collaboration with major industry such as Comalco. In Mount Isa we have created a precinct together with TAFE and some hostel and residential accommodation for the communities surrounding Mount Isa. In areas like Cherbourg we have some quite specific strategies that you may wish to deal with as one of your terms of reference.

In conclusion, VET in Schools obviously plays a significant role in helping young people to improve their career opportunities. We are all aware that the completion of 12 years of schooling or equivalent is a major determinant as to whether young people can get a job and sustain a job—and that factor is common throughout all OECD countries. We know that we need to improve both retention and attainment levels. There are challenges with respect to particular population groups—such as the Indigenous student cohort—in certain regions, particularly in growth areas. In our own communities, particularly around the Wide Bay Burnett area, there are low retention rates. So there are geographic reasons and population group reasons that we need to concentrate on. We will obviously be attempting to build on those achievements through some of the work that we are doing within the state. We understand that the committee yesterday visited Robina, that it has visited Marymount College and is going to Gladstone to look at some Indigenous projects et cetera.

It is an exciting time in Queensland in education and in employment and training areas. We are also working in very close cooperation with the Commonwealth, particularly with DEST and DEWR. There is a greater degree of willingness to work in close cooperation to deal with some of the issues in isolated communities in a much more flexible way than we have seen in the past. We would encourage that degree of flexibility, on both sides, rather than duplicating activity or creating activities which are competing. Wherever it is possible, Commonwealth and state interventions should work in sync, in partnership, to achieve the objectives that both spheres of government are attempting to put in place. So we thank you for this opportunity.

CHAIR—Thank you. Are some of your other colleagues going to make some introductory comments as well?

Mr Robinson—Ken has covered the main issues, but I would just say that we welcome this inquiry and we think that this issue is critical for the future of young people. Nowadays in the

work force, people who have a degree or a higher level certificate or diploma are the people who have a secure employment future. Around 80 per cent of those who have such qualifications are employed at any one time. For people who leave school without a post-school qualification and enter the work force, that employment rate is only 57 per cent and the gap has been growing markedly in recent years. So, for that 70 per cent of the population who do not go on to university directly, we think VET in schools is a critical issue in terms of engaging people in further learning that will give them skills and qualifications. It is very important that we find better ways of improving that, even though we think Queensland's performance over the last five years has been very strong in leading the way and developing this avenue on the national scene. That goes back to Ken's comments that it is about the importance of VET options for people who leave school when they are young, and it is also about that embedded VET option that allows people to pursue some vocational education while they are still at school doing other things as well. That is very important.

CHAIR—We will proceed to questions. Ken, one of the key issues—and you alluded to it there—is industry confidence in VET qualifications, particularly VET in Schools qualifications. Two states, New South Wales and Tasmania, have mandatory structured workplace learning as part of VET in Schools. Queensland has not gone down that path. Could you outline for us the reasons you have not gone down that path? Are you considering it? What benefits and obstacles might there be to pursuing that direction?

Mr K. Smith—We are open to continuing to review how we best proceed to provide the suite of options for VET in schools. In the area of embedded VET there are a range of options provided with respect to workplace preparation, but we have also worked to enhance a range of opportunities across a range of industry areas and expertise that can provide that preparatory work.

CHAIR—Can you elaborate on those for us?

Mr K. Smith—The range of areas is outlined in our submission, but Ian from the QSA may want to comment on them.

Mr Fyfe—With respect to the mandatory work placement, we would note that the training packages do not require it as such. However, they do require assessment in real or simulated workplaces, which is what we encourage. We actually encourage schools to engage in work placement. As part of our work with the white paper that Ken has referred to already, we will be looking at issues for schools in particular communities in their capacity to offer that workplace placement to all students who want to do it. We have large numbers of students wanting to do VET, as has been indicated. It then has to be a question of community and industry capacity to support all of that. I think we also need to recognise that the training packages, if they are to require work placement, should actually say that in their documentation.

CHAIR—Isn't it true, though, that industry confidence would be enhanced if all students had some component of structured workplace learning as part of their course, even in certificate II and certificate I courses?

Mr Fyfe—I guess we would have to ascertain that, in a sense. The popular belief would have to be that it would be. But, at the same time, it has to be quality work placement linked to what

they are doing and within their community, with the issues that have been raised in our submission. I should also point out at this point in time that no-one collects the data, but the evidence that we have anecdotally is that there are substantial numbers of students doing work placement of one form or another anyway. It would have to be strengthened and we would have to take into account a number of the issues that would perhaps make it problematic in our community. The last thing we would want is for some of our communities to say, 'No, we cannot offer VET because of this requirement.'

CHAIR—Is it your view that industry's capacity to take on the number of students wanting places would prevent it occurring? Do you think that industry's capacity would be overstretched?

Mr Fyfe—I can only say that, anecdotally, the answer is that some schools in some areas are finding it difficult and other schools in other areas, particularly in the provincial areas of Queensland where the sense of community is much stronger, are having less of a problem.

Mr Robinson—Chair, in relation to your query, it should be remembered that people doing these VET programs are assessed in terms of their workplace competencies. Almost 30,000 of the students in Queensland schools who are doing VET in schools at the moment are engaged in some kind of structured work experience. Also, we think that the experience gained in the school based apprenticeship and traineeship, with which we are leading the nation, is actually the strongest form of that. There is an incredibly strong link between the on- and off-the-job components of the program. We think that is a high quality issue that needs pushing for those students who are electing to take a strong VET option within their programs. Where you have some of the students just taking one or two VET subjects, it may not be an important or critical issue at this point, because it is about leading them into a subsequent stream that may well involve a much higher workplace activity. So it is not a linear thing, where it all has to occur at once when they first start. Part of it is a progression into other things that follow.

The other thing I would point out that is terribly important in this debate is whether the quality and the employer perception of that quality is all determined by workplace exposure only or whether it is determined by that plus a range of other things to do with the quality of the program. In Australia—and this is probably not well known—we in fact have the third highest rate of teenage employment amongst OECD countries and the highest rate of employment of 20- to 24-year-olds in the world. There is an incredible exposure to the workplace for young Australians. It is second to none, really, in the world. Often people are actually undertaking studies of one kind or another and some casual work, some of which relates to their VET programs and some of which may not. But it is still giving people exposure to those generic work skills.

Mr K. Smith—In fact, in Queensland, because of the nature of our economy, particularly the tourism economy, there is a higher involvement of that cohort in casual employment than in the rest of the nation. Mr Chair, the summary response to your issue is that, wherever possible, we should be looking at industry placements and work opportunities that can link people's VET education with a real workplace opportunity. But this area, generally, does change quite dramatically from time to time, even in post-school options.

I give the example of the aviation industry, where, in fact, in aviation maintenance and avionics the VET qualifications have become more associated with an institutional stream prior to work placement to provide people with a very sound theoretical and practical experience—often in an educative and hands-on environment. Work placement actually occurs after the first year of an institutional certificate being provided. Recently, Queensland established a training company called Aviation Australia and the industry—all of the general aviation sector as well as the major commercial sector; Qantas, Virgin et cetera, Boeing and the defence forces—was looking very much at moving to institutional training as the entree into work based arrangements after that. It varies, industry by industry, and it moves over time.

Mr Robinson—One of the key things in trying to approach the widespread availability of quality VET options is to recognise that one size does not fit all and to try to tailor what you can achieve in different places. Clearly, the availability from industry of quality workplace experience will vary from place to place and from industry to industry. But we want to make sure that, where that cannot be provided, at least immediately, we are still getting people into those VET options under the national arrangements of workplace competencies.

CHAIR—Perhaps another aspect of that might be increasing industry confidence in the experience of teachers teaching within the school system. ANTA suggests, for instance, requiring all teacher training to include up to certificate IV level in workplace training and assessment for trainee teachers. That is, again, to enhance their confidence in what teachers are doing in the school. How would you respond to that proposal?

Mr Robinson—At the moment, people who are teaching VET programs within schools are required to have that.

CHAIR—They are all required to?

Mr K. Smith—That is actually current.

CHAIR—Up to certificate IV level?

Mr Robinson—Yes.

CHAIR—What about the proposal that all teachers coming through do certificate IV?

Mr Camm—It is not the simplistic position in Queensland nor is it a requirement of the Australian Quality Training Framework just to say they have to have certificate IV, because some teacher training programs already have those types of competencies embedded in them. They have to have relevant certificate IV competencies or the equivalent in their training. There are arrangements in place in Queensland to ensure that teachers do comply with standard 8 of the Australian Quality Training Framework and the professional development and industry currency requirements around it. I know your question actually relates more to embedding VET assessment type training and assessment type competencies into, I suppose, their university studies.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr K. Smith—I think, Mr Chair, we would need to see if that is relevant for the whole of the teacher cohort. Clearly, much of the emphasis of undergraduate training of teachers will centre around the three phases of schooling. VET is important in the senior phases of schooling, but we have demands, obviously, for early childhood, middle schooling and senior schooling, and to actually include VET for all teacher training—for example, where we are training people for early childhood—would not be appropriate.

CHAIR—Is it feasible that it might be included in the training for all teachers in senior schooling?

Mr K. Smith—Part of the issue would be whether it would be in the undergraduate curricula for teachers or taken up as a postqualification issue. It may be better to take it up as a postqualification issue, because people are increasingly moving between the three phases of schooling and require differential support for their core applications. So we need to be careful not to crowd out undergraduate education, because there are obviously pressures with respect to general educational expertise and also specialisation in, say, maths, science and ICT in the phases of schooling et cetera. I would be concerned about looking at that as being the way to go. I think you would probably be better to deal with it either as a specialisation component within the undergraduate degree which people could opt to take as an option or, alternatively, by continuing to take this forward with the work force as a postgraduate issue.

Mr PEARCE—I have a couple of questions. Firstly, there has clearly been a significant increase in the number of students in Queensland participating in VET. I think in your submission you said that it has increased from about 40 percent in about 1998 to up around 55 or 60 per cent now. Clearly, it is a strong priority for you. I am interested in your comments about what the future looks like if that growth continues, and clearly you have that as a strong priority. We have heard questions from several schools as to how, from a practical viewpoint, they manage the VET process and work with the students and the local industry groups et cetera. Yesterday at Robina, for example, we saw a wonderful example of what they are doing there to help young students, but the central person responsible for VET there is a person that has got a half-time teaching load, and so they are almost doing this as a sort of moonlighting job. It is a very strong and important priority within the school. Mr Smith, how do you see that panning out over the future if it continues to increase at this rate? It seems inevitable to me that there is going to have to be a stronger focus on the road within the schools in terms of coordinating it. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr K. Smith—There are obviously a couple of issues there. One of the primary issues from our perspective is that schools have been concerned that the funding of the VET component for the brokerage of the VET opportunities, particularly with respect to industry placements or organisation of school based apprenticeships and traineeships, is such that it has stretched school resources.

If you look at it from another perspective you will see that we are in a period where major changes are occurring within the school system, and we obviously need to step back and look at what needs to occur in terms of the organisation at a schooling level to meet a variety of outcomes for students in quite a range of areas. It is important that we look to organising the school environment around what the market segments of the cohort are, what their needs are and, therefore, what the organisational responses at a school level should be to support their educational outcomes through those final two years of schooling. In Queensland, we are looking

at that not just within the school environment but within some tailored programs within TAFE and private training providers.

There is no doubt that some individual schools are doing this work a lot better than other schools. Some have fully embraced the challenges that come with those and have actually dramatically changed the organisation of how they deliver their services to the student cohort and their work with the community. Robina is one of those schools. Coincidentally, the principal of Robina was in fact previously a senior VET officer within the Gold Coast Institute of Technology and so has brought a lot of that expertise with her in heading Robina State High School.

The future relates to how the resources at a school level are organised to meet the needs of the cohort in a much more flexible way. Rather than simply saying year 11 and 12 are about pursuing the Senior Certificate and entry to university, as has been mentioned, we see that the issues schools will need to deal with are diverse. They centre around preparing young people for a world of work, lifelong learning through further education and/or training and supporting a cohort we have not mentioned—such as students with significant disabilities, whose issues are quite different, although there are common issues. We need to look specifically at how we are going to enhance their opportunities and take those issues forward.

Mr PEARCE—It is not clear to me, and I would like to be clear on this issue. In Queensland this success has been great and is obviously making a difference to young people in the schools, but how much of it is coming down to the local school and its principal as opposed to what is being mandated out of government and the department? It is not clear to me how much you are mandating to the school. At the end of the day is it essentially devolved to the principal of the school and their enthusiasm for it in terms of how they prioritise it within their curriculum?

Mr K. Smith—We provide the strategic directions that we wish schools to pursue. There is no doubt that much of the growth has occurred as a result of principals and groups within particular areas taking on these initiatives and developing responses to their local communities. We believe that is a good thing. There is a strong strategic and policy focus. In Queensland that focus emerged through what was called Queensland State Education 2010. The policy parameters around the green paper and white paper have firmed up a more flexible direction.

We could not underestimate the initiative taken at a local level. At one point, for example, a small group of schools on the Sunshine Coast had more than 20 per cent of the nation's school based apprenticeships and traineeships. That is very much because of the commitment of those principals, the nature of their communities and the job opportunities within their communities and the picking up of those opportunities through the subsidy streams that were available from the state and the Commonwealth. Without necessarily mandating, we are attempting to build on that by providing a policy environment where schools can pick up those initiatives and be rewarded for picking them up.

Mr McHugh—The success in Queensland is clearly a combination of both central policy settings and the local initiatives taken at the school level. Like most other states, in Queensland we have models of school based management occurring. Within broad policy frameworks it is at the level of the school that action occurs. I point to three features. The first one is that in 1998-99 a joint ministerial policy statement about VET in Schools between the then ministers of the

departments and their respective directors-general provided an overarching policy approach for our schools.

Mr PEARCE—Was that one of the points of genesis for that increase?

Mr McHugh—Like all good initiatives, schools usually run ahead with them and then we get involved later—if I can be as blunt as that. That policy setting clearly enables schools and school communities to, in the first instance, perhaps legitimise what they were already doing but put it within a policy context. Within that broad ministerial policy statement, we encourage schools to engage with the school based apprenticeships and traineeships, and our schools took that up, as the evidence demonstrates.

Ms Williams—I would like to make a point there. The policy work was done in 1998-99 but it was published in March 2000.

Mr McHugh—Yes. Secondly, there is the SATs agenda. Ian referred to the statutory authorities embedding VET in a range of subjects, including building around 13 study area specifications, which are 13 subjects built around particular AQF certificates. I think the third major dimension was that we then started to shift some of our resourcing models to say, ‘You’re not going to be resourced because you exist; you’re going to be resourced on the basis of your performance.’ So the disbursements of some tied sums of money were built around the levels of activity in our schools.

Mr PEARCE—So there was some inherent motivation or incentive for principals to get behind some sort of training?

Mr McHugh—Yes, there was, but I would have to say that I think it was also a response to an identified need. As Ken has outlined, if you are promoting retention to senior school or equivalent then you must have a response at the local level. So I think incentives may have assisted, but I would not say that they were the sole factor.

Mr Robinson—I would like to make another point in response to your question about the future. I think you have raised quite an important issue, because there are obviously some limits to the kind of vocational education training that a school can realistically provide. We have seen a concentration of the current VET in Schools programs in areas around hospitality and business admin—things that schools can mount with their facilities, with the kind of teaching staff they have and so forth. I think the future will hold greater diversity and access to other VET programs.

In terms of the education and training reforms for the future, we are going to be trying to pilot VET for school students that is actually delivered from TAFE institutions and other training providers as a way of expanding the offerings for students, particularly in some of those areas where there are thin markets and only two or three students from a school wanting to go down that pathway rather than whole classes of people. So part of the future is a greater diversity in the offerings that has more of a synergy with local labour market needs. Rather than simply thinking of it as expanding VET in Schools, another way of thinking about the future is in terms of VET for school students.

Mr K. Smith—I would like to respond to the questions on SATs. It is interesting how these things emerge. There was a policy framework and there was also quite a strong commitment at a senior level. One of the key players in developing the traineeship system nationally was the Director-General of the Department of Employment and Training at the time, Bob Marshman. He played a very personal role in this being driven out. He was a very senior public servant at a national level and then worked in Queensland. I think there were individuals, both at a local level and at a state level, who saw it as part of their mission in life to drive the development of SATs. Rather than try to drive it as comprehensive and compulsory across the system, they actually worked with areas that were responsive to the growth.

When the growth in those areas, such as the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast, was seen to be very effective, other people in other parts of the state said, 'Hang on, this must be quite worthwhile.' So we have experienced exponential growth in Queensland—and, obviously, there would be some limit to the growth—from less than 100 five years ago to over 4,000. That growth has been developed based on passion and commitment at both the local and state levels and also based on the support of some state funding that has existed in Queensland as a result of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, which has not been available in other states. So there has been some incentive funding to push that growth along.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thanks for your submission. Five of my five questions have been answered—particularly the last one—so I will have to think of some more! I am interested in trying to tie some of these together. I thought your last comments, on using TAFE to deliver flexible programs with schools to meet their needs, particularly on the question of providing equity of access to VET courses, were significant. Do you have total global budgeting in your schools?

Mr McHugh—It depends on how you define it, but, in essence, yes. We provide a school recurrent grant, and the school principal under certain governance arrangements may have a school council which then determines the school budget on an annual basis.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Does that involve staffing?

Mr McHugh—No, it does not.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Do you think the fact that you do not have a greater degree of flexibility in your budgets in terms of staffing will militate against your being able to provide the most qualitative programs you can offer in VET in Schools?

Mr K. Smith—You may be aware that we are in the middle of enterprise bargaining negotiations with the Teachers Union, and it is a very difficult question. Obviously, much of the staffing resources in the state system are based on formulaic arrangements around enrolment. At this stage, as Bob mentioned, we are attempting to get greater authority at a school level across a range of resources—not simply the discretionary budgets that schools have. We are committed, within those general arrangements, to get a degree of flexibility in, if you like, the qualifications of the teaching work force that are required for the particular schools. Industrially, there has been an acceptance by the primary union in this area—the Queensland Teachers Union—to negotiate some flexibility around the needs of particular locations. As you would have seen at Robina yesterday, there are also a range of schools that have very significant VET

activities that principals have been able to negotiate for flexibility in their work force arrangements to deliver on those issues.

The other important issue is that schools are increasingly looking to how they may access available Commonwealth funds. One of our schools—Marsden State High School—has a significant Commonwealth program under the Jobs Pathway Program that it operates from the school and links to other schools in a very disadvantaged area in the Logan area of Brisbane. It has great successes in securing apprenticeships for young people coming through its program, and also supports a network of schools. So the importance of some of the Commonwealth programs in supporting a greater degree of flexibility at a school level—in this instance through the Jobs Pathway Program—cannot be underestimated. The Jobs Pathway Program has provided a basis for support not only in that school but in a range of schools within its precinct.

Mr McHugh—I would like to add further that, though we have resource allocation models that say Robina State High School is entitled to 105.6 full-time teachers and the dollar equivalent is not reflected in the school recurrent grant, since the early nineties in Queensland our secondary school principals have had a great degree of involvement in the staffing of their schools back through the district staffing offices. Basically, it is not a situation where the teachers who turn up at the door are the teachers that you have. There is a lot of negotiation about statements such as, ‘These are my requirements,’ and working with district offices. Often school principals—I will use the term ‘find’—find teachers and negotiate their employment. It is not just a simple case of, ‘Here are the teachers being pumped out by the centre.’ There is a lot of negotiation to be responsive to the profile of your teaching staff needs at the local level.

CHAIR—From the small number of schools that we have visited to date, it would seem that flexibility is a critical issue and that, if more resources were available, they need to be made available to schools to enable them to increase their flexibility. Some schools would want to totally release their vocational teacher from face-to-face teaching so that they could concentrate on work placements, coordination, support, supervision and counselling for students. Other schools might want to be able to provide for more industry experience and currency for their teachers involved in vocational education. If there were more funds, would you agree that they ought to be made available to the schools so that they have the flexibility to be able to adapt to their local needs?

Mr K. Smith—If additional funds became available, it would be useful to make them available to the school for more flexible use of those resources.

Mr PEARCE—Directly or via the department?

Mr K. Smith—In the case of the Jobs Pathway Program the contract is directly with the schools.

CHAIR—Or even through ANTA? You have argued for extra ANTA funding, so if that were available would you be happy if that was made directly available to schools on the basis of a per student funding formula based on the number of students in VET?

Mr K. Smith—We would really need to see that in the context of our responsibilities, which are both for the total student cohort, including the Catholic and independent sector, as well as

for the state sector. So the issues really are associated with how you run a fair grants program that has regard to those issues, and the possible implications of not funding through, for example, the state system, but going directly to schools. In Queensland we provide funding to the Catholic and independent sector under an arrangement called a 'basket nexus', which is basically a set proportion of funds that are available to the state school system.

CHAIR—So that applies to ANTA funding as well?

Mr K. Smith—Yes. So we would need to be very careful that we do not disadvantage a sector, for example, the Catholic and independent sector, through a funding methodology that might disadvantage them. We need to step back a bit and say, 'What is the best way of implementing this fairly, across all sectors, that will not overly disadvantage one sector over another.'

Mr Robinson—The other thing I would say about this issue is that it needs to be remembered that often when we are talking about trying to enhance the range of opportunities available for students to do VET, we are actually talking about something new and additional. You may still need to run a maths class with a maths teacher that now has 20 students instead of 24, because the other students want to do something else. So it is not just a simple straightforward number of students game; there are development costs or additional costs, because you are trying to offer something more to the students in terms of range and quality. That is an important thing. I think schools have done an incredible job at trying to blend what they have been offering, with new offerings under a VET banner. That needs to be borne in mind when you are thinking about funding arrangements.

Mr K. Smith—Following up on Chris's comments, the more marginalised VET is in the senior school agenda, given the way that resources are provided to schools, the harder it is for schools to free up resources to organise the VET activity. The greater the level of the activity is, as part of the core activity of the senior schooling, the greater is the capacity to isolate and make sure that specific resources are allocated to that activity. As the VET activity becomes larger in the senior school curricula, particularly in larger schools, their ability to identify and allocate specific resources grows.

