



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Forum

Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people

DARWIN

Monday, 28 April 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Members

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Peter Baldwin	Mrs Gash
Mr Barresi	Mr Marek
Mr Bradford	Mr Mossfield
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Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

SCHOOL FORUM

Factors influencing the employment of young people

DARWIN

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Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Barresi

Mr Mossfield

The forum met at 1.36 p.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

PARTICIPANTS:

Casuarina Senior College

Joel Carlson
Jati Harburn
Ione Jolly
Mathew Kerle
Elizabeth Moore
Melena Rigg

Darwin High School

Tim Aldridge
Kate Stuchbury
Mario Tsirbas

Driver High School

Chris Bennett
Kylie Buckler
Paull Hart
Linh Nguyen
Maree Patroni
Belinda Wilson

Kormilda College

Jackie Bistak
Daniel Macmillan
Renfred Manmurulu
Joanne Richards
Charles White
Kate Wickett

Sanderson High School

Tracy Culgan
Suzanne Graham
Michael Hanlon
Brian Jarick
Tabatha McMahon
James Sutherland

St Johns College

Matthew Brightwell
Kylie Clift
Justin De Zylva
Ben Hughes
Michele Shanahan
Anna-Maria Socci

CHAIR—I declare open this school forum on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The purpose of the inquiry is to consult widely and produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of our youth. The committee has conducted similar school forums in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. Students and members of the committee have agreed that the forums are a valuable opportunity to share concerns and express views about this most important issue. This school forum is one of a series with students in Darwin, Kununurra, Broome, Carnarvon and Kalgoorlie. The committee considers the school forums to be an important part of the inquiry process.

So far the committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Alice Springs and several regional centres in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. For the most part, the evidence collected has come from employers and government and non-government agencies. Through this school forum, all of you will have the opportunity to voice your views and opinions on this important matter.

The agenda and issues for discussion have been sent to you, and you have had prior opportunity to study the issues. Some of the issues we wish to discuss include the effectiveness and appropriateness of the secondary education system, vocational education in schools, employer perceptions of young people, apprenticeships and traineeships, youth wages, income assistance and any other issues you may wish to discuss.

To help structure the debate, I will introduce each section with a few comments based on evidence that has already been provided to the committee. I will then seek your comments and views on the matters under discussion. If you wish to speak, please raise your hand. When you have been given a microphone, please state your name, age and the school that you are from.

Thank you for coming today. We appreciate your giving up your time to come to talk to us. Despite the fact that these people over here have microphones and all of this gets written down, it really is an informal process. If you do not generate the action, nothing will happen. We can sit here and tell you what we think, but that is not what we are here for. We are here to hear what you think, so being bashful will not help the process at all. Usually we find that it takes only one person to get started and everybody wants to talk, and that is good, but it is important that you raise your hand so that Gaye can see who wants to speak and she can try to share the microphone around in order that everybody gets a go. We do not want to cut anybody off. Everybody should have a chance to participate.

I should say to you that, while we are your representatives in parliament, we are just people like you and your mums and dads. We all happen to be men. The committee has a number of women on it, but for one reason or another they could not join us today.

We have ties on—I guess because it is expected—but outside we dress the same as you do. We really just want you to talk to us like we are your friends or your colleagues.

The first topic is the secondary education system. We have heard from lots of your colleagues and from businesses and some industry that many young people seem today to lack a real understanding of what kinds of careers might be available to you—what sorts of opportunities there are in the workplace and how many of those opportunities might be available to you without a university degree.

Some young people—I would be interested in your views—have told us that their parents, and indeed their teachers in the school system, encourage them to go on to university. But, more than that, they sometimes say, ‘If you don’t get a university degree’—if that is not an option for you—‘then you are doomed to a life of misery because there will just be nothing for you.’ That is rubbish. You should know that.

To kick it off, how do your parents and your school system tell you about what is available for jobs when you finish your schooling? Somebody always has to speak first, and then it becomes a flood. I am sure Northern Territory students are not going to tell us that they are all bashful.

CHARLES WHITE—They are not. I am concerned about schools and colleges—Kormilda College being one—not catering for people who are not academically orientated, who are more interested in getting a trade instead of going to university.

CHAIR—Do you have any vocational courses at the school?

CHARLES WHITE—Not as such. We do not have a chance to do tech studies, electronics, automotive studies or any home economics classes in years 11 and 12. It is more pushed in the junior years, in 8, 9 and 10.

CHAIR—What about your careers guidance teachers—how do they help you?

CHARLES WHITE—We get work experience in years 10 and 11. If you are not going to the careers classes before then, then it is a bit of a waste of time. I just do not think that they put much emphasis on the trades in school. They do not cater for the people who are not going to university.

JATI HARBURN—At our school we have a careers office, and it caters for students who are interested in both academic and vocational courses. You are allowed to do tech studies and home economics—all the sort of non-professional university strains. It is easy to pick up one of those.

CHAIR—Do many of your classmates choose that option?

JATI HARBURN—I would say at least half my friends go that way.

IONE JOLLY—While Casuarina has a lot of vocational education classes, their careers department is not that great. The head of the department advised me when I went there to select physics, chemistry, maths I, maths II and English if I wanted to go to university, to leave all my options open. Personally, I do not think taking physics and maths II is such a good thing. I think they advised me incorrectly. They are assuming that every girl should take those classes so they can be open to engineering, et cetera.

KATE WICKETT—In regard to careers at Kormilda College—I have actually just come up from Adelaide; I have just started at Kormilda this year—they are at the moment setting up career days where people come along from that certain career and talk to us about it. I think that is a good idea, but then of course that is limited because you can only have so many people come and speak to you.

In regard to what the girl from Casuarina said, I tend to agree with that. I went last year to a careers adviser at my old school, Loreto College, and she advised me of certain subjects to do for what I wanted to do when I leave school, which is to go to ADFA. But I found that the subjects that I am doing and that I am able to do are not necessarily the ones that I need. I also found it difficult to do the subjects that I wanted, purely because maybe there was not enough time for the teachers or other classes were scheduled on the same period. For instance, I am taking chemistry and I have no inclination to go down that path; nevertheless, that is what I have to do.

So I think, when it comes to careers and people advising you, there needs to be more a one-to-one basis between the careers' adviser and the student over a prolonged period of time rather than just one meeting, because I found that that one meeting was useful, but six months down the track I have changed my mind—not that I do not want to go to ADFA but that I need some more assistance and guidance.

CHAIR—What is ADFA?

KATE WICKETT—The Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra.

CHAIR—Can we hear from another school?

MELENA RIGG—I tend to disagree with what they are saying, at least at Casuarina. I think Casuarina has a really good careers centre. We have computer programs that allow you to enter what you think you might like to do in the future, and it is just well equipped. I found that, when I was advised, it was just what I had in mind, and what I got was not what I wanted but that was really quite my fault because I was not sure. So it actually does have quite a good careers facility.

CHAIR—Can we hear from a few other schools? We need not be bashful. We are

all friends.

MARIO TSIRBAS—What this girl from Kormilda College was saying was quite good, because I think with your parents you can sit down and talk about all your grades and stuff and what you think of certain things that you want to do. With your careers officer, counsellor or whatever you want to call them, you need to go into more detail and sit down there and talk about what you have wanted to do before and what you want to do in the future. You talk to them more and get more out of it on a one-to-one basis so they get to know you, what you like and what you dislike, and you get to know them. I think that is a good idea.

IONE JOLLY—I would just like to say one thing. Parents need counselling on what the year 12 subjects, certificate and university entrance mean. Because when I went around to do it, I had to teach my parents all about it.

CHAIR—Fair enough. Let us put it this way: could we have a show of hands of those of you who think your course structure is based on what a tertiary entrance score might be? And those who don't? It looks like we have a lot of fence-sitters.

One of the things we have heard, which I think I heard again a few minutes ago, is that the high school curriculum seems to be structured towards the sciences and the maths in order to get a higher score and in order to be able to get a university place. I know one of my daughters did not enjoy maths much and she did not enjoy sciences much, so when it came to year 12 she did what she wanted to do and she got top grades but she got a very low TER score as a result of not doing sciences, even though she got an A in English, a B in economics and so it went. What do you think of that? Do you think the system is balanced right? Do you think it is fair?

JOANNE RICHARDS—I do not think the system is balanced right at all. I am in grade 10 this year. This year we have six periods of maths a week, which is more than any other subject. It seems to have taken over. Maths and science are the most pushed subjects at Kormilda. English is up there and so is social education, but with languages being cut down to four periods a week, if your interest is not towards maths and science, it can make it harder to focus on other things.

MAREE PATRONI—Driver High School started a new thing this year where they have three different packages for year 11 students. One is an academic course, and there is a business course, and there is a vocational course. So we have all the areas, but the problem with it is that a lot of people do not want to specialise. A lot of people want a couple of different options, but we cannot do that. If you are not in the business courses, you do not have any careers advice; you just do the academic stuff. So it is not all that good with careers there.

KATE WICKETT—Just to clarify a point, I agree that there is definitely much

more emphasis put on maths and sciences. For instance, during years 8, 9 and 10, I found it quite difficult to cope with the amount of sciences we were doing. Okay, you need to learn the basic mathematical methods, not only for maths but for logical thinking. However, I found that, in regard to history and English, people were lacking. Those subjects were not their strengths, and they found it hard to express themselves when speaking with people. I do not know what the school or the education department thinks of it, but there should be a higher priority on learning to express yourself and discuss—something I am having difficulty with now—rather than learning so much about maths and then, when you come to speak about it, you cannot speak about it because you have not learnt language to express yourself.

Also, people often ask in maths, ‘What relevance will this have to me when I leave school?’ The answer is 50 per cent of it will not be relevant. I do not think years 9, 10, 11 and 12 should have to do as much maths as they do when they will not be using it. Sure, if people want to go down that path, that is fine, but it should be part of the university course. I do not think so much emphasis should be placed on it.

ELIZABETH MOORE—Upon entering year 11, I had to make choices in my subjects. I have to do maths for a semester. I want to go to NIDA, so I am doing a lot of arts courses. What will happen in grade 12 is that, if I get a 20 in art, it is not going to come up on my final score as a 20. They are going to mark me down because it is an arts subject. That is totally unfair. It is like a devaluation of the arts. You only get top marks if you are doing maths or chemistry or biology or something. That is totally unfair, because I work just as hard, and I am not taking art as a bludge subject; I am doing it because I enjoy it and that is what I want to make my career. It is not fair that people should say I am not as good a student because I am doing an arts subject.

CHAIR—Well said.

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—I am only in year 10. I have not experienced what others who are in years 11 and 12 have, but I have been discussing with others who attend St Johns College the fact that in years 8 and 9 we do not learn anything that is relevant to year 10. It is basically a bludge for years 8 and 9. In year 10 everything has been crammed in. I have not experienced fully what is going to happen in year 10, but my IRR is due soon. As well, we have our work experience and our one-week retreat, which will take up most of our time, so we will not be able to spend our whole term on IRR. Our expectations in science and maths as well in Kormilda College are quite high. We do not have sufficient capacity of teachers helping us because there are too many in a class as well and it is always pressure. This year so far has been pressure constantly. Years 8 and 9, even year 7, were nothing compared with right now.

I think we should have had more time spent in years 8 and 9 learning more things, because in year 9 we did not learn many things about essay writing and in year 10 we had a new English teacher and she gave us marks we had never had before. We were so used

to having high marks and we got marks that we think are low and it is so disappointing because we have not been taught the way we should have been to the high standards we should have. So I really think we should have been taught more in years 8 and 9 than how much we are being pressured in year 10.

CHAIR—Can you tell us what IRR stands for?

JOANNE RICHARDS—Independent research report. It is a major social assignment that you have to do.

CHAIR—Remember we have not been in school for a while.

MARIO TSIRBAS—I agree that schools are putting more emphasis on academic subjects than vocational stuff. I think everybody is suddenly getting caught up in this thing that knowledge is power and then you have got people that maybe do not want to and cannot keep up with other students in, say, maths and sciences and so they decide to take arts courses and other things and there is not really that much open to them. People think, 'Oh no, you are going to be an auto mechanic or something,' and you're suddenly a stupid person who doesn't know anything. I think that is very wrong and very degrading to these people.

IONE JOLLY—Last year I did a couple of classes that had more to do with life skills than academics. One was teddy bear making and there were a couple of other things like that, and I was still in the academic stream. This year I am doing academics and I do not get to do any classes like that, which are fun and are not stressful and which will have meaning to my life—not like physics, et cetera.

JATI HARBURN—In response to the girl from St Johns, I think one of the main problems is the standard of teaching. I was attending Dripstone High School last year and I know that we went through different teachers, they could not get permanent teachers in, and we were being chopped and changed. We would have different standards enforced upon us every week. You would go from one term expecting one level and then the next week it would be completely higher or completely lower, and I think in that way I was not properly prepared for the standard of years 11 and 12 because of the way the teachers just were not organised or even aware of all the ins and outs that they should have been.

JOEL CARSON—In response to the emphasis on sciences as opposed to arts, I have a friend who is a highly skilled musician and she is also a highly skilled mathematician. She has skipped grade 10 to get into year 11 at the moment. However, this bias on science subjects as opposed to arts subjects is going to cost her through her whole life. She has to work very hard at both her maths and her music at the moment, so in some ways her maths could be infringing on her musical success. Music is what she wants to do when she leaves school. She is still going to go to uni, but her entrance score will drop and as soon as she comes through uni and is a musician she will not earn much for

the rest of her life anyway. Only the really successful musicians earn heaps of money. I think the bias is really there, and that is an example of where it has blown to huge proportions. People who are brainy, people who are not brainy, people who have the skills in areas that they need just will not be able to succeed in ways that other people will because they do the wrong subjects.

BRIAN JARICK—I feel that teachers are striving for a goal for us that is not what we expect. So our goals get left behind. Then when we get to years 11 and 12 we start to think again, ‘What do I want to do?’ What we wanted to do when we first started school is left behind, so we have to change our minds again.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Following on from that, in what year do you think that you should be looking at developing views relating to a particular career?

BRIAN JARICK—At about 8 or 9.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Is there some different view on that?

ELIZABETH MOORE—You are at the age of 13 in grade 8 or 9. Since grade 8 I have changed my mind as to what I want to do about three times. I know now, and I am 16, and I think I am at an age now where I am not going to change my mind. I do not think it is fair on yourself to decide in grade 8, ‘I want to be a musician,’ and do only music subjects. I think up to the start of grade 11 you need to keep the options open and you need to have kids trying out different things, trying out maths, trying out science, trying out different arts subjects and vocational courses so that they can make their decision based on knowledge, not on what they think they might want to do.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Can I develop a further theme, although you have been touching on it. A number of employers have said to us that when young people go to apply for a job a lot of people have fairly poor literacy and numeracy skills. Would you agree with that? If you do, why do you think this is so? Is this area being neglected in the school system?

ELIZABETH MOORE—I think that there are a surprising amount of people who are in senior school or years 10, 11 and 12 who cannot read as well as they should be reading or whose literacy and numeracy skills are too low. I think that there are high schools that are trying to combat this and trying to have special remedial courses. But with these remedial courses people should be caught early in primary school. By the time you get to high school if you cannot read properly your self-esteem is going to be so low that it is likely you are going to think, ‘I’m stupid; I can’t do anything.’ It needs to be caught early; it needs to be caught when you are in primary school. There need to be smaller classes. The teachers should be able to see that a child cannot read and it should be fixed at a young age.

IONE JOLLY—In response to literacy, I reckon that there should be more speech therapists at school. When my little brother was in primary school they had one speech therapist and she used to visit about once a term. He had great difficulty speaking. The only reason she visited him was that my mother chucked a big stink. She came to the school but she would not visit any of the other kids at the school. The other kids have had major problems with their reading and writing and when they are in grades 4 or 5 their parents have had to pay, say, \$30 an hour each for tutoring. They really can't afford that. By that stage it is too late for some kids, whereas if you have a mother like mine it is not.

ANNA-MARIE SOCCI—Along with what the Casuarina Senior College students are saying, I had trouble in primary school with my English. I came to Nightcliff Primary School in year 5 and they straightaway put me in ESL class because my father was Italian and my mother was Dutch. They put me in there because they thought I could not speak English properly, because my parents cannot speak it properly. They told my parents that I would never be able to get a job, that I would be lucky to have a K-Mart check-out chick job. Now I am in year 10, I get As in English, most subjects I get As in, and I proved them wrong.

