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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING
(SUBCOMMITTEE)

Reference: Vocational education in schools

THURSDAY, 10 APRIL 2003

GLADSTONE

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Thursday, 10 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 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.

WITNESSES

Subcommittee met at 9.39 a.m.

ANDREWS, Ms Ashleigh; BEARE, Ms Kimberley; BEDFORD, Mr Jason; CALDWELL, Mr Kingsley; DUNSTAN, Mr Ben; GAINEY, Ms Tracey; HERBENER, Mr Ashley; PATRONI, Ms Janelle; PRANGE, Ms Patrina; and ROBINSON, Mr Ian

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education in schools. I thank the principal of Toolooa State High School, Mr Roger Atkins, for his hospitality and for agreeing to host the committee's visit today. I also thank the students who put on a great morning tea for us this morning. Thank you for that and congratulations to the hospitality section. Also, I thank Raelene Fysh for her work guiding us around this morning. We are looking forward to hearing what you have to say to us later today. I would like to give the apologies of Mr Paul Neville, the member for Hinkler, who would very much have liked to have been here today because he has a great interest in educational issues. Unfortunately, he has another commitment in Brisbane.

I welcome students and former students of Tannum Sands State High School and Toolooa State High School. Do not be too anxious about this. We have filled you in a little bit on what happens. We are really keen to hear from you and to hear what you have to say about your experiences in school, your connections with the workplace, traineeships and so on. What you say and what we say will be recorded. That is mainly for our reference later on, so that, in putting our report together, we can go back and read what has been said. You will also be able to look back on it years down the track and say that you are on the official parliamentary record.

In this inquiry we are really interested in how well we can connect between school and work, and how well the vocational education courses in school prepare you for work—traineeships, apprenticeships and those sorts of things. So we really want your ideas on how you think it is working. Perhaps those of you in school could tell us what courses you are doing in school and whether you are doing a general introduction to workplace skills, a traineeship or an apprenticeship. Those of you who are out of school might tell us how you made the connection from school to the workplace you are in now. Perhaps you might also tell us why you chose the particular course you are doing and whether you are looking at a particular career—what made you choose to go in that direction.

Ben Dunstan—I had some background knowledge of what I wanted to do. I saw my business teacher about getting some work experience at one of the local industries around here in years 11 and 12, just to get in and see whether I really liked it. That worked out all right, and I decided that mechanical fitting was the field I wanted to go into. I saw my teacher again about a work placement, which I took part in at PT Engineering. They put me on for one day a week. I learned a lot about fitting, how a workshop runs and all the rest of it. I really did not know whether I wanted to go into a small business or a large one—though I figured that the larger one would look after me a bit better—so I applied for everything that came up. The two places I had work experience at offered me apprenticeships within the first week. I decided to wait until I had finished year 12 because more of the large companies prefer year 12 over pretty much everything. So I finished year 12 and applied at QAL, NRG, BSL, the Comalco Alumina Refinery and a lot of other places.

I think the work experience helped me a lot in the end, because they asked a lot of questions about how jobs would be done and what you would do in this situation. I had already experienced something like that, and that helped me through the interviews and writing up my application. I ended up getting an offer from every big company. I took the one at Comalco, which put me at the smelter for a year and then at the new refinery site when it is built, doing commissioning and stuff out there. I figured that would be the best experience as an apprentice—going into a new factory with new equipment, commissioning it and seeing how it works so that in the long run I will know how it works and its little niggly bits and whatnot. My work experience helped me a lot.

CHAIR—Does the big company look after you well?

Ben Dunstan—Yes, they do.

CHAIR—So you would recommend it?

Ben Dunstan—Yes, I would recommend it to anyone.

Jason Bedford—Last year I attended NRG for one day a week for 30 weeks as regular work experience, and I continued that again this year. That gave me an idea of what I want to do for the rest of my life. Through that I have learned new people skills, mechanical work and all that sort of stuff. I am getting to do things with my hands and learning at the same time. I recommend it to anybody who is interested in doing anything like that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You are still doing one day a week?

Jason Bedford—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Is that more general experience? Are you trying lots of different things, or is it in a particular area?

Jason Bedford—It is just in the area of telecommunications. Occasionally I get to do some electrical work, but that is restricted.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Is that the field you will look to in the future?

Jason Bedford—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—How did you get on to this? What made you choose that pathway?

Jason Bedford—I talked to a friend who works in that area at NRG. He described what they do and I was really interested, so I asked Mr Hay, our work experience coordinator, and he did what he could for me.

CHAIR—What did that involve? What did Mr Hay do?

Jason Bedford—He organised a whole different thing. You go one day a week for 30 weeks and you have insurance. After that 30 weeks you lose your insurance so you cannot go, but he

ensured that I could go during school time. So it became a basic work day without being paid—the only downside.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You are not suggesting it is slave labour! Is this certificated for you? What will you get at the end, apart from that great experience? Are you going to receive anything in relation to your formal schooling?

Jason Bedford—Not that I know of specifically but, as Ben said, it could help with an apprenticeship or getting credits towards something.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You are not doing a certificate course?

Jason Bedford—No.

CHAIR—Have NRG given you an indication that you will get an apprenticeship at the end? Have they said that there is a good chance?

Jason Bedford—It all depends on whether they want to keep the apprentice they have now. If they do not, I have a greater chance because I know most of the staff already.

Ashleigh Andrews—I am currently doing year 11 at Toolooa State High School, but it all started when I was a little girl. I have always wanted to do hairdressing. Last year I was having a lot of trouble with school and stuff like that, so I decided to help myself by taking a course in hairdressing at the TAFE college here. Last year I completed my certificate II in hairdressing, and I have also done a year's work experience at Hair Montage on the waterfront. This year I am successfully completing year 11 and doing my certificate III in hairdressing.

CHAIR—Did you do that work experience at Hair Montage?

Ashleigh Andrews—Yes.

CHAIR—Who lined that up? Did you find it yourself, or did Mr Hay organise that for you?

Ashleigh Andrews—My cousin organised it. She had watched me grow up doing people's hair and she said that I had a natural talent for it. She owns her own salon and she said that she would like me to experience more about hairdressing so she offered me a job there. I was doing tea and tidy, washing hair and things like that. That made me feel a lot more confident about hairdressing. I have now furthered it by completing certificate III at TAFE.

CHAIR—Have you found that being able to do the thing that you love most and being able to get a pathway into that has helped with your other schooling? You seem very directed now.

Ashleigh Andrews—Yes, it definitely has. I was suffering in year 9 and 10 at school. I had problems with a lot of the girls there. But it has made me feel better as a person because I feel more confident about things and I have done a lot more schoolwork than I did in the past. I feel that it has helped my schooling a lot.

CHAIR—Are you doing certificate III at TAFE or have you finished it?

Ashleigh Andrews—I am completing it this year.

CHAIR—You just started this year?

Ashleigh Andrews—Yes.

CHAIR—When do you do that?

Ashleigh Andrews—I do it every Thursday.

CHAIR—All day?

Ashleigh Andrews—Yes—from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

CHAIR—Does that cause any problems with any other subjects? Are your classmates doing other subjects on those days which you need to catch up on?

Ashleigh Andrews—It does effect one or two classes but, because I have a lot of spares during the day, on other days I catch up with that in my spare time.

CHAIR—Does that work okay?

Ashleigh Andrews—Yes, it does.

CHAIR—Are any other people in year 11 doing the same sort of thing—doing a certificate III at TAFE in other subjects at the same time as doing year 11?

Ashleigh Andrews—Because I wanted to do hairdressing so badly they actually put me through TAFE a year early while I was in year 10, so I am a step ahead of the other girls who are completing TAFE at the moment. So there are girls in my grade but they are completing certificate II this year.

CHAIR—Very good.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Was there a special exemption for you to do TAFE in year 10? Was it a special arrangement?

Ian Robinson—I did it in grade 10.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You did it as well?

Ashleigh Andrews—I think because we were so dedicated to what we wanted to do we pushed it a bit so we could start early.

CHAIR—That is very good.

Ian Robinson—That is like me in year 10. I was really bad and I used to wag all the time—I was a rebel. Then I got put in a Youth Access course and was sent to the kitchen at the TAFE

college. They taught me knife skills, how to prepare food, garnishing, waiting on tables and so on. I got a certificate out of it based on what I had completed. After that I had built up a resume and then this year I got a traineeship at the school canteen.

CHAIR—Very good. Did you finish certificate II at TAFE last year?

Ashleigh Andrews—No, I just got all competencies. I finished half of the certificate I. I am finishing certificate II through my school based traineeship. I will finish next year—it runs through all this year and next year.

CHAIR—Do you enjoy that work? Do you think that after that you will try to get an apprenticeship as a chef? What are the chances of that locally?

Ian Robinson—They are pretty good.

CHAIR—Do you have contacts with any employers around the place who might take you on? Are you doing part-time work out of school?

Ian Robinson—I did that last year through my Youth Access course. We went there every Thursday and Friday, and that is running through this year. Last year we finished it and now different kids are going this year. We go every Thursday and Friday and we do maths and English, and then the next day we do kitchen stuff. This year new people were sent who were being bad.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Good enough, too. Do you find having that sense of direction has helped your approach to other things at school?

Ian Robinson—Yes. It has made me a lot clearer on how to do my maths and that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Great. That is a good story.

CHAIR—I hope you do well.

Kingsley Caldwell—Last year, a school based traineeship was offered through McDonald's for retail operations. I applied for it and received the job. This involves a pretty big form that you are supposed to fill out. We go every Tuesday afternoon for about an hour. We complete it with help from the managers there. It is a job, so I get shifts. It has been pretty good.

CHAIR—Do you get paid for that?

Kingsley Caldwell—Yes.

CHAIR—How many hours a week is that?

Kingsley Caldwell—About 10, roughly.

CHAIR—How does that fit into your school program?

Kingsley Caldwell—It is usually in the afternoons, so it does not really affect schooling.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Do you do after-school work as well? In other words, are you working for them outside of your school arrangement?

Kingsley Caldwell—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—How many hours would that be?

Kingsley Caldwell—It is still about 10.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Sorry. I thought you might also be doing work with them apart from the training side of it.

Kingsley Caldwell—No. The training is an hour a week, but then the other nine hours are for work with McDonald's.

CHAIR—Where will that lead to?

Kingsley Caldwell—A Certificate II in Retail Operations

CHAIR—Do you think you will stick with McDonald's?

Kingsley Caldwell—I currently am employed at two places.

CHAIR—So you have lots of options.

Kingsley Caldwell—Yes, which is good.

Janelle Patroni—I had an interest in the business side of things during years 8, 9 and 10 at Toolooa. It was not until year 11 that I realised the possibility of doing a VET course. I wanted to do accounting and legal studies, but unfortunately they are on the same line so I had some problems with my subjects. I went to see Mrs Fysh, who offered me a school based traineeship in office administration. I applied for the job and ended up working at Gladstone West State School here in Gladstone. I go over once a week, usually on Thursdays, and work from about eight until three just doing office administration within the school. So it has helped. I am earning some extra money as well as learning the skills. It is so good to learn the organisational skills and communication skills, especially being in year 12, because it has helped with my school work. It has been really good.

CHAIR—It is not a problem for you missing classes in other subjects in year 12?

Janelle Patroni—I sort of worked around my timetable. I have got spares as well, so I go on the day when I have the most spares. Also, Toolooa have their TAFE afternoon, which is on a Thursday afternoon. At one o'clock children go home and they can either study or work. I take that opportunity to go to work, so I am not missing out on as many subjects as I usually would. The teachers are really great. If I need any catching up, I just see them during my spares and they help me out. So it is good.

CHAIR—Where will you go after school then? How will you use that?

Janelle Patroni—The appeal for the traineeship came with the opportunity for me to still gain my OP. My dream has always been to go to uni, so when I get past year 12 I will hopefully get a good OP and go to university. I am not exactly sure of the course, but hopefully it will be either business accounting or communications.

CHAIR—So the traineeship that you are doing counts towards your OP?

Janelle Patroni—I end up getting a certificate II in office administration. If I do stay, I might be offered some extra work as well with Gladstone West, but it depends on what happens at the end of the year.

Ashley Herbener—I was a former student in year 12 at Toolooa State High School. At the start of year 12, about this time last year, I started doing industry placement, which was work experience one day a week on a Friday. I went across the road to work at Reef City Ford. The time I spent there was unpaid for the industry placement. Other students throughout the manual arts department also did it. I spent most of my time in the manual arts block, because I enjoy working with my hands, and the Ford mechanics course just happened to suit me. If I wanted, I could have gone for any other trade—carpentry, furnishing, electrician. Other students, mates of mine, did that. What I did was open to everyone doing manual arts. I went across to Ford and spent one day a week there learning the trade, learning the experience. If I did not like that experience, I could have put in an application to change to something else, but it suited me fine. I enjoyed it.

About halfway through my time there, a position became available for an apprentice and they offered it to me. At the time, I was not too sure because I did not want to drop out of year 12. I spoke with my school, Ford and the apprenticeship board and they eventually let me spend four days at work getting paid for it and one day at school to complete my year 12 certificate, which came in handy. I chose the day at school, which helped me most in doing English and Maths. I completed my Senior Certificate, went to prom and then there was just a rollover of paperwork to get a full-time apprenticeship.

CHAIR—To prom?

Ashley Herbener—Graduation. That is something every kid wants to do when they are at school.

CHAIR—Did you find it hard doing your Senior Certificate with only one day a week at school and four days of work? That would have been a big load.

Ashley Herbener—It was a bit awkward. I am also dyslexic so English was difficult. It did not slip, surprisingly. I went to school on Wednesday and did the first two periods of English. I had manual arts in my third period and the middle two periods were maths. In the afternoon, I had two spare periods where I could catch up on English or maths depending on which was the most important at the time because of assignments, assessments et cetera. I spent some afternoons doing work at home, which is rare for children obviously. It did not interfere much at all. I maintained my grades; they did not slip at all. It worked in perfectly.

CHAIR—You only did English and maths at school. Did you do other subjects for your Senior Certificate?

Ashley Herbener—I dropped the other four subjects that I was doing. Three of them were in manual arts and one was in marine studies. I did not lose any experience in manual arts because I was gaining it over at Ford. Furnishing was one of my other manual arts subjects and I do a lot of that at home. What they taught me at school really helped me with that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—On your certificate, apart from the English and maths and I think you got manual arts, did you get recognition for what you had done and then what you were doing at Ford when you took the apprenticeship up for those four days a week?

Ashley Herbener—On my Senior Certificate?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Yes.

Ashley Herbener—No I did not. However, I gained certificate III in engineering, furnishing and also marine and aquatic practices. Over at Ford, I had to keep a diary of all the things that I did over there, for example, workplace health and safety, safety with tools and all those things, which was also required at school in our manual arts department. Through the school, we organised a TAFE certificate so that what I learned over at Ford was transferred to the school. The school signed it down as a competency and I was signed off for it. What I have done at school has also helped me with my apprenticeship. I have recognised prior learning through work, which has put me ahead in my trade already.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is a great story.

CHAIR—Excellent, you have a great career ahead of you.

Ashley Herbener—Yes.

CHAIR—Very good.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And Ford.

Kimberley Beare—Last year, I completed year 12 at Tannum Sands State High School. While I was in year 12, I gained a school based traineeship in aged care. I did that for the whole year and now I am a full-time trainee. It carried on once I had finished year 12. Through that, I got a certificate III in aged care. By law, you need to have a certificate III to work in an aged care facility so that helped out. I did that in my own time as well as getting experience from work. While I was at school, one day a week was allocated to my traineeship, but once I got more experience then work put me on afternoons and even on weekends, whenever they could fit me in. I started off in the low-care facility but now I specialise in dementia and high care. That helped boost me a lot for my age.

CHAIR—Yes.

Kimberley Beare—I got that through the school. At the start of the school year they announced that there were traineeships going in certain areas. I applied for this one through the Gladstone school apprentice board and was lucky enough to get picked; so that was really good. I finished certificate III and whatever modules I had completed in year 12 showed up on my senior certificate. I am completing certificate IV at the moment. So it is really good; I recommend it to anyone.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You have done very well.

Patrina Prange—I left Tannum Sands State High School two weeks ago as I got offered a full-time traineeship at Chris Trevor and Associates, solicitors. While I was at school, I disliked it—even though I got very good marks in years 11 and 12. I did work placement in 2002 at Addecco Labour Hire. While I was doing work experience I was offered a position running the office by myself as they absolutely loved how I worked there. I was really good. They actually offered me a full-time position there after I finished my work experience, but I wanted to finish year 12—which I did not do as I just got offered a full-time traineeship. With the traineeship I am in now I am completing the Certificate II in Office Administration and after certificate II, I will be going on to certificate III. After I have finished my traineeship, which will be next year, I will be a permanent staff member.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—They have offered you a job?

Patrina Prange—Yes.

CHAIR—There are some great stories there and they are all very different. You are all doing very well. One thing I would be interested in, because there is such a range of career paths that you are choosing, is what made you choose the area of vocation that you are going into? Was it because of your families, guidance from your careers counsellor here or because it was something that you grew up with and which you liked? Some students in some schools have said to us that they had terrific information and direction from their careers officer or vocational education teacher. Others have said that it was there but they did not use it very much. How did that work for you guys? Did you have a lot of sessions with your careers guidance teacher or vocational education teacher or did you think that you did not need that?

Jason Bedford—The way I got into my work experience was to find out about it from Greg Jamison who works at NRG. He basically told me what I would be doing out there. Because of the computer side of it and the actual hands-on work, I was really interested. I have always wanted to do something with computers considering that they are going to be the way of the future. That interested me and then I went to Mr Hay to find out what I could do to go out there during school time. Instead of just going out there during the holidays, I wanted to go during school time.

CHAIR—Did any of you find that you did not really have any idea before you went to your careers teacher and it was only through the information that he or she gave you that you then got an idea or did you all have it pretty much worked out? It sounds like you all had a pretty good idea of where you were going anyway.

Ian Robinson—I went to the guidance officer here, Mr Burke. He told me about the Youth Access Program in the hospitality industry. My brother-in-law had worked in the hospitality industry so I thought I would do that too. Ever since then I have really like cooking.

