HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people

KUNUNURRA

Tuesday, 29 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
Mr Brough	Mr Neville
Mr Dargavel	Mr Pyne
Mrs Elson	Mr Sawford
Mr Martin Ferguson	

Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

WITNESSES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Factors influencing the employment of young people

KUNUNURRA

Tuesday, 29 April 1997

Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Barresi Mr Mossfield

The committee met at 8.32 a.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing on 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 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 in which young people discussed their views and opinions with the committee. A school forum will be conducted in Kununurra after this hearing.

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. 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 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 inquiry. We are here to listen, to learn and to help improve the prospects of young Australians. We are an all-party committee. It is our job, after over a year of talking to people, to come to grips with how we can do a better job of making young people better ready for the world of work and of encouraging employers to make jobs more available for our youth.

[8.35 a.m.]

GARDINER, Mrs Elaine Margaret, PO Box 898, Kununurra, Western Australia 6743

WARRENER, Mr Geoff, Station Manager, Carlton Hill Station, PMB 616, Kununurra, Western Australia

CHAIR—Mrs Gardiner, in what capacity are you appearing before us today?

Mrs Gardiner—I am here as a private citizen—or, I should say, a horticulturalist—representing basically the horticultural industry in the valley.

CHAIR—Welcome. Would either or both of you like to make a statement about what you do and the sort of employment prospects there are for young people in the area? When we are talking about young people, we are talking about kids 16 to 24.

Mr Warrener—I suppose I am representing the company. There are four stock camps. Is this Australia-wide or Western Australia?

CHAIR—I don't care.

Mr Warrener—There are probably five stock camps comprising 10 people each. So that's 50 people, and they'd all be under 24.

CHAIR—All of them?

Mr Warrener—Pretty well, except for the head stockman.

CHAIR—Do they get burnt out?

Mr Warrener—No. It's pretty hard work, but a lot of them are people from grazing backgrounds who come up here for the experience and then go back home to their family properties. The money's not too good in it. They do it for an experience more than to make a living out of it.

Mr BARRESI—How are you sourcing these kids?

Mr Warrener—We don't have to advertise. It's word of mouth—friends of the people who were here last year, our family friends' children and that sort of stuff.

Mr BARRESI—They come from all over the state?

Mr Warrener—Yes, it goes in trends. Most of them are from New South Wales this year. They tell all their friends about the experiences they've had up here and it goes like that. The station gets a name.

Mr BARRESI—What kinds of skills are you looking for when you are putting these kids on?

Mr Warrener—They have to be fit and keen to work. We will teach them everything they need to know when they get here.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Just generally, can you give us some idea what the employment opportunities are like for young people in the Kununurra area?

Mrs Gardiner—The employment opportunities are very good in Kununurra, but whether they are the jobs that the kids are looking for is a different thing. I employ up to 10 and 12 people during a season, but again a lot of it is menial work in a way. It is a bit like factory work. It is repetitive work, but the money is good. If the person or the people are prepared to work, the money is there to be made. So, taking out any of the station people from the valley, in the valley itself within the horticultural area and in the town, there's quite a large opportunity there for young people.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Is there an unemployment problem amongst the young people in the area?

Mrs Gardiner—Only if they want there to be, yes, because the jobs are there. There are jobs there. I have to fill jobs frequently with overseas travellers because I can't get the local kids to work.

Mr BARRESI—Do you have any idea what the unemployment rate would be up here?

Mrs Gardiner—I don't know.

Mr BARRESI—Are there any statistics on that?

Mrs Gardiner—Not among the kids, no.

Mr BARRESI—So you are saying that, once these young kids leave the school here at Kununurra, Wyndham or wherever it may be, there is ample opportunity for them to work if they want to stay in Kununurra?

Mrs Gardiner—Yes, but perhaps not at the job they want. I feel the issue with kids today is that they don't want to start working at anything. They want to start working at the top basically. To me, once you're in the work force—and Geoff probably feels the same about this—it's far easier to get a job than if you're sitting at home doing nothing and worrying or thinking about work. Once you get out there and get a job, the next job seems to come along or you start then looking for the next job.

I can honestly say that, in the 10 years I've been employing people since I've been farming in Kununurra, I've employed two kids out of school and I sourced them out of the

school here myself and that's all. They were 16-year-olds at the time. The rest of the people that I employ are people who come up and are travelling around. I employ them for six months and then they carry on travelling.

Mr BARRESI—Where are most of them going when they leave school then?

Mrs Gardiner—I don't know.

Mr BARRESI—Are they going to a bigger town down south? Are they going to Darwin?

Mrs Gardiner—You see a lot of the kids around the town. There are a lot of young people around town that I know. I don't know if they're all working. I honestly don't know the unemployment figures, but the employment in the valley, in the farming area in the valley, is good.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Have you got any idea why there is this attitude, why young people just will not be prepared to start at the bottom and work their way up? Is it a problem at school, with the advice they are receiving at school? I am only suggesting that might be one reason, I do not know.

Mrs Gardiner—When my daughter left school, she left here in year 7 and went to school in Perth. One of the things the friends of mine who left their kids here were amazed at was that when they were in year 10 they were taught how to fill out dole forms. That to me is an horrendous thing to teach someone. You should be teaching them to go out and fill out a job application, not a dole form. To be perfectly honest, I feel that if things get too difficult the kids know they can go on the dole. They may not get the dole tomorrow but they will get it in six or eight weeks time.

Mr Warrener—I believe the kids also are more highly educated now. The majority of young people get into university and all that sort of stuff and they come out of there fairly well educated, but they still have to be prepared to start at the bottom. They come out and think they are a manager or an overseer or whatever straightaway.

Mr BARRESI—Could you give a run-down on the types of jobs that are available here for the young kids, not only through your organisation but generally? What is available here? You are saying there are lots of jobs.

Mrs Gardiner—The farming provides the main ones. I guess a lot of the farming jobs are seasonal in the beginning, but every farmer in the valley would be looking for someone that is looking to stay on and move up from being the bottom person to middle—

Mr BARRESI—So farm hands.

Mrs Gardiner—Farm hands, yes. What we lack in the valley in the farming

community are middle management, if you like. I am not saying that these kids can be that straightaway, but if they were interested there is that.

In town we have got the school, we have got the hospital, we have got numerous government departments that have jobs advertised—not a lot but occasionally. There are always a lot of jobs advertised within ATSIC or that sort of thing. There are jobs in town in the supermarket, there are accountants—the town is growing now, so there are quite significant jobs available. People who come to town with the skills get jobs very quickly if they want a job. I am only relating what I see as an employer, and that is that people tell me that when they come in they might look around for a week and they will have a job. It might not be the job they want to get.

Mr BARRESI—Do you put any of these kids on for work experience throughout the year for two weeks, one week, to give them the opportunity to come out to the farm? You do not?

Mr Warrener—No, we do not. We have never been approached to do it.

Mrs Gardiner—No.

CHAIR—You said that farm hands are reasonably well paid. Can you give us an idea of that?

Mrs Gardiner—When you start someone off, if I were to employ someone today, I would start them on $10 while he or she is being trained. Quite often we have contract work on the farm itself. You do not want to give someone a job on an hourly rate; you give them a contract rate for that specific job. So they can earn anything from $13 to $15 or $20 an hour if they are good or if they want to apply themselves to the job. But the general run of the mill farm hand that is starting starts on $10. We have a 15 per cent horticultural tax up here for the first six months, so that eases it a bit there.

CHAIR—I do not understand.

Mrs Gardiner—Instead of paying regular tax, we have a special 15 per cent horticultural tax, so for the first six months whoever is working in the horticultural industry gets charged 15 per cent tax.

CHAIR—Really.

Mr BARRESI—You want to sign up, do you?

CHAIR—I did not know we had a special economic zone anywhere.

Mrs Gardiner—Just horticulture. It would not apply to Geoff.

CHAIR—You do not get that, Geoff?

Mr Warrener—No. I will look into that one.

Mrs Gardiner—I think it came in because of the high turnover of people that we get. It was sort of a drawcard to get more people into the industry, I think, at one point.

CHAIR—They do not pay federal income tax—

Mrs Gardiner—Not for the first six months. If they stay with the same employer for more than six months, then they go onto the regular tax. But they can jump around all the time and change employers and still pay the 15 per cent tax.

Mr BARRESI—And still stay in the valley by doing that?

Mrs Gardiner—And still stay in the valley, yes. At the end of the day, I might add, when they send their tax forms in and they have not paid sufficient tax then they have to pay extra tax.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are there any major industries: for example, mining, manufacturing or anything like that?

Mrs Gardiner—There is no manufacturing. We have a sugar industry here now. There are the mines—Argyle diamond mine and whatever. But they are out of town.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Would you know if they employ apprentices?

Mrs Gardiner—They used to. I do not think Argyle Diamond do any more. But Western Power have apprenticeships. There are a few mechanic and electrician places.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How far away is that from here?

Mrs Gardiner—The mines?

Mr MOSSFIELD—Yes.

Mrs Gardiner— The mines are about 200 kilometres or something.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do they advertise locally for—

Mrs Gardiner—Yes. They used to, but they have downsized this last 12 months, so that it is not a big issue.

Mr Warrener—They have changed over out there. They used to be a fly in-fly out operation from Kununurra and they swapped it over to Perth.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are there any organised approaches through schools to let the local school kids know what jobs are available in the local area?

Mrs Gardiner—I think so, yes. I have not had a lot to do with the school for quite a long time now.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You do not know for sure that that happens.

Mrs Gardiner—No, I do not really know for sure. About five years ago, there was a big push to get the kids from year 8 into horticulture.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Yes.

Mrs Gardiner—They have a paddock at the side of the school there with a big shed and all that sort of stuff, but I am not sure how that is going. We have not seen any benefit from it in our industry, put it that way.

CHAIR—The schools have not approached you at all to come and tell the kids what the work is like or what is available?

Mrs Gardiner—No.

CHAIR—What sort of money does your—

Mr Warrener—They get on average $350 to $360 a week.

Mr BARRESI—How many hours a week is that, Geoff?

Mr Warrener—I think 40 hours, or whatever it is on the pay slip. Sometimes there would be more and sometimes there would be less.

Mr BARRESI—Is that a 40-hour week or do different conditions apply on the station?

Mr Warrener—Different conditions apply, but their salary is based on a 40-hour week.

Mrs Gardiner—I actually do not think that the money is really the issue, because you can pay people more and they still do not want to work. I have tried that one as well. It is their attitude to the job or their non-attitude to the job.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Basically, there is not really a great unemployment problem here?

Mrs Gardiner—I do not think there is, no.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Not as far as young people are concerned.

Mrs Gardiner—As I said earlier, currently I have on my staff three overseas

people that I do not really need to have on my staff. But I cannot get anyone else.

Mr Warrener—We have not got one local at home.

Mrs Gardiner—I think that speaks for itself.

CHAIR—Not one?

Mr Warrener—No.

Mr BARRESI—What you are saying to me—this needs to be checked out—is that you are not employing locals but you are employing a lot of itinerant workers, yet there is not an unemployment problem.

Mrs Gardiner—I did not say that there was not an unemployment problem. I said I did not think there was a problem with jobs. I do not know what the unemployment problem is. There should not be an unemployment problem; that is what I am saying. The three people that I have on I do not necessarily have to employ. I employed them because they applied for the job and I needed someone straightaway, basically. I have an ad in the CES on a constant basis for people because we have a high turnover of itinerant staff.

Mr BARRESI—Do you think the kids out there would have a good appreciation of the type of work that is offered through your organisations, even though they have not been there? Would there be an understanding out here amongst the kids of what you are offering?

Mr Warrener—I think so, yes.

Mr BARRESI—It is not a matter of selling.

Mr Warrener—Everyone knows what mustering, horse work and all that is. I would think so, anyway.

Mr MOSSFIELD—We are anxious to know about the schools. You probably cannot tell us much about that. We will have to find that out from other people.

Mrs Gardiner—I do not have any children at school any more.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How many children did you have go through local schools?

Mrs Gardiner—Two, but only to year 7.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Only to year 7. What was the reason? Did you feel that there was a need for them to move elsewhere to get a broader education?

Mrs Gardiner—I thought so at the time, yes. At the time they were only offering to year 10 here.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do they go up to year 12 now?

Mrs Gardiner—They have year 12, but it is distance education for years 11 and 12.

Mr MOSSFIELD—It is what?

Mrs Gardiner—I cannot remember what it is called, but it is distance education.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I see. So it is not here at the—

Mrs Gardiner—It is here at the school, but it is done through Perth.

Mr BARRESI—Are there traineeships available in your industry generally?

Mrs Gardiner—Yes. I have a trainee on at the moment. That started last year.

Mr BARRESI—Where did that trainee come from?

Mrs Gardiner—Perth. She had been around the area for a while. She had been to Perth but had come back up because she could not get a job in Perth.

Mr BARRESI—So she is a local?

Mrs Gardiner—I guess you could say she is a local, yes. She has been here for quite a while.

Mr BARRESI—Would you be in a position to be able to put on more trainees?

Mrs Gardiner—Yes. Once Sarah finishes her traineeship in May she is leaving, so I will be looking at taking on at least another one or two people if there are people available. Just to fill you in on this, the traineeship started last year with 12 people, I think it was. I think they are down to five.

Mr BARRESI—They just dropped out?

Mrs Gardiner—They dropped out. Again, the traineeship was through TAFE and CES. It seemed like a good idea at the time. They were not actually kids. Sarah is 28, so she does not come into the 16 to 24 category. Most of the other ones that were in it were about 20 to 22.

Mr BARRESI—That traineeship would eventually lead up to those middle management positions you were talking about.

Mrs Gardiner—It would eventually. Obviously not in the first year, but if they were keen to stay on and take on more responsibility then, yes. We are a bit like Geoff.

We tend to train whoever comes along to do things our way anyway.

CHAIR—Geoff, what do you do for mechanics?