My sister is in grade 4 and she also has trouble. I cannot help her because I have got homework and mum cannot help her out either. Mum went one day to a homework centre and said, 'Would you enrol my child?' They said, 'No, because your child is not an Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander.' This is not a racial thing I am starting up now, but you have got to think about the fact that some students still have difficulty but are expected to understand. ESL classes do not help you out that much. I have been there, done that. I got so confused that my English straightaway went down, but because I had more help with my parents, because they could not speak English before, and they gave me more confidence, I was able to do it. Expectations now are just so bad that my sister could not even read in year 3. She only got taught by me and my mum, and that was it. Most teachers do not help you out any more. They just forget about you. They only concentrate on the higher students. Some do actually help with the kids who have difficulties, but it is a very small majority. I think there needs to be more help extended with these students coming up.

MARIO TSIRBAS—Talking on the same subject, my little brother suffers from ADD and he has trouble concentrating at school. He is in year 3 now, and he has been visiting a speech pathologist privately for the past two years. Seeing his transition from grade 1 on, his reading has suddenly jumped up, and his counting and maths and so on has jumped up incredibly. I am really happy for him because he has been working hard.

But I also feel sorry for the other kids who suffer from the same thing he does and from other difficulties. I really feel sorry for them because maybe their parents cannot understand, and maybe their teacher does not understand, why these things are happening. I know a lot of kids who suffer from ADD especially. They do really silly things, but they

cannot help themselves because that is just how they are.

I think special teachers, like speech pathologists and so on, one per school, especially in primary schools, should go around and look at each student individually for maybe half an hour a week, and just look at problem areas and discuss them and work on them. Then this problem would not be so big because there would be people caring and people trying to help.

JATI HARBURN—My point has been made.

MELENA RIGG—I would like to point out that, although you have your underachieving children, you also have your overachieving children who also need to be extended. There is no catering for gifted children or children who are overachievers. It just does not appear to be happening. My mother teaches a gifted unit and caters for 23 children, except out of the whole school there are more children than that who are gifted and those children are not being catered for.

JOANNE RICHARDS—I will go back to numeracy and literacy problems. I think we can trace the problem back to primary school. That is where the basics of reading, writing and maths are learnt. They are not being taught properly. I was taught to read at a very young age. The emphasis was on how to do things right—the basic things, like sentence structure and how to use all different things.

I have seen kids now in grade 10 who do not read and cannot write. That is because they were not taught the basics. It will be impossible to try to pick them up and go back to the very basics like how to write properly, how to add basically. It will be hard to pick them up because the problem has been left for so long and it is still not being faced now.

IONE JOLLY—Melena has spoken about gifted children. I believe that in primary school I was kept back mainly because I was a female and girls were not meant to be smart. My grade 4 teacher would give me 99½ out of 100 for a project because I had messy writing when my writing was the neatest in the class and stuff like that.

With numeracy skills, in grade 3 where you are actually developing your beginnings, like your times tables and so on, I would finish my maths book and have to go and rub it all out to get back to where the class was so I would not get ahead of the class. I believe that was mainly because I was a girl and I was not allowed to be advanced. My brother now is doing grade 8 maths in grade 5, whereas I was only allowed to do grade 5 maths in grade 5.

CHRIS BENNETT—We have got three levels of English at Driver High School—I do not know whether it is like that at any other school—Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. The attitude of the kids there is that Level 1 is for all the smart people, Level 2 is for the

moderate people and Level 3 is for all the dumb people. That attitude does not really help when you have teachers saying, 'You're not going to learn anything anyway, you might as well just go home.'

KATE WICKETT—I will be frank: my maths is dismal, I am really bad at maths.

CHAIR—So is my spelling.

KATE WICKETT—That is funny actually—so is mine. I really enjoy English. I think it is the best subject ever. I am probably a grade A student in English. However, with my maths I am probably a C student and, as I said before, I am not really mathematically inclined. However, I do agree that it starts from primary school.

During primary school I can remember my maths lessons. They were for one hour a day from 10 to 11, and we did everything we could to get out of them. The teachers really did not care because they knew that they had to have a certain amount of the syllabus done each year, and if half the class was getting it that was fine; they did not really bother about the other half.

I know that I probably should have worked harder with maths, but the expectation of me was, 'Kate's not that smart, but that's okay because she'll get help later in life.' But I really think it has affected my high school years. I wish I could be a little better at maths—but, as I said, not that I go down that way.

I also agree that there needs to be a bigger emphasis on literacy. I have friends in years 11 and 12 who struggle to write an essay. I was helping a girl to write an essay last week. She was in tears because she could not get an introduction structured properly. My parents are very demanding of me with my English. However, she is unfortunate in that her mother's English is not well structured. So her daughter has not been given opportunities that she should have been given to develop her English over the years.

When it comes to things like standing up in a room full of people, I think people should feel comfortable in speaking about things. It does not really matter whether you know the square root of a quadratic or whatever; I think speaking and communicating with people is probably the most important thing anyone can do.

Mr BARRESI—Before we move on and just for my own understanding—because I am not as familiar with the education system in the Northern Territory as perhaps I should be—most of you have spoken of or expressed a concern about your schools being too academically oriented beyond year 9, year 10 onwards, and there not being enough opportunities perhaps for vocational education or at least keeping your options open beyond years 9 and 10. Are there any colleges or secondary schools in Darwin, in the Northern Territory, that do give you that option much later than at the stage you have expressed?

IONE JOLLY—Casuarina does, but there are only a certain amount of lines on your timetable. We have seven lines, and that means you can take seven classes. If you have two maths, two science, an English and a study line, that only leaves one line free. If you want to do, say, computing to help you with the rest of your courses, then you do not have any lines free to do the other subjects. So there is really no time.

JATI HARBURN—I think one of the things that everybody seems to be whingeing about is that they are pushed to do sciences and maths. But the fact is that most people go to the careers counsellor saying, 'I don't know what I want,' and the careers counsellor tries to give them the subjects that will give them the best mark that will open up the most opportunity so that when they finally do decide they will be able to get into it. Everybody is saying, 'I don't want to do this; I don't want to do science,' yet really we have to do those things in order to keep our options open. So I think that foundation has to be changed before we can start chopping and changing with our subjects.

Mr BARRESI—As a follow-up, just as a bit of a straw poll—and just raise your hands if you like—how many of you are planning not to go to university?

CHAIR—Everybody else is going to university? All those who are going to university, please put your hands up. That was 17. And those who haven't put their hands up, now put your hands up if you do not know what you are going to do. It is about split between university and non-university and those who do not know.

Mr BARRESI—Of those who are not going to university, are any of you planning to take on an apprenticeship or traineeship and, if so, what have you done about it so far?

CHARLES WHITE—I am a strong believer in the defence forces, so I am heading that way myself. As far as trades and that sort of thing are concerned, I think they are really good. I suppose you have all heard the plugs. They pay you money while you are doing it and all the rest of that sort of thing. But, yes, that is the way I am heading.

CHRIS BENNETT—I am doing a VET course at the moment, and that is for construction. I hope to get an apprenticeship out of that—if not, through the Army.

Mr BARRESI—What are the opportunities like up here for traineeships and apprenticeships? Are there ample opportunities if you want to go out that way? Someone told me yesterday—I was speaking to a local—that there is a shortage of panel beaters. I do not know whether that means there are not enough panel beaters or too many accidents.

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—With apprenticeships, there are plenty in Darwin, as far as I know, but there are small businesses that cannot afford to bring in teenagers with them. It is not that they do not trust them or anything; it is because they have to pay for their insurance, their wellbeing. My father is a tiler, and sometimes we want to bring in a

teenager to help us out, one who wants to learn a new trade, but we can't, because we have to pay for him to go to school at least once a week—my father wants that—and we have to pay for their insurance and everything that they need. We would be most likely paying them a couple of hundred dollars a week and all these things add up after a long period of time. If or when anything happens to this teenager, you have to pay out quite a bit of money, so most small businesses are too scared to actually get kids to their apprenticeships. There are a lot of opportunities around Darwin if you look for them, but some businesses do not want to take the risk at all.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Just on the same theme: when you say there are plenty of opportunities for apprenticeships, could you give some indication of what field those are in?

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—As far as I know, they would basically be in trades. There are quite a lot in engineering. Nowadays, teenagers basically do the same old jobs: working at KFC or Woolies or something like that. But that is not a career job. Most adults do not give them the opportunity to test themselves, to go a bit further. One of my mates wants to do civil engineering. As far as he knows, once he gets to university all he is going to do is study—that is basically it; he knows that already—but he still wants to become a civil engineer. What are you going to do? If you don't get your hands into it, you are not going to learn anything in the long run. So you have to have more practical work.

We have work experience—I haven't had mine yet—for one week in year 10 and one week in year 11. That is just not enough. You need to have more. I cannot say that you can take out all the days of the week during school, but you have to have something that keeps on going. We need to be able to get a taste of work—not just one week where most people just choose to bludge and just go somewhere. Some people choose to go to work for a bakery and work from 12 midnight to 8 a.m. and they sleep the rest. That is like working. The thing is: it is an experience that you will be learning.

MAREE PATRONI—In Darwin there are a lot of options in tourism because it is an important part of Darwin, but at Driver High, in the vocational and business courses, you can choose to go out one day a week for work experience in sales or tourism and there is one other area. You can choose those areas if you want to get into that sort of work. But you can also choose areas, if you want to go to university and that, where you just do academic courses. So Driver High School has a fair range of subjects.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Has anyone here applied for a full-time job, apprenticeship or traineeship? If you did really want an apprenticeship, would you know where to go? Would your careers advisers at school be able to help you in that way?

ELIZABETH MOORE—I am pretty sure that our school would be able to. We have a really good careers system. They keep a lot of things on hand about that. We have

quite even vocational and academic at our school. If you wanted to do an apprenticeship or something like that, I think you would be able to find out about that at our school. At the school I went to before, which was Darwin High, I do not think I would have been able to find that out.

Mr MOSSFELD—Can you tell me where some of your friends who left school last year have gained employment?

JATI HARBURN—Two of my friends dropped out halfway through year 10. One of them is working as a panel beater and the other one is working as a tiler. They got their jobs within a month. They rang around; they were interested. I know another girl who is sitting around whingeing every day about how she cannot get a job. She is striving for a job that needs qualifications, whereas she has not even completed year 10. I think people need to be realistic. She is thinking of working with animals, but as she does not have any qualifications that will be really hard. I think you need to realise what you can achieve with your qualifications and then just ring around and annoy people.

PAULL HART—Often to get training we go to our careers adviser who gives us help and advice as to where we can go. I want to talk about work experience. Chris and I are currently doing a VET course. One day a week—on Tuesdays—throughout the whole year we attend this VET course. I go to Metclad, which is a sheet metal company in Palmerston. I go through the various machines every day, and I get to learn plenty of stuff. Chris used to go to Barclay Molem, which is a big building company. Since we do the course one day a week, we get used to the job and prepare ourselves for the work force for when we do leave school. It does help us. We get to know people. When we leave school, we can get out there and try our best.

CHAIR—Do you like it?

PAULL HART—Yes, I do. I have been asked if I wanted to change after one term and I said, ‘No, I will go for it and I will keep going for this.’ I have not made up my mind yet.

CHAIR—Do they treat you all right at work?

PAULL HART—Sure. We all get on quite well. Both males and females work there. I am the only student from my school going there at the moment, but one of my other friends is hoping to go. It is pretty good the way it is. You get to learn heaps of stuff, so it is not too bad at all.

Mr BARRESI—Before, when we asked whether or not people were going to go to university, did you put your hand up to indicate that you are going?

PAULL HART—I hope not to go to university.

Mr BARRESI—Has this VET course helped you to make your decision?

PAULL HART—I think it is going to help me get a job in the work force because I will be prepared for what it is going to be like in the real world. I would like to go to uni and continue my education in order to go for a higher job, but the problem is that I want to get started early. That is my choice. I will continue with this VET course because it is preparing me for what I am doing.

IONE JOLLY—There is a program called secondary transition education with the education department. I know one of the work trainers there. One of the kids she was working with got a traineeship with Parks and Wildlife. That was either at the end of last year or the beginning of this year. Several of the kids she works with have been offered jobs from that. They have been offered full-time jobs leading to a career in that area. They go one day a week to the workplace, and each term they change so they get experience in different areas. It is a really good program, except there is one problem, in that workplace counselling should take place prior to work experience. A lot of the previous employees get jealous of the work experience students because they believe they are taking hours off them.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you have career days where employers come to your school to tell you what jobs are available in the area? Could somebody give us some examples of that, if it does occur?

JOEL CARLSON—Where we attend at Casuarina Secondary College, once every fortnight or so there is a lunchtime event in the careers centre, which is quite a big block that is devoted just to careers. That goes to show what they are doing. Once a fortnight, speakers from different fields are asked to come in—artists, police people, just to name a few. That is advertised quite a bit. You look around and see signs up saying, ‘Do you want to know what it is like being an artist? If so, come here.’ You have to motivate yourself to do that. They are not going out and saying, ‘You said you want to be an artist. Come now.’ You have to look for yourself for that. If, by chance, you miss the signs, you would not know. I think it is quite successful and it is a good idea.

CHAIR—How many kids go along, typically?

JOEL CARLSON—I haven’t actually been to one yet, but the fact that they keep on doing it, I would assume, would mean numbers are quite consistent.

JOANNE RICHARDS—Our school, Kormilda College, has a very similar program. Every Thursday this term our careers adviser has arranged for someone to come to speak to us about jobs. Not only is it helpful to us but after they talk they are willing to actually help you find more information about what they are talking about and maybe help you get into the field later on. If you contacted them and said, ‘I went to your talk and I’m interested in doing that. Would you tell me how to go about it?’ they do talk. They

also tell you how to go about it. The Defence Force were very clear on what you had to do to apply for that. One of the things is that, in all our subjects at school and with all the effort, they don't actually give you an impression of a bigger picture. It is like, 'You're getting all this education. You should be learning, you should be working.' But they don't say, 'This is what you're striving for.'

I agree that you should not choose yourself a career at a really young age—just leave your options open. They should give more information saying, 'You should try harder at this because then you might have a chance to do this and this.' They just don't say that. Kids are encouraged to work and do their best, but they are not exactly told why. That is a bit of a problem.

MELENA RIGG—We can sit here and whinge and whine as much as we want, but ultimately it is up to us to decide what we want to do. There are facilities available and we can go out and find information on career paths. We cannot sit around and blame bad career counselling. Ultimately, it is up to us.

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—She's got a great attitude towards life but, if you think about it, so many teenagers nowadays don't have that attitude. As far as they are concerned—and this is true—you don't have to go to school; you just have to go to the dole. That's it. I don't have to be worried about getting a job, I don't have to be worried about becoming a mechanic, a lawyer or a civil engineer, anything like that. All I have to do is go down to the nearest dole-bludging place and get my money. That is it, basically. That is the attitude.

Teenagers at my age now—I am only 14, 15 soon—just don't care any more. They go to Darwin High, Nightcliff High and some used to go to St John's College. They went to Nightcliff High, but I don't think they go any more. They actually wag it. They don't care. It is their attitude, it is up to them, but they don't see that they have anything to look forward to. As far as they are concerned, they don't have to worry about life any more. The government is going to look after them and education is not as important as it is supposed to be. There are so many expectations put on them. Some of them are not very good at their English, maths or science or whatever. They are only good at certain things, but that is not noticed at all. Only the main subjects are noticed—if you are not good at those you are good at nothing.

Some people here may be good at trades or public speaking or something like that, but that is not noticed. If you are not good at English, maths, science or social education—those four areas that at our school you need for your straight SSC certificate—you are good at nothing. If you do not pass year 10 you do not get anywhere in life; if you do not pass year 12 you do not get anywhere in life. That is how it is nowadays.

CHAIR—How many of you intend to leave school and go on the dole? How many of you have friends who have done that or will probably do that? That show of hands

indicates over 50 per cent, well and truly.

JATI HARBURN—I agree that a lot of people are going to go on the dole. Teachers and students should not be expected, especially at 10, 11 and 12 level, to have to put up with these people if they are not interested. The opportunities—perhaps this is only my personal experience—are there if you want to access them. I do not think it is a question of money or class or anything. If you want to do well, then you work hard and you pick the subjects that are open to you.

Perhaps Casuarina Senior College is more open to change and suggestion than some of the other high schools, I do not know. I have not been to them. I know that at our school if you want to do a vocational subject, if you are willing to work hard and put in the time and energy equal to someone who wants to be a doctor, then you will get somewhere. But, if you want to be on the dole and you want to bludge, so be it. The opportunity is there to get yourself out and get yourself in the work force. Even if it is a vocational subject the opportunities are available. You just have to stop expecting to be held by the hand and get up and access them.

KATE WICKETT—I think that is a very good attitude. At my old school in Adelaide, Loreto College, there were absolutely no options for vocational studies at all. I was reading in the Adelaide *Advertiser* last week that this school had 98 per cent university entrance rate for year 12. That is great, but those people who did not want to go to university were looked down upon by the school—students as well as teachers. At Kormilda it is very different in that people go and do apprenticeships and they go straight to jobs.