Ashleigh Andrews—It was actually my aunty who pushed me into hairdressing. She said that she would haunt me for the rest of her life if I did not do hairdressing. I was talking to my cousin and she said that, if that was really what I wanted to do, I should go down to the salon the next day and talk to her about it. The main person here at school who had so much faith in me was actually Mrs Fysh. She actually used to get her done at our salon, and she knows exactly what I was put through. So I thank her and my Auntie Trish.

Ben Dunstan—I got into it an apprenticeship because when I was a young fellow I was always around motors. I had a bomb car, a motorbike and an outboard to keep going—and they would always break down. I could never keep them running for longer than five hours at a time.

CHAIR—I know that problem.

Ben Dunstan—I was always fixing them. I did not really want to be a mechanic, because there are too many fiddly bits—and a fitter is pretty much the same—so I thought about an apprenticeship as a mechanical engineer. I saw our guidance counsellor and told him my situation and what I wanted to do. I had no idea what a mechanical engineer really did; I just liked the name 'mechanical engineer' —and thought, 'Excellent!' The counsellor sat me down and told me that I would be looking at drawings and sitting at a desk all day. I asked him whether I would get to touch anything, and he said, 'Maybe sometimes.' Then he told me what a fitter did. He said, 'You're pulling pumps apart and you replace bits.' That was exactly what I had been doing all the time—but this time I would be paid for it as a career. It also helps you out at home—wherever you need it, really. There is not really a shortage of fitters around, but there is apparently a shortage of apprentices. So that was how I ended up getting into it.

Kimberley Beare—I actually wanted to work with disabled children. While I was going through school I had a fascination with them. I was talking to the guidance counsellor and he gave me information about certificates I could do. But then I was offered a traineeship in aged care, and I thought I would have a go at that because you get a trial period before you have to say whether or not you want to keep at it. I did pretty well, so I thought I would keep at it. And I really enjoy it.

Kingsley Caldwell—Grade 9 was when I found out that I enjoyed cooking. I decided to do home economics through one of the subjects at school, which was one of the options. After that I made a few visits to the guidance counsellor. He gave me information about career options and pathways to go down to become a chef or to assist with cooking and stuff.

CHAIR—Our time is nearly over, so I will just ask you one other question. How well do you think the system works in getting you into training courses and into the workplace while you are still at school? Perhaps I can put it this way: if there are a couple of things you had to tell us about how the system could be improved, what would you say? How could it work better to make those connections between school, training and work?

Ben Dunstan—You could offer payments. Payments are always a good incentive.

CHAIR—But you told us that you are getting paid.

Ben Dunstan—No—for the training, I mean. Maybe there could be a longer period. I did one day a week for work placement and some of the jobs I was learning probably could have taken two or three days to get used to. If you work in a computer lab, it would probably take you a day to read the book—and you really need to do that. So maybe extending the period could be an idea.

CHAIR—Are there any other ideas?

Ian Robinson—You could work there one day out of school—like, when you are supposed to be at school you work there—and then on the weekends you can go there and work.

CHAIR—Do any of you have that arrangement? Did you when you were at school?

Ian Robinson—I did when I did the youth access course. I worked at the Grand Hotel.

CHAIR—At the same time?

Ian Robinson—Yes. Every Thursday and sometimes on Saturday night I would go up and help as well.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Were you paid for that?

Ian Robinson—No.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You were happy to help them out and they helped you with a bit more training and experience?

Ian Robinson—Yes.

Janelle Patroni—I would say that it may be helpful to get experience in different work areas. I do office admin at Gladstone West. But office admin at, say, a doctor's surgery or a lawyer's office would be completely different. Having that experience in a different work environment—doing the same sort of thing but in a different environment—might be a little bit more helpful.

CHAIR—So you would like the school to be helping organise that for you?

Janelle Patroni—I have not talked to anyone about it; it is just an idea. I do get used to working in a school environment, I will end up in a certificate II, but working in a lawyer's office—

CHAIR—A broader range of experiences.

Janelle Patroni—Yes.

Jason Bedford—I basically think it should be giving students more choices. Instead of doing a block during the holidays, they could have, say, two days a week during school or half a day a

week during school. This is letting them have the option of doing what they want rather than having a select area. Otherwise you will lose a lot of interest.

Ashley Herbener—Through what I did I actually did not find any problems with it. Going out into industry, if I did not enjoy it the school was flexible enough to allow me to change my job. Some people are going out to the GPA and I know after a certain time they were to move on to another area to get more experience. If I chose I could change, but I seemed to like to where I was working. So really I would not change anything to do with the program. It is entirely up to the school and the school did well in what it had to do.

CHAIR—Great. We are just about out of time. Are there any others?

Patrina Prange—The program is very good, it is really good experience, but, as Ben said, I think you need a longer period of time to have the training and everything to go with it. You have your standard 30 days that you are allowed to go and I think that should be extended.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That has been very helpful to us. Congratulations. You have all got a great career path ahead of you. It is a terrific story. Good luck to you all.

[10.24 a.m.]

MANTTAN, Mr David, Executive Director (Schools), Education Queensland

BROOKS, Mr Rohan Gerard, Deputy Principal, Tannum Sands State High School

CONNOLLY, Mr Malcolm John, Head of Department (Practical Arts), Tannum Sands State High School

HAY, Mr Wayne Allan, Head of Department (Business Education) and Head of Senior Schooling, Tannum Sands State High School

JOHNSTON, Mr Raymond Keith, Principal, Tannum Sands State High School

CONTI, Mrs Julie Maree, Teacher, Home Economics, Toolooa State High School

FYSH, Mrs Raelene Esme, Deputy Principal, Toolooa State High School

PACEY, Ms Debra Anne, VET Coordinator, and Teacher, Business Education, Toolooa State High School

WADE, Mr Gregory Kevin, Head of Department (Vocational Studies), and Head of Department (Design), Toolooa State High School

CHAIR—Would you like to make any introductory comments before we proceed to a discussion?

Mr Johnston—We have a short PowerPoint presentation that Raelene and I will jointly make. We thank the committee for joining us and particularly for hearing those students' stories this morning. Raelene Fysh and I would like to make a fairly short presentation just to introduce this session, and hopefully we will leave most of the time for questions. Basically, we would like to inform you about why we think VET is so important in schools, what we are seeing in schools at the moment as the key challenges in delivering vocational education in schools, why it is so important that we continue to get support from not only employers and the community but also state and federal governments and where we see the future of voc ed in schools going.

VET is working for students, it is working for schools and it is working for Australia. If we take each of those in turn, having students being able to access the sorts of opportunities that you have heard of this morning from our students and ex-students is definitely working for us in increasing retention rates in schools. It is no good having increased retention rates if kids are just coming back to schools and parking themselves here. They really need worthwhile things to do while they are at school and vocational education is playing an important part in that.

Transitioning is happening much better. Rather than wanting students to finish an extra year—for example, year 10 and now we want to finish them at year 11 and then we want to finish them at year 12—and then still having them come to the end of the queue and jump off,

what we are seeing with vocational education is a better transition for the students. For example, the boy at the end, Ashley, who was working with Ford, has one foot in each camp and is feeling very comfortable in moving to the new camp and eventually taking his foot out of the old camp. Ten or 20 years ago we would have done our best in schools, hoped it had worked, put him out to Ford and it may or may not have worked—and we would not have even known. Now we are transitioning from one to the other.

They were really powerful stories that those students were telling. I am sure you could sense, as I did in hearing from some of the students whom I had not heard or seen before, the high self-esteem that it generates in students. There are students who are struggling at school and finding bullying a problem. One of the girls said that when she had accessed a program she suddenly started to believe in herself, she had adults telling her she was doing great things, and she started to believe that more and more. That was the blossoming of that kid.

One of the great things is that students have powerful connections with schools. Going to the prom or the graduation is important. Attending the athletics day is important. The social environment that schools provide, and do a very good job at, is part of keeping students connected with each other in a place where they feel comfortable. If we can do that, by providing that for them and helping the transition to the big, bad world—and I think schools are doing that very well—then that is a powerful thing. It is working also for schools.

It is working also for schools. We have a much more balanced curriculum than we had a decade or two ago. It really is driving culture change in schools. Some of us who have been in the game longer than others have in the past sometimes struggled with the concept that, once we finish with kids at grades 9 and 10, we are not just providing university preparation for grade 11 and 12 kids. That was a real challenge through the eighties and nineties for us. I believe schools met the challenge very well, but there has been some culture change—we are still overcoming that—about the purposes of schooling. But when you get stories as powerful as you heard here—and teachers know these stories—culture will start to change very quickly. I believe it is changing. Change has particularly accelerated in the last five or 10 years.

We are starting to value more the very different aspirations of students. We are not seeing it as, 'If you get to university, that is top drawer; if you only make it to TAFE, that is not too bad; if you have to drop out and go to work—well, we did the best we could.' That is not the concept that schools have now. We are starting to value all these different aspirations equally and trying to support them. When you hear students describe themselves as rebels and you see them 12 months later in a blazer presenting to a committee like this, obviously it has a major positive effect on behaviour management issues. It is great that we are now finding stronger links between schools and all the partners out there. It is something we have been seeking, we are getting better at doing it and people outside the fence are starting to connect better with us too.

I really think it is working for our community at large, for our country. That acceptance of different pathways that I spoke about just before is starting to happen Australia-wide in our community. We are not seeing people's different aspirations as different levels but just as different. Students are better skilled for the work force. We can always do a better job on that, but they really are leaving with work-ready skills. That probably was not happening as much 20 years ago. It is enforcing the notion that school is not just something that happens to you and you finish and that is it for the next 30 or 40 years, you just wait till you retire. Our society is moving so quickly and it is about lifelong learning. Those kids who are doing voc ed are getting

that concept through to them much more than they did in our traditional modes. Some students—rebels—really do re-engage in learning and while they are doing their voc ed they come back with some better reason to learn their English or their maths and things that they were not engaged in before.

Let me discuss the key issues. Every one of those stories was different and we could have provided another tableful and another tableful and they would all have been individual pathways. That is great. It also introduces challenges, of course, in trying to be flexible to meet those needs of students. We have students that are missing every Friday, we have students that are gone on Wednesday afternoon and we have students that are away for two-week block release and then come back. All those differences introduce challenges for us. I will talk a little about some of the challenges of flexibility and then Raelene will talk about policy, training and community engagement issues.

We had the old industrial model—one size fits all. We know we have to move away from that and we are. With those myriad opportunities and pathways, managing the administration becomes a much more complex task. We do have a duty of care for kids. We need to know where they are. Where we might have had 150 senior students all on the same type of timetable—six subjects for two years—now we have maybe 100 of those 150 doing that and 50 of them doing all sorts of variations on that. When something happens, we need to know that Johnny is over at Ford or down at the hairdressers or wherever. Just that task of tracking where students are introduces a whole lot of administrative complexity. For the tracking of kids' pathways—what voc ed units they have done and what competencies they have been passed on—at our school we have two full-time teacher aides. They sit in a room all day, and they do some other tasks but a large part of their time is spent doing the admin of computer entry and so on, tracking all these sorts of things.

You heard strongly from some of those students about the impact that an appointment with a guidance officer made. That is a key part in individualising pathways—having really good guidance support. Unfortunately, we do not have enough guidance resources in schools. At our school, for example, we have a four-day-a-week guidance service and most of that service is taken up with crisis counselling—pregnancies and all sorts of things like that. A small portion of it is taken up by career counselling like you have heard about today. I would estimate that at our school we would need three full-time guidance officers to really do the job of individual goal setting and career path planning with kids properly.

It really is a big issue. Yes, there are wonderful web sites such as mycareer.com and so on that have been developed—they are great—but career guidance still needs that human interaction. Human interaction is expensive but it is crucial. Some of these students may not have started this pathway except for that crucial interview with the guidance officer. Sometimes we send students, or strongly suggest to them to go, to the guidance officer because they are playing up, but we have to remember that there is a hidden mass out there who are not playing up and who do not get to the guidance officer, simply because there is not enough time for us to have a structured program to force them to go. The self-referrals and the mandated referrals take up all the time that we have. I really think that is one of the key issues that needs to be thought about in this coming agenda. I would now like to hand over to Raelene to talk about some of the policy issues.

Mrs Fysh—That is the hard thing. Welcome to Toolooa, and thank you for choosing to come to our community. We believe that we have a story to tell which might be very useful in determining policy and a future vision for VET in Australia. The sorts of things that we are looking at here are in policy and legislation. I just might clarify something in relation to the students and the 30-days work experience. Legislation says that 30 days is the maximum work experience but that it can be varied by the principal of a school, and some principals have varied that to meet the flexibility challenges that we have now. Even though the 30-day rule is in there, principals still have that flexibility to vary it.

CHAIR—How much can they vary it?

Mrs Fysh—It could be double that, depending on the program and the students. That is something that we can clarify. When we refer to the 4.20 p.m. rule, we are talking about TAFE. ANTA funding has come to the fore in recent times, and that is through a funding rule of double dipping. A million hours in TAFEs are now put over to secondary school students. There is some difference with payments into schools and into TAFE colleges. But after 4.20 the students can become someone else—even though it is the same thing—and they can be accommodated under profile hours in the TAFE system. That is something we may have to look at, or there may have to be changes in the way in which that is done. Kim alerted us this morning that, with the ETRF, there will be changes and that the students will take with them the training money. That is still to be put into place.

We have been very fortunate in Queensland in relation to coordination in VET in schools. We have had a close association with Education Queensland. The Catholic system has valued VET and has had some coordinators. We have been doing that in schools. The onerous accountability comes from the Commonwealth bodies. We had an ECEF or ASTF cluster in our ECEF. Trust me, when I first started off with that, we had to do quality matrixes and all sorts of things just to get funding. It has been cut back over a period of time. Our first grant was for $50,000. It was cut back to $23,000, and now we are lifting it as our numbers increase. That was for structured workplace learning, not work experience. I suppose when we were working in schools and doing it on a voluntary basis, filling out all those forms was a little concerning. A lot of clusters folded because of that.

You have no doubt seen the tables in the Queensland submission on the distribution of ANTA funding to the states. Queensland has the greatest take-up of school based traineeships and apprenticeships. Over a period of time, we have had some concerns to do with being involved in training resources. Sometimes the demands from ITABs, especially in construction at the moment, are a bit of a concern. Of course, in Gladstone we do not see too many ITABs. We have a MERS ITAB with John Marxsen from NRG, and we have worked with him, but most of the ITABs are in south-east Queensland. One of the concerns with our being in a regional area such as Gladstone is that we do not get to see some of these people. Sometimes what they are putting in place does not reflect our views and what we think might happen.

The teacher industry placement is part of our HR component and AQTF compliance. That is very expensive. We do not get any extra moneys to do that. We need to have teachers out there in industry. Last year we built it into our professional development, and that worked really well. Teachers were going out throughout the year and bringing it straight back into classrooms. It was just amazing. After teachers had done IT for a week in the workplace, they were able to bring those practices back into the schools and implement them almost straightaway.

We will hear a bit more about the undergraduate training in VET this afternoon. My association with the universities is very helpful in bringing preservice teachers into these schools here and also, we hope, bringing them on board as teachers, because they have the industry background.

Clusters are dependent on funding, especially from ECEF now. Local businesses within this region want to help, and we are very happy with the commitment we have had from them. Sometimes industry bodies are demanding, but they are not always responsive. There are some issues with QAL. We do not have people on site there because it is a chemical site and the induction and safety procedures do not allow us to have students on it.

One of the real challenges is how to educate parents to understand what is happening in schools and the visioning of where we see schools going. Parents just want students to do a full timetable, nine to three. They all want them to be brain surgeons but, unfortunately, that is not going to be the case. It is a real challenge for schools and communities to change that culture. There are difficulties in connecting with small business, because they are busy. We find that, unless we have a dedicated coordinator, we are not going to be able to get out and tap into small business—and they are the majority businesses in our towns. There is some nonacceptance of school VET, where students have done VET in schools, gone somewhere and then had to redo it, which is a bit demeaning.

What we want from Commonwealth governments is continued financial support. Certainly the clusters and the sharing and networking of knowledge and resources have been wonderful, but they need to continue—and you will hear from people within clusters and so on later on. We still need to work through state-Commonwealth issues and ANTA funding. Of course, as you can see, we are really supporting our future young Australians. With the growth in this particular community, we believe we have a resource that the industry and community need, and we are supporting students to make those choices so they have those options.

We have some ideas for the future. We want some limited extension into junior schools, especially of career guidance. That is the improved resources for goal setting. We really need people to work one on one with these students in getting careers, having work experience in the junior school and getting into some aspirations and goal setting programs. We certainly have improved the school, industry and small business links and we have improved multiagency. Things like Centrelink et cetera are a very important part, and we are looking at that option.

In summary, we believe that we have achieved huge successes with our students. Certainly we believe we have done quite a lot in this region and we are promoting VET in a very positive way. We are meeting the range of student needs and will continue that. We get challenges every day as to how we can meet their needs. Those challenges are: linking businesses and industry; responding creatively to timetables—being involved in timetables, I know that it is a bit of a challenge and I know that Rowan at Tannum Sands has also had some challenges with timetables and flexibility—funding and individualising programs; keeping students engaged in learning, which I see as one of the most important aspects; and providing successful transition-to-work training. This needs to be replicated Australia-wide. So VET needs continued support, especially in our school systems. Thank you.

CHAIR—Could we please have a copy of that presentation?

Mrs Fysh—Yes. There are copies here.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I am curious about your emblem. Do I see a dragon in it?

Mrs Fysh—They are the four symbols of our houses; yes, there is a dragon.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And there is a tiger?

Mrs Fysh—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What are the other two?

Mrs Fysh—A dolphin and a bird. They are our four houses at the school.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Dragons and tigers.

Mrs Fysh—They have nothing to do with football teams!

