COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Vocational education in schools

WEDNESDAY, 30 APRIL 2003

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Wednesday, 30 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 Albanese, Mr Bartlett, Mrs May and Mr Sawford

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

WITNESSES

Committee commenced at 9.51 a.m.

BATSON, Camille; ERLANDSON, Yolanda Stephanie; GALINDO, Julian Mathew; MURN, Roxy; and SMITH, Kelly June

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education in schools. I thank Centralian College and their executive director, Don Zoellner, for their hospitality—we certainly appreciate their having us here today—and thank you to the students for your time. I know you would rather be over there studying or whatever, but thanks for giving us your time this morning.

Just before we start, I will fill you in on what the inquiry is about. This is an inquiry into vocational education. We want to find out how vocational education is working, how it can be improved, what are the problems, what are the benefits, what are the strengths et cetera. That includes the whole range: school based New Apprenticeships, Pathways, VET in schools—all of those sorts of things. At the end of this inquiry we will make some recommendations to the government about the sorts of things that they can do to improve VET in schools. We are visiting a lot of schools around the country. We want to talk to students as well as teachers, government officials and so on to give us a good idea of how it is working. So the sorts of things that you say to us today will help us in formulating the recommendations that we make to government. We want you to be relaxed. Do not be too anxious about what goes on here. Do not tell us what you think we want to hear; tell us what you think about how the whole system is working.

To begin with we might ask you to give us your names and tell us what you are doing, whether it is a Pathways apprenticeship or VET course and what year you are in. Then we will ask you some questions and you can make comments whenever you have something to add.

Camille Batson—My name is Camille Batson, and I am doing a hairdressing apprenticeship.

Kelly Smith—I am Kelly Smith, and I am doing a chef apprenticeship.

Roxy Murn—My name is Roxy Murn. I am doing child care.

Yolanda Erlandson—My name is Yolanda, and I am doing an apprenticeship in office admin.

Julian Galindo—My name is Julian Galindo. I am a school based apprentice enrolled in the Pathways class in diesel mechanics.

CHAIR—Do you all live in town, or have some of you come from out of town to do these courses? You are all from Alice Springs?

Camille Batson—Yes.

CHAIR—Why did you choose Centralian College rather than one of the other schools in town? Is it because of the VET courses?

Kelly Smith—It offers better opportunities.

Julian Galindo—It is better. It has welding, VET courses and so on. I am not sure that OLSH has school based apprenticeships as well. Marty helped me out with the enrolment and told me where to go and that I could do this and that. I kind of went from there.

Mrs MAY—Who is Marty? Someone in your primary school?

Julian Galindo—Home group teacher.

Yolanda Erlandson—Marty runs the Pathways program.

Mrs MAY—He came to your school?

Julian Galindo—We came here.

Mrs MAY—You came here. So there was a careers day or an open day that brought you here?

Julian Galindo—An open day.

Mrs MAY—Through the open day you were able to find out what was happening here, what courses were available?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

Mrs MAY—That helped you make your choice?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—What schools did you come from before?

Julian Galindo—Anzac.

CHAIR—That is a state high school, is it, in town?

Julian Galindo—Yes, public.

Yolanda Erlandson—It is just a high school. It goes from year 7 to year 10.

CHAIR—All of you came from Anzac? Where did you come from?

Roxy Murn—From Adelaide.

CHAIR—You came up here because of this?

Roxy Murn—No, I came up two years ago because my mum got a job. Then I found out about this program.

Kelly Smith—Yes, I am from here.

CHAIR—From Anzac Hill High School?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

Camille Batson—Yes, from Anzac.

Mr SAWFORD—So you all left at year 10 and came here for year 11, basically?

Camille Batson—Yes.

CHAIR—Just tell us about your apprenticeship. Where are you up to in your apprenticeship course?

Julian Galindo—Just about to go to trade school in the next month, I reckon.

Mr ALBANESE—Where will you do that—here?

Julian Galindo—Yes, Centralian.

Mrs MAY—What year are you in?

Julian Galindo—Year 11.

Mrs MAY—But how far through your course are you?

Julian Galindo—I am not sure.

CHAIR—How many days do you do your apprenticeship and how many days do you do normal study in a week?

Julian Galindo—I do two days school and three days my apprenticeship. I also do a VET course on Thursday afternoons, which is welding.

CHAIR—So you do three days with your apprenticeship?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—That is with an employer in town?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—With one employer?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—Yolanda, what about yours?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am here on Monday and Tuesday, and then on Wednesday I do my VET course upstairs with Gillian Marshall. That is until four o'clock. Then on Thursday and Friday I do 10 hours at my workplace where I am doing my apprenticeship.

CHAIR—You said you do a VET course upstairs. Is that on the same subject as your apprenticeship?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes, almost exactly the same.

Mr SAWFORD—What other things do you do on those other two days at school? What subjects do you take?

Yolanda Erlandson—Maths, English, integrated studies.

Roxy Murn—Work skills.

Yolanda Erlandson—Work skills—all sorts of stuff.

Mr SAWFORD—On weekends do you work at your place of employment?

Yolanda Erlandson—No, I am employed somewhere else in a part-time job.

Mr SAWFORD—So you have another part-time job as well?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Who of you have part-time jobs? What do you do?

Roxy Murn—I work at Kmart.

Mr SAWFORD—How many hours a week do you do?

Roxy Murn—It depends because I am casual.

Mr SAWFORD—Average?

Roxy Murn—I work most weekends and sometimes during the week.

Mr SAWFORD—So you could work 14 hours, 16 hours?

Roxy Murn—About six or seven hours.

Mr SAWFORD—Where and how many hours do you work, Kelly?

Kelly Smith—At the moment I work about only six hours because I am in training.

Mr SAWFORD—Whereabouts do you work?

Kelly Smith—At Kmart.

Mr SAWFORD—What about you, Camille?

Camille Batson—I work at KFC about 25 to 30 hours a week.

Mr SAWFORD—How does that impact on your commitment to here?

Camille Batson—Sometimes it is pretty hard because I come to school Monday and Tuesday and then go straight to work usually. I will finish work at my apprenticeship and go straight to KFC and work.

Mr SAWFORD—So you are working late at night at KFC?

Camille Batson—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—What sorts of times do you knock off?

Camille Batson—Sometimes 10, 11 or 12.

Mr SAWFORD—What sort of start time do you have the next day?

Camille Batson—For school it is nine o'clock and for my apprenticeship it is 12.30.

Mr SAWFORD—So that is not too bad.

Camille Batson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—What is your apprenticeship, Camille?

Camille Batson—Hairdressing.

CHAIR—Kelly, you are not doing an apprenticeship but a VET course; is that right?

Kelly Smith—No, I am doing an apprenticeship.

CHAIR—You are doing an apprenticeship as well?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—In hospitality and catering?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—Who is your employer?

Kelly Smith—Centralian College.

CHAIR—That is here?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you think it is easy having your employer running your course as well?

Kelly Smith—It is, because I have a lot of contact with my teachers and if I need help they are just out my backdoor, basically.

Mr SAWFORD—You are all in year 11; is that correct?

Students—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you know of or have you heard of other people who may have liked what they were doing in the beginning but when they have reached year 12 they have realised maybe they are not doing what they want to do and want to change? If you want to change your mind, what happens?

Julian Galindo—You have to go into the work force.

Mr SAWFORD—Go into the work force?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—So you would not just come back and start again?

Julian Galindo—No.

Mr SAWFORD—What would you do?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am not too sure. I am quite happy with what I am doing at the moment.

CHAIR—So most of you are out in the workplace for a lot of time, two or three days a week. Does that make it hard to keep up with the other studies you are doing?

Yolanda Erlandson—Not really, because we do not have specific time slots for our subjects. We spend the nine or whatever hours on Monday just doing maths and English and all the stuff that we need to catch up on. Tuesdays are just catch-up time, really.

CHAIR—Will you all do the NTCE?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—So you can still do that. Next year you will continue your apprenticeships?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—Will you spend more time doing those other subjects as well?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes, probably.

CHAIR—So the amount of time you spend on your apprenticeship will be reduced so you can—

Julian Galindo—No.

CHAIR—No? You will still do three days a week?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

Yolanda Erlandson—I am allowed to do only 10 hours a week for my apprenticeship.

CHAIR—So, Julian, how will you manage your NTCE when you are out three days a week working and doing your apprenticeship?

Julian Galindo—I reckon I will manage it pretty good.

CHAIR—You will manage it?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—How many subjects do you have to do for the NTCE?

Julian Galindo—I think nine.

Yolanda Erlandson—Twelve.

CHAIR—Over two years?

Yolanda Erlandson—No, one year.

CHAIR—Twelve subjects over one year. How many credits do you get for your apprenticeship?

Julian Galindo—I reckon you could get three.

CHAIR—So you have to do nine other ones?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—You will do that in two days a week?

Yolanda Erlandson—For every 50 hours that I do at my workplace I get one credit towards my NTCE. I think it is every 50 hours that I am in my TAFE course I get another credit to my NTCE as well.

Mrs MAY—How many credits do you need then?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am not quite sure how many you need to pass year 11.

CHAIR—So you will all have your NTCE and most of you will have apprenticeships or you will be part way through your apprenticeships. So by the end of year 12 how far through your apprenticeship will you be? You will have done certificate II level?

Julian Galindo—I am going to only year 11.

CHAIR—You are only going to year 11?

Julian Galindo—Yes. I am going into the work force next year full time.

CHAIR—Yolanda, you are doing year 12?

Yolanda Erlandson—My school based apprenticeship is over 24 months. So I will be here next year as well until I finish my apprenticeship and get my NTCE done.

CHAIR—Your apprenticeship will be finished when you are at school? You will still have to continue?

Yolanda Erlandson—I have to keep doing it until the end of next year, yes. It finishes at the end of next year.

CHAIR—So that will finish your apprenticeship; you do not have to do another two years after that with your employer?

Yolanda Erlandson—No.

Mr ALBANESE—Sorry, Yolanda, what apprenticeship are you doing?

Yolanda Erlandson—Office admin. I am doing cert II and cert III in business in TAFE.

CHAIR—I am a bit confused about how that works. So you are doing two; you are doing office management and business?

Yolanda Erlandson—The business sort of comes in to help me with my apprenticeship as well so I can get used to the office business sort of stuff.

CHAIR—So that will be a traineeship and you will be up to certificate III by the end of next year?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—Kelly, how about you?

Kelly Smith—I think I shall be halfway.

CHAIR—So once you finish year 12 here you will continue your apprenticeship?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—Will Centralian College still be your employer for that, or will you transfer to another employer?

Kelly Smith—I can't say. They say experience is one of the most important things for a chef, being in different places. So it just depends.

CHAIR—So you will have certificate II by the time you leave here?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—Then you will finish your apprenticeship with another employer?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—Will the work be fairly easy to find in town?

Kelly Smith—It depends really on the workplace, whether they will take on apprentices, and basically on your reputation of how well you have worked beforehand.

CHAIR—Do you think, if you have certificate II and you have a good work record, you should find it fairly easy to find someone to take you on for the rest of it?

Kelly Smith—It might take a couple of months, three or four months.

Mrs MAY—I am confused about the school to work transition program.

CHAIR—Is your pattern fairly typical of most students doing school based apprenticeships: they would do part of it at school, say up to II, complete the NTCE at the same time and then find another employer or continue with an employer outside for another couple of years to finish the apprenticeship? Is that a fairly common pattern?

Kelly Smith—Yes, it just depends on the employee, if they want to stay there or if they want to get more opportunities in a different style.

Mrs MAY—Is anyone thinking of a tertiary education after school, or you would all stay in your apprenticeships in that chosen field, the field you have been working in now?

Roxy Murn—I am going on to my diploma in child care.

Mrs MAY—Where will you do that?

Roxy Murn—Here probably, after doing certificate II and certificate III this year.

Mrs MAY—So you can continue that here?

Roxy Murn—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Would you find work here in Alice Springs?

Roxy Murn—Yes.

Mrs MAY—So you would be able to stay here; you will not have to go away?

Roxy Murn—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Camille, will you finish here?

Camille Batson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—You are working with a local hairdressing salon?

Camille Batson—Yes, working in Cutting Remark in town. So I will do the rest of this year, and if I get offered a full-time apprenticeship I will go full time. But, if not, I will stay and do year 12 and then I will finish my apprenticeship with Cutting Remark still.

CHAIR—So it will take another two years after school to finish that?

Camille Batson—Yes.

CHAIR—So, again, you would be up to certificate II by the time you do year 12 here?

Camille Batson—Yes.

CHAIR—Julian, why are you going to leave at the end of year 11? Is it because you have an apprenticeship and you do not need the NTCE?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—Are there plenty of jobs in town?

Yolanda Erlandson—Depends, really.

CHAIR—Depends on what?

Yolanda Erlandson—If there are any jobs going. It depends on what area you are looking at too.

Mrs MAY—You have obviously all found part-time jobs too, because you are all working part time during apprenticeships. You all have quite a heavy load. So those jobs are obviously out there?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—If you want to work, there are jobs there?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Do any of you find it difficult balancing working part time, doing your studies, doing your apprenticeship? Is it impacting?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. I am really busy. I do not really have any time to—

Mrs MAY—For a social life?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. I am pretty flat out during the week, and then I have to work on the weekends at my part-time job as well.

Mrs MAY—Do you all work part time because you need the income?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes, more money.

Mrs MAY—More money to help you through?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Are you all living at home?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am.

Roxy Murn—Yes.

Mrs MAY—You are all living at home. Are you paying board?

Yolanda Erlandson—No.

Mrs MAY—So it would be more difficult if you left home?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. I am trying to save.

Mrs MAY—You are trying to save some money. Is there anywhere you particularly want to go, Yolanda?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am moving out of here as soon as I finish my apprenticeship.

Mrs MAY—Wow; that sounds like a goal you have set.

CHAIR—Why?

Mrs MAY—Why?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am sick of Alice Springs.

CHAIR—Why?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am just sick of it.

Mrs MAY—Did you grow up here?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. I have been here for too long.

Mrs MAY—Where would you like to go?

Yolanda Erlandson—My mum wants to move down to Adelaide, but if I do not like it down there I might go up to Darwin.

Mrs MAY—Do you have friends or family in any of those places?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—So they could help you set up to start with?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Does anyone else want to move?

Roxy Murn—One day I want to go back to Adelaide.

Mrs MAY—How long have you been here?

Roxy Murn—Three years in November.

CHAIR—It is interesting that you all think of north-south of Alice Springs, going to Darwin or Adelaide; no-one thinks of going east-west.

Mrs MAY—Sydney or Melbourne?

Julian Galindo—I would not mind going out on a station.

Mr SAWFORD—You all have lots of commitments throughout the week, but are any of you involved in sport or music et cetera? Do you have opportunities to develop some of your own interests other than work and study?

Roxy Murn—Yes.

Yolanda Erlandson—I do not have any time to.

Mr SAWFORD—You do not?

Yolanda Erlandson—No.

Mr SAWFORD—What about you, Julian; what do you do?

Julian Galindo—I have a $9,000 motorbike.

Mrs MAY—Do you take that out into the bush?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Our driver said this morning the thing he missed most when he came here as a young man from Adelaide was having a disco, somewhere where he could go and dance. There was nowhere he could do that.

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Are there no facilities for young people here?

Yolanda Erlandson—No, there are no discos. There is nothing to entertain the children.

Mrs MAY—Is there a movie theatre?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes, we have a cinema with three cinemas in it.

Mrs MAY—Would that get a work-out?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Do any of you play sport, as Mr Sawford asked?

Roxy Murn—Yes, I play netball. I also do dog obedience training with my dog.

Mr SAWFORD—Kelly, what do you do?

Kelly Smith—I play netball as well.

Mr SAWFORD—Netball and?

Kelly Smith—Just netball.

Camille Batson—I do not get to do anything because I am always at KFC working.

Mr SAWFORD—You are the one doing 25 to 30 hours at KFC.

CHAIR—But a good bank account!

Mr SAWFORD—But a good bank account?

Camille Batson—Not at the moment.

Mrs MAY—Do you all have your own cars or transport?

Camille Batson—Yes.

Yolanda Erlandson—I am trying to save up for a car.