Mr Warrener—We used to employ our own, but this year we are starting to bring our vehicles into town for mechanical services. In our industry it is pretty tight, and to pay the wages that we have to pay to get by we cannot pay a good mechanic to stay out there. So you are better off paying the higher rates here but not employing them. You get better service in here and the hours are probably shorter because they know what they are doing rather than employing a half mechanic out there. We think that we will get less breakdowns by doing the services by qualified mechanics than by a half-baked one out there.

CHAIR—How far out of town are you?

Mr Warrener—Fifty kilometres, but our property surrounds Kununurra pretty well, so we are coming through it all the time.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Is there much employment in the tourism industry at the local level?

Mr Warrener—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about the employment of young people in that industry?

Mrs Gardiner—I honestly cannot comment on that.

Mr Warrener—I think there is.

Mr MOSSFIELD—There is?

Mr Warrener—Maybe above the 24 age.

Mrs Gardiner—I do not think there would be many under 24.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are you aware of what sort of employment the children that went to school with your children, the local children, have now?

Mrs Gardiner—I know of two or three of the girls. One is working in the court house and—

Mr MOSSFIELD—The court house here?

Mrs Gardiner—Yes. One is up at the hospital in administration. But that is all I know. The rest of them aren't here any more.

CHAIR—They don't come back?

Mrs Gardiner—Some of them do.

CHAIR—Is it a good place to live?

Mrs Gardiner—It's an excellent place to live.

CHAIR—In the summer.

Mrs Gardiner—Every place has a bad time, be it hot or cold.

Mr Warrener—It was cooler to live here than in Perth last summer.

Mr BARRESI—It was probably cooler than it was in Melbourne last summer too.

Mrs Gardiner—I wouldn't live in Melbourne if you paid me.

Mr BARRESI—Can I pursue the traineeship issue for a moment. I feel that there is an opportunity there that can be explored further. Who are you actually doing it through? Did you say the local TAFE?

Mrs Gardiner—Yes, the CES organised it with the TAFE. Basically, that is how it started. The trainee does one full day at TAFE and the rest of the time is on the job.

Mr BARRESI—Was that advertised or was there at least some sort of pitch made to the kids in the school here?

Mrs Gardiner—I do not know. I was involved originally trying to set this up and then we got very busy and I could not continue with it. Then I was approached last year to see if I was still interested in a trainee and I said yes. The CES just brought people out to talk to me. I honestly do not know where it was advertised.

Mr BARRESI—Of that 12, I think you said five were still on. Is that right?

Mrs Gardiner—I think it is five who stayed on.

Mr BARRESI—Has anyone asked why the other seven left? Has there been any questioning of that?

Mrs Gardiner—I don't know. I have enough trouble running my business without chasing up what is happening in other areas.

Mr BARRESI—None of those who left were connected with you?

Mrs Gardiner—No, the woman who I took on is still with me.

Mr BARRESI—I am just trying to get a feel of whether the traineeship was structured correctly—whether there were some particular issues that could be resolved that may help the next intake succeed.

Mrs Gardiner—There probably were teething problems with it. It was the first time it was run, but I honestly cannot comment on that.

Mr Warrener—We had one trainee come in last year for the season.

Mr BARRESI—What did he do?

Mr Warrener—At the jackeroo training school, I think it was.

Mr BARRESI—You have traineeships in that, have you?

Mr Warrener—We were approached to see if we wanted one out of it. In that traineeship—I think it was at Wyndham TAFE or something—they weren't allowed to start work until eight and they had to knock off at five and then they got a camp-out allowance. So, if you are training a jackeroo, as soon as he leaves there, he gets kicked in the teeth straightaway. He is not going to get a camp-out allowance and he is not getting nine to five, so I think they have to restructure them a bit.

CHAIR—You said most of the kids who come to work with you stay a year?

Mr Warrener—This year at home in our stock camp we have nine. We have four who came back from last year and there are two who are still there from the year before. That is about the cycle we go through. Out of those four who came back from last year, two of them will probably go. None of them stay on too long.

CHAIR—When you say come back?

Mr Warrener—It is an eight-month season. You cannot muster through the wet season, so we put them off.

CHAIR—So during the wet it is just you and—

Mr Warrener—About three of us stay out there.

Mr BARRESI—I imagine it is very physical work—very much outdoors in the sun and hard yakka to some extent.

Mr Warrener—Yes. That is farming, I suppose—out in the sun all day.

Mr BARRESI—That, in itself, would not be appealing to some of the kids who are coming through. Is that what you are saying about attitude? Is it the job itself? Is it that they do not have a positive attitude to work in that type of industry or is it the

attitude in general to work? I am just trying to work out whether or not it is the nature of the job that is causing this.

Mrs Gardiner—In our industry, I would say the job does cause quite a lot of that problem. The job is hard work. I actually grow bananas, so you are not in the sun much there. But it is hot and it is humid at some times of the year—not at this time of the year. It is an excellent time of the year now.

A lot of the time I just think their attitude to getting down and doing the job is not there. I don't know why it is not there, whether it comes from the parents or from the kids' peers. I do not know quite where their attitude comes from.

Mr Warrener—I think the employees feel they do not have to be as good any more because we cannot just sack them if they are no good. A comment was made the other day that, 'I know he doesn't like me, but I'm going to stick it out anyway. He can't get rid of me because he's got to give me at least three warnings and all that sort of stuff.' They've got a bit of backing there. If they don't want to work they don't really have to.

Mr MOSSFIELD—But you would be fairly selective, I suppose, about the people that you employ?

Mr Warrener—I never interview them. We employ them all through—

Mr MOSSFIELD—You don't interview them?

Mr Warrener—No—word of mouth, over the phone and references.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So if they say they want to work with you they just come out and work with you—

Mr Warrener—Just get a few references and that's it. Generally we get a pretty good—

Mr MOSSFIELD—So you're quite happy with your own system with, I suppose, a 95 per cent success rate.

Mr Warrener—Yes. We put one extra on a year because we know probably one is not going to like it.

CHAIR—You do what?

Mr Warrener—We put one extra on at the beginning of every year because there's always one that doesn't like it. You work on that basis.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Getting out of that group only one or two that are not happy, for whatever reason, is a fairly good success rate, I think.

Mr Warrener—One always seems to leave because of a family matter or something like that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—People are not going to come all the way here and then go out to your location to work unless they really want to.

CHAIR—Do you have any Aboriginal stockmen?

Mr Warrener—No. None have applied. I have never had an Aboriginal apply.

CHAIR—Never?

Mr Warrener—I used to employ them all but not in the last few years.

CHAIR—Do you know why that is?

Mr Warrener—They don't need to work much any more. They can get a lot of money pretty easily, I would say.

Mr MOSSFIELD—When they were working with you, were they good workers?

Mr Warrener—Yes, really good.

CHAIR—Do you have anything else, Frank?

Mr MOSSFIELD—No, not really, although I suppose we could ask the general question about whether you would like to make any suggestions to us as to how the government could improve the system.

Mr Warrener—Just with that Aboriginal issue, we tried to start up a training program out at Ningbing, which is an Aboriginal community. It was the Aboriginals' idea. They approached us. A white Aboriginal, I suppose you might call him, got hold of it and caused a big conflict in the Aboriginal community. The program won't go ahead until they have sorted out their own internal problems. It is all to do with native title claims and all that sort of stuff that is going on—traditional rights. So they are making their own little snowball that they can't get out of, which is a bit of a shame.

Mr BARRESI—Is your property susceptible to a native title claim?

Mr Warrener—Yes, it's all under claim.

Mr BARRESI—Where is it in the process at this stage?

Mr Warrener—I don't know. I've lost track of it. It's going to go through the High Court.

Mr BARRESI—It's been lodged and it's gone to the Native Title Tribunal?

Mr Warrener—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—So it is being fought there. You are saying it is now going to the High Court?

Mr Warrener—I think so. I'm not sure. I keep out of that side of things.

Mr BARRESI—So what you are saying is that the Aboriginal community would not even consider applying or working for you until that has been resolved?

Mr Warrener—No. The Aboriginals want to work but they are held back by the bureaucrats, by the white people in town who are running the claims.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming and talking to us this morning. You won't mind if we go back to Melbourne and Sydney and put up big signposts saying 'Come to Kununurra if you want to work—but you'd better want to work', 'Heaps of jobs but you'd want to work'.

Mr BARRESI—Can I ask one question about the people you employ. You say you do most of it over the phone. Do you subsidise their airfare up here?

Mr Warrener—Yes. I think after six months they get their bus fare back. They make their own way up here and, if they are coming back the next season, at the end of that eight months we'll give them a return bus fare to the capital city they live in so that it doesn't cost them any money to go home and come back. After six months we refund them the trip up here.

CHAIR—Thanks again. We should finish our inquiry in June and we will try to write the report by August, at the latest early September. We will certainly send you a copy of the report. We thank you very much for your input.

Mrs Gardiner—Thank you.

Mr Warrener—Thank you.

[9.07 a.m.]

MAHOMET, Mr Adrian John, Manager, East Kimberley Business Enterprise Centre, PO Box 420, Wyndham, Western Australia 6740

CHAIR—John, you heard the opening statement, so I don't need to go through that again, and you've met my colleagues. Would you like to make a statement to the committee about the matters that we are inquiring into?

Mr Mahomet—What I would like to do is hand up several documents I've got here. I guess some of these things relate directly to what has been spoken about this morning. This document is about individual problems throughout the school system. This document addresses a number of the issues that were raised in your paper plus other items. This is a regional plan from the Wunan Regional Council which has a number of items about education, employment and things of that nature. This is a document with regard to Aboriginal education in the whole East Kimberley region. They are all probably fairly relevant to your questions here today.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You are involved with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?

Mr Mahomet—Yes. It's hard to avoid not being involved with all parties because of the make-up of our community, which is about 45 per cent Aboriginal across the board. But in areas like Wyndham, Halls Creek and other places it is between 60 to 80 per cent Aboriginal.

CHAIR—What is the total population of the region?

Mr Mahomet—Of the whole Kimberley region, it is somewhere between 23,000 and 25,000.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You have got the document there. Could you just briefly outline some of the points you have made relating to the local education system?

Mr Mahomet—In relation to education, in Wyndham in particular, and I guess this probably relates to Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing as well, the Western Australia government does not recognise those areas as being remote. As a consequence, the teachers who have tended to come into those areas are generally younger or first- or second-year teachers. So there is a decided disadvantage to children in those areas with regard to the way they are being taught because the teachers themselves are generally grappling with their locations and their vocation at that stage.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are there high schools in these locations—years 11 and 12?

Mr Mahomet—No. They all stop at year 10 and that is even the same here in Kununurra. There is no senior high school here.

Mr MOSSFIELD—They stop at year 10.

Mr Mahomet—They stop at year 10. They can do distance education and learning for years 11 and 12. It is horrendously difficult because you are basically learning via a TV screen or audio or some other type of arrangement and, in locations like Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Wyndham, there is a lack of communication facilities. You do not even have the communication facility or IT facilities to actually take in some of these activities. Even to access the Internet is the price of an STD phone call. They have had a service provider only recently in Kununurra. So there are quite a few disadvantages to schools and to the children who are in the schools.

Mr BARRESI—Where are they going to finish their education? Are they going down to Perth?

Mr Mahomet—You find that a lot of the children go to year 7 and quite a lot go off either to Darwin, Perth or other schools around the country—that is, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It is pretty broad. I have made a comment here that lower pass standards seem to be acceptable in this region in particular. A grade 3 child in term 3 in Wyndham would be one term behind a Broome kid and probably two or three terms behind somebody who was in the same class in Perth. Even children who move, either into the region or out of the region, are under quite a bit of stress coming to terms with that issue.

There is also a tendency in the schools to maintain classes at middle or lowest common denominator rather than having remedial activities provided for children who are having difficulty or who are struggling in classes. So rather than actually taking one or two or three children out of the class and trying to get them up to the speed of everybody else, they tend to leave them in there and the whole class starts to come back.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So a lack of staff would be a problem there, I guess.

Mr Mahomet—It possibly is, but I think there is an inability also to actually identify gifted students, above-average students and below-average students. I think there is a bit of difficulty. I do not know that there is any system for monitoring or testing children at school level with their abilities.

Mr BARRESI—Could I ask a question about unemployment in this area that the other two witnesses were unable to answer? Do you have a better handle on that?

Mr Mahomet—It is about 7.6 per cent across the whole region. In different towns it varies from about 15 per cent to 25 per cent. In some areas that is a result of there not being jobs but it does not necessarily say that there are not jobs. There seems to be a lack of ratcheting of the education system or whatever to produce kids for particular job streams when they come out of their school environment. If you are in a horticultural valley it is not much good attempting to produce a series of rocket scientists. There does not seem to be any matching capacity at the school level with what is going on. There does not seem to be a connection with what is around them.

Mr BARRESI—What is local industry doing in order to make that connection? You can blame the schools but are they offering apprenticeships or traineeships? Those two were not offering work experience, to begin with. What are local industry and local industry groups doing in order to bridge that gap?

Mr Mahomet—I think there is a deficiency in the local industry groups with regard to having addressed those gaps. Also I think there has been a problem with the likes of unions and organisations of that nature as well. They have not been in there trying to get a handle on the situation. It appears to me that that would be a useful area for them to involve themselves with making links between business and the students. If they are representing workers, that is where the prospective workers will come from.

I do not blame the schools. I think there has been deficiency on both sides, schools and industry, to come to grips with it. But I think there has been a huge reliance on the likes of DEETYA to provide traineeships and the like. Up here you have the Western Australian Department of Training, DEET and TAFE. You basically have a series of organisations that are competing for the same bodies. There is no concerted effort in any particular area. The curriculum formats for those sorts of training organisations seem to be that someone sits in Perth and develops a curriculum and then pumps it out into the community and it may have no relevance in certain areas whatsoever.

Geoff was talking about the jackaroo or the pastoral training. I do not believe anyone from TAFE ever talked to anyone from the pastoral industry and said, 'We would like to deliver this. What is the best mechanism? How does your industry work?' Someone just guessed they knew how it worked.

Mr BARRESI—Is there a role that your organisation can perform?