CHAIR—Thank you for that presentation. Congratulations on the energy and initiative that you have shown; I think it is fantastic. There are some terrific things happening for the kids. Those young people here this morning give great encouragement and a great example of what can happen. As you said, Ray, you could probably fill the table several times over. I want to ask about those people who perhaps would not be able to sit at this table—those who seem to fall between the cracks and do not seem to fit into any of the many pathways and options. Are there things that we ought to be doing in VET that we are not doing? Are there ways in which the system is not catering for some of those other students who do not want to follow an ordinary academic path but who cannot seem to connect to one of these pathways that these outstanding young people who were here this morning have connected to?

Mr Manttan—Over the last few years I have seen an increased retention rate in high schools that are offering vocational education and specific pathways for kids so that they can actually pick a course. Ray and Raelene pointed out that many students do not necessarily understand before they get to the end of year 10 what some of those options in the senior school really are. So we need to have programs that enable kids to understand and their parents to understand. Parents are significant in helping make decisions about choices at year 10, and having them involved earlier in planning is most important, particularly for those kids who are likely to drop out.

CHAIR—So, do the vocational education teachers and guidance teachers here have a program of connecting with parents earlier on? Is that a direction in which we ought to be going?

Mrs Fysh—One of our concerns is that we have not had the resources in that area. I believe that some of the at-risk students—some of the students you are talking about—who are not connecting are those who are engaged in academic subjects and do not do any vocational program. They have made some fairly poor subject choices along the way and end up at the end of year 12 with an OP that will not get them anywhere, and they do not have the vocational programs or skills that will get them into places. That is a group that we have identified in the

last two years, and now the guidance officers are working very closely with all students but certainly with a group of those students who have not selected subjects that will lead them into a productive transition from school. They have been our concerns, and they have been girls. I have identified groups of girls, and some boys, whose parents—and it has come back to parents—have said, 'You will do Maths B, Physics and Chemistry.' In fact, they are not succeeding in those areas, so at the end of year 12 they are really in no-man's-land because they cannot get into university and they do not have the skills to be in line for apprenticeships and traineeships. They are the people we are trying to work with now, and the guidance officer, and that is why we need more resources in the career area rather than just in guidance. In fact, my opinion is that we will probably always need career officers and guidance officers in schools.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Following on the educative process with parents and students themselves, what about staff? Is there still a tension within schools with regard to this culture?

Mr Brooks—Yes, absolutely. Ray was alluding to the change of culture and the need to work at that. A staff person on a full timetable has their head down and is working flat out. They do not often see what we see as the students move in and out of the school at the administrative level or the head of department for senior schooling level. We are managing these various flexibilities for students. A lot of staff just see that, all of a sudden, once or twice a week, that student is not there.

Our HOD, Wayne Hay, works hard at keeping teachers informed about the movements of students and the implications of that. He has some documents there in terms of the tracking procedures that we have tried to put in place. Part of that is not only for the school administration and for the student but also for the teachers so that they have some idea of what is going on and have a better vision of the success for that individual student. That still does not make it any easier for them at the coalface trying to do the other learnings.

If I could carry on with what Raelene was saying about part of the problem for those students falling through the cracks, we have a group who end up being picked up because they stick up their heads out of the sand. Because of their behavior problems or because they are really struggling, they get pulled out first and are channelled into support systems that might end them up in traineeships and what have you.

We have also got the group who are very academic. They travel along well in the current structures. And we have a group who do not have a real idea of what they want to do. They have been told they should be at school. They select a range of subjects that they may be interested in, but there is even a lack of flexibility there depending on the schools resources and what we can provide. We are trying to provide a greater range of non-traditional academic subjects, but that is limited. The students' motivation in that is limited by their perception of how important those subjects are. That importance is raised as they gain experience outside the school environment as well and that school-community link is becoming more and more important.

Mr Hay—Some of the things that were raised there are very important—the fact that we have to be flexible. But along with being flexible comes complexity, and tracking students is a real problem. It is a very time-consuming thing and I feel that it is very underresourced, even though we do have two teacher aids on timetabling and tracking voc ed. It is also part of my role, but I also have a teaching role. That makes it even more difficult. Half the time I am

running around like a madman. I believe really strongly in it and I think we have see today some of the success stories. We have had some similar success stories among the students who go to the TAFE college in the at-risk group, the work readiness group. I think it is a really heartening thing to see students who were going to drop out of school, who were troublemakers go on and do really great things. For example, we had seven out of nine: two went to full-time work, one went to full-time TAFE, one went to a school based traineeship, another got part-time work and is trying to negotiate a traineeship for herself, and two are still attending school. We think it is a really worthwhile path for those sorts of students.

Mr Johnston—That is exactly the sort of program that is under threat if the 4.20 rule cuts in. Whereas that program ran very successfully last year, there is a threat that that sort of program may not be able to happen. These are kids that we caught early in year 9 or year 10. They are highly at risk of leaving school, highly at risk of a life of misfortune. If we cannot solve this problem at a policy level, it is a really poor show.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—For clarification, when you talk about tracking, I can appreciate that you have admin people here. Let us say that Janelle goes out. Do you have trackers out there as well?

Mr Brooks—That is tracking of—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Of students in work placement and whatever else.

Mr Brooks—There is the combination of the industry grouping of SAIN, School and Industry Network, that is set up and the support of that network is crucial in helping us coordinate what is going on in following a student into the workplace and watching what they are doing in the workplace. Other than the occasional visit to the workplace, nothing else, no; we just could not resource it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You just could not carry it out. That is an interesting one.

Mr Hay—One of the things that we found we had to do was to bring in a process where students are reviewed on their performance at school. Also, I will be talking to their employers about their performance in the workplace, so they know they are going to be watched, encouraged and supported through that as well. Again, that is going to be very time consuming, but we see it as a very necessary thing. How effectively we can do that depends on our human resources, time and money.

Mr Manttan—Kerry, you alluded before to the kids who slip through the cracks and who actually are not in the 70-odd per cent who go through to year 12. For those students—and I think Raelene alluded to this in her presentation—there is a need for schools to be able to be the full-service venue for things such as Centrelink; that is, those sorts of social infrastructure that can actually help students who are at risk. Where schools have entered into localised arrangements with those agencies, there are positive outcomes for kids, particularly those kids who are likely to drop out in the years 9-10 area as soon as they turn 15.

Mrs Fysh—We also have groups of independent live-in students. Because of issues at home, they have left home. Part of the Centrelink aim is to engage them in schooling. We have worked

with special programs for them because we have issues with them. They never get up early enough to get here by nine o'clock, they are at the doctors quite a bit because of their health and they do not know how to manage their money in a lot of cases. Certainly, health and nutrition is an issue. We have put a program together so that they can come here at a later time in the morning and engage, although not in a full program, in some of the VET programs such as Work Readiness and link in with Centrelink and the multiagencies around town. We have seen some students actually get to the end of year 12, which is quite an achievement for them, given their circumstances. They are homeless or having problems at home, and just being able to get to school is an absolute achievement for a lot of them. So they are becoming a bigger group within our schools as well that we need to cater for in a very flexible way. We need to put special programs in place to support them to get to the end of year 12.

CHAIR—There are a lot of extra pressures on schools, aren't there?

Mrs Fysh—Yes, definitely.

CHAIR—Wayne, you said before that you have a half-teaching load and a half-supervision load as careers teacher.

Mr Hay—Yes. I teach three classes.

CHAIR—Obviously, this is a reflection of the funding resource problem. If there were more resources available, do you think it would be desirable for your role to be fully looking after careers work placement issues? Would more resources be better used employing an admin assistant to do a lot of that work for you or would more resources be better used to release teachers for professional development?

Mr Hay—All of the above.

CHAIR—I had a feeling that is what you were going to say.

Mr Hay—All of those things would assist in making a program which we feel is really good much better.

CHAIR—Should that decision be made by the schools or should it be made centrally by local inspectors or the department?

Mr Hay—I think there should be more money.

Mr Johnston—Flexibility for the schools would be better.

CHAIR—Because you have a better idea of how that money could be best used.

Mr Manttan—I support the money going to schools as well. The model that you see operating here in Gladstone with Toolooa State High School, Gladstone State High School and Tannum Sands State High School is different from a model that can operate at Moura State High School, which is separated by a greater distance and a different set of needs. But there are still needs at Moura State High School that need to be addressed, so I think having some sort of

local flexibility in the way funds are actually used, on both a cluster basis and an individual school basis, is important.

CHAIR—Do you think, David, that the department is likely to go down that path? Departments generally tend to want to have their hands on where the money goes and how it is used. Do you think it is possible that, within the administration of the Queensland education department, for instance, they could say to schools, 'Here is extra money'—be it from the Commonwealth or the state—'for VET in Schools. You decide how you want to use it'?

Mr Manttan—If my understanding is right—and I am not sure that it totally is—most of the ANTA funds, for example, that come to school based traineeships, apprenticeships and vocational education in schools come directly to schools and are based around the number of students that schools have. How that money gets used then is, I think, dependent upon each individual site. Maybe sometimes that funding could be better used on cluster bases to support a greater range of kids across schools. I guess that part of my agenda is to have more clustering arrangements between schools to better utilise the existing set of resources for kids.

Mrs Fysh—The number of students is increasing each year in the VET area and whether the resources are being increased to match that increase in growth is something that needs to be looked at. I do agree with Dave about the clustering impacts. If we could share teachers, certainly specialist teachers, resources, facilities, and our NRG site is a good case in point, we would be able to then deliver to the local community—I think that local needs are certainly important in the way we structure how we organise these clusters—we could deliver a quality product. That includes universities as well.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Have you found in your program that there is a trade-off—we talked about tension before—with the more VET students you have? That seems to be more resource hungry than the more traditional subjects, so of course there is cost shifting going on. That must affect class sizes. I do not need to tell you; I am sure that goes on all the time. No equity funding is built into this. As you get more resource hungry in order to meet a need, other areas will suffer or you have to rationalise to the point of cutting your other programs. So it must be an interesting balancing act without equity funding.

Mr Johnston—The crucial point about that is that, for example, in Queensland schools, in years 11 and 12, our staffing ratio is 23 students to one teacher, yet most VET programs operate around the 14 to 16 class size range. So you have to operate non-VET classes somehow to make the average come as close as you can to 23, and yet the maximum class size is 25.

CHAIR—That is a tough formula to work with.

Mr Johnston—It is a pretty tough formula.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—On the issue of educating parents and changing the whole school culture and the way the parents perceive that, do you have many difficulties in the physical movement and location of children? Parents knew their kids were at school from nine to three, especially when parents are working or whatever, but now they could be halfway between school and the workplace or at TAFE or starting early or finishing late or finishing early and wandering around town. Do you have any of those issues?

Mr Brooks—You have touched on an issue very dear to my heart: the geography of a school. Schools are still being built in a way that suits the traditional format of student movement. In a school where you have students aged 12 years up to 18 years, sometimes 19 years, the needs of those students are so diverse, yet the physical structures you are trying to cater with are the same. As a consequence of students moving in and out, you get grade 9 students seeing kids in grades 10 and 11 moving in and out of the school at will and they think, 'That's a good idea,' and they are off too.

You heard all the kids talking about being able to cope with their varied programs because they have what they call 'spares'. We have a term where we say, 'We expect you to be doing a full program of study.' A program of study is no longer the six traditional subjects. It could be a traineeship and five subjects or a traineeship and four subjects or a TAFE course and five subjects. That means that they are off-site. The key thing is flexibility. Students are moving outside the fence. Ray talked about a fenceless school and the kids moving outside the fence. That creates more complexity inside the school.

One of the big things is physically being able to cater for the students and their needs. If they are on a spare, where do they go? You will see a whole lot of shaded areas around this school, and a lot of the time the kids are sitting underneath the table doing work or just having a break. We talked about cultures before. At the start of that issue, a lot of teachers were upset because they saw students sitting doing nothing, whereas in fact they were doing things at other times, at the less traditional times. So the physical geography of a school, its physical abilities to cater for the diversity of needs for students, is becoming much more demanding and much more complex. We have more than a teacher timetabled within our school simply to cater for the flexibility of students and when they are not in their traditional classrooms. That then impacts on our staffing ratio, as Ray was saying. It is not just the one to 25 in years 11 and 12; it is also the one to 30 in years 8, 9, and 10.

CHAIR—Have you had any or many incidences of difficulties with that, where parents think their kids are at school, you think they are at work or TAFE and no-one knows where they are? Do they get into mischief in town?

Mr Brooks—Happily, no, not of that nature. Basically, once the kids are involved in those programs, the reality would be that, if they were not going to work, it would be a fairly significant time lag, unless there was a coincidental catch-up between parents and the school to actually find that out. But, as a general experience, it is not a problem at this stage. The majority of kids actually appreciate the opportunities that they are gaining outside of the school and they tend to adhere to the attendance requirements fairly well. Probably the bigger issue is their attendance at school once they get a taste of things outside. Some are motivated to come back in. Others think, 'This is good,' and they want more of it. That is a positive in itself, I guess, if they are prepared to go out and go after more of that type of thing.

The attitude of the parents is interesting too. I am actually finding in my position now a small but growing group of parents who have latched on to this idea that flexibility is available. I am actually getting them coming into me asking and looking for that flexibility. Some of the kids here this morning were saying that they became interested in what was going on or what they would like to do through friends and family. Quite often, friends and family organise traineeships or work experience, and then they come in and tell us, 'I've got this. What are you going to do about it?' It is not in those words, but basically that is it. Then the school is trying to

react to the needs and the established patterns that the kids and their parents have started to set up.

Mr Hay—While Rohan is talking about that, you heard from Jason Bedford this morning, and his mother is coming in to talk to you this afternoon. They were really a test case. They pushed the boundaries of what was allowable for students going out to work experience. So that came from the parents as well, and that is what Rohan is talking about. We are finding more and more inquiries and pressure from parents for that to happen.

CHAIR—I am afraid our time is up. Is there any final key issue that you want to put to us? We get the message loud and clear about funding. Are there any other key issues?

Mrs Fysh—I think the key issue is the passion of our staff. The success of our programs is put down to the passion that our staff members have in the schools in delivering the types of programs which you have heard about this morning. They are a very dedicated group of people. I know there are some who have not spoken to you. If a school has the passion in it that they want to do the best by their students, I think the outcomes are going to be the successful transition of students into the community. The passion highlights perhaps best practice schools and communities—not only of the teachers but also of the community.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—We do not want them to burn out, though, do we?

Mrs Fysh—No, that is right. We have to support them. That is why I believe the issue for you to take back is that they do need support, they do need industry release and they do need more resources within the school. Then I think it will continue to be very successful.

Mr Johnston—The message I would like to send back is just how creative and energetic schools are. I do not believe it is just these two schools, obviously; they are all over Australia. Schools generally are not short of ideas about how to enact this agenda. They are not short of creative ways to help kids. Sometimes, yes, it is resources, sometimes it is policy and sometimes it is just tradition and practice. The message I want to send is: support schools, get the funding direct to them as much as possible, empower them to do what they are already doing a great job of and want to do even more.

CHAIR—Ray, you said sometimes it is policy.

Mr Johnston—Yes, things like the 4.20 rule. We had a really successful teen at risk program last year. Suddenly, we are being told that maybe we cannot run it any more.

CHAIR—Apart from funding issues, are there any policy issues from a federal point of view that you think are impeding what ought to be happening?

Mr Johnston—My main beef about that is the overaccountability sometimes expected from bodies such as ECEF. We all expect accountability when we are using taxpayers' funds, but let us not make it an eight-hour job for a committee of three teachers who are doing it on a weekend—to put in a document that is probably going to be put in a filing cabinet and not even read.

CHAIR—Are there any other comments?

Mr Manttan—There is an issue around the way the federal government funds vocational education and training in schools. Funding needs to keep up with number and quantity.

CHAIR—Yes, that is put to us frequently.

Mr Manttan—It should be differentially based around where the numbers are, not about where you live.

Mr Brooks—There is one other thing. If the perception is that what is occurring is good and that it is going to go further, there are some other implications for the community in general. The focus of employers and businesses is on profit and on running a business, yet the reality is for us to be able to support our students. They are moving more into the community and there needs to occur, probably at a national level, an appreciation of the implications of the changes in the nature of learning and in the nature of training. If we want to get philosophical about it, I believe there needs to be an appreciation by the community and businesses, both large and small, of their responsibilities in supporting youth and developing the country. What we are doing here is great, but we are talking about a whole group of students who have not yet been touched and if we are going to try to do things in education there has to be a response in the community which will be able to cater for that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. It has been very helpful and inspiring.

Proceedings suspended from 11.12 a.m. to 11.31 a.m.

BEDFORD, Ms Kerry Anne, Parent Representative, Tannum Sands State High School

COLEMAN, Mr Roderick Roy, Manager, Schools and Industry Network, Gladstone Region

COOK, Mrs Tracey Karen (Private capacity)

GREENAWAY, Mr Mark William, Manager, Operations Support Services, Gladstone Port Authority

LOVEDAY, Mr Bruce Robert, Service Manager, Andersons Auto City

MANNING, Mr Alban Louis, Manager, Monadelphous Engineering

MARXSEN, Mr Neville (John), Maintenance Training Specialist (Apprentices and Maintenance Employees), NRG Gladstone Operating Services Pty Ltd

O'SULLIVAN, Mr Peter Thomas, Safety and Employee Relations Manager, Gladstone Port Authority

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us today to be part of this inquiry. We have had a very interesting time so far and it has been very helpful to us. Please tell us which company you are with and your connection with vocational education—whether you have a school based trainee or apprentice, are part of the SAIN system or have someone on work placement—and how your connection works with the school.

Mr Marxsen—I have the role of looking after the apprentice training and maintenance training at NRG. We have industry placements through the local school and have been part of setting up the school of excellence in engineering with Toolooa and the schools in the Gladstone region to get that up and running. We have 39 apprentices at NRG. We take them on in our own right. We do not use the group scheme for them. They are hired by us.

CHAIR—That is after they have left school?

Mr Marxsen—Yes. They are not school based apprentices.

Mr Greenaway—I am presently with GPA, but I had a lot to do with the development of the school of engineering excellence with NRG. At GPA I have a lot to do with the apprentices we have on site and at NRG I had a lot to do with school based people that came into the workplace to gain experience.