As to what the girl from St Johns College was saying about people knowing that they can go on the dole and bludge, frankly, I look down on people like that. If you are on the dole because you legitimately cannot find a job, that is fair enough, but there needs to be more incentive to find a job. This is probably getting into politics, but I think that the dole should only be for a certain amount of time. For instance, today I was sitting in the study room listening to a bunch of boys saying, 'School sucks. I hate it here, blah, blah, blah.' I said to them, 'Hey guys, this is school; you can make the most of it and you can be what you want to be.' I know that that is optimistic and a bit idealistic and so forth, but I agree with the girl from Casuarina College that you can make the most of your life and it is attitude. Maybe that is what needs to be addressed. Maybe there needs to be councillors on people's attitudes.

Someone said that we should not have to put up with people who do not want to be there. I agree with that 100 per cent. I am doing the IB at Kormilda and there are a couple of students in the class that really do not want to be there. The question is: why are they doing it in the first place? They are just detracting from the people who do want to be there.

MARIO TSIRBAS—I agree totally with what these two girls are saying. Some people who do want to bludge around and go on the dole are holding back other people who want to make more of themselves and their lives. I think that is why schools have a leaving age of 15: so they can say to some students who have not been performing at all, ‘If you don’t want to work at school, what do you want to do? Do you want to go and do a traineeship, apprenticeship or whatever? If that is so, we’ll find you an apprenticeship. Or do you just want to go on the dole?’ or just, ‘Go away because you are holding up other people.’ I think that is a good attitude because in class when students muck up the teacher has to focus on them and tell them to be quiet, get outside, go to the principal and so forth. Other kids are distracted from their work by that and think it is a great big joke when really it is not; it is very important, no matter how you think of it. So I think it is a good attitude.

Mr CHARLES—In the United States you cannot get unemployment benefits until you have been employed. What do you think about that?

JATI HARBURN—I think, in some cases, that defies the purpose. You cannot find a job. What should happen is that you should have to work for the dole, not that if you have not been employed you should not get it because if you have not been employed then the chances of you getting a job are going to be less and less. The problem with getting jobs these days is the lack of qualifications and experience. If you have not worked somewhere before, you cannot get a job somewhere else and the cycle continues.

MATTHEW BRIGHTWELL—I think people should have to work for the dole. Also, if there are 10 skilled motor mechanics who are not employed, the government should invest in a new garage or something out of our money—out of our parents’ money, actually: taxpayers’ money—so those people can work. They should do that with other things, like any unskilled people should notify the government and if there are enough numbers they should invest in that area.

JOANNE RICHARDS—I do not believe that anyone should be held back from doing anything that they want to do if they think it is worth while doing. These people who just want to go on the dole and whatever can do that, as long as they realise what is going to happen if they are going to make that decision. If the government suddenly decides that there will be no more dole, those people may think, ‘I should have done this. I should have done that course. I should have gone to TAFE.’ Maybe they will realise one day what they should have done. But if they hold us back that is just not fair.

Most of us would be striving to get ahead in life and striving to do what we are good at. These people are going to hold us back, as one guy said, by taking the teacher’s attention or by not participating. We are asked to work in groups and come up with group solutions. This is great experience for life because you cannot just lead your own life, you have to be able to work in a team. But it is impossible with people who do not want to work, who will not contribute and who will not think. If they do not want to be there we

should just say, 'Go. Realise what you are doing but go anyway.'

JOEL CARLSON—I agree with what lots of people have been saying so far except that, if these people leave school and bludge on the dole, as has been put, we will have a lot of people who are out of school and who are not really ever going to have much inspiration to work or do uni, get an apprenticeship or anything. While I agree with the attitude I am not sure that we can say 'Leave' because then we would be putting people on the streets who maybe are going to be unemployed for the rest of their lives. We would be supporting them, as taxpayers, when we have gone through the system. It would bring more and more unemployment out there.

Perhaps programs should be geared towards making these people look up and see what they are actually doing. I do not have a quick solution for it. I agree wholeheartedly that these people could really hinder other people who want to do vocational or university stuff, but before you can just turf them out of school you really have to think about what that will do to unemployment later on.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I have a question for the young lady down there. I would like to know why she thinks there are some young people who would just want to go on the dole and do nothing else? What percentage of young people fall into this category?

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—To answer your question, I could not tell you how many people are on the dole.

Mr MOSSFIELD—No. How many people at your school, for example? Would it be a small percentage?

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—Yes, basically. But it has to do with their attitude. Many people would be saying the same thing.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Would the fact that it is very difficult to get employment make people pessimistic and give up too easily?

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—I could not really answer that question—maybe others could. I believe that, if you want to get the dole, you should work for it. Everyone's parents pay tax—even you do. As far as I know, everyone pays tax in some way—just buying a loaf of bread or something like that. We are paying people money to sit down, to relax, to go to the beach for the whole day or to do something else. They should be able to work for it. They want to be able to sit at home and not work. They want to just sit there and do nothing and get their money and go out for the night. They should not have that attitude. They should have the attitude, 'Okay, tomorrow morning at 8 a.m., I have to go to work. Someone is going to set me up with a job somewhere. I should have to get my money somewhere.'

There are jobs somewhere. I am not saying that picking up rubbish is the best job in the world, but it is something. You are earning your money. You can look after kids, clean the pool or mow lawns. They are kids' jobs, but if you work for different types of businesses—such as a VIP garden service or whatever—that is something to start on. It is not the best thing in the world. You are not getting \$100,000 a year but you are starting from somewhere. You are actually earning your money. You have more pride than if you sit there and get other people to give you money. You are actually earning that money that you are willing to have.

CHAIR—I know heaps of adults who mow lawns for a living and make very good money. They pay heaps of taxes too.

Mr BARRESI—I want to follow up on Anna-Maria's point; I was going to ask this question before. There are heaps of jobs and people can start at base level and work their way up. There are employers out there. You mentioned that your father is typical of people who are not prepared to give young kids an opportunity for various reasons. How do you get around that individual, that type of businessman, and convince them that they should give a young kid with no experience an opportunity?

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—Basically, you cannot convince my father. We got a letter about all the things to do. My mother would be the same as this girl's over here. She would be telling you exactly what she thinks; she would be full on, going for you. I cannot really speak about this because it is not my opinion, but basically my mum said that, if the government had something to do with it and gave some money to the businesses—I am not saying that businesses take all the money—they could get insurance for those kids. They could put some insurance on the kids. I am not promising anything; I know nothing about the business world. I am just saying what I know, based on my own parents. Some people do not get work for three months. If you do labouring work, you get excellent money, but you can go through dry-outs where you do not get any money. Labouring is a good job.

To get through to my father, you have to convince him by actually saying, 'Yes, I will pay for your insurance.' My father is happy to give people jobs but just cannot. Many businesses just cannot give work to these kids—unless it is KFC or Woollies and those things. The small businesses just cannot employ them. There is no hope. They could lose so much money in the long run.

Mr BARRESI—So employing the young kid is just too high a risk for them to take. Is that what you are saying?

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—Yes. Most people who do get employed are employed by their parents because the parents know that, if anything goes wrong, it is in the family.

IONE JOLLY—I do not really believe that the unemployment rate is that bad in Australia. In places like Germany, which is a big industrial country and one of the powers of the world, there is a 20 per cent unemployment rate and ours is somewhere around 10 per cent. So currently it is not too bad.

The work for the dole scheme could work in Australia, because it has worked in places like Canada and New Zealand. In Alberta in Canada, an Athabasca MP introduced it, and all the local people really like the idea. The employers are really getting into it and the people who are on the dole really like it—they say it improves their self-esteem. I also believe that the last grade of school should be raised to, say, year 14, so we could be given more experience, and we could grow up and mature to make our decisions on careers.

KATE STUCHBURY—I totally agree with the work for the dole scheme. You should be able to do community service and work for your money. You may be working for the government, but at least you are getting money and not bludging. People's money is going to good use. Also, you know how you said your father was not insured. The government should aid him in getting insurance so that he can have students employed. There is a big risk.

CHARLES WHITE—Maybe the Australian attitude is that people do not have that little thing in their head which says, 'You must go on and get a job and be educated.' To look at some of the more developed Asian countries—for instance, Japan—everyone runs around and it is expected that you achieve really highly. We have all seen those types of people. They are all running around and they are all really smart and they can all sit down and take time and try really hard whereas maybe in Australia people are not thinking that way. Secondly, I thought that government did give things to people who were taking on students—maybe not money, but benefits.

MARIO TSIRBAS—I am 14, so I do not have much experience of the world as such. Talking about apprenticeships and stuff with this girl here, when you get risks from taking on young, inexperienced people you also get benefits. You are teaching them the trade, and then they can help you. They are working for you. They are adding more produce to your business, and so you are getting more out of it.

I also think that why some employers do not want to take on young people as workers is because of all this media hype that kids do not want to work at all and just want to go on the bludge straightaway. That is wrong. Some kids—I would like to say most, but I am not too sure about that—who are on the dole and have been for a long time are out there looking for work and want to work, but the media is blowing way out of proportion cases where kids have a really bad attitude and do not want to work, and this is scaring employers into saying, 'No, nobody wants to work.'

KATE WICKETT—To refer back to your question, Mr Mossfield, about why kids want to go on to the dole, the simple answer to that is: because they know they can. Many people have said here—

Mr MOSSFIELD—Wouldn't they rather work?

KATE WICKETT—What do you get out of working if you can sit home and drink a few tinnies each day and know that you have a cheque in the mail every week or month or whatever it is? I would not know when it comes. Someone was talking about pride in doing work. I totally agree. And the class structures are a problem—that is, self-esteem and paranoia where people think, 'If I am a garbage collector or a postman, people are going to think of me lower in society.' I do not think that at all. If you are on the dole, people will think lower of you. People who say, 'There are no jobs out there,' are not looking hard enough and they are not going to lower themselves to the jobs. Who is saying they are lowering themselves? It is their own mind set that is saying they are lowering themselves. So I do not think they have an argument there that is strong.

To refer to the jobs for apprenticeships, I think the government might like to prioritise where they are allocating the money. Sure, there has been a lot of talk lately about putting money into small business, and I think that would be a good idea—maybe directing it from other places into small business, into education and into the schooling system, whereby people can be taught at a higher standard and then apprenticeships can eventuate.

MATHEW KERLE—A lot has been said about people not wanting to work; they have this attitude that they like to sit around and bludge. My opinion of that is that, personally, I am just about scared shitless about going into the work force. I only know school: going to school, fighting with the teachers, doing my work, going home, struggling and all of that. When I think about going out into the work force and having to cope with all this new stuff that comes along, I go into a cold sweat; I just don't want to think about it.

I am lucky. My parents have high expectations of me; I have to succeed. So I am going to go on and I will probably do well, but a lot of people maybe do not have that support network or their parents maybe do not have the time for them or they have got other things that are distracting them and they cannot think about this.

The world as it is is being transformed into this huge, confusing thing. It is so huge and complex, and there is so much you have to know that it can easily overwhelm you. So if you cannot cope with that, it is easy to just opt out of the system and say, 'I cannot cope with this; I am just not going to do it.' So they drop out of school, bum along for a while, maybe get on the dole, be a bit of a no-hoper—and then someone has to come along and invest a lot of time and effort in trying to get you up, set you up and put you back on your feet.

So I think this is a problem that should be addressed and that—going back a lot—maybe there should be more focus earlier on in the years, say, about now, in years 10 and 11, on a course where people can have a look around, have a look through a wide range of options, see what they like and figure out how these things work and say, ‘Oh, I can do this.’

At our school we have a good idea with guest speakers that you can talk to. These people are actually there doing the job and you can see how hard it is, what you have to do, what you have to cope with, and maybe realise and figure out that it is not so hard after all; you can go ahead and you can do it.

JATI HARBURN—I hate to be difficult, but I think one of the problems we are having here is that we are all sort of agreeing with each other and we are not coming up with any solutions. We are all going over the same points. And another problem we are having here is that none of us is so down or so uninterested to not be here to voice an opinion. I don’t think we have anybody here who is so uninterested in their education and their future, because we are all here to talk about it. So we can keep agreeing with each other and saying, ‘Oh yes, it is hard, it is hard,’ but we are not coming up with any solutions or any remedies to the problems we are having. We are just going over the same points.

Mr BARRESI—Can I just go back to the young boy who spoke a moment ago about the fear of going out into the work force. I can very well understand that in terms of going for your first job. Wouldn’t work experience and schools developing a partnership with the local businesses in the area to provide students in the school through the VET or your secondary transition education or other programs help in being part of that? Wouldn’t getting yourself on to work experience tend to break down the mystique of the workplace and also introduce you to the routine of work—getting up in the morning and going on to work every day?

MATHEW KERLE—It is a good idea, but the thing is you are not always going to do the same thing. It has been said many times that you do not get one idea and go straight through with that. Personally, I have changed what I want to be at least three times so far in my life. I wanted to be a diesel fitter, so I did work experience for that and I was finding out a lot about that. Then I talked to someone who really knows a lot about that—he has spent his whole life in the business—and he basically told me, ‘Don’t waste your time with it. You can do better than that.’ So now I have to go out again, except that now I am in year 11 I am doing all the hard subjects—I am aiming for engineering and I want to go to the Defence Force Academy down south—and I do not have time for that. I do not have time to take a week off school, lose a whole week of my studies, to go in and try out with an engineer. What would suit me best would be to sit down with an engineer and talk to him about it. Basically I do not have the time to go out for a week.

DANIEL MACMILLAN—Referring back to the issue of the dole, who wouldn’t

want to sit round and do nothing and get money for it? You are under no pressure from your employer or anything like that. You just take your days as they come. As for work for the dole, I am very much in agreement with that, because there is a community about 300-500 kilometres west of Tennant Creek where they have enforced this very heavily and it is probably the best community that I have seen for a long time. It is always clean. There is no vandalism. It is just a very nice place to go to.

MELENA RIGG—Work experience, particularly in year 10, is pathetic. I went to a law firm because I had these ideas that I would be a lawyer. I spent my time filing and photocopying. That taught me absolutely nothing about the law industry. I had friends who went to firms like that. They learnt nothing. When you go to work experience, TRAC and vocational studies are good, but in junior school there is no point. The employers do not trust you. You have no responsibilities and you are slave labour.

JATI HARBURN—I would like to totally disagree. I went to Morgan Buckley and I did spend a lot of time filing. But when they realised that I was not a complete bimbo and I was not about to put the Gs in with the Es they gave me opportunities. They gave me the opportunity to go with them into the courts. I was allowed to sit in on proceedings. I think they had a lot of bad experience previously with people, but I found that it was really good. It was a real inspiration for me.

MAREE PATRONI—I agree with the first girl. In a lot of the places they would not let you do stuff, especially in administration because they cannot. If you do muck it up, it makes a lot of problems for them. I went to a resort type thing. In a lot of the areas like cleaning and the kitchen you can help out because it is not such a big deal if you make a mistake. That is where a lot of the people have a problem—they go to administration areas and you cannot do the work because you are not qualified yet. In the trade areas it is not so bad.

CHAIR—How many of you have or have had part-time jobs? It looks like most of the room. How about telling us about your part-time jobs and whether you think they help you or will help you in the future to get work. How difficult is it to get a part-time job?

JUSTIN DE ZYLVA—I was working at K-Mart for five months to save for a trip to Paris. When I went there I did not expect the work to be like it was. The work consisted of a psychological part, not just a physical part. I thought it would just be, 'Go stack stuff on the shelves and serve people at the checkouts.' But you had to put on a smiley face and you had to be able to obey your boss, for instance. That was a new thing for me.

It was really hard because that is the thing that work experience does not teach you about. Education, for instance, is a tool we use to help us fit into society—to get something out and to fit in—but it does not teach us how to use this tool. We have to work this out ourselves. That is the real difficult bit about work experience. When I went

to K-Mart, to battle with my boss, shouting at me and all sorts of stuff was real hard for me. It was a new thing.

For instance, I also work with my dad. He will not put me too much through his sorts of problems, but I have an outlook of what his problems are like. If contractors do not go his way and the problem looks pretty meek, he has to look for other options and all sorts of things. He is prepared in his situations. I do not know anything about this stuff. I believe that work is something that you just go out and do. It is something on a set criteria. But nothing is a set criteria. Your emotions and everything come into it. So that is a good experience for me—working part-time.

CHAIR—Good on you.

BRIAN JARICK—I have had several part-time jobs from when I turned 15. But most of them are more to earn money so I could help myself to go through high school. It depends on what field you are looking at working in when you get out of school as to whether they help you out with your schooling. I have worked for a fruit and veg shop. I worked for DEBM. But they have not really helped me, because the field I want to work in is linguistics. So all they have really helped me do is pay for courses that I want to do at school. They have not really helped with the area that I am looking at getting involved in.

CHAIR—Any employer worth his salt will look at all the experience that you have had and take that into account. If you go up against other people who have not had part-time work and you have heaps of it, you are bound to win every time.