We have actually come through a period where the VET activity was not as significant and people had to rearrange resources within a limited cake. It is easier to do that now. The more mainstream, if I could call it that, the VET activity becomes in the senior schooling years, the easier it will be to work through that, because that will then enable the allocation of teaching resource to those critical activities. VET will be one of the critical activities, rather than being seen as in competition with maths, physics and any of the sciences, and VET will be a streaming activity that can be allocated the appropriate teaching resources.

Mr McHugh—I would add to that—you raised the ANTA VET in Schools allocation. Last year the allocation was approximately \$3.6 million to this state. It was slightly less than \$1 million to our non-government colleagues under the basket nexus arrangements, so it is on the top side of \$2 million plus to the government sector. I want to stress that those funds, by and large, were then disbursed directly in grants to our schools subject to a resource allocation methodology. That money was not all devolved to schools, because some of those resources were kept centrally—for example, to support schools in AQTF compliance and in moving their

VET agendas to facilitate work at new cluster levels. Whereas you have seen some very good examples, sometimes there is a need for greater capacity at the central agency simply to enable a given area to establish itself and then, through literally a myriad of resourcing approaches, to get on with its focus. The only other one that I would like to comment on, because it does relate to your earlier comment, Mr Pearce, was about coordination and facilitation. As part of the education and training reform agenda, we will be allocating \$1.8 million to schools on an annual basis to better assist local coordination guidance work at the level of the school. So there is a range of strategies being followed.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is why I raised the issue earlier about equity of provision of VET in schools. I understand that it is not just between sectors; it is between your schools, as well. I was interested in how you go about promoting and supporting VET, particularly in those areas that do not have that critical mass or the expertise, or that need the structural change within the schools to actually inculcate the idea of VET in their schools. So I appreciate the fact that you need to be able to hold back some of those resources, rather than just doing it on a per capita basis. I think that is absolutely crucial. I suppose I am really saying: how do you infuse equity of access in your schools, to your students and your communities, with VET?

Mr K. Smith—That might be a useful issue for Robert, because there are some quite major challenges in some of those areas for Indigenous students in particular.

Mr Barton—With reference to Indigenous issues, I would say that Queensland is certainly one of the most decentralised jurisdictions in the country. Along with that, rurality and remoteness is a significant feature of the majority of our Indigenous communities. Approximately 64 per cent of our communities are more than 50 kilometres away from a TAFE facility and so on. The other thing that I would indicate is that Queensland is the only jurisdiction with two graphically and culturally distinct groups. We have both Aboriginal mainland people and Torres Strait Islanders and then, underneath those broad groupings, we have significant diversity. That also adds to the complexity and the challenges in terms of ensuring equity of access and provision across the state. The other thing that I would add is that, in terms of the provision of services in this area, increasingly, it is much more expensive to provide services in those remote areas and it has a significant impact on provision of work placements.

Essentially, the biggest player in most communities is government. There is not a lot of industry, and ensuring work placements within the community is not necessarily possible, so we have to look at other options. If you count the HR component from the state government in those communities and look at health, education and police, we account for 90 per cent of the public servants employed in those communities. Significantly, that is where the majority of the jobs rest. In that light, there is, essentially, an opportunity as well as an onus to provide education, training and employment within that context, because that is where the jobs are.

In Queensland, we have a very young Indigenous population. Sixty per cent of our Indigenous population is under 25 years of age, so we have a significant focus around education, training and employment for that young cohort. Around six per cent of the total number of students in our system are Indigenous, compared with 3.2 per cent of the total population. Ultimately, what we see is a fairly large uptake. The other thing is that Queensland not only has more students engaged in the system but also has a greater proportionate rate of

completions at the end of the day, with 49.7 per cent of students going through to grade 12 or equivalent.

The road ahead is about ensuring we can achieve outcomes for those students and young people, with employment opportunities that are relevant to their needs in their communities. Ultimately, it is about providing choice, as I see it. As a young Indigenous person in a community, I would like to be able to get up and go through education and training in my community and have the opportunity for a job in my community. Alternatively, I would like to be able to get up and leave my community and pursue training and further education outside. Those choices are tempered, though, with limited industry placements and opportunities and, also, the remoteness in reality and the difficulties that are paired with that.

Some of the major initiatives that we are rolling out to address some of these issues take up the point about the government being the main game in terms of employment. One of the significant initiatives that we have rolled out—and it has been rolling out for a number of years—is called RATEP, or Remote Area Teacher Education Program. This year will see the 100th graduate going through that program—an Indigenous student who is four-year trained with a university qualification. That is a significant achievement and it is unique to Queensland. There is certainly no other program in the country that has had the level of success that this program has had.

One of the major elements of the success of this program is the support which is based in the school and in the local community. We have a coordinator who links the RATEP participants to the ongoing training and development within a school and also links with the TAFE sector and the university. We also have, obviously, the resources embedded in the school around technology, ongoing curriculum and support and mentorship for those participants. It has been a highly successful program. We are looking to apply that model more broadly to other opportunities in the health sector and also the policing sector. So there are Indigenous health workers and opportunities in nursing, community justice and policing, child care and environmental health and protection, as well as some basic skills for the community councils. One of the significant issues for community councils is capacity in terms of corporate governance. This particular model offers the opportunity to support those councils in their roles around accountancy, HR and so on.

The second thing I would like to provide advice on is the Western Cape College initiative up in the north of the state. Significantly, we have had very good relationships with local employers. Comalco is a major employer in that region. We have an ore body with a life of 300 years, so we are looking at several generations of employment for the local community.

Comalco have made a significant commitment to employing local Indigenous people. In the context of education and training, we will work with Comalco to provide graduates with the requisite skills in literacy and achievement to take up those jobs. If we look at most of the communities and the economies in those communities, 80 per cent plus of people are on the CDEP, which is effectively Work for the Dole—you are working for \$9,000 a year. Shifting from that to a \$60,000 job has an absolutely phenomenal impact on the family economies as well as the global economy in those communities. That is what we want to be able to do—provide education, training and employment in a context that ultimately results in economic development and a better outcome for communities.

CHAIR—Thanks, Bob. I am sure there are questions the committee would like to ask, but the time unfortunately has gone. If other questions arise, perhaps we could give them to you on notice, and you might respond to those in writing, if you could. Thank you very much for your time, your very valuable input and your submission.

[10.07 a.m.]

CREAGH, Miss Theresa, Project Officer, ETRF, Queensland Catholic Education Commission

McCORLEY, Mr Joe, Executive Director, Queensland Catholic Education Commission

POWER-WEST, Ms Gabrielle, Executive Officer - Post Compulsory/Curriculum, Queensland Catholic Education Commission

CHAIR—I welcome representatives from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. I remind you that proceedings of the committee are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. Thank you for joining us and for your very detailed submission. Would you like to make some introductory comments?

Mr McCorley—Thank you. There are five points I would like to share in the opening statement. The first is looking at the importance of VET in the school curriculum; the second is the role of pastoral care; the third is careers education and VET; the fourth is schools as RTOs; and the final point is funding. Seeing we are from Catholic education, we seem to always end up at funding.

CHAIR—We all do.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—We start there too.

Mr McCorley—We do too. We will leave it till last. First of all, I would like to congratulate the Commonwealth government on the introduction of VET in Schools. As you have seen in our submission, in 2001, 55 per cent of our students in years 11 and 12 were heavily involved in VET. That is a growth of well over 100 per cent since 1997. VET has significantly enriched the curriculum offered to students post-compulsory education. It has provided alternative worthwhile pathways for many students so that they can now complete 12 years of schooling and exit with the Senior Certificate as well as vocational certificates.

The inclusion of VET in schools has also helped communities to develop with their schools a much better understanding of vocational opportunities available to students. When VET initially started, I think it was labelled 'vegie' work in some of our areas. Now it has a greater prominence among parents, particularly in school areas, so we have an increasing range of pathways that are open to students when they complete secondary schooling.

I want to mention pastoral care, because we see this as extremely important in the delivery of VET in Schools particularly. In fact the success of VET in our schools is largely due to the pastoral care practices that are around, where you are one to one with the different students. Often students undertaking VET programs need a higher level of personal support and mentoring than some of the straight academic students. Without this support, they would quickly drop out of school and out of training. If students were to leave the schooling sector at the end of year 10, it is probable that many of them would not complete vocational programs in

other institutions, because those institutions may not be set up as well as schools are in the whole pastoral care area. Also, the ages are different. I think the average age at some of the TAFE colleges is around 32, so when we have young students working in that environment it is harder to provide the pastoral care they need at ages 16, 17 and 18.

Career education and VET—we believe that there has been considerable progress integrating VET in the curriculum offered by schools, but where it has been really successful it goes hand in hand with integrated career education and career guidance programs. During the past 12 months, DEST has sponsored a number of projects across Australia. The one familiarly known as CATs—the Career and Transition program—has been very successful. We hope that the messages that are coming out of there are sent around various schools in Australia, particularly the best practice that is coming out of those career guidance programs. If we can link them better with VET in Schools, they will be more beneficial.

Schools as RTOs—I guess you have found out that all schools in Queensland are RTOs. We think that is very important because of the significant uptake and success of VET in Queensland schools. Parents seem to want their children to remain within the schooling sector until they are 17 at least, because they appreciate the support available to them at those ages and the opportunity to mature and grow at that important stage of a student's life. The school as an RTO has enabled that to happen. We believe the need for teachers to gain industry experience and currency has had a positive outcome, where teachers have gained a much better understanding of the work force and work outside school. There is a downside there. Because of financial restraints, some of our teachers have to do their experience in vacation time because the school cannot afford to release them during work time. But they do that because they believe in the program. Queensland schools have met the challenge of becoming RTOs and are meeting the compliance requirements of AQTF. We had a battle with that one, but I think that overall we would support it because of the standards it brings with it. We believe it would be a backward step if schools were to lose their status as RTOs.

My final comment is in relation to funding. I would have to say that this is the best value for money education program that I have seen come from the Commonwealth in 30 or 40 years now. I know you were at Marymount College yesterday. That whole college is provided with \$10,000 for a year for what they are able to do in the VET area. What they have done, as you probably saw yesterday, is 477 enrolments in competencies in straight VET programs. There are 129 enrolments in OP subjects with VET embedded and they have 57 school based apprenticeships or traineeships this year. They had 50 last year. To do all that with \$10,000—and Gabrielle has the figures for all our schools in this program—is quite financially attractive in education these days. Of course we have schools that do provide the financial systems with recurrent costs for teaching—often higher in VET programs because classes are smaller than the academic classes. They meet that, and they meet the release time for VET coordinators, secretarial support and for teachers visiting students in the workplace.

I would like to speak on behalf of our partnership with Education Queensland in the ETRF reforms, because we have made a commitment in the Queensland Catholic Education Commission to work together in this area for all students in Queensland. We believe Queensland misses out a little in the allocation across Australia, and you have probably heard this. Because of growth, Queensland students now make up 21 per cent of years 11 and 12 in Australia. They have 28 per cent of the whole VET cohort in Australia and yet they only get 16.9 per cent of the funds coming to Queensland.

In conclusion, I offer my congratulations on what has been achieved with the partnership between the Commonwealth and Catholic education over that time—it has really been only five years. We believe it is essential that Commonwealth funding for VET continues into the future. It will ensure that positive and significant progress already made will continue for the benefit of Australia's youth, our work force and our economy generally.

Ms Power-West—Following on from some of the discussions we had yesterday, I will now provide you with some of the data. On the first yellow sheet are our strategic directions for 2003. Our allocation of funding for 2003 under the ANTA VET in Schools program is \$710,428. We have five strategic directions. The bulk of the funding will be going to strategic directions Nos 1 and 2. Strategic direction No. 1 relates to the seed funding that is made available to our schools for each SAT that is organised. In Queensland, we commonly use the term SAT, which means School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship.

This year, we are going to give retail SATs \$200 for seed funding, with \$400 for all other SATs. That is because we had a 18 per cent increase in SATs last year in our schools, and we could see halfway through the year that we were going to run out of seed funding. There was a big increase in retail SATs because—it was coming through from quite a number of our principals—some of the employers, such as Big W, Red Rooster, Sizzler and Coles, were putting a lot of their school-age part-time employees onto SATs. That was coming through—I had at least four principals contact me. They were concerned because some of the students that these organisations were putting onto SATs really did not want to go into a traineeship but were told that their hours would be cut back significantly if they did not. There is not nearly as much support in the retail area, because most of that work is done on Thursday nights and on weekends, as you would appreciate. Therefore, school personnel are not there to go out and visit the students at those times. So we took that decision and last year halved it so it was \$500 to all SATs except retail SATs, which were given \$250. This year, we have gone to \$400 and \$200.

We did not want to increase the bucket of money available to SATs, which was \$250,000 of that \$665,000, simply because we like to give as much discretionary funding as possible to schools to meet the secretarial support, the release time for teachers going out to visit the students in the workplace and to provide additional release time for the VET coordinator. All of our schools have a VET coordinator, and that is one of the keys to the success of our program.

Those are our strategic directions. The ones that are handled centrally, once the money has been allocated across the state and therefore across the schools, are strategic direction No. 3, which is for when we are involved in cross-sectoral programs, and strategic direction No. 4, which I handle separately. That is for special needs students who have been ascertained as being at levels 5 and 6 and therefore have significant needs in a whole range of disability areas. It is to support those students in SATs. It is also to provide funding for students who have to travel to do their off-the-job training. For example, they might live at Mt Isa and have to come into Townsville or Cairns or somewhere to do it. The last one is again for cross-sectoral work.

Moving on to the next page, this shows our SATs statistics for 2002—even though it has March 2003 as the date; that was our committee meeting—and how they were divided up across the various areas in 2002. Yesterday, in my discussions with you between sessions, I talked about the seed funding for SATs last year. We did a mapping process across our 74 Catholic schools in Queensland because it appeared in some of our regions, particularly in Rockhampton, that all of the seed funding we were allocating to the schools was going to brokers. In most

cases those brokers were the local ECEF cluster group or JPP group. So they were receiving the whole \$500 sent to the school. When they could see that they were only going to get the \$250 for retail SATs, there was the problem. We could see that there was quite a bit of diversity across the state. So we undertook this mapping process and I am sure when you have time to look through that you will see that it is a very different situation across Queensland. Some schools are not having to pay any of their seed funding to the brokers; other schools are having to pay significant amounts, in fact more than they receive in some cases. So that mapping process was very useful.

To support our schools and enable them to negotiate a better position in 2003 with the brokers, I put a lot of the information together—it is on these green pages—to form a PowerPoint presentation. I used this at seminars with our schools to give them a background on SATs—what the intention of them was, looking at the purpose of seed funding, the responsibilities of the broker and the responsibilities of the schools. In most cases, our schools have been able to negotiate a very satisfactory outcome this year. Most of them seem to have negotiated, where they are paying funds to the brokers, that they keep 50 per cent of the funds in the school and that 50 per cent is the maximum amount that goes to the brokers.

A concern that emerged during that mapping process was that some of the programs in Queensland, as well as being ECEF programs, are also JPP programs—and you would be familiar with JPP. They were paying seed funding to JPP programs as well. We had a concern that there could have been double dipping in that particular area because JPP programs are funded separately to put students into SATs. It appeared that they may have been double dipping through the JPP program and then through the seed funding coming from our schools. That was happening in a couple of instances.

Moving on to the orange page: 45 of our 75 schools are in the Brisbane archdiocese. In order to allocate the funding available through the ANTA Vet in Schools program to our schools we use a performance measurement based on 2002 figures and we band the schools. We have five bands for 2003. The indicators that we used were the number of VET subjects that the school offers, the actual VET that is in subject area specifications—they are the subjects that do not lead directly to tertiary entrance but which, through the ranking system, can count—the VET enrolments in OP subjects and the number of SATs that the school has. You can see there that Marymount College came out at the top of the 45 schools in 2002.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—St Joseph's Nudgee College has an incredible figure there. Is it a VET college?

Ms Power-West—No, it is not. But you will notice there that St Joseph's Nudgee has quite a few of their enrolments in OP subjects. They would offer more OP subjects with VET in them than any other school. They offer six of the OP subjects with VET; most schools, on average, would offer two or three. So you can see that about 60 per cent of their enrolments are in the OP subjects with VET.

Mr McCorley—The other thing is that it is a boarding college. They were getting a lot of children from right out in the west of Queensland and they needed some alternatives in their senior curriculum.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—So are these referring to competencies here?

Ms Power-West—Yes, the enrolments in competencies—VET enrolments.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Right. Thanks.

Ms Power-West—So that is across the board there. You can see that band A schools got \$10,000, and then it went down accordingly. Last of all, on the yellow sheet, that is simply the process we use for dividing up that funding. It is on a per capita basis between dioceses, of which we have five in Queensland. The orange sheet you have just had a look at referred to the \$266,000 available to the Brisbane schools. Each of the other four dioceses uses slightly different means of dividing up its funds between its schools. That gives you the documentation that I referred to yesterday, which I told you I would provide.

Mr McCorley—If there are any pages missing, it is because it was done fairly quickly this morning.

Ms Power-West—There were a couple of other points that I wanted to pick up. They come out of what Joe said and out of your visit to Marymount yesterday. A critical area in all of this is the careers area—you picked that up from the students very definitely, as well as from the employers, yesterday. I want to make it quite clear that the model that is operating at Marymount, which is an excellent model I believe, is by no means the norm. In most schools in Queensland I think you would find that the amount of career guidance available is very minimal. I was very disappointed that it was an area the white paper did not pick up in greater depth. I think it is an area that really needs to have a significant focus on it.

Joe referred to the CATs—the career and transition projects that are operating. I know of one that is excellent, down at Shailer Park High School. They have a program from years 8 to 12. The school operates seven lines, and the seventh line, for every student from years 8 to 12, is career guidance and education. I think that is the type of model that all of our schools need. I cannot emphasise strongly enough that I think the key to improvement in all areas—not only for students studying VET but also for academic students who go straight on to tertiary education—is career education and guidance, because, as you would be aware, the drop-out rate at university is quite significant. The percentage of students who are changing at the end of first semester or first year is also quite significant and has increased enormously in the last few years. If we had better career guidance and education, we would not be wasting nearly as many resources in that area at tertiary level.

The other part I would really like to emphasise is having the right people. It was very evident at Marymount that you need people to drive that agenda who are really committed to it—many of whom are nearly at burn-out stage, I would have to say. I thought one of the most telling comments made yesterday was in response to your question to the employers, ‘Have you got any recommendations to improve the program?’ They suggested that the VET coordinator should be completely funded and not have any teaching responsibilities. I cannot support that strongly enough. I also think that the convergence of VET and general education is a really important focus. It was great to hear those students yesterday saying that they felt no different from the rest of the school because they were studying VET. I would have to say that I do not believe that is the case in many schools, so I think that the convergence issue is very important.

Another important area is winning the hearts and minds of teachers. The average age of teachers in Australia is 47, and a lot of the teachers have themselves come through a very academic schooling system. They have university qualifications—multiple qualifications in many cases—and a lot of them do have a negative attitude towards VET. Having come from a school myself just 12 months ago, I know that trying to convince those people that it is worth while and important is not easy. That is another area we need to focus on.

Industry experience for teachers is an issue. We need to look at ways to improve that and to be able to support schools in providing that for their teachers. The ECEF JPP programs are very important. They provide a lot of the links between business and industry and the school. They organise a lot of structured workplace learning. They organise a lot of the SATs in many of the schools. Those programs are funded on an annual basis. I have been very closely involved with one of them since 1996. They lose good people from those programs on an annual basis simply because people have mortgages; they have school fees to pay; they have all their other commitments; and they like to have a bit more than 12 months security. The funding for those programs comes from the federal government. We need to look at providing it for a longer term—at least three to four years—so that we keep those very good, committed people working to improve outcomes for our youth while providing some security for them too. Finding the right staff is a critical issue. Again that is tied in with winning the hearts and minds of teachers. That is a critical factor in making further progress.

Miss Creagh—I was just thinking you must have been watching a lot of TV, Gabrielle, speaking of winning the hearts and minds.

Ms Power-West—I watch very little, actually.

Mr McCorley—You can see how this area of education won the heart and mind of Gabrielle!

Miss Creagh—I do not want to add very much because Gabrielle really is the person with all the information. The term ‘winning the hearts and minds’ is very much a part of the education and training reforms for the future. The emphasis of the senior schooling part of that is to pick up much of what has been picked up in the VET areas in schools. With the reforms, young people will be provided with flexibility and opportunities to take up post-year-10 education in a variety of ways. The thing that has come across to me through the development of the reforms and the commencement of the implementation is the important role that schools will continue to play. Much of it is because of the support that schools offer to young people. To be able to continue to assist young people to make choices but to also provide flexibility is a real dilemma, but it is a way that has to be advanced.

Partnerships are a key to ETRF. In the development of what has been called the district youth achievement plan, partnerships between schools, TAFEs, industry and business have been looked at to try and draw a picture of particular areas and ask those groups to provide the opportunities and support that young people need. The whole concept of working together is an ideal. We are hopeful that it will be able to be picked up. There is already the pattern of that in many of the ECEF groups. We are hoping that they will be able to either be a basic group in that district youth achievement plan or have strong influence in that area.

The other important aspect that Gabrielle and Joe spoke about was career education. The reforms are also looking at beginning earlier with young people—year 10s and year 9s, but year 10s particularly—to create a plan that they will become inspired to take through to year 12 or an equivalent. At the same time, part of the reality of life is that young people will not stick to a plan. While it is hopeful that, if we do have better career education, we may not have as many changes as we have had, I think that is the reality of life and, therefore, there will be changes. A lot of the studies are showing that people are not seeing that a direct path is the way to go but that there will be many paths. I think we will see young people reaching an end path, an end goal, by moving through many different paths, and we are providing opportunities for young people to do this. It is interesting to see the number of OP students who are taking up VET in Schools. It is really providing them with a much broader vision of the opportunities in life.

I do not want to add anything more to what has been said except to say that it really has provided hope and opportunities for a lot of young people. One of the things that I have seen at speech nights recently, in the last five years or maybe even longer, is young people on stage receiving awards for their apprenticeship and VET achievements. It is something that schools have taken on really well. They have acknowledged the role of these young people in the school and the contribution that they have been able to make to society through the work that they have done. I will leave it at that.