Mr Mahomet—We are trying to. I have been involved recently in setting up a group training organisation. We are hoping to have a series of doors, I guess, once the group training organisation actually gets mobile, because there is quite a large numeracy and literacy deficiency with a lot of people as well, even after having come out of school. We think, through the group training organisation, that one of the things we are going to have to seriously consider is to have an induction process and also an assessment process so that when they come in, if they are deficient in letters or numbers, we don't just say, 'You're off. We can't deal with you.' We are seriously looking at having some sort of in-house system which would then take those people into literacy and numeracy classes and whatever work types they are interested in, and trying to have a connection. If it is the pastoral industry, maybe the way to bring their literacy and numeracy skills along is by weighing batches of feed or counting fence posts—and something that is relevant.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Have you looked at the occupations that might be covered by a group training company at a local level?

Mr Mahomet—Once the thing hits the ground, people will be going from the organisation to industry and saying, 'What's required?' There will not be a system where

the training company says, 'We think that we can attract funds over here for trainees in the gold mining industry,' because there is no gold mining industry around here. What we think would be occurring there is that there would be a big push towards liaising with industry and commerce about what their requirements really are.

Mr BARRESI—Where is this idea at at the moment?

Mr Mahomet—The idea is at the stage now where there is a series of applicants for the chief executive officer position. We should have an outcome there within two weeks and then the organisation will be up and running. There also is an unusual mix in the organisation. Its roots were really housed in the Aboriginal community but then what has occurred over time is that there is a combination of Aboriginal organisations and non-Aboriginal organisations which are actually underpinning the whole of the group training organisation.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You do mention in your document related school industry linked projects. Could you give us more—

Mr Mahomet—That is just something that the business enterprise centre itself has been dealing with. We attempted, first of all, to get into the area of mock interviews and things of that nature, just to see whether we could get something rolling along.

Mr MOSSFIELD—That is important.

Mr Mahomet—That was reasonably well received. Then we thought another way of engaging the two parties was that we would look at promoting school children in the senior years of high school to attend Aussiehost training courses. So we did that on a number of occasions as well. We have also developed a program for this year and next year for school industry links, projects which are coming on stream now.

CHAIR—Will you be doing much of that, though, in years 9 and 10?

Mr Mahomet—We are actually looking at going back to about year 5 and trying to have small projects happening in there—it might be cross-cultural awareness—where those kids can be involved. They will be taken from their school to an Aboriginal community that delivers it, which would be some 100 kilometres away from their own school. They are the sorts of things. We think there is a need to get back a lot further back into the schools than years 9 and 10.

The other thing that obviously is of grave concern to us is that there seems to be a subsidence in work ethic: there is that issue, and there is also the expectation of collecting the salary of a chief executive officer of BHP the minute that you leave school and get into a job. There is this expectation out there that you should not have to start at the bottom—that if you decide to start in the middle, there should not be an obstacle to your starting there.

CHAIR—What has created those attitudes?

Mr Mahomet—Honestly, I do not know. I would probably be getting a lot more money if I could get a handle on that. I honestly do not know. Maybe it is because things are too easy. It has to have something to do with parental and school activities, I am sure.

CHAIR—Elaine said that she cannot get young people to service the horticultural industry in the area—

Mr Mahomet—Yes.

CHAIR—And Geoff said he only hires young people, but he cannot get any locals whatsoever as stockmen. Yet you say that there is youth unemployment.

Mr Mahomet—Yes.

CHAIR—This committee has been hearing this—we heard it in Alice Springs, we heard it in Darwin.

Mr Mahomet—I think you also need to talk to the kids.

CHAIR—We are having difficulty coming to grips with this concept that there is unemployment and yet there are heaps of jobs. What do we do about that?

Mr Mahomet—I think that as part of this process you need to talk to people who are in that 15 to 24 age bracket and find out why they have this expectation of only having to go to work between 10 and 4 every day and being able to take home $750 a week. I do not know what the answer is, but the answer obviously lies amongst those people who have that expectation.

CHAIR—Is the dole too easy?

Mr Mahomet—I think there is no doubt about that. In our area we have CDEP as well, which is actually reflected as employment. But in lots of instances it is not associated with employment at all—a community is eligible for it. Some communities apply ‘no work, no money’, but others do not. That is a bit of a snack if you can—

CHAIR—Where it is applied, is it successful in most of those communities? We have had varying advice across the country from east to west.

Mr Mahomet—In some places that I go to—I go to nearly all the Aboriginal communities throughout this region—it works pretty well because they have actually done some pretty good things in their own community. In other places, even where it is applied the success of it is not obvious. I do not know the answer to that either.

CHAIR—Where it is successful, is it changing attitudes to work or not?

Mr Mahomet—I think it has, actually—yes. When it is successful you see those people out early in the mornings, late in the evenings, and they are into it, whereas in other places they are not.

CHAIR—How do you mean?

Mr Mahomet—Where they have pastoral leases they are out there fencing or grading roads or making improvements. In other places everyone is sitting around in the community. You can see by the level of activity in the place whether it is going ahead or not. Are you going to any Aboriginal communities? It is a pity that you do not have an opportunity to physically see—

CHAIR—But then we would have to go to 50.

Mr Mahomet—Quite possibly. There is a relationship between what you are doing here and what occurs there.

CHAIR—We would have to go to a whole lot of them because attitudes vary so significantly, we are told, from one community to another.

Mr Mahomet—That is my point. If another committee did it, there would have to be a relationship between what this committee did and what they did because, once you go around, the differences that you would notice even in 100 kilometres from one place to another would be mind-boggling.

Mr BARRESI—On another topic, we have heard from various employer groups and from employers themselves that one of the problems they see with employing young kids is that they are not work ready. So the transition from school to work has been broken. If they just had that extra bit of experience it would minimise on-the-job training and the risk associated with training somebody who did not work out. Do you concur with that? Do you think that if kids in this area were more job ready there would be more jobs available for them?

Mr Mahomet—I have a different view. I think that up here there has been training just for training's sake. The deliverers of the training have not had an outcome in their minds at all. There is a bundle of cash, so we get the cash and train people—

CHAIR—In other words, you train forklift drivers when there is not a forklift in the area?

Mr Mahomet—Basically, yes. But also you have organisations who depend on that training money to survive. So they will train; it does not matter what is going on. That is a problem in itself. You would probably find, if you actually talked to employers, that a lot of them would like to be trained as trainers in-house so they could deliver some of the training themselves. A lot of them have a huge difficulty. They say: 'I have employed this person and for one and a half days a week they are not going to be there.

So what is the point?' It is the equivalent of working with one man short.

CHAIR—Your organisation covers a broad range of industry, commerce and business. Is there any area of activity with potential employment in this region?

Mr Mahomet—Tourism.

CHAIR—But is there any area, whether it is mechanics in a garage, the tourism industry, the horticultural industry, pastoralists or whatever, where you have enough skills available in the area to fill the jobs?

Mr Mahomet—I do not think so. That is also a reason for the fly-in, fly-out for mining companies. I am most concerned about the possibilities of jobs when Ord stage 2 takes off.

CHAIR—Can you tell us about that?

Mr Mahomet—That is a 64,000 hectare further development of the Ord Valley, which is partly in Western Australia and then goes over into the Northern Territory. There will be construction and on-farm work. There will be every sort of skill that you have ever seen around those sorts of projects. Downstream activity will increase. I do not know that we really have the people here who have the tools at this stage to take advantage of that.

CHAIR—So you want us to advertise for you down south and tell the people—

Mr Mahomet—No, part of what the group training organisation is seriously looking at is to identify what those jobs might be. The lead time is probably somewhere between three and five years, so there is an opportunity to perhaps develop some people into those skill areas.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Will an authority be responsible for this stage 2 project?

Mr Mahomet—At this stage there are a number of key stakeholders, including the Western Australian government. The Department of Resource Development is probably the major player.

CHAIR—What is the major emphasis—just a water pipeline?

Mr Mahomet—It will be drains and irrigation channels and all that sort of thing to do with irrigation.

Mr BARRESI—What is the projected increase in population in the work force?

Mr Mahomet—At this stage it varies from about 400 to 1,300. Again, hopefully through the group training organisation there will be an attempt to get a handle on what the real numbers might be.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming, John. It has been most helpful. We will try to advertise for you! Good luck. We hope to complete the inquiry at the end of June. We will certainly send you a copy of our final report. We hope to make a few very positive recommendations, not a whole raft of things. I do not intend that we write recommendations recommending that somebody inquire into something else. We want to try to get something positive done for these kids. That is what we are all about.

Mr Mahomet—I think that's great.

CHAIR—We appreciate your input and we will certainly send you a copy of the report.

Mr Mahomet—Thank you for that.

[9.40 a.m.]

TRUST, Mr Ian Richard, Chairperson, Wunan Regional Council, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, P.O. Box 260, Kununurra, Western Australia 6743

CHAIR—Welcome and thank you for coming. This committee's inquiry is about two things: firstly, how we can assist young people to become more employable; and, secondly, how we can encourage employers to make more jobs available for our youth. Do you have a statement to make about the matters we are inquiring into?

Mr Trust—I suppose I would say just basically that my regional council is very concerned about youth unemployment and the social impact it is having on Aboriginal people not just in Kununurra but in the East Kimberley generally. We are looking at any sorts of options or strategies that can alleviate that problem. We are looking at a number of issues, and you probably have heard already about a couple of them this morning.

I am quite interested also in the outcome of this sort of inquiry as well because I think it has a lot of relevance for our young people here, even though we are a long way from Canberra. That is my chief interest and also that of my regional council, and we are very keen to come up with anything that can alleviate the problems a bit.

CHAIR—Essentially we are looking at the age group from 16 to 24. Do you have a rough idea of the population of young Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley region in that category?

Mr Trust—The Aboriginal population generally is quite different from the non-Aboriginal one in that it tends to be younger. I think one of the legacies of unemployment and economic development, and so on, is that Aboriginal people, in later generations anyway, have not tended to live to really old ages. The bulk of our population is up to about, say, 35, or something like that. I know that because, before I had this job, I used to work for the East Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service and we used to keep statistics on the population spread of the Aboriginal people.

Basically, the classic shape of the population spread of a developed country is like a beehive, with the number of younger people and also a large number of older people. But the Aboriginal one is very much like a pyramid with its number of very much younger people peaking fairly steeply as they die off at a younger age for whatever reasons. But I think that is the major sort of difference between the two populations in the region—that the Aboriginal population is generally younger than the non-Aboriginal one, and also that the age span probably is not as high in regard to the old-age bracket.

CHAIR—We have heard this morning that, depending on what skills are required, there are a significant number of employment opportunities not just in Kununurra but in Wyndham and throughout the region, whether they be in the pastoral industry, horticulture, tourism, or in the towns in the supermarkets, or whatever. What problems do you see in

getting your young people into some of those entry level jobs and encouraging them to stay there?

Mr Trust—Obviously, a lot of it is to do with education and training if there are any skills required to do some of these jobs. I think one of the problems we have with our younger people, especially at primary but at also secondary school level, is that not very many go beyond year 10. In fact, at year 11 and year 12 level very few go on. The ones who do tend to go on are mainly female. The boys, for some reason, drop out a bit earlier.

There is a large section of the Aboriginal people that does not see education and training as important. Coming from a background where your mother and father are illiterate and you never had much education or training yourself, you do not see it as important. That is just the way it is. So for us to change that there also has to be, in addition to finding these positions and creating an environment where there are education and training opportunities, some mechanism to change that culture of not seeing education and training as important. Maybe you are talking about some sort of marketing strategy through mass media on TV or whatever. A lot of the young kids are walking around with Michael Jackson or Michael Jordan T-shirts and so on, so there is obviously an impact on them.

We are looking at that sort of issue as well: that you do have to change the culture and that education and training are important. When they do get some education and training there has to be something at the end of it in terms of actually getting a job out of it. There are lots of jobs around in the area here, like in horticulture, the farming industry and so on. For some reason with the Aboriginal people, because of the history of the region and because it is mainly pastoral, there is still a bit of that legacy of them seeing themselves as horsemen and involved in the cattle industry and so on. That is the position of glamour—things like the local rodeos, race meetings and so on. That is where all the idols that they look up to are: people who are good rodeo riders and things like that. So there is that sort of culture there, which is to do with the pastoral industry to some extent. Trying to get some of the younger people into just going out and picking mangoes as opposed to going out and riding a horse somewhere is an issue.

I am not sure how effective some of the mechanisms of connecting these young people with some of the jobs have been in the past. The main link between the employer and employee has been through organisations like the CES. But there does not seem to be a very good success rate in actually getting these kids out to these jobs. I have, for many years, tried to figure out what are some of the motivating factors. With some Aboriginal people it is not just money. On pastoral properties they would sort of give them a top-up on CDEP or they would get fairly good money; so money is one factor, but it is not the only factor. One is the image that they have about being cowboys and sometimes it is some of the things that come with the job: I know in the old station days that you would give them clothing, hats, boots and so on at the end of the season as an incentive bonus for doing a good job.

In regard to the training point of view, we do need to have for Aboriginal people

some sort of media campaign with role models that they can identify with who will keep on pushing that education and training are important. We have tried to push that policy through our regional council with our organisations that we fund through ATSIC. If two people are applying for a job and one of them has had no formal training or skills and the other person has tried to do something, we press our organisations to consider the second person for the job. That puts some value and recognition back into education and training. We have not had a lot of success in that area. People tend to recognise someone who has not been formally trained but who has had a lot of experience in doing something. I suppose that is in line with competency based training which is being considered now. They are the sorts of issues that we want to identify.

We are setting up a group training company. I would like to see that company target kids as they come out of school to develop some career path for them. They should have mentors at every step of the way, especially if they come from backgrounds where their mother and father may be illiterate, where they obviously cannot provide the vision for their children as to what they want to achieve. I think you have to provide that from another source. I would like to see the training company that we are setting up provide a mentoring system from when they leave secondary school and even before they leave school to make sure that they stay on at school and achieve something there.

One problem we have with Aboriginal kids at the primary school level is that—from what they tell me—they are two or three years behind even before they start. This is because they do not come from a home background where there are lots of books around, where mothers and fathers read to their kids at night or get their kids to read from books so they become familiar with numbers and so on. They do not come from that environment. By the time they get to school, the kids who come from that sort of home environment are already a couple of years in advance.