ANNA-MARIA SOCCI—I have not had my work experience yet, but basically I know—since year 6 actually—that I want to become a barrister. I have only one week of experience. I am not going to spend it in a law firm because I know—I expect it—there is no way in the world that I am actually going to be in a court defending somebody, because I have no qualifications in that work. I have no right to be there in actual fact. I would rather be mowing lawns or working in the bakery—something that I can do myself.

I have a part-time job. That is with my family, though. I work for a business with my family. My parents will not let me get a job. I asked my parents, ‘Do you want me to get a job?’ No. Specific, mean answer—no. I work for my parents and I get paid every Sunday. That depends on the profits we make. If we make a profit, my brother and I get paid, but we are the bosses in the work. We have two businesses—this may be boring to you—one being a tiling business, and that is where the main money comes in, and we have a simple food market and that is mum’s hobby. But my brother and I run it. We learn so many things: communication, knowing how to add up, doing the books. My brother and I do it. Everything that you need to know, we have been doing it.

I am only 14. My brother is 24. He has been in and out of work, but he has always

been working. He has never been on the dole. I know that some people have to go on the dole. There is no such thing as, 'You cannot go on the dole.' If you have to go then go, but do not think that you can go on it for a long period of time. Know that there is always some job to go to.

I have always said, 'I will never go on the dole. I will never be a bludger. I will never do this.' But I do not know. For all I know, when I get older I will probably be able to work for a couple of months and I will have to rely on the dole. But I will not do that for long. I know that I have to do something. Actually, that is how the attitude should be of more adults these days, and more or less teenagers as well.

There is a kid in my school—he is in our class—and his parents are on the dole and his attitude towards life is nothing. He sleeps in class. He does not care about nothing at all. Probably most students do. But, as far as he is concerned, life sucks. Someone else said it. That is the attitude towards life. Because his parents are on the dole, he thinks that when he gets older he will get on the dole. As far as he knows, it is going to go on and on.

Work experience is really good, but there needs to be more part-time jobs. Some people cannot get them—like me—because we are not allowed to. Others have to have more qualifications nowadays. Education is really good to go into uni or to do things like that. It is really great. But we need to have more hands-on work. Sitting there learning is not going to do everything for us. We need to do more things with our hands or actually getting into the work. I cannot actually get into that, but some other area so I can learn a different qualification except just one.

IONE JOLLY—My dad is in the government and he takes uni students over the holidays and sometimes work experience students from high school. Most of the students he intends on sitting in front of the computer and getting them to type in data because his guys do not have enough time to do it. I do not really see the point of getting work experience with people if they are just going to sit you in front of a computer.

I had a part-time job delivering pamphlets. The guy who I was doing it with would constantly rip me off. Even though it was a small amount, he would have 20 kids doing it and so he would make a big profit out of us. I would not bother worrying about \$50, but when it is 50 times 20, that is \$1,000 every so often, and that is a lot of money. You cannot really trust them most of the time.

KATE WICKETT—I agree. I am in the same situation as Anna-Maria. I work for my parents. They will not let me get a part-time job because they think I should be studying on my school work. However, they have an accounting practice together and I work in there and file and learn to use the Xerox photocopying machine, answer the phone and those sorts of things. I get paid weekly. I had previously applied for jobs before they decided that it was not a very good idea for me to get a job. I got three interviews from

three CVs I handed in and they said, 'You would be really good because you have a good character, et cetera. However, you do not have any experience, therefore we cannot hire you.'

You were saying before, Mr Charles, that if people have got experience then they are always going to get it. It is a vicious cycle: people are not going to hire you because you do not have experience so where are you expected to get the experience from? I have done work experience at the Smith Family in Adelaide. We had to do it a community based service and I did it at the Smith Family. I worked there for four or five days and they taught me how to use the Xerox. I said, 'Yes, I have been through this, it is okay.' They just got me to do the slack work and the stuff that they did not really want to do. In that sense, I learned how to do some photocopying, and sure that is a necessity in life if you are going to go that way, but I did not learn anything that I could not have otherwise. It did not really help me.

I worked for my parents and I also worked for my step-mum. She works for the nurses board and I was in there helping doing registrations. You can learn from those sorts of experiences, but when you go to school they know you are only going to be there for a week, or a certain period of time, so their mentality is, 'Why put all our efforts into this one person when we know they are only going to be here for a week.'

MARIO TSIRBAS—I have not done my work experience yet, so I do not know anything about that, but from what I have heard from my family and from other students I think what this girl has been saying is quite true, that people just give students the job because they cannot be bothered doing it and to get it done.

I work with my father who sells tiles. You might not think that is too exciting, but he owns two shops. So in one shop I work as a storeman and in the other I sell the actual product. I think that is a good experience for me because I can also get into the mentality of having a happy face whenever they abuse you; also, working hard and using your muscles, getting into things like looking at dockets and saying, 'Where does this go? Where should I put this?' and so on is a good experience. The part-time work is where you get your basic experience from—working with your parents. As you say, it is a vicious cycle: 'You do not have any experience. Too bad. We will get this person who does.' So this is the only time you ever get a chance to get some experience, because if you have never had a part-time job or anything obviously you have no experience, and so this is where it all comes into it.

Maybe people should start—especially schools and other businesses—doing work experience during the holidays. Maybe those kids who feel that they want more experience to get jobs and stuff should take a course that goes through the holidays and they can work in a certain area and learn more things. I think that would be a good way to go.

MAREE PATRONI—I was very lucky with my work experience because through

that I got a part-time job, and I have also been offered a traineeship through it. So I was lucky in that sense. But, when one of my friends went to the Plaza, they spent their whole time highlighting and filing. I went to another hotel. The atmosphere in the two hotels was different. A lot of the time the bigger businesses and high-class places can't let you do much because of the image they've got. So you just have to be lucky enough to get a good place.

ELIZABETH MOORE—Everyone so far has really been bagging work experience, saying that you get all the awful jobs. But if you go to a law firm you cannot expect them to give you anything much but filing. There isn't much else you can do. They can't let you take on cases or anything like that, but you can be there and watch and gain experience from it. Maybe it is not the best experience in the world, but you can watch what they are doing. I think work experience is really good in that sense. You can't expect to learn everything about the job, but you can watch.

CHARLES WHITE—In defence of work experience, I worked for the Navy in different spots for about eight weeks. With weapons, technology and top secret stuff they can't let you do much, but you are there to make the most out of work experience. So you get around and ask questions and have a look for yourself. They put me in a different section each time. Once I was in Weapons and then in Electronics. If electronics got boring, I went down to the next floor or somewhere else to look for something to do. So you get around, ask questions, bug people and find out all you can.

MATTHEW BRIGHTWELL—I would just like to say that I think work experience will be good, but there should be more of it. You only get one week to experience the job that you would like to do, but if something goes wrong or you don't like it our careers teacher told us that you can go and find another job within that week. That is all you can do. If something goes wrong and you don't like it, you miss out and have to wait until the next year. If something happens again, you don't really know what to do. I reckon there should be more of it because it is a good system.

Mr BARRESI—Some of you have not had bad experiences with work experience. In fact, I think two of you actually made the point that you were offered a more permanent position—whether it was part time or staying on. This may be a hard question to answer—perhaps I should ask this of your career counsellors—but what was it about that specific work experience which made it successful? What did that employer do which made it a good experience for you? We know about the ones that have had bad experiences—and I can get a feel for why that was the case—but what about the good ones?

JATI HARBURN—I went to a law firm and was given a lot of opportunities. I was taken to court. I was given a lot of inspiration. I was taken aside and spoken to about the sorts of courses I would want to do, about the sorts of aspects of law I could follow. It wasn't all hands on—I spent most of my time in front of a photocopier—but the thing that

they gave me that I benefited from was simply the inspiration and the drive and the push for me to work harder to get into a career like that.

MAREE PATRONI—For work experience I went to the Mirambeena Tourist Resort. The first day was fairly boring because I was working in administration. Basically, I folded envelopes and pieces of paper for them and sorted out what they had to post. The next day I worked in the kitchen and did functions and stuff like that. The next day I worked in cleaning. Then the next day I made up advertising packs. Because I worked in cleaning and in the kitchen, I actually did the work. If you are in administration, you do all the boring stuff, the stuff they do not feel like doing. When you do what the actual workers do, you feel more helpful. When you are in administration, you feel like you are in the way.

MATHEW KERLE—I had a really good experience with my work experience. I went to Komatsu Machinery. The first day I was there I basically did the jobs they did not want to do. I picked up all the hydraulic hoses from the mud and cut things up—really boring stuff that even the apprentice did not want to do. I was conscientious, I did what I was told and I stuck to it. The next day one of the diesel fitters asked me to help put together some big dozers that they just got in. I suppose that was a fairly responsible position, because I was expected to have a good knowledge of safety and to know my limits, because I was dealing with tonnes of steel and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of machinery.

I think what you get out of work experience depends on the person. If you do not want to get much out of it, if you go somewhere just to spend the time and you do not really care about it, you will not get much out of it. But, if you care about it and you go somewhere where you think you will get the most out of it, if you do what you are told and you basically behave as though it is work and you do your best, they will see that you are doing your best and that you are capable, and they will give you as much as they can give you. I realise that if your work experience is with a law firm they cannot put you on a case, but if you show that you are capable they will let you sit in and listen to everything to see how it all works.

BRIAN JARICK—I believe the attitude you project makes what you do for your work experience a more exciting place to be. I am currently doing stage 2 TRAC; last year I did stage 1. At three of the four places I went last year, I was treated as a person, and that made it a lot more enjoyable. It does not matter what you are doing—whether you are filing, typing on a computer or sitting in a courtroom with a lawyer—it makes it a lot more enjoyable if you are treated as a person. At the other place I was treated as a statistic, and that made me feel lower than what I was trying to project. It is the personal projection and the way they appear to see you that make a good work experience place.

Mr MOSSFELD—Are you given any advice at school regarding interviewing skills, how to present yourself when you go for a job? Would somebody like to give me

some examples of the way you think you should present yourself when you go for a job?

MELENA RIGG—Last year I attended Darwin High School. Part of work experience included almost a whole term of social education. It focused on work experience, how to write resumes, how to talk on the phone when being interviewed, et cetera. Basically we were told that we should always be polite, courteous, well dressed and eager for the job.

MATHEW KERLE—For my work experience I went to Nightcliff High. We did not get much information on what to do, what to expect or what to look for. Any knowledge we gained was from taking teachers aside and asking them how to go about it and what the best thing to do was. Officially all they did was call us out into a big assembly and tell us what we had to do to make the school look good, ‘Don’t make us look like dirt.’ They did not hand out any sheets or talk to us one to one and say, ‘When you are doing the interview, try to be polite and courteous,’ or give us any techniques that we could use to cinch it. There was no real solid advice. We just got taken aside by the teacher and were given the background knowledge.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So you think it would be important if they added that to the curriculum?

MATHEW KERLE—I do not know about the other schools; that was my experience at Nightcliff.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Some employers also say to us that they like new employees to research their own companies so that when you go for a job you have some idea of what that particular company does. You might keep that in mind whenever you apply for a position.

IONE JOLLY—Last year at my former school I did career education. We had to have an interview with the careers counsellor. He told me that I was not eager enough for the job because I was overqualified. Granted, I was applying for a funeral assistant’s job. He told me I had too many qualifications on my resume for the job and I should have been applying for something higher. Therefore, he probably would not have given me the job because I was overqualified.

Mr BARRESI—Can I give you an example that Mr Mossfield was referring to about doing research for an interview. This is by no means a high benchmark, so don’t look at it as if you have to do it as well. When I worked for a company prior to going into politics we had a student who came in and applied for a full-time job. He got to the second interview. The guy was so knowledgeable about the company; he knew everything about what we were doing. It came to us after a while and we asked him how he knew so much.

About two months before the interview took place he organised to do a tour of the company under the guise that he was doing a school project. He went right through the plant. He went into parts of the plant that some employees had never been into and he knew everything about that company. So, come the interview, he was asking questions and we were all dumbfounded why he knew so much. He impressed, of course, and now he is working in sales, which kind of makes sense.

CHAIR—We have been asking the questions. We are coming close to the end of our time together. Is there anything that we have not brought up in examining this issue of employment for you and your colleagues? Is there something you would like to mention or talk about that we haven't questioned you on?

IONE JOLLY—I don't think you mentioned what age you should start and finish school. I believe that we should either start school later or the grades should be extended so we have the opportunity to go on for longer. I have some friends in Switzerland. They have only just finished uni and they are 27. They were old enough to make the decision that that was the career they wanted whereas I figure that when I am 17 I will not be old enough to make a decision as to whether or not I want to go into geophysics or something like that at uni. It is just too hard at such a young age.

CHAIR—Many of you have talked about the fact that you have already changed your mind several times. Don't let that bother you. I am on my fourth career. Life happens like that, and it will increasingly happen like that in the future. So don't let that worry you.

CHARLES WHITE—Do you know exactly why the Northern Territory has the lowest unemployment rate for people coming out of school, youth in particular?

CHAIR—No.

CHARLES WHITE—Is that what this is all about? Is this what these forums are for?

CHAIR—I don't know. We were in Alice Springs three weeks ago and they told us there that if you want a job you can get a job. You might not get the one you want. You might want to be a brain surgeon and you have to work at K-Mart, Woolies or McDonald's, but if you want a job you can get a job. That is what they reckon. Don't ask me; I don't understand. We will ask some people later this afternoon.

MARIO TSIRBAS—I know you have had meetings like this before in other states and other parts of Australia. But what does this do for the whole picture? Are you just going to look at this information that we have given you and our thoughts and our feelings about the subjects that we brought up? What is the government going to do about it now?

CHAIR—Firstly, remember that we are not the government. We are a committee of parliamentarians—your representatives. We represent all the political parties. It is a multiparty committee. After leaving Darwin and speaking with people located around WA this week, including more of your colleagues and some adults who represent either employers or employment type bodies or whatever, we will sit down in May and June and start to compile a report. We may talk to a few more people. In August or September we will bring down a report in which we will make a number of recommendations—probably not very many but a few recommendations that we think will really help: No. 1, to help you to become more employable, and No. 2, to try to encourage employers to make more jobs available for you. That will be a bipartisan effort.

We will present the report to the parliament—not to the government but to the parliament. The Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs is required, on behalf of the government, to respond to our recommendations. We would hope that we are intelligent enough and good enough that, with all of your input from all over the country, we will be able to make a difference. That is what will come out of it.

It will not be a report stating that we think somebody should investigate something else again; I guarantee you that. It will be a report recommending that we do some things. For example, this committee was first formed in 1988, I think. In the early 1990s, we compiled two reports on literacy: one was on adult literacy but the second report on early childhood literacy development has become the Bible for government action. Everybody in Australia still refers back to that report on literacy. We frightened the life out of people because we said that there was a problem. Now something is being done about it, but whether it is enough remains to be seen.

Another report we did back in the early 1990s was into Austudy. I think it had 23 recommendations, and the government of the day picked up 22 of the 23 and implemented them. In 1995 we compiled a report on group training schemes and recommended that they be expanded in scope, be given more funding and have a larger part to play in creating apprenticeships and traineeships. The government has picked that up and is doing it. We do not always win, but if we do it intelligently we should have a huge influence over government action. That is the best I can tell you.

Young ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. You are a very bright and intelligent and, I might say, literate lot. Thank you for coming and spending your time with us today and helping us with our inquiry. I also thank your principals and teachers.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Barresi):

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

Forum adjourned at 3.29 p.m.

WITNESSES

**COURT, Mr Gilmour Alexander, Executive Officer, Northern Territory
Mining Industry Training Advisory Board, 75 Woods Street, Darwin,
Northern Territory 0822 1395**

**HARPER, Mr Henry, Community Education Coordinator, Arnhem Land
Progress Association, PO Box 3825, Darwin, Northern Territory 0801 . . 1413**

**HEAP, Mr Michael James, General Manager, Beaufort Hotel, Darwin, GPO
Box 207, Darwin, Northern Territory 0800 1421**

**MARTIN, Ms Tressna Jane, Coordinator, Darwin TRAC Association, PO Box
40419, Casuarina, Northern Territory 0811 1405**

**MURRAY, Mrs Karen Leslie, Company Secretary, Northern Territory, and
Manager, Aboriginal Employment Strategy, Henry Walker Group Ltd,
1059 Stuart Highway, Berrimah, Northern Territory 0828 1395**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

PUBLIC HEARING

Factors influencing the employment of young people

DARWIN

Monday, 28 April 1997

Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Barresi

Mr Mossfield

The committee met at 4.01 p.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The purpose of this inquiry is to consult widely and produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of our youth. The committee has received over 100 submissions, and has conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Alice Springs and several regional centres in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. The committee has also conducted school forums, including one in Darwin today, in which young people express their views and opinions to the committee.