Mrs MAY—You will get there. Then it will cost you money.

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—Julian, I think you said Marty advised you which way to go with the VET course, apprenticeship and so on. Marty is your careers counsellor?

Julian Galindo—No, he is our—

Yolanda Erlandson—He is our teacher.

CHAIR—Your home group teacher?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—In the last school you were at was there a careers counsellor/guidance officer who sat down with you and said, 'These are all the options. These are the things you can do. This is what we recommend'?

Yolanda Erlandson—No, not really. As soon as we left Anzac, year 10, then that is when all the opportunities got put in front of us.

CHAIR—Was that put in front of you after you left?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—Put in front of you by whom?

Yolanda Erlandson—The Centralian people, like career advisers and people like that, came over to our school and explained which paths we could choose.

CHAIR—That was only Centralian, or did other people come as well?

Yolanda Erlandson—No, only Centralian.

CHAIR—Do you think it would have been helpful if that had happened earlier, say at the start of year 10, rather than waiting until you left year 10?

Julian Galindo—No, it was at the end of year 10, just before we finished.

CHAIR—But do you think it would have been good if it had been earlier so you could think about it a bit longer?

Yolanda Erlandson—Not really, because we needed to complete year 10 before we started looking at year 11. Year 10 was pretty hard as well.

CHAIR—Does that mean, then, that not many of you had much of a clear idea until the end of year 10 about what you were going to do?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—You always wanted to be a diesel mechanic, did you not?

Julian Galindo—No.

Roxy Murn—I have always wanted to be a child-care worker.

CHAIR—So you did not need that guidance?

Roxy Murn—No.

CHAIR—Was the advice you had helpful? Did you need more advice? Should it have happened earlier, or do you think it was all okay?

Camille Batson—I wanted to be a hairdresser to start with, but I was just going to do straight years 11 and 12 and then try to find an apprenticeship. But when Bob Chapman came to Anzac I spoke to him about the Jobs Pathway Program and he told me if I wanted to be a hairdresser I would probably be better off going through the Jobs Pathway Program. That way I could get a school based apprenticeship, and after I finished years 11 and 12 I would have only two years to go.

CHAIR—Bob Chapman is from Centralian?

Camille Batson—Yes.

CHAIR—He came to Anzac to explain all of that?

Camille Batson—Yes.

CHAIR—So that was helpful advice. How about you, Kelly?

Kelly Smith—Halfway through year 10 I was sort of being pushed to be a hairdresser. My dad always wanted me to be a hairdresser. So it took me to say that I wanted to be a chef. I said I was going to quit after year 10 and do a full-time apprenticeship. Centralian told me that I could still do school and go to catering school as well.

CHAIR—Are you glad you took that option?

Kelly Smith—I am in a way and I am not in another way.

CHAIR—Why yes and why no?

Kelly Smith—Because I want more opportunities in my workplace; and—I don't know really—money as well.

Mr ALBANESE—Do you get paid for your school based apprenticeship component?

Camille Batson—Yes. You get paid by—

Julian Galindo—To go to school?

Mr ALBANESE—No, for the school based apprenticeships, like when you are in the hairdressers or when you are—

Yolanda Erlandson—My host employer is Group Training, and I am employed by somebody else down Elder Street. Group Training pays them to train me and they pay me as well. But it is not very much money.

Mr ALBANESE—Because you all have to have separate jobs as well?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes; and then I have to do my part-time job to get the money that I want to spend on the weekend.

Mr SAWFORD—What is the big difference in coming from a secondary school to Centralian?

Yolanda Erlandson—So many more opportunities and it is your choice whether you want to do it or not.

Mr SAWFORD—That is a positive thing for you?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Julian, what is the big difference coming from Anzac to here?

Julian Galindo—About the same.

Mr SAWFORD—Roxy.

Roxy Murn—Probably the VET courses.

Mr SAWFORD—What in particular?

Roxy Murn—Child care.

Mr SAWFORD—Kelly.

Kelly Smith—Definitely the opportunities.

Mr SAWFORD—Camille.

Camille Batson—Last year we did not really get a choice in what subjects we did. We still got our choices of whether or not we wanted to do a VET course. If we were over in straight year 11 we would get a choice, but here you can choose what you want to do as well and you do only two days of school, whereas it was five days of school over at Anzac.

Mr SAWFORD—So you are saying it is a bit slack?

Camille Batson—No, it is just better because we still get our NTCE. We still work and everything, but it is just easier because you always have the teacher near you and you can work at your own pace as well. There are no set deadlines or anything. As long as the work gets done, Marty is still happy. But over at Anzac you had to have something in or you would probably fail.

Mr SAWFORD—So it is a bit more flexible here?

Camille Batson—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there anything about Centralian that you would change? If you were Don Zoellner and you were the boss, what would you change for students here about this place?

Yolanda Erlandson—Nothing much really. It is a pretty good school.

Mr SAWFORD—Julian.

Julian Galindo—I would put in a swimming pool.

Mr SAWFORD—Roxy, what would you change?

Roxy Murn—I do not know; maybe put a child-care centre in so you could do work placement here.

CHAIR—Do your teachers here give you much support in your workplace if you are having problems with your apprenticeship or your boss at work?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. They always do follow-ups, and come and check out the work placement to see whether we are okay and happy with how it is going.

CHAIR—When you say 'always', how often is that?

Yolanda Erlandson—I don't know; once or twice a month maybe, just to come and check it out, see if everything is okay.

CHAIR—Is that the same for all of you?

Camille Batson—Yes.

CHAIR—Have there been many cases where you have really needed them there and they have sorted out a problem for you, or is it just nice to know that they are interested?

Yolanda Erlandson—Nice to know that they are interested.

Mrs MAY—Do you have much contact with Group Training as well, Yolanda?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. Kathryn Walsham always comes and checks on me to see whether I am okay and that we are getting along in the office and everything is all right.

Mrs MAY—So if you had problems with your employer you would take them up with Kathryn?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—What about the rest of you? Do you have someone, Julian, you can speak to?

Julian Galindo—The same as Yolanda.

Mrs MAY—Are you through Group Training too?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

Mrs MAY—So you have a contact in Group Training you can speak to?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

CHAIR—Camille, are you through Group Training?

Camille Batson—Yes, Group Training.

CHAIR—You are all through Group Training—

Kelly Smith—I am not.

CHAIR—You are not. So for all of your apprenticeships you are hired by Group Training?

Camille Batson—Yes.

Kelly Smith—Yes.

Mrs MAY—How did you find your apprenticeships? Were you given assistance in finding them?

Kelly Smith—They ask you what you want to do and whether you want to do it full time or part time, and they find jobs for you. Basically, they ask you whether or not you want to work there. They help you try to find somewhere.

Mrs MAY—Did you go through an interview process?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Did you have a CV that you had to produce too?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

Mrs MAY—So you all prepared that here? Were you given assistance at school to do that?

Kelly Smith—Yes.

Yolanda Erlandson—When I came over from Anzac at the start of this year I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and I wasn't sure whether I was going to do year 11. I spoke to Colleen Devlin—she is another careers adviser—and she told me that there was a school based apprenticeship in office admin. I thought I might as well just see what it was like, so I did the interviews and stuff and got the job, and I like it.

Mrs MAY—You are enjoying it?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mrs MAY—You made the right choice?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. Then Bob Chapman enrolled me in the office admin business class upstairs. So that helps me as well.

Mrs MAY—Are you doing accounting, MYOB or anything?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. That is exactly what I am doing.

Mrs MAY—That will be a good skill to learn.

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—How did you get involved with Group Training? How did that happen?

Yolanda Erlandson—The apprenticeship was through Group Training. Colleen gets all the jobs on her computer all the time.

Mr SAWFORD—So they conducted the interview?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes. I did the interview with Group Training first. Then I went over to the switchboard in PAWA where my work placement is and had an interview with the boss over there.

CHAIR—Are your employers fairly easy to get on with? Do they understand you have school commitments as well?

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—You have no hassles there? Mr Sawford asked whether there is anything you would change about Centralian and, apart from the swimming pool, you said no. What about more generally with regard to the way VET in Schools and New Apprenticeships work? Do you think we ought to change anything there to make it work better?

Yolanda Erlandson—I am really happy with my TAFE course.

Roxy Murn—Me, too.

CHAIR—No real problems? So it works pretty well?

Julian Galindo—Yes.

Yolanda Erlandson—Yes.

CHAIR—You are enjoying it and you are pretty sure you will get a job when you leave school; so everything is looking pretty good?

Students—Yes.

CHAIR—Good on you. Good luck. Thanks for your time this morning. It has been really good for us to talk to you. There being nothing else you want to say to us, all the best with the rest of school and your work.

Yolanda Erlandson—Thanks.

Proceedings suspended from 10.22 a.m. to 10.52 a.m.

ABOTOMEY, Ms Elizabeth Mary, Hairdressing Coordinator and Lecturer, Centralian College

BELL, Ms Judith Lorraine, Assistant to Associate Director (Business, Arts and Tourism), Centralian College

CAWTHORNE-CROSBY, Mrs Amanda Doric, Lecturer/Coordinator Children's Services, Centralian College

SMITH, Ms Sabina, Associate Director Secondary, Centralian College

VARLEY, Mr Victor Thomas, Lecturer Trades-Coordinator VET in Schools, Centralian College

ZOELLNER, Mr Don, Executive Director, Centralian College

CHAIR—I welcome the director, Don Zoellner, and members of the staff of Centralian College. Thank you again for having us here this morning and for your hospitality. It has been very interesting so far. Don, did you or one of your colleagues want to make some introductory comments before we proceed to questioning?

Mr Zoellner—Very briefly. Thank you for attending what I think you are finding to be a very unique organisation that has a range of flexibility achieved by the combination of senior secondary, a little bit of junior secondary, TAFE and a little bit of higher ed on top of it. So there is a fair amount of flexibility. As I have indicated to some of you off the record but will now put on the record, something that is unique about this organisation is that it transcends a lot of boundaries and rules. We need a lot of goodwill on the part of people to make that work, because if you followed every particular rule to the letter this place probably would not work. So it is a matter of the staff applying a lot of commonsense.

As you observed, there is a vast variety of activity. It is taking place both on this campus and in remote communities right across the Northern Territory. We deliver from Docker River in the far south-west to the Tiwi Islands in the Top End. The people here actually do the work, so it is probably more important that you listen to them than me.

CHAIR—Obviously you are doing some tremendous things here and you are meeting some real needs in the community. You mentioned the word 'flexibility'. We have heard that mentioned a number of times this morning. That is clearly a key ingredient to your success. Being a traditionalist, I am finding it a little hard to work out how that fits with my thinking of how schools generally work and I am still confused, and perhaps a few of my colleagues are somewhat confused as well. So to begin with perhaps I should ask a couple of questions for clarification.

A couple of students who appeared before us this morning said that they are doing three days a week as part of their school based apprenticeships and two days a week at school doing more traditional subjects, and they talked about credit units that are required for the NTCE. Could

perhaps you, Don, or one of your colleagues explain what is required in terms of the number of subjects or the number of units for the NTCE, how many of those are made up of apprenticeship or VET courses and how many other courses need to be done as well?

Ms Smith—You have no idea what you are asking there! It is in fact quite complicated, and—

CHAIR—That makes me feel a little better.

Ms Smith—I cannot claim to be an expert on it. But, simplistically, a stage 1 student, who is the equivalent of a year 11 student, is required to successfully pass a number of units within a period and then in stage 2 another number of units. In total that is 22 units. Generally we encourage students to have what we call a full load or a full pattern. Individual students will make up those units from straight NTCE subjects—your traditional subjects: maths, English, biology, geography et cetera—and a growing number will be mixing and matching that with the VET units.

CHAIR—Twenty-two units. So they need to do 11 units in stage 2?

Ms Smith—That is correct. It gets more complicated than that, and I am not the person who manages that on a day-to-day basis.

Mr Zoellner—Essentially a unit is a semester length of work that is about 60 hours of instruction time. If you put two of them together, that will be a full year's work in a particular subject. Many of them are like that. So if you are doing English, for example, you will do one semester of English followed in semester 2 by another semester of English to get a yearlong course out of it. The pattern is established. It is the same as in South Australia. The Northern Territory has a contractual arrangement with the South Australian assessment board to do that. So it is essentially the South Australian pattern but it has the flexibility of the dual recognition of many of the VET units.

CHAIR—So those students who met with us this morning who are doing only English and maths in addition to their apprenticeships will get four units worth by doing English and maths for the two semesters in year 12?

Ms Smith—I think they are doing a few more units. They are doing something called 'integrated studies' as well, plus they are doing something called 'community studies'.

CHAIR—So their apprenticeship is worth six units or four units?

Mr Zoellner—Again, it is quite flexible. You can negotiate through. While there is a lot of rhetoric around the place, the actual offering is based on individual student need and they come along with their shopping trolley, more or less, and put different things in it to build into that pattern of 22 units. The shortest time you could do the 22 units is two years. The traditional pattern would be that you do 12 units in year 11 and 10 in year 12, and there are your 22 units; and if they are in the right combination you will get your Certificate of Education. But more and more students are coming in from year 10 with some of those units already under their belt, and a number of students also spread the pattern over three years.

Mr ALBANESE—Are there compulsory elements, though? Is there milk and bread—English and maths—in everyone's shopping trolley?

Ms Smith—Yes, there is. It is not specific to subjects, but it is specific to subject groupings. If you unpack the shopping trolley, you will find English or language-rich subjects constitute group 1; and maths, technology and science constitute group 2. If you are heading for a tertiary entrance ranking, there are very clear requirements as to what you require in your shopping trolley—what you have to pass and require a score in. If your queue or aisle is to get into a school based apprenticeship or find full-time employment, then obviously that is less critical. You do not need to follow that particular—

CHAIR—It was interesting that some of the students are doing, I think, three days a week in their apprenticeship. That is not possible in the other two states we have visited so far. I think the most they would spend in their apprenticeships would be one day, perhaps two days, a week because of the need to cover those other subjects. You mentioned the TER. That is another area I am a bit confused about. It seems that most students need a TER to get into university but some can get into university with just the NTCE. No?

Ms Smith—I am not aware of any.

Ms Bell—They do need a TER to get in, yes.

Ms Smith—You might find that some students will complete years 11 and 12, go away and work, and then will attempt to gain entry into universities by undertaking other examinations and—

CHAIR—I am sure we heard yesterday from some students who were getting access to Northern Territory University with just a NTCE and not a TER.

Ms Smith—I cannot comment on that.

Mr Zoellner—I would be surprised at that if they have not done some other study. They may be undertaking the tertiary enabling program into university.

CHAIR—So any of your students here who want to study the higher education components you are offering at Centralian have to get a TER?

Mr Zoellner—Yes.

Ms Bell—To get a TER means their combination of subjects has to satisfy the requirement for gaining a TER. It does not differentiate them from other students, and it does not stop them still doing VET courses as long as they satisfy the number of units that they need to gain a TER.

Ms Smith—A TER is five scores out of 20, essentially. It is more complicated than that, but crudely that is what it is. There are any number of subjects that you can undertake and get a score. If it is required for a TER it will be ranked, it will be adjusted, so that it gets counted.

CHAIR—But the VET subjects do not count for TER, do they?

Ms Smith—That is correct.

CHAIR—Do you think that is a disadvantage for those students who do want to go to university—that they cannot incorporate their VET study into their TER? They can in most states, but it seems that in the Territory they cannot.

Ms Smith—As Don indicated, we are operating within the South Australian system. I am aware of at least one subject that hopefully will be made available next year, but I cannot recall which one it is.

Ms Bell—Information technology.

Ms Smith—I think I have seen the paperwork for probably four that will be able to be counted.

CHAIR—Centralian will offer those?

Ms Smith—Not necessarily. We will look at them and consider whether they would be of interest to the students. A lot of the difficulty with going that way is that the course then becomes much more academic and stops meeting the needs of the very students for whom it was originally designed.

CHAIR—So we seem to have that problem, do we not, of trying to cater for both the academic students and those who want to do a more vocational course without creating a two-tiered system of education?