We have to contend with those sorts of issues in regard to the education system. How do you compensate for those kids coming from that sort of home background? How do you give them extra exposure to learning, reading and writing and basic arithmetic before they start school? We are looking at how we can improve that situation.

CHAIR—A friend of mine for the last four years was in a fairly large community 750 kilometres due east of Port Hedland—in the middle of nowhere. His job was to teach the children of that community. They adopted, as I recall, a program that used their own language first and English second. It taught language skills—both reading and converting the spoken language into writing. He thought that he was having a pretty significant degree of success. Do you know whether that sort of approach has been tried through the Kimberley at all?

Mr Trust—I think some of the schools have that system, but it depends on the size of the community. For example, a community like Yagga Yagga, which is about 90 kilometres east of Balgo, has about 120 people and one teacher. There are about 20 or 30 kids in the classroom. Their ages range from about five or six years to about 13 or 14 years. Their mental ages range from grade one up to grade 7 or something like that.

I think it is a very difficult environment for those sorts of really remote communities to try to do any sort of quality education in when you have a big mix of ages and academic ability of kids in one classroom trying to be taught by one person, especially if that person is not conversant with the local language, does not speak the local language, and so on.

I think that people who have been in some of these communities for a number of years, who may not necessarily speak the language but can speak Pidgin English or whatever to communicate with the kids, have tried different ways of some levels of bilingual education, where the Aboriginal language was the one that was mainly spoken, and using Aboriginal teacher aides and people like that working in the schools. In some of the places I have been to, I have seen material on the wall where they have had nursery rhymes or little stories and so on written up in the local language so that the kids could understand it—although that presents a bit of a problem because spelling some of the local Aboriginal words is more difficult than English.

CHAIR—I accept that, absolutely.

Mr MOSSFIELD—We have been told that probably the best way forward with the Aboriginal community is to have them involved in their own industries. We were told yesterday by someone from the Arnhemland Progress Association that they have a group of supermarkets working very successfully with the Aboriginal people employed there. Is that the best way to go—into Aboriginal-type industries—rather than try to fit Aboriginal people into some of the traditional industries where, for various reasons, it is very difficult for them to get in?

Mr Trust—I think it depends on the area. In a situation like Kununurra, I would look at both sorts of strategies—Aboriginal initiated ones and also having kids involved in the wider industry generally. In the more remote areas, in the desert region here—those communities south of Halls Creek—the only industry that has got up to any large extent and that is fairly successful is traditional arts. Places like Balgo have sold—I think it was last year—over $600,000 in paintings and so on, with people flying in direct from Sydney and Melbourne and so on to buy the art work. So it is something that is in demand. People there have a natural skill and something that they are good at.

I think there are those sorts of things, like the arts and craft industry and the tourism industry, which obviously can be developed just for Aboriginal people. In a town situation, I think we are looking at developing some economic projects here in places like Kununurra which we hope will provide opportunities for our people. But we do not see that as being the only strategy we would be wanting to get involved with. We would want to see them getting involved with private employees as well because there are opportunities there.

CHAIR—In Alice Springs, by way of an example to tell a story, we were told about one young girl. We were told that very few stayed on through high school and very few when they finished school actually went out into the work force. This young lass was

pretty talented and wanted to work. She got a part-time job at Woolies while she was still going to school and was going well. But every payday the extended family lined up outside the front of Woolies on the footpath and waited for her to come out so they could collect her pay. Eventually, it got to her and she just gave the whole thing away as being too hard. Is that a significant problem in the Kimberley as well?

Mr Trust—For some communities, it would be. Again, it depends on the location and also, in some of the places, some of the families. That is not universal. I have heard stories of people having a lot of demands made on them by extended family. Some of the organisations that employ people do all sorts of things to try to reduce that problem. For instance, instead of giving them cash, in some places they can go and get their stores from the shop and take the food home, so it is not actually cash. Cash is the major problem, with people carrying lots of money in their pockets and people keeping on asking them for it and wanting to go and spend it on all sorts of things. In some places it probably would be a problem but in other places some people would not see it as being a problem. So it depends on the location. But even here in Kununurra, with some families it would be a problem.

We have noticed—through ATSIC—that when a community is being managed well, in terms of their administration, the management of their projects and so on, you can sense that people are a lot happier than in the communities that are not being managed well. If you go into a community where the administration has broken down, the store is not running well and the work projects are not working well, you can pick it up: people are restless and there is a lot of harassment of people for money, because there are no systems or procedures in place. You notice that more in the more remote, traditional communities. But you go into another community which is being run well and, just driving through it, you can see it is being kept better: there are some trees and so on being tended around the place, there are work programs going on and people are generally happier.

One of the major problems with the CDEP program that a lot of these places have is that there is not enough money coming into it for people to act as supervisors. The way it is funded is that you get the wages component of it and there is capital recurrent—which used to be about $2,700 per participant—which was for materials and capital equipment and so on for the work programs to use to work with. If you have a CDEP with 200 people on it, it will have a staff of, say, two or three in the office, doing all the administration work and preparing the pay and accounting for the money back to ATSIC, but there is nobody out in the field supervising the work crews. You have got to try to find the extra money from within the program to top the extra supervisors up, because you have got to pay them a bit more for them to act as supervisors. That is one of the problems with that program—there is insufficient money for supervisors. Some of the ones that tend to fall down a bit are basically due to lack of supervision in terms of work programs and administering the program properly. You can have a program that is being administered back to ATSIC perfectly, in regards to audit reports and all that sort of thing, but you go and have a look on the ground and it is a complete disaster because of the fact that there is no on-site supervisor. So that is a thing with the CDEP program.

In closing on that program, it is a good program. It can be used for a lot of economic development work for Aboriginal people, and most of the Aboriginal people in this region support it. In fact, they would like to see it expanded. A lot of the projects do have a 'no work, no pay' policy. When they say, 'no pay', they are no pay up to a certain point. They let them have some money to live on, otherwise they just go and get it off someone else next door. It is a good program. It has a lot of merit. In regards to a lot of the economic things we want to achieve, CDEP can play a big part in achieving some of those things.

Mr BARRESI—Going back to the good training program that you are hoping to put in place—it sounds good in terms of what you've got in store—is a similar model being applied elsewhere? If so, is it working in other Aboriginal communities?

Mr Trust—I don't know of any. There are group training companies around which I presume are privately owned and profit motivated. The one that we are setting up will hopefully make a profit but that won't be going back to any principals or individuals. It goes back into more education and training.

No, I don't know of any others around. In fact, we were looking for other examples to see what the structures were, how they were set up and so on to base ours on, but we didn't come across any that we could use as a model. I've heard of some good projects around. There's an apprenticeship scheme over on the east coast of New South Wales that apparently works very well and has a very high success rate with regards to apprentices getting training. We would like to go and have a look at that. I don't know of a specific training company as such.

CHAIR—Ian, thank you very much for coming. We hope to finish talking to people by the end of June. We've been doing lots of talking. After that it will be time for us to sit down and actually do the hard work of writing our report. We will certainly send you a copy. We don't intend to make many recommendations, but we hope them to be meaningful and that the government will pick them up and will have an opportunity to make more jobs available for all our kids, if you will.

Mr Trust—Thanks very much.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Barresi):

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 the documents received from Mr Mahomet titled:

'Appeal concerning rejected AIC claim'
'Paper for Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Kununurra, Tuesday, 29 April 1997'
East Kimberley Aboriginal Education Conference: The key to our future
'Wunan Regional Plan 1996'

Resolved (on motion by Mr Barresi):

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

Committee adjourned at 10.08 a.m.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

FORUM

Factors influencing the employment of young people

BROOME

Tuesday, 29 April 1997

Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Barresi Mr Mossfield

The forum met at 3.34 p.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

PARTICIPANTS:

Broome Senior High School

Patrick Clarke
Craig Cowdrey
Russell Francis
Tiarna Pigram
Kim Webster
Lisa Webster
Matthew Whitely
Kris Young

St Mary's Catholic College

Rebecca Darcy
Drew Gronow
Marcello Puertollano
Jamarra Ryan

CHAIR—Thank you for coming; I know you were not in school today so it is good of you to come along. 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, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Students and members of the committee agreed that the forums were a valuable opportunity to share concerns and express views about this important issue. This school forum is one of a series with students in Darwin, Broome, Carnarvon and Kalgoorlie. The committee considers the school forums to be an important part of our inquiry process. So far the committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Darwin, Alice Springs and several regional centres in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.

For the most part, the evidence collected has come from employers and government and non-government agencies. Through this forum, all of you will have the opportunity to voice your views and your opinions on this very important matter. The agenda and issues for discussions 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 that 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 your views on the matters under discussion.

We are not the government; we are an all-party committee of the parliament. We are elected representatives but we report to the parliament. We have been chasing this very big topic for a year now and we are coming to the end of the inquiry. But it is important for us, before we finish, to get as many views from young people as possible. We thought it important to come out to the regional centres that are away from the big capital cities and see what sorts of special problems you have.

The first topic is the secondary education system and whether or not you think it is equipping you for real life and for work in the future. Some of your colleagues in the big cities and in some of the regions have told us that their parents and their teachers say, ‘You have two choices: you either go to university or you go on the dole. There is nothing else. You would not want to work in an abattoir because that might be a bit smelly.’ They forget to tell you that you might earn $50,000 a year doing it. They say, ‘You would not want to work in a factory because you would get your hands dirty.’ And so it goes.

What we would like to hear from you is how appropriate you think the secondary

school system is in Broome for what you want to do. We want to know how much help your teachers and the system and your parents give you in explaining to you what careers are available, what kind of work you might do in the future and what the employment prospects are in those industries or businesses that you might think about? Having said that, who wants to be first? Somebody always has to be first, and then everybody talks.

Mr MOSSFIELD—The topic is the secondary education system.

PATRICK CLARKE—The more practical things that we have been doing, such as the week where we go out, have actually been getting better recently. That has to do with our youth education officers and the transferable skills program that we did once a week. We went out for a week and worked in a line of work that we had chosen, like in day care centres. I went out on a trip on a boat for a week. Programs like that have been improving over the few years that we have been doing them.

Mr BARRESI—What is the name of the program, Patrick?

PATRICK CLARKE—Work experience. That was enjoyable. I helped deal with other industries and things like that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Has anybody else had work experience that they would like to tell us about?

CRAIG COWDREY—I went on work experience. I was thinking about joining the Army. I went to Norforce, which is our local regiment. It helped me to learn a lot. I got a lot out of the experience. I realised I did not want to join the Army after that. But the people were really helpful. They helped me a lot in my choice.

The career counselling here at school could be a bit better. The education officer, Mr McLarty, is sometimes too busy, and some more information could be made available to us about all the lines of work. But overall it has been pretty good.

Mr BARRESI—Are there ample opportunities for work experience in Broome? Is it first come first served because there is not that much available?

CRAIG COWDREY—Most people did get work experience with the people that they wanted. The local businesses were pretty helpful.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Has everyone had work experience?

CRAIG COWDREY—It is in year 10. Most people do it.

PATRICK CLARKE—It is an opportunity to have a week off school.

Mr BARRESI—Who has not found work experience valuable? Has anyone had a negative experience with it?

RUSSELL FRANCIS—I did it. It was not really that useful because I was not sure what I wanted to do. With the field that I was looking at, which was something to do with mining, the closest area that I could do anything with was out in the middle of the bush. I cannot just go there for a week because I do not really know any contacts, so they could not really help me.

It is a bit hard. Broome is really only tourist stuff. Patrick went out on a boat on a charter trip. It is mainly tourist stuff and nothing else really. If you are interested in something majorly science based, you cannot go anywhere unless you have a plane fare to somewhere, and they are just a bit expensive. It is not in the government's interest to fund it because it is not worth it for a week. You do not get that much.

Also, school is doing all right, but it is also a lot harder to get into the harder academic studies. I was going to do chemistry, physics and a few others. I managed to do the few others, but I could not do chemistry and physics because I had to do them through DEC, and the workload is too much. You do not get as much out of it. There were five or six of us who were going to do chemistry but that just was not enough. We have a full chemistry lab, but it is not being used for what it is for because there is not enough of us to fill what the school counts as the quota of students. If you try to do something which is not a vocational study, you cannot, unless you want to do it through DEC, and it is too hard to do at least two subjects.

Vocational study is good, but it should not hold down the people who want to do something that is above it—academic studies. I agree with it; I am doing a vocational study now called media studies. It is mainly a time when I have a bit more fun. It is good fun, but I would rather have done physics because it would help me more in my life and what I am aiming for. But I could not do it because the workload would be a lot too much if I had done it through DEC.

PATRICK CLARKE—I agree with Russell that it is mainly the isolation of the community in Broome and the lack of numbers in schools that restricts what we are able to do in certain subjects. They are still all offered to us. It is just that a lot of them are really hard because we are not working with the larger groups that we otherwise would. In chemistry, for example, you would not be doing so many experiments. You would be doing it over a phone to someone else on the other end. It would be a lot harder to do such subjects like that.

Mr BARRESI—If you wanted to do those subjects, but not through DEC, where would you have to go—to Perth?

PATRICK CLARKE—Yes. Boarding school in Perth probably.

Mr BARRESI—Do you find lots of your friends moving to Perth to do that?

PATRICK CLARKE—Yes, the numbers are quickly decreasing at the moment through year 11. Everyone is going to board down in Perth at Scotch College—places like that.

CHAIR—Do you have any idea how many stay here and how many move on?

PATRICK CLARKE—I would say 10 or 15 per cent.

CHAIR—Would leave?

PATRICK CLARKE—Yes.

CRAIG COWDREY—You were talking about the school leaving age being raised to 17 by that New South Wales task force and I was thinking that it should not be raised. People should always be given the option. There should be more things put in place like better counselling and better people around the school to help people to make decisions about whether they want to leave. But people should not be forced to stay. In recent years, with less jobs and stuff like that, people are choosing to stay in school, but it should not be made compulsory to stay. There should be more help, like more career counsellors who can help us decide where we want to go and what we want to do so that you do not find yourself halfway through university thinking, 'I do not want to do this course. I should not have decided back in year 10 when I was still immature and undecided. I do not want to be an engineer.'