CHAIR—They did not actually start as apprentices while they were at school?

Mr Greenaway—No.

Mr O'Sullivan—I am the human resource manager at the Gladstone Port Authority. I am also the Chair of SAIN in Gladstone. At GPA we have students in for work placements from time to time. There is also a relationship between vocational education and my work with SAIN in my capacity as chair.

Mrs Cook—I was involved with vocational education from the hospitality side, although I am not currently. We had a lot of students over an eight-year period as work placement. I am also on the SAIN committee. My new occupation is with Ken's Plumbing and Decor. I was previously involved in hospitality and training. Now I am involved in retail sale.

Mr Coleman—I am the Manager of the Schools and Industry Network—the workplace coordinator of the ECEF funded community partnership. Our statistics show the number of placements have been growing over the last couple of years. Last year we placed 124 students in structured work placement. This year we have a projected figure of 813 in structured work placements directly attributed to competency based, nationally recognised courses. We also facilitate work experience and school based traineeships in town.

Mr Manning—I am the manager at Monadelphous. We have one school based trainee with us from this very school. I am new to Gladstone, and obviously I want to encourage it a bit more. This is where my involvement has come in. We have apprentices from group training, probably seven of them. From time to time we put kids through work experience.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What is your business?

Mr Manning—Heavy engineering.

Mrs Bedford—I am a parent of a child who is doing workplace training at NRG. Jason was here this morning.

Mr Loveday—I am the Service Manager for Andersons Auto City, which is the local Holden, Mitsubishi, Mazda and Daewoo dealership. We have young fellows for work placement, several of them throughout the year. We currently employ five apprentices in our own right. We have several trainees in different areas of the dealership. We are currently putting people through certificate III traineeships. I cannot give you exact numbers, but it is approximately 20 people currently going through certificate III.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Male and female?

Mr Loveday—Yes.

CHAIR—And they are all post school?

Mr Loveday—Yes, all post school. As I said to you earlier, the school based trainees are too expensive, in my opinion. It is cheaper to run an apprentice, certainly for the value that you get out of a one- or two-day a week person, and the cost of running them is way too much.

CHAIR—Rod, you said you place in structured workplaces 124 students a year.

Mr Coleman—Last year. In 2002 it was 124 students. This year, however, we have really expanded seriously. There are lots of different hospitality in Gladstone State High and child care is going at Gladstone State High whereas it was not before. The schools have actually picked up and we have got a much broader range of kids going out into industry. The actual total work experience/structured work placements that we did last year was 550. However, this year it is looking more like 1,200 in total that this community partnership will be putting out into industry. It is getting quite a bit of exposure out there.

CHAIR—It is certainly a large number. Are you managing to place everyone who wants to be placed? In some regions they have a real problem in there not being enough employment opportunities.

Mr Coleman—Our employer body in the Gladstone region is brilliant, and so far we have not come up against a problem, but I do believe that if we double our numbers come next year and we have, say, 2,200 then we will have to have organised areas to actually put those VET kids and we will have to create those environments to get them out to. The community will not sustain it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Is that your organisation, your collective, saying that is the total number out there and there is only so much capacity, or is it what you could handle and another provider could come in as well?

Mr Coleman—I take the view that when I get so many knock-backs the barriers are back, and I have not had that yet. So I am still expanding and pushing the boundaries and I have been finding that that is okay at the moment. My projection is that we will do the 1,100, maybe 1,200, and that will be fine for this year, but next year there could be some issues if we still get increased placements, work experience and structured work learning placements come through. That is my feeling as the workplace coordinator and controller of the Schools and Industry Network for the Gladstone region.

CHAIR—It seems to me from what you have just said that the structured work placements are going well but not many of you are taking on apprentices and trainees while at school—after school, but not many at school. Bruce made the point about trainees being too expensive compared to apprentices. Why has there not been much take-up of school based apprenticeships then?

Mr Coleman—It is the casual loaded rate of pay—$7.36 an hour for a year 11 student and $8.50 for a year 12 student—and at the moment there is no real avenue to get that information out there to the employer body. I actually make up a package to employers on school based traineeships and just this morning one of the guys that I made this package up for rang me and said that they wanted to take on two school based trainees. That is just this morning from Rocky's Cactus Jacks—a local hospitality employer. It costs money to get that package together and there is no sustainable funding to achieve that. I believe that if there was some funding available on a per capita basis or something like that we could get some great outcomes out of school based traineeships and work experience.

CHAIR—So the cost to the employer is not a disincentive?

Mr Coleman—I do not think so. It has changed. For school based traineeships, as of 1 January this year the upfront incentive for an employer is $2,200. If they retain that student after year 12 and the student gets their certificate II, it is a further $825. I believe the incentive is definitely there, but that has only changed this year and nobody has the information out there.

CHAIR—Did you know about that, Bruce?

Mr Loveday—No.

Mr Coleman—That is what I mean—nobody has got the information out there. I am in the process, but because we have limited funding we cannot get that information out there.

CHAIR—So there is $2,000 up front and then if they employ them after school—

Mr Coleman—If they employ them after school, within six months, they get another $825. That is extremely lucrative for an employer now. That has just happened as at 1 January this year.

CHAIR—This is a good meeting then, is it not, because it has already got one outcome?

Mr Coleman—It is, but I do have to say that the rules have also changed for group training companies and I do not believe that will benefit the school based traineeships in the long run.

CHAIR—Do you have an upgrade on that?

Mr Coleman—My information from a person in DEST was that the group training companies have a group training incentive of $1,100 for every employee that they put on. From 2003 to 2004 that incentive still stays. From 2004 to 2005 that incentive goes down to half, $550, and the year after that they do not get that incentive at all. If you think about that, group training companies are going to take the short-term view that there is nothing in it for them, so the only way that school based trainees are going to get put on is to be indentured by a particular employer. It will be one on one with that employer and they will not go through the group training companies. The companies will not be interested because there will not be any money in it for them to keep it rolling.

Mr Marxsen—In answer to your original question about why companies do not take on more, from our point of view there was a conscious decision taken. We used to have an apprentice training section at NRG and we used to train our people out there for three months before we would release them into the work group. When that shut down, it has been a suck and see arrangement to see where we were heading. We still take our apprentice intake on, we utilise TAFE to do it and we have a continuation of employment rather than the one or two days a week which it might be. It allows us better utilisation of those people when we have them back in the work force after their three weeks at TAFE. That was the main thing, to keep continuity of employment and keep working with them. Instead of having to manage the jobs around the one-day appointment, we had them in the system full time.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Was it economics that closed down your skill centre apprenticeships and trainees.

Mr Marxsen—It was purely economics. The results coming out were well known around the region, but everything was downsized when we were bought out. A decision was made to shut that area down, and that was purely dollars as far as I can see.

Mr Greenaway—That is the area that you would have seen this morning when you went out to the power station.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Yes, it will live again now.

Mr Greenaway—When you are looking at putting people from schools into industry, funding is one issue, but I think there are a couple of other issues—first of all, safety. These young people have come from very protected environments both at home and at school. You are throwing them into the middle of a huge industrial area. For instance, a power station has huge boilers and turbines spinning at 3,000 RPM. It is difficult for a young person to get his head around all of that. On top of that, we only see them for one day a week. You have a commitment to tagging that young person with a senior fitter and that affects that person's production and ability to do his job. If it was a normal apprentice—that is, an apprentice who had started his four-year training—they would not be moved from one situation to another. They are spending five days a week and 52 weeks a year in that environment. When you are pulling them from school and putting them into industry for one day, it probably takes them a couple of hours just to get their heads around the change.

Unfortunately, with the workplace health and safety laws that are around now, it really exposes industry terribly if something goes wrong. We do our best to make sure that does not happen, but unfortunately sometimes it does get in the way of how much a young person is exposed to the industry. From my point of view, it was one of the drivers behind the engineering school of excellence building that is going up at the power station. They can come into industry, but it is still a semiprotected environment. They are in the middle of the power station and they come through the front gates like everyone else, but they still go to an environment that is semiprotected. That is one of the things that we see with apprentices. When an apprentice comes from school, whether it be at the end of year 10, 11 or 12, he spends the first six months of his working life just getting his head around the changes that are going on—'I'm not at school. I don't start at nine o'clock and finish at three; I start at seven o'clock and go to 3.30 or four o'clock. Gee, there is a bit of overtime here. I have all these social changes going on around me. There are industrial issues; learning is now my responsibility. Gee whiz, I have to look after my tools. Hang on, that thing over there might hurt me.' So there are those changes.

One of the things that the work with Toolooa and the building out there is going to do is start getting rid of those changes, but in smaller chunks. It will not hit all at once. When we see them in industry as an apprentice, the first day is not, 'Hell, I've just left school and I'm now at work.' It is more like, 'Okay, I have been in this environment and I've spent two or three days a week here for the last two years, so let's just keep building on it.' Money is important, but there are a lot of other issues that sit around taking a young person into industry.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—A point of clarification: is insurance covered by the school and not the workplace?

Mr Coleman—Yes, the education department's insurance policy has coverage for that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And nothing is required of the employer?

Mr Marxsen—No.

CHAIR—Do some of the issues that Mark referred to as impediments for school based apprenticeships and trainees—OH&S issues and all of those sorts of things—not also apply to the structured workplace learning placements that you have?

Mr Coleman—Yes.

CHAIR—So are there benefits for you as employers in taking on participants in that structured program or do you do it mainly because of the benefits for the kids?

Mr O'Sullivan—I suppose it would depend on the industry. For us, it is a community obligation. We recognise our role as part of the Gladstone community. I know that in some industries—for example, hospitality and retail, where part-time work fits the industry—the students can be productive members of that work site relatively quickly. But, especially in heavy industry, if they are only there for a few weeks, as Mark said, the first couple of weeks are probably spent saying, 'Here are all of the hazards and dangers that you need to beware of,' and then in the next couple of weeks they will start to feel comfortable in the workplace. Then the number of days per week and the length of placement will govern how much productive work you get out of the individual. But, basically, the first reason we put our hand up is that we see it as part of our community obligation role.

CHAIR—Do you agree with that, Tracey?

Mrs Cook—Definitely. That is what we found. We started so long ago that I have forgotten why we did it. But it became quite an enjoyment. Because I could only offer casual employment, especially around the festive season, in a lot of cases we kept some of those students on and kept them employed until they left year 12 and went on to university. So some of them were kept for two years on a casual basis, which was good.

Mr Manning—From our perspective, from a heavy engineering perspective, it is the same thing: if all of us do not do it, who is going to do it? Some are now also part of the Gladstone Engineering Alliance, where we are getting all the engineering companies to work together. We see that as a source to tap into, but I do not think that a lot of the young ones going through school today are thinking about getting into heavy engineering; they are looking at other options. If everybody does that, there eventually will be nobody coming through the chain.

Mr Coleman—You will have a skill shortage.

Mr Manning—We have a skill shortage now, and we see that as a major problem a couple of years down the track. So we feel that, if we are going to start offering this school based training, we at least get their interest pretty early, in grades 9, 10 or 11. We can then bring them through from that stage instead of getting them when they finish school and have other ideas. We see it is as a good area to tap into very early and bring them through.

CHAIR—How often is it that a student in a work placement ends up with employment with the same employer? Does that happen?

Mr Marxsen—For us that has happened reasonably regularly—if they have passed the aptitude test and we have already seen how they handle themselves safety-wise and things like that. Over the years we have picked up quite a few people that way. You know that they want to be there. It is exactly as Alban is saying. There is nothing worse than taking somebody on, going through all the interviewing and everything else and then down the track all of a sudden they say, 'I didn't really want to be here. It is too dirty, too big. I do not want to be doing this type of work.' The industry placement is a good way. We get from Roderick a list of what competencies they have already done so that we can align the work with them. It has to be one on one. There is no way we can let them be any other way. There has to be a tradesperson with them. For the benefit we get out of it at the end, it is pretty cost-effective for us.

CHAIR—Are they on a one day a week basis or slabs of a week, or all sorts?

Mr Coleman—It is right across the board now. It did start off being one day a week, but because we are obviously getting more and more kids coming on board we had to go for a five-day block here and there. Flexible timetabling within the schools has allowed kids to be put out for five days. That gives the student a huge chance to build on knowledge that they have seen before and not lose so much of it from one week to the next. In some ways that benefits them, but not in other ways. Obviously it affects the academic side of things—they drop some of their subjects because they cannot get to classes and all those sorts of things.

Mr Manning—As an employer, I would go along exactly with what you guys are saying. I would prefer for them to be there on more than one day.

Mrs Cook—Yes, that is a big bone of contention.

Mr Manning—It is a big bone of contention. They really need to be there for two days, whether it is a Friday and a Monday, and you need that bridge. One day is not sufficient.

Mr Coleman—It needs to be two consecutive days—

Mr Manning—It has to be two consecutive days.

Mr Coleman—so you can at least build on the knowledge, cement something on one day and then build on that knowledge and cement another idea on the next day to continue that on.

CHAIR—I suppose that is a lot harder for the schools to organise.

Mr Coleman—It is a lot harder for schools.

Mrs Cook—But you are dealing with young minds that have been cosseted in the system since the time they were three years old. They come out and find that it is such a shock to work among adults—and people coming at you all the time. It requires a lot of confidence-building time in these kids.

CHAIR—So placements for a week at a time, twice a year or something like that, would work better?

Mrs Cook—Yes, or at least three days, because the first day is wasted just in giving them their confidence before they start to retain anything. They are coming out of this cosy little cocoon into the big world.

Mr Greenaway—There is something else that the opportunity allows them to do. Personally, I think somewhere along the line we did a good job of scaring a lot of the young people away from engineering. They think, 'It is dirty, it is hot'—all the terrible things—'and I would rather go here and wear a good shirt, in air-conditioning.' There are also a lot of kids who love that. It is very much a decision-making process: 'Okay. I want to go and be in engineering or heavy industry. What do I want to do in heavy industry? Do I want to go and be a mechanical engineer or a fitter? Do I want to be an electrical engineer, an electrician, a chemist or a chemical engineer?' If we have a process where young people can go into an industry and experience these different things, it will allow them to make a decision—when it comes time to jump into a career—and say, 'That is what I want to do.'

And then, when they go into it, the money that was invested in them to give them that education, from both a company point of view and a government point of view—those supporting them through university—is a better investment because, at the end of the day, we hold them in that career and we end up with career-minded people if that is where they want to be. They do not go in, get halfway through and think, 'I don't really want to do this,' which is a bit of a waste of money for companies, government and even the person themselves, because they have wasted potentially two to four years of their life.

Mr Coleman—That is why work experience is a good career transition option—it also teaches them what they do not want to do.

Mr Greenaway—It really helps them make those decisions like, 'Where do I want to go? What do I want to spend the rest of my life doing?'

Ms Bedford—From a parent's point of view, my son Jason did not have any career plans—no particular path that he knew was the way he wanted to go. He was offered work experience with NRG, really enjoyed it and is doing it again this year—he did it all last year. So he knows which way he wants to go. He did not want to go to university but now he has decided that, if he has the opportunities that he wants at NRG and university study is down the track, he will take that. He will do that. His idea of his work placement is that, as he has said, he is there, he is learning something and it may lead to an apprenticeship—you get your head known, people know you and they know what you are like. And he enjoys it. Even though he is only doing one day a week, he is learning quite a lot. We did home renovations not long ago, and he had learnt some electrical things at work, and he came home and had suggestions like where to put power points. He is learning and he is interested—very interested.

CHAIR—He started that work placement in year 11?

Ms Bedford—No, year 10. He is in year 11 now.

CHAIR—So that gave him a clear indication of where he wanted to go?

Ms Bedford—Yes. He has dropped one subject but is still OP eligible. If he were offered a school based apprenticeship, he would be prepared to only get a pass in grade 12 and not an OP so that he has a job. He is prepared to do that. I have discussed it with the school as well as a careers counsellor.

Mr Greenaway—Excellent. That is an important thing. Because young people have to make a selection at the start of year 11 as to the subjects they want to do and because, unfortunately, those subjects—if you want to do engineering—determine very much what courses you can do at university, it is important that young people are given the work experience opportunity in year 10. Then they have a bit of a feel for it and can say at least, 'Even if I wanted to do engineering from a broad point of view, these are the subjects I've got to do, because I will use those subjects anyway.'

If they are not given the opportunity until years 11 and 12, they could select some of the 'softer' subjects—I have been known to use the term—and so when it comes time to elect to go to university in some ways they are cut off because they do not have the appropriate subjects to continue their education. It is important that it is in year 10. And it is pleasing to hear that your son has got some benefit out of it, because it is always the question that sits in an employer's mind: is he getting anything out of it?

Ms Bedford—He really enjoys it.

Mr Manning—From our perspective, we did what you said—asked, 'Who wants to get dirty?' One of the things I have been encouraging our people to do is to encourage students to get a bit dirty first, before they put the fancy clothes on and set that career path very early—to say, 'You can go out there; you can become a boilie. If you take the right subjects early on, you will have that practical experience and then from there you can move on to uni.' It is win-win both ways.

Mr Coleman—Going back to your question about how many outcomes we get from structured work placements, the answer is that the number is quite high. From a class of, say, 24 in hospitality or something like that, I might get one school based traineeship, a couple of casual employments and one part-time employment. In an engineering class you would get a similar number of very good outcomes. It gets the foot in the door and employers use it as a recruitment tool.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What benefits do you and your organisations get from having young people in your workplace through these programs? I assume you do get benefits.

Mr Marxsen—I know from talking to the fellows on the shop floor that it is excellent for them to be with young people and help them out in making a career choice. You get so much more from industry placement than just working hands-on. I dare say that there have been electricians talking to young fellows about where you can go and what the advantages are. There is more to it than just being an electrician. That is the start; then it can spread across about 12 different areas of work.

The fellows themselves have always said that the industry placement program—or even just people on work experience, not industry placement—gives them the opportunity to talk to them and convince them or dissuade them. They might say, 'Listen, this isn't what you want to be doing if you think you're going to be working with computers and stuff like that; you're better off in information technology.' Because we have such a broad range of work, we have been able to swap those students around and put them into different areas. They do not just go into engineering; they go into the office area, telecommunications, information technology, chemistry—all of those things—so it is across a broad range.