Ms Bell—On the other side of that, though, you will get students who anticipate going to university but also want part-time jobs to help them get through that, so they undertake VET courses to give them skills that will make them employable. Hospitality is a very good example of that, where students will do courses in table service and bar service to enable them to pick up part-time work so they can financially support themselves through university.

CHAIR—But under the current system those VET courses have to be in addition to their academic courses?

Ms Bell—Yes, that is correct. Probably for a number of those students, maybe those who are doing it over three years.

Mr SAWFORD—I have been on this committee for 13 or 14 years. As the chairman has probably indicated, when we as committee members approach a new area we often have our own agendas. But I think this is one area where we do not, and we are quite open in relation to where we ought to be going. I have come to the conclusion that I have lost faith in the comprehensive high school delivering VET. I think the past 30 years have been a disaster in terms of VET in the main across Australia. All states have significant exceptions, where normally principals have taken on the department and developed programs but only through sheer hard work and often against the will of the department. The structure that you have here is very attractive to me as an individual. When I read through the submission the first thing that struck me is this school has a very strong process. Don, there are lots of references to relationships and how things are done,

but there is something I cannot get clear in my head. I do not want to sound overcritical, but a clear rationale for this sort of structure has not come across to me. Is there a reason there is not a clear rationale?

Mr Zoellner—A rationale for?

Mr SAWFORD—Basically every educational institution will have a philosophy, a rationale, a set of processes, and hopefully they will all be coherent with a set of outcomes. I do not have a problem with the outcomes here; I do not have a problem with the process. But what would you state is the rationale of this place? That is what I am not quite clear about.

Mr Zoellner—I am probably the newest comer here, so the others can probably talk more about this, but essentially it boils down to the word 'pathways'. It is a variety of pathways that will allow a student to go over—

Mr SAWFORD—That is the process—

Mr Zoellner—No; the emblem of the place is a pathway. Much of the mission statement uses the word 'pathways'. It is about providing a variety of pathways.

Mr SAWFORD—You are just reinforcing my confusion because you are reinforcing the process. I appreciate what you are saying, and it comes across very strongly in what you read here. If we were to recommend this structure when making our recommendations to government, and personally I think we will probably recommend a structure similar to yours, we also would need to be able to put forward a pretty strong statement regarding the rationale of such an organisation. It is a little bit more than just providing pathways. Maybe the language being used is causing the confusion some of us are experiencing.

The people in Darwin we spoke to yesterday said there needs to be a national approach, that all the states are going off and doing different things. We are in the early stages of this inquiry. As the chairman has indicated, it is very confusing. I cannot see a definite rationale that this organisation has. I am sure you have one, and maybe the confusion arises because of the language being used or I am not reading the submission properly. Can you state—1, 2, 3—what the purpose of this place is?

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—From my point of view as a TAFE lecturer delivering to years 10, 11 and 12 students, my personal rationale is to make learning attractive and transferable. So what I tend to do is not just encompass an academic focus, although that theory stuff underpins what I deliver, but set up what I feel very strongly about, which is a community of learning within the group where they are supported not only by the system here, being the college, but by lecturers, teachers or deliverers, the administration and each other so that for them schooling is not a drag. Very few of my students do not come to class. My years 11 and 12 students who have elected to do the VET child-care program have elected to do so because it is an attractive option with very positive, evident outcomes. That is as a result of the whole college working together to produce and offer this option. I feel very passionately about the positives of the VET programs that we run. I think it is about the notion of learning. Somehow we are changing that notion and learning now goes with these students; it does not stop when they finish year 12.

Mr SAWFORD—It is interesting that, other than the notion of learning, much of Amanda's answer was about process. How would some of you describe the notion of learning in terms of the purpose of this place?

Ms Bell—Maybe opportunities. We are told that these students may have anything up to eight career changes throughout their lives. So we are giving them opportunities to have a look at what is possible—maybe even the opportunity to enter into a field that they never thought possible.

Ms Abotomey—But I think it is also the opportunity for kids to stay at school longer. They have subjects that they are interested in doing. They therefore choose to stay at school rather than go out into the work force at a younger age.

Mrs MAY—Do you have any figures, Don, with regard to retention rates at the school?

Mr Zoellner—We measure retention rates in three ways: the standard retention to year 12, employment and further training. If we do not have all three, this place does not make sense. Essentially—using just the year 12 retention rate, the apparent retention rate—if a student goes out into structured workplace learning, the employer likes them and offers them an apprenticeship, and then the student leaves the secondary part of the college and goes over to and enrols in the TAFE part of it, that traditionally would be counted as a loss even though they are still a student at the college. Last year, for example, we could account for 98 per cent of the students who were in stage 1; 98 per cent of them went into year 12, employment or further training. The others in fact all fell pregnant, which is a noble cause in itself: it keeps us in a job! So essentially we have 100 per cent retention in that broader definition, and we track the students fairly carefully to understand where they are going. It is part of maintaining that relationship, because a number of them will come back in a variety of ways.

I guess as an administrator I am process driven in that regard, but certainly much of the rationale for this place, especially with its being in a very isolated community, was to make absolutely the best use of the available resources and expertise to allow that variety of learning to take place. Everyone could see the huge inefficiencies in having a TAFE college 50 metres away from a senior secondary college. Again I will defer to my colleagues, but I think the only thing that was shared at one stage was the library.

Ms Smith—In fact, part of the rationale for creating a senior secondary college was to enable a more integrated approach.

CHAIR—Doing that has obvious benefits in terms of not duplicating resources. We have heard of other schools trying to run VET courses that a TAFE a few kilometres away is running and because of transport problems and so on resources are being duplicated. You have the whole thing on site here, which really increases your capacity to meet the needs of those students without duplicating resources.

Mr Zoellner—One of the arrangements we have in town—the situation is different in Darwin—is that there is an agreement amongst the high schools not to become registered training organisations, that all of the training is to be either delivered through here or auspiced through here. That is to ensure that the industry standard part of it is met. I tend to agree with the

observation made earlier that schools generally have no business being registered training organisations. I think it debases the currency quite significantly.

Mr ALBANESE—Part 1 of this inquiry's terms of reference relates to access of Indigenous people to VET in schools. A walk around this place is obviously not representative of a walk around town, let alone outside of town. Perhaps we should get on the record some of the informal discussions we had whilst walking around this morning. How many Indigenous students do you have here?

Ms Smith—Within the senior secondary I think it is approximately 20, maybe 23 per cent.

Mr Zoellner—Which is about 50 students.

Ms Smith—Yes, that is within the senior secondary.

Mr ALBANESE—Yesterday I met with some people at Deadly Mob and had a discussion with them about the problems they have in connecting with young Indigenous people, particularly those in remote communities.

Ms Smith—If we just step back, in the junior high school the Indigenous population is significantly higher. It is anything between 35 and 45 per cent in the two state junior high schools. I think it would be fair to say, historically, that Centralian College had not been very successful or as successful as it could have been in terms of attracting Indigenous students to the place, particularly in its early years. I think kids saw it as being very white middle class, and many of those who had succeeded academically at a junior level and had made that brave step to come over here dropped out very early on. They did not identify with the environment. They had lost the support structures that had existed in the junior high schools.

However, having said that, that was 12 years ago. I am now back here and working with people, and I can see a significant shift, I believe, in terms of the degree of ownership that Indigenous students feel in the place. We are getting better, but we recognise obviously that a major outcome for us has to be much more improved Indigenous outcomes.

Mr ALBANESE—Are there any Indigenous staff here?

Ms Smith—Yes, we do have a small number. Again, I think that is recognised as being one of the factors that might improve outcomes for kids.

Mr ALBANESE—Are retention rates for Indigenous kids getting better? When they come here do they tend to stay?

Ms Smith—Definitely, yes. There have been significant improvements over the last four or five years, I would say. I do not have the figures to hand, but I could get them for you.

CHAIR—What are the reasons for that?

Ms Smith—I think as a college we now have some very clear ideas about what we need to be doing for Indigenous students. We have an enrolment attendance and retention strategy, for

instance, that is part of an overall Northern Territory education plan with strategies. We have support in place within the college now, whereas perhaps 10 years ago we never bothered to look that hard at what the issues were.

Mrs MAY—Don, this morning you touched on some of those support structures that are in place for Indigenous students. You took us into a room. Just for the record, would you like to expand on what Sabina—

Mr Zoellner—Yes. In the senior secondary area we have two Indigenous education workers—Aboriginal and Islander education workers, they are called here in the Territory. Essentially they offer significant support to students in terms of both their home life and responsibilities. Essentially these young Indigenous people are adults in their community, so the pressures on them are often not even subtly but very different from those on European students of the same age. We have a dedicated area where they can study. We use the ATAS tutoring. We use a variety of IESIP funding for particular programs to support them. We have the Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness Committee, which is supporting the students. We use the AITAP challenge and have tutors. We give each student a mentor. Above all, what we are doing is keeping very detailed records of their achievement. It is very much an evidence based activity. Previously I think we tended to hide from the facts. We now know a whole lot about the students. The students, I think, feel fairly confident in approaching individual lecturers, which is probably a key to their being successful. They are developing a personal relationship with some member of staff or some adult in the college community.

The other thing is that I think a number of their parents are achieving some success here at the college, probably in TAFE level studies, and so that rubs off on students. It is saying it is a safe and okay place to go in terms of their activity.

Mr SAWFORD—Are you able to track your ex-students? Do you keep a record of where they are?

Ms Smith—Up until recently we found that very difficult. We now have a pilot program, career in transition, funded through the Commonwealth. One of its primary goals is to be able to do that. It has been running for not quite 12 months, but we have been able to get a very clear sense of where the students have gone.

Mr Zoellner—One of the reasons why it is difficult is that 18-year-olds who finish secondary or their training in Alice Springs very often really want to go somewhere else. They may come back, particularly the Indigenous students, because they are going to be here for the long haul, but many of them want to leave. Once they get interstate, it is just really hard to track them down and keep tabs on them.

Ms Bell—Also, going back to some of the strategies in place for Indigenous students, we have realised that we need to put things in place before Indigenous students stop coming instead of waiting until they stop coming and then trying to bring them back. So there has been a lot more emphasis on immediate reaction to non-attendance as well as strategies for increasing the attendance. I think we have addressed that better in the last couple of years than in previous years.

Mr SAWFORD—In Darwin, Karmi Dunn, an Indigenous coordinator, made reference in her submission to Aboriginal elders making the point that they felt that their kids were better off in terms of literacy and numeracy 30 years ago than they are now, which is a bit of an indictment of what we have been doing over the past 30 years. Do you find a similar situation here in terms of literacy and numeracy?

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—As a lecturer in TAFE with years 11 and 12, I think overall literacy and numeracy is fairly appalling, not just that within the Indigenous community. My teaching is competency based. I am not there to mark on how well they spell. If they can tap-dance their answer and it covers the performance criterion, the learning outcome, then I have to say, 'Yes, you can demonstrate this particular skill.' But I am very aware of the difficulty overall students have in their written aspects—

Mr SAWFORD—I would have thought if you do not attain an appropriate level of literacy and numeracy between the ages of seven and 11 you are really fighting an uphill battle. Are there any initiatives in place in Alice Springs to address that? Has this college, TAFE or secondary school taken up any initiatives?

Mr Zoellner—Certainly through the IESIP funding we do have people specialising in literacy who work with students. I do not think it is quite as simple as saying that all Indigenous people are further behind than they were 30 years ago. I think that would be true of certain communities, and what Karmi would be referring to in specific communities is—

Mr SAWFORD—It was not her reference.

Mr Zoellner—But it is undoubtedly true.

Mr SAWFORD—It was a reference from the elders.

Mr Zoellner—But, on the other hand, most of these students who are now finishing year 12 both here and at Alice Springs High School are the first in their families to complete year 12, much less go to university or anywhere else. They are not completing year 12 without being literate. So these students who are finishing successfully now are the most highly educated people in their families, as far back as you wish to look. So there are pockets of that—it is hard to make a sweeping generalisation. There are huge gains for some students and some families. Certainly we do not deal well at all with, for example, the town campers. They do not engage in mainstream education, and their literacy levels would be absolutely appallingly low—so low in fact that they cannot participate in mainstream society generally. We are aware of that, but the solutions to that are not easy. They are really fraught with difficulty. I think, to be fair, we cannot ask the staff to take on something for which we do not have a road map to deal with.

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—Just going back to this statement about general overall literacy, the literacy of the two Indigenous students I have far surpasses that of the other students.

Mr SAWFORD—So you are saying it is a mixed bag but there is still a problem?

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—There is a general problem, I believe, with literacy. My experience is—and I have been here for three years delivering to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students—

that literacy is not the problem with the Indigenous students I take. It has not been a problem by any means. Certainly the literacy of the two I have at the moment is excellent. I do not think it can be pocketed to a particular group of people. It just seems to be at random. There are some students who have excellent oral communication skills but very poor literacy skills and vice versa.

Ms Smith—There are a number of initiatives operating but they do not relate directly to us as an institution—the accelerated literacy program, which used to be called the scaffolding literacy program, at Gillen Primary School, for instance.

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—At the moment one of the primary schools is running a program called Rainbow Words. I do not know much about it, but I do know that they are having huge—at Ross Park, I think—

Ms Smith—So in terms of an initiative that has been supported through the system that is probably the most—

Mr Zoellner—I think it would be fair to say, though, that the bulk of the work of the ATAS tutors is probably literacy and numeracy related. It is not content specific. It is about generally getting the skills to be able to perform the assessment tasks, because essentially the NTCE assessment, unlike TAFE's, which is competency based, is written based.

CHAIR—Don, returning to the issue of tertiary entrance and the links with VET, what percentage of your students here would go on to university, and how does that compare with other high schools?

Mr Zoellner—About 30 per cent, and that approximates the national average. But one of the interesting phenomena that take place driven by the various allowance schemes funded by the Commonwealth is that essentially no student, as far as I am aware, in Alice Springs goes straight from secondary school to university. They all take a year off to make the requisite amount of money, which I think is about $14,000 or $15,000, so that they can then get the independent living allowance. Of the 25 or 30 students who last year got a TER that would allow them to go to university and got admission, all deferred except one, that I am aware of.

CHAIR—Do most of them go to Northern Territory University?

Ms Bell—No.

CHAIR—Flinders?

Ms Bell—Anywhere and everywhere.

Mr Varley—Kids here just see the whole of Australia and pick the course they like that suits their needs, like others do, and that is where they go.

CHAIR—Say they want to go to Sydney University, Monash or somewhere, do they get some sort of a loading on top of their TER?

Mr Zoellner—In certain subjects they do.

Ms Smith—Yes, my word they do. But, again, it would depend on which course it was.

CHAIR—Out of the 30 per cent, how many actually get into the more hotly contested courses of, say, law, medicine, commerce? Does that happen? Do many aspire to that?

Mr Zoellner—Yes. I do not know the numbers. It would not be a great many. Essentially, like every other rural and regional area in Australia, students here on average do not do as well as those at the top city based schools do. That is a matter of public record, if you just analyse the results. We do not have many people who get a 99.9 TER.

CHAIR—Do many of those students who go off to those other universities have a VET component, not as part of their TER but in addition to their other subjects?

Ms Smith—I would say a small number but a growing number.

Mr Zoellner—As Judy said before, hospitality is very popular, particularly for year 11 students.

CHAIR—For those who are wanting to maximise their TER results to get into competitive courses, the time committed to an extra VET subject must be a bit of a disadvantage. Will there be a disadvantage in their going down the path of taking some of these embedded courses from South Australia where they can do VET and use that towards their TER? In New South Wales, for instance, students can do one of, I think, eight accepted courses and count the two units of that towards their TER. Do you think that would provide benefits in terms of greater flexibility?

Ms Smith—I think for a small number of students in some specialised areas there would be.

CHAIR—But the downside of that, as I understand it, is industry confidence in embedded versus stand-alone courses?

Mr Zoellner—Yes, that is right. That becomes the issue. The key distinguishing factor between the two sectors is the method of assessment. Essentially, it seems they have no other way of assessing those subjects which are leading to a TER other than through a paper based exercise. It is really difficult to do anything else. It is quite heavily moderated in performance based subjects, but even with art and photography only half of the assessment is the actual work you produce; the other half is a written assessment of some sort.

Mr SAWFORD—Where would kids from Tennant Creek who wanted to do VET go?

