
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Reference: Vocational education in schools**

FRIDAY, 2 MAY 2003

YULARA

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**Friday, 2 May 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 and Mrs May

### 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

**ANTHONEY, Mr Wayne, Project Manager, Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation..... 659**

**ASHBY, Mr Chris, Program Development Officer, Nyangatjatjara College..... 659**

**GONZALEZ, Mr Jorge, Teacher/Transition to Work Program Coordinator, Nyangatjatjara College..... 659**

**SCOLLAY, Mr Clive, Chief Executive Officer, Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation ..... 659**

**WHITE, Mr Ian, Principal, Nyangatjatjara College..... 659**

**WILSON, Mr Harry, Teacher/Anangu Liaison Officer, Nyangatjatjara College..... 659**

**Committee commenced at 10.44 a.m.**

**ANTHONEY, Mr Wayne, Project Manager, Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation**

**ASHBY, Mr Chris, Program Development Officer, Nyangatjatjara College**

**GONZALEZ, Mr Jorge, Teacher/Transition to Work Program Coordinator, Nyangatjatjara College**

**SCOLLAY, Mr Clive, Chief Executive Officer, Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation**

**WHITE, Mr Ian, Principal, Nyangatjatjara College**

**WILSON, Mr Harry, Teacher/Anangu Liaison Officer, Nyangatjatjara College**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing into the inquiry into vocational education in schools. Thank you to the principal and the staff of Nyangatjatjara College for your hospitality and for having us here today. We invite you to make some introductory comments about the school, the corporation and the structure of how things work, and then we might proceed to some questions.

**Mr White**—The college is under the umbrella of the corporation, which was set up in the 1990s to support Aboriginal interests in the three communities in this area: Mutitjulu, Imanpu and Docker River. The college has been running for about five years, but it was not until recently that we finalised our lease on this land, and that is when development of the new building and the other structures around here started proper. What else would you like me to talk about?

**Mrs MAY**—How many staff do you have?

**Mr White**—We have about 25 staff, and 11 are Indigenous people. So we are a major employer of this area. We offer on-site training. Harry is being trained as a teacher as a sort of apprenticeship. We have people working in the office. Two people representing the students from each of the communities come here and work with the students. We also employ indigenous tutors from the communities. I will pass you on to Clive to talk about the corporation.

**Mr Scollay**—I have just given you our first newsletter, which sets out the structure of the organisation. I am afraid I have only two copies left. I will give you the latest newsletter, which is an update on a lot of that. The corporation was established 10 years ago, in 1993, in response to an ATSIC study of regional service needs in the south-west of the Northern Territory. It was thought the organisation would be involved in municipal services, job creation and so on, but very quickly it became apparent that the real need was in the area of education. So the first real project that got off the ground five years ago, coming into its sixth year now, was the college.

The college can explain its role, but we realised very early that running alongside that there was a need to create opportunities for the graduates of the college. So our organisation was one of the first to tender for the first round of the Job Network. We delivered a Job Network service in this region, where there had been very few jobs, for the first round and the second round,

which is about to finish; and we have now successfully tendered for the ESC3 round of Job Network.

We saw the need to create education opportunities and pathways from that, the possibility of finding jobs for people. But obviously that would not be adequate because there are very few jobs per se. So we also created a series of businesses. We have a number of companies. Nyangatjatjara Corporation is a public benevolent institution—it is a PBI. As such, we have to separate our business ventures from our PBI status. The corporation decided that it has two sides to its portfolio: the social development and social benefit side, which has the college and the Job Network and provides regional services; and then the commercial side.

The corporation does not receive funding from ATSIC partly because of its commercial operations. Those commercial operations include Anangu Tours—the first newsletter has a diagram of the family tree—Wana Unkunytja, a business company, Anangu Productions and Anangu Accounting Agency. We have a new company called Anangu Real Estate. We have a management service that provides management services to communities for a fee. For example, at Imanpu and Docker River we manage the community stores, both of which are wholly owned by their communities and which, if they make a profit, turn those profits back into the community. We charge a fee for managing them successfully, and that fee eventually makes its way back to the communities as well.