The blokes just like it. They like to be able to talk to the students and tell them things. They give them all the bad points too—don't worry about that—but the students can make their decision that way. That is the ideal way. It is a lot better than what you can do by standing in front of a class, which I have done. I have gone to the schools and talked about what is involved, but I do not think you get the full benefit until you are actually there and you get somebody talking to you in the workplace who has been there, done that and can outline which way to go. It is very beneficial.

Mr Greenaway—Also, from the point of view of the tradesman or the organisation, the young people come in with questioning and challenging minds. Sometimes a guy who has been doing a job the same way for 20 years gets a young person saying, 'What do you do it that way for?' He might say, 'Who are you?' but it forces him to think and it moves him to a different level. What they bring into our organisations is an opportunity for a person who is willingly passing on his skills to also think about himself and what he is doing. I have noticed particularly at NRG that the older tradesmen who have a lot to do with these people come away with a different point of view. I have seen some really hardened guys come away thinking, 'Hang on—okay' and it has all naturally happened. There has been no forcing, pushing or anything like that.

Mr Loveday—One of the greatest benefits from an employer's point of view is being able to vet the people you are going to put the time into training properly through apprenticeships et cetera. As someone mentioned earlier, you can do 100 interviews and pick out five young people, and I defy anyone—whether they be human resource specialists or whatever—to be able to pick the right person every time whereas if you have them there for 12 months or two years on a part-time basis you know them. You know what they are like. The guys who are working with them know them and you know what they are going to bring to your organisation. That has to be the biggest advantage for any employer.

CHAIR—I have one other question that goes back to something you said, Alban—and it is something that has been said by others as well—about skills shortages. Obviously, that is being addressed through the excellence in engineering links program. That is obviously an attempt to look ahead and to plan where some of those skills shortages will be. Is there anything else happening in the area to try to analyse what the future demands for labour are going to be, where the skills shortages will be and how this will be addressed in an organised way? What you are doing with traineeships and apprenticeships and so on does that on an ad hoc basis, but is it happening in any more organised way apart from through the engineering program?

Mr Manning—Obviously, my perspective is really more that of private enterprise. Sometimes you only know for a very short period of time the direction in which you are really going. From a company perspective, in trying to have that vision of where we want to be we have been trying to get involved in long-term contracts with the NRGs and with the local

companies. Out of that, we then feel we have a plan where we can put people on long term. I think a lot of employers in the private enterprise section would have pretty much the same thing to say: 'How do you plan when you do not know where you are going to be?' That is one of the hiccups that we see. Obviously, I am new to the group and to the company, but one of the things that jumps out at me is that we have not been doing enough training for a long time. A lot of us have not been doing that, because a lot of us did not know where we were going. But I still feel that there is a big shortage out there now.

CHAIR—So how do we address that then? These programs that have been set up are obviously a step in the right direction. What else needs to be done?

Mr Manning—I see it as a joint thing. If I can start getting long-term commitments from people who have long-term plans and link up with them, that will be a move in the right direction. That is an area which I am working on putting into place now. I think that a lot of people in our industry would say the same thing. NRG and Gladstone Port Authority have a different structure from us, where they can plan a lot better than we can.

Mr Greenaway—From NRG's perspective—I will put on that hat—we have major outages on our units and we would employ approximately 70 to 80 temporary people. Since CAR, the Comalco alumina refinery, commenced, the labour shortage here in Gladstone has really been critical for us—so much so that people will actually drive up from Brisbane to work for the six weeks and then go back again. One of the things is that an apprenticeship is for four years and all it means is that, at the end of the four years, it is the end of the beginning. We still have to give them the skills. If they want to be a pressure welder, they have to go and be an apprentice pressure welder once they finish their apprenticeship. If they want to go and be a toolmaker, they have to do that sort of training.

As Alban said, one of the difficulties is just being able to give people the security of continuity of work. One of the things that we did at the power station when we had a recent 'downsizing exercise' was to actually put some adult apprentices on. We took some people who were trades assistants and gave them the opportunity to take on adult apprenticeships as either fitters and turners or electricians. We had a chap who was 52 years of age take that on. When the guy originally took it on, I would say it was for one set of reasons but, since he has been in, it has changed.

Mr Marxsen—It is certainly for the trade now.

Mr Greenaway—Something could be worked up for adults. Sometimes not all of us get the opportunities as we are moving on to open some of those other opportunities to go and do apprenticeships. I think there are some opportunities to help with the skills shortages there, too.

CHAIR—In that situation, was he paid a full salary while he was doing the apprenticeship?

Mr Greenaway—Yes.

Mr Marxsen—Until such time as his wages pass above the apprenticeship. Then he will move on to the apprentice wages.

Mr O'Sullivan—Also there is the changing nature of work. To train an apprentice is a commitment of time and money for an organisation. Many organisations find that labour needs are now in peaks and troughs and that the mobile nature of our work force means that contractors are freely available or become economically viable. During the last shutdown in Gladstone there were some skill shortages, and scaffolders from WA were flown in. At the end of the day, they make an economic decision that it is still better to do that than to pay people for four years of training. There is still a fairly mobile work force across Australia and, if you think globally, even further afield. One of the great challenges is how do you say to all industries that this is a better way of doing it when it is very much a long-term focus and when bottom lines and dollars may dictate that it is an easer option to pull in contractors and to swing people in and out as the need arises. It is a tough decision for businesses to have to make—which way do you move.

Mr Marxsen—NRG does not keep any apprentices on after they finish their time. The training that Peter is talking about there is an investment long term. We noticed the shortage in rigging scaffolding quite a few years ago. We put on a two-year traineeship. It was the first one that we were able to get for two years into rigging scaffolding. Our fourth person is going through that now—two have finished and two are still going through. Our biggest disappointment was that we did not get those two back on the last shutdown because of the dollars offered to them elsewhere. Prior to that, when there was not so much of a demand upon their skills, it was good to have those blokes back. We had genuine knowledge on the plant. It made our life a lot easier. That is why we do it. If you look at apprentices in purely economical terms, there is not much return for NRG, but from a community and long-term basis there is a return in having people there for the shutdowns when they happen.

CHAIR—Probably long term it does pay off economically; it is just not quite as obvious in the short term.

Mr Marxsen—It is not quite as obvious, but when you have a look you will see that probably one-third of the STEs—specific task employees—working there are ex-apprentices. At present, over half the STEs working at the mill for our shutdowns would be ex-apprentices.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Given your involvement in the VET programs and with the young people, what suggestion could you make to this inquiry on how schools and their students could benefit or do better in order to assist the outcomes that you are looking for? Are there any factors that you think schools could benefit from so that they can do better than they are doing now?

Mrs Cook—Probably the pre-knowledge of what they are about to face—which is the talks beforehand—to give them an opportunity to weigh up things. There is also the bigger blocks. As I said, you are dealing with young people who are going to go out into totally different environments. They are probably the biggest two issues that I have always dealt with.

Mr Marxsen—From my point of view, it is a matter of being purely selfish when you are looking at hiring people. We are looking at running a program out at NRG for the schools. The training that we used to give people does not happen anymore. We lost that amount of training and then we had to invest. You can definitely see the difference in skills now to what it used to be. The two years training that people will receive in the job that they are doing in conjunction

with the schools of excellence will bring the skills of those people back to the same level achieved after three months training at NRG. From my point of view, that is a good standing point for hiring, because I get somebody that I can rock straight into a job and expect a return from them.

Mr O'Sullivan—There is a challenge there for career education to get the scope of VET down to students and to give them a real understanding of what is available out there. We have a lot of students who have a very old-fashioned idea of what an electrician does and what a mechanic does. They make decisions when they go into grade 11, when they select subjects and say, 'That's not for me,' whereas the reality of what jobs mean in industries today can be quite diverse. Electricians in some companies hardly ever touch a wire—they do not even know what a wire is. Getting that information is tough for schools. Having current information from industry to flow into schools and then to flow down to students to assist them with their choices is (a) difficult and (b) essential if you are going to widen students' view of the world so that, when they start to make those choices at about the end of grade 10, they have a wider view than perhaps they have now.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is a big resourcing issue, isn't it, for schools and industry to work closely with schools and with industry groups and whatever? That is a big issue.

Mr O'Sullivan—Career ed is the lesson you had spare in your timetable.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is right. It is very different now.

Mr O'Sullivan—It is a major issue to give schools the resources they need to get up-to-date information out to students and to let them experience those sorts of choices.

Mr Manning—As you said, there has to be a closer link. I think we need to encourage, like you said, more previsits. We can allocate times when they can come out and have a look a bit more prior to them even accepting the post. From my side, we can allocate times for visits for them to have a look and see what comes out of it. I think if we do that a bit more it will encourage more people to come through.

Mr Marxsen—We cannot lose sight of the fact that in the schools, even if you are going into VET, there is still a level of academia that you must achieve to be a worthwhile person in the trade role. Never just think that, just because you are getting VET studies, that will be enough to get you the job and get you through your apprenticeship; you still need some basic maths and stuff like that to be in that level. That still has to be achieved.

Mr Coleman—I think the workplace reinforces that, too.

CHAIR—That is a message we get frequently.

Mr Greenaway—It is a gap, because a couple of young people I know who have done the school based apprenticeship have really found it hard back at school. They go and spend the time with the employer and then, when they have to go back to school, it is very hard to try and fill up that gap. One of the things that the school probably needs to look at is: if we have the

young people doing this, how do we change our structure to help them do that, plus still give them the basics to be good out in the workplace?

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

Proceedings suspended from 12.18 p.m. to 1.11 p.m.

FRY, Mrs Stephanie, Educational Business Manager, Central Queensland Institute of TAFE

HARREVELD, Dr Roberta Elizabeth, Senior Lecturer, Professional and Vocational Education, Central Queensland University

HAWKINS, Mr Ronald George, Board Member, Comalco Community Fund

HOARE, Mr Cameron Cyril, Manager, Technical Services and Engineering, NRG Gladstone Operating Services

PRATER, Associate Professor Robert John, Head of Campus, Central Queensland University, Gladstone Campus

SERMON, Miss Robyn, Community Relations Superintendent, Comalco

WOOD, Ms Julie Ann, Field Officer, Gladstone Area Group Apprentices Ltd

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us today. This has been a very interesting and helpful day for us. Some great initiatives are happening here, and we want to explore some further aspects of them with you. Before we begin, are there any comments you would like to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Hawkins—I am also an employer of trainees for a McDonald's family restaurant.

CHAIR—To begin with, I will ask one of you or a number of you to outline how the Links for Engineering Excellence works, just for the sake of the record and to further our understanding of the essence of how it works, who the players are et cetera.

Mr Hoare—I can look at our side of it. We are providing a facility; we are vacant for the school to use. As I see it, now that more students are going through to grades 11 and 12 there is a desire to look during that time at giving students who wish to have it an opportunity to get links into industry. That is particularly on the engineering side in this program. It gives them more opportunity and more of a skills and understanding base so that by the time they finish school they have more options. They are also a more valuable employee to industry when they finish their schooling. That is how I see it.

CHAIR—How many students are likely to be involved, at what year and for how long?

Mr Hoare—My understanding is that it is grades 11 and 12. Obviously, we are a worksite, so our stipulation is that students have to be 15 years or older to come out to our worksite. So t is grades 11 and 12. The numbers depend on how many apply and wish to go through it. It is whatever the facility will cater for.

CHAIR—Will they do certificates I and II while they are there?

Mr Hoare—My understanding is that they will not complete certificate II. They will be doing whatever they need to do to put themselves in a position to do certificate II. I do not think it is taking them all the way through to actually receiving certificate II, although I could be wrong. That is my understanding of it.

CHAIR—Stephanie, how does it work from TAFE's point of view?

Mrs Fry—At TAFE, in conjunction with the school we are going to provide underpinning skills and knowledge after a reasonable school day. That is to be provided on site or at TAFE, whichever is decided at the time, to link those underpinning skills and that knowledge to the competencies they are going to do on site.

CHAIR—So they are more generic skills?

Mrs Fry—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—How will that be funded?

Mrs Fry—I am not aware of that funding yet, but I think there is some TAFE funding available if it is not used within the school day. So after the school day we can fund that as community participants. That is the reason we were funding—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Through TAFE?

Mrs Fry—Yes, that is right, through TAFE funding. It was not any particular grant; it was just the direct grant funding.

Prof. Prater—I preface my comments from the university sector perspective of the relationship with Toolooa State High by saying there are very strong relationships in the education sector within Gladstone. A key element of this is the strength of each of our partnerships with industry. Industry is the common element in getting us working so effectively together. The university has recently signed an MOU with Toolooa State High as a pilot to develop a number of aspects of this relationship in engineering excellence. That is particularly the transition of school leavers into university. We are looking at ways in which there might be guaranteed entry if a school leaver manages to satisfy certain predefined requirements. We are still in the process of developing that. We are looking at jointly being involved in program development so that the curricula in the school and in the university are developed in a harmonious way. We are also looking at ways in which staff development might occur across the two sectors. So there is a strong relationship on three levels—the student, the program and staff development.

CHAIR—The program development relates to what will be happening at the NRG site?

Prof. Prater—That is less so than the relationship between the curriculum at the school and at the university, but NRG is the site where that will happen.

CHAIR—A qualification and a pathway from school to university, as I understand it, gives the capacity to students—instead of doing the normal range of academic subjects, qualifying for

an OP and then going into engineering at university—to meet some key predefined requirements through the links program. Through their competencies, will they be able to qualify for entry to university?

Prof. Prater—Exactly. We have not decided what those predefined criteria might be, but we run a program called SNAP, which is where university courses can be studied by school students in years 11 and 12. By completing some university courses before completing the high school certificate, that might be part of the way by which students earn their place in a university course. If the student essentially enters into a contract, say back in year 10, that they will do these three things and they satisfy them, then quite aside from their OP they are guaranteed a place in the university program.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Could you give me some examples inside SNAP?

Prof. Prater—We do not have any students studying SNAP at the moment. Last year there were a couple of students at this school and another student at Gladstone State High who were doing maths and ICT subjects at uni. They paid HECS and they get to do the university subject and it then becomes part of their academic transfer against that university subject. It is really very interesting.

CHAIR—So will some of the courses they do while they are still at school articulate into credits at university as well?

Prof. Prater—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—This is the first time I have heard of SNAP. Would this be deemed to be 'high level' study?

Prof. Prater—In the sense that they are existing undergraduate subjects. They come onto campus and sit with students who are completing an undergraduate program and do exactly the same courses. The content and assessment are exactly the same, and if they pass that then it can become part of their profile once they start the university program.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Who generally negotiates that transition or that program? Do the schools initiate it?

Prof. Prater—We do it directly with the school. We talk to the schools about the students that might want to do university courses in the ensuing term and negotiate their enrolment.

CHAIR—Stephanie, how will this work for TAFE? Will there be articulation between TAFE and university with credits for courses done there?

Mrs Fry—We work along those lines if we can. We do have some links with some universities—CQU is one of them—and we are negotiating a range of different courses. I have not been involved in the early part of the negotiation of this course, but I imagine that most of our engineering courses through TAFE do articulate into university at some stage.

Miss Sermon—I would like to explain the involvement of the Comalco Community Fund. Comalco have interests in four of the major industries in Gladstone, totalling about 3,000 employees in the town. With the new refinery we are building, we have also implemented a million dollar fund using three criteria, two of which revolve around workplaces and training and job outcomes while the third is to do with the environment. When we first announced the fund, last May, Toolooa approached us and said they had this idea for the excellence in engineering program in relation to pathways with industry. We sat down with them over a period of about three or four months and came up with our support for that, which revolves around three key areas. It is a $237,000 sponsorship by the Comalco Community Fund over two years. It involves three areas. The first is a small business incentive scheme for small businesses to take on school based work placements for traineeships, particularly for those businesses that have never been involved before because they see it as an out-of-pocket expense which is a risk or because they are not really sure if they could take on a student one day a week or one week a semester or however it has been worked out. So we are actually offering cash to cover their wages for the time that the student is in that small business, up to about 10 weeks—the detail is still being worked out. The idea is that if it is successful then that small business may then go on and take that person on permanently out of their own pocket, or they might say, 'Thanks, we tried that. It did not work, but it has been nice to know how it all works.' So it is about promoting that within small business.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Will there be a person who will be doing this?

Miss Sermon—The second part of the funding is actually for a vocational education person—I do not know what we are actually calling them—based in the school who will facilitate those placements. So there will be someone from the school who will be going around talking to small businesses and saying, 'As part of the pathways to engineering, would you be interested in taking a student on to give them a taste of it?'

CHAIR—It is still focusing on engineering, is it?

Miss Sermon—It is focusing on engineering. The third section of our funding is for a bus to transport students. That is for students from year 8 to year 12. Toolooa argued fairly strongly that if students are really going to engage with industry and get out and into businesses and see what it is all about they need to be able to get there. So the bus is about that and about students visiting the different industry sites, and it is also about starting to open them up to ideas about where they could progress to with their studies. The partnership is very new. It was only signed in November and we have still got a long way to go and a lot of work to do in defining exactly who does what with the roles, but it has certainly opened up quite a lot of dialogue between us and Toolooa. We regularly speak with them now and we have had guest speakers come down here—all sorts of things. Taking the step and signing the partnership has been very successful from a Comalco business point of view. Ron Hawkins, who is with me today, is one of the community members of the fund. We have three Comalco representatives on the board and three community representatives, so it is seen as community money. Ron was one of the people involved in voting for and setting up this partnership.

CHAIR—There are obvious benefits to this links program for the students, because it gets them involved in a career path early on. Presumably, there are benefits for industry as well. Has engineering skills been an area of great skills shortage in Gladstone?

Mr Hoare—There is currently an issue with the amount of development going on in terms of the shortage. We have tended to have peaks and troughs. For overhauls and things like that, we bring in what we call specific task employees—temporaries. We are now finding that that is becoming increasingly difficult. We put apprentices on at the moment and at the end of their time we do not keep them there, so we tend to find that when we are running overhauls or getting people in for peak periods a lot of those apprentices would come back and then go again. But at the moment it is becoming more and more difficult to do that.