The committee is now conducting public hearings in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. This meeting is one of a series in Darwin, Kununurra, Broome, Carnarvon and Kalgoorlie, which will give Australians outside the capital cities an opportunity to put their views and their concerns to the committee. This is a very broad ranging inquiry, and matters raised in submissions so far include the attitudes of young people, the work ethic of young people and their familiarity with the requirements of the workplace, the adequacy and relevance of the education and training systems, the importance of developing better linkages between schools and the business sector, the need for a more flexible industrial relations system and the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs to assist young people to find employment.

That is not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues that the committee will consider or which might be raised. We are entirely open to the views of everyone who wishes to make an input to the committee. We are here to listen, to learn and to help improve the prospects of young Australians. I welcome representatives of the Henry Walker Group and the Northern Territory Mining Industry Training Advisory Board.

[4.03 p.m.]

COURT, Mr Gilmour Alexander, Executive Officer, Northern Territory Mining Industry Training Advisory Board, 75 Woods Street, Darwin, Northern Territory 0822

MURRAY, Mrs Karen Leslie, Company Secretary, Northern Territory, and Manager, Aboriginal Employment Strategy, Henry Walker Group Ltd, 1059 Stuart Highway, Berrimah, Northern Territory 0828

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us today. As I have said to almost everybody whom we have talked to, this is not an inquiry into unemployment; it is an inquiry into employment. Essentially, we are trying to come to grips with two things: firstly, how to make young people more employable and, secondly, how to find more jobs for them all over the place. Having said that, would you each or both like to make a brief opening statement before we start to ask you questions?

Mrs Murray—My company is essentially a contracting company, as opposed to a mining house or such like, which undertakes civil engineering activities as well. The company works right throughout Australia, particularly in the northern regions of it and very remote areas. In doing so, it has identified a need to train and employ more Aboriginal people to use in these remote areas instead of flying people in and out as is the case at the moment.

In the past we trained young people simply by allowing them to get on machines during lunch hours, smoko breaks and what have you. That is how they gained the experience that was necessary to employ them full time throughout the company. Today, however, that has changed, mainly due to the occupational health and safety requirements that we work within and other training issues. So we cannot allow young people to simply jump on to a machine. Also, the machines themselves have changed. They are bigger. Technology has changed. We just cannot allow these kids—if I can use that term—to get on the machines.

What we do for recruitment is look for experienced people. This includes the Aboriginal people. Throughout the company we recruit experienced operators who have had a number of years experience. You tend to find that these people move within the industry. Our company, as such, does not have a training program for youth or young people for a number of reasons. In broad terms, that probably best describes our situation.

Having said that, we developed a strategy specifically for Aboriginal people in remote areas to address something that we needed as a company in terms of utilising local resources in our mining operations and contracting operations in these very remote areas. That involved not only employing but also training Aboriginal people. To do that, we have had to deal with a number of things, including numeracy and literacy problems. In fact,

we are now implementing WELL programs in any of our operations that involve this strategy.

We are finding that these people are very skilled at operating machines, but they lack the numeracy and literacy skills that are needed to address the occupational health and safety standards that we operate under. That strategy has been implemented over the last 12 months. It has a five-year life. Now if we want to employ young people in these communities, we are going to have to do a similar thing, even in the future, in terms of WELL training in numeracy and literacy.

As an example, we have 26 Aboriginal trainees at one of our operations on Groote Eylandt and all of them will undertake numeracy and literacy training. Out of all of that group, the best level is equivalent to a year 9, year 10 student in a normal school. Obviously some are very, very low. So, as we see it at this stage, even kids coming up or following these people through are still going to have that problem. We cannot see that changing in the short term. What we are hoping for is that, given we have a relatively high number of Aboriginal people employed in that operation, the kids there will look at these people as role models, and maybe that will change in time.

I guess there are two fundamental problems there. One is with the Aboriginal strategy in terms of numeracy and literacy. Whilst we are prepared to take these people on—I might add they are employed on full rates, the same as any other person employed by the company in that operation—we do seek and obtain training subsidies from the government to assist us with that because there is a direct cost associated with it.

Wherever else we do the strategy, we have a similar problem in that we have to pay these people full wage rates. It can be a little difficult at times, given that they are effectively trainees in many respects. That is probably my experience so far from Henry Walker's point of view. From an industry sense, Gil could probably comment further.

Mr Court—The Northern Territory Mining Industry Training Advisory Board is a body set up with Commonwealth funds to represent the minerals industry and to advise government bodies on the training needs of the industry—training for current and future needs so that the skills needed by the industry can be developed and maintained.

At the moment in the Northern Territory there are about 4,000 people working directly in the mining industry, so it is a fairly small industry in numbers. But, according to the statistics, it produces 20 per cent of the gross national product of the territory, so it is a very significant industry as far as the Northern Territory's production is concerned.

Of that 4,000 work force, unfortunately I do not have the figures to give you which represent the numbers of people from 15 through to 24, which is the group I believe you are interested in. But, by the statutes, no-one under the age of 16 can work in an open-cut mine; and in an underground mine 18 is the minimum age. At the one end of the age

scale, people are limited to certain ages to be able to work on a mine site.

The projected figures for apprentices and office trainees in 1988, which is next year, is 40. So 40 out of about 4,000 will give you an idea of the intake of people into the industry as apprentices or office trainees. That is not looking at people who are operatives or young people who are coming in as tertiary graduates, or whatever. Those sorts of figures we have not been able to get out of the statistics, unfortunately.

One of the trends in the industry that we are particularly aware of is the trend to contracting. More and more of the operations of mining companies are being contracted out, particularly with regard to the extraction and processing of ore. A more significant proportion of the work force each year is the number of people employed by contractors. I think, as Karen mentioned before, contractors are in the business of competing with a whole lot of other companies and are keen to cut their operational costs. Part of this, of course, is to recruit the best possible labour they can and to reduce down time on machinery. So it does not open the way up for taking on young people.

Current issues in the industry are to do with the development of pools of skilled labour in remote areas. Inevitably, minerals get found and developed in the least accessible places. One of the more expensive parts of getting labour to mine sites is its transport. So fly in-fly out operations are fairly expensive, although they are not as expensive as in situ towns.

One of the big efforts in the industry at the moment is to try to involve more and more of the indigenous people who live in the remote areas. So access and equity issues are areas of current concern and current research. The issue that dominates the whole question of access and equity is the skill level of people who want to get entry into the industry. For young people, this usually relates to literacy and numeracy as well as skills associated with experience in work of some sort. I think that is sufficient as an opening statement.

CHAIR—In a session we have just had with young people, one of them asked us a question that we could not answer; perhaps you could help us with it. Why is unemployment so low in the Northern Territory?

Mr Court—I think it is because we still are a frontier. We do not have the family networks—and I am not talking about Aboriginal people now; I am talking about non-indigenous people. So, if a person comes to the Top End looking for work and there is none, they are more likely to return south, back to the family they come from or their network of friends and supporters. I do not believe that those networks operate as much in the Northern Territory as they do in the southern states.

Mrs Murray—I think you will find too that a lot of the children who are going on to tertiary education and university do not necessarily stay here to do it; they would

perhaps move down south and, in doing so, stay there and not come back. I also believe that there is an attitude generally—and this is my own opinion—that, if you do want a job, you can generally find work in the territory, not necessarily in what you would ideally like to do, but certainly in the meantime you can find work. I think a lot of work has been generated with the defence forces moving up here. Also, there is a lot of building activity here. That is really the only answer that I could perhaps suggest.

Mr BARRESI—Does trade development on its own provide opportunities for locals?

Mr Court—It does, in smaller numbers.

Mrs Murray—It does, but on a smaller scale than you would imagine.

CHAIR—All over Australia one of the things we have heard over and over again, particularly from young people, is that, with today's rapidly changing nature of work and relatively high levels of year 12 retention compared with those of 15 to 20 years ago, young people seem to be poorly advised with respect to what career options and paths are available to them, other than just going to university. Can you tell us what the mining industry in the Northern Territory is doing to try to help alleviate that problem?

Mr Court—Yes. The industry, through the Northern Territory Minerals Council, has a program where teachers are taken onto a mine site for periods of time—two or three days, perhaps a week—and given first-hand knowledge of what it is like to be on a mine site and what actual jobs are done on that mine site. They are given every opportunity to have any questions answered. They can go virtually anywhere that they would find of interest. The whole idea is to give them first-hand appreciation of the environment and also the work that is done.

CHAIR—Not one of the young people to whom we spoke today indicated the mining industry as a career option. Most of them said that their careers advice was almost non-existent—except for one school, where they said it was excellent.

Mrs Murray—Just to follow up from Gil, the Minerals Council also has an education program called 'Minerals Magic', which is an information training kit that is taken to primary schools. It is hands on, it is interactive and it has minerals and all sorts of things. In fact, it is used throughout Australia but it is targeted at primary schoolkids.

As Gil said, teachers are taken out on familiarisation trips. I think one during the school holidays went to the Tanami Desert out of Alice Springs. They are also in the process of developing a similar kit specifically for remote areas and, in particular, Aboriginal people, taking into account cultural problems and issues, again to make kids aware—and again it is primary schoolkids as opposed to high school kids—of the mining industry and how it impacts on their environment and everything else that goes with that.

CHAIR—When you tell us that you have significant problems with the literacy and numeracy of your clients, is the school the place to be introducing what careers are all about when you are asking for better literacy and better numeracy standards?

Mrs Murray—I believe so. In the implementation of my company's strategy, this has been identified as one of the major problems that we are going to have to address; we are talking about young Aboriginal people, and older Aboriginal people too. Because we have to work within our clients' occupational health and safety requirements and our own as a company, we cannot just employ people and put them on a traineeship knowing full well that they cannot read the safety signs, and things like that.

CHAIR—I think you have missed the point. You are wanting to crowd the primary school curriculum with one more item of curricula, one more course, in the mining industry or the retail industry or whatever—

Mrs Murray—No, it is a training aid; it is a teaching aid.

Mr Court—I would not see it from that point of view. I think the need for the developing of basic skills within primary school—those skills being basic literacy and numeracy—has not worked in Australia for a lot of kids. There is a proportion of children who will have learning disabilities, which is well documented. They will come into secondary school without those skills and will need special help, which some of them get.

But the whole idea of providing education in the mining industry is to start that process young, to let children know from an early age that there are careers out there. But that will not make any difference in terms of achieving literacy and numeracy which, if you are to achieve that, is something that not even educationalists will agree on. I think it is a problem for the community, parents and educationalists.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Can you give us a little bit of career history for the 26 Aboriginal trainees you referred to, how long is the traineeship, what are the career prospects of those people once they have completed their traineeship, the selection process and what needs to be done to try to get more people into that career path?

Mrs Murray—That particular traineeship was developed specifically for our operations on Groote Eylandt, which are essentially civil operations as opposed to mining. It does all sorts of subcontract work to our client. The traineeship was developed in conjunction with the local people, with the industry training advisory boards, specifically the Manufacturing and Engineering ITAB and the Automotive ITAB. We identified the various job streams in our operation and then selected from an accredited training program the modules that suited that operation. It also went so far as to address the community's needs. An example that I have used in the past is that there is a module in there that deals with maintenance on an outboard motor. If one of the trainees would like to do that module, they can do so and be fully accredited for it. So what we are doing is not only, in

an Aboriginal community, looking at the individuals; we are looking at the community and taking into account their needs, which, in an Aboriginal society, you do need to do.

Of the 26 people under that traineeship, practically all of them were already fully employed by Henry Walker. With the implementations of strategy, we identified the need to put in a traineeship so that they could become accredited for what they are doing and get recognition for what they are doing. It involves RPL assessment—recognition of prior learning. The training program is all on the job delivery. We could not block release these people because it has been tried in the past and does not work effectively. Once they went onto that traineeship, we did seek funding from the government—wage subsidies, in which we were successful. We spoke to the trainees as a group and explained to them the training program—what it meant, where it would take them—which was year 1 of a two-year course called a Foundation and Engineering Traineeship.

The interesting thing about that was that, when we did this and explained to them that some would move through it quicker than others because some had been working for Henry Walker, on and off, on the island for a number of years, as a group they discussed this and said that they would prefer to go together as a group through the training program; that they would wait for the stragglers to catch up. They are actually charting this on a monthly basis, as they go through and complete each module.

We obviously have an attendance problem, which is pretty typical, but they are addressing that in a similar manner. With those people who are not attending, it is being highlighted and charted and they are being counselled. Again, it comes back to a community approach in that the group—the community, if you like—is going through this training program. At the moment it seems to be working reasonably well. Out of that came the need to address numeracy and literacy issues which meant implementing a WELL program for that operation.

There is great encouragement to us in that there are a number of Aboriginal people from that community wanting to work for our company because we have ended up with what we term as a critical mass of Aboriginal people. In other words, 70 per cent of our work force are Aboriginal. So they are very comfortable in that environment. We have the situation where we have more people wanting to come in and work because they are working with their own group of people. They can talk in Anindilyakwa, in their own language. They can talk on the radio in their own language. So it is very comfortable for them. The only thing stopping us is the amount of work that we have on hand.

To answer your question, it is a combination of a number of things, probably the most important thing being that you have a large number of people working there in an environment that they are comfortable in and eagerness for others to come into that.

Mr BARRESI—Have any of them moved into other jobs in other organisations? In other words, has your company been seen as a great recruitment source for other

industries in the territory because you have done a lot of this up-front work to get the Aboriginal people into some sort of work ethic situation?

Mrs Murray—With traditional people, which you have on Groote Eylandt and in a number of other centres, you will find that they do not want to move away. They have no intention of moving away any great distance. They are quite happy to stay within that community. Some do; I am not saying that some don't. But generally, we look at training these people and they will stay there, which in some respects is very good for us.

CHAIR—Would either of you know how Aboriginal employment has changed or grown or remained static or whatever at Gove, Nabalco?

Mr Court—Are you talking about across the Northern Territory?

CHAIR—No, Nabalco, Gove.

Mr Court—No, I could not comment on Nabalco.

Mrs Murray—I believe that the recruitment and training of Aboriginal people is undertaken by YBE, Yirrkala Business Enterprises, in conjunction with Nabalco. I am not sure about the numbers. I could not comment. Nabalco would have to answer that.

Mr BARRESI—Gil, as part of the Mining Industry Training Advisory Board, although we do not have a submission from you, we did receive a submission from the central industry body. They are talking about introducing a single linear apprenticeship system and scrapping traineeships. Are you moving down that path as well as part of their plan? My concern is that I would have thought—perhaps it is an ignorance and not understanding what a single linear apprenticeship system is all about—there would have been an advantage in having traineeships because the programs themselves are much more short-term based rather than an apprenticeship, which is four years in terms of a commitment that a young kid has to make.

Mr Court—Certainly the industry here has just had accredited with the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority a mining operation certificate—certificate 2 level in the Australian qualifications framework. It is an entry level. It is designed as a traineeship, all of which can be done on the job using company trainers. It is targeting anyone, be it indigenous or non-indigenous, to develop generic and specific skills in the mining industry—in the driving of equipment, operating plant, both static and mobile.

From there it is hoped to develop further courses which will link to that certificate to take them up a career progression into higher levels, which would require them to have the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to do that. Normally a traineeship would be done in conjunction with the development of literacy and numeracy. I would be the first to add that literacy and numeracy is not just for indigenous people. There are a lot of non-

indigenous people who need the same sort of support. We have migrants here as well and we have a lot of Australian born people whose skills are very low because they too haven't gone to school for whatever reason.

We are certainly not identifying any particular group. Across the board there are lots of people interested in working in the mining industry whose skills are holding them back.

Mrs Murray—With the WELL program—it is not only us but there are a number of places that have had it implemented—a lot of non-Aboriginal people express an interest in taking advantage of that program that is on that site, up to supervisory level and even higher in terms of report writing and other issues. It is really open to all people.

Mr Court—To finish off that question, the Northern Territory industry has identified traineeships as a means of developing these pools of labour in the remoter areas. Traineeships are the only way to go. They still want apprenticeships as such, or whatever the new term is—new apprenticeship or whatever—but I cannot see us dropping these now that we finally have them on the board and want to run with them.

Mr BARRESI—The stereotypical view of the mining industry is one of lots of hard labour and high risk and go in there make a quick buck—maybe not so quick but certainly in terms of an overall career perspective, you may work there for five years and slave away and then move on. There is a high transition rate. Are you finding in the territory that that is a pervasive attitude that exists, more so than perhaps some of the other mining towns around Australia, because of that frontier aspect that you were talking about before, Karen?

Mr Court—We are part of Australia. I couldn't comment on Western Australia though. Aren't they going to secede or something?

Mr BARRESI—We will find out, if they let us into Kununurra tonight.