We also manage the Mount Ebenezer Roadhouse, and we are in the process of developing another roadhouse on the junction of the Lasseter and Luritja highways, which is a superb business opportunity. We also manage Angus Downs Cattle Station, and we are in the process of developing a major camel export project, which will be right across these lands. As a matter of interest, there are about 75,000 feral camels in our immediate region and overall about 400,000, and they are creating problems for the environment. There is a growing market for camels in the Middle East and Asia amongst the Muslim communities, who like riding them but also eating them. So we are running and developing a camel project at Docker River and, as of yesterday, also at Angus Downs Cattle Station.

The purpose of all of those businesses is to create job opportunities. As I think you saw yesterday with Anangu Tours, there are pathways through the work experience program and later through the school to work transition program for the kids from here to find absolutely appropriate employment where they actually control the way tourists see them. It is also immensely important, of course, that they are employed in the resort and amongst the other organisations that operate out of this resort, but in that situation they are unlikely to ever really control the way tourists relate to them. But, nonetheless, they are important employment pathways and the college has worked very hard to develop the relationships, as I think you have probably seen today, with the resort.

This college sits on a lease. It is a sublease. The resort was originally developed, as you probably know, 20 years ago with a joint venture between the Northern Territory government and White Industries. It was on-sold to some superannuation funds and the NT government, and seven or so years ago—you would be able to check the facts—it was actually purchased by General Property Trust, the company that now runs the resort. Voyages is the managing company doing that. So our relationships as a corporation are with GPT and with Voyages, and the college's relationships are with the individual management in the hotels. Relationship building

has been tricky at times. It was not easy in the early stages. GPT did not really understand the relationship building that had been going on here for a long time, but now I think most of that has been resolved and certainly a large part of the relationship is due to the work experience and school to work transition programs.

I am sure Ian will provide you with more evidence about finances, but the college is funded by federal and territory grants and a series of project funding. The capital works for the college have been provided by both the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory government and by our own resources. The first capital grant from the Commonwealth was for $1.6 million, and that put in place the infrastructure—roads, water, sewerage et cetera—which is out amongst the grass here, and the pads are waiting for the buildings.

Our initial application for funding was for $7 million; we got $1.6 million. The process for the granting of the lease was rather slow, so the development of the school has got well ahead of the capital development process. As you have just seen, the temporary structures here continue to grow to service a tremendously burgeoning educational process and now the work experience and school to work transition program. Keeping up with that in a capital works sense has fallen well behind. The $1.6 million for capital works was put in. We then had to take out a loan ourselves from the Westpac Bank of a million dollars to develop this classroom building which we are now sitting in for the inquiry. We made an arrangement with the Northern Territory government that they would pay back 50 per cent of our repayments, plus 100 per cent of the interest. We are locked into a 10-year loan where the communities themselves, out of the money made from the businesses, are actually now paying back $500,000 at the rate of $50,000 a year. So for the next 10 years money that could be used for program purposes is actually locked up in capital works.

At the opening of the college last year in November the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, announced that the Commonwealth would be giving us another $2.5 million for this year to develop student accommodation. As you have seen, student accommodation is tight, to say the least. It is beginning to show its age and its impermanence. There is this notion of having tailor-made accommodation. But, once again, the development of the programs and educational processes has been so rapid that, where we thought we were providing initially adequate accommodation for 40 kids, we are now having to provide accommodation for 80 kids from the same capital grant. So we are doubling the bed footprints and halving the dollars available. That is a big challenge for our planners and designers.

We are discussing with the Commonwealth the next round of funding for the following year, but our original application of $7 million is still somewhere in the process. Adding it up, of that $7 million we have had about $1.6 million plus $2.5 million. We still desperately need some more funds from the Commonwealth. We expect that we will receive that. A portion of funding that we need is for capital developments to service the school to work transition program, which is now becoming an important link in the pathway.

**Mr White**—The college has about 94 students enrolled at present. We have four campuses, three in the communities and one here as a boarding campus. In relation to that, our main thrust is to find positions for the students or to develop skills where they can set up their own businesses. So we are taking two lines. Jorge has organised work experience with many different industries and businesses around here, and we are also developing skills at the college in areas

such as art and media in the hope that the students can set up their own businesses, find their own employment in tourism, sell their own products. At present some of the students actually sell their art at Ebenezer Roadhouse. They paint when the tourists come in. They talk to the tourists, and the tourists are naturally interested in buying something which they see as being original.