Ms Bell—Tennant Creek.

Mr SAWFORD—Under this administration?

Ms Bell—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there any need to have a boarding facility here like Regency does in Adelaide?

Ms Bell—It depends on what areas you are talking about.

Ms Abotomey—We had hairdressing apprentices coming down from Tennant Creek, Katherine, Gove. So they have to have accommodation when they are here. They come down for blocks. You get apprentices down for blocks.

Mr SAWFORD—They organise their accommodation themselves?

Ms Abotomey—Yes, they do.

Ms Bell—Alice Springs delivers for the whole of the Northern Territory apprenticeships for butchery and delivers everywhere except Darwin apprenticeships for cookery and hairdressing. Apprenticeships in a number of trades areas will be exclusively delivered in Alice Springs for the whole of the Northern Territory, the same as there will be some apprenticeships delivered exclusively in Darwin for the whole of the Northern Territory.

Mr SAWFORD—When we asked this morning, Don, about where the students come from, you said, 'About 10 kilometres.' They may have originally come from somewhere else?

Mr Zoellner—That is right, but the apprentices are different from the secondary students. This morning I was referring to the standard secondary student who is doing an enrolment. Apprentices operate on a very different schedule because many of them are in town for block release. So they will come in for two to three weeks of intensive instruction and then they will go back to their home base to work.

Mr SAWFORD—How is accommodation arranged for those people? Do they do it themselves?

Ms Bell—Yes. We have a number of establishments that will not offer the students a discounted rate but will allow a number of students to share a room. We give them facilities that would not normally be available to members of the general public staying at that accommodation. The government also gives those students an allowance towards their accommodation.

CHAIR—Given the fact that a lot of the students from here go to study in other states, at universities especially, and presumably a number of your teachers come from different states as well, how do you respond to the argument that we need to have a uniform approach to VET in schools in terms of qualifications, mandated work experience, the way it is incorporated for the TER et cetera? Do you see benefits in that or do you think the problems outweigh the benefits?

Ms Bell—I think there would be pros and cons for both arguments.

CHAIR—Could you outline what you see as being the positives and the negatives?

Ms Bell—If there were a standardised, as you mentioned, minimum industry requirement for teachers delivering TAFE units Australia-wide, it would mean the people teaching the subjects would have experience in the subjects—and who better to teach than those who have been there and done that. That is probably one of the things we do well here inasmuch as all of our TAFE lecturers have an industry background. In relation to the impact of VET units on tertiary entrance ranking or university ranking Australia-wide, it would be very difficult to convince the universities—and they are the ones you would need to convince—that those units should have some weighting, if not equal weighting to a paper based state subject.

CHAIR—They do in some states and not in others. Would there not be benefits in having the same system applying across the country?

Ms Bell—Yes, but I still think you would have to convince the universities of the benefits of that. Preaching to us the benefits would be preaching to the converted.

CHAIR—What would be the disadvantages of having uniform standards for a school like yours?

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—It is not a uniform environment. It is not a uniform town. You have to absorb yourself in the environment to know it. I do not think standardised systems can truly embrace the need to learn about the community and learn about the town.

Ms Abotomey—Isolation plays a big part.

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—It certainly does.

Ms Abotomey—We are so far away from the bigger cities.

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—But I also think that isolation leads to exceptional innovation, and I really celebrate that about this town.

Mr SAWFORD—That is diversity, not integration, isn't it?

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—No, innovation.

Mr SAWFORD—Yes, but that is exploring diversity, not integration. A lot of the propaganda about VET in schools, reflecting over the last 30 years, is pushing the integrated line. All the propaganda we have had thus far, except in the Northern Territory, has been: push the integrated line. You are pushing the other line; you are pushing the diverse line.

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—Because we have to. In doing what we do there is no such thing, for me personally, as saying, 'We can't do it; we are too far away.' It is, 'How do we do it?' as opposed to, 'No, it is not possible.' That is an underlying flavour of living in an environment where you get on and do something as opposed to seeing it as a problem.

Mr Zoellner—It is regarded as one of the difficulties with the training packages. There is quite a strong view that, while the ANTA propaganda suggests the packages are infinitely flexible, the reality for lecturers is the packages are terribly constraining.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you all agree with that?

Ms Bell—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—You do not, Sabina?

Ms Smith—I do not have an opinion; I do not have a view. I do not have a background in that area so cannot make any comment at all.

Mr Varley—In our trades area, for example, we do not offer any stand-alone modules or competencies. We integrate them into a course of study that is homogeneous. If you try to run a communication in the workplace course for 40 hours, with young students filling out a workbook and filling in the blank spaces, and being shown how to use the telephone and alphabetise an index, they will not come back for the second lesson. So we have to integrate that into a course of study so that, as Mandy was saying, it is interesting, it is engaging and they can see real outcomes from it.

That is the problem, as Don was saying, with those absolutely discrete units which are supposed to be taught as stand-alone learning packages: they are inappropriate for most of our students because they just would not reattend for the second session. So we have to be very flexible in that sense. It is the same with your notion of mandatory work placements. In the five years I have been involved with VET in schools and workplaces in a little town with limited resources I have had only one business say no. But our numbers are growing incredibly in that area. Some businesses have four or five students coming on different days of a week for work placement.

Mr SAWFORD—Just quickly, how were each of you recruited from industry to here? How did you come here?

Mr Varley—It was a long process. I married a teacher. I thought teaching looked like a pretty good career, and by natural career moves I ended up in Centralian College.

Ms Bell—I was a teacher originally. I left the town and the industry. I worked in industry for a number of years. I came back to the town and was given the opportunity to come back teaching.

Mr SAWFORD—In that industry?

Ms Bell—And related industries.

Ms Abotomey—I owned a business for nearly 12 years. I sold it. I did not want to stand behind a chair for the rest of my life and wanted to get into the other side. Plus I had done a bit of PTI work with hairdressing over quite a number of years. I used to come in and do specialised things.

Mr SAWFORD—What about you, Sabina?

Ms Smith—Only a teacher.

Mr SAWFORD—Do not say it like that.

Mrs Cawthorne-Crosby—I was a lecturer at TAFE Coober Pedy for 10 years, had two small children and scoured the newspaper looking for a position that would take us somewhere where there was a swimming pool and grass. So I came here.

Mr Zoellner—They do not allow me anywhere near TAFE!

CHAIR—I am afraid our time has run out. Thank you very much. It has been very helpful. Congratulations on a great system you have here.

[11.48 a.m.]

BEURICH, Mr Gerd, General Manager, Alice Springs Resort

de SOUZA, Mrs Wendy, Owner-Operator, Cutting Remark (Hairdressing)

JAMES-WALSHAM, Mrs Kathryn, Field Officer, Group Training Northern Territory

LINN, Mr Tony, Training/Employment Coordinator, Arrernte Council

MILLER, Mr Geoffrey Louis, Training and Employment Coordinator, Arrernte Council

SHEEDY, Mrs Dianne, Owner-Operator, Alice Auto Repairs

CHAIR—Thank you for coming today and for your involvement in VET programs by assisting kids getting work placements. I am interested in your opinions as to the benefits for you and the disadvantages for or costs to you of having VET students as part of their traineeships, VET courses, work placements or apprenticeships. Obviously there are benefits for the students, but what are the benefits for and costs to you?

Mr SAWFORD—I wonder whether we could go back one step.

CHAIR—Okay.

Mr SAWFORD—How did you first get involved and then—

CHAIR—All right, if you want to do it that way. Perhaps tell us how you got involved and then what you see as the benefits and costs.

Mrs Sheedy—We are in the mechanical trade and have been associated with the college now for about 18 years. Our business needs apprentices to become qualified mechanics, so we have worked a lot with the college throughout all those years. The program is very good not only for us but also for the young trainees because it gives both sides a chance to see how they can adjust and prove themselves in the trade. The good part about the program is that the students can be in the workshop or in a workplace situation for a couple of days but they can still be doing curricular activities within the college. So, if anything should happen and they feel they are in a situation not right for them or we feel they are not the most suitable person for that situation, they still have their schooling to go on with, they can still make choices and we can also make choices. So I find it a very flexible program in that situation.

Mrs MAY—Do you take work placements as well as apprentices?

Mrs Sheedy—Yes.

Mrs MAY—So you would see someone on a work placement and maybe identify them as a possible apprentice for the future?

Mrs Sheedy—Yes, as well as—

Mrs MAY—If it does not work.

Mrs Sheedy—Yes, and vice versa. That is where I find it also flexible.

CHAIR—What percentage of the school based apprentices you take would you continue to employ after they leave school?

Mrs Sheedy—Most of them.

CHAIR—So it is a good source of employees for you?

Mrs Sheedy—It is a good source for employment, yes.

Mr SAWFORD—How are the workplace arrangements made with your company?

Mrs Sheedy—Through Kathryn.

Mr SAWFORD—Through Group Training?

Mrs Sheedy—Yes, through Group Training. Because it is still such a small town, we are constantly conversing with lecturers here at the college. We are very privileged. It may be more difficult in a more populated area like Melbourne or Sydney, but we are so lucky here in Central Australia because it is such a close-knit community and you can talk with those people within the industry, whereas in Melbourne I suspect it would be a lot more difficult. So we find it is very good.

Mrs de Souza—I am in the same situation as Dianne. I run a hairdressing business and have done so for about 18 years. Originally you would put on an apprentice and have them for four years. Then Group Training came along. Through Group Training you can employ people and have them for only so many hours or 12 months if you cannot supply them with the full program, which I have always been able to do. I have always been one to have my own apprentice. I like to be in charge and say, 'You are mine. You will do what I want until the end of your four years. Hopefully I will have trained you to the standard you should be at at the end of your four years.'

In our industry it is quite disruptive to have placements who are doing the VET in Schools program come in for a couple of days. I find that the kids get very bored because we cannot give them much hands-on experience. There are only so many times they can sweep the floor, clean up after a client and make coffees. Sometimes the kids enjoy a fraction of it, but it is not as good as getting them in there for a decent period. We need probably a month or so to give them hands-on experience to make it exciting for them in that industry. In our industry, just watching is very boring.

I have just taken on someone through Group Training. She has been with me for three weeks now, and so far so good. I am excited about it all because it is something new to me. She is still able to go to school. She is in year 11. She is still doing some subjects at school. She is attending

TAFE here. I have her for 20 hours a week, which are my busiest hours at the end of the week, so she is not bored. It is working out really well because, as soon as they get bored, they start to lose interest in the industry. The hairdressing industry at the moment is finding it very difficult to get apprentices. Anything that these guys at Group Training can do to help us get students in the salon or whatever for a limited number of hours is wonderful because we need them when we are busy and they can still continue with their education and go to school.

Mr SAWFORD—So you favour block timetabling?

Mrs de Souza—Yes, I am favouring that now, whereas before I used to favour my having them as an apprentice and their being my apprentice. Now they are Group Training's apprentice and I can say to Kathryn, 'I will have the apprentice for 20 hours,' or 'Can I have her for 30 hours?' I can make a choice about what I need the apprentice for. I find that to be really helpful. Like Dianne said, it is really great being a small community. We do have good communication with our education areas and things like that. I find that to be really good as well.

Mr SAWFORD—All your work placements are done through Group Training and this college?

Mrs de Souza—Yes.

CHAIR—Dianne, are all of yours from here as well?

Mrs Sheedy—Yes. Getting back to Group Training, as Wendy was saying, we can have students for, say, 20 hours a week. The minimum is 16 hours per week. We have a trainee at the moment, and next year we are hoping to put that trainee on full time. So there is flexibility there too.

Mrs MAY—Do you have Julian at your—

Mrs James-Walsham—No, he is with Reliance Workshop.

CHAIR—Kathryn, do you do most of the placements?

Mrs James-Walsham—For school based apprenticeships I do. I work closely with all of the schools. Each of the schools has a workplace coordinator who finds work placements for the students. I see a school based apprenticeship as a natural progression from a successful work placement. Centralian College is very good at offering the flexibility for that work placement to be tailored towards the individual student and also the workplace. Sometimes a week is enough for a work placement to lead to an apprenticeship. Sometimes it might take four weeks before a student is work ready and the business is willing to take them on as an apprentice. Centralian College is very good in offering that flexibility. I work closely with all of the schools in placing apprentices, and we have apprentices from every one of the high schools in town placed at the moment, which is good.

Mr SAWFORD—Are there any significant differences between—I do not want you to name the other schools—the other secondary schools and this place in the placing of students?

Mrs James-Walsham—From my point of view, the flexibility that is offered here meets the industry needs a lot better than some of the other schools are able to tailor their curriculum to. It is very hard for them to adjust their timetable, whereas Centralian bend over backwards for each individual student to suit the curriculum around what the business requires and the student requires. So that is an advantage. Also, their being an RTO for a lot of the trades here as well is very beneficial because the communication channels are very good between the businesses, the RTO, me as a legal employer, the student and the school. So it does help to have it in the one place.

CHAIR—Are you a not-for-profit organisation?

Mrs James-Walsham—A not-for-profit organisation, yes.

Mr Beurich—We take a number of work placements throughout the year. They seem to come fairly sporadically. It seems most schools have their work placements pretty much at the same times. We take placements from a cross-section of schools, including Centralian, throughout Alice Springs. Generally the placements are for about a week. I echo the sentiments expressed by somebody before: a week is not enough. Whilst we can show the placements throughout the hotel within a week, the time they have in each department or area is not enough for them to do anything even remotely constructive other than just observe.

Having said that, it is important to continue to offer these work placements, even as an industry, to give young people at least a taste, an idea, of what an industry might be like before they make that final commitment—if there is such a thing as a final commitment these days—or before they make that commitment at the end of their schooling, after year 12, and say, 'Yes, I want to be a front office person,' or a chef, or a waitress, or a hairdresser, or a mechanic or whatever. But the placements should be longer than for one week, which is generally what they tend to be.

CHAIR—Do you take school based apprentices as well?

Mr Beurich—We have not in the past. We have not actively worked on that yet, but we have had some preliminary discussions with Kathryn to see if we could be interested in that. We do training per se as apprenticeships: for example, chef apprenticeships. In the past, in conjunction with Centralian College, we have done a—what is the word I am looking for?

Mrs James-Walsham—Hospitality operations apprenticeship.

Mr Beurich—Yes, which was something new certainly for this college and probably new on a national basis. This two-year apprenticeship covered all areas of hotel operations—from the kitchen, to the front office, to waitering, to housekeeping—and apprentices finished with certificate IV in hospitality. So they are pretty much the apprenticeships we have at the moment—apprenticeships taken as traditional three-year blocks or 3 ½-year blocks which are based on site as well as a block release once or twice a year.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you have any programs in the more junior secondary schools, say in years 9 and 10? Do you go out and talk to those students and staff?

Mr Beurich—No, we have not in the past.

Mr SAWFORD—Do others?

Mrs James-Walsham—I have done. I previously worked for Gerd, and I did it with that organisation. I have just left the casino and the Convention Centre. I used to talk to all of the year 10s and also do their careers markets and things like that.

Mr Beurich—That is one thing we do. A number of the schools have a careers expo on an annual basis. We will attend those.

Mr SAWFORD—You do those?

Mr Beurich—Yes.

Mr Linn—Arrernte Council are looking after 38 trainees and apprentices at the moment through mentoring. With school based apprenticeships, students complete years 10, 11 or 12 and then the following year we put them into full-time apprenticeships with their host employer. We are funded by DEWR through the STEP program, Structured Training Employment Projects, which assists us with wage support for the apprentices and school based apprenticeships.

CHAIR—Are all of your trainees and apprentices from this school, or do you cover all schools?

Mr Linn—We cover all schools. The majority of our kids are from Centralian College. We work closely with Kathryn and Group Training as well with the Indigenous kids.

Mr SAWFORD—Are these apprenticeships right across the board in all different areas?

Mr Linn—Yes. We have apprentices at Desert Park doing zoology, being tour guides, doing horticulture. We have one at Legal Aid doing certificate III in legal administration. He has nearly completed his course and is going on to be a lawyer. We have had one apprentice with Gerd at the Alice Springs Resort. She completed that apprenticeship and has now taken on further studies.

CHAIR—Are they all Indigenous?