Mr MOSSFIELD—A lot of employers say to us that when young people apply for a job their literacy and numeracy skills are not really crash-hot. Would you like to make any comments on that? How do feel your skills are in that area?

RUSSELL FRANCIS—In a lot of the cases up here, a lot of students did not put the effort in. A lot of us are in the top maths class and top English class, so we are all right, but there are a lot of students, especially Aboriginal students, who are in the lower maths groups and who are not doing them at all. You cannot really blame them—not necessarily because they did not have the chance; they just did not want to when they were younger. It did not really seem necessary to them. A lot of them may not have had the chance.

But I know a lot of them in Bunbury who all had the chance, but in year 7 they decided just to flunk it. I kept going. They would not be half as far as I was. I was not very good in primary school, but I came here and I actually studied in year 8. I started in all the bottom classes, but now I am averaging all top classes. I have improved. It is not really because I am better than any of them. It is just that I put the effort in. Also I have had the ability. I could remember stuff that teachers said. I actually listened when they

said it instead of talking with all of my friends, because I did not really have many then. I do not have everyone as my friend now. I know a lot of people, but I do not count them as good friends. A lot of them here I count as friends, but not really good friends—good enough to talk to and I go out with them, but that is about all.

I stay at home at lot and I do not do much else. I read a lot of books, and that has helped me a lot, especially with my English studies. I have learnt to spell a lot of words and it has opened my mind, reading a lot of books and so on. But a lot of the Aboriginals and other kids all look at me when I am reading a book and they think I am stupid because they are off playing basketball and having fun. I am reading my book, but I am still getting as much fun as them. It is also helping me academically. A lot of them are not and a lot of them are quite violent stuff, but still they are good books or written by good authors and so on. That is about it.

CHAIR—Did you read *Tears of the Moon*?

RUSSELL FRANCIS—No.

CHAIR—We have one hand up at the back, but it is not a student.

KIM WEBSTER—I have a question I want to ask you. When employers say that our numeracy and literacy skills are not that high, are you talking about year 12 students who have finished school or year 10 students?

Mr MOSSFIELD—I am probably talking about year 12. It is what employers have told us when young people apply for a job. Of course, this does not apply in every case. But it does seem to be Australia-wide. We have been all over Australia and it has come through that literacy and numeracy skills are weak in some areas. It is very important that you have strong skills in those areas. That is really the basic skill that you need when you apply for a job. You have to be able to write a letter. If you go into small business, you have to be able to add up and work out the cost of items and things like that. That is why we place a fair bit of importance on it.

KIM WEBSTER—I find that difficult to understand because even if you are in the lowest English and maths class you are still taught how to write a letter and basic things like that. That is all really basic stuff. If a person goes to get a job from an employer, they should know how to do those basic skills. There is no reason why they should not have those basic skills. It would be their own fault if they cannot do these things because at school there is help available.

Mr MOSSFIELD—That is what we are trying to find out—whether you are satisfied with the training that you are getting in that particular field.

KIM WEBSTER—At this school, if you need help, it is definitely here for us.

There is no reason not to have those skills.

RUSSELL FRANCIS—I have been to a lot of schools in my time. In primary school, I skipped to about seven schools. I went from little shacks down in God knows where to lots of them in Geraldton and that. All the things have been in the schools but, at different schools, students take to them differently. In Bluff Point in Geraldton, it was quite a rough school but everything was there. If you wanted it, you could get to it. There was a lot of peer pressure. If you had to see a teacher after school, a lot of the students in the class thought you were a square and this and that and they did not like it. But a lot of them were not doing very well at all. They were actually quite dumb, but they thought they were good because they were not there. I have met a few of them and they are not much better than they were then because they just have not listened in class.

Everything has been there, but they do not listen, they do not pay attention. That is all it is. Fair enough, in a lot of areas, students might have that problem—it might not be there. All the places I have been, it has been there. It is just that they do not want to know about it. They brush it off as being useless to them at that point, and when they get older they realise that they need those things and they think it is the school's fault because it did not put it to them. But it was there. They abused the teacher that brought it up to them. They hassled them or listened to their friends too much and they did not pay attention. They went off and played in the playground and played football instead of going and doing that little bit of extra study.

I have rarely ever studied in my life, but I am still doing very well because I listen to everything the teacher says. I take down my notes. I do not usually not finish any work in class. The only thing I ever really study for are assignments that I have got to do at home, and I am still doing very well. I pay attention in class, but a lot of students do not. They study like hell at home, but they do not get anywhere because they are using second-hand information out of their heads that is no good to them because they can only remember half of what the teacher said. They cannot remember that one point from the maths class where the teacher explains it, and it is the key to everything else.

You just have to pay more attention in class and your marks will rise. Cramming at home is not necessarily the best idea. It can be detrimental, I have found. For all my tests, I have stopped cramming now because I overload and I cannot remember anything on the day, although I know I read it that night. If I have read it three weeks ago, I would be able to remember it. You just have to have a good memory and listen when the teacher says it and when it is being explained to you the first time and then you don't have to try as hard the second time. It is a lot harder the second time around than the first time. You have to make them listen a bit more and put it forward that it is not a good idea to just brush the teacher off as some loudmouth. It does not help you a lot.

Mr BARRESI—To go back to the DEC and the kids having to go down to Perth or up to Darwin or wherever to finish off their schooling if they do not want to do it

through the DEC, does the government provide any subsidy in terms of travel costs or accommodation or scholarships? I am just trying to work out why some go and some don't. Is it for purely financial reasons that you decide not to go down there?

KIM WEBSTER—I have found that the people who go down to boarding school come from the more wealthier families. Two of my friends went to boarding school and they were from the wealthier families in town. They were telling us about the fees and how much it cost. There is no way that an average family could afford that. Our family is pretty average, but I doubt whether they could afford to send both me and my sister down to boarding school. I do not know about scholarships and things like that being offered. If they are being offered, they should be publicised a little more because I would like to know about them.

DREW GRONOW—Some of my friends who go to school with me want to move down to Perth to finish years 11 and 12. They are getting a scholarship to go down there. Some schools are offering scholarships to go down there, but it is not very well publicised. You have to look for it or ask about it.

Mr BARRESI—We ask this of most groups. How many of you in this room at this stage of your academic studies are considering going on after year 12, either to a TAFE or university? From the show of hands, that is most of you. What about the rest of you? Will you take on apprenticeships, traineeships or anything that comes along? Out of those of you who are going on—about 70 or 80 per cent—do you feel disadvantaged by staying in Broome to finish off your studies? I know that Broome is a great place to live.

KIM WEBSTER—I do not think that we are disadvantaged, because you get the most out of what you have. It is up to you to make it. I would have liked to have been studying in Perth. A lot of my friends who are studying down there seem to get more benefits. They do not have to do anything by DEC. There were a few subjects I wanted to do, but I couldn't do them unless I did them through DEC. I do not think we are disadvantaged by being up here. A lot of people make out that we are an isolated little town and everything, but you just get the most out of what you have got.

CHAIR—Kim, what is the problem with distance education?

KIM WEBSTER—I have four TE subjects. If I did any DEC subjects, they would probably clash with the subjects I have at the moment. I do not know how it would work out. I could not fit any more in my timetable. That is the only problem with it.

PATRICK CLARKE—Going back to the schooling in Perth, I was talking to some of my friends who were up here these holidays. They were telling me how they have all this homework in the holidays and they were saying that the workload down there is a lot larger. I was thinking, 'Oh, great, I'm up here and its not so much hard work.' Then, again, I was thinking that when we go to college afterwards they may be a lot more

prepared for it than we are.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Has anybody made up their minds as to exactly what career they would like to follow? Would you like to give us some indication of what that career is?

CRAIG COWDREY—I wanted to try to get into law. The score for that is something like 405—around that mark. In medicine do they give any incentives for country people? I am not sure, but I do not think they have anything for law. Maybe it is harder. There are no prerequisites for it, so I do not have to do the harder subjects by DEC. I am concentrating on doing the easier ones but doing them really well so I get the higher score. I did do some DEC subjects—physics, geometry and trigonometry. I did all right. I did not need those subjects to do law. There was no point in doing the really hard ones when I cannot get a good score. So I dropped those and picked up some easier ones so I could do better.

Mr BARRESI—What have you done to investigate what law is all about? Have you done any work experience in a law firm?

CRAIG COWDREY—Like I said before, I wanted to be in the Army.

Mr BARRESI—So you went to the Army and realised that it was not for you. So what have you done about law?

CRAIG COWDREY—Nothing as yet. It has not been that long that I have wanted to do it. I do not necessarily want to be a lawyer but to get into Foreign Affairs afterwards. The career counsellor here got some information from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. That gave me an outline—no specifics, especially not in law. I know I will have to investigate further, maybe ring someone in Perth or go to the CES and get them to help me.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You haven't tried any work experience with the local solicitors?

CRAIG COWDREY—No. It is in year 10 and it is for a week. If you want to change your mind after that then you have to do it on your own.

Mr BARRESI—You can always approach them to do work experience in school holidays.

CRAIG COWDREY—Maybe I'll try that.

JAMARRA RYAN—Craig was saying before about choosing a career. Around year 10 it is hard. You are not sure what you want to do and there are a lot of options

open to you. I know most of my friends have not decided what they want to do yet. At the school the teachers are good to talk to. We are aware of that, and if we are having any trouble we can go to them. What I am trying to say is that the school is fully prepared to back us up in what we want to do and they will help us in whatever we choose to do. That is the good thing about that school.

RUSSELL FRANCIS—With working for a law firm, you have just done 10 weeks of full-time study here and then you have to go to the only solicitor in town, so you do not have many options. You might not like him or he might not like you for some reason, through your family or whatever, because it is only a small town. Also, if you go to work for them, what are you going to do? You are not going to know tid from tad. He is not necessarily going to pay you anything.

I worked half my holidays at Charlie Carters trying to get some money in the bank because I do not have any money. I am too busy during school time to work up any major money. After school I have to go home and have a rest because I get headaches and colds. I have a cold now. I was fine two days ago. If you go to the only solicitor in town, he may not want you. You cannot just say, 'I'm going to Perth for the holidays and work in a solicitor's office.' In Perth—there would be more than one solicitor—you could probably get a job in a firm just hanging around and helping someone out at a lower level.

Mr BARRESI—The point I was making is about investigating. If you have your mind set on a career, what investigations are you doing about that career, because once you investigate sometimes it does bring up aspects of that career that you don't like, such as you investigated the Army and you no longer want to go in there. I take your point that the opportunities may not be abundant in Broome in certain occupations.

RUSSELL FRANCIS—But what is there in Broome? There is tourism. If you are lucky, you might know someone who works out in the mines like I do. I have a brief idea of that from my friend Chris because both his brother and father work out in the mines and they are pretty high up, so I can get a lot of information from them.

But there is not a lot in other areas. In the science areas, the closest thing to science up here would be how to extract a pearl from a pearl shell. Unless you are Japanese, you have to go to Japan to learn that; you cannot learn that anywhere in Australia. There are not many options up here. You have to have the connections to find out these things, and a lot of people just do not have them. Craig spoke about the one solicitor in town, but I did not even know there was a solicitor in town. Does anyone know where he is?

KIM WEBSTER—There are three.

RUSSELL FRANCIS—There are three, are there? I did not know that either. In rural areas the options are cut down a lot unless you have money and can travel

somewhere. A lot of people do not have that.

KIM WEBSTER—I would just like to answer one of Mr Barresi's questions about research. I was thinking about entering the police force, but three weeks ago the tertiary entrance students at Broome Senior High School, the year 12s, got to travel down to Perth and look around the universities and everything, which is a great opportunity—it is the first time it has happened at Broome Senior High School.

Like I said, I was thinking of entering the police force, and I had the opportunity when I was down there to actually go to the police academy. I worked it all out for myself, and the school based police officer took me while the rest of the students had another tour around the university. So that was my research about entering the police academy. It was an excellent opportunity that I did not think I would get this year. It was really good.

Mr BARRESI—Do you get career days at school where the local employers come in and explain what they do and what it is all about?

KIM WEBSTER—Yes, we do, usually in our lunchtimes or during our own time—after school maybe. A few weeks ago we had people from the defence forces come. That is advertised in the form notices and things, and we just go there at lunchtime and talk to them.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Have you really researched what jobs are available locally? For example, could you tell me what jobs the young people that left last year have got?

KIM WEBSTER—Yes. One of my friends is working at the health food shop as a sales assistant. Another one is working at a CD shop. Some are working in fast food—working at Chicken Treat and places like that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So who works part time? Does anyone work part time?

KIM WEBSTER—Here? Yes.

CHAIR—How about each of you telling us what you do?

Mr BARRESI—What do you do, Lisa?

CHAIR—And what do you think of it and do you think it will help you or not.

LISA WEBSTER—I work at Kodak. I develop films and print them. I have learnt a lot about that. The two people I work for know that I am interested in accounting and that. I am doing DEC now and they are prepared to open the books and let me have a look at what it is all about. I enjoy working there.

PATRICK CLARKE—I work at the camping shop in town opposite the checkpoint there. It has got the hire car business and, especially lately with these new supermarkets opening up, as Broome is continually growing there have been more and more career opportunities—well, not career opportunities but more jobs for younger people. I know there are heaps of people with jobs in the boulevard: cashiers, fruit and veg and things like that. But there are lots of jobs around town. There is nothing that you would really want to start a career in—say, Chicken Treat or something like that—but there are a lot of jobs around for younger people.

DREW GRONOW—I work part time at Chicken Treat as a kitchen hand—basically cooking all the food and cleaning up and everything. Most of the kids or some of them are just in basically for the pocket money, but it is a good experience and a good reference when you are older. If you finish school and you want to go on to an apprenticeship or if you finish university or something and they look back on your records, it shows that you have been working and you have been supervised. It is good experience and a good reference actually working and earning the money yourself instead of just going out and bludging pocket money from your parents every week or so. You are actually getting money for yourself and learning to be more responsible in how to look after yourself and look after your money. So I think it is good experience.