CHAIR—It is quite clear that the quality of the teachers, both those providing the career guidance and counselling and those teaching the VET courses, is a critical factor in the effectiveness of what happens in schools. We are all impressed with what we saw at Marymount yesterday. Can I ask what the Catholic Education Commission is doing to try to attract the right sorts of people into those roles within your schools? Do you suffer any disadvantages compared to the state schools, or do you have greater flexibility and advantages that they do not have?

Mr McCorley—I do not think we have any great advantages in that area. It is a matter of attracting people who are interested in this area and see something in it. We try to do that, through advertisements and so on, just as the state schools do. Do you have any comments on attracting teachers?

Ms Power-West—I think we have one slight advantage in that our middle management structure is probably a little more favourable than the government sector. Each school is allocated a number of points to divide across middle management, and the school, through a committee structure, then allocates those points. Certainly, for about the last two rounds—every three years we have a new round of point allocation—our schools have allocated points to a vocational education coordinator. I think that that has been a significant advantage for our schools, because through my associations with colleagues in the government sector it appears that it is usually the head of senior school who looks after that area. That person also has responsibilities for all the academic curriculums, and they are significant responsibilities; they are the interface between the school and the board of studies. I think that we have an advantage there. But in most cases the people who are passionate about VET and who are really taking it forward in schools are usually people who have been there in the school, have seen an opportunity to make a difference for young people and so have taken the leadership in that role.

CHAIR—The careers teacher at Marymount yesterday—Jason, I think—had come from an industry background, a trade background. Does your system have any greater flexibility to

provide teacher training or take on people who have not gone through formal teacher training but have come from that sort of background?

Ms Power-West—No. He would have gone through a formal teacher training.

CHAIR—After he had done his trade apprenticeship?

Ms Power-West—Yes. A lot of our teachers in the industrial skills area have a trade qualification and then go on to do teacher training. So they would all have teacher qualifications, but he has the added advantage of having the trade. The same thing happened for me. I have been in teaching for about 20 years. I had experience in the business world and then went on to get teacher qualifications. You find that a lot of people with that type of background tend to be the ones who are passionate about VET in schools.

CHAIR—What sort of financial support is given for those people moving from industry through teacher training? I know that some independent schools, for instance, do not require formal teacher training. If they get someone from industry with the right skills and experience they will allow them to start teaching and provide on-the-job training. There is a disincentive for people moving out of full-paid employment to do a dip ed or whatever course.

Mr McCorley—Another thing you mentioned yesterday afternoon was that our Catholic University is trying to develop some online mixed mode delivery for people who want to move into teaching who have been in different areas. We have had bank managers and even solicitors, which I thought was interesting, ringing up and saying, ‘How can I get into teaching?’ But the university can’t do it unless they get that help. So they are trying to develop something that will enable people to do their training in a way where they can keep their present job and have that experience. We are going to try to work with that and with our diocesan offices—particularly in rural areas it is needed. But we are governed by the Board of Teacher Registration in Queensland and there are no exceptions.

Miss Creagh—I am surprised to hear you say that about independent schools being able to do that.

CHAIR—There are not many, but I actually met a teacher last week who was in that position.

Miss Creagh—So they must have had an exemption from the board to be able to do that.

Mr McCorley—We can get an exemption if we are in a rural area and we can’t find a teacher. We have done that before.

CHAIR—How do you respond to ANTA’s suggestion requiring teacher training to skill teachers up to certificate IV level in workplace assessment and training, at least for those teachers who will be teaching secondary subjects where there may be an embedded component of VET?

Ms Power-West—The teachers who are teaching VET have come through a teacher training program and they have had significant experience with assessment. They would have studied a

number of units in assessment during their pre-service training and they have either had industry training prior to coming into teaching or have maintained their industry currency since coming into teaching. In many of those cases, I think the certificate IV is superfluous for those people, because they already have skills at a level probably far above certificate IV. That needs to be taken into account. I do not think that the certificate IV should necessarily be mandatory; you have to look at each case individually because you have to look at their other experience.

CHAIR—Do you think in teacher training courses there is enough emphasis on VET and vocational aspects of their training?

Ms Power-West—I don't. I think that is an area that all teacher training institutions really need to look at. As far as I know, the University of Central Queensland is the only tertiary institution that is actually training in that area. At some of the other universities—ACU, for instance, in its two-year program has students in business; one of its teaching areas is accounting and business—they are getting some exposure to the VET area through people who are presenting that program because they have been involved in it. But apart from that there is not much emphasis at all on VET. I think that that is an area that really needs to be addressed, because it is very difficult for schools, when they are trying to recruit people in those areas, if pre-service teachers who are coming to them have had no exposure to it.

Mr McCorley—It is a very important area and we would support it.

Ms Power-West—Yes, it is.

Miss Creagh—It is something that we have talked quite a bit about. Otherwise they come with the attitude that they are here for content, rather than an attitude that is really about what is needed for these young people and how they can support and develop programs to suit them.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I really enjoyed the visit yesterday to Marymount, although I must put on the record that three of my family, whom I had met only once before in my life, are on the staff at the school. It is a small world we live in.

Mr PEARCE—Those Tasmanians are everywhere, aren't they!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—If they were, you would get double your money per capita grants! Your comments about career guidance and pastoral care are absolutely crucial in this. Being an ex-chalkie, I was involved in a college where we were looking at the concept of case managing every student. The comments you were making about going to years 9 and 10 are absolutely important too. You are right: it might not be one path—there might be a number—but at least it gives it some coherence. With your very strong emphasis on VET in your schools in particular—and the growth here in Queensland is quite staggering—is there a correlation between the offering of VET, in its variety of forms, and enrolments in your schools? And is there an increase in retention, particularly from year 10 to years 11 and 12 because of the introduction of VET in your schools?

Mr McCorley—I have not seen a big improvement in enrolment because of VET in Schools. I think the big area has been teachers trying to give the students a meaningful curriculum. They

have taken up and developed the programs accordingly. But I have seen a retention rate improvement from years 10 to 11.

Ms Power-West—I would support that. That is where the biggest change is—the retention rates have increased significantly because you are offering those students a worthwhile alternative. Having come out of school about 12 months ago myself—I was principal of a senior college—it was great to see what was happening with those students who had had an academic program right through to the end of year 10. Those kids are gifted too; they are just gifted in a different way. I always tried to emphasise that they were gifted in applied areas. It was great to see those kids being able to pick up subjects where they could use those gifts, whether it was industrial crafts, hospitality, child care or whatever, just to see how their self-esteem changed. Terry mentioned going to presentation evenings and seeing those kids getting prizes for the first time in their lives and having success. It made a tremendous difference. I certainly believe it has increased retention rates, simply because we are offering them an alternative. It was great to hear that young girl—or a couple of them—yesterday at Marymount say, ‘I wouldn’t be here—I would have left at year 10—if I hadn’t had the opportunity of a VET program and known that I could apply for a SAT.’ There are stories like that in every school. I do not think it is attracting any more students to our schools initially at year 8, when our major intakes are, but I certainly believe it is keeping them there past year 10.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You talk about hearts and minds, and Terry used the phrase ‘speech night’. I came through the Catholic system and I knew exactly what a speech night was—it was speeches! Now you have some presentations, so there is more to it. You make a very interesting comment in the submission, on page 5:

Industry acceptance of school-based VET programs is much more positive at the local or grassroots level than at industry peak body level.

That is a very telling comment, which I think was borne out yesterday. Would you like to expand on that a little?

Ms Power-West—Yes, I made that comment. I have been very involved with one of the local cluster groups—Worklinks—which is on the north-west of Brisbane. I actually started it back in 1996 and now 24 schools belong to it. Since I came into this role I have stayed on the management committee, because I have a great ownership. We work very closely with local business and industry. The management committee has a number of representatives from business and industry and it is a big program. I think they have about 1,500 employers who are part of that program. We have a lot of interaction with them and we know that they think very highly of what is happening in schools in VET. That is the on-the-ground experience. Joe, I think you mentioned at a recent MCEETYA task force meeting that that was also borne out by a comment.

Mr McCorley—It certainly was. It is interesting that you mentioned peak bodies, because that is the impression we were getting—that is, that the peak bodies of employers were not favouring VET in Schools. I went to a meeting of the MCEETYA task force which I am on, which is to do with the Transition to Work program, and it was amazing—I heard representatives of the peak bodies speaking very much in favour of VET in Schools. I talked to them at morning tea and said, ‘That is different from what I am hearing.’ The lady I was

speaking to said, 'I am right behind it.' There were two peak bodies there, so they changed my mind. I might write that differently now! But the impression we were getting was that they were not in favour of it, wasn't it, Gabrielle?

Ms Power-West—Yes. For example, I have heard it from Bill Healey and Steve Balzary when I have had interactions with them on a national level. But that is definitely not my experience at the grassroots level, and I think Mary—the lady Joe was speaking about—was representing AIG. So it is varied. As you would know, there are two research projects going on presently. One is in Queensland as part of the ETRF, where we are looking at the quality of VET in Schools. I am on the steering committee of that one. There is also a national project looking at the quality of VET in Schools. So hopefully, once those research projects have been completed, a lot of the rumours, ideas and misinformation that are around will disappear.

Miss Creagh—During the consultation about the reforms last year, in consultation groups right across the state there were strong pockets of supportive employers, and they particularly supported the whole SATs application. At the same time, there were a couple who were not supportive. Even as late as yesterday, at the minister's information session in Townsville, an employer was saying, 'This is all wrong. This is all going the wrong way. You need to come and talk to me and I'll get it straightened up and smartened up.' So there are some employers—I would almost call them redneck employers—who are saying that it is not the way it should be and saying, 'We really would be able to show you how to do it and do it properly.' But, generally speaking, the people who came to those information sessions around the state spoke very positively about it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—We certainly got that impression at both the meetings yesterday. Finally, on page 5 of your submission, in the last paragraph in the section looking at the differences between school based and other vocational education programs you say:

There is a disincentive for student/s to complete a Certificate II while at school as this diminishes the likelihood of their gaining an apprenticeship or traineeship after completing their schooling.

It is my understanding that from 1 July this year that would no longer be a disincentive. I probably need clarification as well on this, because today's handout says that that will not be the situation.

Ms Power-West—That information came out after we had presented that—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Right.

Ms Power-West—But up until then it had certainly been a disincentive, because if they had a certificate II the employer could not get the training dollar if they put them on to a post-school apprenticeship or traineeship. There were stories all over the place in relation to that. I think it has been a really good issue to address.

CHAIR—That has been addressed.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—It is good to put that on the record then.

Ms Power-West—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you for that.

Mr PEARCE—I have two quick questions. Firstly, Mr McCorley, I am interested in your working relationship with the state education department. How do you work that in terms of making sure that what you are doing is aligned with what they are doing and that there is some consistency, uniformity and sharing of ideas? How is that managed? Are you interacting with them on a regular basis through seminars or briefings?

Mr McCorley—At director-general level we have developed a working plan, particularly in the past two years, which involves meeting regularly, almost weekly, about different areas of education—not just VET but other areas as well. The other good thing is that the department is actually paying for a person to represent us on the reforms. Terry has been working at the grassroots level in the whole development of these training reforms across Queensland. So we are hoping that for the first time in Queensland we can work closely together, not only with Education Queensland but with the independent sector. We meet regularly with them, too, so that we can contribute to support these students who are dropping out of schools.

Mr PEARCE—You said ‘for the first time’. That suggests that in the past that has not been the case.

Mr McCorley—It has probably been done more haphazardly than that. I think the feeling has always been good and we have tried to work with them, but this time we are getting down to nitty-gritty planning. For example, in these areas, all the schools—Catholic, state and independent—are coming together with employers, business and TAFE, and working out how we can put this together in places like Maryborough, Bundaberg and Townsville. That is where Terry is working.

Mr PEARCE—Is this idea of the state paying for somebody like Terry to work in your area common across other states and territories, do you know?

Mr McCorley—I have not heard about it at all, actually.

Miss Creagh—I think it is unique to this reform program.

Mr McCorley—And the minister has been very good, working with us as well.

Ms Power-West—At a grassroots level, I have quite a lot of interaction with people in Education Queensland and AISQ: Pauline is on a committee with me, Chris and I are involved quite a lot, and I work with the Pathway people at Education Queensland. So yes, we do work together. We coordinate our efforts when we develop our strategic directions for the ANTA VET in Schools funding—we do that as a cooperative activity. We are working well with DET and we are working well with Education Queensland.

Mr PEARCE—Ms Power-West, you mentioned the need for re-education of teachers about the benefits of VET in Schools. They have come through what has been sort of an academic peak, if you like, of their own. Yesterday we saw a great example at Marymount of the

wonderful vision that the principal had, so I guess one technique is from the top down. Mr Peacock clearly had the vision and has implemented that—and brought the team with him, which is great to see. What do you think could be done to re-educate or influence people out there, where they do not have such a principal with that vision and enthusiasm? How do we go about convincing those people? Are there two or three key practical things you think could be done to re-educate them about the benefits of VET and its parity as an academic qualification—that VET is just as important? How would we go about that?

Ms Power-West—When I was listening to the young people from Marymount yesterday, I thought I would love to provide this opportunity to our principals, other administrators in our schools and our teachers who are not quite on board with VET. Then I thought, when I sat through the employers presentation, ‘This is the way we convince them.’ So it immediately started my mind ticking. I usually run a couple of seminars each year for our people and I thought a good way might be to look at bringing two students from each school together to have a forum of that kind. So yes, I got some ideas yesterday.

I was very disappointed that the PAVES program, which was coming through the MCEETYA Transition from School Taskforce, did not proceed—that was the Principals and Vocational Education in Schools. ECEF was pushing that program and was providing the bulk of the funding for it. It was aimed at getting principals on board with the VET agenda. For a number of reasons—for example, because there had not been enough consultation with different jurisdictions—it fell by the wayside. I think that would have been a good strategy to get principals onside. I think it is vital; you have to.

The last forum I ran, a couple of weeks ago, was an issues forum, and we had VET coordinators there. In our schools we have always tried to push the idea that they need to have one of the members of our admin team working with the VET coordinator, and that has been a fairly successful approach in the Catholic sector. A lot of issues emerged from the forum—and we are in the process of writing an issues paper about that; we will give the completed issues paper to Brisbane Catholic Education and to the religious institute schools who will take it forward however they wish. The main thing that came through, from the VET coordinators particularly, was the issue of VET’s status—that we have to get the principal and the administration to give VET better status in the school and that, if we want to take this agenda further, it has to come from the top down. They have to promote it and say it is worth while and it is having great outcomes. That is from the people on the ground level, and I think that is where we have to go in the future.

Mr PEARCE—So there is a lot of hard work to be done there, isn’t there?

Miss Creagh—A lot.

Mr McCorley—Yes, I think so. A Mercy nun once told me many years ago that a fish stinks from the head down.

Mr PEARCE—It does.

Mr McCorley—But I think the way to do it is through students testing them. Principals and teachers are interested in schools and students, so I think that is the way to go. If students stood

up and told them what a difference it has made to their study and their lives, they would say, 'Okay'.

Ms Power-West—If people were exposed to those students yesterday, they could not help but see the value of it. I think they articulated it so well.

Miss Creagh—I would just raise the issue of industry training as another disincentive. Gabrielle and Joe have mentioned before the cost of that in time as well as money. But we get back reports from several teachers about the very poor training that they are receiving. You have possibly heard this before. I can give examples: one that comes to mind is where a very experienced and competent home economics teacher, in doing her industry training, peeled potatoes day after day in a top hotel. All was negotiated beforehand, one thought, for appropriate training. It is part of this inability to see the level at which these people should be industry trained, as it were. It is hard to know exactly to whom one goes to ensure that the appropriate training takes place. It really is training at a managerial level, in some ways. The idea is to ensure that, say, the person who is taking hospitality understands all of the implications of the hospitality area, but very frequently they are doing very mundane things. They are doing this in their holiday time. They are spending two weeks and however many hours a year they have to do—

Mr McCorley—About 100.

Ms Power-West—Two days.

Miss Creagh—No, I think it is more.

Ms Power-West—Initially they have to have one week in the industry and then, to maintain their currency, they have to do an additional two days per year.

Miss Creagh—Somebody was telling us the other day that they had been told they have to do 100 hours. So we are getting some confusing messages there.

Mr McCorley—Career education has come up a fair bit. I am on a MCEETYA school-to-work transition. There is also a program being developed by DEST called Careers Australia. It has had very positive comments from every group that has heard about its development. It is costly, but it is being developed well. They are looking at the whole of life, and it has four sections. The first one is K-7—it starts right there with career advice—and then 7-10, 11 and 12, and adult. So it is one integrated program for careers across Australia. There is a lot of work going into it. I think it is based on a Canadian model. That may pick up and help with the career path we are talking about.

Miss Creagh—Some of the schools are using Real Game, too.

Ms Power-West—Yes, that is another Canadian product.

CHAIR—On page 4 of your submission you mention that schools wanting to access courses provided by private providers such as TAFE have to pay for them. Could you give us an

indication of how much that cost is? It seems that it varies from state to state and that in some states they do not.

Ms Power-West—Yes. We are hearing all kinds of different stories all the time. I will give you one that I heard just recently. The school I was at offered a program, through TAFE, in art and design. It had been very successful. Then our board of studies, QSA, developed a subject area specification in that area. The school was going to stay with the other program, through TAFE, but this year the cost rose and it became unviable to remain with the TAFE program. It would have cost in the vicinity of \$1,000 for the program and the school just did not have that type of money.

CHAIR—That was over how many students?

Ms Power-West—I think it worked out at close to per student.

CHAIR—\$1,000 per student?

Ms Power-West—Yes. So they did not stay with it. That is the only significant increase I have heard of in recent times, but certainly that was an example. Cost has been a big factor.

CHAIR—In Queensland, are all TAFE courses which are accessed by Catholic schools charged or are some free?

Ms Power-West—It is an interesting situation. For a number of years now, TAFE has made a bucket of money available to the non-government sector for cooperative programs. That bucket of money has been at around \$350,000, I think, over that time. It has never increased. It has been managed by the independent sector—AISQ. From that bucket of money, they paid the salary of the person who managed the program at AISQ and then, as I understand it, a bidding process was put into place. The TAFE colleges would bid for what was left in the bucket after the salary was taken out of it. They would say, ‘We will offer this course in industrial design or in hospitality or in child care.’ That was the initial bidding process. The next round was, once the TAFE colleges had divided up and taken X thousands of dollars out of that bucket, the schools would bid for places in that program. It might be that, say, Burdekin TAFE was doing child care, and then the schools would bid for the bucket there.

Reports were coming through to us last year that in some of those TAFE colleges, mainly in Brisbane ones—two that I know of—they were in fact also allocating funding to government schools from that bucket that the particular TAFE college had of cooperative programs funding for the non-government sector. It was not quarantined for the independent, non-government sector. The government schools were accessing that funding as well. The government schools have their own bucket, which I can assure you is much larger than the one the non-government sector has. There have been problems consistently over time. I have been dealing with TAFE personally since 1984 and I have never found it a smooth experience. Schools have problems. We might want to put five students into a course. As you know if you have worked in schools—I know Mr Sidebottom has—schools have timetables and they have to have that structure there. The week before the course is to start, we might hear, ‘Oh, we’re no longer running that course.’ So then we have to find an alternative for those students. There have always been lots of operational problems.

CHAIR—So it has been more costly for students from non-government schools than for those from government schools to access TAFE courses?

Ms Power-West—Yes, it has.

Mr McCorley—In fact, it very rarely happens in a lot of our schools, because of the costs. We are hoping that these new reforms will pick up some of that.

Ms Power-West—But I was very disappointed about that first example I gave you, because I saw what a great opportunity it was for the students who were doing that art and design program, and then the cost just became quite impossible for the school to be able to access the program.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That has been very helpful.

Proceedings suspended from 11.15 a.m. to 11.37 a.m.

ROW, Mr Matthew Jason, Acting Operations Manager, BIGA Training Ltd

ROW, Mr Robert Gregory, Chief Executive Officer, BIGA Training Ltd

CHAIR—I welcome representatives of BIGA Training to our inquiry. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr M. Row—I am the manager for training services at BIGA Training.

CHAIR—I remind you that the proceedings today are legal proceedings of the parliament. I invite you to make some introductory comments, and then we will proceed to questioning.

Mr R. Row—I propose to quickly talk about BIGA Training and the program that we have undertaken in the building industry for school-to-work and school based apprenticeships. BIGA is a group training company. It is, obviously, a not-for-profit entity and a company limited by guarantee. It currently employs some 800 apprentices and trainees, predominantly in the building industry but also in some other industries as well. It also has a registered training organisation as part of its operation, known as the Academy of Business and Construction. It currently trains 860 students across Queensland.

In 1999, BIGA piloted a youth access program for 120 school students, predominantly from year 11. In essence, the program was a construction prevocational course, which was carried out one day per week for the school year. At the end of the year, successful graduates were offered a school based apprenticeship with BIGA Training. They would undertake the school based arrangement during their grade 12 year. At the completion of the grade 12 year, they would then transition into full-time arrangements with our company.

It is fair to say that, in the beginning, this was not an easy program to implement. There were a number of specific hurdles to overcome. These were, in terms of the schools, the strong university outcome focus of the teachers, what we saw as inflexible timetabling arrangements and negative perceptions of the construction industry, particularly from parents in private schools. It was therefore necessary for our staff to do a lot of work to overcome those perceptions, through meetings with parents, school teachers and voc ed coordinators, addresses at assemblies et cetera. In some cases, our staff actually did the timetabling for schools to enable the students to be released to our program. It is fair to say that we were very well served by a staff member who had previously been a high school teacher, was an apprentice trainer and had a construction industry background. As an individual, he brought a high level of skill to the program and was able to get the stakeholders very involved in the program.