Mrs Murray—It is not just in the Northern Territory. It is across the board. From a contractor's perspective, you go into a mining operation—which could be five years or 10 years or what have you—but, when that finishes, everything finishes. You get a great circulation of people within the industry, moving from job to job. The traineeship as such is good, in that it is over a short space of time and is flexible and mobile. People can do a module here or there, and then, in time, when it becomes a national initiative, move from job to job and increase their skills as they go—or their qualifications. You need that flexibility and also the ability to have on-site, on-the-job training.

Mr Court—Apart from some of the skills that are in demand at the tertiary level, like geologists and geophysicists, et cetera, it is usually very difficult to get into the mining industry at any middle level, because people, even though they might change

companies, stay within the industry because, if they were to go out of the industry, they would drop alarmingly in their income. It is a highly paid industry. So you could go to any mining site—Nabalco, GEMCo or ERA—and find people who had been there 10 or 15 or 20 years. And then you could see other people that might have only been there one year or two, but they have come from another mine site. So the industry tends to hold onto the skills that it has, and the opportunities for getting in are pretty tough. The biggest problem faced by the mining industry, in terms of skills, is to keep up with the latest developments in electronics and those sorts of fields where what has been learnt and developed overseas has to be taken on board so that they can remain competitive.

CHAIR—To what extent did fringe benefits tax, which taxed remote area housing, have an effect on the transition to fly in-fly out, and what effect would its removal have?

Mrs Murray—It was one issue, looking back. Fly in-fly out certainly attracted fringe benefits tax, but there was also the issue of infrastructure in establishing these camps and townships where they were not near a regional centre. There were a lot of other costs associated too. But fringe benefits tax would certainly have impacted on that. To what degree, I could not tell you, without consulting the company further, but it certainly was a consideration.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You highlighted here the question we are all aware of: with industry moving to contracting more and more, industry is not training the same number of people it did in the past. Has your industry got any plans to counteract this problem and train additional people?

Mr Court—Not that I am currently aware of. As you would be aware, our industry is very much dominated by a number of mining houses, both Australian based and overseas based, and those sorts of decisions are usually taken at board level. I do not know if there is any simple answer to that. The trend to contracting is that, with mineral prices fluctuating—and gold in particular having gone to a fairly low level at the moment—organisations can become very marginal very quickly. Exchange rates change. So, particularly for contract mining, the greater control of costs that you can exercise—and that means keeping your equipment up and running and getting good production, which usually comes out of experienced operators and experienced maintenance people—there is not the room to take trainees on board. It cannot be justified in terms of the bottom line.

This can only be done by the bigger mining houses that believe they have some sort of community responsibility and have in situ operations where contracting is not so important to them. So, if they have a recruitment policy which says they have to employ the sons and daughters of the employees they want to hang on to, then, no doubt, they will have traineeships and apprenticeships for them. But, if they have a fly in-fly out operation, as a lot of mining companies do now—as the previous question indicated—their recruitment policies are different. So there is not the need to provide employment for the people who are following on in the footsteps of their parents.

CHAIR—I think we had best move on because our time is short.

Mr BARRESI—I have a quick question. Industrial relations has often been cited as an impediment to employment growth by various people, and others would dispute that. There have been significant changes to the industrial relations legislation through the Workplace Relations Act last year. In what way is the mining industry now using those new laws to help in terms of creating opportunities, whether it be young kids or just in general?

Mr Court—I do not think there is any doubt they will have increased the number of trainees who will be taken on by mining companies because they can make use of the lower wage structures associated with traineeships. I do not think it would be anything else other than that that would do it, because really the industry is looking for more the experienced, mature person for their work force. I do not think they are against young people per se. It is just that, because of the nature of the operations and the high level of capital equipment, et cetera, they want to guarantee that for the life of the equipment they are going to get the best possible result out of it. That is not usually done with novice operators.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We hope to finish our inquiry at the end of June and write our report in August or early September. We will certainly be pleased to send you a copy. Thank you for your participation today.

[4.38 p.m.]

MARTIN, Ms Tressna Jane, Coordinator, Darwin TRAC Association, PO Box 40419, Casuarina, Northern Territory 0811

CHAIR—Welcome. Is there anything you want to add about the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Martin—TRAC is a private provider linking schools and industry through work experience type programs which involve students going to work placement or training for one day of their school week.

CHAIR—Were you here when we talked to the kids and one of the kids asked us why there is so little unemployment in the Northern Territory?

Ms Martin—Yes.

CHAIR—I would be interested in your response.

Ms Martin—I think, as Karen said, because it is a frontier town and things are growing still at a rapid pace. When we were looking for premises, it was found that there are no actual empty buildings, whereas if you go to some of the bigger cities, Adelaide or Sydney, you find a lot of vacated buildings. I think that is an indication of the growth of Darwin: there are not any vacated buildings at the moment because things are still growing, industry is still growing. I think that is one of the reasons. Because we are growing so much, there are a lot of employment opportunities.

CHAIR—Tell us about how many young people you have through your program, where you have them placed and how many of Darwin's schools are involved, or do you also go to Katherine or beyond?

Ms Martin—In Darwin we have 45 stage 1 TRAC students; that is the equivalent of year 11. We started off with seven stage 2 students, which is the equivalent of year 12. They are in three strands: we have hospitality, retail and office. Most of the students are in retail strand, although most would like to be in hospitality strand.

We give them an interview before they are actually accepted into TRAC, and the interview is with two of the employers in that area as well as the TRAC coordinator. So they come in as if they are going to a job interview. They come in dressed appropriately, with a resume, and they state their reasons for wanting to be in TRAC. The basis of their acceptance is their motivation to work in the industry of their choice.

They might not know where they want to work so, for instance, if they say they want to be in hospitality they might not know whether they want to be in housekeeping or

in a hotel or be the general manager of the Beaufort. But if they know they want to be in hospitality and they are keen and enthusiastic then they are generally accepted.

The grades do not make much of a difference. If we think they can handle TRAC as well as the other subjects—and TRAC is actually a subject going towards their HSC—as long as we know they can cope with it, it does not really matter about their grades. We do offer coaching as well if they do fall behind. So the basis is motivation. The employers are there and they accept the students on behalf of the other TRAC employers.

Mr BARRESI—Do you accept any students who do not want to use that work experience or that opportunity as a step into a career—in other words, they have their minds set on going to university but they want to at least have a wider experience on the way?

Ms Martin—Generally, they are accepted if they want a career in that area. So if they want to have a career in retail or a career in hospitality then they are generally accepted. If they want to be a brain surgeon and they want to just try hospitality or whatever they are generally not accepted.

Mr BARRESI—Most of those kids that we saw today would not qualify for your program.

Ms Martin—But half of them would.

Mr BARRESI—Probably about 90 per cent of them put their hand up to say they wanted to go on to university.

Ms Martin—A lot of those university things they wanted to go on to would have been things like hospitality and that sort of thing. There were actually some TRAC students in the audience.

CHAIR—How many secondary schools are there in Darwin? Were they all here?

Ms Martin—No, they were not all here. There are 11 high schools. All of the schools are invited to participate. We have seven that do participate, and the reasons why the others do not participate are mostly timetabling problems. They have other subjects that they want the students to do rather than TRAC. Mainly, those are Catholic schools that do religious instruction instead of vocational education.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Could I just say that I think it is an excellent scheme. Listening to the young people this afternoon also, it seemed that their criticism was that they were not getting enough work experience and the right type of work experience, which obviously TRAC does provide. So what could be done for you to increase the participation rate in the TRAC program of young people in this area?

Ms Martin—I think it is more education. We go around to the schools twice a year: once at the end of the year before they make their year 11 selections and once before mid-term before they make the second semester selections. But not all of the students turn up, so they do not know about TRAC.

The other thing is that in a lot of places the teachers do not seem to have the right attitude to vocational education as yet in that they tend to try to steer the weaker students towards vocational education, forgetting that the students that are more academically minded might not necessarily want to go to university but they are steered in the direction. So they tend to keep their best students at school rather than put them in a vocational program.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are there other classifications that TRAC covers besides what you have detailed here in the summary with retail, office and hospitality? Are there any other TRAC programs?

Ms Martin—In Tasmania they have a fishing TRAC. There is automotive TRAC and, hopefully, in the territory we are going to be starting up a mining TRAC. But that is still under discussion.

Mr BARRESI—I thought fishing might have been an option up here as well.

Ms Martin—I hope there are no fishing people here, but it is a fairly closed business here. It is very—dare I say it—cliquey. Fishing and shipping in general are fairly much that way.

Mr BARRESI—One of the criticisms that has been levelled by a number of kids—and today was a good example of that—was the lack of structure of their work experience program. Most of the kids felt really disillusioned when they got there and were simply being a spare pair of hands. Your program has overcome that to some extent and you have developed a credibility over it. We could point the finger and say vocational teachers are just not preparing the kids well enough. Is there anything that TRAC can do to be able to assist in that wider program of putting together work experience programs with structure, even though it may not fall under your umbrella?

Ms Martin—I think the ASTF is developing things to help vocational teachers towards the same sort of TRAC model. Whereas you have specific task books or log books that the students have to get through for certain tasks, it more or less explains to their workplace supervisor that this student is not here to wash windows or mop the floor but they are here to learn things like communication skills, telephone skills—a wide variety of things—to see what the business is generally about. It is not, as one of the students said, ‘a bludge week’ or slave labour; it is actually a partnership between the schools and industry to actually teach the students some skills.

But TRAC also runs supervisors evenings and a couple of supervisors days, so people in industry are coming to the supervisors evening and they are learning how to do basic training and assessment so they can judge whether a student is competent at something or not. That helps as well.

Mr BARRESI—How are you finding your efforts in trying to come up with more and more supervisors or placements? Have you reached saturation point here in Darwin, or are there opportunities but you are limited somehow?

Ms Martin—Because TRAC has a \$150 contribution from the employers for each student they have, that seems to be a fairly major hurdle. When a student goes out to an employer, the employer donates \$150 to the program.

Mr BARRESI—To you.

Ms Martin—To us—to the program. Where a lot of employers have no problems with that because they understand what is going on and how they can benefit from it in the future, a lot of employers have the attitude, ‘We are training the students. Why do we have to pay as well?’ and that is a very valid point. In a lot of ways there is no real incentive for the employers to take on trainees or work experience students in that fashion because they are actually training them. It is not slave labour and it is not a free ride for them. In that fashion an incentive for the employer would be fantastic. It would be great.

Mr BARRESI—Do you get any money at all from the government, whether it be the territory or the federal government?

Ms Martin—We are different education departments.

Mr BARRESI—What is the breakdown?

Ms Martin—More or less 50-50 from the government and industry. We also do vocational education courses and we run a retail traineeship, so funds from those programs also help the TRAC program.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How long has TRAC been operating in Darwin and have you had the opportunity of looking at the success rate of students who have been through the program?

Ms Martin—Yes. It has been running for three years. Our success rate: we would have about 80 per cent of our students that have gained full-time or part-time employment with our TRAC employers. One of the difficulties is that where a student goes to the first or second employer they often want to keep them and say, ‘I do not want them in the program any more. I want to keep them on as a trainee.’

Mr MOSSFIELD—But is that bad, if it leads into a full-time job?

Ms Martin—It depends on what their parents want them to do. A lot of them are pressured by the parents who say, ‘Go to university first’ or whatever. A lot of them do accept part-time or weekend work or whatever, so that is really good in that way.

We have had a case where we accepted a student from a school and the school said more or less to us, ‘Thank God you have taken that student because the student is a no-hoper. We can’t do anything with him. He’s going to drop out.’ He went to his first TRAC placement and they rang up after two weeks and said, ‘Sorry, he can’t continue in the TRAC program any more,’ and I was thinking, ‘Oh no, the school is right.’ What had happened was that the employer had found him so interested, motivated and hardworking that they kept him on as a trainee. In that sort of situation, the students’ attitudes are caused by what they are interested in and what they find is relevant in the schools rather than anything else.

CHAIR—I assume that, in terms of numbers of young people, you are limited more by employers than you are by the schools?

Ms Martin—Yes, definitely. We had about 80 students applying for TRAC this year and we accepted 50. That is when we stopped doing interviews.

CHAIR—That is not bad because we have talked to heaps of group training companies and others dealing in apprenticeships and traineeships where a 10 per cent acceptance rate is like McDonald’s—if they open a new store, less than 10 per cent of the kids will get a job. So you are doing pretty well, aren’t you?

Ms Martin—Yes.

CHAIR—How do you go about encouraging more of Darwin’s employers to accept the program?

Ms Martin—Mostly either I or one of my employees goes around and cold canvasses. We knock on doors. That is the only way that we really get employers. We have had one person come to us in response to a television ad, and one person came to us because another employer told her about TRAC and he decided that it was a really good idea, but the rest have come through wearing out shoe leather.

CHAIR—If you had the opportunity to make one of the recommendations in our report that would make more places available for more kids, what would the recommendation be?

Ms Martin—An employer incentive.

CHAIR—An employer incentive for TRAC?

Ms Martin—For any sort of training.

CHAIR—Are the young people paid?

Ms Martin—No.

CHAIR—They are not paid at all?

Ms Martin—No.

CHAIR—Does Mike Heap take any of your TRAC kids?

Ms Martin—Yes.

CHAIR—How many?

Ms Martin—It depends on the season, but during busier seasons one a term.

CHAIR—Very good.

Mr BARRESI—This is all very interesting for me, Tressna. What does an employer get for his 150 bucks?

Ms Martin—The student.

Mr BARRESI—There is obviously a marketing exercise involved here on your behalf to get more employers so what do they get for their \$150?

Ms Martin—What we basically explain to them is that, as well as their public-spiritedness and good-heartedness, they get a pool of potential employees. All the TRAC employers around Darwin are training TRAC students and in the end there is this pool of students who, when they come out of school, say, 'Here is my TRAC certificate. These are the skills that I have learnt.' When they come into the work force, they are still 17 or 18. They have already got the skills so they do not have to say, 'I am too old for your traineeship wage or whatever' but they also know how to say, 'I have been unemployed.' They can come straight from school and say, 'Yes, here are my skills.'

Mr BARRESI—So it comes as a recognisable certificate that they can add to their year 12 certificate?

Ms Martin—Definitely. The employers also get staff development through the supervisor training, and we offer free use of our training rooms for functions and things.

Mr BARRESI—Who carries the risk of that kid? This is what I am trying to get at in terms of why they get \$150. Do you carry the risk in terms of the workers compensation?

Ms Martin—Yes. That is all done through the education department.

Mr BARRESI—And in terms of dismissal of the person if their employment does not work out?

Ms Martin—Yes, that is my job, basically. The students are covered by normal student insurance. I hasten to add that we pick our employers as carefully as we pick the students. If they do not work out on the job—and sometimes they do not because of personality clash or because that student is not suited to that particular job—we can move them around; that is fine.

Mr BARRESI—So there is low risk involved for the employer. What about continuing counselling or mentoring? Do you provide that or is it the supervisor who does that because they have been trained through your course?

Ms Martin—Both. In a term of 10 weeks, the students come to the training centre for three weeks. They come to us and we teach them basics like communication and phone skills. When they go out to the employers for the next seven weeks, they are actually practising those skills—or hopefully they are. They are practising the skills that they learnt in theory in the work force. Even when they start with the TRAC employer, they have got a few basic skills. The first thing we teach them is how to answer the telephone so that, if the employers or supervisors are busy, at least the student can sit at the telephone and take that over for a little while.

Mr BARRESI—From what I can see, all of it is geared to working with the kids who are still in the school system. Do you do any work at all with kids who are not in the school system, who are long-term unemployed high risk?

Ms Martin—Yes. We have pre-vocational courses that are mostly funded by NTETA, which is our state training authority and, therefore, are open to at risk students or long-term unemployed. It is open to anybody, to any age. They can come along to our pre-vocational courses and learn skills in retailing. The courses we run are between four and nine weeks long.

Mr BARRESI—What percentage of your intake is made up of those kids?

Ms Martin—They are totally separate.

Mr BARRESI—How many do you have on your books at the moment?

Ms Martin—We have just finished a pre-vocational course of 12 students and we are doing another one for skillshare next week. That is for four weeks. Hopefully, in June or July, we will have another seven-week course. Around 20 students enrol for those courses. We actually get about 12 who turn up and, out of that, we have seven or eight who continue through it. Obviously, the shorter the course, the more people finish it.

CHAIR—You were also here when the young people today told us that they thought that work for the dole ought to be compulsory. In dealing with the other side of your job, not the TRAC kids, could you give us your view of the kids' view?

Ms Martin—I think they are rather naive. I would like to hear their opinions in about five years time, after they have been out in the work force for a while and seen what really goes on.

CHAIR—Would you like to expand on that a little?

Ms Martin—I do not really see how it can work or how it can be enforced, to tell you the truth. In the end, it is going to work out far more expensive than employment benefits are now.