CHAIR—Who encouraged you to do that—your parents, your teachers, your school, or just you?

DREW GRONOW—Mainly it was me. Mum and dad give you a hint: 'Go and get a job.' But mainly I gave myself the incentive because I have always wanted clothes, CDs and stuff like that and I knew the only time I would get them would be on my birthday or at Christmas. So I thought: 'I might as well just get up and get myself a job.' Luckily my sister came up from Perth. She knew the manager from Chicken Treats. So that helped me get my job up there. It is really good.

MARCELLO PUERTOLLANO—Like Drew, I work at Chicken Treats as a kitchenhand. Like he said, some work there just for the pocket money, which I do. But I work for the experience as well. You are learning along the way. If you are looking for a different job because you are not comfortable being a kitchenhand, to become a manager you have to learn the different steps of working in fast food places. Mostly my parents and my friends encouraged me to do some work for myself so I could build up my confidence in looking for jobs.

CHAIR—Who has tried to get a job and could not get one?

REBECCA DARCY—I have tried to get a couple of jobs. I have put in applications, but I have not received any replies. I did not get anywhere with them, but I am going to keep on trying until I get one. The jobs that are available to us, like check-out chicks and fast food retailers, I do not really want. I would like to try something

different, but I do not know what.

Mr BARRESI—You are looking for a full-time job, are you?

REBECCA DARCY—No, just a part-time job, something different. A lot of my friends work at the fast food places as check-out chicks. I would rather do something different because I experience their jobs with them. They tell me what it is like, so I have a basic idea. I would like to try something totally different.

CHAIR—Has anyone else tried to get a job and couldn't?

RUSSELL FRANCIS—I tried for a job before the two shopping centres started up. Back then there was only one, so there were very few jobs around. The best way to get a job was through your parents. If they worked there you had a better chance. Since the two shopping centres opened up there have been ample jobs, but they are not necessarily what a lot of people want. Fair enough, it is a good experience working on the cash registers, it helps you manage money, but it can become rather boring.

I have been working there for a year and a half now. I would like another job, but they are all full because there are a lot of people around and jobs are harder to get hold of, especially during the wet season when the town grinds to a halt and they lay off heaps of people. A lot of places shut or go to skeleton staff. They just do not have the room for a lot of people.

I had a different job originally in Charlie Carters. I was working as a hand in the butchers department, wrapping meat, cleaning up and cutting a lot of the meat—learning how to do this and that. It was quite helpful. But then Action opened up and we had to close down. That was a lot better for me than working at Charlie Carters on the registers. Working on the registers has not helped me that much. It has showed me how to manage money, but I have managed money all my life. I have always had a good head for money. There is not that much that is different. Lisa has been lucky because she got the one in Kodak, but they do not really look for other young people in those sorts of jobs. It is harder to get hold of jobs that are interesting.

It is good for the first few weeks working at a fast food place—I have done that as well—but it gets really boring really quickly because you know the same thing and nothing really new happens. I liked working at the butchers because it was fun. You did a lot of work, but it wasn't hard. You didn't have to lift a lot of stuff. You might cut yourself every now and again, but that comes with the job. I did that at home anyway.

Mr BARRESI—As long as you cleaned up after you cut yourself.

RUSSELL FRANCIS—But interesting jobs are harder to find for younger people because, unless you are willing to take them on full time, they are not necessarily willing

to take you on. If they take you on for after school, they are going to have to get someone else to fill in during the day and then leave after school and go home and you take over. They are rather reluctant to do that.

It is harder to find jobs like that. There probably are a few around, if you got there at the right time, but not enough to have them amply available. You don't see very many younger people working in places that don't have a constant flow of people like shopping centres and food retailers where they are always busy. They can take that extra hand on for a few hours and it does not really put a dent in their money flow. It is harder to come by good jobs that are interesting, that you do not lose interest in in a few weeks.

Mr BARRESI—Have any of you considered traineeships or apprenticeships? Quite a few of you put your hand up to say you want to go onto uni or college, but what about an apprenticeship or traineeship? How seriously have some of you investigated that? The reason I ask that is that most of you have said that Broome is now thriving through tourism, so I would imagine there would be traineeships available in the hospitality industry and perhaps even the retail industry. We will ask the employer groups later on about this.

DREW GRONOW—I was looking. We had this bloke come over to our house a couple of months ago to paint some of our house and stuff like that. I was sort of interested—but not really—in painting as an apprenticeship and I asked him, 'What would I have to go through to get an apprenticeship in something like that?' He said, 'In some ways being up in Broome would be a better experience than it would be in Perth.'

There is a wide range of apprenticeships to get up here and a lot of people are doing it. I do not know how many there are, but there are different bosses for painting, for example. He said that if I wanted to, say, get an apprenticeship for painting I might be able to go for a month or two with him and then he would get busy so I would have to go out with another bloke. I would get shown basically the same thing but in a different way. So when I finished my apprenticeship I would have lots of different ways to do certain chores or certain jobs. So I would find the better or the easiest way for me.

Just doing an apprenticeship in Perth might be a bit better in some ways, but you would only be taught by one bloke. You would only be shown one way to do it and that might not be the easiest or the best way for you and it might not even end up the best in the future. So I thought it would be pretty good getting one up here.

PATRICK CLARKE—Apprenticeships in Broome are pretty plentiful at the moment. I know of at least two people who have chef apprenticeships around town just through a food production course. Often in the notices there are apprenticeships that are advertised—hairdressers, refrigeration, things like that.

Russell said earlier that it would be easier to get a job if your parents worked

there. Drew said as well that he got his job in Chicken Treat because he knew someone there. It is the same with the apprenticeships. Because it is such a small community, the quality of your job around here depends on not so much what you know but who you know.

Mr BARRESI—So does the school teach you networking skills and how to get out there and develop those networks? That is not just the case in Broome. I would say that would be symptomatic of most cities—even cities as large as Melbourne and Sydney. But there is a lot of networking that is involved. Do you get taught that at all?

RUSSELL FRANCIS—At our age it is a lot harder to network with the older people. We are becoming adults, but we are busy at school a lot of the time and when they are finished working they want to go home and have a rest. They do not want to have us hanging around talking to them and nagging them.

A lot of your networking is done through your parents. You meet people that your parents know and they learn to know you. When we get a bit older it becomes easier to network because we might work with them, meet them at a job site. If they are doing a trade, they might come to where you are working and you will get to know them and you can get a job through them.

But networking for us is a lot easier through our own friends and our family—who they know rather than actually going out and getting a network through just people you meet in the street or at our work. It is a lot harder. We are young and a lot of people look at us and they are very wary of us because we have not finished school, we are not necessarily very well skilled, and in certain areas it is a lot harder to network at our age. If your parents have got good connections, so will you.

Mr BARRESI—I have not heard, though, from any of you why some of you perhaps did not choose an apprenticeship or traineeship. Why haven't you? This goes back to what Bob Charles mentioned earlier. We have heard in a number of settings that a lot of young kids are streamed into university—in other words, it is either university or bust. There is no other career for you. Go to university or you might as well give up, which in fact is wrong. There are so many other careers available to you. Why is it, if that is the case, that perhaps some of you did not choose a traineeship or an apprenticeship?

RUSSELL FRANCIS—I thought about taking an apprenticeship at the beginning of the year as a butcher, because I like it. You might get halfway through the apprenticeship—like my uncle did—and decide, 'I don't want to do this any more.' You have only done half of it, so it is of no use, and you have just burnt two years of your life when you would have been better off finishing high school and having university open and then deciding, 'Do I want to go to university and do this and that or do I want to do that trade and become a mechanic?' Then you can go into it, get halfway through it and decide, 'This isn't really my thing.' You will have that knowledge, you will have what

you have learnt, and you won't have to necessarily go to a mechanic any more when your car breaks down, but you won't have just given up years 11 and 12 just to go and do something that is of no real use to you in an employment sense.

Mr BARRESI—So it is the length of time that is involved; it is a commitment to a four-year apprenticeship and perhaps it is not your bag at the end of it.

KIM WEBSTER—I do not think it is so much that you do four years and then decide that it is a waste of time, it is not your type of thing. I just think that a lot of people at 15 or when you leave year 10 and go into apprenticeships maybe are not really mature enough to decide what they want to do then. I am 17 and I am not even sure what I want to do yet. So I do not think it is a matter of it being not for you.

Another thing is that I have been taught that, if I can finish school at year 10 and get a job, an employer would look at my record and say, 'You went to school for three years. Why didn't you do the other two?' So I figure that if you finish year 12 it looks better on your record, I reckon, basically. You have done five years of schooling and stayed on. I think it shows a bit more perseverance.

Mr MOSSFIELD—On that point, do not be frightened to try something on the basis that you think it is going to be a waste of time. By all means, if you have not got a job you should stay on and complete year 12. But once you have done that, even if you do not succeed when you first try, it is not a waste of time. One of my sons did two years at university and failed both years, but he is now a park ranger. So he moved completely from one type of job to another, and that happens quite a lot. Even when you do get into the work force full time, you may well change your job two or three times. So do not ever think that what you are first trying—even if you do not quite complete it—is a waste because it is not. It is education behind you, it is employment behind you and in many cases it is a stepping stone to other careers.

KIM WEBSTER—I do not think that at all. I think that, even if there is a hint that you might want to go to university, yes, do it. You need to know for sure whether you want to do that. Even if there is a hint that you want to do something, you should do it and find out. I would not be scared of getting into something and not liking it, because I know the option is there to change, to get out of it and do something else.

Mr BARRESI—What if you had the option to do a vocational stream all the way through to year 12 but still keep that option of going to university going at the same time. Would that help?

KIM WEBSTER—Yes. I think that would be great. I am doing one subject, and I think Pat said he is doing one—media studies or something. I find my vocational subject is a bit of a relaxation time. It is a computing course and it just gives me a break from a TE subject. It is easy. You can just cruise through it and get a top mark. I just want to do

TEs so I can keep my options open in case I do want to go to university. I do not want to close any options off.

Mr BARRESI—Is that that fast-tracking that is listed? I saw a poster at the back there referring to fast-tracking and there is something else on the vocational education stream.

RUSSELL FRANCIS—Fast-track is all vocational. It is for students who are not doing very well at the end of year 10 but would like to go on. They spend that year building up their skills to the level that will prepare them for year 11 studies. If they were getting Ds and Fs in year 10, they can go through fast-track. At the end of that year, hopefully they might have raised their levels. Really, it is a crash course type of thing on what they missed. It helps them out. They can do year 11 or if they are good enough go on to year 12 straightaway.

CHAIR—How many of you have got friends who have left school or finished year 12 or just left year 10 or year 11 and gone on the dole? None. So there is no unemployment in Broome?

KIM WEBSTER—Not friends.

CHAIR—People you know. I do not care whether they are friends or not. Let us not get pedantic about relationships.

KIM WEBSTER—Yes, quite a few people.

CHAIR—In your view, is that because they have no jobs, that there are no jobs or do they not want to work?

KIM WEBSTER—They are just slack, lazy. They do not want to work. There are quite a few in Broome. You would be surprised. For example, there are 19- to 20-year-olds that just bum around, go to the beach, get the dole, quit—

Mr BARRESI—Are they locals or just tourists?

KIM WEBSTER—No. They are locals. You get tourists that pass through as well, but a lot of locals—

CHAIR—Is that a general view?

KIM WEBSTER—It is a true view.

CHAIR—Do other people think the same thing?

KIM WEBSTER—They might not know the people I know.

CHAIR—I am asking whether other people know of other young people that do that.

REBECCA DARCY—My sister left after grade 10, I think. She never really bothered to look for a job. She is on the dole. She is not here any more; she is in Sydney now. She still does not have a job. I do not think she can be bothered looking for one because she probably never had the support that I had from mum and dad. She was the first child. They were seeing how she would go. They never really gave her as much support as I am getting, because I am the youngest and they want me to do better than my brother and sister. They have given me a lot of support. They want me to get a job, so I am looking for one for them.

CHAIR—What do the rest of you think? Are there jobs out there? Is it a situation that if you want a job in Broome you can find a job?

KIM WEBSTER—Do you mean a casual job or a full-time job?

CHAIR—Enough to eat on so you do not have to go on the dole.

PATRICK CLARKE—There are jobs around. It is just a matter of whether or not you want to get your hands dirty. I know someone who left school and was on check-out for a while. He was living in Auski Lodge with a few room-mates and he was just getting by on that. Then he decided that he did not like the work, quit and was not working at all for a while. He moved back in with his parents and after that looked for a few other jobs—jobs that he wanted more than the check-out work but he could not get them. So he fell into a sort of unemployable bracket. He is now with his father, working on site as a labourer. Yes, there are jobs around, more so in the tourist season. As Russell said, it goes really quiet in the wet season. Everything disappears. Restaurants close for half the year. There are jobs around.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are you given any training at school on interviewing skills, the skills you need when you apply for a job? Maybe someone who has not already spoken would like to give some indication.

KRIS YOUNG—Yes, we are taught interviewing skills in class, in voc ed. They go through that quite extensively: how to behave in an interview and things like that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—In what year do you do that?

KRIS YOUNG—Mainly in year 10.

CHAIR—Do they teach you how to fill out the dole form?

KRIS YOUNG—No.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What is the situation at St Mary's? Are you trained in interviewing skills? Are you trained how, when you apply for a job, to present yourself and what skills you need to project to the new employer so that he looks on you favourably?

JAMARRA RYAN—We are not really specifically trained, but you pick up things here and there—general stuff like you would in any school. There is no special training or anything. It is just stuff you pick from everyday subjects, like in English and stuff like that, or from things you go through at the school. For example, you might have to be interviewed by the school and that I suppose can give you training further on. That is basically it.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you have any training in public speaking or debating at your school?

JAMARRA RYAN—We have debating, but just in class or whatever as an exercise. That is about it. We have a bit of public speaking, if the school is involved in something or to get kids to be involved in it, to get you up in front of an audience to talk. So that would also give you some more skill, which is a good thing. That is basically what we get.