The first year of training resulted in 70 apprenticeship outcomes. From our point of view, that was a really good success. The program had been treated as a pilot by the Department of Employment and Training, or DETIR as it was then known. They had a paper put together by a research team which was headed by Dr Larry Smith. I will quickly quote from a paragraph in that report's executive summary:

The overwhelming perception of the Youth ACCESS Program conveyed to the research team by everyone interviewed during this evaluation is that the Program is highly successful, highly beneficial, and should be expanded. None of the students, teachers or BIGA staff interviewed voiced any genuine concerns about the Program.

Both BIGA and the Department of Employment and Training believed that the program should increase its numbers of students, and in 2000 BIGA trained 200 school students and in 2001 there were 250 students trained in Bundaberg and Brisbane and on the Gold Coast. Unfortunately, there was a shift in state government funding and for 2002 this resulted in a reduction to 148 student places. Our understanding from DET was that this in no way reflected on the program and was purely a funding issue to do with the pressure that they faced in terms of funding. The program that year saw 84 school based apprenticeship outcomes from those 148 original student placements. That program is identical this year, but we have been advised that there is now uncertainty as to whether any funding will be attached next year.

Since 1999, when we first began to do this, we have put 718 students through training, with 435 apprenticeship employment outcomes. But these are not the only benefits: one of the benefits to BIGA has been quite a reduction in the cancellation rate of apprenticeships, which has previously been higher. The national average is around 50 per cent and ours had been around 54 per cent, which was pretty much average for the construction industry. It has dropped to 43 per cent and, in our view, will continue to drop as we continue to stream people through from this particular program. In 2002, only 18 per cent of cancelled apprentices were recruited through a school based program, yet almost 50 per cent of apprentices that year were recruited through the program; so you can see that there is a remarkable shift in the traditional drop-out rates for apprenticeships.

It is our belief that for BIGA this program is the way of the future. The board of BIGA fully support the program. It would be fair to say that the board of BIGA are representative of the construction industry. Some parts of the board were skeptical at first, but I would say that there is now 100 per cent support for the program at a board level. In my view as CEO, it is the way forward for BIGA in the future. It gives students the opportunity to find out whether this is the career for them and it reduces the cost to government, BIGA and industry in terms of drop-out rates. Even for those who do not decide to continue, there are added benefits in terms of self esteem—I admit that this is anecdotal—and the confidence to go on with other types of education. That part is anecdotal in comparison to the very hard data we have in the company of drop-out rates, the improvement in cancellation rates and feedback from our host employer clients.

If I can say one other thing, we are not suggesting that this is a one size fits all program. This works for BIGA, and it works in our industry. We do not believe that it would work in our industry with individual employers; they are simply not interested in the hassle. They use BIGA as a group training operation, for the same reasons that they do for general apprenticeships as for school based ones. I would add one other thing about that, and that is we also run our own construction programs and it is that holistic approach, where we control the training and the employment, that enables this model to work. But from BIGA's point of view it is an outstanding success and the way of the future.

CHAIR—Thank you, Robert. Matthew, did you want to make a few comments, too?

Mr M. Row—No, not at this stage.

CHAIR—Proceeding to questions, you mentioned in your submission that industry would prefer block arrangements for work release for school based apprentices. Is that right across the board?

Mr M. Row—There are a number of factors. The block arrangement is a good arrangement; it does allow for the issues we have in our industry of weather, availability of supplies and those sorts of issues. For instance, if a particular student or school based apprentice does their work on Thursday every week and it rains one Thursday, it does not give them the flexibility to make that up at another time. If they work for a week in a given month, however, and it rains one day in the week, the loss is not as great as it could be.

CHAIR—It could rain all week!

Mr M. Row—That is quite possible, but I guess that the risk is reduced.

CHAIR—So would that work, say, with holiday periods? Could you just have the block release during holidays?

Mr M. Row—Yes.

CHAIR—Would that provide the students and apprentices with enough days per year if they, say, did a two-week block in the holidays?

Mr M. Row—Not just in the holiday periods. This is one of the things we have noticed with the schools, though. Over the years they have become very flexible with us, to the point where we are able to withdraw students from their high school for block employment arrangements not just during holidays but also during the school year. In some cases, in some schools there are quite a number of students—it might be anything up to 10 students—undertaking a school based arrangement in a given year level or class, so it makes it even easier for them to work their timetable better.

The other thing that is important to note is that in the construction industry there is a skills acquisition issue. To teach a skill one day and expect an increase in productivity that same day is quite unrealistic. But you can teach something at the beginning of the week and have the productivity increase over a few days—and the retention of those skills and what has been taught is far better than on a one day per week basis.

CHAIR—But, even if you had block release for the work experience component, you would still need to have a day, an afternoon or a night a week at TAFE, I suppose.

Mr R. Row—It is actually our academy, sorry.

CHAIR—You are providing the training?

Mr R. Row—Yes.

CHAIR—But that is still one afternoon a week?

Mr R. Row—It is one day.

Mr M. Row—It is a full day a week. That also gives us flexibility. We understand that that day per week may impede the employment side of it, so because we are controlling both the training and employment we can adjust schedules to suit the availability of work for students as well.

CHAIR—Just on another issue, you mentioned in your report that human and physical resources within schools have not been of a satisfactory standard and that you have undertaken professional development for some high school teachers for vocational training. Presumably, that has been more broadly based vocational training rather than building industry specific.

Mr M. Row—No, it is specific to the building industry. It is for those teachers who are involved in delivering construction training to students—and, in a lot of cases, they are delivering training that is from the curriculum used for apprenticeship training. We have noted in the last few months that that has started to improve, from what we can see of the take-up of that PD. We have actually, only a few weeks ago, trained a number of high school teachers in basic construction elements and trade elements. So I think it is probably improving. The issue, as we saw it, was not the willingness to do it; the impression we got was that the system did not allow for replacing teachers, times of PD, had budgetary constrictions and all that sort of thing.

CHAIR—Do you charge the teacher? How much do you charge the teacher?

Mr M. Row—We charge the schools a rate per day for the teachers they send. We charge \$1,200 per day.

CHAIR—Per day. How many days a year would you see as necessary to bring them up to an acceptable standard?

Mr M. Row—‘An acceptable standard’ is probably very subjective. It is more about the school’s ability to release them. I believe we spent around four or five days with these teachers covering pretty much a trade per day and some other training in, for example, levelling and the sorts of things that are generic to construction. Whether or not that is acceptable in terms of what they should have is a different question, and I am sure that in a perfect world every one of us could do more professional development than we do if we had the time. But for these teachers it is definitely a step in the right direction, and we believe they have got a lot out of it.

CHAIR—\$1,200 a day?

Mr M. Row—Yes.

CHAIR—For each person?

Mr M. Row—No. It is for the group.

CHAIR—How many in a group, then?

Mr M. Row—We left that to the schools. We probably would not take on more than 12.

CHAIR—So that would be organised on a cluster basis; a number of schools would get together?

Mr M. Row—Exactly. This latest one was organised through a school cluster group. The cluster group drew the teachers from their schools.

CHAIR—Roughly how many teachers would you train in a year?

Mr M. Row—We have not done it for quite a long time. It is only in the last few weeks that we have undertaken it again, and it would have been a good two or maybe three years since we had done it. I do not think that was anything to do with us, because we have had a high involvement with the schools over the years. I think it was more about their ability to release the teachers. I cannot answer whether or not they were picking up skills or professional development from other providers or other experiences such as work release into industry itself.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—The components of your school-to-work program are only touched on in your submission. Would you like to expand on how you go about that and how it might differ from other school based apprenticeships in operation either in your industry, the construction industry, or in other industries you are able to compare it with?

Mr M. Row—We draw on a number of competencies from a Queensland prevocational course. The competencies are also national general construction competencies, so they are recognised nationally. There are around seven competencies that we draw on, and they are all at a level 1 AQF level. They are competencies to do with communication, plan reading, basic levelling and scaffolding and those sorts of things. We also have a high component of practical activity—in fact, half the course is devoted to purely practical experience—where we deliver up to five trades. Those trades are construction, wall and floor tiling, bricklaying, plastering and painting. Over the course of one year at one day per week, it equates to a number of weeks of training. It equates to what we would deliver to a full-time student. They would do the same course with us, and those students would traditionally be early school leavers anyway, maybe people who had completed year 10. The recommendation for students doing this course is that they have completed year 10, and that is why we focus particularly on year 11 students. But they do get a broad range of experience in the trades.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Are there any other areas in the organisation of VET in Schools which you think could be better adapted or could offer greater flexibility in order to encourage more people into the construction industry? Obviously there is great demand for that, apart from the block release you mentioned.

Mr M. Row—I think what is restricting us now is not so much the relationships we have with schools. We do still have issues with certain schools about releasing students for training and/or work. That will always be there, but I do think that they have greatly improved over the years of dealing with us. They trust us now. They come to us; we do not go to them. A couple of years ago, when we peaked at 250 students, we believed we could have trained 500 of them. But, as a company, we are not focused just on the training of students; we are focused on the outcomes at the end. To facilitate our average of around 60 per cent outcomes on 500 students would mean

around 300 school based apprenticeships. We already put well over 100 school based apprentices into the market at the beginning of year 12 anyway, so to do it with 300 would at this stage be very difficult and would not be beneficial to the students as a whole.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—On liaison, do you think there is a correlation between that seamless communication between you and the school and the students and the school having a very active careers-VET officer? Do you have any comments to make on that?

Mr M. Row—It is very important that you have people at the coalface who are forming relationships not only with the school personnel but with the students and parents. That is one of the important features. We have had situations where our teachers will tell students, 'If you have a problem with anything, give me a call at home at night and I will help you through it,' and that sort of thing. I think it is that sort of approach that endears parents and teachers more to this program. On your last question, I will say that we could train more than we do, but at this point the funding does restrict that.

Mr PEARCE—In your submission, I think you talked about the human and physical resources in high schools not being of a satisfactory standard. What do you think needs to be done to change that?

Mr M. Row—Anecdotally speaking, that is the impression we get. The other comment I would make is that obviously a need has been created because of that problem, otherwise we would not be doing this in the first place. The reason is that, whether it be a construction provider of training or a hospitality provider, they are normally involved in that industry as their core business, whereas high school teachers and personnel are not. It is not necessarily the fault of the high schools; it is just the situation that they are in. It is like us saying that we can deliver a hospitality course. That is not our core business. We could do it, but I am sure we could not do it to the level of a hospitality training organisation that is deeply involved in that industry. I have heard comments from people around manual arts teachers that their depth of knowledge in the trade areas can at times be very limited. That is really all I can say on that side of things. What we pick up is purely anecdotal. Again, the ability to release them to professional development is more on the human resource side than on the physical resource side.

CHAIR—You mention in your submission the need to involve Indigenous students in vocational education. How many of those coming into apprenticeships through your system are Indigenous students?

Mr M. Row—Very few. However, this year we have been given an allocation to draw a few students from a Murri school in Brisbane. We are hopeful that they will be able to continue on into apprenticeships, but we have had problems.

CHAIR—Why and how have you had problems?

Mr M. Row—We have had problems attracting Indigenous students not just into school based apprenticeships but into full-time trades. We did have an influx a few years ago.

CHAIR—Why do you think that is?

Mr R. Row—There was a range of reasons. It was new for our staff. We hired an Indigenous person to be the field officer to these people. We made what are, I guess, typical mistakes. That person was from a rural area, and the people we had were urban Murris. Unbeknownst to us, we were doing more damage than if we had had one of us dealing with the issue. There was a whole range of things there that I do not believe the organisation had the skills to deal with. On top of that, there was a need for intensive assistance and also a lack of sympathy from the construction industry. The construction industry runs on very tight margins and it is not interested in assisting disadvantaged people in any way. That is just a reality. It is not interested, even, in school based apprenticeships per se other than where someone like a group training organisation can handle all the problems for them. I do not believe, for instance, that the construction industry is generally being taken up through school based apprenticeships. It is being taken up through organisations like ours. The only area I have seen it taken up in is, typically, with a parent who is a builder and maybe wants to put a son or daughter through the program with them, because they want them to work with them, and it provides a mechanism where the industrial relations issues are very adequately handled for them. Getting back to your Indigenous question, the reality is that, for a whole range of what I think are quite usual reasons, we have not succeeded. We have had some work with this Murri school and Matt has done some work with them in the last couple of years. But that is a very good support mechanism, and we see that there is a real potential there for that to change now.

CHAIR—Can you elaborate on that support mechanism? How does that work differently to other schools?

Mr M. Row—The Murri school is, in essence, a Murri community. It is predominantly attended by Indigenous students from, I believe, prep through to year 12 now. It is also open to other students of other cultures, but they would be a minority in the school. From my interaction with them, the teaching staff is predominantly Murri, or they have strong connections to the Murri community. We conducted a course in construction with them a couple of years ago with Murri students, and we really had to do things a lot differently from our traditional apprenticeship approach. For instance, we were making natural furniture with special Murri tradespeople who came in. We were trying to work that into our construction program. It really involved a change in our thinking. It worked very well.

I will make a couple of points from the Murri, or Indigenous, people we have employed before. I have had apprentices saying, 'My other Murri friends are getting paid more to stay at home and do nothing than I am to be here doing this apprenticeship.' That is not a very good motivational factor. We have always encountered a range of problems that are probably typical to the Murri community. We had one Indigenous person who took over five years to complete their apprenticeship because they spent about a year in and out of jail during the apprenticeship. We are in a position to provide a bit of flexibility to our apprentices who need to attend jail from time to time, but we are certainly not saying that other employers could do that and the construction industry as a whole would probably not accept that sort of situation. That is not to say that other apprentices do not have these issues, but it just highlights that, as a percentage, the Murri apprentices definitely would encounter these problems a lot more.

CHAIR—What do you think needs to be done to make it easier for organisations such as yours to attract more Indigenous young people?

Mr R. Row—My view is that you need the sorts of support facilities that Matt has talked about—fundamentally, that is money.

Mr M. Row—That is all it comes down to. At the end the day, we hire out apprentices to clients who are builders or subcontractors. They expect a service in return for the fee they pay. Our product is our apprentices. Whether it is a Murri person, someone with a disability or whatever, in order to make them attractive to our clients there has to be some concession. There needs to be something in order for them to say, ‘That is worth me putting in extra time and expecting less productivity.’

A typical problem we have had with Indigenous students is turning up late for work or not turning up at all. I had one student on whom we were really putting the hard word to turn up on time to work. The next day he was late. He would have been on time for work except for the fact that he had stolen number plates from another car so he could drive his car to work get there on time. So his intention was correct, but he became undone because of it anyway. It is because of those sorts of issues that we need to put Indigenous students in a more flexible employment environment that can handle those situations.

CHAIR—How much do you charge employers for your service?

Mr M. Row—It ranges from around \$12 per hour for a first-year apprentice up to around \$21 an hour for a fourth-year apprentice.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. You have been very helpful.

[12.12 p.m.]

CISLOWSKI, Mr Garry, State President, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc.

DONALDSON, Mr Greg, Coordinator, Operations Support Unit, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. As a formality, I need to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament. Thank you for your submission and for coming today. I invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Cislowski—I will not keep you very long with this introduction. VET in Schools, either embedded or stand-alone, is an integral part now of young people's education. While only about 27 per cent of students go on to university, over 60 per cent of students in Queensland exit high school with some sort of VET either embedded in their course or as a stand-alone module. In 2001 about a quarter of all students, or nearly 10,000 students, had an AQF qualification on exiting high school. Queensland is a very diverse state that is experiencing very rapid growth in the 15- to 19-year-old age group. That growth is at a level almost double the national rate and is expected to continue for the next 10 years or so. This obviously puts a lot of pressure not just on the education system but on the VET system as well, given that Queensland has a very high take-up rate of VET. The funding for VET is an issue for Queensland where it is based on the population of 15- to 17-year-olds. This puts Queensland as only a medium state whereas, based on access to VET courses, we are a very heavy user of VET, with, as I said, around 60 per cent of students accessing VET. That concludes my opening statement.

CHAIR—It does seem that there is an issue in a lot of schools in terms of the perception of the quality of VET qualifications versus those more academic courses that are undertaken by a lot of students, although it seems that that impression varies a lot from school to school depending on the quality of the VET courses in particular schools. Does your association have any strategy for addressing that perception problem and for communicating to parents in your membership associations the quality of VET in Schools and therefore changing that perception?

Mr Cislowski—We certainly have it as one of our key messages that we need to get through to parents that VET is not a second-class education—in fact it is a very good, top-class education. I believe that perception is changing in Queensland, with a number of students now exiting high school with both a university entrance and a VET qualification. My daughter is an example. This year she exited with an OP9 and is going off to do a bachelor of commerce. She also exited with an AQF qualification in retail operations. That is not typical, but there is certainly a growing trend within Queensland of exiting with both the university entrance—with an intention of going on to further study—and a VET qualification. There is also a growing trend of university graduates going back to TAFE for further qualification, with around 40 per cent of the enrolments in VET in Queensland this year coming from university graduates.

CHAIR—Do you think there is any difference in the perceptions of parents of the quality of VET in Schools qualifications versus VET in TAFE qualifications?

Mr Cislowski—There is certainly a disparity between VET in Schools and VET in TAFE in terms of prestige. There is some sort of notion that VET in Schools is somehow a second-class VET. I note the comments from the previous group around the quality of some of the facilities in schools. Many schools now have done significant work around improving labs, manual arts blocks, catering blocks et cetera up to what is termed industry standard for those sorts of facilities, recognising that there is a perception that what happens in schools is somehow less than what happens in a TAFE situation.

CHAIR—In your submission, on pages 3 to 4, you say that rigidity in how allowances for study and living are allocated to young people is preventing them achieving better outcomes. Could you elaborate on that for us?

Mr Cislowski—I will try. I am certainly no expert in the area of the funding. Funding comes to VET for doing modules around different subjects, and the rules are very rigid about completing those modules. But increasingly we are finding that students are not completing modules and are mixing and matching through their academic year to make up their own education. When they go in and out of subjects, not only is it a nightmare for the VET in the TAFEs and in the schools to manage, but many of them end up being unfunded because they have used allocations for modules that they did not complete. That is causing a problem. Schools and TAFEs are trying to address it, but it is an issue.

CHAIR—I thought you had made some comments as well about travel allowances.

Mr Cislowski—The nature of Queensland is such that many students are doing a course in a location where there is not that industry, and to get the industry experience they are having to travel significant distances, with associated accommodation costs et cetera that are not part of the funding that they receive for doing the course. That is a particular issue in places like Thursday Island, where one of the cheapest air fares to Cairns is in the order of \$1,500. Thursday Island has the largest outboard motor retailer in the Southern Hemisphere, but if you do not want to do outboard motors and want to do hospitality the opportunities are fairly limited. That is an issue, given that 53 per cent of Queenslanders do not live in the capital city.

It is a significant issue for rural and remote areas. With the way the government is currently travelling with the education and training reforms for the future, which is looking more at up to AQF 3 qualifications coming out of high school or when they exit the equivalent of year 12, it is going to be a significant issue for those in rural and remote areas if they want to continue to access what are not traditional industries in their area. For example, not every student in Mount Isa wants to do mining or heavy industry—there are other qualifications they wish to gain for which they just do not have access to the industry qualifications.

CHAIR—How far do you think governments ought to go, then, in terms of funding for travel allowances to enable those people to access courses where there is no local industry?

Mr Cislowski—I certainly would not promote carte blanche funding for everybody; there would need to be some parameters around it. But it would need to have enough flexibility to look at individual circumstances with regard to where students are and what industry is available to them. It would also need to take into account the fact that there has to be some community engagement in the whole issue of education and training. There is a place for a mix

and match situation between federal, state and local funding and local solutions. What we are finding now is that there are a lot of local solutions running round that provide very good outcomes within fairly limited budgets.

Mr PEARCE—I want to ask you about the parents of students who are involved in vocational education and training, particularly with regard to the level of understanding that you believe parents have about VET. Do you think they have a good level of understanding, or do you think that they are not sure about it? If that is the case, what do you believe could be done to better inform parents?

Mr Cislawski—VET, in particular, is pretty much a black box to most parents. They see stuff coming in one end and out the other but are not quite sure what it means in between. There need to be a lot more work around what educational experience VET is providing to students beyond what people think are just traditional apprenticeships in a workplace, because VET is far more than that. As I said earlier, my daughter recently exited with an OP and an AQF 2, and I was very involved in that, obviously, because of where I come from. But a lot of parents leave that pretty much to the student.

Probably one of the biggest concerns is about guidance officers or career counsellors getting students into the right sorts of courses and areas of study. Unfortunately, most of the people we have doing guidance and career counselling have a vested interest in one sense or another—that is, they are either in a school, a TAFE or some other setting. We do not really have a pool of—for want of a better term—‘dispassionate’ counsellors who, rather than having a vested interest in needing to get them into TAFE, university or school, are looking at what is best for that student and counselling not only the student but their parents about what that means for whatever career path they decide to take.

Mr PEARCE—What do you think should be done, and what sort of action should be taken, particularly in relation to schools?

Mr Cislawski—There needs to be much better packaged information for parents—not about individual VET but about what VET in Schools actually does and some examples of where VET is already in courses of study. They may not even realise. For example, many parents see their child doing marine studies, and, to them, that is a course that is offered by the Queensland government, whereas in fact it has embedded modules of VET. So they do not even realise that their student is already engaging in VET through a course of study which they believe is quite an academic course of study. It is quite academic, but within that it does have some components from other providers through VET.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I actually found your submission very invigorating. You do not mince your words, and I would like to ask you about some of those comments. On several occasions in your submission you tend to give, in a historical sense, the view that VET in Schools has been ad hoc, haphazard, inequitable, and based on the goodwill and drive of individuals, and that, systemically, it has not been supported enough. Time has gone by since you wrote this submission—do you believe it is getting better, or do you believe that, systemically, there is still not enough support for VET in Schools?

Mr Cislowski—Certainly, it is getting somewhat better. But the bottom line still is that there is a whole pile of local solutions around that grew up locally because there was a vacuum around how to actually engage in VET in Schools. While those local solutions are fantastic, and we are now touting them as ‘lighthouses’ of how to go about it, historically there was not a lighthouse that showed a medic how to get there in the first place. So while VET in Schools is now recognised as being very important, how we got to here was in spite of the system rather than because of the system.