Mr Linn—Yes, they are all Indigenous.

Mr ALBANESE—How important do you think the wage subsidy component is in making this system work?

Mr Linn—The wage subsidy is very important to us because it is more than CDEP.

Mr ALBANESE—Under STEP the wage subsidy is paid to employers, is it not?

Mr Linn—Yes. Arrernte Council are the employer. We are similar to Group Training. We put apprentices with host employers.

Mrs MAY—So you source the positions for these traineeships or apprenticeships?

Mr Linn—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—You operate on a very similar basis to Kathryn; is that right?

Mr Linn—Yes.

Mrs James-Walsham—Very similar. Sometimes when an organisation is putting on a work placement or an apprentice it needs to roster somebody else to supervise them. A lot of preliminary work is involved and an extra person is needed to supervise that student. It is very difficult for a small business to be able to afford the extra person to supervise that student and pay for them. The wage assistance that Tony has been able to offer through Arrernte Council has been very beneficial to the businesses. They will willingly put in the extra effort or put the extra person on to supervise that student.

Mr ALBANESE—What level is the wage subsidy?

Mr Linn—It depends on what the national training award is for whatever category it is.

Mr ALBANESE—The subsidy is linked to a percentage of the award?

Mr Linn—If the wage subsidy is roughly $200 a week and the apprentice works 15 hours that week, we will pay them a percentage of whatever that is. We provide a service with regard to mentoring Indigenous kids, as a lot of them would be considered as at-risk kids. We give the commitment that if any issues develop we will be on site within the hour if we are in town.

Mr ALBANESE—Can people be eligible for funding through the Reconnect program as well? Are you involved in that at all?

Mr Linn—No.

CHAIR—Do you want to add anything, Geoff?

Mr Miller—I work with Tony. I have been in this job for only a short while and I am still learning. Just about the same as what Tony has just been through, I suppose.

CHAIR—From what you are all saying, it seems to be working fairly well. What would be your recommendations about how we could improve the system? That is really what our focus is. From your experience, what sorts of recommendations could we be making to the government about how VET in schools can work?

Mr Linn—From an Indigenous point of view, and I guess a mainstream point of view as well, if we could be provided with more money for mentoring. There are a lot of small businesses in

town and we have found that a lot of them do not have the time to help the kids through some difficult situations. Some of the situations are personal and others are work related.

Mrs MAY—Tony, you would get phone calls regularly from the young person or from the employer?

Mr Linn—It works out fifty-fifty. The employer sometimes has difficulty with some of the Indigenous cultural issues that they do not understand. We help them understand that. Some of the kids have trouble adapting to mainstream work if they have lived in the bush all their lives. They do not have an understanding of work ethics. We help them get through those issues and problems.

Mrs MAY—Would you say then that those students are not work ready? Is there a need to go back a step to maybe the school getting them work ready?

Mr Linn—We are running a program to help the kids become work ready.

Mrs MAY—Where is this program being run—outside of the school?

Mr Linn—Arrernte Council run that, and sometimes it is in conjunction with Centralian College through the VISA program for literacy and numeracy.

Mrs MAY—You encourage all your work placements to attend that course or be involved in it?

Mr Linn—We encourage them, but a lot of them are too ashamed to attend classroom situations. We find that a lot of the stuff we do is better done on the job. Through CDEP we can work alongside the kids. That is how we get our success rate, if you want to call it that.

Mrs MAY—We heard from the school this morning that, with their Indigenous programs here at the school, an Indigenous student has a mentor who works with them. What you are saying to us now is that that needs to continue within the workplace; there is a need for it.

Mr Linn—Yes, there is a big need for it.

Mrs MAY—Would you all agree there is a big need for it, or you do not have those same sorts of problems?

Mrs Sheedy—I believe more so with Indigenous youth; most definitely.

CHAIR—So money for mentoring is the key. What other issues are there?

Mrs de Souza—There is a problem across the board in relation to students being job ready. There are not enough programs at school to make students job ready by the time they reach years 10, 11 or 12, or whatever year they decide to break out and perhaps go into a trade, more so than go to university. A lot of them are not job ready. I think they need a lot of nurturing and some of us need some education in how to react to or teach the younger kids coming out who are not job ready. No responsibility is ground into the students at all. I find that they feel they can take sick

leave and things like that. Yes, obviously sometimes sick leave is warranted because the kids are very stressed about leaving school and starting work. There is not enough emphasis in our senior education area on making students job ready, and that is the case anywhere.

CHAIR—Even for kids here who are doing VET courses?

Mrs de Souza—Yes. While they are doing a VET course they might come to the salon maybe one day a week or go to you one day a week for 12 months. That is not so much the case with what I am doing with Kathryn at the moment with the placement. But, if they are doing just work experience and they are doing the VET course through school, by the end of that 12 months they are still students; they are not actually ready for the workplace. They find it very difficult when they have to attend work for 38 hours a week. I find that is the case across the board, not just with Indigenous kids. It is very much across the board that kids need to be made more job ready. They find it very difficult.

Mr Beurich—As in basic work ethics.

Mrs Sheedy—I think that stems from the parents.

Mrs MAY—Gerd, are you talking about simple things like turning up on time?

Mr Beurich—Very basic: grooming, dress, hygiene—'comb your hair', 'brush your teeth'. Dress standards, grooming standards. If the boss says eight o'clock, you do not turn up at five past eight, and ideally you do not turn up at eight o'clock either but maybe five to eight, 10 to eight, so you are ready to go at eight o'clock. They often do not seem to have an idea of just the basic things.

Mrs MAY—Has this been discussed with the school here? Do you have the opportunity of working and raising those issues with the teachers here in delivering the programs?

Mrs James-Walsham—That is why I took this job. My main gripe in the hospitality industry was that it was unacceptable to me that students who were due to start at eight o'clock would turn up at eight o'clock. We think it is commonsense that you would be ready to start work at eight o'clock, but at eight o'clock they still had to get changed into their uniforms. By working closely with Centralian College, the position came up and now I speak to the kids when they are still at school and try to assist with that issue. Another lady, Colleen Devlin, who is with the CATS program, is working closely with the government schools to try to—

Mr ALBANESE—What is the CATS program?

Mrs James-Walsham—Career and Transition Pilot Scheme. She is trying to do that as well. She is dealing with Alice Springs High School, Anzac Hill High School and Centralian, talking to kids in years 9 and 10 and trying to help them establish basic work ethics like hygiene, grooming, punctuality and even basic financial control. They have to make sure they have their bus fare ready for the week to get to work—that kind of thing.

Mr Beurich—All of a sudden these kids, for lack of a better word, earn a wage, and in most cases quite a reasonable wage. Often they are not ready to deal with that sort of money. You are

right, that skill should be taught at home, but sadly often it is not. Two days later they end up on your doorstep and say, 'I need an advance,' and you think, 'Hang on a minute, you just got paid. What happened with it?'

Mrs MAY—You are talking about simple budgeting and life skills that are missing, as well as kids being work ready.

Mrs Sheedy—Perhaps the parents need to have a training program.

Mrs James-Walsham—That is not as silly as it sounds. I sit the parents down when we sign a training contract for a school based apprenticeship. We make sure the parents have sat down and gone through it as well. We sign an employment contract that they co-sign that says that, if the student is sick, they will ring the host employer and they will ring Group Training and say what the procedure is, that they know they have to get a medical certificate or, if they are going to be late, what the procedure is. As silly as that sounds, it has worked so far when the parents have had to sit down and co-sign the contract.

Mrs MAY—So, if their son or daughter was taking a day off, the parents would know the process as well? They cannot have the wool pulled over their eyes, so to speak, by the student?

Mrs James-Walsham—Yes.

Mr Linn—Some of our kids' parents have not worked before; they have been on welfare all their lives. The kids see alcohol and family violence as the norm. We try to get them to change that system or jump the fence into another paddock.

CHAIR—How successful are you at doing that, Tony?

Mr Linn—When we first started the program the government told us we would have a 20 per cent success rate. We said, 'Bugger this, we will do better than that,' and we have an 80 per cent success rate now. Two apprentices we had last year have bought houses. That is a milestone. You cannot put that down in your report, but for them it is a milestone.

CHAIR—Fantastic.

Mr SAWFORD—Do any of you have a view about or a bias towards a structure in which VET can be delivered more successfully—comprehensive high schools, this sort of system, senior secondary college? Do you have any views about that? What is the best structure?

Mr Linn—It has to be flexible. Here in the Territory it has to be flexible. I do not know about down south.

Mr SAWFORD—Are the high schools flexible?

Mr Linn—Similar.

Mrs James-Walsham—They are getting there. They are trying—absolutely. It is very difficult. Even our private schools are stretched to the limit at the moment. A lot of responsibility

falls on the VET coordinators and the workplace coordinator, and they are trying to teach and do extra curricular activities as well. They need to take a personal interest in each individual student and make the timetable flexible around them. They are doing that; they are getting there. It has been hard.

Mr SAWFORD—But not as good as Centralian?

Mrs James-Walsham—No, not as good as Centralian yet.

CHAIR—Going back to the issue of work readiness, what do you think about the standard of advice given by the schools in guiding the students in the right direction? Are they coming to you with a reasonable understanding of what different careers mean and what different courses are available, or do you think they are coming to you fairly blind?

Mrs de Souza—I think they are coming to us a bit blind. Today school programs and career people at school are certainly pushing people towards university and higher education. In our industry and in trades—and you would all find that across the board—it is very difficult to get a choice of a tradesperson. If I want to put on an apprentice, I do not get a choice anymore. Five salons might want somebody and there might be only one person available. The kids who, say, 10 years ago were becoming tradespeople—mechanics, electricians, hairdressers or whatever—are now doing arts degrees at university, or that is how I feel it is going.

Mrs Sheedy—They are still not getting jobs.

Mrs de Souza—They are not picking a career and they are still not getting jobs, whereas they should be back with us. One of the big problems in our industry is that our pay is not anywhere near what you can be paid if you have been to uni or you are in a different job. A senior's wage in our industry is still only $32,000 a year. It could even be less than that, depending on what system you have your staff on. It is very difficult to bring that level up in the industry. People think, 'I am only having a haircut, so I should have to pay only $16 or $17 for it.' They are forgetting the costs involved and that the person doing that haircut would like to be earning $40,000 a year and not $28,000 a year. There is a real problem in that area. So parents are trying to encourage their children to do something better than a trade, because trades are marked down here at the moment.

CHAIR—Is part of that problem the career advice given at schools in terms of the opportunities that are there and the security of employment?

Mrs de Souza—They are told they will not get paid very well if they take on a trade.

Mrs Sheedy—Kids today are faced with three to four years of apprenticeship on a very low wage. I say to our guys, 'It is like the pension. You will be on the pension for three years.' An 18-year-old's take-home pay can be $400 to $500, but these young first-year apprentices are taking home only $250. They become very despondent, especially in today's society where all the good things are there but they cost a lot of money, and their mates are going out. It is really difficult to tell a 16- or 17-year-old, 'You will have to stay with mum and dad for three years, and you will not be able to have that $20,000 motorbike.'

Mr SAWFORD—That is no different from when we grew up, is it?

Mrs de Souza—No, it is not. It was the same for us, but today it is different, if you know what I mean.

Mr SAWFORD—Why is it different today?

Mrs Sheedy—Our governments have pushed university. Over the past five years our governments—you guys—have really pushed our students to stay in school to year 12.

CHAIR—I do not think it has been the past five years. That is starting to change. That had been the case for some time, and part of the reason for this—

Mrs de Souza—I think this is trying to change it again.

CHAIR—We are trying to swing the pendulum back the other way. Kathryn, do you agree with those comments? In Group Training, are you finding it hard to attract students to hairdressing, for instance, as an apprenticeship?

Mrs James-Walsham—Yes.

CHAIR—For those same sorts of reasons?

Mrs James-Walsham—Yes. The academic people in the high schools want their results as well. They want their kids to finish year 12 and go on to university. There is still a bit of the stigma that if you are not doing well at school, then go get—in my case—a school based apprenticeship, go do a trade. But that is slowly changing. I believe the school based apprenticeship system is one way they can do both. They can do year 12 and they can begin their trade. Financially, it does help for them to do their first year while they are still at school and living with mum and dad et cetera. So there have been moves to try to put positive changes in place.

CHAIR—You see a growing recognition and esteem of school based apprenticeships?

Mrs James-Walsham—Definitely. When I started the push in February, no-one had ever heard of it. Arrernte Council had some successes last year, but that was it. Many of the employers I have approached have been wonderful and have said, 'Great! If you can find me the right kid, absolutely.'

Mrs de Souza—Kathryn takes all our work away from us. It is great.

CHAIR—Terrific.

Mrs MAY—This morning we heard from a couple of students. They want to be on the first plane out of here as soon as their education is finished. Does that cause you problems, Kathryn, in identifying someone who wants to stay here and work?

Mrs James-Walsham—Yes, it does. Unfortunately there is not a lot we can do other than ensure they finish their apprenticeship. There will be many opportunities offered to them if they do become a fully qualified tradesperson at the end of their apprenticeship. Every business I speak to that puts on an apprentice wants to keep the person on when they finish their apprenticeship, but you cannot force them to stay if they want to travel the world with a trade. That is one of our promotional tools: if you become a hairdresser or a chef, you can go anywhere in the world and still have a job. Unfortunately, that is one of my mechanisms for attracting them, but keeping them here is something we as a town have to do. Our whole infrastructure has to support people wanting to stay and bring up their family here.

Mrs MAY—Dianne and Wendy, you could put all this time and effort into an apprentice, take them all the way through and then you lose them and start again?

Mrs Sheedy—That happens continually.

Mrs de Souza—That happens all the time.

Mr Linn—It is the same with the zoology apprentices we have at the Alice Springs Desert Park. Previously the Desert Park had to bring in at great expense all their animal keepers. Now that we have introduced an animal husbandry program there, I am fairly certain the two girls we have there will stay on because they are local girls, they have been here all their lives and their families are here.

Mr Beurich—Every employer in Alice Springs probably would express the same sentiments: it is hard to find and attract good staff to Alice Springs or to keep them in Alice Springs. We cannot take the attitude of saying, 'They are leaving anyway; let's just not do anything.' You cannot take that attitude.

Mrs MAY—Gerd, would you have at your property, though, a lot of kids doing their three months on working holiday visas? Would you take on those young people?

Mr Beurich—We try very hard not to, for the simple reason you know you have them for only three months. There is the cost of employing somebody—paperwork, uniform, standards. The first month goes before they can do anything productive. Then you are left with eight weeks, and eight weeks later you are in the same boat again. So your standards continually go up and down.

CHAIR—I am afraid we have run out of time. We will have to stop there, otherwise we will not get to our next engagement. Thank you for your time this morning and for your very valuable input. It is much appreciated.

Proceedings suspended from 12.25 p.m. to 2.20 p.m.

ARMSTRONG, Lekesha, BAILEY, Marie Jane; CAMPBELL, Dane; COOK, Edwin; IMPU, Beverly; RIVERS, Scott; WOLLOGORANG, Marissa, WOLLOGORANG, Nerileen; and YUNUPINGU, Athelita

BOYD, Mrs Coralie Anne, IESIP Tutor, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

GOODWIN, Mrs Ann, NTOEC Supervisor, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

HASTWELL, Mr Graeme Cecil, Academic Coordinator, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education. Thank you to the Principal of Yirara College, Reverend Mark Doecke, for his hospitality. Thank you to the teachers and the students for showing us around and for coming in to talk to us today. We enjoyed looking around the school. I think it is a great school. To start with we just want you to tell us who you are and where you come from. Scott showed me around. He did a great job. Good on you, Scott. Scott is from Broome. I did not really talk to any of the rest of you so maybe you can tell us who you are, where you come from and what year you are in.

Edwin Cook—I come from Ti Tree, which is just north of Alice Springs—about two hours drive. I am in year 10.

Mr ALBANESE—Edwin did a great job showing me around.

Beverly Impu—I am from Hermannsburg. I am in 10H. Hermannsburg is west of Alice Springs—about one-and-a-half hours drive.