The work program is following two streams, if you like: placement in work or development of skills where they can develop their own businesses or skills. The media program Chris has just started this year is very important. We are hoping to build up a media unit which will attract businesses from outside and tender for business, and the students will work in the film crew to carry out tenders.

**CHAIR**—Did anyone else want to make some introductory comments, or will we proceed to questioning?

**Mr Scollay**—I might just add one thing. We obviously have a strategic advantage here—in one sense it is an advantage, in a second sense it is a disadvantage—in that we have one of the biggest tourist icons in Australia: Ayers Rock. People who come to Central Australia often have a great interest in our media enterprise and in our art. They are interested because they come here for that purpose: the rock and its facilities.

It is a disadvantage, of course, because we are a long way from any normal services and resources, and we have a huge area to cover. We cannot stress enough in a practical sense the number of kilometres that these teachers drive on a weekly basis to pick up kids to go to work sites, to take kids home for exit weekends. It is an enormous amount of pressure for all of us. Our Job Network people were here the other day and we drove from one end, from Imanpu, to here and out to Docker River and back in a day and a half. I do not think they had a clue about the kinds of dirt roads that we have to travel over and the distances involved. I think that is a really important aspect of this: on the one hand, there is the icon; on the other hand, there are great distances to travel. Ironically, we are equidistant from everywhere.

**Mr Gonzalez**—The school to work transition program was set up at the request of parents. One of the college's aims as stated in the vision statement by Anangu was to prepare students for real work. Another aim is to develop their social skills outside their community. The third aim, which is probably the most important, is to make them literate. This program is achieving all three in one. They all overlap. The only opportunity the students really have to acquire some of those social skills, if you like, is outside their communities. This particular program, having the students immersed in the resort, is one way for them to achieve that. That has huge implications and ramifications further down the track because the way they relate to people outside their community now is what they are going to pass on to their children. This is helping them to gain confidence in dealing with people outside their communities. So that cannot be overstated.

**Mr Scollay**—I did neglect to mention something that Jorge just reminded me of. The corporation is owned entirely by the communities of Imanpu, Mutitjulu and Docker River. I had forgotten I had explained this off the record. But, on the record, two representatives elected from each of the communities are on the corporation's board of directors. That board also decides policies for the college. So we are constantly guided by the major stakeholders, and they are

absolutely intrinsic to the decision-making processes of both the college and all of our other activities. I think it is important to emphasise that.

It is the same for Wana Unkunytja, the head of our business arm, as you will see from the diagram there. Wana Unkunytja has a separate board of directors, with two directors from each community as representatives. Splitting the boys and the girls, for example, a notion seen as socially and culturally appropriate, was at the direction of the elders, who wanted the girls to come in for nine weeks while the boys go to their local campuses. Then the boys come in for nine weeks while the girls attend their local campuses. Issues like that are tremendously important in the educational process, and all of us receive our guidance from our board of directors.

Our chairman would have liked to have been here today but, unfortunately, is in hospital in Alice Springs and is on dialysis—a major problem that I am sure you have become aware of.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Some very exciting things are happening. You will forgive us if we ask questions that you have perhaps already been asked or answered off the record, just so that we can get them on the record. Ian, could you elaborate a little for us on how the work here interacts with the work at your community based campuses, just how that system works, and what actually happens in the schools in the community?

**Mr White**—In relation to work experience—

**CHAIR**—In relation to your general curriculum and work experience.

**Mr White**—The curriculum is set for all four campuses. So we follow a common curriculum. It is adjusted according to circumstances in the community occasionally, but it has four main subject areas: social studies, English literacy, numeracy and health. We have a nurse on site who runs health classes here, also looks after students' health problems, and visits and liaises with the communities, clinics et cetera. Most of the work experience happens here, but there is some limited work experience in the community. Some of the students actually work in the community store in Docker River and also go to the primary school and work with the teachers there. So they have work experience there. Of course, there are limited opportunities in the communities compared with Yulara, and that is why the boarding site was established close to Yulara: for students finding work in this area in the future.

**CHAIR**—Is the schooling in the communities much less structured than it is here? Obviously having students on site, issues such as attendance and punctuality and so on are fairly well taken care of. Do those things present barriers in the community schools or does that work fairly smoothly as well?

**Mr White**—No, it works very smoothly. In fact, it is just as disciplined as here. The students are picked up at 8.30 or they walk to the college. They run classes there until 3.30 in the afternoon, and they follow the same curriculum as in here.