CHAIR—The apprentices you currently have do their training at TAFE—that is, prior to this program?

Mr Hoare—That is right.

CHAIR—Is that going to continue? Once you have set up the workshops and everything out there at the NRG site, will you still be using TAFE for training your apprentices or will that transfer to your skills centre?

Mrs Fry—I imagine that would continue as it is for apprentices and in conjunction with the schools teaching the students from this initiative in levels I and II. TAFE would then be involved in a partnership linking with teachers from this school and involving those with the school students. You mentioned skill shortages before. Central Queensland TAFE is involved in a lot of trade training because there is a lack of some trades in the area. Sometimes, but not always, the big projects have a lack of those tradespeople and sometimes there is a flow-on effect to the smaller operators. The state government has linked up with TAFE to provide a Central Queensland strategy and this training would fit in with that strategy as well.

CHAIR—The small business incentive program presumably will help there as well.

Mrs Fry—That is right.

CHAIR—Why has there been a skills shortage in some of these areas? Is it just a lack of knowledge or is it inaccurate perceptions about the sort of work that is involved in manufacturing, or a bit of both? How do we address those issues besides this sort of excellent scheme?

Mrs Fry—There are many facets to it, I guess. I am not from a trade background, so I only know from what I hear around the college et cetera. At the moment a lot of pipe-fitters and pipe-welders are needed on sites, so we are training lots of those particular students. But normally, without the expansions that are happening, perhaps there would not be the need for that number of tradespeople, and usually they would fit into the small businesses. But, with the big projects offering good money and that sort of thing, sometimes the small businesses are drained. That is where we are finding the school shortages are. Not only in Gladstone but in other areas of Queensland people come for project work, and that leaves skill shortages in other parts of the state.

CHAIR—Is there any estimate of the increase in the number of trainees with these sorts of skills, up to say certificate II level, that will come through this program compared with what we

have under the current system? Will it mean an increase of 20, 30, 40 or 100 kids a year coming through with at least certificate I, maybe certificate II, in engineering related skills?

Mrs Fry—I cannot comment on that. I have not done any of that research.

Miss Sermon—I think we are looking at 40 students a year through the program at NRG. I would have to check with Toolooa, but that is ringing bells.

CHAIR—How does that compare with the number trained through TAFE at the moment?

Mrs Fry—Do you mean just apprentices or trainees?

CHAIR—Both, in those engineering related areas.

Mrs Fry—We train a lot of engineering apprentices not only in Gladstone but across Central Queensland. Diesel fitters are trained in Mackay and all those sorts of things.

CHAIR—No, I am just talking about Gladstone.

Mrs Fry—There would already be a couple of hundred trained a year, and these will add to that. We also have prevocational students who are hoping to get apprenticeships and we have good outcomes from those. But they are taken by industry and small organisations.

CHAIR—Is there any estimate of the increase in the number of university students—undergraduates—in engineering courses?

Prof. Prater—We have actually had a decrease in the number of commencing undergraduate engineering students this year at this campus, although the faculty has increased overall. I think that is partly due to some domestic factors, if I could put it that way. We offer first-year engineering at this stage. I think that a logical consequence of this partnership will be an examination of the feasability of offering a full program. In the end, that comes down to a question of resources and the number of EFTS that the university can apply to the campus. As it is, the system is that DEST gives places to the institution, not to a location. So it becomes an issue of internal resource allocation.

CHAIR—So what happens at the moment? Would students do the first year here—maths, physics, chemistry, whatever—and then move to another campus to do specialist engineering?

Prof. Prater—They would move to Rockhampton to complete. But a lot of those students, particularly the ones in the co-op program where workplace experience is embedded are actually involved in industry here. One of the comments I can make, as far as skill shortages are concerned, is that there is full employment among our graduates. That is an indication of the demand for graduate engineers in this community.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Just expanding on that, we have a similar situation, in part at least, where I come from. We have a university campus that basically has one year in terms of faculty. Do you think that our community loses people because where they have to go costs ten grand a

year extra—that, because of where you live, you are geographically discriminated against? Do you think that would affect the numbers?

Prof. Prater—Definitely, but I think it is more extreme than that. The only anecdotal evidence is that, if a student cannot complete an entire program at their home campus, they are unlikely to just do first year there and then move elsewhere. The fear, particularly for school leavers, is that the people who started at the place they have to move to will have formed their social group, and they will have to break into that in second year and they do not like the idea of being an outsider. So either they will start by moving to where they are going to ultimately complete the program or, if they cannot afford it—worse still—they will not do it at all.

I only have the census data from 1996—the 2000 Census data is not available—and, in 1996, there was outmigration from Gladstone for higher education in every discipline field, and it was quite extensive in the sciences and in engineering. The outmigration is not within CQU; it is actually to south-east Queensland. The pity there is that those students, those school leavers, are often lost to Gladstone where they would ultimately be of great value in industry. So the question we are grappling with here is how to retain and train those school leavers who want to go on to higher education in this community.

Dr Harreveld—From the point of view of teacher education, continuing professions and building capacity within the community, I would like to endorse what Bob is saying. One of the big things that we are barely beginning to scratch the surface with—where Raelene is connected with me—in the teacher education program is looking at people within the local community. Traditionally in teacher education, you have had to go to the bigger cities—to Brisbane and in later years to Townsville—because you had to be there face to face. If you flex up that delivery and allow it to take place using technologies old and new, within communities you can take people who have done trades, meet the learning needs of those sorts of people—who are highly skilled within their community—and have them trained as teachers who can move across the sectoral boundaries that we have been talking about here. If they can work in TAFE, if they can train on site at NRG, if they are a specialist and can be brought in to work with the first-year engineering students, then you have some highly skilled people who do not have to leave their local community. That is a challenge, not just in engineering—although that is your purpose here today, obviously. I work across all the trade areas, and it is not just trade either. That is a big challenge for us.

CHAIR—Is that happening much—it is happening increasingly?

Dr Harreveld—We are barely scratching the surface here. We probably have more of a footprint in Mackay at the moment and we are starting to move ahead in Bundaberg as well.

CHAIR—What can we do to encourage that process—those who are in the trades who would like to qualify to teach but do not want to take a drop in salary or have problems getting the Dip Ed or whatever? How do we address those issues?

Dr Harreveld—A big factor is employing authorities working with the universities and local communities to look at the fact that someone going from $90,000 a year back onto Austudy to support three or four kids is a big ask. If you have a flex program the way we have, can they work and train—work and learn and earn? We have some arrangements with employers.

Education Queensland has been very good. The Catholic Education Commission has been excellent to work with. Likewise the independent schools. In pockets throughout the state where they have had need—and in combination with the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration—the partnerships are building quite well. The uni is flexing up and we are looking at alternative pathways of entry into teacher education. I am not saying it is just teaching—we have been talking about engineering—but you can see the options. If you have someone who can move across, then within a community you have a lot of value added potential in human beings who can work there.

CHAIR—Does it involve education courses online and that sort of thing?

Dr Harreveld—That sort of thing—study groups. Raelene here at Toolooa State High School runs our study group on site in Gladstone for the teacher education program which we started just last year.

CHAIR—Do you think there is also the requirement for a component perhaps to be funded by the employing authorities—Education Queensland—for full teacher salary for X months while they are completing their studies full time?

Dr Harreveld—I believe so. I believe it is worth while investigating. I do not know how it happened, but there is some scheme through which some of the independent schools received funding—and I have not wanted to inquire too much because it is their business. One of my students graduates in a couple of months. He was taken in as a tradesman and supported and mentored. There was funding for a teacher on-site in that school to be taken offline from teaching, which gave her support, and she was that chap's mentor. Then we ran a study group on-site at the uni that supplemented the work that was taking place in the school. He is from the construction industry and is now in Construction Training Queensland. He graduates next week. Some examples of how it can work are starting to come through now.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Profiling engineering in its broadest sense, which we are looking at at the moment, was raised earlier. An issue there is how you invest in that in schools to increase that profile and by employer bodies investing in people that have industry experience, particularly in engineering and so forth, for VET in Schools. You can broaden that out to say, 'How are we going to get industry experience in schools to teach and offer VET unless we work on programs as flexible as this?' What you are saying and what we are saying about engineering can go right across the board. It is an area that we possibly need to investigate even more to profile it. How are we going to get industry people into schools in order to take on this burgeoning demand for VET?

Dr Harreveld—One final issue that has been coming through recently that I am very aware of is that, if we can keep that movement of people, the quickest thing that happens to them is that they become deskilled. As changes come in industry, the worst thing you can do to someone is take them out of their industry site and put them in the traditional classroom. So you have got to keep that mobility that the engineering excellence program seems, from what I have heard, to provide. It can provide the facility for that to happen. That is one of the crucial things. In the training of voc ed teachers throughout this country, when they move away from the cutting edge, whether it is as a professional engineer or a certificate level III tradie, you have got to give people the facility to remain current and relevant in their professions.

CHAIR—What happens in VET training at the university undergraduate level?

Dr Harreveld—I can only speak from the teacher ed side, because the other faculties—

CHAIR—I am thinking of teacher ed particularly.

Dr Harreveld—We have traditional secondary training, and primary and early childhood. This program is a flexible program where people have flexi-entry: they can come in with a trade or industry relevant qualifications and documented evidence of relevant work experience. If you have 32 courses in a four-year degree, they receive credit for eight upon substantiation of it. So that is one vocational training area that they can teach in. Within the rest of the 24 programs they can pick up another teaching area. They can choose. Some of them choose maths. For example, I have one bloke in Bundaberg who is getting distinctions and high distinctions in maths. So his teaching area will be construction and maths from grade 8 through to grade 12. Some of them are doing English; so a retail teacher might pick up English. Some of them choose to go deeper into engineering. I know that a couple of the diesel fitters coming in are actually doing engineering subjects as that consolidation. Then they pick up the education subjects. They are flexible. They can do one subject a term up to four, and they can work as they are doing it.

CHAIR—There is still a big impediment, though, isn't there? If they have to do four years worth of tertiary education and get credit for maybe 1½ years worth, there is still a lot of work to do.

Dr Harreveld—Exactly. They still have to do a lot of work. I believe that their time would be spent more appropriately if they were learning on site, and their teaching and all their education courses were on site. We are just beginning. Bob mentioned curriculum development. I think that is where we will see the big move coming: getting the curriculum and what they are learning more appropriate to what they are teaching on site. I think that is a challenge for us. We are not there yet; we just know that it has to happen. That is in the undergraduate pathway and in the graduate pathway. They still have to do teaching prac. The big thing in Queensland is the power of the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration. I have learnt that, whatever program you put in place, you have to make sure that people have the facility to go right through and get their teacher registration. At the same time you have to give them exit points. In the undergraduate pathway we have an exit point at the three-year degree level. So, if they want to, they can get the three-year degree and exit. That means they only do two years equivalent full time. Sometimes they can do it over spring-summer and finish it in 18 months, depending on what they want to do. So, if you put in the flexible entry and exit points, they can come back; if they want to go on and get the full one, they can. That is undergraduate. If you marry that with a graduate entry program you can bring in engineers. We have nurses, engineers and IT specialists. You can move it, depending on when they need it.

CHAIR—Is that for graduates?

Dr Harreveld—That is for graduates.

CHAIR—It would seem to me that it is not as much of a problem for graduates because they have a degree.

Dr Harreveld—In Queensland they still have to do 16 university subjects.

CHAIR—Do you think that is an excessive requirement?

Dr Harreveld—Actually, no. I think the challenge is to make what they do relevant to where they are going to teach or train.

CHAIR—And enable them to survive financially while they are doing it.

Dr Harreveld—Exactly; I think that is the challenge. They are the two.

CHAIR—I will just ask something on the other side of that. We were talking there about training people with industrial experience—tradespeople and engineers—in teaching. What about upskilling those who are being trained as teachers in the industry skills and vocational skills areas? How much is being done on that at university? One of ANTA's recommendations to us is that every student doing a training course in education should be required to reach at least certificate IV level in workplace training and assessment as part of their undergraduate course. We have had both responses to that. Some said, 'Yes, they could do it standing on their heads.' One other group said, 'No way; that is totally unrealistic.' What is your response to that?

Dr Harreveld—We have built the certificate IV competencies into the undergraduate teacher training.

CHAIR—Is that for all courses?

Dr Harreveld—No, only for this program. It is only for the secondary vocational education and training program. Our challenge is with my colleagues in the other secondary program. I think that will probably come next year. We have embedded competencies similar to those in the Queensland system, where they embed the competencies. Rightly or wrongly, we embed them within the university courses. Three university courses have competencies from that training package embedded in them. So when they come out they will know about both worlds and will have been signed off. We have a memorandum of understanding with TAFE, which we will probably have to revisit. And we had a reciprocal cross-credit that was signed off about two years ago. Is that right, Stephanie?

Mrs Fry—Approximately.

Dr Harreveld—Approximately two years ago. It was the only one that existed at that point in time. We probably need to revisit it. When students did two of our courses there was a small administration fee. They could get the certificate IV in assessment and workplace training so that, when they graduate, they have the dual quals. With the training package being under review—if it ever gets endorsed—obviously we will have to renegotiate. We give credit. If they come in and have their cert IV, we give a course credit. That is the reciprocal cross-credit arrangement. There is that, as well as this flexi entry and exit. It goes some way. Our students at the moment are being employed under 'teaching under authorisation' because, across the secondary sector, there is such a demand for teachers. The staffing officers around the state are literally, every week, on the phone looking for staff.

CHAIR—Particularly in industrial related areas?

Dr Harreveld—Particularly in the industrial areas, hospitality and retail. If they are multiskilled across two or three different areas, they are often snapped up when they go out on prac. They finish their degree part time because they have a job.

CHAIR—Is there a long-term problem in terms of the lack of competitiveness of teacher salaries vis-à-vis what can be earned in industry?

Dr Harreveld—Some of them are students. I just sit there and say, 'Could I have your salaries, please?' I think that would be in the future. That comes back to the challenge: how can people keep current, relevant and live?

CHAIR—From an industry point of view, what is your response to these sorts of comments about teacher training?

Miss Sermon—From the Comalco Community Fund point of view, there are some possible partnerships. I know Comalco have a scholarships program internally for staff who want to study. There may be some partnerships that would be quite easy to fulfil, particularly in a town like Gladstone where we are trying to strengthen our community base and also work more closely with local institutions. We have a huge pool of skilled and experienced members of staff in various areas, from environmental scientists through to fitters through to IT specialists et cetera who have had experience all over the world. From the new refinery's point of view, a lot of them are coming here and are eager to be part of the community. It may be that there are some connections there.

CHAIR—Changing the subject totally, with the students going to TAFE particularly, and I suppose into employment as well—and this is perhaps a bit of a sensitive question—do you notice much difference in the students' awareness of the various pathways and forms of study and the options regarding career progression and so on as a result of the different high schools they come from? I think there are three high schools in the area. Do you notice much of a difference in their awareness of the workplace issues and pathways?

Mrs Fry—In TAFE I think that is just starting to happen. Gladstone TAFE has relationships with all sectors of the community, and it is reciprocated. We find that students are now looking for those different pathways as well. TAFE personnel—all the personnel—come to all the schools and talk at the end of the year. We find students, as well as parents, fronting up and saying, 'But we heard at the talk that we could do this, if we haven't got an apprenticeship now or didn't get a traineeship at school, or that we could do other things.' So students and parents are becoming much more aware and want to access those for their students who are not going to go straight on to university. We also promote the sorts of things Bobby has been talking about, because a lot of people at TAFE have done trades, have gone on to do teaching and are then working for high schools, TAFEs and those sorts of places. So we are sort of role models for those sorts of alternative pathways as well.

Ms Wood—I would like to reinforce that. Gladstone Area Group Apprentices are one of the largest employers of apprentices and trainees and also school based apprentices and trainees within the region. We have been heavily involved with the school based programs. You can see

the difference in the students when they get out, particularly when they are doing voc ed subjects, and then they decide to do a school based apprenticeship or traineeship during years 11 and 12. So they are pretty set at the end of year 12 on what they want to do. They have already been out to industry and have gained skills, and a lot of the school based apprentices study engineering when they graduate and finish their apprenticeship. We have been heavily involved with a number of students that have gone on to uni.

With school based traineeships, it may only be a years 11 and 12 program but a lot of those then go on to university because all of a sudden they know what they want to do. It is the same with trainees who have come out of year 12. They do 12 months of a traineeship, they have done voc ed subjects at school, they are perhaps a little uncertain on what they want to do and then they do that traineeship and go straight on to university. As an employer and representing the group—and I have been heavily involved with voc ed with all the schools in Gladstone—I think what Toolooa is trying to do at the moment is an excellent idea and I can only see that benefiting initially Toolooa students, but I know the plan is to move on to greater things and involve other schools. I think it is excellent.

CHAIR—What do we as a committee need to recommend to government to facilitate this whole process?

Ms Wood—I think funding is always a problem for small businesses, isn't it? The idea of Comalco offering assistance to small businesses initially to get the students involved in the school based traineeship program or school based apprenticeship program is a great idea. If that is a success, hopefully that employer will continue that arrangement. Everyone seems to think that in Gladstone there is a lot of money flowing around, but there are still a lot of businesses out there struggling, particularly small businesses. If there was additional funding to continue this, not just for a 10-week program—I know that has not been said but as an example—I think that will help the program move forward. Money is always the issue. We are a very community based city and you have businesses wanting to do things, but unfortunately they cannot afford it at this time. Hopefully, that will turn around with more industries coming into Gladstone, but I am dealing with industry and small businesses on a daily basis and I know a lot of them are struggling still.