CHAIR—What about their view that too many young people see the dole as a carrot? How do we deal with that?

Ms Martin—I do not know; I could not answer that. One of my colleagues suggested today that we should take these students with this sort of attitude to the soup kitchens and St Vinnies and say, 'This is what happens to people who lose all motivation and have no work or no job'. Maybe we should take them out to the long grass communities and places like that where people have just sort of dropped out of society. But I do not know whether that would work either. I do not know whether there are any quick answers.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming to talk to us today. We appreciate your input. As I have told the others, we will finish in June and try to write a report in August or early September. We would be pleased to send you and your organisation a copy of our final report.

Ms Martin—Thank you. I have brought a backpack with student outcomes and things in it. I have one for everyone.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[5.01 p.m.]

HARPER, Mr Henry, Community Education Coordinator, Arnhem Land Progress Association, PO Box 3825, Darwin, Northern Territory 0801

CHAIR—Henry, thank you for coming along to talk with us this afternoon. We are an all party committee of the parliament. We are not the government. Our report will be to the parliament but it is up to the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs to respond to our recommendation. We would be hopeful that we could recommend some factors which might really help young people to become more employable and employers to make more positions available for them.

Since you did not give us a submission, Henry, would you like to make a brief opening statement to the issues that we are here to discuss today before we start to ask you questions.

Mr Harper—The organisation that I work for—it is called ALPA for short—is a wholly Aboriginal owned retail association that is based in eastern Arnhem Land. It has been running since 1972 without any government assistance. It is a normal business chain. It operates five supermarkets in eastern Arnhem Land. Collectively those five supermarkets are owned by the Arnhem Land Progress Association. The members of the association are the Aboriginal people who live in those five communities. So collectively the people of those five communities own the five businesses and head office and all the rest of it.

In addition to those five businesses, we operate another eight remote community supermarkets in locations across the top of Australia, as far away as Noonkanbah to the west and Umbakumba to the east and a small place near Borroloola called Robinson River. Our representation is basically across the top of Australia.

As well as running supermarkets, we are registered training providers, primarily for retail skills. The organisation has a developmental philosophy. The constitutional aim of the organisation is social and economic development for the members. They are using the supermarkets as a source of employment and as a source of funds to pursue social and economic objectives for the members.

CHAIR—Where are the five supermarkets in east Arnhem Land?

Mr Harper—Starting from the west, near Cobourg Peninsula is one island called Croker Island. The community there is called Minjilang. It is a fairly small community of about 130 people. Travelling further east there is Milingimbi, Ramingining, Elcho Island and Lake Evella. Those are the easiest names. I can give you Aboriginal names as well.

The organisation was started in 1972. They were originally Methodist missions

which became Uniting Church missions. ALPA was incorporated as a developmental initiative of the Uniting Church in 1972. Things were changing; a cash economy was developing and the people of the day saw that as a good opportunity to use this as a development tool. The association employs about 120 Aboriginal people.

CHAIR—How many of those are our age—15 to 24?

Mr Harper—Very few. The largest representative group in the supermarket staff is women. Most of the women, who would be considered young women, would be aged 20 and upwards. Before the age of 20 is traditionally a time for young people who have their own classification, so they are not inclined to go into work until a little later. Up to the age of 25 would account for a maximum at any one time of 30 per cent.

Probably 28 to 30 per cent of the 100 employees now have long service leave entitlements. People come and they stay. Like normal retail turnover, down the bottom end there is a fairly high turnover. Once that is sorted out, there is a very stable work force.

CHAIR—In Alice Springs one group of three people, including a pastor, who just about made us cry, was talking about one young girl who was doing reasonably well in school and wanted to work. She continued with her studies. It was either a TRAC program or something else that put her on the job for one day a week. Then she got an after-hours school job. As I recall, it was with Woolies in Alice Springs. What really finished her off was that every payday all of her extended family was sitting on the footpath outside the door waiting for her to come out with her pay. Eventually it destroyed her initiative. Have you experienced that kind of problem?

Mr Harper—Absolutely. That is the reality we work with. There are only extended families. We are looking at a very traditional structure. The traditional economic, legal and social structure determines who works in the stores. Someone may be competent vocationally, may be a very bright achiever and may have everything going for them but if they are not strong and they do not have the parallel social and traditional cultural skills, it is very difficult for them to sustain a position.

The organisation has an all Aboriginal board of directors to work out the organisation functions because a large part of it overlaps with the social and cultural realities in the stores. At the same time we get everyone to pay for all the groceries and that sort of stuff.

CHAIR—Which might be difficult.

Mr Harper—You should bear in mind that there are no police there. If someone shoplifts, we cannot ring up and get the police. Largely, the stores run out of the operation and the understanding of the entire community—goodwill and education towards the entire community.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Just on that same subject, those people who work in the supermarkets do not have that same social pressure to distribute their money to other members of the family. Do they have the same social pressure as the younger people?

Mr Harper—Absolutely. This would be a factor, particularly because of the large proportion of our employees who are young women. They would hand over their pay to the family. As they have got regular employment, they would be used to guarantee loans for motor vehicles and things like that. But on the positive side, because it is still a relatively traditional society where English might be a third or fourth language—you certainly do not use only English to talk to non-Aboriginal people—there is a support base as well as a demand base. A large part of the work that I do uses traditional Aboriginal legal, economic and social structures to explain contemporary economic and social structures of organisations like ALPA, so we do cross-cultural economics and things like that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How many non-Aboriginal people would be employed in the association?

Mr Harper—Just under 50.

Mr MOSSFIELD—In what capacity?

Mr Harper—Mostly management.

Mr MOSSFIELD—This committee is looking at the issue of the employment of young people. What suggestions can you make to this committee in relation to assisting Aboriginal young people to get employment?

Mr Harper—There are a couple of issues. In remote communities, employment is extraordinarily high. As a percentage of the population, the people that are employed would be about 10 per cent. I do not have the statistics relating to the number of people who are in the work force who are over 15 and under 50 or whatever. But just in raw data, if there are 300 people in a place, approximately 30 have jobs. This is largely because Aboriginal communities are social realities; they are not economic ones. For example, there is a mining town in Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula. It is established for an economic purpose, so all the people go there and most people have got jobs. In these cases they are there because the people are there. We are always looking for economic opportunities to provide employment, but largely there will never be that many jobs. That is the reality.

In terms of efficiencies, people will relate to you that in the mission days there used to be a team of people building all the houses and doing all the jobs and all the rest of it. But in terms of relative efficiency, it is much cheaper to subcontract out the work to a non-Aboriginal housing company. Two or three non-Aboriginal people come in, work

very, very hard for seven days a week for three or four weeks, build the houses and go. So the contemporary realities work against increased employment.

As I said, the other factor is there are not that many jobs there. Most of my co-workers and colleagues are Aboriginal people. They see the education system in remote communities as having a credibility problem. For probably three or four generations now we have been saying to Aboriginal people, 'If you do this and this and go to school for a really long time—12 years or something—when you come out, this will be the outcome.' The people living in these places actually have a benchmark. In their traditional ceremonies—they are not invited into the ceremonies until they are ready—however long they take, when they come out they have the power and the authority. And whatever the particular ceremony is, they do get that recognition.

So for three or four generations now we have been asking them to go into this very, very long ceremony. We have been promising them a lot of things. When they get to the end and they are waiting for the jobs and whatever else we have been promising, they have not been there. The first time I had that presented to me it was a bit hard to swallow. But I can understand it. Anyway, I might stop there.

Mr BARRESI—On that issue, there are role models that they can see. Don't those help in getting that message across at all, or are they seen more as anomalies?

Mr Harper—For the 4,000 people that live in eastern Arnhem Land, the role models are Galarrwuy Yunupingu and Mandawuy Yunupingu, who is from Yothu Yindi, the band. They are about the only role models that people actually see who have sufficient power and glory and authority so that it sort of makes the whole thing worth while.

Mr BARRESI—But there are quite a few very successful Aboriginals who have gone on to university, who have created careers—whether or not it fits into their culture—and who can see that there is a reward at the end of that educational process.

Mr Harper—You are looking at what you and I would determine as Aboriginal people. If you come from eastern Arnhem Land, people's ethnocentric position of who Aboriginal people are people called Yulu, and this is how they look. This is one of the difficulties when you are talking about role models. With somebody outside that area—certainly someone who is not very black or who does not speak their traditional language—people will say, 'Well, they are not real.' There are a whole lot of reasons for that. I have tried to give examples of many of the aspiring role models that we would see and clearly identify, and people say, 'Come on!'. By and large, people are not seeing very many role models.

The organisation I work for has a reserve with scholarship funding in it and all the rest of it. So far no-one has been able to take it up. But there are a couple of reasons for that. Within the school system, a lot of the teachers who go there go there by last resort.

They do not really want to go to places like Ramingining or Milingimbi. But when you are No. 3,000 on the list for a job in Victoria, Milingimbi starts to look fairly good. In many ways people are struggling with their own stuff. The teachers are struggling with their own things. It is extremely difficult for any non-Aboriginal people to function in these places as a cultural minority. It is a bit like living in Thailand or somewhere for an extended period, only you are still in Australia.

People are getting all the way through school without a functional level of numeracy or literacy. The reason why that is so can be investigated. But that is one of the outcomes. The organisation that I work for is the largest independently funded employer of people in each of these communities. A lot of times we are actually looking for employees and we cannot get them, and our requirements are very minimal.

CHAIR—Since you are from the area, you might know how many Aboriginals now at Nhulunbuy are employed?

Mr Harper—Employed where?

CHAIR—At the mine site or in the tourism industry, for example.

Mr Harper—It is fairly minimal because with the mine, Yirrkala Business Enterprises has contracts relating to land care, to transport and so on. So they are peripheral to the main mining project. Those positions attract some Aboriginal participation, but at the actual mine itself the culture of the mine and the mine workers makes it very difficult for people to work there. It is a fairly alien type of culture and the people—

CHAIR—So there are still not very many in the processing plant?

Mr Harper—No. And I do not know whether I could work in a processing plant.

CHAIR—Really? I could. I did.

Mr Harper—I think it is the whole thing of coming in day after day and putting up with the all the noise and all the rest of it. In some ways it is people's socialisation about what is more important in life. You go back to world view and all sorts of stuff like that.

CHAIR—What do we do to better encourage young Aboriginal children to participate in schooling, to stick with it and to somehow see something at the end of it called a job and develop a work ethic?

Mr Harper—There are a couple of issues. One is that there are enormous misconceptions of how the people that I work with in eastern Arnhem Land view our

society. It is what would be termed in New Guinea in previous years as cargo cult mentality. People see enormous wealth around them that they never get a share of, so even when someone is earning a comparatively good salary or wage, or something like that, there is still the feeling that the real El Dorado is escaping them.

A lot of my work relates to that. Basically I work with post-primary and prevocational students occasionally and we also do work experience, but just about all the training courses that I run with Aboriginal colleagues relate to providing the big picture of how the Australian economy works—where the money comes from, where it goes and so on. That is probably something that would need to be incorporated, so it is project based stuff but deals with the reality, because what we are finding are similar problems emerging in mainstream society where young people are going into a labour market which they have no concept of because traditionally younger people and children had more opportunities to be exposed to employment. So I would say we need broader based education and making it project based so that literacy and numeracy are still incorporated, because that is a critical factor: if somebody manages to get all the way through without base level literacy and numeracy they cannot get a job.

The other issue is vocational streams starting at an earlier level, because we see Aboriginal boys at 15 or 16 being treated in their society as men. If we have got vocational streams relating specifically to the jobs that do exist in the communities—there are quite a few bookkeeping positions, there are health worker positions and there are mechanic, maintenance and road crew positions, so there are jobs to be had—when the labour is there, either fully or partially skilled, that can be incorporated into contracts with external providers. So I see a much greater focus on vocational streams.

This is also applicable where, for instance, students come into town. Their parents are saying, 'These schools in the bush are not good' so they come into Kormilda and St Johns and things like that, the idea being that they attend school for some time and this is like leadership training to go back to the communities. When the people go back they are manifestly inadequately trained. A lot of the time it is unrealistic expectations, but it is also that base level foundation skills necessary to build clerical studies or whatever on are not there. I would say that is the key issue: the general information about the reality as it exists in our society. I have worked for this organisation for 19 years, so I have tried many, many things and that is where I start right at the beginning now. But, certainly, we should have vocational-streamed project based stuff so that the literacy and the numeracy are included, which is absolutely critical in that.

CHAIR—Do you have much of an alcohol problem in eastern Arnhem Land?

Mr Harper—No. When the London Missionary Society divided up Australia and New Guinea in 1892, all the churches were allocated sections and the Methodists got eastern Arnhem Land. There is a kava problem but not an alcohol problem.

CHAIR—There is a what?

Mr Harper—A kava problem.

CHAIR—Is that local alcohol?

Mr Harper—No. It is a drink that comes from the Pacific Islands.

CHAIR—Oh, kava. I misunderstood the pronunciation. I'm with you now.

Mr Harper—So there is not an alcohol problem. Overall, things are fairly stable. There are well-established CDEP programs which sort of work, even though there are a few key jobs and a lot of very menial jobs, but, basically, it gives people a sense of purpose overall. So CDEP works quite well.

CHAIR—We have had mixed reports about CDEP. Some reject it, saying that in some areas those participating thought that it was only shoving them into jobs that the community saw as menial, and others saying it was fantastic.

Mr Harper—Yes, both.

CHAIR—Everything in between.

Mr Harper—Yes. Essentially, for these communities, if you are looking to give 500 or 600 people work, someone is going to be raking up and mowing the grass because that is what exists. The schemes work if they are administered well and there are not less equal and more equal people, where some families are getting all the good jobs and some are not getting anything. That inequitable distribution is one of the downfalls with CDEP. But, overall, the idea of making some effort for remuneration is a sound concept that makes most people feel okay.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Getting back to the education system, do many Aboriginal people go into teacher training?

Mr Harper—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How is that working out?

Mr Harper—I think it is working okay because Batchelor College is producing a fairly large number of graduates and more and more Aboriginal teachers are graduating and taking their places in the schools. Most of my informants are of the previous generation and, of course, more and more of the education is done in eastern Arnhem Land in what is called Yolngu Matha, which is the language of that region. The old guard are very critical of this. They are saying that if we want to teach people Yolngu Matha,

we can do it at home. But the reason they go to school is to learn to speak English and to write English—the three R's. As a consequence, there is a movement towards sending children to boarding schools in Darwin. I think the issue on both sides is sort of half-baked but the perception is that it is an Aboriginal school so it is not a real school.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming. We should get the report out in August or early September. We appreciate your input very much. It has been most helpful. We will certainly send you a copy of the report.

Mr Harper—Thank you.

[5.33 p.m.]

HEAP, Mr Michael James, General Manager, Beaufort Hotel, Darwin, GPO Box 207, Darwin, Northern Territory 0800

CHAIR—Welcome. Mike, we are not looking at unemployment; we are really looking at employment opportunities for young people. We are trying to come to grips, I think, with how we can help young people to be more employable and how we can encourage you, the employers in Australia, to make more jobs available for our youth. We are an all-party committee of the parliament. We do not represent the government. We will report to the parliament, and ultimately the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs will respond to our recommendations either positively or negatively. Would you like to make an opening statement and tell us a bit about what you think about the issues we are trying to address?

Mr Heap—I have been closely associated with the employment of young people for some considerable time in my capacity as an employer of people, generally in hotels. Prior to that, some years ago I was associate director of a TAFE college, so I have some background in training and education. I am not sure that I can clarify some of the main problems, but I am certainly aware of some of the problems that exist. Hopefully, through a committee like this we can improve the situation for everybody concerned.

CHAIR—As manager of an award winning hotel in Darwin, what is your total employment and what percentage of those are 16 to 24?

Mr Heap—We employ around 120 people. That varies according to season. It would go to a low of about 95 people and a high of probably about 130 people full time. We have a very high percentage of people who would be 16 to 24. In fact, that would be the majority of our employees.

CHAIR—Why?

Mr Heap—Essentially in this environment, and it may well differ elsewhere, Darwin is seen as a place to go and visit. There is not a lot of family infrastructure here, so people come here to work around for a while and then go to the next place of employment. So, as you may well know, the hospitality and tourism industry is a fairly mobile industry. There is a high degree of mobility with the people working in it.

CHAIR—Out of every 100 young people that apply to you for a job, how many actually get work?

Mr Heap—A fairly high percentage would be employed. We do not always get a lot of applications for employment. In fact, this year we seem to be noticing it is getting more and more difficult to employ young people. Essentially our industry is a big

consumer of skills. It does not always train a lot of people in skills, and there is not a lot of young people around here who want to get into our industry, or there is a decreasing number. By that I mean that our industry is long hours, late at night. They are unusual hours for young people, and that is not always highly desirable for them.