**Mrs MAY**—So there is no fall-back from the students when you see them come back here at the end of a term?

**Mr White**—No, the only reason students are not at college is when there is business elsewhere, cultural business, when there is a sporting event or when the families travel. But, if the students are actually in the communities, 90 per cent of the time they are at school. So absenteeism is not a problem. It is a problem only in terms of the lifestyle of the people living in those communities. Clive has just reminded me that in fact at Imanpu there are too many students for the building we have out there, and the same at Mutitjulu too. We have one good building, Docker River, and that is an excellent building. But the other two communities have inadequate school buildings. The school has grown much more quickly than anticipated.

**Mr ALBANESE**—How long does it take to get from here to Docker River?

**Mr White**—It takes about 2½ hours, depending on the roads. Sometimes the road is flooded, sometimes it is corrugated. It is a dirt road for about 180 kilometres.

**Mr Scollay**—Fifty kilometres of bitumen. That is 230 kilometres.

**Mrs MAY**—Do you have permanent staff at those three campuses or do you rotate from here?

**Mr White**—No, we have permanent staff in each of the communities, one teacher in each community; and permanent staff here too—three staff here, teachers.

**CHAIR**—The college was established here five years ago?

**Mr White**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Were those community branches of the schools in existence before that?

**Mr White**—No. Imanpu started off, and even then it was operating just coming in here and then going back, not having any schooling then. Docker River was opened only two years ago. So it has been a fairly recent—

**CHAIR**—So a rapid growth of interest?

**Mr White**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—To what do you attribute that growth?

**Mr White**—I think we are offering a positive, optimistic outlook for the parents and the students in the communities. Without this school, there are no opportunities to gain work. CDEP is in two communities. But, because there is no business to any great extent except for the store, the community office and the primary school, there is not a great deal of opportunity to find work. When the school was set up the parents on the committee said that they wanted the students to learn 'white fella' ways, not necessarily to lose their cultural background but to be able to exist and work in a 'white fella' society. That is partly to do with work here. In the past when students went to Alice Springs to board there was a lot of absenteeism, because they did not like leaving their communities.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any sort of breakdown of the destinations of the students who have progressed through the school and left over the past five years: how many of them are in employment, how many are back in their communities, how many have, say, gone on to Centralian College or another school and how many are doing apprenticeships?

**Mr White**—I do not have the exact figures, but I would say no students have gone on to apprenticeships except for the four who are here now. I think they will be the first from the three communities to have ever done an apprenticeship. The students who have left have left to get married, basically. It is like once you are married you do not go to school. For some of the boys, it is like once you become men you do not go to school. We are looking at providing in the future some sort of educational training for groups of young women and men who no longer want to mix with the boys in the school. But I do not think students have gone from here to Centralian College. In fact, graduates from this school have been employed by the school. We have employed a house parent. Harry, although not a graduate from here, is now working with us. I do not think much has happened in the past, but the school offers one way into work and employment.

**CHAIR**—Clive, does the corporation have any employment policy that requires employment from those composite members from their communities?

**Mr Scollay**—We certainly prioritise those former graduates of the school. We are only just beginning to see the first lot through, and it is important that these four girls have the apprenticeships. Certainly where possible an Aboriginalisation policy is obviously of benefit to the organisation generally.

I just want to add a couple of points of clarification. Firstly, before the college was established there was no education here past grade 6. The primary system is of course provided by the Territory in each of those communities. So until the college was here there was no pathway beyond grade 6. Secondly, you may be a little confused when we use the word 'business'. We are talking of business in two terms. Ian referred to 'business' and then the throwaway line 'cultural business'. Very much a driver of our policies is the generally accepted and recognised importance of what is known as 'cultural business'. So when ceremonies come through here the school program adjusts itself to work around those ceremonies. When we say 'business' in that sense we mean ceremonial activity and traditional cultural processes: for example, funerals and the ceremonial cycle that is probably twice a year. So, when the parents and the executives talk about learning the 'white fella' way, they are also still practising those very strong cultural practices.

It is important to note that there is one generic tribunal group here, the Pitjantjatjaras, with some Yankunytjatjaras, who are related. That is the tribunal make-up and cultural make-up in this part of the world. They still do have very strong traditional ties to the land and very strong traditional practices.