Dane Campbell—I am from Elliott, which is up the top, north. I am in 10H but really I am schooling at NTOEC, the Northern Territory Open Education Centre. My teacher is Mrs Goodwin. In the future I want to be a professional sportsperson, a PE. I love playing basketball. When I am big I am going to go and play basketball in the big cities—maybe for the mighty Titans in Brisbane.

CHAIR—You should come to Sydney Kings.

Dane Campbell—Yes, maybe the Sydney Kings. Harden their defence.

Mrs MAY—Are you a good player?

Dane Campbell—Yes.

Mrs MAY—And you enjoy playing?

Dane Campbell—Yes.

Mrs MAY—You are very tall.

Dane Campbell—I am 1.89 metres and I am 16.

Mrs MAY—You are still growing.

Dane Campbell—Yes, I am still growing. My mum said I am an overgrown kid.

Mrs MAY—Perhaps she is feeding you too much.

Dane Campbell—My dad is tall like me and he has curly hair. When I was going to school my friend was calling me 'afro man' because I had big hair. They were making a joke of me. That is all I want to say.

Mrs MAY—Good luck with your basketball.

Athelita Yunupingu—I come from Santa Teresa.

Mrs MAY—Athelita showed me around the school and she did a great job.

Athelita Yunupingu—Santa Teresa is south-east of Alice Springs. I am in year 10.

Mrs MAY—What are you studying? You are going somewhere next week, aren't you?

Athelita Yunupingu—I am going to Centralian College.

Mrs MAY—What are you going to be doing there?

Athelita Yunupingu—I am doing office work.

Mrs MAY—You have already done some work experience in an office, haven't you? And you enjoyed that?

Athelita Yunupingu—Yes.

CHAIR—Very good.

Lekesha Armstrong—I come from Hermannsburg. I am in 10H and I study at NTOEC.

CHAIR—Do you enjoy that?

Lekesha Armstrong—Yes.

CHAIR—Is it a good school to be at?

Lekesha Armstrong—Yes.

Marie Jane Bailey—I come from Maryvale, which is south of Alice Springs. I am in year 10.

CHAIR—Do you like the school?

Marie Jane Bailey—Yes.

CHAIR—It is a great school.

Marissa Wollogorang—I come from Kiana Station, which is south of Borroloola, which is up near the Gulf of Carpentaria. I am in year 10 as well but I go to Centralian and I study child care.

CHAIR—You do some time here and some time at Centralian. Is that how it works?

Marissa Wollogorang—Yes.

CHAIR—You are backwards and forwards all the time. Do you want to be a childcare worker when you leave school?

Marissa Wollogorang—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—One of the girls at Centralian said to us this morning that she would like to have a childcare centre at Centralian. What do you think of that idea?

Marissa Wollogorang—No, I would not like that.

Nerileen Wollogorang—I come from Kiana Station, the same place as Marissa. I am in year 10 as well. I study at Centralian College doing child care.

Scott Rivers—I am from Broome, Western Australia. I am doing work experience with a motor mechanic at a wreckers in Alice.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you have a speedway here in Alice Springs?

Scott Rivers—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you go?

Scott Rivers—Sometimes.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you driven one of those cars? Would you like to?

Scott Rivers—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you. You are from all different parts of Australia. We are too. Mr Albanese is from Sydney, Mrs May is from the Gold Coast near Brisbane, Alison Childs is from Canberra, I am from just out of Sydney and Mr Sawford is from Adelaide.

Mr SAWFORD—Port Adelaide. You have to get this right.

CHAIR—He follows a strange football team. We are travelling around Australia to talk to students and visit schools so we can see what is happening in schools with vocational education like child care, motor mechanics and office works—the things that you are studying for. We want to hear from students about how it works. Is it good? Is it bad? What do you like about it? All of those sorts of things. Is this a good school?

Dane Campbell—This is a good school. It's all right.

CHAIR—Why? What is the best thing about it?

Dane Campbell—The education—learning about what you are going to be when you are big, planning what you are going to do at university and all that and having a great time. Like I said, I worked at Hungry Jacks for work experience every Tuesday, and yesterday I filled out an application form so I can work on Saturdays and Sundays. Maybe I am going to start this week or next week. We have another six more weeks before we go back home. So I do not know how much I am going to work, but they are going to give me money for it.

CHAIR—For how many hours a week do you do work experience at Hungry Jacks?

Dane Campbell—Maybe three. Yesterday—Tuesday—I had three hours. I started at 10 a.m. and finished at one o'clock. Maybe on Saturday or Sunday I am going to work right through.

CHAIR—Do you get paid for what you are doing now?

Dane Campbell—I filled out an application form yesterday. Maybe I am going to work on Saturday and Sunday—on the weekends—and maybe I am going to get paid after that.

CHAIR—Very good.

Mr SAWFORD—How did you learn about Yirara College in the first place? Was it through family? How did you know about this place?

Dane Campbell—It is a pretty good school. They said it was strict and all that, but it is not. They keep the boys away from the girls. They said, 'If you're in love with the girls, they'll make trouble.' They have separated the girls and the boys.

Mr SAWFORD—Who told you about the school? Was it your parents or others?

Dane Campbell—My parents and the other fella Mr Peter Imms. He would go around and pick up people and tell them about the college rules that you cannot have a girlfriend and you cannot run away—if you run away, you can get in jail for that.

Mr SAWFORD—Dane is a St Kilda supporter.

Dane Campbell—We thrashed Geelong by miles.

Mr SAWFORD—The reason he is saying that, of course, is that Mr Snowdon, the local member, is a Geelong supporter.

Dane Campbell—I have been teasing him all day today about Geelong being thrashed by St Kilda.

Mr SAWFORD—How did other people find out about Yirara? Was it through family members? Can you tell us, Marissa?

Marissa Wollogorang—My parents told me about Yirara. They said that it is a Christian school and that you could learn about God. Mr Imms came up to visit our community. He is the community liaison officer.

Mr SAWFORD—Scott, how did you find out about Yirara?

Scott Rivers—My cousin used to come here before and said it was all right.

Mr SAWFORD—Was he also from Broome?

Scott Rivers—Wyndham.

Mr SAWFORD—So he told you it was a good place to come?

Scott Rivers—Yes.

CHAIR—What is he doing now? Is he working?

Scott Rivers—He is working at Peter Kittle's.

CHAIR—Where is that?

Scott Rivers—It is a big car place. They sell cars in Alice Springs.

Mr ALBANESE—Do you stay here at the college, Scott?

Scott Rivers—Yes. I board.

Mr ALBANESE—Do you board here as well, Dane?

Dane Campbell—Yes, but in a different place.

CHAIR—Edwin, how did you find out about this school? Who told you? Was it your mum and dad or a teacher from your other school? You cannot remember. But it is a good school; you are glad you came? Okay.

Mrs MAY—Athelita, who told you about this school?

Athelita Yunupingu—My mum.

Mrs MAY—Had other family members been to this school?

Athelita Yunupingu—Yes, a cousin and a sister.

Mrs MAY—Do you like the school?

Athelita Yunupingu—Yes.

CHAIR—Your cousin and your sister came here?

Athelita Yunupingu—Yes.

CHAIR—Are they working—do they have jobs now?

Athelita Yunupingu—Yes, they are working now.

CHAIR—Where are they working?

Athelita Yunupingu—My sister is working up in the Top End—in Arnhem Land.

Mrs MAY—What is she doing?

Athelita Yunupingu—Working in an office.

Mrs MAY—Is that why you would like to work in an office?

Athelita Yunupingu—Yes.

Mrs MAY—Is that how you heard about office work?

Athelita Yunupingu—Yes.

CHAIR—Dane, do you want to say something?

Dane Campbell—About what, the school?

CHAIR—Yes, whatever. I thought you were about to say something.

Dane Campbell—I want to say something about the school. My brother went to Yirara College when I was small. When I was growing up he said, 'You have to go to school first before you can go to college.' When I was in year 9 I was still going to school. But in year 10, I went out to Katherine. But I did not want to go there, because they have lots of fights there. That is how I came to Yirara College. My brother said, 'Yirara College is a good school because you learn about God's word and all that stuff.' It is a good school to go to.

CHAIR—Does your brother work somewhere now?

Dane Campbell—He works at Elliott radio station. If you have a request, he works there. It runs down to Alice Springs from Elliott. Every half hour he stops and we have the Alice Springs

news, in stereo. After that finishes, he starts talking and puts on requests for anyone out there who wants one.

CHAIR—That would be a good job.

Dane Campbell—Yes. That is what I want to become, maybe. But it depends on me if I want to have a job.

CHAIR—Working in radio?

Dane Campbell—Yes.

CHAIR—You are in year 10. Will you stay for year 11?

Dane Campbell—Yes. I was planning to do years 11 and 12 and after that I want to go to university.

CHAIR—The Northern Territory University?

Dane Campbell—Yes, or maybe a big school like in Sydney or Adelaide where you two fellas come from. Maybe a big school or NTU. It is up to me. It depends on whether I want to.

Mrs MAY—Do you know what you want to do at university?

Dane Campbell—I want to become a sportsperson, so if I am a teacher some day in a community I can be a PE teacher and teach them how to play basketball and all that.

CHAIR—That would be a great job. Is everyone here planning to do years 11 and 12? That's good. That will mean another two years here and more work experience while you are here. That gives you a better chance of finding a job when you finish.

Dane Campbell—I would like to have a job. That gives you the money to pay the rent and all that stuff. It is better than sitting at home watching TV and always feeling bored.

Mrs MAY—You go shopping here every Saturday, don't you?

Dane Campbell—Yes, every Saturday we do shopping. We go from nine o'clock or half past nine until 11 o'clock. After 11 o'clock we go and have lunch in the dining room and after the dining room we go to the cinemas, and after the cinemas the boys at the north dorm, on Saturday night, go out to the go-karts.

Mrs MAY—Do you get an allowance each week so you learn to budget your allowance?

Dane Campbell—Yes.

Mrs MAY—What do you buy with your allowance? What have you learnt about budgeting and what do you need to buy with that allowance?

Dane Campbell—I do not know; I do not have a clue about that.

Mrs MAY—You don't buy yourself any clothes?

Dane Campbell—I do buy my clothes, every Saturday.

Mrs MAY——Do you enjoy going into town on a Saturday?

Dane Campbell—Yes, I enjoy it. It's all right; it's better than staying home at college all day on Saturday. But, like the teacher said, if you meet a girl on Saturday you will have the teacher look at you and then the next Saturday you will have detention and miss out on the shopping, and you will go the next week after that. That is not bad, but if they see you they will do it, and they will give you a job to do.

Mrs MAY—What sort of job would they give you?

Dane Campbell—I have not done that before. I do not know what sort of job; it is up to the houseparents.

CHAIR—Girls, are the teachers here good teachers?

Dane Campbell—There are good teachers around here. But, like I said, Mr Hastwell is my favourite teacher. He is a good teacher.

Mrs Goodwin—You are just saying that because we are sitting behind you!

Dane Campbell—My NTOEC teacher is a good teacher. Her husband, Mr Goodwin, is our bus driver every Saturday, and he is working hard out the front of the chapel. My favourite houseparent is Mr Eckermann—the senior one. The junior Eckermann is, maybe, going to lead the kids at the dormitory tonight, but I will not be there because I will be at the youth parliament. I am doing a youth parliament at the MacDonnell Range Caravan Park. We came here to answer some questions and we are going back this afternoon. I was supposed to dress up in the Yirara College gear, but I was too late. Do you have any more questions I can answer for you?

CHAIR—You are doing very well, mate; you would be very good in parliament—you are very good at answering questions.

Mr SAWFORD—He is in the parliament!

Dane Campbell—My two friends, Brooke and Amy, are in the parliament. I have a bill to discuss on Friday. Amy and Brooke said, 'Are you going to write down 10 paragraphs?' I said, 'I am not going to write down 10 paragraphs, because then I would lose my voice and they would not hear what I am talking about when they put me up to the microphone!'

CHAIR—You speak well; you answered the questions very well.

Mr SAWFORD—Would any of you change anything at this school? If you had the power to change anything here, what would you do?

Dane Campbell—What are you talking about?

Mr SAWFORD—If you were the boss, what is the first thing you would do?

Dane Campbell—I like it like it is right now.

CHAIR—You like it like it is right now?

Dane Campbell—Yes.

CHAIR—Would any of the girls change it?

Mrs MAY—Would you make any changes?

Dane Campbell—Are you talking about the rules at Yirara College—the boss rules, the principal's rules?

Mr SAWFORD—Not just rules; it might be programs—

Dane Campbell—What sort of programs?

Mr SAWFORD—Study programs. For example, you might want to have an area of study that is not here introduced. You have home economics, but there might be another area that you might want to study that is not here.

Dane Campbell—We have home economics, art, technical studies, metalwork and woodwork.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you have music?

Dane Campbell—Yes, we have music. If you are a really good guitar, drum or bass player, you go up to the chapel and you can play there. The girls and the boys get a turn every day—girls, boys; girls, boys. We have chapel in the morning every day and we have a big crowd at God's house.

CHAIR—Is that a good part of the day?

Dane Campbell—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you like that?

Dane Campbell—Yes, I like it, and I like to be a Christian.

CHAIR—Very good. Scott, what do you think is the best thing about the school? What do you like about the school?

Scott Rivers—Doing work experience.

CHAIR—Is it the best because you enjoy that, because it will help you get a job?

Scott Rivers—Yes.

Dane Campbell—Education's better.

CHAIR—But the two go together, don't they? You can have education and work experience, and get a job there.

Dane Campbell—For me—there is a lady manager; there are two, an assistant manager and a manager; I don't know what the manager's last name is—he saw me at Hungry Jack's. I was working really good, so he gave me an application form to fill in and I can work on Saturday and Sunday.

CHAIR—That is great, isn't it?

Dane Campbell—He watched me and saw I was a good worker.

CHAIR—So he saw you worked hard and were reliable and you could get a job. Dane, I think you and one of the girls said you were studying at open—

Dane Campbell—Me and Lekesha are doing open education. There's supposed to be two—a girl and a boy. In the same community there's Kirsten Egan and Denis Nelson.

CHAIR—So they are doing it and you and Lekesha are doing it?

Dane Campbell—There are two at the moment. There are supposed to be four, but two are away from the same community. I don't know what time they are going to show up at the college.

CHAIR—Lekesha, could you tell us how the open education works? I don't know anything about it. What do you do there?

Mrs Goodwin—What subjects do you do?

Lekesha Armstrong—Science, English, maths and soc ed.

CHAIR—You do all those through open education?

Lekesha Armstrong—Yes.

Mr Hastwell—And where do you send that work?

Lekesha Armstrong—To Darwin.

CHAIR—So you have assignments every week you have to send to Darwin?

Lekesha Armstrong—Yes.

Dane Campbell—If you finish the booklet, you send it to them.

CHAIR—And they mark it?

Dane Campbell—Yes, they mark it. Louise Becker is my maths teacher. She said I was doing great and I got 100 per cent when two books were corrected.

CHAIR—Excellent.

Dane Campbell—And I got 95 per cent, and 75 per cent for soc ed. That was in term 2. In term 3 we are going on an excursion to Darwin for a residential.

CHAIR—And are you going to that too, Lekesha?

Lekesha Armstrong—Yes.

Mrs MAY—What is your favourite subject, Lekesha?

Lekesha Armstrong—Maths.

Mrs MAY—Do you do well at maths? Are you good at it?

Lekesha Armstrong—Sometimes.

CHAIR—Why do you do open education? Why do you do maths and science in open education instead of doing it here—or do you do both?

Mrs Goodwin—The students are studying at a year 9 level. That is a different year level to what the other students are studying, so we get the work prepared for students who have been here a while or who have been in mainstream schools. That is where they study.

Mrs MAY—Is that because there are no other students studying at that level?

Mrs Goodwin—Yes.

Mrs MAY—So Dane would be out on his own; he would be the only one doing that level. Is that why he is doing open learning?

Mrs Goodwin—Yes, that is right.

Mrs MAY—So there is not a whole class here doing that level. Is that right?

Dane Campbell—A couple of classes.

Mrs Goodwin—That is right. We have had up to five or six students at a time.

Dane Campbell—We have dropped back to four now because two ran away and they have not come back yet. There are two at the moment, but maybe there will be four when this term finishes. Maybe those two will come back. During term 2 maybe we can go and check out Darwin—if they want to show up.