Those teachers and schools with drive and ambition were, on behalf of their students, able to create those solutions. They have gone out and done the hard work of engaging their local community, their local businesses. For a long time, schools said: ‘Business stay away, TAFE stay away. This is our patch.’ Now they have realised that we really do need to re-engage business and TAFE back into schools, because that is the way students are going. That is what students are demanding and, obviously, taking up in very high numbers. Yes, there is some more work being done around that. As I said earlier, the education and training reforms are a bit of a driver to that, and I think the state government is recognising that the programs that exist now are a way forward, and that it needs to put some more resources into generating those from the system level rather than from the local level. But there certainly needs to be the capacity for local solutions to still come up within that system. Systems have to grow and develop to be dynamic and keep pace with what students and industry are looking for.

CHAIR—If I could come back to funding, some submissions have argued that funding ought to be on a per capita basis, a per student basis—not numbers across the board in years 11 and 12, but of those actually involved in VET courses. What is your response to that?

Mr Cislowski—That is a solution which is very easy to grab onto. Unfortunately, when you have a limited pool of money, as we do in VET, it is very hard to predict what those enrolments are going to be and to shuffle that money around. On the current level, Queensland gets a very low amount of the funding compared to the national average. I think the Northern Territory is at the top. Its slice of the funding is about \$350 per student enrolled, whereas Queensland’s is about \$75. That is simply a reflection that Queensland has been very active in getting young people into VET in Schools. That is not to say that if those other states were to engage their students similarly it would not drag the funding back to a level similar to Queensland’s. But there certainly needs to be a funding model that more equitably distributes funds around Australia for students who are actually engaged in VET. That comes with the capacity for schools to, for want of a better term, ‘administer’ the students—to give them the support needed in order for industry to support them, and for transportability.

If someone is doing a course in the Northern Territory, where they are getting a significant amount of funding support, and they move to Queensland and the funding support is not there, that may impact on their ability to access the course. So more equitable funding across Australia would certainly be useful. We do have a very mobile population these days. Queensland sees that as much as any other state. Particularly with resource industries, there is a lot of movement around and students do need a level of portability. So the funds need a level of portability and consistency between the states to enable people to access VET properly.

CHAIR—What about consistency between school sectors? If funding were allocated on a per capita basis of those involved in VET programs, what would the view of your association be

with regard to that funding also being for non-government school sectors—Catholic schools and independent schools?

Mr Cislowski—We have absolutely no problem with that. We recognise that in Queensland 40 per cent of all students will access more than one system—government and non-government—during their school life. That is the nature of the beast. We work very closely with both the Isolated Children's Parents Association and the Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools in Queensland because we realise that is an issue. In terms of equitability, we do not have any problem with equitable funding between government and non-government sectors. A student is a student, whichever system they are in. Even within their senior schooling they may be accessing more than one system. We would not like to see any student disadvantaged because of which system they go to.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Your last statement was interesting. Do you mean funding right across the board?

CHAIR—You just mean VET, don't you?

Mr Cislowski—No, I mean right across the board. We have had quite a deal of discussion in relation to the State Grants Bill regarding funding for education. We believe that funding should be based on the concept of a student being a student wherever they are.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—So funding follows a student?

Mr Cislowski—Funding follows a student equitably so that they can access education. I will get on my soapbox—education is a resource for society. If we are going to develop Australia's economy and students' wellbeing, we need to recognise that wherever they are getting their education they need to have an equitable level of funding to allow them to access a quality education that will see them get an outcome that makes them a valuable member of society in whatever endeavour—whether they go into education, work, further training or whatever it is—they want to access beyond school. One of the things Australia has internationally at the moment is a very good reputation for the quality of its graduates, whether that be through TAFE or university. I would not like to see that diminished in any way.

CHAIR—Do you have any views regarding the adequacy of the training of teachers who will be involved in VET programs?

Mr Cislowski—There is certainly a large issue around the capacity of schools to keep up the industry qualifications of teachers delivering VET in schools. It becomes a significant burden to release that teacher from their classroom duties to keep up their industry qualifications. It is a very important role, and one that we recognise is an issue. There is a very large issue in rural and regional Queensland where in many situations the teacher is happy to deliver the academic part of VET but does not have the industry qualifications to do the industry part; whereas a local businessperson in town is willing to do that but does not want to become a teacher. So a teacher does not want to become an industry expert and an industry expert does not want to become a teacher. But the current model does not allow them to, for want of a better term, team teach—to be a complete team that deals with that student to deliver the outcome, which is a VET qualification that has a good industry basis as well as a good academic basis. That is one of the

issues that needs some attention given to it which may overcome some of the issues around travelling to get experience.

Julia Creek is an example of where there are some local businesses which would be more than happy for students to be in their workshop, but they do not want to do the academic part of it. They would like to do it in conjunction with the school. They do not have a high school—they have P-10 with a couple of extra students tacked on. But there is an opportunity there. I am sure there are opportunities in other areas in Queensland where the same sort of thing could happen if there were a team approach to how VET is delivered rather than expecting one person to be the whole model.

CHAIR—Finally, if you had to recommend three things to the government for how we might improve the way VET works, what would those three things be?

Mr Cislowski—The first recommendation would be to have a better education program in terms of what VET is, what it provides to students, to families and to business. That is an important one. The second one would be to look at the funding model that would allow greater equity between states and between sectors. The third one would be to look at the opportunities to team teach between an academic and an industry person to deliver VET.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That has been very helpful.

Proceedings suspended from 12.35 p.m. to 2.01 p.m.

SCOLLAY, Ms Moira, Chief Executive Officer, Australian National Training Authority

STEPHENS, Mr Adrian, Director, Client Relationships, Australian National Training Authority

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you both for appearing and for your very substantial submission to the committee. I invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions.

Ms Scollay—Thank you for the opportunity to say a few introductory things. You have our submission in front of you, so I am certainly not going to go through what is in that, other than to emphasise a couple of points and give you an update. We have already referred to a few of the reports that are pending, so I will let you know where we are with all of that.

Firstly, from our perspective, we just want to emphasise the fact that VET in Schools has been a major success story. I think the ANTA board has been a bit surprised at the extent to which it has taken off over the last few years in schools. It was never originally part of the ANTA remit. As at the end of 2001, we have 170,000 school students involved in VET, which is an amazing phenomenon, really. There has been an increase in the number of participating schools—it is up to 95 per cent, as you probably know. Average student contact hours are up to 205 hours from 110 only four years ago, so it is phenomenal. Even the number of students now participating in structured workplace learning, which is an important issue for us, is at 101,000 in 2001, which is 60 per cent of all students. That is up from 25,000 students in 1997, so that is another very big increase. In the companion area of school based new apprenticeships, again, at the end of 2001, the number was 5,755. But, if you take the NCVER data for the end of 2002, the number actually involved now in the new apprenticeship pathway is about 10,000 young people. I think all of those are really big successes.

I think the most important point for me to make to you, apart from the success, is about the way we define VET in Schools. The ANTA definition is just a subset of the terms of your inquiry. Yours is a broader inquiry and we need to be clear about what we are talking about in terms of the definitions that have been agreed by MINCO and MCEETYA, if those two committees have meaning for you. The main point for us is really the central role of the National Training Framework. For us, that is at the heart of the industry-led vocational education and training system. As we explained in our submission, the system really works like this. You have training packages. Across about 80 to 85 per cent of industry now, industry spells out the competencies it wants for the work force. So industry-specified competency standards are contained within these training packages, which are mapped to the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Then you have a quality framework, the AQTF—the Australian Quality Training Framework—within which we register quality providers. They can be schools or TAFEs, or private providers or companies, provided they meet the standards for delivery. So the two quality aspects of the system are the AQTF, which is fundamentally around the quality of the providers and those who audit them, and the training packages. Training packages are very broad in their scope. They are not curriculum tools; they are the outcomes, as specified by

industry, mapped to the Australian Qualifications Framework, with assessment guidelines and a range of support materials, but they are in no way curriculum tools.

We commissioned an evaluation of VET in Schools in 2000 by the Allen Consulting Group. That has been freely available, and is available to you if you want it, Chair. One of the main findings was that the \$20 million a year that ANTA has been putting into VET in Schools since 1997 has been a major contributor to the growth and success of the program. The major recommendation from our own consulting group in 2000 was that we needed to be much clearer about the core purpose of VET in Schools.

We then worked with all the players during 2001 and, for 2002-04, we issued that set of principles and guidelines which, apart from anything else, was very clear about what MCEETYA and MINCO believed was the core purpose of VET in Schools. That has been defined as 'contributing to the expansion in the number and percentage of young people undertaking VET programs in their senior secondary years, and ensuring that the quality of the outcomes achieved through these programs meets industry standards as specified in the National Training Framework'.

The other specific findings of that evaluation, which have been reflected in the principles and guidelines, are around quality, data, funding, tertiary entrance, and employer confidence and support. In all of those areas, we are taking work forward about the quality of the data, the reporting against the AVETMISS standard and the need to meet the qualifications requirements in the National Training Framework—so there is a range of things.

I do not know whether in your packs you have colour copies of this diagram. We will give you a colour copy. The VET in Schools language has been covering a continuum from the case of young people who might like to go into a workplace to find out the meaning of that work right through to an apprenticeship and a formal contract of training. On this diagram, things like enterprise education, career education, community based learning, work education and work experience are all in blue, which are not what we from ANTA and the VET or Vocational Education and Training system are concerned with.

We are concerned with the stuff in yellow on the diagram, which are the structured workplace components of VET in Schools, leading to AQF qualifications—mainly certificate Is and IIs, a few certificate IIIs and a very few certificate IVs—and school based New Apprenticeships. We are also working on a generic certificate at the certificate I level, and a range of preparation and foundation programs, all of which will be inside the National Training Framework so that, in terms of those outcomes, students can get a senior secondary certificate and a nationally recognised VET qualification. The ANTA board's concern with the VET in Schools agenda is defined, basically, by what is in yellow in the diagram.

Mr PEARCE—Are you differentiating that from what are commonly referred to as embedded VET programs in schools—are you separating those out?

Ms Scollay—No. Provided they are still delivering a qualification within the National Training Framework, whether it is embedded or separate, leading to an AQF qualification certificate I, II, III, IV et cetera, it will be counted.

Mr PEARCE—Right.

Ms Scollay—Embedding is more to do with the form of delivery than the outcome that is being achieved. We just thought it was really important to be very clear about that because, in our submission, it is the stuff in yellow that we are talking about—all the statistics we quote and all the quality arrangements we are going through et cetera.

The emerging issues that we have highlighted in our submission are to do with quality, first of all. At the end of 2001, there were 1.7 million Australians in vocational education and training. That is one in eight of the working age population. The average age of people in vocational education and training is about 38, which means, if there are 170,000 young people in VET in Schools, it is about 10 per cent of the totality of our VET student population.

We need to ensure that, if you get a VET in Schools qualification, it has equal standing to a qualification that any other adult learner might get through a different pathway. We have commissioned a consultancy. This has been taken to ministers. If you wish, I can table a copy of the consultancy brief. We actually have a very preliminary draft report already from that consultancy, which will be going to ANTA's National Training Quality Council next week. We will be able to make that report available to you after that meeting.

It is important that you understand that that particular project is looking at the quality of the operations of the quality framework in the school sector. It is addressing concerns from industry that the quality of a VET in Schools qualification is not as good as that of a qualification coming from another pathway. It is looking at that concern and it is also looking at the coverage of VET in Schools. That report would be very helpful to this inquiry. When it has been to our NTQC next week, we will make the preliminary draft of that available to you. The final draft will be available after the June MINCO, probably in July.

CHAIR—If we could have a copy of both the initial and the later draft, that would be very helpful.

Ms Scollay—We will let you have both of those. In relation to funding, we are doing a lot of work coordinating a process to look at sustainable funding for VET in Schools. As I am sure you are aware, there are issues around who pays and how much comes from which budget—whether it is schools or vocational education or special funding. There is a small working party that is doing work on that and will take the findings, with a range of options, to the MINCO meeting on 13 June. That would be available for you, as a committee, after the ministers have considered it.

In relation to the data collection, there is quite a lot of difficulty in understanding what is really going on in VET in Schools, partly because some of it is school data and some of it is VET data. We have been trying to ensure that the school system is compliant with the basic standard of VET reporting, which is what we call the AVETMIS standard. Again, we have a range of processes to try and bring that to finality and, again, we will be reporting that to ministers in June. Then there is the school based new apprenticeship issue, on which we have just tabled the evaluation. We will be preparing a response to that report—a new set of guidelines and strategies—which will also go to ministers in June.

In terms of the future, we think this is pretty unstoppable now. It has a momentum of its own and that is really terrific. We are also undertaking some major work in four areas to further support the pathways for young people within the national training framework. Cross-sectorally, ANTA has been commissioned by both MCEETYA and MINCO to do work on employability skills to ensure that they are properly reflected in training packages, and on the extent that they are going to be picked up in other ways by schools and by the university sector.

We are looking at the development of a skills passport, which may be an electronic way of recording skills and qualifications as people go through their lives, including recognition of prior learning for older workers. We are looking at generic pre-employment qualifications. We are also looking at recognition of the skills achieved by young people when they are participating in youth development programs. We have a major process under way at the moment under the auspices of something called Due Credit, giving due credit to young people who might be in programs such as the Duke of Edinburgh scheme or cadets or things of that kind where they are learning a whole range of leadership, team-building and communication skills. It will make sure they get due credit for that within the Australian qualifications framework and will be able to get recognition that they could then record in their skills passport, for instance.

For the future, we are looking to work with others to ensure improved partnerships between industry and schools and improved access to better pathways for young Indigenous students and students with a disability. We are looking to assist young people to make better-informed lifelong learning decisions, in terms of the different pathway options that they have, through better career information and awareness. We are looking to build capacity in local communities, better connect youth to youth services at the local level and track young people on the multiple transition journeys that they are going on. We are also constantly working to try to make it easier for young people to navigate their way backwards and forwards through school, VET, university and ACE. You probably know that about 20,000 people a year go from VET to uni and 100,000 a year go from uni to VET. It is an interesting set of pathways that is developing for people. We have an excellent basis to work from, and we are happy to not only answer your questions now but continue to hand over to you, as a committee, the work that will be coming forward later in the year through the June MINCO.

CHAIR—Thank you, Moira. Adrian, do you wish to make some comments as well?

Mr Stephens—I can only add to what Moira was saying by indicating that, from our perspective, there have probably been two stages of the program that ANTA has been involved in since 1997, when the first budget allocation was made. Fundamentally, the allocation of specific dollars from ANTA has been from 1997 to 2000, a four-year period. That was really the start of all this and there is no doubt that, as was outlined in the Allen report, it helped to get the whole thing going—along with allocations of funds from states and territories and other money through the Commonwealth. That was the start-up phase. What that middle evaluation, the Allen group evaluation, did for us in 2000 was to basically say that the transition to a new system was not complete at that stage. As Moira was saying, it said we needed to focus on better definitions and establish some new priorities. Those priorities were all geared towards sustainability in the long term. The next set of guidelines developed related to 2002 and funding for 2002 to 2004. That is the stage we are in at the moment.

CHAIR—It seems that one of the central issues—and you really touched on this as well, Moira—is industry confidence in VET qualifications, particularly in VET in Schools qualifications compared to those provided through other trainers. My understanding is that the introduction of the AQTF system was supposed to address that by requiring that any registered training organisation qualify under the AQTF system. But it seems that, notwithstanding that, there is still a lot of uncertainty within industry and across industry sectors about that. Why do you think that still persists?

Ms Scollay—The first thing to say is that this consultancy report, which you can have in a week or so, is specifically looking at that issue. I think it is coming up with some pretty interesting findings.

CHAIR—Findings that would dispute that, for instance?

Ms Scollay—Certainly, yes. They would dispute that but, in a way, also confirm that.

CHAIR—Right.

Ms Scollay—One of the things is that we have a problem or an issue with what we would call the institutional pathway. That applies whether you are doing your training in a TAFE college or in a school. If you are not getting access to workplace experience, then industry is quite sceptical of the quality of the learning that you have achieved and the quality of simulation of a workplace experience that you might have had. Sixty per cent of people doing VET in Schools are getting some kind of workplace experience but another 40 per cent are not. In VET in general, up to 50 per cent of people are also not necessarily getting a workplace experience.

CHAIR—Through TAFE, for instance?

Ms Scollay—Through TAFE, perhaps, if they are doing it in TAFE but, because they do not have access to that workplace, working in another workplace. This happens particularly with either young people who go into TAFE without an apprenticeship or a workplace and so do it through an institutional pathway or older workers who want to change careers. They are still working in their old career and studying in a new one but do not have access to a workplace in the new one yet. And so the whole issue of an institutional pathway is coming through as a bigger issue than, in that instance, the fact that it is VET in Schools. I think the fact that it is in a school also adds to a sense of unease on the part of industry. Adrian can add to this too in a second. Also, there are some industries where it is more prevalent than others.

CHAIR—Could you give us a few examples?

Ms Scollay—Yes. If you take areas which have probably traditionally been done by schools and where the psyche of the industry is different, you will find that in IT, in office administration and probably in some areas of hospitality there is not the quite the same mind-set that there is, for instance, in traditional trades like manufacturing, commercial cookery—which is a specific part of hospitality—and retail. The big mismatch is with the number of young people who are working part time in retail, which you would think would lead to a flow-on so that those people who had access to that workplace would actually then undertake relevant training in that area. But on the standard VET in Schools side, as opposed to the New

Apprenticeships pathway, that is an area where we are still seeing a lack of confidence on the part of the retail industry in relation to the lack of a workplace experience by young people.

CHAIR—Is mandating a structured workplace learning component the solution to that? First of all, is it possible? I know there are two stages to it, so is it possible to have that mandated? If that were to occur, would that resolve this issue?

Mr Stephens—Part of the issue is in the development of our training packages. Some industries do have mandatory workplace experience and others do not. So, to a large degree, the argument levelled in some industry areas by some schools or school authorities will be that that is not necessary—if the training package does not mandate it then there is no necessity to do it. However, on the other side, it is pretty clear to us that the more we can get young people into having workplace experience the better. Workplace experience probably serves two purposes: in some instances, it will be to reinforce theoretical learning that might happen back at the school or in a TAFE college; secondly, it may be for actually having competencies assessed in the workplace. So I am unsure about the mandating and the capacity to deliver on that one.

Ms Scollay—There will always be instances where it will not be possible for a person to get workplace experience, either because they are part of an equity group or because they are in a remote area where they cannot necessarily get to that level of workplace experience. From our perspective, because it is also broader than just VET in Schools, this is an issue where the sorts of recommendations that are coming to us are that in the review of the training package process which we are going through now, as Adrian said, we need to work on what is really meant by competency standards, how they are to be assessed and what their workplace component actually means in terms of the assessment of competency.

Where you have got industries that are averse to recognising anyone that has not been trained in a workplace, in many instances those are industries that are suffering from skill shortages. There is a vested interest on the part of all of us to work really collaboratively with the VET sector, the school sector and industry to start to be much clearer about what you can learn in a simulated environment and what they are definitely saying that you cannot learn unless you are physically doing it. We know there are some things like that. For example, if you are an abattoir worker you cannot train to kill a beast whilst you are outside of an abattoir—it is just not allowed. You will never ever find a set of competencies that are non-workplace specific. That said, there are very few that, in the training packages, absolutely say that you are denied access to this unless it is a work based pathway. There are very few, but there is confusion around what that then means if it is described in terms of demonstrating a competency.

CHAIR—How important a factor in this whole formula is the industry experience of the teacher? For VET in Schools courses where there is not a structured workplace component, is confidence within industry greater if the teacher and the deliverer of that course in school or in TAFE has had industry experience in the past which is current in the industry?

Ms Scollay—My view would be that it is vital. Apart from anything else, it is a requirement of the Australian Quality Training Framework that they have—

CHAIR—But there is a degree of variation in that, though, isn't there?

Ms Scollay—They must be competent in the industry to the level to which they are teaching. If they are teaching a certificate III in IT, they have to have competence in a certificate III in IT—or whatever certificate they are teaching.

CHAIR—How uniform are those standards across the country?

Ms Scollay—They are a uniform set of standards across the country. They also have to have the equivalent—

CHAIR—How are they examined on and assessed against those standards?

Ms Scollay—I am not as sure that the way they are assessed against those standards is as uniform. While for the last 10 years we have been building one national VET system, when it hits the school system it goes straight into eight state and territory school systems. From my perspective, I would like to see a national senior secondary certificate, which I think is some way off though I think the country would be better off for it. When the national VET system hits eight state and territory school systems, the quality processes, which are often the responsibility of the boards of studies, then atomises it back into eight systems.

So, systems of assessment and moderation can be different across the states and territories, both in the VET sector and the school sector, though we try—we are trying all the time—to make sure the standards are clear enough and that they do not lend themselves to different assessments. But that implies as well the need for more work on specifying how you demonstrate workplace competence. Another aspect of that is skill maturity. In some what you would call traditional trades, there is a difference, irrespective of the level of competence, between demonstrating that you can do it and demonstrating that you can do it in your sleep. I call that the difference between conscious competence and unconscious competence.

CHAIR—Or if you can do it under pressure in the workplace.

Ms Scollay—Yes. Some of the industries that are involved in VET in Schools believe that you are competent if you can demonstrate that competence under a range of settings, but there are other industries that believe that, even after you have demonstrated that you are competent, you need a couple of years of experience before you really are competent.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr PEARCE—I have a couple of questions. On page 24 of your submission, in the bolded area, the last paragraph is particularly interesting to me. Talking about the success of VET et cetera, you say:

The next step must now be focussed on moving this program from the “margins” to the “mainstream”, by underpinning and integrating VET as a universally accessible and valued option ...

We have heard about the great success of VET, particularly since 1996-97, and there are 170,000-odd people in VET, but you still consider it to be at the margins. Why is it still considered to be at the margins; and what do you think are the two or three key things that fundamentally need to be done to move it into the mainstream?