Mr Hawkins—I am from the Comalco Community Fund. The fund was approached by Gladstone Area Group Apprentices to look at the shortage of trained people in Gladstone for what is coming up. The group apprenticeship scheme identified needs in many areas and asked the fund if they would fund encouraging first and second year apprentices from around the state who, for one reason or another, are not in their current trade to come to Gladstone to complete that trade. That was taken up by the Comalco fund. I think it is an incredible thing to do to get people back into the work force. There might be second or third year apprentices who could easily come back in. It is a waste of resources to have people like that sitting out in the community who could finish their trade very easily. To answer your question as to what could the government do in cases like that, there could be funding to get an outcome where you have got a fully qualified technician or whatever for little expense. Those people could be back in the work force very easily. The coordination of such a program would be very easy to do. I commend the group apprenticeship scheme for undertaking such a venture.

Prof. Prater—Just to comment on funding, community support and industry involvement: one of the things that I think is unfortunate is that, whilst industry gains intrinsic benefit from

the partnerships it has and the financial support it gives to programs such as this, it does not get any direct incentives. We have things such as greenhouse credits, but there is nothing equivalent in the education area. I would encourage the committee to consider the concept of education credits or some sort of tax incentive for industry where it pumps resources—and often those are in-kind resources—into educational programs such as this. I am sure that those of us who are from the education side of the partnership would find that we could spin things even further if companies were given those types of tax incentives.

CHAIR—That is interesting. Before we go on, would Comalco's contributions to the community fund be tax deductible?

Miss Sermon—I am not sure. The fund has been set as an independent fund, on its own, in its budget.

CHAIR—But your financial commitment to that, I would think, would be tax deductible. What you are saying probably applies much more broadly anyway. I suspect there are some areas in which there are credits but others in which there are not but perhaps need to be. Sid, were you going to say something on that?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I just wondered whether or not it would be.

Mr Hawkins—From an employer's point of view, there are some things that I think could be done. As it is at the moment, this is a state issue, but money paid towards traineeships does not go towards state payroll tax—it is exempt. However, if businesses take on traineeships outside the subsidised programs that are offered, and businesses do it off their own backs to put people through certificate II or III, then those amounts are not subsidised in any way by the government. Certainly, from a state point of view, there is no reduction in things such as payroll tax.

Mr Hoare—I am not too sure how it fits in, but I guess this opportunity only presented itself because NRG had a facility that was vacant. If we had not had that, it would have been very difficult to even start this off. So I guess, if you are looking to industry, you will find that they just do not have the ability, the facility or the resources spare to be able to do something like that. How you can factor that in, I am not too sure, but the benefit I see here is that the campus for the high school is actually on our site, so when students come onto our site they go through all of our safety inductions. We run them through in the same way as for an employee, a contractor—anyone coming to work on our site. When they are on that site, they have to behave in the same way as one of our employees, and from time to time we give them the added benefit of seeing what actually goes on on the site and involving them in some of our work. But we would not have been able to do that if we did not already have that facility. We would not have had the ability to fund that.

CHAIR—There would be very few communities that would have an employer the size of NRG and the facilities to be able to do that.

Mr Hoare—Yes, that is another issue. How you factor that into what sort of funding you can apply to expand this sort of thing, I am not too sure.

CHAIR—Are there any other comments on that?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I have a more general question—and this is probably a bit offbeam. We talk about the community being aware of all these pathways—and the acronyms that go with them—and everything else. Do you think there is a general confusion out there between traineeships and apprenticeships—what used to be an apprenticeship? You hear people say: 'What're you doing—an apprenticeship? At school? What's going on?' Do you think there is a bit of a problem with nomenclature out there?

Mr Hoare—I think so.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Maybe the names we use are important.

Ms Wood—Absolutely. There is still confusion out there not only among students but also among parents. We are constantly confused with Queensland Apprenticeship Services, which is a NAC. We are also the RTO—the list goes on. I do not know how you rectify that. It is certainly not a case of lack of publicity in Gladstone or lack of publicity from the point of view of the schools or TAFE, because we are continually promoting school based apprenticeships and school based traineeships and the parties involved are usually party to those promotions. I do not have an answer to the problem, but you are correct: there is a lot of confusion.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That shows in the views people have just of the term 'apprenticeship'.

CHAIR—Thank you. That has been very helpful. You have an exciting program here. I hope it goes really well and is broadened to other areas.

Proceedings suspended from 2.00 p.m. to 2.14 p.m.

[2.14 p.m.]

ADIE, Mr John Norman, Deputy Principal, Tannum Sands State High School

BUCK, Mr Robert James, Coordinator, Gladstone Indigenous Vocation and Enterprise Network (GIVEN)

COROWA, Mrs Loris Cecelia, Community Education Counsellor, Toolooa State High School

FYSH, Mrs Raelene Esme, Deputy Principal, Toolooa State High School

CHAIR—Thank you for appearing before this committee today and for the material you have given us on GIVEN. Could you just give us a quick overview of how the program works?

Mr Buck—I have a PowerPoint presentation which I will give.

CHAIR—Great. Fire away.

Mr Buck—I had absolutely no idea of what was expected of me today.

CHAIR—It looks like you have it covered.

Mr Buck—I just put stuff together and hoped that I would get it right somewhere along the line.

CHAIR—I am sure you have.

Mr Buck—I am here to speak about the Gladstone Indigenous Vocation and Enterprise Network, GIVEN. The rationale for the program, as stated in the submission—and no doubt some of you have read the submission—was that GIVEN was to be an innovative, district-wide program running in all the remote schools as well as the Gladstone city schools. It was aimed at building partnerships between education facilities and industry—anything, basically, that could further a young person's career—and to develop programs that will identify and reconnect students who have disconnected or enhance the future for students who are connected. The program aims to develop multiple pathways for students. I am sure you have heard phrases such as one size does not fit all any longer and that sort of thing. So we are looking at changing that sort of thing. This will enable rural and urban Indigenous students to access vocational education, enterprise education, and career and transition programs. It is also designed to create opportunity for rural and urban Indigenous students to achieve employment outcomes equal to or greater than those of mainstream students. Statistically, Indigenous students within the Gladstone district have not progressed to further education or lifelong careers.

Some of the key outcomes we are looking to fulfil—and I will address some of these in a bit more depth in a minute but I will just briefly go through what our program is designed and set up to cater for—are: all Indigenous students will have the opportunity to have achieved success

in an innovative and culturally appropriate enterprise education program; increased outcomes achieved in further education, training and employment; and an increased level of parent participation in their student's education. They are three of the main things that we are focusing on at the moment. We are looking at alternative ways of getting the kids reconnected and getting the parents connected with their student's learning. Hopefully I am not speaking too fast; I do that a bit when I am nervous.

CHAIR—Don't be nervous.

Mr Buck—Under our program, all Indigenous students will have their own portfolio for the future incorporating learning pathway plans, individual aspiration plans and progress monitoring tools. I have brought along an example of an individual aspiration plan which also incorporates a learning pathway plan. This is modelled after our secretary and you are more than welcome to have a look at it later on if you would like to. We also aim to improve literacy skills for all Indigenous students.

I would now like to address some of the key outcomes in a bit more detail. I turn to the culturally appropriate enterprise education program that we are looking at. We are currently looking at developing what is known as a seasons calendar. This will be an A1 size calendar. In the middle it will have our icon. Around that will be January to December. Around that will be summer to winter and around that will be Indigenous science such as when the wattle flowers, when the turtles are fat and ready to hunt, when the black crow flies west and it is going to rain, when the mullet are running or whatever it may be. Once all of that data is collected and collated, it will be turned into a CD-ROM. All of those little Indigenous icons will be little icons that you can click on and which will expand further. It will have the local Indigenous language name for each icon and this will come out on the audio. There is truckloads of information. This all involves working with the elders of the community and with the parents of the students as well. So this is a sneaky way of getting the parents to come and work with the kids and the kids to work with the parents.

This project involves a partnership with TAFE. TAFE are supporting us very well. At the moment we are running this program through a TAFE Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access course. We take the students out of school one day a week and put them through this course. TAFE actually pay the elders a tutor rate to come in and work with the students—which is very good—and they supply us with their normal TAFE teacher. Because we have a teacher, their normal TAFE teacher becomes our tutor. This means that we actually have two teachers in the classroom with approximately 10 students. So that gives the course a fairly intensive literacy element as well.

Phase 2 will be the production of a booklet, which will be developed with the leftover information. Phase 3, to be undertaken in a couple of years time, will be the development of a nature trail. Basically, as we go around exploring all these different areas, learning about the native tucker trees and local midden areas, we will be developing a track where we will be walking and pointing out the plants that Indigenous people used to use. Over a period of time we will develop that into a nature trail as well. That is the enterprise education program we are using. That is a very loose example of what the calendar may look like. I would not imagine it would look anything like that, but it is a sort of loose example.

The next thing is increased outcomes achieved in further education training and employment. We are developing memorandums of understanding with industries such as Comalco and Boyne Smelters to take on our students. They have given us a commitment that they will do real training. It will not be a situation where we bang the students out there and they grab a broom for a week. They have given us a full commitment that they will supply real training. They have committed managers to the program and put on Indigenous employment officers to work with us to develop these programs further. The MOUs between GIVEN and industries also allow us to develop a much more culturally sensitive application process for Indigenous people. Historically, interviews where you sit down in front of six guys and ladies who grill you has not really worked for Indigenous people. They fall by the wayside. It is not really very appropriate. So we are developing more hands-on ways to get the employers to recognise the students and to get the students to apply. While the students are on site, they work with Indigenous people. So it is a really good mentoring program. We have lots of people coming into the program to talk to them, including people who have been fairly successful in their lives—for instance, Mark Ella. We have someone come every second week, if we can. I think it is really important to talk to somebody not just once about something but to keep reinforcing it.

As part of the one day a week program for partnerships with tertiary institutes that we are running, not only are we in partnership with TAFE but also we go from venue to venue. We study at CQU, which is the local university; we study at TAFE; and we study at the Boyne Island Environmental Education Centre. They let us do that for free. It is all part of removing a lot of the mystique and scariness about going on to further education. It breaks down a lot of those barriers.

We actively encourage parents to participate in class time. We do not have a lot of success with that, but we do have a lot of success with the parents coming along on excursions, to morning teas or to things like that with the kids. We are slowly breaking down the barriers there. In conjunction with the schools and the ASSPA committees, we have taken the ASSPA meetings and things like that out of the school grounds and into people's houses. The parents are more inclined to come along to meetings at somebody's house rather than in an office at the school. For a lot of Indigenous people, historically, school was a fairly terrifying experience. I must confess that it was for me.

Forums for discussion are held on a regular basis. We like to keep the channels open at all times. Parents are made to feel really welcome to contact us. We try to have a meeting, a morning tea or a sausage sizzle or whatever it may be every couple of months. It is fairly informal. Parents get to come along and tell us what they are happy about and what they are not happy about. Parents are welcome to come along to steering committee meetings, and at times they come along in quite large numbers, which is good. The enterprise education project is a really big one for engaging the parents. They actually have to be a part of it to pass on their knowledge. So it is interesting for them and it is interesting for the students. I think that is a great way for us to get the kids and the parents working together. At the moment we are thinking about having a big awards night at the end of the year and an annual camp where we can do team building and all that sort of wonderful stuff with them.

The students work on a regular basis with goal setting, career aspirations and short- and long-term targets. That is all part of the individual aspiration plan. Every Friday we try to set some little survey where we ask: 'How do you think you went at school this week? What was your attitude like?' Next week it might be something relating to their future: for instance, 'Do

you know what you want to do when you leave school?' Every week we put them through these little surveys. We collect the data from them and then we turn them into a graph, and the students can see whether they are improving or not.

I actually borrowed the CATs IAP form as well. I do not know if you are aware of the CATs program—Career and Transition. They have an individual aspiration program that I have borrowed and modified a bit. It is really good because it sets things out like: 'Have you got a short-term goal? Do you know what you want to achieve this month? Do you know what you want to achieve by the end of the year? Do you know what you want to achieve by the end of school and in the future?' It breaks it down into cycles. It also asks, 'Do you know what steps you need to take to get from here to there to make sure you actually reach your end target?' I thought that was the best one I had seen, so we borrowed it, put our name on it and called it wonderful.

Graphs are used as visual aids for students to monitor their progress. I have a couple of examples here. This is one where the students can track how they are going. In semester 1, their English is down fairly low. Here is semester 2. They can keep an eye on it. This graph actually goes into their IAP so the student gets to have a look at it as well. The reason I choose graphs is that I think they are a really good visual aid for kids; they seem to relate a lot better to them than just seeing letters, numbers or whatnot. They can see the areas where they need to pick up and they know, by the time they reach the end of this graph here, that if their English and maths are not at this level they cannot become an apprentice, a boilermaker or whatever. So that is also part of that individual aspiration plan. It gives them a good visual mark to aim for. The graph would be a lot more complex than these. We would mark the level they needed to be achieving by the end of year 12 if they want to go on to wherever they want to go.

This is another simple one. They are only examples—we change them on a regular basis. We are only a brand new program so we have not set anything in concrete. It is still growing on a daily basis, a weekly basis. Quite often we come across things that maybe we have not been doing exactly right, so we change them to make them better and sometimes we even scrap them. On this one, question 1 might simply be something like, 'Do you know what you want to do when you leave school? Have you had any career guidance? Have you done any work experience?' Simple things like that. Then the next semester we can ask them again, and it might be here on the graph. Hopefully, after four semesters all their answers will be right up here on the graph. It gives us a target—okay, they have had no work experience, they have not been to university or they have not sampled any of these other programs. It gives us and them a good visual aid and, yet again, it links back to the individual aspiration plans or IAPs.

Improved literacy skills for all Indigenous students—Ghunyse. I should clarify that. That is actually the local Indigenous word for 'spear'. We figured it was a really good name for our program because we are hoping that it is very sharp and to the point. We asked the local elders if we could use it and they gave us permission. So we call our once a week program Ghunyse. We have a ratio of roughly one teacher to five students, and we work on this ATSI access course as well as linking it back to schools through negotiations with HODs and things like that. They get very intense tutoring—I am not quite sure what the right words for that would be but you can understand what I am saying. Instead of a ratio of one to 30, it is one to five, so if they cannot learn something they are not working hard enough.

Speaking of working hard, when they join the program they have to sign contracts and things like that where they agree that they are prepared to work as hard as they possibly can for us. It is a volunteer program; you do not have to join. You can leave any time you like. Also, if you do not live up to expectations and to the contract you signed, you will be removed from the program, the same as if you had a job.

There are quite a few funny little things that we have thrown in there to make it a bit more like real life, where we let them make their own decisions rather than like school where we tell them what they have to do. We use all that empowerment stuff where they get to make decisions on where we might go in a couple of weeks time for an excursion or what we might want to study this week. We have our guidelines as to what they need to learn, but we let them make a lot of decisions as well. That is all part of goal setting, being empowered to control your own destiny and that sort of thing.

In recording and collating data for the seasonal calendar and booklet, they have to sit down and interview the elders, record all the information and enter it into computer programs. It is very intensive literacy. I probably do not need to go on too much about that. Obviously, you understand that putting together a big portfolio of information takes a whole lot of literacy and numeracy skills, and computer work.

One of the important things is that we look at the students and assess the level they are at with their literacy—I am sure you have heard this 100 times before—and then we go back to where they became disconnected. If they have very poor literacy skills, we will try to work out where they got disconnected. We will then go back and start teaching them from there so that they are not swamped or overloaded with information they do not understand. Of course, we do that in a culturally appropriate manner. We would never single people out or anything like that. We do not want anyone to feel ashamed because they are learning at a lesser level than the bloke sitting beside them.

That is about it for my PowerPoint display. I hope I did not rush too quickly through it for you. That is a very loose overview of the program itself. Nothing is explained too much in depth there. It is fairly complex, so all we could do was put together a loose overview of it.

CHAIR—How many Indigenous students are involved in the program?

Mr Buck—We have 230 in the Gladstone district. At the moment we are directly working with only the Toolooa students. As of next term we will be working with Tannum Sands and Biloela students. It takes a fair while to get it up and running. We have to negotiate with schools, parents and students. We have to assess students to work out which ones are suitable for the program. Not every kid would be ideally suited to go into the program.

CHAIR—What are the criteria?

Mr Buck—Generally, the criteria would be low numeracy and literacy and perhaps having no real goal.

Mr Adie—I have some initial data. Real kids names are shown, but I will not mention them. It suggests that, given those criteria, 13 of our 35 kids may go into the program for those sorts of reasons. We are yet to see how it will go, but we feel very positive about it.

CHAIR—Are they students whom you think have a reasonable chance of reaching their career aspirations once these issues are addressed?

Mr Adie—Anyone has I think.

CHAIR—That is a fair point.

Mr Adie—You just don't know, do you? We have this young lady here in a TAFE course two days a week. She is doing TAFE literacy and numeracy. They are suggesting another day out, and that is one of the things we are going to talk about—whether going for three days would be the right thing for her. These are discussions we are yet to have with the kids and with the parents. I feel that all of those kids can achieve if we can do that. But they can achieve anyway, because there are multiple pathways.

Mrs Corowa—Are they students who are at risk?

Mr Adie—I would not write off any of these kids, no. They are all at risk.

CHAIR—What makes them eligible—or targets—for the GIVEN program rather than, say, intensive numeracy and literacy programs?

Mr Buck—They are eligible if they are Indigenous. The other 17 at Tannum will not be neglected either, even though they will not be going into our one day a week program. As part of that enterprise program, we are envisaging that a lot of the computer work will be done by the higher achievers that will still be at school.

Mr Adie—There are 22 students. One of our concerns was that we have high-achieving Aboriginal kids and we do not want them to be forced out of the classroom when they want to be there. So part of the discussions with the GIVEN people was to find out what those kids wanted. The criteria are that they have to be or identified as (a) Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, (b) they have to want to go into the program and (c) there will have to be parental agreement because we are taking them out of their normal course of study.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What is the funding for this?

Mr Buck—It is DEST funding?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—How much is it?

Mrs Corowa—It is $160,000 for the first year.

Mr Adie—Through the GIVEN program?

Mr Buck—Yes.

Mr Adie—Did you want to know what our school gets?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Yes.

Mr Adie—I do not know of any money. We do not get any money to support such a program.

Mrs Corowa—It is all based here at Toolooa State High School.