**Mr ALBANESE**—With you and also Tangentyere coming under the Job Futures umbrella, what scope is there for learning, through cooperation, about what is going on?

**Mr Scollay**—We have a strong relationship with Tangentyere. In fact, one of the Job Futures people from Sydney is working full time at Tangentyere now to apply the new ESC3.

**Mr ALBANESE**—Who is that?

**Mr Scollay**—Matthew Ellem. Of course, the ESC3, the new process of the Job Network, is yet to be tested. What we gain from being a member of Job Futures is a very interesting level of training by a number of practices. For example, other members of Job Futures have a lot of experience in the area of work mentoring in Indigenous organisations. For example, in western New South Wales and in parts of Victoria that is absolutely applicable to our understanding the way we can relate to the new Job Network. So there is a strong partnership between us and Tangentyere. They are different tribal entities. They are the Arrernte people in Alice Springs. But as an Indigenous organisation they are a kindred body and we have a close relationship.

**Mr White**—We also have a relationship with Tangentyere Council, in the sense that we run the junior ranger program at Mutijulu campus, which looks at caring for the land from a traditional point of view and from a Western or scientific point of view. From there the students might be able to find work in the ranger station out at Mutijulu. Tangentyere Council helps with supplying a biologist and providing speakers to talk about the scientific angle of looking after the land here.

**Mrs MAY**—Jorge, on behalf of all of us I would like to thank you for your time yesterday and today. I think we need to get on the record some of the things you have shared with us, particularly with regard to students coming through work experience and now your young apprentices. We have seen them on the job this morning. For the record, I think it would be important for us to know how you have identified those girls and the two young men doing work experience yesterday, how you have made them work ready and how you have helped them develop to get to where they are today.

**Mr Gonzalez**—They have identified themselves here to facilitate and provide the fertile ground, if you like, for it, and we provide similar opportunities for all students. It is only a matter of when they are ready. One criterion is they have to be 15 or older for most work experience programs. Students know from a very young age that they can aim at becoming apprentices eventually. That is entirely up to them. We try to provide a whole range of experiences for them. I would like to emphasise that the program is aimed at not only employment but also developing the social capital that is so important for the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities: reciprocity, trust, cooperation et cetera. This is one way of doing it.

When students turn 15 we give them a range of choices and they can choose where they want to go. We encourage them to try different things. We started very small about three years ago at the Outback Pioneer Hotel, which you visited this morning. People there embraced it. We started as a work observation program, where students would visit once or twice a week for about an hour. They would talk to people, mingle with people, eat something and have a drink, until they felt comfortable enough to start a work experience program. We continued negotiations with the management and we started the work experience program, where students attended two or three times a week for a couple of hours and they had the opportunity to experience different forms of employment, such as housekeeping, working in the kitchen area et cetera.

Last year we put to the students that there was an opportunity for them to become apprentices, whereby they would be employed part of the time and part of the time they would be attending

Centralian College to get proper training, and they would start earning their own money. This has huge implications for their whole lifestyle and the future for them and their families. They agreed that they wanted to make a commitment, and we put the whole machinery in motion. As you can imagine, being in a remote area, the process of negotiation to try to implement such a program was very lengthy, very intricate, and dealing with the bureaucracy sometimes was frustrating because we did not fit into the framework of some of the bodies out there offering services to other people.

Finally, we made an arrangement with Centralian College, the New Apprenticeships program, in Alice Springs, and we started implementing the program at the beginning of this year. We have had four fully-fledged apprentices since the beginning of 2003. These are the first ever apprentices the college has had. Putting it in context, within five years of the college being funded, these students are now apprentices. They were part of the college from the day the college opened. Now at ages 18 and 19, the youngest one being almost 17 now, they are apprentices and, realistically, we can expect them to become fully trained and employed by the middle of next year.

Since term 1, 2003, the college has started negotiating with potential employers around the resort. We have created a number of opportunities for students, including at Ayers Rock Autos, which provides a whole range of trades for students, both boys and girls, to gain experience in mechanical work and technical services. We have also tapped into opportunities in the communities—a takeaway food store at Mutijulu, a child-care centre at Mutijulu—trying to create jobs where there are not any.