Ms Scollay—I think Adrian and I can both have a go at this. Let me start off by saying that we started with an assumption that secondary schooling in years 11 and 12 was predominantly aimed at ensuring that the 30 per cent who would go to university would go to university and that schools were really focusing on that as an outcome. That left the 70 per cent who did not go to university with the notion that they were in some way second-class or had not achieved as much. I think that, for the whole of vocational education and training, not just in schools, there is still an issue of status. Is university the first prize? And then, if you are the runner-up or the second cousin once removed, you get VET. We still have careers advisors saying to little Johnny, 'If you don't smarten up, you'll end up in VET—you won't get to uni.' So there is that aspect of it.

There is also the aspect of the psychology of general education, and the assumption about the general education that takes place in schooling combined with the validity of vocational education taking place in schooling. And there are some schools now, which are probably better characterised as regional and rural schools, which are so much a part of their community and the industries of their community that they have actually undergone a psychological shift. It is not that they are not teaching general education, but they understand that if they are going to keep their kids in their communities and keep their kids staying at school to year 11 and 12 they really have to position their school as a part of the community and its industries, whether that is a wine-making, rice-growing or mining industry—whatever it might be. You can see an actual shift in where the school has positioned itself in terms of those kinds of options.

You could find other examples where there are a few people in the school doing VET in Schools and it is a rather inconvenient add-on that is there because there is a very passionate teacher who has got a particular interest in one or two different vocational areas, which then take off. When that teacher leaves, those options are not then necessarily available and the whole of the school is not committed to the fact that they want a vocational outcome. That may not be a bad thing; it may be the sort of diversity that we need. But, to the extent that schools want to provide multiple choices for young people, VET needs to be better positioned as not just that alternative over at the side that is a bit inconvenient. The things you might do in order to achieve that—

Mr Stephens—Do you want me to add to that?

Ms Scollay—Yes.

Mr Stephens—The important thing about moving from the margins to the mainstream is really about making sure this is quite a clear choice and sustainable within a school setting. The issues that come up for us are to do with settling on how programs of this sort are funded over the long term and settling on the issue of status within the school and in relation to schools and tertiary entrance et cetera. The issues are also to do with the area of quality that we were talking about before, in that there needs to be a critical mass of young people in a school who can actually be delivered a vocational program. There are probably many examples around where the whole initiative has got up with just a couple of kids being able to do some vocational programs in some schools. As the popularity of it rises, what you then get is class sizes being able to be constructed around running a particular program within a school. So we do have a couple of critical issues about not just employer confidence in the area and getting it quite clear in the employers' eyes that this is a clear option and one which they value. There are also funding arrangements that need to be put in place. I table for the committee the terms of

reference for some work that we are doing at the moment on future funding options for VET in Schools.

Mr PEARCE—That leads into what was going to be my second question. I refer you to the table on page 26 about funding for 2003. We have had quite a lot of people from different states talk to us about the funding, and there are different states that think other states get some sort of benefit from it and all that sort of thing. What are your comments about future funding options?

Mr Stephens—The important thing here is that what we have been finding, and what we reported to ministers last year, is that there are a whole range of sources of funding which go into this venture. We believe that the ANTA \$20 million is just one very small part of the pie, although it is an influential one. In the main, through the recurrent funding that occurs in school systems now, the bulk of support actually happens through a school. The resources for that venture are provided through schools—that is the first thing. So we do have recurring funds coming through the school side now.

We know also—and this is varied—that there are probably funds being used for support in some states and territories out of the VET recurrent funds, which are provided by ANTA to states and territories. There have been third elements around specific purpose Commonwealth funding. Then you get the ANTA funding as well. So there has been a real mix of funding applied over the period of time, and the task that ministers asked us to do was to look at funding options for the future. At the moment, we are going through the process of trying to work out what those options might be. Obviously, we have to look at the large amount of recurrent funding that is currently there within the school system to support this venture and the delivery of programs. That is around this issue of sustainability over time; we need to find a way to settle how the funding will occur for delivery at the school level over time. The original intention with the ANTA \$20 million was always that it be used as special purpose money, or ginger money, in a lot of ways, to help with the start-up of the system and to provide intervention at times. We do know, however, that it also provides a contribution in some states and territories towards the cost of delivery.

Mr PEARCE—Coming back to the central point, what do we do in the future to fix some of these perception issues? We have heard it a lot. It is clearly a factor all throughout Australia. One of the things that I have a sense of frustration about is that, while we have asked a lot of the people we have spoken to for some specific initiative that could be done to try to change this perceptual problem—which is clearly a major issue—it is very difficult, quite often, to get a handle on what governments should be particularly recommending and doing to overcome this. I think it needs to be dealt with. Are there any other comments you want to add, based on your experience? It is almost a magic wand scenario. If you could wave the magic wand, what do you think needs to be done to get a sense of equity between VET and academic pursuits?

Ms Scollay—I think there are a couple of issues there. One is that three lots of recommendations will go forward at June MINCO, all of which will help this committee. They are around funding, quality and industry's perceptions of quality, and data collection. There may be one other; it has just gone out of my mind. All of those together could be used to really sort through sustainable funding so that it is not a case of grabbing a bit here and seeing if you can grab a bit there if it is done in a TAFE. You could sort through all of the issues about what the entitlements are for 15- to 19-year-olds. Through the Adelaide declaration, if they stay at school

their funding is assured. The minute they step out of school and follow another pathway their funding is not necessarily assured. I think that is a very big issue to be addressed.

Mr PEARCE—I want to come back to the earlier point you made. You said that you would like to see some sort of national secondary school certificate. Is that really something that should be more broadly debated in the sense of getting some high-level, consistent recognition across the country? Is a lot of the issue to do with the fact that it is somewhat ad hoc? One school does it differently to another school; one state does it differently to another state; one training group—

Ms Scollay—Certainly, if you were to talk to the large employers in the country—who would be the most likely, in a way, to be taking larger numbers of apprentices as school based apprentices or as VET in Schools students—they have been pushing us, ANTA, to get the states and territories to deliver on one national system for VET.

Mr PEARCE—Are you talking, for example, of employers like McDonald's who have people throughout Australia?

Ms Scollay—Yes, exactly: McDonald's, Hungry Jacks, Woolworths, Coles, Brambles—

Mr PEARCE—Big W and all those sorts of places.

Ms Scollay—Yes, and Toyota.

Mr PEARCE—Because they have to deal with six or seven different systems?

Ms Scollay—Yes. A lot of collaborative work—and this is for the VET system in general—has been done with the states and territories, the Commonwealth and ANTA to try to deliver on one national system. We have not got there yet, but a lot of work has been done.

Mr PEARCE—What has been slowing that down?

Ms Scollay—A lot of it is the different decisions that state and territory governments need to make about their priorities around User Choice funding. Governments get elected on the basis of specific commitments that they make to specific industries et cetera to give areas of support to innovative industries. That will be different across different states and territories. So, if a national company wants access to User Choice funding, they might get it in some places and not in others, because there are different priorities across different governments. You will never get it. You will never change that; that is the way the political system works.

Mr PEARCE—Do you think that is contributing to this ad hoc syndrome, in a sense?

Ms Scollay—It is in the VET system more generally, but there are also things such as employment law. Take the situation of a mining company that might be operating across all of the borders in the centre of Australia, where the lines do not make a lot of difference. Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and New South Wales all converge, and there are instances where, if you have a mining apprentice, they have to be hired and fired as they move across. If they are an apprentice in New South Wales and they move to Queensland,

they have to have their contract terminated and be re-employed across the border. If they then move to another mine, they have to be hired and fired. That is not a productive way to run the country.

We are trying to address all of those issues, and many of them are being addressed in the VET system. You then go into the 10 per cent of students who are in the school system and you immediately atomise into eight state and territory school systems. So, as we are bringing the VET system together into a national system, we move into eight state and territory school systems. We understand why that is so but, as far as the implementation of vocational education and training in schools goes, it is problematic from our perspective. And history is not on our side here. I think there is some willingness now on the part of the MCEETYA ministers to do a lot more to synchronise the senior secondary certificate around the country. If that were to happen, then it would add to the national nature of the national vocational education and training system, of which the schools have chosen to be a part.

There are cultural issues too, such as the extent to which this VET system is something which school is part of or to which this is something separate—that is, a VET in Schools system. If you want employment outcomes and real industry-recognised qualifications for people in schools and want industry to respect the qualification as much as they do a VET one, then our view would be that VET in Schools must be positioned as part of VET for the National Training Framework part of it and not as part of something that is separately done in schools.

I think the other issue, the issue of image, goes back to Plato and Aristotle, really. For 2,000 years, work of the head has been more valued than work of the hand. This is despite the fact that vocational education and training now is so clearly IT based—it is not necessarily dirty work—and it is across the creative arts, ambulance driving, financial services and so on. It is very diverse and dispersed across about 82 per cent of industry. But there are still the tags of ‘manual labour’, ‘dirty work’, ‘male dominated’ and ‘old work’, and we have to do a lot of work to try to shift the image to the reality. But then, even when we get to the reality, we have to have equality there. Otherwise, why would people respect it? But there is a lot of history of parents saying to their kids, ‘We want you to go to uni.’

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—There is only one thing more challenging than all of that, and that is to work out the acronyms involved in all of this!

Ms Scollay—You have my sympathy.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you for taking us through that. The challenges that you lay before us are real ones, and I think many of your observations are very poignant. Most of the things I wanted to ask you have already been dealt with by my colleagues. One of the things I would like to raise with you—and this is getting pretty much down to ground level—is that a number of the schools that we met deal with VET and are highly enthusiastic about it. There is no doubt about that, and that is a very positive sign. But they talk about the paperwork and the bureaucracy involved in the drive for accountability, quality assurance and so forth. Whilst recognising the need for that, they also claim that the paperwork and reporting involved seem to be overtly unnecessary, almost more so than it is for aged care and accreditation. Do you have any comments about that, or does that just reflect a mismatch that has evolved?

Ms Scollay—I think they are right. I agree with them, and I think they are right. The NTQC, the National Training Quality Council, is chaired by Stella Axarlis, who is a member of the ANTA board. That committee reports to the ANTA board, which then reports to MINCO. The NTQC has statutory responsibility under the ANTA agreement and the act. It is very much aware that, in the move to this new quality framework, a lot of the evidentiary material has become paper based. It is probably, as much as anything, because there are now 4,500 registered training organisations in the country. To do a lot of it by paper is a more efficient outcome from the point of view of those doing the auditing. But the message has been heard loud and clear that it is overly paper based and the evidence is not enough on outcomes and too much on process. This is something which is seriously being addressed now by the National Training Quality Council under the chairmanship of Stella Axarlis.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Good. That seems to be in line with the terms of reference of about four or five inquiries which are going on which are relevant to us. I was also interested in the comments that have been made—and you alluded to this, as did my colleagues—about a certain amount of tension that exists between industry and school based VET about quality assurance and the whole issue of whether industry can be confident that what people are being accredited for is relevant and appropriate. You also mentioned generic prework skills. I wonder if that is almost the compromise, the benchmark. The bottom line is that we would like to see these generic prework skills built into schools so at least we can trust that much of it, and we can all work towards that. Maybe that fits into your personal view about the national senior secondary certificate. I would be interested in your comments about that.

Ms Scollay—I think that is right. Adrian is actually working on this, so I will ask him to comment. One of the things is that, although the Australian Qualifications Framework goes from certificate I to IV and then to diploma and advanced diploma, in many of the training packages there is no certificate I, because industry says there is no work at that level. By the time they get to certificate II in some industries, they are really becoming very specific and technical, and you really do have to be devoted to that industry. And yet we know that a lot of young people in VET in Schools do not have that level of commitment. They want to do a lot more tasting—a bit of this, a bit of that—to see what it is really like. At the certificate I level and even, potentially, at the certificate II level, there should be something more about generic employability skills, which are also in huge demand from employers.

You would know from the Business Council of Australia-ACCI report that they have defined for us a set of employability skills which, with some modifications, we are now looking to take forward. I feel quite sorry for young people these days. They seem almost to need to emerge from the womb with highly developed team skills, communication skills and a global mind-set and be able to show initiative and creativity. It is an unbelievable set of skills. I have been trying to develop these skills for the last 50 years, but they seem to need them fully-fledged from middle school time. So I think the more we can do around that generic set of employability skills the better. But we also know that that set of skills is best developed when embedded in an employment circumstance. So, again, it does not remove the need for structured workplace learning. It probably means we can make it more generic across a range of industries that could be packaged together as, for example, service industries, manufacturing or retail and hospitality. It still does not mean that you can learn them outside of a context.

Mr Stephens—We are probably going to need both of those things. Under our current arrangements, a young person can follow through and develop skills in a particular industry.

Another layer would be a taster, I suppose. We are looking at trying to put together arrangements, through training packages, which would enable someone to do a number of things at various levels, as Moira was saying. That is one of the bits of work that we have under way at the moment.

I want to add something that we probably should have picked up earlier in the piece, and that is to do with the perceptions about the title 'VET in Schools' and some confusion that comes through at times. One of the interesting things in this whole venture is that it is delivered in a mix of ways. There are many arrangements where a school delivers the whole of the qualification itself, so it really is 'VET in a school'. There are other arrangements where there are partnerships—and many of them—across states and territories where a school student goes outside the school to get that training. It is probably pretty important. Would a better term in some ways have been 'VET for school students' or something else? That is sometimes where a little bit of confusion lies—with perceptions that it is only delivered in a school.

CHAIR—That has been put to us before. From your experience is it very often the case that there is duplication going on—that schools are trying to offer within the school what actually is obtainable through the local TAFE college or even a private provider?

Mr Stephens—If you look at the sustainability of this over time, from a school point of view you undoubtedly have to ask, 'What are the resources that I have within my recurrent budget and what can I deliver myself'—and, if I have to deliver it myself, I know I have to go through a certain number of hoops to become registered to do that—'and what services should I purchase from a TAFE institute or private provider?'

Ms Scollay—Schools are becoming much more discerning about what they will deliver themselves and what they will purchase.

CHAIR—Given those hoops that you have just alluded to, there are difficulties for schools. If they could access those services or have their students plug into TAFE colleges for some of those courses and if it were available at no cost through TAFE—that is, TAFE was funded by government but the service was at no extra cost to the school—would it be your view that there would be a number of cases where schools would be more willing to have their students plug into a TAFE course rather than offer the course themselves, given that they would have to set up the equipment et cetera?

Ms Scollay—Again, I think it depends. In some areas, some schools have long traditions of teaching some of this stuff—IT, some of the business stuff. It is not that they do not need access to a workplace, but the mind-set of the industry is more open and accommodating. If the student went to a TAFE, they might have no more access to a workplace and the environment might be very little different. It partly depends on what we are talking about.

CHAIR—I am thinking not just from the point of view of accessing workplace experience but from the point of view of overall efficiency and maximising the effectiveness of teaching with government dollars. If you have a TAFE providing a course and a school providing a course just down the road, we are really duplicating what is happening. Do you think there is a capacity to be getting a better bang for our buck out of what is happening?

Mr Stephens—One would think so, yes.

CHAIR—How do we do that then? What are the impediments that are stopping that happening? What are the factors that are causing that duplication?

Mr Stephens—In a number of instances it is around settling on how resources in the system operate in the future and whether you look at resources following the students or whether there is some quid pro quo between sectors. That happens in some instances. If you talk to the people of New South Wales, they will talk about how there is a transfer of resources that happens at state level to support that type of arrangement in some cases.

I think it depends, also, upon the availability of the infrastructure locally, upon whether that is actually there. The other thing is the basis on which a school will make the choice of which provider to use. I would have to check this with Queensland colleagues, but it would appear that there have been many cases of Queensland schools choosing private providers over public providers for the delivery of training. I am uncertain as to whether that is just around the school based new apprenticeship arrangements or whether it is in general for full-time VET students.

CHAIR—We had an example of that this morning with regard to the building industry.

Ms Scollay—I am not sure, either, of the extent to which the duty of care issues that schools have create disincentives for them to send their students off to another place of learning.

CHAIR—That has been put to us before.

Ms Scollay—We find that, again, in some locations. There are other locations where a school exists where there is not necessarily a provider, so it makes sense. Certainly, in the way in which we fund the skill centres for schools, we try to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that a skill centre for a school is not built anywhere where there is an equivalent TAFE in the near vicinity that could offer that. That is one of the criteria we would use.

CHAIR—Thank you. Sorry, Sid, I kind of sidetracked from where you were going.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—No, that was good. It went down the right path.

CHAIR—I want to ask you one other question on the recognition of VET in Schools qualifications for university entrance in NSW through the UAI, in Queensland through the OP and so on. How much variation is there from state to state in that regard?

Ms Scollay—My perception is that there is a pretty big variation. It is done differently in all the states and territories, and the different ways in which it is counted—

CHAIR—Can you give us an outline?

Mr Stephens—From my knowledge, in Victoria, certainly, there have been arrangements in place for a number of years to enable a student undertaking a VET in Schools program to have that count not just on their senior secondary certificate but also for entry to university.

Ms Scollay—That is provided they are in a Victorian school and going into a Victorian university.

CHAIR—Okay, but it is not recognisable outside of the state?

Ms Scollay—If you were an ACT student going to a Victorian university, that might be more problematic.

CHAIR—In New South Wales, I think there are seven or eight courses that are accepted by industry and are counted towards the UAI.

Mr Stephens—Yes.

Ms Scollay—There has been a lot of work done in New South Wales on that.

Mr Stephens—I am not certain of the number, but there are a number of universities around Australia that have agreed to provide entry for students who have undertaken those VET in Schools programs. That varies across the states.

Ms Scollay—There are 38 universities, and it was something like 20 universities.

CHAIR—Would you be able to take that on notice?

Mr Stephens—Yes.

CHAIR—If you could give us an outline, or a table, for each state showing how many courses are recognised for university entrance, that would be very helpful.

Ms Scollay—New South Wales has been leading a project for us in that area to try to open that arrangement up a bit more across more states and territories with more universities.

CHAIR—And you could include what degree of interstate recognition there is, as well.

Ms Scollay—I am not sure we know that, but if we have got it we will give it to you.

CHAIR—If you have got it, that would be helpful. As there are no further questions, I thank you very much. That has been very helpful. Thank you, Adrian, for making the trip up from Melbourne.

Proceedings suspended from 2.59 p.m. to 3.11 p.m.

MAJOR, Mr Jeffrey James, Delegate for Geebung and Stafford District Principals, Queensland Secondary Principals Association

NEVILLE, Mr John, Executive Member, Queensland Secondary Principals Association

SMITH, Mr Ross, Vice-President, Curriculum, Queensland Secondary Principals Association

CHAIR—Thank you for appearing before us today. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Major—I am the Principal of Bracken Ridge State High School.

Mr Neville—I am the Principal of Stanthorpe State High School.

Mr R. Smith—I am the Principal of Elanora State High School on the Gold Coast.

CHAIR—As a formality, I need to remind you that proceedings here today are the same as legal proceedings of the House. I invite you to make some opening comments.

Mr R. Smith—I would like to start by giving apologies for our president. He would have been here, but he is currently occupied with the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training here in town for the Dare to Lead launch today—so there are a lot of visitors in town today, and we are pleased to have you here.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr R. Smith—I take a fairly simple approach to vocational education and training in schools, in that you cannot engage heads without engaging hearts and hands. To my mind, vocational education is a very neat way to engage hearts and hands. If youngsters are committed to what they are doing in that way then their heads will follow. Some of us might think that sitting around all day thinking is a useful and engaging activity, but not all of us share that view, and if we can approach it in another way that is great. The outcomes of that are that with VET we have a higher retention rate and that multiple pathways become an option for us in schools to organise career planning for youngsters. Needless to say, we embrace vocational education in this state and are pleased to welcome you here. In this state we have an uptake of over half the SATs in the country in our schools. We are proud to enunciate that. We did that with the federal minister this week and he said, ‘I should have mentioned that to you first.’ So that is a start.

Mr Neville—The Queensland Secondary Principals Association supports vocational education and training in schools and has actively promoted the VET agenda in schools over the last decade as a means of increasing retention rates and as a recognition of the need for multiple pathways for our students into worthwhile outcomes. Queensland secondary schools now provide entry-level training for many thousands of students each year across a wide range of industry areas. Schools, as registered training organisations, generally comply with the AQTF.

Whilst most of our delivery is for certificates I and II, a small number of schools deliver certificate III and even certificate IV training.

Over the last several years, Queensland schools have invested significant resources, as available, and structured their curricula in flexible and innovative ways to accommodate VET. The curriculum in Queensland schools through the Queensland Studies Authority, previously the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, has been a catalyst for vocational education and training, because it provides courses of study that lead to certificates I and II, with national qualification. Over the last six or seven years, or even the last decade, the development that has taken place in schools to deliver VET has occurred without any additional staffing and with minimal facilities and infrastructure support. While Queensland schools have to date managed the VET in Schools agenda in ways that now position us at the forefront of national activity, certainly in areas such as SATs, in our view schools have done so without a recognisable, guaranteed and appropriate resourcing model. In essence, schools have made it work through creativity, entrepreneurial activity, internal cross-subsidisation of resources, collaboration, strong links with community and industry and basically working ahead of policy settings, in the interests of a good, broad education for our students.

Many of our schools have worked hard to foster strong links with the immediate and wider community, industries and employers. They have developed networks with a range of service providers and agencies to establish the necessary external infrastructural supports to school programs. School staff are being released from scheduled classes and duties to gain industry experience, to visit employers and students on the job and also to enhance their own qualifications so that they can deliver VET within the schools. This is an ongoing commitment that Queensland principals are making to VET. I want to emphasise that the principals have valued it. We see it as a most worthwhile aspect of the curriculum. In the last five years, probably one of the most significant areas of curriculum development in schools has been around the VET agenda in years 11 and 12.

Mr Major—I might pick up on the funding issue. I have had a role with our association as chair of a small group of people looking at the distribution of the ANTA funding that comes to Queensland for state secondary schools. I believe that that funding, the quantum of money that has come to Queensland, has not changed in three years. However, the number of SATs, as you have heard from the previous two speakers, has grown—and grown somewhat exponentially—over the last three to four years. That has caused two things to happen in Queensland. Firstly, we have the strongest growing retention rate of students into years 11 and 12. I believe, as my colleagues would, that that is essentially to do with the VET and SAT agenda that we are providing for our young people, which is giving them worthwhile learning. However, having no increase in funding has meant that the burden of putting SATs in place has fallen more and more on schools to deliver from existing resources—to cut a lot of corners and impose a lot of goodwill on the staff that we have running those programs.