Mr BARRESI—If I may go back to the question of attitude and explore that a little bit further, students have mentioned that there are kids out there who are on the dole. We have heard from a number of employers—it is often commented on but it has also been disputed by others—that one of the factors that are influencing whether a young kid gets a job or not is general attitude. There is a perception that young kids do not have the right attitude to be employable. What do you think about that? Do you think there is any truth in that allegation?

KIM WEBSTER—It really depends on the person. There would definitely be a lot of people that have that attitude. They go in and apply for a job and they do not have the right attitude. I think there are a few in the 18 to 20 age group that think, 'If I don't get a job, I will just go on the dole.' I have gained that from speaking to people. Yes, there is that attitude, but there are some people that really do want a job but they do not get it. They have got the right attitude. It just really depends on who you are and what attitudes you have.

CHAIR—I think we have covered all the topics that we sent you. Are there any other issues that you can think of that we ought to know about? What do you think about jobs, particularly employment around Broome, which is where you live? No comments? You don't think you can help us any more?

Mr MOSSFIELD—I have a question about expectations. When you apply for a

job, what are your expectations? Are you prepared to start at the bottom and maybe start in an area that is not really too good with a view to improving yourself as you go on? What are your expectations when you apply for a position?

DREW GRONOW—With all jobs, you have to expect to start at the bottom and work your way up. You start school and you start from the very basics and work your way up. When I started at Chicken Treat you are called a 'dish pig', which means you are stuck at the dishes all night. That is where you start off and you work your way up to other stuff that is not quite so horrible. If you are not really expecting to start off with the worst part or start off at the bottom, you may as well just stay at home and not do anything because if you are always expecting to do the best stuff first and get on top all the way you miss out on all the little jobs that might seem insignificant or minor but will help you out on your way and make it easier. If I am going to go for a job, I expect to start from the bottom and work my way up.

CHAIR—Do you think it is fair—you have that attitude and you are willing to start at the bottom and do the dirty jobs, the nasty jobs, and the ones that are not any fun—when some other young people are able to not worry about work and live on the dole? Do you think that is right?

DREW GRONOW—No, I do not think it is right. They should at least try to start at the bottom. If they try it and they do not succeed or anything like that, that's okay, but you have to give everything a go. If you are not willing to do that, what else can you do?

CHAIR—What do you think of the work for the dole proposal?

DREW GRONOW—That is a good idea.

CHAIR—I see a lot of heads nodding. Does anybody think it is a bad idea?

PATRICK CLARKE—It is a good idea within a certain age bracket, especially for young people, as Kim was saying, of 18 to 21 or so who say, 'I don't want to work for a while. I'll go on the dole and go surfing.' That is the attitude of a lot of people. Working down at the shops, a lot of people come in and say, 'Can I have a job?' They are dressed absolutely disgustingly. They are told, 'No, I don't have a job for you.' They say, 'Can you sign this form then?' You see things like that.

Working for the dole is good in a certain age bracket. When you are unemployed for a certain amount of time, you should go to work for the dole, but when people are moving between jobs—a lot of people just get laid off come the wet season when there is not enough work around—maybe it would not be such a good idea. Otherwise, I think it is a good idea.

Mr BARRESI—That is what I was referring to before about attitude being a

concept of how you present yourself at interview and how it can convey the attitude of not caring—it is all mixed in as part of all that willingness to start at the bottom. One of the other accusations that is made is that kids do not want to start at the bottom, that they all want to be managing directors by the time they are 30 years of age. I had that attitude too for a while. That attitude is fairly unrealistic. Drew spoke about wanting to start at the bottom. That needs to be conveyed through what you say. An employer also looks at you conveying that through your behaviour in the workplace, which is extremely important.

PATRICK CLARKE—By starting at the bottom, the employer has time to assess how good you are at certain things, and whether or not they want to employ you further up the chain.

Mr BARRESI—Thank you, Patrick.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming and sharing your views and experiences with us. It has been most valuable. We hope to finish the inquiry by the end of June. We will work on a report in August and probably bring it down in September.

We will not make many recommendations, but we hope to make real ones that are important—not recommend that another committee inquire further into how we find more jobs for our young people. We hope to make a difference. By sharing your views with us you have certainly helped us along that path. So thank you very much and enjoy the rest of your day off.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Barresi):

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

Forum adjourned at 4.40 p.m.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Factors influencing the employment of young people

BROOME

Tuesday, 29 April 1997

Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Barresi Mr Mossfield

The committee met at 5.36 p.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing 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 received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Darwin, Alice Springs and several regional centres in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. The committee has also conducted school forums, including one in Broome today, in which young people discussed their views and opinions with 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 concerns to the committee.

This is a very broad ranging inquiry. 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 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 inquiry. We are here to listen, to learn and to help improve the prospects of all young Australians.

This committee is not government. We are a committee of the parliament and we have representatives of all the political parties on the committee. It is a bipartisan committee, and we report to the House of Representatives, not the government. Ultimately, the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs will respond to our report on what government action will be taken on the recommendations that we make.

The committee is not about unemployment; it is about employment. In that sense, I think we are trying to come to grips with two major issues. The first is how we help young people to become more employable. The second is how we encourage business, industry, commerce and the public sector to make more jobs available for our youth.

HANIGAN, Ms Robin Ann, Employment and Training Field Officer, Broome Chamber of Commerce, PO Box 1307, Broome, Western Australia 6725

KNEEBONE, Mr Peter Richard, President, Derby Chamber of Commerce (Inc.), PO Box 111, Derby, Western Australia 6728

CHAIR—Do you have an opening statement that you would like to make to us about the matters we are here to discuss today?

Ms Hanigan—Yes. I would like to give a bit of background. The Broome Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1987 to support and promote the business community within the context of regional development. I am an employment and training field officer. My role is to assist to create vacancies. I am part of a joint project between the federal government and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I am one of 70 employment and training field officers based around Australia. My area of Broome-Derby covers Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek. In my capacity as an employment and training field officer, I work with the Broome Chamber of Commerce and the Derby Chamber of Commerce. The Broome Chamber of Commerce is my host organisation.

My target is to visit up to 90 employers per month and to assist to generate up to 35 vacancies per month. My contract is for 70 visits per month and 25 vacancies per month. From that information, which I thought was very relevant, I have quite a bit of contact with employers in the area of creating vacancies and assisting to generate vacancies within their organisations, within their businesses. My effort is concentrated on enterprise based organisations, as contrasted with, say, a number of Aboriginal communities or community based organisations. As such, I work in the areas of traineeships, apprenticeships and also in the filling of vacancies that arise within any individual business.

I would like to approach this from a number of perspectives. One is an employer perspective, and I will provide you with a summary of the attitudes that employers have expressed to me over the course of my contract with the Broome Chamber of Commerce. That has been since February last year. The other aspect has to do with my role as the employment and training field officer and the work that I do jointly involving various government departments, including the Commonwealth Employment Service.

In terms of employer attitudes, I will speak in a general sense and, because Peter is representing the Derby-West Kimberley area, perhaps refer more specifically to Broome. In terms of filling vacancies for juniors—and when I talk about juniors I mean generally those young people between the ages of 16 and 18—it appears to be fairly problematic filling those positions. I have had employers three or four weeks and finally give up because they have been unable to get a junior to fill that position, and not just filling junior positions within a business but it also has to do with filling apprenticeships and

filling traineeships. Because this has recurred on a number of occasions, I have attempted to speak to young people as well as to employers to find out whether there are any problems with regard to young people not feeling comfortable with the CES and feeling that they are unable for whatever reason to work with an employer.

The response that I get from the employer is that young people are very reticent to come forward, that they had been contacted by CES. CES has told me that they had been notifying young people who are registered, but it would appear that that particular labour pool in this area is fairly small and there is a reticence to seek employment. It has led to some hardening of views on the part of employers who seem to feel that young people do not want to work and that it is made all too easy.

I have then sought the opinions of young people who I know are actively seeking work. It would appear to be individual preference as to the type of work that they want to do and also the attractiveness of a number of other programs that are operating within the town, such as the community development employment program, the CDEP. This is relating to indigenous people. In speaking with people in the community generally, I am told that a lot of our young people that are non-indigenous are more likely to leave the area for an education or are more likely to continue their education in other places, either at a technical or a tertiary level.

Those explanations aside, it provides very little consolation for an employer who is very keen or committed to taking on an apprentice. It is very difficult in these economic times to persuade employers to do that. It has been very disappointing for me when I have been unable to fill a vacancy because young people have not been available to fill it.

In relation to those employers that have taken on apprentices or trainees, the information that I am getting back—this is in assisting to create vacancies within the business—is that there needs to be family support for the trainee or the apprentice to be successful. That seems to be an extremely important requisite.

The other issue that is raised with me by employers has to do with the level of literacy and numeracy. A number of employers have complained to me that the greatest problem has been that when kids have wanted to commence a traineeship—I refer to national traineeships—with all the traineeships that I am aware of, there is a prerequisite that the trainee complete up to year 10 or have the literacy and numeracy levels equivalent to that level. It has been very difficult to find young people that have actually achieved those levels. The same applies to apprenticeships where employers have said to me, ‘Look, I am playing tutor to these kids because they just do not have the literacy and numeracy standards and it has meant that there is a greater workload on me in order to ensure that the apprenticeship completes the three years or four years.’

That is some feedback on what I am currently hearing from employers and the situation I find myself in as an employment and training field officer out in the field

assisting employers to fill vacancies. It is very difficult within that particular age group.

CHAIR—Peter, would you like to make a statement to the committee before we start to ask the two of you questions?

Mr Kneebone—I would just like to go over what Robin has covered about employers' views of school leavers. Our assessment is that these youngsters are not being prepared for work. They are not even prepared in the way in which they come to work or come to us for a job. Whilst it might be that the system allows them to have earrings and dreadlocks and all the rest of it, in the retail environment the customer-business relationship is very important and, unfortunately, dreadlocks and earrings do not fit that environment. It is not only that: young boys do not come shaved and they come in dirty clothes. Someone has not even put them in a position to come and ask for work. As Robin has already pointed out, their literacy and numeracy standards are often quite poor and their actual writing is extremely poor. One of my main interests is the employment of apprentices and it is difficult to get them to do a clean job of preparing their notes and work in response to their TAFE courses.

The area that I was considering covering was employment in general. Whilst we are relieved to know that staff dismissals now are likely to have a 12-month review time, it is still not easy in a small business where you have two or three people. I compare that situation with a marriage—if we can draw a comparison. With marriage, people go through a long period of courtship and getting to know one another. When you take someone on for a job it usually takes about half an hour. A very high percentage of marriages break down in a very short time, sometimes in a matter of months but most often over a few years. They break down for all sorts of reasons and a lot of it is, in most cases, because of incompatibility. That happens with work staff as well. It is very difficult, at that point, because they might be quite good workers but you cannot live together in that workplace environment.

Under the present rules it is more difficult. I often use the analogy that it is easier to get a divorce than it is to sack an incompatible employee. It is very difficult, especially in the country because most people know everybody else in the village or town, to dismiss staff at the best of times. But when you are faced with strict rules that really do not give you enough opportunity to dismiss, it can reach the point where a business might even close down because that is the only way out.

On the employment of school leavers, one of the notes that we have taken down is that it appears there needs to be a review of the education system so that it actually includes work experience for the teachers. I am particularly involved in the automotive industry and it is still, today, one of those industries where the teaching system says to a child, 'You won't ever be a computer processor and you won't ever be a doctor, so you might be better off going for the automotive industry.' But it has gone beyond that now. What we need is an understanding by teachers of exactly what sort of work these

youngsters are going in for. If youth are looking for work in the automotive industry they need to make up their minds whether they want to be a veterinary surgeon, a chemist or an automotive repairer because that is where the technology is heading.

Going into the work, there is now opportunity for students to undertake work experience, but it is a very short-term thing of a couple of weeks. Perhaps the other way out might be to have a period in which the student—it needs to have the school's cooperation and understanding—actually goes into the workplace for, say, half the day and then goes to school for the other half or something of that order. There would be a transition where they go back to school and realise that what they are learning is applicable to the workplace and that they are learning for a reason, not learning purely because they are going to school.

On training generally, I have had a few fights with the training system because there is an never-ending number of training programs. But no-one has ever come and asked, 'What is suitable for us in the industry?' At Derby, for instance, we have got Skillshare, we have got TAFE, we have got telecentre and others that are all into this training. 'Training for what?' I ask. No-one has actually come to the Chamber of Commerce and said, 'Well, what sort of people do you want?' I have to say Robin has taken on this task and has probably been more help than anyone. Obviously, operating out of Broome is a little difficult, but she is probably a breath of fresh air.

The training of apprentices is a major issue—and I guess that is basically a state concern. Currently it is chaotic, particularly for country employers. There is no easy path. We have to supervise the apprentices doing TAFE external studies. There is no subsidy or compensation for that—not that that really bothers us. But if we operated from Perth or from the cities, the metropolitan areas, we could send students to college and they would actually get paid for that day. We do not get that benefit. Also, it often takes a technician away from his normal duties to go and supervise difficult parts of their training. It is worse in Western Australia. I do not know whether it looks like improving, but currently the technical system is run down.

Last year in the automotive division the fellows who went down from Derby—they probably went from everywhere in the country—basically had a holiday. To add insult to injury, it was a really busy time up here, because we have quite deep economic cycles. During the wet season you go through some pretty difficult times. It cost us $75,000 for the last five months. We have got to work really hard for the next seven months to make it up. That is our economic cycle. To have someone away in the peak of that economic cycle is pretty difficult, and it was worse when they came home and said they did not learn anything.

We believe that there needs to be a change in the way that apprentice training is undertaken. It should be more industry driven and more under industry control. Going on from that, we suggest that even in the cities people from industry—particularly those more

comfortably off or heading towards retirement—might be able to offer their services as trainers. At least the trainers would understand what happens in the workplace. At the moment these guys who teach don't have the faintest idea what happens in the workplace and they are teaching things that are totally irrelevant to the working environment. That briefly is what I have to say.