Clive mentioned before some of the opportunities that exist in the communities. Some opportunities do not exist yet, but we are working on that. For example, there are no child-care centre facilities at Docker River, and we are trying to create one and train our students so that they can fill those jobs and the community does not have to look outside for non-Indigenous people to fill those jobs.

Another huge, very important issue is health. We are trying to encourage our students to take up apprenticeships to become community health workers, nurses or doctors in the future. We encourage the students; at the same time, the decision is totally up to them. Of course, we keep the community informed. We travelled to Imanpu community before those apprentices became apprentices. We had meetings with the parents and guardians. We explained the whole situation. We asked for their approval and whether they were happy with the circumstances because there would be implications. They had already said that they wanted a gender segregated school. Having apprentices on campus means that gender segregation would have to somehow be compromised to a point. They agreed that this was the way to go and, as precarious as they are, we have accommodation for students.

It is very tempting to concentrate on apprenticeships, but in the end we could spread ourselves too thin and see the whole thing collapse in a very short period. We have been very disciplined in that sense. We have paced ourselves and aimed for success, and even today we are very, very careful how we go about things. It is very tempting to get a whole lot of students doing a whole number of things, but we know that we would be setting ourselves up for failure. The way we are going now we are aiming for success, and success is in sight.

**CHAIR**—So those girls started their apprenticeships at only the beginning of this year; is that right?

**Mr Gonzalez**—We are talking about the apprentices?

**CHAIR**—Those four.

**Mr Gonzalez**—They started their apprenticeships proper at the beginning of this year, in January. They have been apprentices since January this year.

**Mrs MAY**—But they had done work experience up until that period?

**Mr Gonzalez**—Prior to their apprenticeship, they had done work experience at the same place, for the last two, 2½, three years.

**Mr ALBANESE**—Do they already have certificate I or certificate II?

**Mr Gonzalez**—The thing about work experience is there is no pressure whatsoever. It is not linked to any training at all, except what they get when they get there. That is quite deliberate, because there is no pressure on them to make a commitment at that point. It is just for them to have a taste of what it is like. We are now trying to provide a whole range of work experience so that by the time they get to 16 or 17, which is usually when they either get married or go back to their communities and so on, they can make an informed choice about which career path they want to take.

**Mr White**—If I could just add to what Jorge said, in fact it has been a slow process but it has been rapid at the same time, in that we have achieved outcomes which are surprising to us, especially if we had thought about it three or four years ago. Also, as Jorge has pointed out, without the college doing this nothing would happen. There would not be any opportunities for students to go into work, to find work experience, to have these experiences. At the moment we are planning to set up a VET centre here. We are trying to become classified as an RTO to provide training. Staff are undergoing a certificate to become instructors. We are hoping to build a VET centre here, if we can get funding for it, to provide the academic or the bookwork training as well as the hands-on experience. A lot of the work the students do in class is connected to the work too, like you develop literacy skills from being at work and seeing a purpose for learning those things in the classroom. So there is a strong emphasis on work in the classroom as well as outside. I cannot overemphasise that, without the college doing this, nothing would be happening in this area; there would not be any opportunities at all for young people to find work.

**Mr Scollay**—I think it has been a really interesting learning curve for the employers. When the college was first started here I am not sure that the tourist operators could see much compatibility between Indigenous education and tourism, and the services they provide. The exit polls at the resort have shown that something like 96 per cent of the tourists wonder why they did not see an Indigenous face while they were at the resort. The opportunity to forge this relationship with the college was something that they have been a bit surprised at. As Jorge has implied, there were probably a lot of embedded impediments to working over there. The girls and boys, during their time in work experience, have broken down at every level any prejudices or worries or concerns that people had, because they are absolutely brilliant at relationship

building. They have been the bridgehead. They have actually forged the way in establishing relationships with the other workers in the resort, with their managers—at every level. I think it has been a very interesting learning curve for the employers as much as for us and for the students.

**CHAIR**—Has that made it easier to find work placements as time has gone by? As it has been demonstrated that taking on students is working, have you found it easier to get employers to take on more?

**Mr Gonzalez**—It is important to emphasise that the students are there not as window-dressing. The point was brought up very early on that the students are there to fulfil their own career aspirations, and it is important everybody has the same understanding. Having said that, there is obviously a vested interest in having Indigenous people involved in the industry. Even though they may not talk to people, they are there. It basically means that people are working together. They are not there to talk to tourists, they are not there for PR; they are there to fulfil their own career aspirations. So it is a win-win situation, basically. Does that answer your question?