Mrs MAY—But they cannot do that level here? I do not quite understand.

Mrs Goodwin—They form a group by themselves because they are doing those subjects from years 9 through to 11. It is a combination of different year levels. It is extended work, I guess you would call it, so they can progress at their pace.

CHAIR—And your teachers help you with that? You do not sit in a maths class, but you go to them for help with your units?

Dane Campbell—A little bit.

CHAIR—But mostly you do it on your own?

Dane Campbell—Mostly we do it ourselves.

CHAIR—You have time free from other classes to do that?

Mrs Goodwin—Yes, that is right.

Dane Campbell—In the morning we have two lessons, then recess. First in the morning we line up at chapel and go down to 10 Hastwell. First we do maths at 10 Hastwell. When that lesson is finished we go to NTOEC and do another maths, and then after that there is recess. So we do two maths in two lessons.

Mr Hastwell—NTOEC is a bit like a halfway step for some of these students who want to leave and go and do work in a mainstream school.

CHAIR—Does that provide an effective bridge there? Do many students go from a school like this, having completed enough NTOEC, to then enrol in a mainstream school?

Mr Hastwell—At the moment we have one student—it is actually Scott's sister—who is going to do year 11 at the Catholic high. This is a way that the kids can move into the mainstream.

Dane Campbell—Are there any more questions we can answer?

CHAIR—You have exhausted us, tired us out, from asking questions.

Dane Campbell—I'm on fire here!

CHAIR—Good on you, Dane!

Mr SAWFORD—Be careful, Dane, or you might finish up like Stephen Milne!

Dane Campbell—He's a smart player—a cheeky player!

Mr SAWFORD—He has a two-week holiday.

Dane Campbell—Yes.

CHAIR—Is there anything else? Do you want to tell us anything else that we should know about your school? It sounds very good, and I think it is a great school.

Dane Campbell—A couple of things changed at the school when we came back from term.

CHAIR—What sorts of things have changed?

Dane Campbell—The oval is like an American gridiron oval. It has a sort of 'H' and on the backline there is a short fence—but they've got a taller one now. That's where we play football sometimes. So we can kick a ball over, they put a high fence. And when we walk to the chapel in the morning the sun can be shining at us. They put a board there; they will block it in the morning.

CHAIR—So there are plenty of changes; things are being improved all the time?

Dane Campbell—Yes.

CHAIR—Terrific. Thank you for coming in and answering our questions and for showing us around the school. Good luck to you all.

Dane Campbell—Maybe I will see you on Friday. Will you be at parliament?

CHAIR—No. On Friday we are going to Uluru for half a day and then back to Sydney and Brisbane. It has been good talking to you. Thank you for what you have told us. Good luck with your jobs and sport. You will make a good PE teacher, Dane.

Proceedings suspended from 2.54 p.m. to 3.22 p.m.

BOYD, Mrs Coralie Anne, IESIP Tutor, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

DOECKE, Reverend Mark Leo, Principal, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

GOODWIN, Mrs Ann, NTOEC Supervisor, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

HASTWELL, Mr Graeme Cecil, Academic Coordinator, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

PHILLIPS, Mr Graeme Bertrand, Pathways Coordinator, Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you again for your hospitality and for having us here today. It was a great afternoon tea and we had an enjoyable time with the students. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Rev. Doecke—I have not prepared any introductory comments because I was probably keener for us to respond to your questions. I said to Graeme Phillips that I would probably handball a fair bit to him. Graeme is the one who has developed our approach to vocational education since 1998, when the program in its present form first started, with help from these people and others.

Mr Phillips—My role includes seeking out a range of Pathways options available in the Alice Springs area and beyond and to present them to the students of Yirara College. For instance, we have a memorandum of cooperation with Centralian College and we have developed relationships with the Institute for Aboriginal Development, the Centre for Appropriate Technology and Katharine Rural College. We anticipate further relationship building with the emerging Desert Knowledge centre. Another part of my role is to ensure that students at Yirara have the opportunity of accessing a diverse range of education and training services both within the college and through other providers. We provide ongoing support to students by liaising with teachers and boarding staff and providing tutorial and homework assistance and problem-solving counselling. Part of my job is to ensure that we have wide-ranging consultation regarding pathways for individual students, and that involves these people, others who are involved in teaching the program and others particularly from the institutions I have already named.

Within our internal Pathways program I recommend staff allocation and we interview and employ external staff for a number of our programs. This term we only have two—in previous terms we have had up to five—external people coming in with their expertise and particular skills. We also provide for students to access mainstream schools when appropriate. At present we have one student attending the Catholic college in town while living at Yirara, because it is a much more appropriate level of learning for her while her parents want her to be in Yirara College for its boarding facility and protective environment—I think is a fair way to put it.

We also provide mainstream education through the Northern Territory Open Education Centre, which Ann is the supervisor for. We currently have four students that are accessing mainstream courses that way. An important part of that is liaising with parents and liaising with the Open Education Centre, which is Ann's work. She spends a lot of time in direct contact with them.

Regarding our students who access the VET courses, there is a good deal of liaison with Centralian College this year. In previous years we have also had considerable liaison with IAD. This term, we have started two students at the Centre for Appropriate Technology doing a certificate course there in development and design, I think it is called—I should check on that. The students are starting there as full-time members of that body. The Centre for Appropriate Technology operates as a workplace rather than a college or a school, which puts a different slant on education for these young fellows because they will be working on specific projects on communities while they are learning. It is an excellent opportunity for them. We also maintain communication with the Alice Springs Workplace Learning Community. The coordinator of that body organises work placements for our students who are studying VET courses. That is a fairly general picture of what we do.

CHAIR—I will get the ball rolling and then hand over to my colleagues. How many schools are there in the Territory like this that provide full-time boarding for Indigenous students from dispersed remote areas?

Rev. Doecke—The only other school that would have totally remote Indigenous students would be Nyangatjatjara College. There are two colleges in Darwin that have a mixture of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, both boarding and non-boarding, but there are no other ones quite like us other than Nyangatjatjara, which does it in a slightly different way and on a much smaller scale.

CHAIR—I am interested in how you actually attract students. Some of the students that we had here earlier on were saying that they came here because their cousins or their sisters had been here or their parents had heard about it. Where do their family members gain that awareness to begin with? Is it through the Lutheran Church or through the feeder primary schools?

Rev. Doecke—It is a mixture. Some of the school teachers know about us and they promote Yirara. For many students, Yirara is one of the main options at a secondary level. There are a lot of very small communities dotted around Central Australia that are not big enough to have any secondary facilities, so Yirara is known for that. But, in terms of kids going further up north, we have got two community liaison officers, who spend a lot of time driving around to bush communities talking to families—they are well known in the communities—and talking to students and teachers. I guess a lot of it is just by word of mouth. Particularly with our northern kids, they are all related in some way and they keep feeding in the younger ones as they come in.

CHAIR—Where does Yirara fit into the scale, if I can use that term, of opportunities or aspirations for Indigenous kids once they leave primary school? Is this considered to be a fairly elite aspiration or is it for the kids who cannot quite make it in local schools?

Rev. Doecke—It is probably considered to be the most suitable option for bush kids. If the kids have a lot of ability and have had some exposure to more mainstream education as opposed to education in a community in a little school which is totally indigenous, they may look at other options. If they are working at a mainstream level, they are more likely to go to some of the predominantly non-Indigenous schools like St Phillips in town. They may consider Catholic schools, boarding here or going to schools in Darwin.

Mr Hastwell—In many of the communities, there are not many options after you finish your primary years. They often have what they call a post-primary annexe which is usually staffed by one person. One person cannot offer very much. The person cannot be a jack-of-all-trades, although they try to be. They usually specialise in one thing. What they can get there is very limited.

Rev. Doecke—We are certainly not regarded as the elitist model. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. One of the DEST officers in town over the years has encouraged us to apply some stringent entry tests to make ourselves more elitist. However, if we did that, as I said before about literacy levels, we would not have any students here. That would be the case if you applied a minimum literacy entry level. The reality is that we have many students who can do little more than read or write their own name coming in at 12 years of age or older.

Mrs MAY—Is there a cost involved for students coming here?

Rev. Doecke—No. Predominantly the Commonwealth government pay through Abstudy and recurrent funding and the rest comes from the Northern Territory government through recurrent funding. We also have a special subvention which is top-up money provided by the NT government.

Mrs MAY—Do you select your students or do they apply to you and go through some sort of selection process?

Rev. Doecke—They apply. We talk to the family and to schools. We prefer to take students who have actually attended school for some of the time. They will get the first preference. Obviously siblings of students who have already been through are taken. We usually have a waiting list for a while and there are always some students whom we reject or keep at the very end of the waiting list because they have a poor history of schooling at primary school level. They may have social problems or extreme learning difficulties. One of the gaps in Indigenous education relates to students with very special physical or emotional needs. If they are from a remote community, where do they go? They cannot fit into a normal boarding school like Yirara College. They need a lot of one on one. There are very few options for those students. We have two students who are totally hearing impaired and it is very hard. One goes into town and boards here. All we can do for the other one is have an assistant sit next to them to help the student work. There are students whom we just cannot take because their needs are greater than we can meet.

Mrs MAY—What about the drop-out rate once you have taken students in? Is it high or low?

Rev. Doecke—It is very high. It is no higher than anywhere else across the landscape of Indigenous education in the country, particularly in traditional areas. In maintaining approximately 200 kids throughout the year, we would see something like 370 students in a whole year. It is a bit like a revolving door—around and around—but there is also a sense of in once and then you never see them again—a term or two or a year or two later and they just disappear.

Mrs MAY—What are the reasons for their going?

Mr Hastwell—A million reasons.

Mrs MAY—Family problems; social problems?

Mr Hastwell—You could fill a page with the reasons.

Rev. Doecke—Anything other than reasons related to school specifically in terms of education. It is all family, social—

Mrs Boyd—External issues.

Rev. Doecke—External issues. It is just too hard. Family mobility and dysfunctionalism are other factors.

Mr Hastwell—Or if there is a sports day on.

CHAIR—Can you give us an overview of where students go after they leave here? What percentage leave and do not come back? What percentage go on to another school? In general terms, how many of the ones we spoke to earlier who are doing a VET course or a link-in with Centralian transfer to another school or into employment or go back to their villages?

Mr Phillips—It is almost easier to speak about individuals than percentages. For instance, last year we had two students who completed certificate III education at Centralian College, one of whom was enrolled at and completed the orientation at Flinders University. But the social pressures of going suddenly from Hermannsburg to Adelaide, and the various things attached to that, meant that she just found it too hard to stay. Flinders made it clear that she is more than welcome to defer and come back next year, but there is a lot of work to be done just to assure her that that is acceptable. She is finding it a very difficult thing to do. To go from Hermannsburg to Alice Springs to Yirara is not such a big thing. Another student who completed the same course was, when I last heard, which was maybe two months ago, attending a high school in Darwin, despite the fact that she basically has tertiary entrance available. The factor there is that she has a younger sister who needs support at the other school. We are not talking about the factors that normally influence the decisions of a child from a family in suburban Sydney, Melbourne or wherever.

Mr SAWFORD—Isn't it somewhat similar to what the Jesuits used to say: give me a child at the age of seven and I will have him or her for the rest of my life? Even educational research will tell you that if children by the age of 11 get confident with literacy, numeracy, social skills and, these days, technological skills—if they encompass that with a sense of confidence—then they have that for the rest of their lives. It is much harder to do that with a group of post-puberty kids, who have not got that. Graeme and I spoke earlier about understanding the difficulties. If the age groups you dealt with started at seven and went to where you are now, I wonder if in the long term you would be far more successful, albeit with the problems that may cause.

Rev. Doecke—Certainly the more that students have been to school at a younger age the more they are likely to stay at Yirara and go on or, in fact, go to other schools where they have even more choices. My argument in all this is that at primary school they have not hit puberty yet, they are fairly compliant, school is interesting—it is probably the most interesting thing that

happens for them on community life—and there is a good reason to come to school and they are reasonably happy to do that, depending on what is happening at school. When they reach teenage years they are more independent, but at the end of the day what is secondary education going to give them? Education has no value for them. It is, 'What are you going to do when you finish school?' 'Go on sit-down money.'

The students that you have seen here are the exceptions rather than the norm in many ways. They are the kids who do have aspirations, and we have to cater for them, but why should kids have an education when they go back home to any of the Western Desert communities or down in the Pitlands and all the young fellas are just driving around in cars and the women are having babies? What is education bringing them? Is that a fair comment to make?

Mr Hastwell—In most of the bush communities the people who get the paid positions are related to somebody. So it is through family that they get employment, not necessarily through education. If the two coincide, then that is a happy coincidence, but mostly it is just a case of, 'I need somebody to work with me; my brother will do it.'

CHAIR—I take it that most of your students are doing VET courses of one sort or another?

Rev. Doecke—Yes, quite a number of them are.

CHAIR—How many of them end up with employment related to their training? For example, Dane said that he may score some part-time work at Hungry Jacks. For those who are doing courses in office administration, child care et cetera, does that very frequently lead to further training and employment in related areas?

Mr Hastwell—It does, and it will, as this program builds momentum and we have more students going through and actually succeeding. These two students that Graeme mentioned were the first two to complete that avenue of attack. Now we have more students who have seen those first two succeed and are coming up behind them. We have a third group now starting along that same road.

CHAIR—So is the culture starting to change there? Are they learning from their predecessors?

Mr Hastwell—I think it is. A lot of it is changing because one of the classes in the school has changed. You could almost call my year-10 class a VET class now. This document shows where my kids go on a day-to-day basis and you can see that they go all over the place—they are doing VET courses, NTOEC courses et cetera.

Rev. Doecke—One of the difficulties is, even if you get them into further training and into a job, how long they will stay in that job. If they are home and working, their families will suck them dry. When I first came here in 1994 we had students working at Kmart and Woolworths—they were good employers who were keen to give our kids opportunities. Families would sit outside in the car park on payday waiting to fleece their kids. That happens anywhere across the Indigenous landscape: families suck achieving Aboriginal people dry. That is a Western viewpoint. In terms of their obligation and what family means, they have very little opportunity to say no, and they probably would not even think of it. How do you separate them from that

whole family cycle? After a while, what is the incentive for them to work when families take those earnings, whereas at least if you are on Centrelink payments you are one of a whole lot and not getting anymore than anybody else and so you are probably less likely to be approached and asked for money? So it is easier just to go on sit-down money.

Mr SAWFORD—On a previous visit to Alice Springs—I think it was about 1994—a young Aboriginal boy who came from Darwin was working at Kmart and he actually realised that having no family or connections here was in fact a plus. He understood the pressure that his colleagues, boys and girls, were under. I went out and watched it, and you have described exactly what happened.

Rev. Doecke—That is why we get some kids from up north, whom you met today, and why some kids from Central Australia go to Darwin to go to school.

Mr SAWFORD—I want to return to the question of the younger kids. We had Karmi Dunn from Darwin explain to us that Aboriginal elders had reported to her that, although there were exceptions, they felt literacy and numeracy was worse today that it was 30 years ago. They felt that there was some progress 30 years ago but that that has gone into a hiatus and it is now all over the place. Sure there are exceptions, but in the main it has gone backwards. You have to point to what has been happening in some of those schools. Graeme was saying before that the attendance rates are pretty low. Is it the case that Aboriginal elders have to convince their communities that their children have to have education of this nature at a much earlier age? Maybe then they will have the social skills to be able to withstand those obvious pressures that are there.

Mr Hastwell—I am almost not sure that the Aboriginal elders have that sway anymore.

Rev. Doecke—I would agree with that. They do not have that power anymore. The cultural mechanisms that once operated are very quickly breaking down. There are a few communities around Central Australia, say, where there are probably some fairly Westernised Aboriginal people who put a value on education running the communities. An example would be Harts Range. An example would be Finke. Wallace Rockhole has been like that. In those places those fairly Westernised Aboriginal people who have married in will say, 'In this community, if you live here, your kids have to go to school,' and there is a value put on education. Wallace Rockhole kids go to St Phillips. They are too good for here—or they think they are. Of the Finke kids, half will go down to Adelaide and the other half will come to Yirara. The higher-achieving ones will go down to the Wiltja program at Woodville High. That happens, but by and large in a community you have a number of families who are quite independent from each other, and the level of substance abuse, of dysfunctionalism, that operates means that the old cultural boundaries that would apply no longer do so.