CHAIR—So you have difficulty filling available positions?

Mr Heap—In some cases, yes.

CHAIR—Outside of TRAC—which we have already heard about, and you are a willing participant in that—what is your company doing to help train young people in your industry?

Mr Heap—We take on the hospitality and tourism trainees, which is a one-year program. We also take on apprentice chefs. Those are the two formal schemes that we use. We also employ people in other capacities and train them. In our particular property we have some fairly high skill requirements in our computers. We have a fairly sophisticated hotel computer system, so many of the people who come to work for us need specialised training in that area.

Mr BARRESI—You also participate in the work experience program.

Mr Heap—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—In fact, we had a group of students here earlier this afternoon, and one of them praised their work experience placement with your hotel. What is it about the experience in your business which makes it positive for these young kids, because there are a lot of negative experiences as well?

Mr Heap—I guess there is a stigma with hotels, particularly at our end of the market, and restaurants. It always looks a fun place to work, and for young people it appears attractive. The reality of that sort of life is that it is not easy. We encourage a lot of school groups to come through so that they can see a hotel in operation for themselves, and many of them are impressed by the way things do operate.

Mr BARRESI—How many would you put through a year in work experience?

Mr Heap—I really do not know the numbers, but we would accommodate almost every request that we get from schools, where possible.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Can you make any comment about the local education system. Through our general inquiry, various comments are made relating to the education system and whether it is providing the appropriate skills to enable young people to get employment. The question of literacy and numeracy is always raised. Do you have any

comments about the type of people?

Mr Heap—Yes, I have, but I sit on both sides of the fence too, having TAFE experience. Employers usually blame the education system, and the education system blames other people. So there are two sides to every story. I think it is fair to suggest that with a lot of the younger people in this environment there does not always appear to be as a responsible attitude towards work as one would hope. In our particular environment, as you might imagine in a hotel, presentability is a high factor. To get people with all sorts of tattoos or markings on their features, occasionally it is not desirable for us to employ those people.

With the young people, we find some of them are prepared to meet our requirements, which is again presenting themselves in an appropriate way. We have the ability in our business to employ all sorts of peoples with all sorts of skills. We do not always require high literacy and numeracy skills, although that is pretty useful in most businesses and in our business. There are people who we employ and it does not really matter whether they can read and write fully or not.

Mr MOSSFELD—What about the people that you do employ? Would they be mainly local people or are they people who might be travelling around?

Mr Heap—A high percentage would be people travelling around. We try to give some preference to local people. The reason we do that is that we have a responsible attitude towards employing people in this environment. Clearly, people with family support tend to be a little bit more permanent than people who are holidaying around Australia on a working holiday.

CHAIR—You said the majority of your staff are 16 to 24, and a lot of those were transients in essence. Are 50 per cent permanent Darwin residents? Is it less or more?

Mr Heap—I would think that it might be slightly less than 50 per cent.

CHAIR—So slightly more transient?

Mr Heap—Yes.

CHAIR—How much more does the hotel and hospitality industry need to do to advertise what sorts of careers are available so that we encourage more young people in that direction?

Mr Heap—Clearly the answer is that it needs to do a lot more, although it is doing quite a lot through the training network. It is doing quite a lot there to advertise and to promote the various careers in our environment. In all honesty, it seems to me that the numbers of young people are diminishing and so are the applications to our business. I

think, from the figures that I recall, there is not a lot of unemployment for people who want to work in our business. Certainly there are jobs around.

Mr BARRESI—What about the chefs? How are you going there?

Mr Heap—That is a good question.

Mr BARRESI—It seems that most other hotels and restaurants are struggling to find apprentice chefs?

Mr Heap—That is right. It is a total disaster, frankly. We have been trying for 2½ months to get chefs. Right now in Darwin there is an acute shortage of chefs, and there is an increase in business. We have advertised in every national newspaper, every capital city newspaper and in New Zealand trying to get chefs.

We have had a handful of applicants. We have people who are not very experienced who are asking for \$44,000-plus, plus transfer fees. There then becomes a point as to what you can afford in a business and what skill does that person have, because chefs have an artistic nature, and that in itself can generate business. It is a total disaster. What is exacerbating the problem now is that you have one major environment in Victoria that is soaking up a lot of the skills of Australia and the chefs. Probably in about six months they will be dispensing with a lot of them, but at the moment they are employing something more than 500 chefs.

Mr BARRESI—Who is that?

Mr Heap—Crown Casino.

CHAIR—I think we were actually told by the industry association that there is a deficit in Australia of 1,000 chefs and 5,000 cooks.

Mr Heap—I would not like to think of the numbers, but we have a great problem getting chefs, and that is getting worse.

Mr BARRESI—So there is a real lack of ability by the industry to just sell its message to young school leavers that there is a career available there for them.

Mr Heap—I think it is doing a reasonable job, but clearly it is not getting results.

Mr BARRESI—At the end of the day that is the final judgment, though.

Mr Heap—I think what impacts on that is the nature of our business. It is a high pressure job. For young people, working weekends and many nights is not desirable. There are many other alternatives for those people who want to work.

Mr BARRESI—You have the ability now, though, through the industrial relations changes to be able to change the structure of some of those conditions as well. Are you not able to come down with some new working hour arrangements and make it attractive for these young kids to move into?

Mr Heap—The industrial legislation permits a lot more flexibility but, unfortunately, people want to eat dinner at dinner time. Whilst you can be more flexible in industrial relations, people still want to eat at 8 or 9 o'clock at night.

Mr BARRESI—There are other industries where people are working 12-hour shifts, working weekends and seven-day shift rosters. They are able to attract the people to those industries. I do not want to be picky here, but it seems to me that there is a lot of effort going into it with very little success, yet there are kids out there who cannot find jobs.

Mr Heap—I agree. That could be one factor as to why employers such as us are finding it increasingly difficult to get young people to come into our business. Maybe we are just not paying enough.

Mr BARRESI—So it could be a wage issue.

Mr Heap—It is certainly a wage issue although there was a recent report on apprenticeship training up here, completed by Tourism Training Northern Territory. From memory, one of the comments was that, while the pay seemed to be at an acceptable level, there were other problems regarding employment that concerned young people.

Mr MOSSFIELD—As you said, the pay that you are offering or that they can get may be all right for a 35- or 40-hour week but when people have to work Saturdays and Sundays and work during normal meal breaks, and they expect something a bit more than just the basic break, that could be a problem.

Mr Heap—Just out of interest I was asking our human resources people about the cost and, for a third- or fourth-year apprentice, it would cost us around \$30,000 a year to employ that person.

CHAIR—That is a lot of money.

Mr Heap—Now, that is not an insignificant amount of money. We are in a better position than many small businesses to pay that sort of money. Frankly, in some cases—although in many cases it is not the case—young people do not always treat work as seriously as perhaps they should and are sometimes unreliable. When you put all that together in a small business it is very difficult to justify that expenditure.

Mr BARRESI—Is that an award rate or is that a market rate?

Mr Heap—That is an award wage with all the on-costs. In fact, the equation I have here is—

Mr BARRESI—So the market rate would push it even higher because of competition?

Mr Heap—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I think the argument could be put that if the employee is unsatisfactory obviously you do not keep him, irrespective of what the wage is. Secondly, I would think that a third- or fourth-year apprentice should be pretty close to producing the same as a fully-fledged tradesman would in their third or fourth year. Would that be true?

Mr Heap—You would hope so, yes. Often, if they are not, that is not the individual's problem, it is the quality of the training.

CHAIR—Traditionally, the hotel industry has brought people in at bellhop level or in the kitchen as an apprentice chef or whatever and those people have worked their way through the various skill requirements of a major hotel and then, eventually, into management. Is that still the preferred career path to get to management in hotels? Or is it changing?

Mr Heap—It is certainly changing although it is still possible to go through that career path but with the extensive range of both university and TAFE programs today, which are usually very good. That would generally be a minimum requirement—an associate diploma in hospitality management from a TAFE college—for people to get to that level. Hospitality management is no different from any other business; it is becoming a fairly sophisticated business environment, particularly with increased competition. You need to not only be a good 'mein host' and to understand people's needs and wants to get into a serious management position but also you need to have an extensive business background.

CHAIR—And is a degree in hotel management of any value?

Mr Heap—Certainly, yes.

CHAIR—It is interesting that your industry association said 'of less value than a TAFE course'.

Mr Heap—There are some prejudices. There are some people that would react to that who would not have had a degree. One of the main problems, certainly that I had from my TAFE days, was that we used to select very carefully some of the best graduates from high school and then put them through a good program. After two years we would

say, 'Go into industry and wash dishes.' Of course, that is difficult for a young person to accommodate. There needs to be a better balance between effective training and implementation in the work force.

Mr BARRESI—Are you affiliated with any hotel chain at all?

Mr Heap—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Which one?

Mr Heap—The Beaufort Hotel Group, which is a small chain.

Mr BARRESI—Do they have hotels elsewhere in Australia.

Mr Heap—We have one other at this stage, which is in Brisbane. The other hotels are overseas.

Mr BARRESI—Perhaps it is not applicable to your situation but is there a possibility with some of these chains to develop, as a way of attracting staff, some sort of rotational employment opportunities from one hotel to another?

Mr Heap—I would think that that would be essential, particularly for a larger hotel chain. I think most of them do very thorough programs there. Particularly the Sheratons, the Hiltons and the Intercontinentals have very effective training for young people, which is a great attraction for a career orientated young person. You will see advertisements highlighting the fact that we are a hotel chain with X number of hotels, and that is a very attractive proposition for a young person.

Mr BARRESI—But would that be possible only at the elite end of the hotel industry?

Mr Heap—Yes, generally it would be the four- or five-star hotels—certainly the three-, four- or five-star hotels.

Mr BARRESI—I was thinking that if you were linked to a hotel chain that has hotels down the north coast of Queensland and on the surrounding islands there would be opportunities to move around, which may just be that little bit of incentive to come on board.

Mr Heap—It would be a very attractive proposition for young people. Our hotel group is not that large, although we do interchange some people. We also interchange people from overseas, which is a little bit easier than it used to be because of the skills shortages. So that is a good asset, too—to interchange those skills.

CHAIR—I am advised, by one person anyway, that in your industry—the hotel industry—it used to be part of the preferred path, for Australians, to work in a hotel here and then, at the first opportunity, they would go to Europe to expand their experience and then come back. I am told that increasingly the preferred path now is not Europe but Asia. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr Heap—You are right—it used to be European based. I think that is probably a result of the first hotel managers and heads of departments—food and beverage managers—essentially, until a few years ago, being European. So, of course, they were familiar with European ways of doing things and would always say that going to work in Europe is essential. Frankly, for many reasons, I think that Asia for Australians is a better proposition. We are very much part of Asia. Australian hotels are highly regarded in Asia, and Asian hotels beat the pants off European hotels generally anyway.

CHAIR—One of the students today asked us a question which we could not answer. Perhaps with your background in the chamber of commerce, and not just thinking of your hotel but Darwin and the area as a whole, you could answer it. They asked: why is it that unemployment in Darwin is so low?

Mr Heap—You have a rapidly expanding economy here. I think there is plenty of opportunity for young people in various positions. In Darwin unemployment is fairly low, but as soon as you get out of Darwin I think it is a different story.

CHAIR—Until you get to Alice Springs.

Mr Heap—Yes.

CHAIR—They told us in the Alice that if you want a job—it might not be the job that you want—you can find a job. Would that be true in Darwin?

Mr Heap—Generally the case. If we were interviewing a person who showed initiative and the correct attitude and was presentable and had those sorts of ingredients, we would have no difficulty in employing that person here.

Mr BARRESI—So you are not losing kids to the southern states like you may have years ago?

Mr Heap—I think that is occurring. A daughter of mine graduated two years ago, and none of her class actually work in Darwin right now. She graduated from university. So, again, it gets back to our industry being a very mobile industry. For people who want to travel, our industry is an ideal one to enter into. Young people are very mobile. It seems to me that a lot of graduates from university are fairly mobile. Once they graduate and get a bit of experience, then they move around.

Mr BARRESI—What types of jobs would they leave Darwin for? I would have thought that most of the jobs that you get down south you would be able to get up here as well.

Mr Heap—Throughout Australia there is a shortage of the right people. Generally, what seems to occur is that a lot of younger people will go to isolated areas to gain their spurs or their stars, so to speak. They do a couple of years here and then go back to the eastern seaboard in major hotels and get promotion in that regard.

Mr BARRESI—I was more thinking from the point of view of your local kids. Why would they leave Darwin or the territory in general?

CHAIR—It's hot.

Mr BARRESI—No, it isn't.

CHAIR—It's wet.

Mr BARRESI—You are a southerner; you do not understand these things. Why would they leave Darwin when the opportunities are here? I could understand that, in years gone by when you did not have a university here—it was more of a college—you went to Queensland or New South Wales and got a degree and once you were there you tended to stay there, but these days you can get your educational requirements fulfilled all the way through.

Mr Heap—There are two reasons. Again, getting back to our industry, there is a desire by people, once they have graduated here, studied here or have worked here, to see the big wide world for a while, and some may return. We have had that experience where people have studied here, gone elsewhere and come back. Also it is fair to say that we are a small isolated community and for people that are really ambitious there is more opportunity elsewhere. There is a more competitive employment nature and more opportunity elsewhere.

Mr BARRESI—What are your territory government leaders doing in order to keep people in the territory? Are they doing anything?

Mr Heap—Not that I am aware of that would enable me to answer that question, although they are encouraging people to come here with the development of this environment where you have got the military relocation with a lot of light industry coming here. That in itself will expand the community and its needs, wants and opportunities for young people. But, in terms of what are they doing to keep people here, I am not sure what can be done to do that.

Mr BARRESI—I had a chat at the weekend with one of your senior polities in the

area. I asked him if it would help to attract industry to Darwin. His comment was: 'Yes, it does but what we need more is an increase in population.' His view was that population should come first and that industry would follow, which is a bit different perhaps from some of the models which have been tried out in the past—I am thinking of Albury-Wodonga down along the New South Wales-Victorian border where the idea was: 'Let's move all the industry up there and the population will follow.' Do you have a view on that?

Mr Heap—It is a chicken and egg situation. Which comes first? Certainly with the increase in population, the availability of jobs will expand and be more attractive to a lot of people. Being a small isolated community, the cost of employing people in this part of the world is very high for an employer and for an employee the cost of living is high too.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Would not government employment in the area—both Commonwealth and territory—be fairly high?

Mr Heap—Yes, it seems to be a fairly high population. But to me the cost of employing people is quite high. It would be higher than that in other states.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about the training of young people? Do the territory government and the Commonwealth government play a part in this? Are they playing the part that they should play?

Mr Heap—In terms of the TAFE programs and in terms of the training that is occurring, there is a lot to be improved. One of the problems that, no doubt, you have been made aware of from talking to any of the politicians here is that the cost per student hour is a lot higher here than elsewhere so you need more dollars to train and educate people, but it seems to me that there are a lot of programs. There is the TAFE out at Palmerston, training in our business, the university that does a lot of the vocational education here and there is a substantial number of private providers here for the size of the population that do all sorts of different training.

CHAIR—Particularly considering the armed services and the fact that you have an established manufacturing industry and are a centre for the mining, fishing industry and shipping industries, don't you really have a full complement of employment prospects in Darwin?

Mr Heap—I think that if you package all those things together—the industries that are developing and merging—there would be great opportunities in the future. Recently I was involved in a skills audit, and it seems to me that the non-availability of skills might be an inhibiting factor to the development of this community.

CHAIR—What is the Chamber of Commerce doing about telling young people about what careers might be available to them so they make the right choices, and

encouraging the schools to offer more vocational courses or more TRAC elements or whatever?

Mr Heap—I cannot answer that generally except that I am aware they are involved in a skills career expo, which details the skills that are required and available. Most of the ITABs—the industry training bodies—have developed videos or career development packages, which is a sell job for their particular industries.

CHAIR—Which gather dust?

Mr Heap—Certainly the tourism and hospitality one does not. They have a very effective video. I could not speak with authority about the other ITABs.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Mossfield):

That the committee receive as evidence and include in its records as an exhibit for the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people documents received from the Northern Territory Mining Industry Training Advisory Board titled 'Profile and training plan 1989' and the Darwin TRAC Association titled 'Right on track: Workplace learning'.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Mossfield):

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

Resolved (on motion by Mr Mossfield):

That a subcommittee of this committee be established, comprising Mr Charles, Mr Barresi and Mr Mossfield, for the purpose of conducting school forums and public hearings in Western Australia between Tuesday 29 April 1997 and Thursday 1 May 1997.

CHAIR—Mike, thank you very much for coming. We will certainly send you a copy of our report. We hope it has some impact and we hope we come up with some terrific recommendations. We appreciate your input. You have been most helpful.

Committee adjourned at 6.01 p.m.