Mr Adie—We have to find our own place.

CHAIR—What is the money used for?

Mrs Fysh—The money was there and it is for the district. The money that came from DEST was used to employ Rob and a teacher and an admin assistant. It was also used to lease a 13-seater bus, which was to be utilised throughout Biloela, Baralaba and the Callide district—which is about 2½ hours away from Gladstone—plus the Gladstone schools.

Since the money has come through, they have been piloting what would they would like to do and setting up programs here at Toolooa and at Baralaba. They have been working very closely, because they take in Woorabinda students at Baralaba. They have specific needs out there, and the principal is also a person who is very enthusiastic and passionate about implementing these types of programs. So it was a whole-of-district program, not just for one school. It is just that Toolooa High School put in the submission, with the help and support of the other principals in the district.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—So it is $160,000 per annum?

Mr Adie—Initially.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And for Rob that is effectively another teacher—

Mrs Fysh—And an admin assistant and the bus.

Mr Buck—There is money which is left over that we use for enterprise programs, student resources and office equipment. I could get you a copy of the budget fairly easily, if you would like one before you leave this afternoon.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I would like to follow this through a little bit, otherwise we will be left a little confused. I want to take that through to your interesting idea about the calendar and the seasons. Where do the funds come from for the physical creation of that?

Mr Buck—They come from Comalco, Rio Tinto, Aldoga—any industry that will listen to me long enough to give us money.

Mrs Corowa—And schools.

Mr Buck—Yes.

Mr Adie—Rob is attempting to get sponsorship. A fraction of that $160,000 will also be used. They have allocated approximately $5,000 for resources.

Mr Buck—We have got about $8,000 or $9,000 for enterprise programs, but that has got to cover nine schools—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—And 230 students.

Mrs Corowa—But it goes for two years.

Mr Buck—Yes, but that is per year.

Mr Adie—So it relies on the goodwill of schools as well as the funding that schools already receive. We do not get any extra funding for things like my time in working with those kids or parents or with the GIVEN teachers.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Do the schools get an extra component because of the Indigenous students?

Mr Adie—Schools get funded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Is that also used by the schools to complement this?

Mr Adie—No, the individual students get that money.

Mrs Corowa—Are you talking about IESIP?

Mr Adie—Yes.

Mrs Corowa—IESIP is used for developing individual skills to address the professional development and employment of Indigenous people in skilled jobs.

Mr Adie—We employ two Indigenous teaching aides. So we have teachers aides in the classroom with students, but we do not use that money to buy resources much. ASSPA gets a small amount of money. It is around $5,000 in our school—

Mrs Corowa—It is about $150 per student.

Mr Adie—That is used to help support students, and some of that money goes towards providing resources for the school. For example, the Successmaker program is designed to assist students with low numeracy and literacy skills. It is a program written by teachers in Cairns. It is a very good program. The ASSPA committee at our school has paid for one of those site licences and may fund half of another one in time.

CHAIR—So that happens in addition to this?

Mr Adie—That is on a yearly basis. It is not part of the GIVEN funding. There have been ongoing programs in schools that Loris has been involved with for over three or four years now where she spends one day a week in our school and four days in other schools.

Mrs Corowa—I actually have nine schools.

Mr Adie—We get support in terms of salary.

CHAIR—What do you do in that time, Loris?

Mrs Corowa—I work with students and liaise with students, parents, teachers and school staff. I implement programs that EQ puts in the schools, programs like AITAP and AICAP, which has now died. I also work with DEST through ATAS, which is the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme. I also work with students through ASSPA. But my main job is to counsel students if they have any issues that would prevent them from achieving in the classroom and to liaise with parents if parents are not sure about the expectations of schools. I organise parents coming into the school and maybe even meeting a teacher if there are problems. That is my main role in the school. But I do work on implementing programs.

GIVEN is probably a plus for me in my position, in that I do not have time to do everything. On the vocational side of education, it is really a big help to me, because when GIVEN applied for the funding they applied for all the schools that I work at—all nine schools. They are Moura, Biloela and Theodore, which are way out that way; Baralaba, which is way up this way; and then I have three main schools here; and there are another two at each end of Gladstone. So there are a lot of schools to cover, and I have really appreciated them coming and working in that area. They work mainly on the vocational side, connecting kids. That is one of my roles too, but there are a lot of other things. We probably need another person in this area, in my position, because I really do not get to go out to the Callide Valley much—probably once a term, which I think is not really good for them or for me because there is no rapport built between the kids and me.

Mr Adie—Loris has developed lots of relationships with people. That is one of her main tasks—a very important support. The GIVEN team have been able to get some networking happening between industry, the schools and TAFE. The program that they are developing is going to have that certification side of it, which will be a really important thing. It is a good motivator for kids because at the end they will come out of it with something they can show an employer, which is very important.

CHAIR—Could you expand on that memorandum of understanding with industry? How effectively will that work? Have they shown a real commitment to it?

Mr Buck—100 per cent—certainly Comalco has. It is a shame Robyn Sermon had to leave. Basically, they have committed to taking on X amount of our students per year. We have had to put a ceiling on the number. They are not going to take them on for employment, but they will take them on for training, as in structured work placements and things like that. And they have committed workers to work with them to set out a training schedule—

CHAIR—I am sorry to interrupt. Would that be for blocks of time during the year or for a couple of days a week? How would that work?

Mr Buck—All of the above. Whichever we see as suiting the students best, we will go and talk to Comalco and they will commit somebody to work with our program for that week. They are basically committing a worker away from his job for a week to work with one of our students. So it is a fairly large commitment. They have also committed—if we target some student who is doing particularly well—to creating positions for them, or they will take them on for future employment. I do not know whether or not you are aware of this, but CAR is not yet up and running as a functional smelter. It is still only with subcontractors and that sort of thing. So we are looking more at things in two years time when the smelter is actually up and running. But they will take on students now. If we had a student who was good enough now and we sat down and negotiated with them, they looked at him or her and said, 'Yes, they're wonderful,' they will take them on now and start training them for in two years time when the business is up and running.

CHAIR—What are the ages of the students involved in the GIVEN program?

Mr Buck—Year 8 to year 12. We are not doing a whole lot with the year 8s at the moment. We are a little swamped, to be honest. With nine schools and such a wide range of students—we have high and low achievers, remote and city students—we are finding it really difficult to cater for everybody. We have had to just make a decision and say, 'We'll start with the lower achievers and we'll start with this school, then branch out to those schools and then branch out to these schools.' We are trying to take it one step at a time rather than doing 150 things at once and not achieving anything. So we are a little swamped as far as that goes and we are not working with the year 8s. We are talking with them, negotiating with them what they want to do and starting to get them goal setting, but we are not yet incorporating them in a program as such. So the reality is that we are working with the year 9s to year 12s.

CHAIR—But if those younger students can see what is happening with the older students I suppose it gives them something to—

Mr Buck—Something to aim for, something to work for.

CHAIR—To aim for and to aspire to.

Mr Buck—I certainly do not think a program like ours is a quick-fix either. I do not think, by any stretch of the imagination, that if we run this program this year every Indigenous student in the Gladstone area is going to be wonderful. A lot of these kids have a lot of historical background as well, in that their parents perhaps did not work and their parents' parents did not work. So we have the issues of no work ethic and no real role models within the home to model themselves after. We have to change, we have to turn all that around, and I do not think that is anything we can achieve within six or 12 months, or a couple of years even.

CHAIR—Isn't that part of what Loris does?

Mrs Corowa—Yes.

Mr Adie—I would like to talk about my school for a moment. Over the last few years—we are a new school; I think you might have heard a bit about us earlier in the day—we have had a fair amount of success with Aboriginal kids. When Rob came to us, one of the things he said to us was that he was surprised at how well some of our kids were doing. I think there are a few reasons why. I would like to state some of them and make some parallels with the GIVEN program. Firstly, in our junior curriculum we have a vertical timetable, which employs real choice for kids. It is not just, 'I'm going to pick maths, science or home ec.' Within each of those subjects they have to choose some individual units of study and they build a course, depending on where they think they are going to head in the future. If they want to become an accountant, they would pick accountancy and they might add a spreadsheeting unit and a database unit, and maybe they will add an introduction to law unit. That builds a junior curriculum that is focused on the learner. Our kids have had that from year 9 through to year 10.

In year 8 they have to make real choice. In year 8 they have to be considering their future, they have to be making serious decisions about where they are going. They do that in all schools, but at our school they are forced to think much more clearly about just what it is they want to do, because they have the opportunity to build an individual curriculum. If you look at every kid, every kid will have a different combination of units. That is not unusual in schools with vertical timetables, but I think it is one of the reasons that students in our school have had the chance to do reasonably well, because they are doing things they want to do. It also lines up with the QSA syllabi, so we are not doing anything that does not conform to standards across the state.

We also have a focus on goal setting, so every term kids have to set goals in their student organiser, which is their diary. At the end of the term we do a report and they have to talk about their goals to their parents. That is in-your-face goal setting. That is the idea of the Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program. The GIVEN guys are doing that in more detail than we can do, because they can do it individually with kids—sit down, talk them through those things—so I can only see that enhancing the sort of program that our school does.

I think the term reporting puts a lot of pressure on our teachers—they are currently complaining about that. Most schools report only at the end of a semester, but we give regular feedback and I think that helps, because then parents know that their kid is doing well or not well. Another feature that we have at our school is consistent tracking of assignments. Every assignment has to be done, and they have to be handed to a deputy principal if they are not done. There is a lot of pressure on kids to get things in. I do not want to put Aboriginal kids down, but often they do not assignments in on time, they do not get them done. Would that be right, Rob?

Mr Buck—Yes.

Mr Adie—There has been a bit of pressure on the whole group to get assignments in. I suspect that helps. I do not have any data to back that up, except to say that we have a lot of kids doing well. I also think we have lots of kids doing well because we have good parental support. As Rob said, if parents are working and achieving, their kids are more likely to be working and achieving. At Tannum we are fairly lucky that lots of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids have parents who are good role models. That helps us, I think. It is very important to provide that for other kids.

We also support students when they are doing these multiple pathways. They miss classes because they are off doing a traineeship or something else. So we have put a teacher into our resource centre, which we call our skills development centre. We have allocated our resources that way so there is always someone there to make sure kids are on task. Normally, they would be there just to catch up on work set by another teacher, because they were away or off at TAFE for that lesson. We have made a choice to have a teacher there to put a bit more pressure on but also to give a bit more support. They are also in an environment where there are computers available. They are in the library, so texts are available. I think that helps.

Other schools might put that one teacher into a discipline room or something like that. We have chosen not to have one of those rooms. We have put that teacher in to try to support kids positively. We do not get enough teachers, so we have had to take a teacher out of the classroom to do that. It is at a cost to us, but we think that it is going to help in the long term. We could have used that teacher to put five or six more classes from the curriculum in the timetable. But if kids are supported they are more likely to achieve. So schools need more teachers and smaller class sizes, as the unions have been telling us.

CHAIR—There is no argument about that.

Mr Adie—I think they are positive reasons, and the GIVEN program is picking out those things. It is supporting kids, it is getting the elders in to give real knowledge, and I can see only benefits will come out of it. What I know about these kids is that they need to know who they are and where they are culturally. The schools are foreign to them. The way they talk and behave at home is quite different from the way white people talk and behave, and we need to have that link. That is important.

The pressures I have talked about include timetabling. They are going to miss some classes to do this program, so we are going to have to have teachers working harder to provide extra work for these kids so they do not get behind in their other subjects. We have transport issues. As you know, we are 20-something kilometres away. We do not have a bus, but luckily they do. But no-one gives us a bus: if we want one we have to be creative about it. Our congratulations go to Toolooa, because they have been very creative. We hope to learn from them. It would be great if we got that sort of provision for schools.

The biggest thing that I think puts pressure on this program is the guidance service. We get four days per week of guidance. We have two guidance officers, one for one day a week and one for three days a week. If they were to give a student 30 minutes of their time, and if they did that for all 800 kids in the school, that would be 800 days worth of guidance time. That is one 30-minute session. Yet we get 160 days. If we are going to really get kids going into these multiple pathways that I heard talked about in the last session and that we are trying to develop, we need good guidance. We have good people, and they do give good guidance, but we are stretched. And guidance officers are not just there for career advice. In fact, their biggest job is helping kids at risk and kids who are having day-to-day problems. The GIVEN program is taking a little bit of that role away from the guidance officers, which is great. Even though they are not trained as guidance officers, they are doing some of that role. They are helping with career aspirations and giving guidance to kids who need it, and it will only help in the long run.

Mr Buck—Something that came through loud and clear when we started surveying high school students was that nearly 95 per cent of students in years 11 and 12, I would say, said they had received no or very minimal amounts of career guidance through their time at school. Almost everyone, to a person, said they had no idea what they wanted to do when they left school.

CHAIR—So you are working with them from year 8 and, more so, from year 9?

Mr Buck—Yes.

CHAIR—That should certainly help to address that.

Mr Buck—One can only hope so.

CHAIR—What percentage of Indigenous students in the area get through to complete year 12? What is the successful completion rate?

Mrs Corowa—Last year is the first year that we have seen so many go through at one of the schools. It was the most that I have seen go through in the 10 years that I have been working at the school.

CHAIR—What percentage?

Mrs Corowa—I would say 80 per cent completed year 12 from the beginning of the year.

CHAIR—Of those that started year 11?

Mrs Corowa—Yes.

CHAIR—What percentage of Aboriginal students drop out at years 9 or 10?

Mrs Corowa—I could not say.

CHAIR—Ballpark?

Mrs Fysh—I think 25 per cent of Indigenous students at least will drop out in years 8, 9 and 10 through non-attendance at school. I know Loris has helped with that, but it is a real issue in the junior school and in year 8. They have issues of harassment within schools, but other issues are non-attendance, non-completion of work and also the impacts of their home environment.

Mrs Corowa—Moving.

Mrs Fysh—Yes, moving out of town and moving back. They are very transient sometimes. I would say that, in the past, we have had poor retention rates up to year 10. If we can get them over that hump, in years 11 and 12 we seem to have better success. Because of the AITAP and those sorts of programs we seem to be able to get them to year 12.

CHAIR—Of those that complete year 12, what percentage find employment or go on to further study? Is it pretty high?

Mrs Fysh—Yes, it is a fairly high percentage. Last year, one of our students received a Coles scholarship worth $2,000. It was not that she was Indigenous. It was just that she worked at Coles and they had a scholarship which allowed her to do further study. She was involved in an AITAP program where she went to university during the senior year. I think the biggest hump with Indigenous students is certainly the 8s, 9s and 10s. If we can get them into the senior years, we have better success.

Mr Buck—Would it be a fair comparison to say that we have about 20 grade 8s but only one grade 12.

CHAIR—That says a lot, doesn't it?

Mr Buck—Do we have two grade 11s?

Mrs Corowa—It has been low for a while.

Mr Buck—We have high numbers in years 8 and 9, but each year they seem to drop off until they are virtually non-existent.

CHAIR—So is part of the focus of GIVEN to try to get them across that hump and at least to complete year 10?

Mr Buck—Yes. And if they do complete year 10 and do not go on to year 12 then they have to go into employment. You have to have a zero unemployment policy. They either go on to further education or go on to employment—one or the other.

CHAIR—Are you achieving that?

Mr Buck—I do not know. We have only been here for one term.

Mr Adie—It is very difficult to get that data because schools do not have staff who can track destinations of kids once they leave. For example, we have tried to get the destinations of our last year's year 12s. We gave them a letter before they went to send back to us when they got into the next year to tell us what they were doing. We have only received 50 per cent of those back. We do not have the staff to spend a whole lot of time tracking and finding out where kids are.

Mr Buck—That is certainly something that we will be looking at.

CHAIR—Do ATSIC put funding into something like that?

Mrs Corowa—No.

Mr Adie—I am talking across the range of students, not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Mrs Corowa—I am the only one in the school that addresses those needs. I have to service nine schools.

Mr Adie—We would like to have a more integrated process for how kids move and are tracked. I do not know how you do that, but it is on the agenda.

Mrs Fysh—It is very difficult. I have been tracking students and doing destination studies for five years now at the school. I have kept data. I have tried all sorts of ways to get the data from the students. I had email addresses this year and I thought that might be easy, but I did not get a lot back and we really had to phone around to see where students had gone. The other thing that we tracked in the last couple of years is students leaving in year 11 because we were being penalised by Education Queensland in their data. We would say that a student had a full-time apprenticeship, but on the data that went to Brisbane it would come up as 'Left school'. So we were not getting any credit for transitioning students successfully because the data did not allow us to put that in. We have actually put that in now, so we know how many students left at the end of year 11 for employment, apprenticeships or further training somewhere else. That makes a difference to our data, whereas in Brisbane they were just saying, 'Left school; not retained.' Tracking, because of the small numbers, is going to be very interesting—how GIVEN is able to track them and what the real figures are. We do not know a lot about it because Loris has been one person—

Mrs Corowa—AITAP was one of the forums that they used to track from year 7 to year 12 and last year was the last year and then they closed it down. That was supposed to be able to provide some data on the progress of Indigenous students, but it has closed down now. They stopped it last year.

CHAIR—I am afraid we are out of time, otherwise we will miss our plane. Thank you very much and good luck with the program.

Mr Buck—I have some attendance examples. I only managed to pull these out this morning. The ones that I have here are from when they have entered our program. We are only brand new. Before that there are all the unexplained attendances for each student. Probably for about 80 per cent of students that we have worked with so far, the lack of attendance has dropped to zero. We have not done it with every student. We still have one student who is proving to be a problem, but he is not showing up to our program. The one student who chose not to enter our program is still not attending school at all.

CHAIR—I would be very interested to see your progress over the next couple of years.

Mr Buck—Whether it holds or not is another thing.

Mrs Corowa—It has only really been in for two years.

CHAIR—You have only just started. I am afraid we will have to wrap it up there. Thank you. I really appreciate your work.

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

That the subcommittee authorise the publication of the evidence given before it at public hearings on this day, including publication on the electronic parliamentary database of the transcript.

Subcommittee adjourned at 3.01 p.m.