**CHAIR**—Yes. The other question was: is it increasingly easier to find employers to take on students for work placement?

**Mr Gonzalez**—One way of putting it is that people are queuing up to take our students. We have it from a whole range of sources. This is what I was trying to get at before: it is very tempting to go out there every day with our students and drive them to work placements, but at the end of the day we have limited staff. The staff here are stretched to the limit, and this is no exaggeration. There is a lot of stress. It is a very stressful job at times. This is by no means a complaint at all, but we need to work within our capabilities.

**Mrs MAY**—How difficult is it to attract staff and keep them here? Is there a high turnover?

**Mr White**—No, there is a low turnover of staff. In fact, most staff have been here for three to four years, up to five years. That is very unusual in the education department in the Northern Territory. One year is the average, I think.

Just continuing with Jorge's point about people wanting to take students on, we find we have to check out the motives for their wanting students to go to those positions. As Jorge has pointed out, we do not want tokenism or just to have a black face in the workplace. It has to be suitable for the student. We, Jorge especially and Harry, also spend time briefing the employers about cultural matters and how to deal with the students. So in fact the employer learns a lot from the students about how to deal with Indigenous people.

**Mr Wilson**—The difficulty with the cultural system is our boys go through ceremonies and never return to school, and some girls just go on and get married and never come back to school. But we want them to come back so they can go into workplaces in Yulara. Basic stuff.

**CHAIR**—Harry, where did you go to school?

**Mr Wilson**—Down in Adelaide.

**Mrs MAY**—May I ask you how old you are, Harry.

**Mr Wilson**—I am 21.

**Mrs MAY**—How long have you been here at the college?

**Mr Wilson**—Two years.

**CHAIR**—Did you do your NTCE year, or did you do year 12 in Adelaide?

**Mr Wilson**—Year 12. I had one year to finish; then I went to cultural business and then I came back because I knew I had only one year to finish. But the hard thing is we are just trying to get all the young men and all the young girls to come back and get them back into work somehow.

**CHAIR**—Jorge, what effect has those four girls now having started apprenticeships had on other students here? Has that really started to spark an interest in them that there are possibilities that they are now beginning to aspire to?

**Mr Gonzalez**—We have had a lot of young girls, and boys as a matter of fact, asking when they can start their apprenticeship. As a matter of fact, a student who had not been at school for family reasons returned from the community recently. The first day she returned she wanted to join the students in their apprenticeship program. We had to explain that there is a certain procedure and that she was very welcome to join in due course. So what is happening here is that these four apprentices are setting the standards and a lot of the younger ones look up to them. They are their role models. One issue we keep very much in mind is the importance of these four students being very successful and completing their apprenticeship. It is not the be-all and end-all, of course, but it is important for them and for the younger ones to have that sort of role model. There is a lot of interest.

**Mr Scollay**—We had some Job Futures people with us the other day, Robert Tickner and Matthew Ellem. We went to Imanpu community and they asked that very question of all the girls in the classroom, and the instant reply was, 'Yes, we can't wait to get a job just like those other apprentices have,' and those four apprentices were actually outside the door waiting to catch a bus to come into town. One final thing I would say, just adding to Ian's answer, is that the staff turnover here contrasts very well with the staff turnover at the resort. The average stay over there is about five months for employees.

**CHAIR**—That is interesting. Obviously what you are doing here is really exciting and has a lot of potential. You have some particular advantages here in attracting tourists and so on. What are the chances of this sort of model being replicated in other isolated areas for Indigenous communities? Also, what barriers exist even here that we ought to be taking on board in recommendations to the government? What things would you say to us need to be addressed? How can we address them to make it work more effectively here and perhaps be able to be replicated elsewhere?

**Mr White**—We have been approached to set up this model elsewhere. Other schools have asked us how to get away from the system of having a boarding school in a central major town

and to take the education to the communities. I think Yirara in Alice Springs is looking at setting up campuses in different areas. I do not know whether it can be replicated entirely. Each situation is unique. This is a fairly unusual situation in that the students have not been urbanised. They know very little about urban life. In relation to work experience in the community, there are very few models of people showing up to work daily and working long hours regularly. So it is a fairly unique situation.