There is \$2.78 million in ANTA funding provided to state secondary schools in Queensland. As I said, that has not changed in three years. The increase in SATs is now at a level where Queensland offers—and you would be aware of this as well—62 per cent of the SATs across Australia. It has grown at the rate of 20 to 30 per cent in each of the last three years. Two years ago, state secondary schools were being funded at the level of \$600 per SAT. Last year that was reduced to \$500 per SAT, and there is some debate around any changes that might be necessary to fit in with the expected 20 to 30 per cent growth this year. With no increase in funding there

is a limit to how sustainable SATs will be in Queensland in the long term. So our plea is that you look at supporting the good outcomes that we are achieving in Queensland through the SATs program, and, of course, the way to do that is to provide some more resourcing.

CHAIR—One of the issues you have pointed out in your submission relates to the shortage of suitably trained teachers, or the difficulty of keeping up with demand in that regard. What suggestions do you have as to how we can get more teachers who are appropriately trained in VET into our schools? For instance, ANTA suggested the possibility of requiring all teacher training courses at universities to provide up to certificate IV in workplace learning and assessment. Is that a possibility? Can you think of other ways we might pursue to provide incentives for people in industry to get teaching qualifications and enter our school system? What approaches would you use?

Mr Major—In Queensland there has been some use of scholarships in the maths/science area recently. I think the use of teacher scholarships to help people move from industry into some training to become a teacher and then on to a school has a financial disincentive for them—

CHAIR—Are they fully paid scholarships equivalent to full salary?

Mr Major—No, just assistance scholarships. Some sort of financial incentive for someone to move from industry to go and train and then come into the schooling sector is essential—it is a big ask for someone to do it without that—particularly in the industrial skills, manual arts and IT areas. Those areas are critically short in our schools.

CHAIR—Do you think it is viable for the government to pay a full teaching salary for someone in industry to retrain into teaching?

Mr Major—I am not sure, given the shortage of funding in education that we are told often about, but if we are to expand those skill areas then I guess it is essential.

Mr Neville—One of the dilemmas that we face in delivering vocational education and training is the disparity between the systems. Schools do not interface that easily with the training system. We have come from different histories and, whilst we have a will to do it and work hard at it, there is some discrepancy in understanding how the systems work. One of the recommendations that we made in our submission in relation to the teacher shortage is that there should be some systemic work force planning. I can only speak for Queensland really, but I guess that it is probably a national issue. If vocational education and training is to be enhanced and improved in schools, we need to have the funding agencies working together at a systemic level and there needs to be a work force planning exercise done either at a state level or at a national level to identify emerging needs in terms of skilled teachers. In the short term, any teacher training that addresses the issues of improving the portability and skills of teachers to engage with VET as soon as they take up their placement would be well and truly worth investigating.

CHAIR—One of the issues that has become fairly evident to us is that the effectiveness of VET within schools depends very much on the commitment, quality, experience and motivation of not only the teachers within particular VET courses but also the careers guidance teacher within a school. It depends on the quality of the information he or she makes available to

students, their motivation to inspire students to take up VET courses and so on. Can you see a way in which we could better equip our teachers through pre-service training to have a broader range of knowledge and experiences in that regard?

Mr R. Smith—I will address your earlier question and follow up with that one. Firstly, I would not have thought it was a big ask to get a cert IV in workplace training for a degreed teacher. I would have thought that that would come through fairly easily. Of course, the devil is always in the detail, and the tertiary people would have to have a look at it, but I would have thought a degreed schoolteacher would do that standing on their head. I do not know if ANTA would want to hear that, but that would be my professional opinion.

Secondly, I am always most amused by this issue of skilling and schoolteachers. I know that schoolteachers are much put down by some industry reps, but I still remember being required to send one of my business teachers away, some years ago, to an office for four days to get on-the-job office training, because that was required. It cost me a lot of money to send a teacher away for four days. In the meantime, all the students she has to look after have to be covered as well. She came back and I wanted to see her first thing. I said: 'Tell me what you've learnt. I need to know what you've learnt, because you're going to make a major difference after this workplace experience that you've had.' She said: 'I'm really annoyed. They learned more from me than I learnt from them. I can tell you what I learnt in four days: I learnt that I should be teaching our students the numeric keypad more than we do now.' That was because in the insurance business which she was in for those four days they use the numeric keypad much more than the rest of the keyboard. Four days it cost me for her to learn that! So I have very mixed feelings about how 'unskilled' schoolteachers really are in many of these areas—for certs I and II. Certainly, I would accept it for certs III and IV but not for I and II. Am I answering what you are asking?

CHAIR—Others have said a similar sort of thing, although there is a broad range and a great degree of difference from school to school, from industry to industry, from employer to employer.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I am sure they learnt stapling as well!

Mr R. Smith—And photocopying!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—On a historical question, when did Queensland schools—and I am assuming they did—go from having more general high schools and techs to comprehensive schools?

Mr R. Smith—It was before my time, and I have been in the job for 30 years.

Mr Major—My mother went to a home ec tech school in about 1957 or 1958.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I ask that because I come from Tassie, where we had tech schools and so forth, and now there is a drive back into vocational education—except that this time it is not for the kids who cannot do academic work; it is attractive to all student abilities. I find it very interesting that we tended to throw the baby out with the bathwater—

Mr Neville—In the late fifties.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—and I think it is starting to come through now that maybe we did not get it right. We talk about having key individuals in schools, particularly teachers with goodwill. You talked about trading on goodwill and you are right. But when it comes to having a leader I suppose that in your organisation the role of a principal in the school, particularly with VET and changing curricula, would be very important. What role does your organisation play in supporting your members in bringing the school and its community around to new pathways to learning and achieving, particularly in VET?

Mr Major—Do you mean our organisation or us as individual principals?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You are a principals' organisation or association.

Mr Major—That is what we represent, yes. I am not necessarily sure that that is one of the main objectives of our association, although we do have a very big professional development aspect. We address some of those issues through the conferences we run. It is more an issue that we take on as individual principals within our own schools.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—The commitment in Queensland is very noted and, I think, very good. As colleagues in an association, I thought there might have been a more collegial approach in terms of how you support each other in bringing about these changes in some schools which are far more resistant to change.

Mr Major—As an example of what I am talking about with professional development, my school is involved in a multiple pathways program. In term 1, we run a four-day senior week for all of our year 11 students engaged in a work education cert I, before they go into their work placements in the next term. Each of our schools that do different things like that have the opportunity to share that at our annual conferences. I had the opportunity to do that last year at our state conference here in Brisbane. So it is about having that network of principals connected to be able to share what we see as good practice across the state.

Mr Neville—At a more local level, the district level, we do that kind of thing. I am part of the Darling Downs Group within the QSPA. We have a conference once a term. We have shared best practice, we have brought speakers in and that kind of thing. I think it happens more at a district level than at an executive level within the association. Having said that, I think the role of the principal is absolutely crucial. Probably before guidance officers I would identify the school administration as the crucial people. Even though there has been some level of support at a principals' association level, the success that you noted in Queensland schools has happened at a school level and through the school-community interface and relationship. I think the key drivers are principals and deputy principals—the administration within schools. When they are committed to VET, the school will develop VET programs and they will be good programs. The guidance officer and other senior staff, the heads of department, will be engaged and will be part of that administration team to see the thing go ahead. But I think the key drivers are very clearly the principals with their deputies—the administration teams in schools.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You may have noted when we were talking to ANTA that I raised an issue that had been raised with us about the incredible accountability, the paperwork and bureaucracy that goes with this. I notice they have taken that on board. Do you have anything to add to that, apart from supporting what you have said here at No. 4?

Mr Major—Dealing with all the standards for AQTF compliance has certainly been problematic for us over the last 12 to 18 months. We are on top of that, but the bureaucracy is just mind-numbing. I enjoyed hearing the comments about focusing a bit more on the outcomes rather than processes. We are pretty good at processes in our schools with lots of things, but I think the bureaucracy attached to meeting each of these 12 standards is over the top, somewhat nitpicky and not really contributing to better outcomes for students and for the VET programs we are offering in our schools. Some of it is necessary, but some of it is not so.

Mr R. Smith—Most of the auditing around compliance is to do with paper proof, evidence. They keep saying: ‘Prove it. Show me on paper where you do such and such. Show me how that process works.’ You have got to be able to reach into a filing cabinet and put it out in front of them, otherwise you will not retain your currency. So it is all about paper; the system requires paper.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—The issue of staffing is crucial to successful VET programs—as it is, of course, for any program in schools. Do you believe you have enough flexibility as schools in terms of staffing to be able to meet your commitments to the programs and also to be able to expand them in the current system?

Mr R. Smith—Speaking for us—but certainly my colleagues can add to this—I can say that we have got ultimate flexibility within our schools. We are very proud as EQ principals that we can pretty much manage locally as we see fit. We have not yet got local hiring and firing, because we need to staff the whole state—whilst I could hire on the Gold Coast perfectly adequately, if I was the principal of Barcaldine State School it might be a bit of a challenge hiring locally. So we do not retain that pleasure, but certainly as near as, and all the decisions within the school based on curriculum issues are based on local need and student need. That is our beginning and end, so there is complete flexibility in that regard.

Mr Major—I agree with that. I will add a comment about one aspect which I think picks up on what the ANTA people were saying to you before, and that is in relation to portability—the staffing following the student. If you have a student doing a school based course but then doing part of their course at a TAFE college, there has been some notion of being able to move that staffing component with that student. I think that gets away from the complexity of what a secondary school is all about. Secondary school is not about delivering six subjects to kids; it is about all of the social development of the young people we have and all the co-curricula stuff with our musicals, dramas and all that sort of thing. You cannot very neatly package the HR or the staffing that goes with this child as you might with someone doing a range of courses in a university, or in a TAFE college for that matter, because you do not have that range of other complexity around co-curricula activity that happens in a high school. Maybe it can be done, but it is not as easy to unwrap that staffing component.

Mr PEARCE—Thank you all. Most of my five questions have just been asked by my colleague! Queensland has been successful, and it has been more successful than any other state, so clearly there has been a desire at local school level to promote VET, and I guess there has also been that desire at a governmental and departmental level. As practitioners and as the people who are out there and ultimately responsible for the implementation of VET in your schools, how much input are you having up the chain to the department here in relation to changes to VET, how it is managed, how it is administered and so on? Are you being consulted? Is there a feedback loop mechanism in place?

Mr Major—Historically, most of the curriculum in Queensland has been managed through the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, which is a separate statutory authority to Education Queensland. What has happened in Queensland has happened because of that body and the professional relationship that teachers have had through being that body. The state has teachers involved in curriculum committees for all of the syllabuses across the state, and that was also true when the study area specifications for the VET subjects got up. So there is a huge level of professional involvement by teachers and staff in developing that curriculum. That is one of the main reasons why VET has been so successful in Queensland. It is not something that has been dumped on school but rather something that has been built up because of that network of teachers actually being involved in the professional development of those curriculum documents.

Mr PEARCE—How does that actually happen in your schools, for example? How are your teachers able to give feedback? Are they asked to go to seminars? Are they asked to fill in surveys? Are they asked to fill in questionnaires? How is it done?

Mr Major—It is done through a range of mechanisms. I have staff who are on curriculum committees attached to what is now called the Queensland Studies Authority. They are representatives of teachers in the area that have worked on and developed those study area specifications. Those specifications have come from the training packages, of course, but the teachers have been engaged in working out how we package it together here in Queensland to deliver it as a VET subject in a school. So they are involved in the curriculum committees. In terms of the subjects that are less VET oriented, they are involved in the panels around developing those syllabuses and moderating and monitoring those things as well.

Mr PEARCE—I am just interested in VET and the feedback loop on it.

Mr Major—Then, of course, there are the surveys. The evaluation teams come out and go to the schools and evaluate what is happening with those particular syllabuses. They run meetings in the different districts around the state to get some feedback through the loop about how those subjects have gone. Then, of course, they have been redeveloped as a result of that feedback.

Mr PEARCE—At a local level, what about you and your teachers in terms of getting feedback from parents? What sorts of formal mechanisms do you have in place there? Do you try and have regular briefings with groups of parents that have got children involved in VET, or is it more informal—does it tend to be ad hoc in that you have a one-off meeting with a parent if there is an issue? I am interested because there have been quite a number of suggestions that there is a lack of understanding and knowledge amongst the parent fraternity about what VET is and the perception of VET and so forth. I wonder whether there is or should be a process in place where you are going back to the parents and almost educating them along with their child so they understand what is around the corner.

Mr R. Smith—A large part of our work involves educating our parent body. One of the interesting issues, as I always say, is that schoolteachers are the most accountable public servants, because our work is talked about over every dining room table in the state every evening.

Mr PEARCE—I think a lot of ours is too!

Mr R. Smith—Perhaps yours is too. We might be second to you! That is not the case if you work for Main Roads or Forestry and so on. We are certainly accountable in that regard, and people talk about our work from day to day in regard to themselves. It is very much about asking ‘Does it matter to me?’—it is a personal sort of thing. Certainly on my campus at my school my head of senior schooling negotiates individually with parents and their sons and daughters about their needs in our community. That is how it happens—it is face to face and one on one. It is rare that we would call a whole group of parents together. One reason is that on the Gold Coast it is almost impossible to make it happen, but I guess that is the case in everyday life today anyway. It is very much face-to-face work with the family, the employer and the child or young person—if they are under 18 they are still children these days. That is where it stops and starts—face to face and one on one.

Mr Neville—I think schools would do it differently. Every school approaches these kinds of issues differently. In my school we have formal meetings with parents. Particularly with the skill based apprenticeship program, we found we have been very successful in making that work. We have very few kids that drop out of it—we have about 35 skill based trainees. We have virtually had to run the program. One of our staff has a passion for it and a commitment to it, and has almost become a second parent to the kids. The contact with home is heightened beyond anything we have done before, in terms of our relationship with parents. There are things to be explained; there are kids to be supported. The students are juggling the three elements: training, work and school.

We have an induction program where parents are required to come in for interviews after they have filled in forms and been to an information evening. I think schools are attacking that differently, but Ross’s point is a key one: we are in the business more and more these days. I think in schools in recent years there has been a huge increase in our understanding of the need to and our capacity to communicate with parents about the range of services and the way in which our services are offered to the kids.

Mr PEARCE—We have also heard a lot about the conflict or dilemma in what is typically the VET coordinator having to combine that responsibility with their normal teaching responsibility. We heard a lot about that. I think that some people would advocate very strongly that there should be a full-time permanent position in schools for a VET coordinator and a careers counsellor or adviser and all that sort of thing. Others would say, ‘No, that is not necessary.’ Do you have a comment?

Mr Major—I think that is the point. Each school should have the capacity to make those decisions in the local community, depending on their context. Each of us has a different context that we come from where that is necessary. Ross was talking before about the senior schooling head of department position—the administration of the school and the structure—and it is indicative. Most of our schools would have some person who is allocated into that role of senior schooling head of department, and who would have very close contact with lots of kids around that in developing their individual plans. Is there enough time available to do those roles? Clearly, there is not.

Mr PEARCE—It is only going to get worse, isn’t it? It is only going to grow?

Mr Major—It is getting worse.

Mr PEARCE—My point is: is it time that the department and everybody else say, ‘There is a head for this particular purpose now—there is a position there’?

Mr Major—Absolutely.

Mr Neville—Absolutely. I think Jeff’s point is a good one—that we would like to see the flexibility stay with the school. We have different sized schools, as we were speaking about earlier. I think we would say, yes, there is a definite need for an enhanced level of support for that role. As to how a school would then use that support, I would like to see some degree of flexibility remain with the school. Remember that we have already developed structures. We have people in place. The people that do these kinds of things are people who do it over and above their usual duties. They are committed and they are passionate. In my school it is the head of department who has taken on a whole extra role, which she should not have to do. I cannot wrench it off her; she loves it so much. But there should be some support for it.

At another bigger school there may be a designated head of department. Because of the complexity of vocational education and training, there is a need for infrastructure support—all of that AQTF compliance and auditing. We need support for that. We need secretarial support for the coordinator to be able to do that well and do it properly. At the moment it is being done, again, by people who already have full-time jobs in our schools. We have tacked this on as an extra duty for them. I think we make the point clearly in our submission that this is an area where schools do require and would certainly value that kind of additional support, but with flexibility.

CHAIR—Should that funding be allocated to each school on a global sort of basis? They could then decide on their needs, whether it is release from face-to-face teaching as a coordinator, professional development for staff, purchasing outside courses or whatever—just an allocation to the schools.

Mr Neville—Absolutely.

Mr Major—Absolutely. It obviously needs some accountabilities attached to it but, yes, that certainly would be the way we would want to see it go.

Mr R. Smith—Our association would reject out of hand the idea of putting a nominated person in to do that job. I go back to where I started, with the hearts and heads stuff—if you do not have the hearts right, you have nothing right. I would be looking for a nurse, a youth worker, a chaplain and a police officer in the school as well as someone looking at this model of pathways for careers. So there is a complex mix of needs in schools now, and churches are not filling the role that they might have filled in the past. Schools have certainly become the major centre at which young people in our community congregate and it is where they see some ownership and involvement. So flexibility is what we need, not compliance.

Mr PEARCE—I think in this particular area, unlike some other areas of education, there are a lot of different entities involved in VET, aren’t there? There is the school itself; parents; stakeholders; group training organisations, quite often; the employers themselves; peak bodies; and the department and so on. Queensland has been successful, but I am sure that there are still issues with how that all fits together as one great, big, smoothly operating machine. Do you

have any comments there? I think you may have made some comments on these areas in the submission—that there still needs to be a lot of work done to make sure that all of the links in the chain are coming together. Do you have any comments about what needs to be done in that regard or any other observations? If you had your time over again, what sort of advice would you give to other states that are trailing behind Queensland? What should they look at in relation to how all of those entities work together?

Mr R. Smith—There are a number of models around the nation for that. Certainly, we have a number in this state. The one on the Gold Coast is excellent. I know that they are speaking with you today. But I think it is vital, because there are so many players in this. I have been to a function this morning, which we have called the ‘mayor-principals breakfast’. The mayor did not know much about it until we briefed him on it and created it for and with him.

Mr PEARCE—And that is forcing a group of principals to come together and have a yarn about something?

Mr R. Smith—No, the principals are forcing the mayor and the community to get together and talk about the training agenda for the future. Our agenda as a community is that we want these youngsters learning or earning until they are 18 and more. It has implications for the whole community. We need that ownership across the board. Our work in engaging employers as school teachers is all new work to us. We did not do it 20 years ago. We stood aside a little in the past. That has changed and many more school teachers are actively involved in the community at all levels. Engaging our employers—especially in Queensland, where most of the employers are small businesses—is a major task. So making that willingness in the hearts of employers come together to match that in the hearts of our youngsters is a big issue. Coordinating bodies like that are great—they are invaluable, really.

Mr Neville—The comment I would make is that we have interface with the school from various groups which have received federal funding. We have ECEF doing certain things—sometimes we are not quite sure what they do; their role is changing at the moment, I believe—we have the JPP funding, which is touching the school, and we have the ANTA funding, which comes to Education Queensland and is then distributed to the school. But those things are a little bit disjointed. They invariably give a good service and the structured workplace programs that we have had with ECEF funding have been good, but they sit outside the school—they are funded outside the school and we send our kids to them. The JPP does good work but, again, it is not direct funding.

What we do not have is enough funding. We have classes of 25, because the allocative model we are staffed on did not change when VET took hold. The allocative model says that you get one teacher for 25 kids in a senior school. So we have classes of 25, which is too large to successfully deliver a VET course in most circumstances in years 11 and 12. We have no increase to our grant. Our base grant has not been addressed with VET funding—there has been no change. We have had no change to our staffing allocative model. We have some extra funds on the side to support our SATs and our delivery of the VET curriculum. That is a small amount—that is the \$2 million or so that Jeff mentioned before. Fortunately, our department gives that to us to use flexibly. Schools have been very innovative. They have taken grant money to support VET, but it is always at the cost of what the funds were there for. We had that grant money before we added VET, but now we have to dip into that to deliver VET.

My point is that, in Queensland, I believe we have done this enormously well. We have sought community support, sponsorship and all kinds of things. But what we do not have is enough money. We have never had an additional influx of funds or staffing allocation to take on the extra task that we have and the particular challenges that go with delivering VET well. I am convinced that we do it particularly well and the community uptake has been great. The kids want it and the parents want it. They value the certification that they get on their Senior Certificate. But we would like to see some more funds and we want to be able to use them flexibly within the school to meet the infrastructure that the school has already developed and enhanced. This will be quite different from the school down the road—it is quite a different community, so it is a different school.

Mr Major—Some certainty would be great, too, and John has mentioned this.

CHAIR—Certainty of funding?

Mr Major—Yes. From year to year, it is always a struggle in terms of ECEF funding for our structured work placement. You are chewing your fingernails as to whether you are going to get that so that you can continue your structured work placement for next year or whether you are going to have to dig deeper into the budget somewhere to be able to fund those things. So some certainty around the delivery of that would be great.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And about what is required of you, too. That is forever changing—just listening to ANTA. So that will be fairly difficult as well, I suspect.

CHAIR—I am afraid our time has gone. Thank you very much for your time here, for your very valuable submission and for the work that you are doing with the kids in your schools.

Mr Major—Thank you for the opportunity.

[3.58 p.m.]

COOKE, Mr Stewart, Chairman, South Coast Industry Schools Coordinating Organisation Inc.

MEREDITH, Ms Andrea Helen, Programs Manager, South Coast Industry Schools Coordinating Organisation Inc.

ROMANET, Ms Maureen, Senior Schooling, Head of Department, Elanora State High School; and Committee Member, South Coast Industry Schools Coordinating Organisation Inc.

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us today. Thank you for your submission and your time. As a formality, I remind you that proceedings today are legal proceedings of the parliament. I invite you to make some introductory comments if you would like to do that, then will proceed to questioning. We have got an eye on the clock, though. We need to be finished by 4.30 p.m. So over to you.