Mr Hastwell—In 1981, with the land rights round the Ernabella area, there was almost a parting of the ways between those generations. Following land rights, the grandparent generations started heading for the homelands, but the younger generations headed for Alice Springs; so it removed that influence from the family. Basically, the kids did not want to go to the homelands. There was no TV, nothing you could work your thumbs on—video games and all that sort of thing. The bright lights attracted them to Alice Springs. To them, Ernabella was the bright lights, and even that grew dimmer later on when they discovered that Alice Springs was

even better. Meanwhile, the people that you were talking about, the elders, are sitting out in the homelands.

Rev. Doecke—Visit any of these communities in the cooler months out west and, on any given weekend, who is left at home? The little kids and the oldest people. The rest are just travelling around to sports carnivals or have gone into town. Who is actually taking responsibility for bringing up the children? That is the legacy of what we have in the education system now. For us here, kids coming in and boarding at age 12 or older are less socialised. It is more of a shock to them than ever before in terms of how to live with others and following guidelines. I am talking about health and nutrition and all those things. It is very hard to talk about these things because there are Aboriginal leaders—and whitefellas—in the community who are very defensive about this sort of stuff. But it is true. Our observation from all the communities we travel to is exactly what Graeme is saying.

Mr Hastwell—The elders out there are now 14 years of age. Aboriginal kids have always been fairly independent, but if you are part of a little group of four to six independent kids within an extended family you are coming under the influence of the elders much more than if you are those same six kids just with those six kids. The generational influence is not there. They are just being brought up by their peers.

Mr ALBANESE—How successful are you at raising the literacy levels for kids who stay here?

Mrs Boyd—I have brought some figures along. I am the tutor for Graeme's level 10 class. It is an older group of students—say, from 15 through to 20, which is the age of our oldest students at the moment—and we have seen some quite remarkable progress with some of them, where they are jumping year levels in a term. I will try to pick out somebody that you might have met today as an example.

CHAIR—If you are going to read out levels, it might be better not to have their names recorded in *Hansard*.

Mrs Boyd—One of the students that you met this afternoon was recorded at a year 5 reading level in term 3, 2002. By term 4, 2002 he had come up to year 6 level. It is not uncommon that we get them up a year in a term.

Mr ALBANESE—Is a term three months?

Mrs Boyd—It is 10 weeks, roughly. That is not an uncommon jump at that age. We get them roughly to a year 7 level and it often plateaus there.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there a reason why it plateaus?

Mrs Boyd—There probably is.

Mr Hastwell—It is like the way a 20-stone person finds it easier to lose weight quickly at the start than, say, a 10-stone person would, but later on, when that 20 stone gets down to 12 stone, the last few—

Mr SAWFORD—Don't look at me while you are saying that!

Mr Hastwell—It is that kind of thing.

CHAIR—Are the students who are doing the open education in this category of students who have improved rapidly while they have been here and now need more of a challenge?

Rev. Doecke—We have a student who is a very good example of what can happen. She started a couple of years ago in the second bottom class. She would have had a starting literacy level of around grade 1. She is now operating at year 9. That is remarkable. She has been through very intensive literacy tutoring.

Mr SAWFORD—She indicated that mathematics was her favourite subject, which was interesting.

Mrs Boyd—Another student came in at level 6, and that is not uncommon. The students from the Top End, students from Katherine and further north, are much more articulate with their spoken English. Whether it is their first language or not, they hear it a lot more and they often come into the school with a lot higher literacy level than the Central Australia kids do.

CHAIR—Is it a fairly normal progression for those students who are doing open education to move from that to another high school?

Mrs Goodwin—Yes, for those students with ability but also with support. I have been with NTOEC for only 18 months and I see some terrific students. Some of them have been to other colleges before Yirara, so they have a very well established idea of what to expect in the mainstream classroom. Other students have had what would probably be a general experience of attending a primary school and then working their way through the classrooms at Yirara until they have been given this opportunity because of their ability. Generally, the support is the thing that is very typical of all of them. They have parents, brothers and sisters—families—that have employment, and their families are really encouraging them to do the best they can. They have wonderful goals for their kids. Generally, the students are very motivated to learn and to go on to further education.

The other positive thing that particularly the career students are exposed to is a number of Indigenous people living locally who come from all around Australia with degrees, several degrees sometimes, who are self-employed and work through all sorts of community agencies—health, education. They too are so encouraging of these kids. They want Indigenous young people in the work force. They want them to go home to the communities.

Just changing my train of thought, I was thinking earlier about CJ, who has been at the school for 20-plus years, and how she has children of children for whom she was a boarding house parent. It is that same thing: they have had a great experience at Yirara or a great experience with education and they are passing it on. It is changing. The students I have had through NTOEC have gone on to senior secondary classes. We have had people go back to employment in their communities. We have got people like Dane, who is fired up—he told us he was fired up—to go on because he knows that the opportunities are there. The positions are there, and there are people there to support them.

Rev. Doecke—There is an enormous diversity in terms of Indigenous people in the country. We see that even here in Alice Spring with the students we have—they are chalk and cheese. You talked about role models who have good jobs and are articulate and have a vision for where they want Indigenous people to go. Contrast that with a great majority of our students out in remote communities, some of whom are just living out of rubbish bins; who have one family member to another, for generations, in on the grog in Alice Springs; who have been brought up, for one reason or another, by some other family member. It is very different.

Mrs Goodwin—Yes, it is.

CHAIR—Would students such as Dane and Lekesha and others who are motivated and have got that support network do the NTCE here, or would they transfer to Centralia or one of the other colleges?

Mr Phillips—Yes, they would need to do that because we just do not have the scope to cope with it here, apart from what Ann's is doing through the Northern Territory Open Ed Centre. But even there, because of the nature of the beast, it is a desirable way of increasing the capacity of the student in order to handle the next step. My personal view is that the students we have in that group doing correspondence work through NTOEC are the students I would visualise taking the next step and moving into mainstream, higher-level education, rather that us trying to provide NTCE here. We do it partially, in a sense, because every student that completes a module or unit from a VET course has some accreditation towards NTCE through that, but the actual core of the NTCE is not there.

CHAIR—So they need to do that somewhere else?

Mr Phillips—Yes. But we have an excellent relationship with, for instance the Catholic college, where the student who is currently there and another student who was there previously and who is now an apprentice mechanic in town have had excellent support through their Indigenous support unit. So that is available, but it does not suit everybody. It also requires someone who is able to cope with the town scene. It is interesting to me that the two people I am talking about are actually cousins and come from across the border in Western Australia—one is from Kununurra and the family of the other one is based in Broome, but they are all the same family. So there is something else going on there.

Mrs MAY—To change tack a little, I want to ask about work placements. A couple of the students indicated they were out in work placements. Who sources those positions for them? Do they usually undergo an interview process, or have they identified to you that that is where they want to go? Are you working in conjunction with industry?

Mr Phillips—The students who would have said that would have been of two different kinds. The first kind are the ones who are 15-plus and doing work experience. We work hand in hand with the Alice Springs Transition to Work Enclave. The charter of the enclave is to provide work experience for students who are disadvantaged. That word 'disadvantaged' covers a huge range. In our case it covers students who come from communities where work experience is not generally freely available; in another case it might mean a student who has some particular disability, either physical or intellectual. To me, it is interesting that our students are placed in a disadvantaged group in order to get work experience but they do not share the same

disadvantages of the other clients of that body. So we have that particular group who are doing work experience, and the Alice Springs Transition to Work Enclave are the people who source the positions. They come out here, we recommend the students, they interview the students, they source the positions and they place them. All we do is the transport. They do the reporting and everything else that is connected with it.

The second group are the ones that are doing VET in Schools programs and are, therefore, doing work placements that are a part of that. They are the people who are doing the placements, for instance, at the two child-care centres and at Aboriginal Air Services. They are doing the work placement as a module of their course.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you get adequate funding for what this college is trying to do?

Rev. Doecke—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—It is adequate?

Rev. Doecke—I was just trying to think. It would not be adequate with normal recurrent funding; it is adequate because the Northern Territory government give us a subvention on top of recurrent funding, Abstudy and so forth. I would have to say that Commonwealth funding is very significant for the programs and staffing level that we can operate at. We still have a deficit, which the Northern Territory government pick up. They guarantee us up to an extra $500,000 a year. That deficit is largely through the extra costs incurred and the boarding site, because these kids come in with nothing. They have heaps of pocket money but they blow it all on the wrong stuff—some of them do and some of them do not, but we have to supply every little thing that they need.

Mr SAWFORD—What teaching styles work effectively? I see Ann smiling!

Mrs Goodwin—My group works fabulously because we are such a small group. It is very streamlined. The work arrives in a booklet form. The ability to give students individual attention encourages them and gives them confidence. They can work through it at their own pace. If it is something that they are good at, they work through it very quickly.

Mr SAWFORD—Open education work guides have always been very good at being very explicit. Are the ones that you use very explicit?

Mrs Goodwin—Yes, they are—but what is explicit to one student is not necessarily explicit to another.

Mr SAWFORD—Some people think that over the last 10 or 15 years they have moved away from their former strength of being very explicit—almost totally explicit—and that the implicit parts of the curriculum have dominated over the last 10 or 15 years.

Mrs Goodwin—That could be because they are working very closely with South Australia. A lot of the work that we do—a lot of the units that we take—are designed for Indigenous students, but a lot of the work is generally for remote students, who come from all sorts of backgrounds. A lot of the work is challenging, and that is because of all the things that come into education.

Experience, prior knowledge and those sorts of things do not always exist with our students. But, generally, the things that are designed for Indigenous communities and kids are well researched and presented.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you noticed any changes in recent years in that sort of material that you have been receiving?

Mrs Goodwin—Only that it is improving—because they are working very closely with communities and they ask for a lot of feedback.

Mr SAWFORD—When you say 'improving', what has actually changed?

Mrs Goodwin—It is improving from the perspective of the language they use. They will present something in very conversational language rather than instructional language. It is very visual. A lot of our students are very visual learners, so there will be smaller units of reading, and diagrams and things that are more open to discussion, because that is where our kids come from too. Their learning background is the spoken word and the visual. That is how they have had their education to date.

Mr SAWFORD—What do Graeme, Coralie or Graeme think about that?

Mr Hastwell—I would have to say that my teaching style is very good, because Dane said so!

Mr SAWFORD—He said you were terrific!

Mr Hastwell—Yeah, okay. But apart from all that, up in the area where Coralie and I work, we are trying to prepare these students to go out into the big, wide world and do things, and for that they need a lot of confidence. We have put a lot of effort into building up individual confidence in things like facing people and speaking—even like what these poor kids have gone through today. The students in my class run the chapel program, for example, and assemblies, which we have every Friday, which means that they have to stand in front of the school and speak and be heard. It is not an easy thing for some of these kids, because sometimes when they come into the class they are like little mice. Through our various skills and abilities, because we do work very closely as a team, we have very high expectations that every student in the class, with no exception, will take part in this. We have had kids out in front of the school running these things, and teachers who have had these kids in the previous year have said, 'How did you do that?' It was purely by having high expectations. I do not give kids any choice. I say: 'This is the responsibility of this class. This is what we do. This is what we are on about, and this is why we're on about it—to build confidence et cetera.' They understand why we are doing it and what they have to do. I will say, 'Assembly this week—you, you and you; in there with Coralie.' Coralie takes them through tutoring, practising and all that sort of stuff. Between the two of us—I am the power and she is the mum; she builds up their confidence—in that avenue of attack, we have a remarkable level of success. Last term, only one student in the whole class did not get out up in front of the school, and that was only because we ran out of time on the roster. But they all got up; they all did it.

Mrs Boyd—I would agree. Certainly at our level, with the older students, both Graeme and I recognise that we might have them for a very short time. It is the education system's last chance

to give these kids some real life skills that they can carry either back to the community or into town. As Graeme said, preparing them to speak in front of the school might seem a fairly small thing in the big picture, but if they can do that there is a chance that they can front up to a bank counter and actually say what their problem is and what they need. So I do a lot of one-to-one or small group work with them where the emphasis is, 'You're the senior students of the school. You're going to be the people going back to your families and communities, and they're going to be asking you for help in these areas. That's why we are looking at it,' and trying to build into them an expectation that will flow on when they leave us.

Some of them have stayed on. One of the older students is probably in her third year of being in our class. It has been a slow process, but it is just a matter of building confidence and a sense of responsibility and letting those students see that they can operate in our Western-style world if they need to and choose to. As Graeme said, he does not give them a choice about what they need to do in the class situation. On the other side of that, I do a lot of talking with them about how they are going to have to make choices. I say, 'I can't choose a lifestyle for you, but I can give you some of the skills that you need if you choose this pathway.'

Mr Phillips—I am a tech teacher with a bit of art experience. Speaking about learning and teaching styles, what I found did not work when I first came here, 10 years ago, was that I could not teach from a work sheet, I could not teach from a plan or according to some of the normal processes that might take place in the schools that I came from. What I found after a while was that, if I were to sit around with the students, we would discuss the problem and sort it out. By talking around it and with demonstration they would learn very quickly, whereas if I were to resort to some of the methods that are perhaps more normal in a tech studies facility in, say, a Melbourne school that would be totally unfruitful. The learning style of the students at home is: 'I have seen grandma do this so many times that I know how to do it. Now I am getting a little bit older, I am watching my uncles, I am part of that circle, and I know how to do it—not because someone kept on telling me how to do it. They just kept me alongside and expected that I would come to a point where I could do it.' What was important for me was a recognition of the different learning styles compared with what I had been used to in a tech facility.

CHAIR—If you had to recommend two or three things to the government to improve VET for Indigenous students, what would be the key messages that you would have us take back?

Mr Hastwell—Sometimes with things that we would like to do, we fall in between buckets of funding. Take, for example, accessing the Northern Territory Rural College. If we want to take kids up there to have a look, we can get funding through VEGAS. If we want to get them more regularly to actually do the course but without their being up there—because for social reasons some kids cannot go up there and stay; it is a 13-week course—suddenly for funding for that we have to go back to Abstudy, but we are already drawing Abstudy money for those students. We cannot just say to the college, 'Give us that money just for this purpose,' because we cannot close down a section of the college while we take out kids from various dormitories. We cannot sack a houseparent for the two or six weeks or whatever. So we are almost in a situation where we need to be able to double dip occasionally.

Rev. Doecke—To summarise that point, Chair, whilst I would respond overall to your question that yes, funding is adequate, what would be good would be a particular bucket of funding for vocational things perhaps on a per capita basis for Indigenous students.

Mr SAWFORD—A discretionary fund.

Rev. Doecke—Yes, or just a specific one for Indigenous students in that area. As I mentioned in my submission, I think the whole area of Centrelink payments, at a broader level, and incentives to work has to be looked at. My observation over the years is that Aboriginal people are suited to seasonal and part-time and casual work but the whole structure of Centrelink payments, where immediately your income changes you have to alert someone and you go through all this rigmarole, is just too hard for Aboriginal people. I think there has to be far more flexibility, because at the moment there is no encouragement for Aboriginal people to do even part-time or casual work when it is on offer, whereas that is the thing that is going to be most attractive to them, given the particular lifestyle that they have. That is at a broader level. I would love to see a whole look at the way welfare payments are administered. As I say, we have third- and fourth-generation kids who understand that the only life they will ever lead is one of relying on welfare payments—endemic reliance on the welfare system. If we are going to get kids into work and if we are going to get them to value education, we need to get them thinking about work and I think we have to change our whole mindset in that area. That is a huge job.

CHAIR—Thank you, everyone. It has been very helpful. Thank you for your submission and for your hospitality today. It has been great.

Rev. Doecke—Thank you. You are most welcome. It has been a privilege to have you here.

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

That the committee authorise the publication of the evidence given before it at the hearing on this day, including publication on the electronic parliamentary database of the transcript but with the names of the student participants suppressed from the discussion of results.

Committee adjourned at 4.15 p.m.