The problem with the college is that we are funded as a school to provide teachers in classrooms. We are branching out into a media unit, Jorge is released from teaching to run this transition to work program, but we are still being funded as a college teaching classes, not running working programs. A lot of the things we have done have been outside what you would consider to be a normal school's terms of reference. So we are approaching funding bodies. As Jorge has mentioned, because of our unique situation we are sometimes knocked back because we do not fit into the categories of all other schools and workplace providers. We had trouble getting funding from DEWR for that reason—we did not fit in with their criteria of what is normal, I suppose, or usual. For example, Chris's salary comes out of the school. He does not have any teaching duties—perhaps two or three hours a week with the students. Jorge has been released for 75 per cent of his teaching time. But we are still funded for teachers, not for these extra duties. We have had to employ other people to replace people running programs connected to work. So that is a major problem from our point of view.

**CHAIR**—So it comes down to funding in that regard at least?

**Mr White**—Yes. There is enormous expense in communications and transport, moving people around in vehicles. As you can see, we do not have enough rooms to run a VET centre. That is why we are pushing to run everything ourselves, because it is easier to run it on-site here.

**Mr Scollay**—If there is any lesson to be learned, it is that whatever pathways have happened within the funding agencies should be bridged by them. The Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, DEET NT, say their role is to fill in the cracks between the other funding agencies. Certainly smoothing over that whole process between the agencies would be tremendously important. In a general sense, one of the biggest problems for colleges like us, particularly for the principal and those of us seeking funds, is the myriad funding sources that we have to go to to simply run a simple educational program out here. Ian is constantly filling in application forms with other members of the staff for project funding on a one-by-one basis rather than being able to have the sort of funding that allows us to plan ahead adequately and know with surety that the program can exist. So, if there is a way, the committee could use its authority to work out with those agencies normal and ongoing funding arrangements.

**Mrs MAY**—Ian, would applying as an RTO and running an RTO out of here be another burden for you to undertake?

**Mr White**—Yes, it will be, but it is necessary to control it and to provide all the things that we need to provide. Centralian College provides some courses. But, to be quite honest, there is the problem of inexperience in dealing with Indigenous people. As you saw with those students who came in here to speak this morning, it takes a long process to gain their confidence. It probably took a long time before the two students who showed you around yesterday started talking with you, but once they did talk things happened. But putting these people into work has to come

through the college because we have a sort of nurturing feeling here. The students feel confident. This is their college. They go with people who support them, mentor them. You cannot just say to a student, 'We would like you to go to work this morning. Can you go over to Outback, show up and do four hours work?' It just would not work without the strength of the college staff and Indigenous people working on the college staff especially supporting those students.

**Mrs MAY**—How many Indigenous staff do you have here?

**Mr White**—We have 11.

**Mr Scollay**—The entire structure of the way Nyangatjatjara has been set up, with its relationship between its social charter and its business relationships within its own organisation and the fact that there is complete stakeholder control, is a model that is certainly worth applying elsewhere. We have a lot of interest from other parts of Australia in just how that works and what are the magic ingredients that make it possible to provide a sheltered education system, in a sense, within that other larger context.

**CHAIR**—So that can work without the obvious attraction of the tourist destination you have here?

**Mr Scollay**—As Ian said, it is horses for courses. There are obviously differences in every place. But also every place has its special qualities and its special drawcards. Once you recognise the ingredients for achieving success, they can be applied in other contexts. For example, in relation to working through Job Futures as a national network and the networks of schools that Ian and the other teachers work through, we are beginning to influence the way some of those organisations approach their work and think.

**Mr White**—The Northern Territory education department have approached me and said, 'You are obviously doing the right thing.' Programs that they have set up have not worked in schools. We gave a presentation last year to the ANTA board. They said, 'You are obviously doing the right things.' As Clive said, it is horses for courses. We are doing what is required here, what is necessary.

**CHAIR**—That is terrific. Congratulations on what you are doing. It is fantastic. It has been exciting for us to see what is going on here. It has been a great revelation to us. Thank you for your hospitality. Thank you, Jorge, for your time yesterday as well. Not only has it been a great education for us but also it has been very enjoyable. Thank you very much. And keep up the terrific work. When we come back in a few years time we expect to see things even bigger here.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs May**):

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

**Committee adjourned at 11.38 a.m.**