Ms Meredith—I will give a very quick overview of SCISCO. We are a non-profit organisation run by a management committee. On the management committee we have principals, VET coordinators and industry leaders. We work with 26 schools on the Gold Coast. We operate the ECEF funded workplace learning program, the DEST funded JPP—Jobs Pathway Program—and school based traineeships which are self-funded. We do a fee-for-service program with the schools. We have also introduced a mentoring program called Plan-It Youth that involves community volunteers who work one on one with our students. If you are from New South Wales you will know about the program. Plan-It Youth is an initiative of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. We have done a lot of work with Dusseldorp over the last couple of years.

Our reason for being here and for putting in a submission to the inquiry is to represent our Gold Coast schools and to say that we think VET in Schools is a wonderful thing and needs to be enhanced. It is crucial for young people. SCISCO has always been interested in anything that assists students with their transition from school to work. We believe industry placement is an important component of any VET in Schools program. You really cannot do that without strong partnerships with industry, and a cluster approach is something that Gold Coast industry really value, because they love to know that one organisation will link them into 26 schools. It is an ECEF thing. ECEF clusters play an important role in enhancing that.

School based new apprenticeships, which on the Gold Coast we call SNAPs—School based New Apprenticeships Program—are growing rapidly in Queensland schools, as you know, but unfortunately the ANTA funding is not increasing with demand and that is causing lots of problems for the schools at the moment. Many VET students require individualised assistance to help them prepare for careers and that also is underresourced, particularly for the students who are deemed to be—and I hate labelling young people—at risk of leaving school early. They really need individualised attention. Once you can identify a young person's needs, then putting strategies in place to meet those needs requires one-on-one support. That is poorly resourced.

We support most of the recommendations in *Footprints to the future*. We suggest the use of existing community based organisations, particularly to enhance what is currently happening and particularly the Jobs Pathway Program, which we think addresses so many issues in schools. The Jobs Pathway Program on the coast is operating very well. If you can extend or enhance that program, that would address a lot of the issues that the inquiry is looking at.

Despite VET in Schools being a national program, we are finding that every state is doing something different. It drives us all crazy because you have these wonderful federally funded programs and then you have the states doing their own thing. The minister's declaration—Stepping Forward—is a wonderful thing. We thought it was pretty exciting. But we are not seeing evidence of that actually happening, especially here in Queensland with the white paper. There is a lot of duplication and services are fragmented. We hope that your inquiry can forward that feedback to the MCEETYA task force.

Mr PEARCE—Is that in relation to Education Queensland?

Ms Meredith—I am mainly referring to what is happening with the state government—the Department of Employment and Training, and Education Queensland. With their white paper, the ETRF, there is some duplication with what is happening with federally funded programs. I do not see any evidence of the Commonwealth and state governments talking to each other as per the declaration.

CHAIR—Workplace learning obviously is an essential part of VET in Schools, and a couple of states mandate it. That is not the case in Queensland. How difficult is it for you getting those work placements, with the growing number of school students involved in VET courses? Are you reaching saturation point or is there almost a limitless field of opportunities out there with industry?

Ms Meredith—That is a good question. We have not ever had a problem placing a student in an industry.

CHAIR—Is that across the whole range—apprenticeships down to week-long learning experiences, the whole lot?

Ms Meredith—No. With workplace learning, there are no problems. With school based traineeships and apprenticeships, there are problems. If a young person comes to you and wants a traineeship in graphic design, you cannot materialise one. We are finding that school based traineeships are almost matching our outcomes with workplace learning. School based traineeships are just going out of control.

CHAIR—But with the structured workplace learning there is no problem?

Ms Meredith—Not at this stage, no—not with sourcing employers.

CHAIR—And what sort of response has there been from industry, from the employers? Are they happy with the way that the student fits in with their productivity, with their attitude to the workplace and so on?

Ms Meredith—They are. It is well received by industry, but one area for improvement would be to increase the quality of what is happening in the workplace. There is very little assessment on the job. I think that this is specific to Queensland. It would be more like work experience than a structured placement in most cases because we do not have the resources to have people out there monitoring the placements and doing on-the-job assessments of those students in relation to their subject.

CHAIR—You say, ‘We do not have the resources.’ That is, organisations such as SCISCO?

Ms Romanet—The schools do not have the resources either. To be able to do workplace assessments, the qualification needs to be a certificate IV in workplace training and assessment. The majority of school teachers do not have that qualification. The release time to go out and work with the employers, firstly, to establish the requirements for the work placement in terms of the assessment outcomes and, secondly, to be in the workplace to assess them would be very demanding on a school. At this point in time those resources come from the teaching staff. We do not have people who are specifically employed within the state school system to be able to facilitate that.

CHAIR—Is that a direction that you think we should be heading? Do you think that there should be more resources for schools to provide for that release? Do you think that there ought to be more training to have someone in the school trained up to the certificate IV level assigned to get out and do that assessment?

Ms Romanet—It would be advantageous for new people being trained through the education system to be able to walk out with a certificate IV in workplace training and assessment, so that when they do come into the school environment they have an understanding of the broader nature of the work environment—the teaching environment—that they are going into. They would be a far greater asset to the school and we would be able to utilise their skills. I find that one of the problems in terms of the school environment is that there is a reticence on behalf of teachers and, to an extent I am finding lately, even students to go out into the workplace for that kind of structured learning. There is a sense, perhaps, that what is taking place within the school is sufficient. Again, this may be a consequence of the fact that within the VET programs there is no mandated requirement for students to be in the workplace, except for a couple of certificate courses. The majority of them do not have that requirement.

CHAIR—How many Indigenous students do you have in placements?

Ms Meredith—Our percentage is really low. It is one per cent of SCISCO’s total placements, which are about 500 or 600 a year.

CHAIR—Is that commensurate with the percentage of Indigenous students on the Gold Coast generally?

Ms Meredith—No. On the Gold Coast, three per cent of the population are Indigenous students. We only place one per cent of our numbers.

CHAIR—Why do you think that disparity exists?

Ms Meredith—It could be because they are not self-identifying. We are finding that they will not tell us that they are Indigenous unless there is an advantage for them in identifying.

CHAIR—Have you noted any difficulty with employers taking on Indigenous students? One group we had here this morning indicated that there was a problem in the construction industry, for instance.

Ms Meredith—No. I have never come across that in the six years that I have worked there.

CHAIR—So employers are just as keen to take on Indigenous students in structured workplaces?

Ms Meredith—Yes. I am trying to think of a situation where we had to identify them as such. I have not experienced that.

Mr Cooke—As chairman I am not as involved in the day-to-day running of SCISCO as obviously Andrea is. I work with an ITAB in sport and recreation. From an industry perspective, we are probably under-represented in terms of work placements. There probably are industries that are overall. From our perspective, with our small employers, those work placements have carried over to VET courses in TAFE as well. It is a difficult issue for industry—for our employers—to take kids and even TAFE students into work placements. There are implications in relation to minimum qualifications in the workplace at the time, staffing to provide resources and supervision, and things like that. Again, to some extent this gets back to what the schools have access to in terms of supervision and support. One of the things that need to be acknowledged is that there are differences between industries. There is probably an under-representation from a number of industries in terms of work placements.

Ms Meredith—With Indigenous students?

Mr Cooke—Not specifically with Indigenous students; I am talking overall.

CHAIR—Overall, is there a broad pattern of the industries that are taking a lot of students and those that are not? What is the main focus—tourism based industries and hospitality service industries?

Ms Meredith—Hospitality is our biggest chunk at 40 per cent.

CHAIR—Is manufacturing a long way down the list?

Ms Meredith—Yes. I could not tell you the breakdown of it.

CHAIR—Is that because of a lack of interest by the students, a lack of employers or both?

Ms Meredith—The work placements that SCISCO do are student driven in a sense, so it would be because of the students.

Mr Cooke—I think there is still an issue—and we do not want to be critical of schools—with the knowledge of the VET coordinators within schools about the outcomes in different

industries. A lot of kids do not realise what the opportunities are within the different industries. Part of their information comes from the VET coordinators and it also comes from SCISCO. Obviously, given SCISCO's representation, they can provide better evidence of those outcomes where they have the opportunity to do so. The initial impetus from the students is: 'We don't know what all the opportunities are.' Getting that information to them is an issue.

CHAIR—I noticed that you made that point in your submission and you suggested that maybe someone like SCISCO should be involved more in the schools in providing career guidance to children. Another submission has suggested the same thing, that there is a capacity, perhaps, for a privatised career counselling service for schools. Do you think that is necessary or do you think it is just a matter of more adequately training teachers to be aware of and conversant with the range of possibilities in industry?

Ms Romanet—I believe that there is a role for both, to be perfectly honest. I believe that within the school system you need to have people who are trained and have knowledge of what is taking place in the workplace, particularly in the local community and area. I find that SCISCO provides me with very good information in relation to that. Also you have to remember that students are with teachers for a long period of time. We become a little like parents, if you like, and they do have a tendency to stop listening at times. Outside organisations such as SCISCO provide a very good support base for our students. They are seen in a very different light from the more formalised structure of the school environment and they provide very good advice and support to our students.

Mr PEARCE—In your submission you talk about some of the factors that mitigate against VET being even more successful. One of the factors that you highlighted was the shortage of appropriately qualified and experienced teachers. You are dealing with 26 schools, I think you said. I am interested in your comments about whether you have seen that improve over the time you have been working with the schools in your area. What do you think governments should be doing in terms of policy to ensure the professional development of those teachers?

Ms Meredith—To make sure that the teachers are adequately qualified to deliver VET?

Mr PEARCE—Yes.

Ms Meredith—It has definitely improved over the last six or seven years, but a lot of that is because of the dedication of the individual teachers.

Mr PEARCE—They have gone out of their way to skill themselves up.

Ms Meredith—Yes, and they are doing that in their holidays. There is no allowance for them to be released from school to gain more industry experience and that sort of thing, which is really sad.

Mr PEARCE—Your organisation is obviously spending a lot of time with the individual VET coordinators in the schools. As I understand it, you are the interface between the school community and the employer community. In that role, are you providing training?

Ms Meredith—We do not provide training, but we do provide opportunities for teachers to go into industry. We coordinate it all. We liaise with employers on behalf of teachers to make that easier for them and we provide that service to the schools.

Mr PEARCE—Do you charge any schools for that?

Ms Meredith—Not for teacher placement, purely because we believe in encouraging that activity. We do not charge for teachers, yet we do for students.

Mr PEARCE—That is interesting. What sort of process is in place as a feedback mechanism? What I mean by that is: when you place a student in an organisation somewhere, you obviously stay in touch with the employer and with the student. If it is a positive experience or if it is not such a good experience, what sort of debriefing process do you go through?

Ms Meredith—With both student and employer?

Mr PEARCE—And with the school potentially—whether or not it was good or bad?

Ms Meredith—Our follow-up could be a lot better than it is. We do destination surveys with our workplace learning students. We get a lot of feedback then but sometimes that is six or eight months after they have done the placement. When the student is on placement, we phone them in their first week. We also phone the employer and if there are any concerns, we are in touch with the schools on a daily basis and they would know straight away if there was any problem. As far as a structured, formal feedback system is concerned, we do not actually have something in place at the moment.

Mr PEARCE—Quite a bit of effort is put into getting a placement and I wonder whether or not it turns out to be exactly everything that student thought it would be and that the parents thought it would be. Is there a process that we need to look at to ensure that not only do we learn from the experience—to get comments back from the experience—but also we make it easier the next time round for future students? Clearly, you would support some sort of structured process there as well to close that loophole.

Ms Meredith—Yes.

Mr Cooke—A lot of it comes down to resourcing issues. Andrea could probably expand on it more than I could, but with many of the programs, you spend a lot of time trying to get that placement in the first place. To have the resourcing to provide that feedback, which is absolutely vital to find out whether it has been successful—from the point of the view of the employer, the student, the school and the parents as well, obviously—is really difficult. We do not have the resourcing to do it to the extent that we would like. Therefore, it is not carried out. It is no less of a priority; it is just that the resourcing is not there.

If you are trying to achieve certain outcomes, for example, if the outcome and the resourcing for that feedback and follow-up are not there then, as a matter of necessity, it does not get done as much as possible. Where situations arise, SCISCO staff obviously go out of their way to address those on a needs basis, and as Andrea says, in the first instance there is that initial follow-up. I think that is common to a lot of government funding programs: these are the

outcomes you have to get and you have to have some results at the end of the day. The intermediate step between start and finish is not necessarily resourced to the level it needs to be to ensure that you are really getting the level of outcome along the way that you want to get.

Mr PEARCE—There has been quite a lot of comment about the fact that VET is perceived as being less credible than an academic pursuit, despite some wonderful initiatives, some great organisations with some great people behind VET. My sense is that if you are pursuing an academic career, which is much more formalised and structured, it must be much more credible. Whereas, to date with VET a lot of the implementation has been ad hoc—a little bit of this, a little bit of that; let's get them out there and get them involved—without necessarily formalising and closing it off. Does that add to the sense that it is not as credible as the academic route because that is more of an established process and the feedback loops are more in place there?

Ms Meredith—When you think that the funding for an academic subject and the funding for a VET subject is roughly the same, yet the resources required for VET are absolutely huge. By rights, we should be meeting with the employer before every placement, training them to take a student and inducting them into the whole process—we do not do that in all cases. We should be out visiting the student during placement—we do not do that. Then we should be following up and doing the feedback process afterwards. That would make a really good quality program.

Mr Cooke—I think that perception from parents and industry about the value of VET is changing though. But it is a slow process and there are a lot of people—parents and students—out there who think, 'If I don't go to university, that's it. I'm a failure.' Despite the importance of it in industry—and for my own industry, and a whole lot of others, it is exceptionally important—VET is still not given the kudos that it needs to have. Part of that comes back to this whole process of getting that result along the way. I think there are plenty of issues with the training in VET in general where, because of that lack of resourcing, the outcomes are not what we should be getting. That takes nothing away from the dedication of the people involved; it is just that the resourcing still is not there to achieve the outcomes that we need, as Andrea said.

CHAIR—Thanks, Stewart.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Just to fill you in, before I got into this job I was at a senior secondary college in Tasmania, years 11 and 12, which had been involved in VET for some time. It is really interesting that a lot of resources—both staffing and financial—are devoted to structured workplace learning and monitoring. I remember that the work that went into monitoring students in the workplace and the activities in the workplace was absolutely vital to the scheme. To hear that you see it as one of the deficiencies in this is sad, but given the numbers I suppose that is understandable. In Tassie, I know they regarded it as absolutely crucial to achieving the desired outcomes. I have a couple of points. You talked about the ETRF, the white paper and very quickly about the duplications that were taking place. Are you going to formally respond to that white paper about that?

Mr Cooke—We have done.

Ms Meredith—We have.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Have you?

Ms Meredith—We did submit a formal response to that, but that was before the Stepping Forward declaration. When that Stepping Forward declaration was launched on the case by Matt Foley, I started to think, ‘Hang on a sec—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—‘Here we go again.’

Ms Meredith—‘if the feds and the states are talking together, nothing has actually’—I felt it was a bit frustrating—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Are you responding?

Ms Meredith—Will I respond? To answer the question, I think I should; I just do not know how.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I wonder if we could have a copy of that response, because that is really and truly one of the issues that we are looking at—this whole replication, duplication thing—and we want to try to tackle this in a very systematic and efficient way.

Ms Meredith—All the reports are saying that. The Footprints to the Future report—admittedly, the Commonwealth should show leadership in it—and all of Dusseldorp’s reports say the same thing. Actually, the Queensland white paper does say that they will work with Commonwealth and local government.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is someone at the coalface responding to what seems to be a duplication of a duplication. I was really interested in—and this is very positive about you; I have listened to parents, school students and teachers talk positively about SCISCO, which I think is a great testament to you—how you differ from a normal group training organisation. What is it that is special about you? I can appreciate your funding model, or lack of it—one or the other—but I am interested in what you actually charge as a fee for service, because I think that is also important. And, even more into the nitty-gritty, how many staff do you have? How do you go about organising yourselves to provide that service?

Ms Meredith—Sure. What is special about us? In the first place, I think it is the fact that the schools initiated SCISCO, in 1996, with three little Christian schools—if you can call them little; they are quite big now, but it was quite a while ago. In the early days, in 1996, they were delivering VET and they wanted to enhance that with industry exposure, so they applied for ASTF-ECEF funding. They talked to some other private schools about it and ended up with nine schools. Then the government schools came on board. When the government schools came on board and we ballooned, we started to come into our own, and people started taking us quite seriously. I think that is one key—the fact that the schools do feel ownership of what we do and they really trust and endorse what we do. The other thing is that we have very strong industry input from our management committee. There is very low staff turnover, so the schools trust us. Group training companies have a few problems with reputation on the coast. I figure that if schools will welcome you through their gates it says a lot for the organisation. If you can get a principal to accept you and like what you do, half the battle is won.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And trust what you do.

Ms Meredith—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—How does fee for service work?

Ms Meredith—Right from day one, we asked the schools to pay \$1,000 a year to be an associated school, and that has not increased in the seven years that we have been in existence; it has always been \$1,000 a year. For work placements we charge the school, not the student, \$60 a year, which gives them two placements—and that has not increased in six years. For a school based traineeship we charge the school \$260, which equates to 50 per cent of what they receive through their ANTA funding through Education Queensland.

Ms Romanet—There are issues around that currently, because in Queensland, as a consequence of the success of school based traineeships, that funding has been cut quite significantly. From a state perspective, I am not even aware of what the funding will be. That is an issue for us in the sense of accessing organisations such as SCISCO and even in the sense that I employ a workplace coordinator for three days a week through funding generated through the school based trainee programs. As a bit of an aside to this, the proposed cuts to the training for school based traineeships in a range of different industry areas are also posing some concerns for state schools in Queensland. I am not sure whether you are aware of them.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What is your staffing?

Ms Meredith—We have got six full-time staff. The majority of our funding comes from the Jobs Pathway Program, so the majority of staff work in that program. So there are six full-time staff and a couple of part-timers.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Is that funding triennial?

Ms Meredith—No, that is annual. All our funding is year to year.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Oh, goodness!

Ms Meredith—We are incredibly lucky that our staff have not thought, ‘Am I going to be around next year? I had better start looking for another job just in case.’ Admittedly, I send out a sense of security to them. I do not actually tell them that there may be no funding next year, so they do not actually know that. And I am pretty confident that funding will come if you continue to do a good job. But we have a very low staff turnover at SCISCO.

Ms Romanet—Even in the early days there was support through the school network to ensure that there was funding available until the programs SCISCO had applied for were funded.

Ms Meredith—There was a case where the schools pitched in to pay some of our salaries between staging of grants.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—So you are more than a training organisation; you are more than a brokerage.

Ms Romanet—They are not a trainer.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You are not a trainer; you are more than a broker, though.

Ms Meredith—And we are not a group training company either.

Mr Cooke—Andrea commented on perceptions of group training companies. It is an aside to this, but the government focuses on pushing group training companies as a major option. I fail to see why the government sees that group training companies should be funded to the extent that it does. In a lot of cases, group training companies do not provide the level of support that is expected of them. A number of group training companies in Queensland in the last couple of years have been investigated for particularly poor practices, which probably have not got the level of media that they should have.

We are very different to a group training company. We do not undertake most of the roles of a group training company. It is worth noting that the government focus—both state and federal—on group training companies probably needs to be looked at, particularly if there are ways of providing the support network other than an employment and support network. To reiterate Andrea's comment, I think the success of SCISCO and our operation largely comes down to the strong bonds between industry and schools.

CHAIR—Do you go out to schools and run career expos and so on?

Ms Meredith—We do not go in and run them—I do not think they would like that. We support the schools. We are at all of them in our own capacity. Most of the service that we provide is individualised—it is one on one with the student.

Ms Romanet—Essentially, if there is an issue in relation to work placement or we have concerns about students who might fall out of our school and we are not really sure where they might end up, we contact SCISCO and we direct parents and students to the organisation because they are able to supply a range of different support mechanisms. If we have students who have a specific requirement for a school-based traineeship or something along those lines and at the school level we are unable to support that or locate that for the student, again we go to SCISCO. It is the same with some of the more complex work placements that we require in some of the larger organisations. We can only access those through SCISCO.

CHAIR—Because you are involved with so many schools, you would notice a great range of effectiveness with which schools tackle the VET in Schools programs. Given that range, what are the key ingredients that distinguish a good program from a bad program? In terms of recommendations that we make to the government, how can we address those issues that need to be addressed to bring them all up to that standard?

Ms Meredith—I think my answer is probably not going to help you much. The schools that perform really well have a dedicated person in that school and a supportive principal. What would your answer be, Maureen?

CHAIR—So it is the people and not the program?

Ms Meredith—Funding is consistent, basically, across the schools so, yes, I would have to say that. If a principal's priority is VET, you will find that, because schools are basically self-managed, they may then put more resources into that part of the school.

Mr Cooke—I think that is right. The point was made earlier about the dedication of teaching staff to VET, in terms of their qualifications, their industry currency and things like that. The success of these programs often comes down to individuals who are prepared to work well beyond their funding and their job specifications to try to achieve those outcomes, because they have a genuine commitment to them. I do not think you are ever going to replace that; you are probably never going to be able to fund to a level that really recognises that. The work of the individuals within the schools makes a big difference.

Ms Romanet—From a general perspective, what really needs to take place is a greater appreciation for the pathways that vocational education and training can lead to from schools. Where you have dedicated staff and principals who are supportive of that, students and parents are more familiar with those kinds of programs and outcomes and staff value them more. The qualifications and the certification that students walk out with need to be considered and need to be valued. Even though the AQTF requirements are horrendously onerous, at least they mean that, under this current system, people will walk out with an equivalent qualification to what they would get from a private provider or a TAFE. That, in itself, is significant. I know there are proposals to perhaps water that down, but if that is going to be the case it needs to be done very carefully. I would much rather see support in schools for AQTF compliance than the watering down of the programs that we offer.

CHAIR—I am afraid our time has gone. Thank you very much for your time and your valuable input. Keep up the great work. From the comments we have had from schools and parents, you are doing a great job.

Ms Meredith—Thanks for giving us this opportunity.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 4.32 p.m.