CHAIR—When you were talking about finding it difficult to fill apprenticeships and traineeships and about poor literacy and numeracy skills, were you talking about kids going through the two senior high schools in Broome?

Ms Hanigan—No. What I meant was that I am finding it difficult to find young people to become apprentices, to take on apprenticeships or traineeships or to fill vacancies.

CHAIR—Does everybody want to go to university?

Ms Hanigan—When I have then approached the CES to find out what is happening—because I have employers on my back who say, 'I've lodged a vacancy, what's going on here? I've waited for over three weeks?'—what I am hearing from the CES is that very few young people, say, between 15 and 20, actually register with them in this area. There are a number of reasons for that. It has to do possibly with the mobility of people within that age group, but it also has to do with a high percentage of indigenous youth in this area—I believe indigenous people comprise about 40 per cent of the population here—going into the community development employment program.

To that end, what I have done is arrange for meetings with ATSIC, CDEP providers, CES and myself with a view to developing opportunities for training, especially with the possibility of a secondary employer arrangement where a young person is on CDEP but is placed in a job with an employer either full time or for the 18 hours above CDEP which is generally 20 hours a week. There has been considerable red tape involved in that, but such has been my concern that vacancies have not been filled and young people are losing the opportunity to gain employment that I have provided support and have been involved in coordinating these meetings so that a practical solution can be worked out regarding the employment of young people who are currently on CDEP and to ensure that they can partake in national traineeships and apprenticeships in a real job situation with employers.

CHAIR—Do you work with the two schools?

Ms Hanigan—No, I don't.

CHAIR—Could I ask why? At some point, all the kids come through the school.

Ms Hanigan—Sure. I have tended to go through the CES this year. I did have a meeting last year with the district high school with a view to coordinating a forum between employers, parents, teachers, as well as students.

CHAIR—Since all the kids come to school, either here or at St Mary's, wouldn't that be the first place you would go?

Ms Hanigan—The message I have been getting with CES has been that the need to—

CHAIR—What does CES have to do with it? You have young people who want jobs or don't want jobs.

Ms Hanigan—This is with the filling of vacancies. I have attempted to contact people here at the school with a view to finding out whether there are young people who are looking for a job and looking at leaving the school system, but the message I was getting earlier on in this school year was that it would be disruptive for me to try to ferret students from their classes. I don't think that would be appropriate behaviour on my part.

CHAIR—Wouldn't it be helpful for the careers people in the school and the kids themselves to know what jobs are or will be available?

Ms Hanigan—Yes, definitely.

CHAIR—We have heard from all over the country that young people do not know as well today as they did 20 years ago what career opportunities there are. The world of work has changed. Retention rates in schools have changed. The whole thing has changed massively.

Ms Hanigan—Sure.

CHAIR—The kids are confused.

Ms Hanigan—Definitely they should be aware of the options. But I was referring to the filling of vacancies. Where employers have a need right now, they want to take on board staff, and they are finding it difficult to have that position filled by a junior, a young person between 15 and 18 years of age.

Mr BARRESI—Robin, no doubt your appointment is a positive step for the region. You would have two objectives though: one is the immediate objective of filling a current vacancy, because that is what the employer wants as well.

Ms Hanigan—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—But the other—picking up from what Bob is saying—is also projecting a little bit and making sure that there are kids available to fill future vacancies. The reason why I say that—and I know where Bob is coming from in making that comment—is that we had a school forum here today and I asked the question how many of them would consider apprenticeships and traineeships. I do not think one hand went up, not one.

To some extent, a lot of that is driven via parental attitudes and also the education system, which says that it is either university or you are a failure, which is an incorrect attitude to have. But part of that also has to rest with the lack of knowledge that kids have of the usefulness and value of an apprenticeship or traineeship—that, in fact, there is a career and an apprenticeship or a traineeship is not an end in itself; that it can, in fact, be a beginning to a whole range of other careers.

If the careers counsellors are not selling that message effectively, for whatever reason, perhaps that is where someone like you and the chamber can step in and bridge that gap. There was a bit of a concern that not one hand went up today.

Ms Hanigan—It is a concern of mine that a lot of young people see the trades area and apprenticeships as a dummy's option and an inferior sort of alternative to conducting academic studies. I have grave concerns about that and discussed it with this school last year. I suggested that a way of resolving that would be a regular forum involving the schools—students and parents as well as young people.

You are right. Obviously it is quite apparent that there is not that link between employers and the school, although it is surprising the number of employers who have said to me, 'Yes, I would be very interested in being able to go into the school and talk about hairdressing,' or, 'Yes, I would be happy to have young people here in a work experience capacity.' Obviously there is a shortcoming there.

Mr BARRESI—Are you comfortable with the range of apprenticeships or traineeships that are available for you to work with, or are there some areas where there is a lack?

Ms Hanigan—We are gravely disadvantaged.

Mr BARRESI—I will give you an example of that. We were in Kununurra this morning and a comment was made about the lack of apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities that are available; there is just nothing. So, even if a kid wanted one, it just is not there. That was a concern in itself.

Ms Hanigan—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Just to follow the same theme that my colleagues have been

talking about: it is quite clear to us that young people are very confused. They do not know what positions are available out there. They feel as though they have got the skills, and they do not see any weaknesses. When I raised the question of literacy and numeracy with them here today, I was challenged, 'Who says that we haven't got good literacy and numeracy skills?' The problem, of course, is that we probably were speaking to the higher level.

But I think it is very important—and we have seen this elsewhere—that there does not seem to be any structured way where local businesses can get into local schools and talk to the students and say, 'Look, this is what our requirements will be, whether you go into the work force this year, next year or in year 12.' As a business community, I would like you to think about this, as it is something you can do on a local level to meet your own requirements and let people know what jobs are available. I think that is important.

Mr Kneebone—This is something that I have worked with for quite a long time. In my own business we have attempted to have at least one apprentice running right through. We have one and a half: usually, one almost complete and one just about to start.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How many tradesmen do you have?

Mr Kneebone—Five. In recent times the difficulty has been that our two boys really have not been locals; they have been sort of locals. They were in college in Perth and came home, and one's mother happened to be there on holidays. She asked whether we could have him for work experience. So we took him on. His mother still lives in Perth and his father now works up there.

The local level seems to be where the difficulty is. I have actually sent youngsters back. I have said, 'Look, you've got to do another year of school; there's no point in coming out looking for an apprenticeship.' This is what I said earlier: the teaching system does not understand what is involved in being a tradesman. They think you just wield spanners, and if they are no good at anything else perhaps they can wield spanners. It has gone past that now. That might have happened 30 years ago, but it is a new industry we are in.

That is why I believe that the teachers in that area should come over and have a bit of experience of what actually happens in our environment. Then they can go back and say, 'This is what you are going to have to be good at to be a tradesman.'

CHAIR—I think we could talk to the two of you for a long time, but unfortunately we now are running behind time. Just briefly, I will tell you that we visited a school in East Elizabeth in South Australia where the Rotary Club had found a number of businesses needing young people and willing to make work positions available for them while they were at school. They set up a program where the kids work in industry one day a week. If they decide that they do not like hotels and want to go into automotive, they

switch them. They combine that with vocational courses.

Their program has been going at such a rate that, within two years, something like 80 per cent of the kids will be doing regular work experience as part of their year 11 and year 12 schooling courses. Those kids are now switched on; they understand what industry and jobs are about. Anyway, thank you for coming and talking to us.

Ms Hanigan—Just to respond to what Phil said earlier: yes, it is problematic with apprenticeships. A lot of our young people need to go away to Perth and the Pilbara, and that does place considerable pressure on not only them but the family. Also, with the traineeships, especially national traineeships, because of the isolation and the smallness of the population base, yes, it is very difficult to get national traineeships off the ground, especially when your local Department of Training, WADOT, expects there to be a minimum number of trainees. In most cases that is fairly unreasonable for small country towns—even with the population of Broome, where you are looking at, what, 10,000, 10,500.

CHAIR—Fair enough. We have heard that the kids have difficulties if they want to take physics as a subject because there are too few of them to be able to afford to put a teacher on to teach physics.

Mr BARRESI—Robin, have you come across TRAC from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum?

Ms Hanigan—No, I have not.

Mr BARRESI—It just occurred to me looking at the back of the brochure that not one city or town in Western Australia is included through the TRAC program—not one. That may be something for you to have a look at.

Ms Hanigan—Yes, thank you.

Mr BARRESI—It is an excellent program. It actually covers what Bob just said about the East Elizabeth school. It is a partnership between the schools and the business community.

CHAIR—We hope to wind up our inquiry in June. We will be working on a report when the parliament resumes in August, and we will certainly send you a copy of it. Thank you very much.

[6.15 p.m.]

HANIGAN, Mr Russell James, Regional Manager (Broome), Paspaley Pearls Pty Ltd, PO Box 371, Broome, Western Australia 6725

CHAIR—Russell, thank you for coming this afternoon. Is there anything you would like to add?

Mr Hanigan—I have responsibility for all of Paspaley's interests in this area, including the employment of workers on our pearl farms and on our vessels which operate out of Broome.

CHAIR—We are an all-party committee of the parliament; we are not the government. We report to the parliament, but the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs will respond to our recommendations in due course and tell us what government action will be taken with respect to each of the recommendations that we alternately will make. Could you tell us how many young people you employ and the type of work that they do?

Mr Hanigan—The reason I wanted to speak to this committee is that we endeavour to employ as many Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal youths as possible on our pearling farms and also on our boats. I would like to take the opportunity to tell the committee not so much about the problems that we encounter in employing Aboriginal people but the philosophy that we take as a company, taking into account the aspirations of Aboriginal people working on pearl farms. What I am talking about is a cultural thing.

We know full well that Aboriginal people, Aboriginal youths especially, like to work on pearl farms. In fact, I was talking about it to two youths in my car today. We have to take into consideration the fact that, firstly, they are away from their family. Aboriginal youths are brought up in a close family situation. It is a cultural thing and we all know about it in Broome. They are away from their family and they are away from Broome. Broome has a special way of life for the youth and the Aboriginal people.

For example, we find that it is very difficult for them to be punctual. It is very difficult for them to catch a plane on time. We design our flight schedules and various aspects of our operations around this so that we can take into account Aboriginal youth and the problems that we encounter. For example, we work two weeks on, one week off at the pearl farms. We have to be ready at any time to fly out an Aboriginal employee because they may need to attend a funeral or they may have some family problems or whatever. We have to make special dispensation for that.

I just wanted to let the committee know that, as an employer, I think other employers in our area could take note of the way we go about things and they could learn something from it. I think that is a valuable lesson that perhaps could be passed on to

other employers of Aboriginal people.

CHAIR—Tell us about pearl farms.

Mr Hanigan—Sorry, I naturally assumed everybody knows how a pearl farm works.

CHAIR—Everybody here does not.

Mr Hanigan—A pearl farm is a very isolated area. We have our pearl farms in the north of the Kimberley. We are looking for pristine conditions. We are looking for isolated conditions because of security. We are looking for tidal flow. So what you have is a secluded bay with either a camp site or a boat on site.

The work entails working on the water. Any employee who is working for us will get a sea time experience. That goes towards a coxswain's ticket and then eventually a master class 5. There is a career path working on the sea. Basically, it is seamanship orientated work. Again, we find that the local Aboriginal youth are very suited to this type of work because they have been brought up around the sea. So that is what is involved. It is involved with cleaning pearl shell and husbandry. That is the type of work that we do.

Mr BARRESI—Russell, how many have gone through the career path with your organisation to middle management or senior management level?

Mr Hanigan—The career path starts as a trainee shell cleaner. First of all, we have to make sure that an employee likes isolation and does not mind being away from home, does not mind living so far away. It is a very isolated area. For example, it is 200 nautical miles north of us here and 200 nautical miles west of Kununurra. So it is a very isolated area. That can affect you if you are not used to being isolated.

They go in there on a trial basis for three months. Having proved that they like to work there, we then put them on as a trainee shell cleaner, then a shell cleaner, then a trainee foreman and then a foreman on a cleaning boat. A foreman has responsibility for three other workers, so there are four on the boat. He will have been there for a year so he will have a coxswain's ticket and then he will progress. After three years, he will get his master class 5 and he should have progressed to managing a section on the pearl farm or even managing the pearl farm.

Mr BARRESI—The question I am asking though is, based on your comment that it is well suited to Aboriginals, how many of them have actually gone right through? Is there a fall-out that takes place?

Mr Hanigan—There is a fall-out. I would say there would be a 25 per cent, 30 per cent success rate. In fact, my administration manager is on holidays at the moment and

I have had a local Aboriginal fellow who has progressed right through relieving him in the past two weeks. It has been quite a successful program. Of course, there are those who fall by the way. They find that they do not like working for such a long time in an isolated area. The work can be tedious, and some people are not suited. Some do not get the adequate advancement in their own mind. They get a little bit impatient and look for other avenues.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How many Aborigines are employed?

Mr Hanigan—About 50 per cent of our work force on our pearl farms would be Aboriginal.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Would that be 200 people?

Mr Hanigan—There are 200 people employed in Western Australia on pearl farms.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So you would have 100 Aboriginal people. What is the basis of success? How do you judge whether the program is successful—they stay with you for X number of years, two years or three years?

Mr Hanigan—Yes, at two to three years we would be happy.

Mr MOSSFIELD—At that point you would say it has been a successful program?

Mr Hanigan—We find also that the Aboriginal employee stays with us longer than the European employee.

Mr BARRESI—Where do they typically go after that two or three years, Russell?

Mr Hanigan—They will go back to their community—One Arm Point, Beagle Bay, Lombadina or Broome, or they will go to Darwin or Katherine or wherever they come from.

CHAIR—What does a shell cleaner do and how much do they earn?

Mr Hanigan—Because the pearl shell is a filter feeder, we need to clean the pearl shell every two weeks. Therefore, we have a boat which operates with a cleaning machine, which uses high pressure water. It cleans the pearl shell. The pearl shell cleaner has to handle the pearl shell, put it through the machine, take it out, clean it, tend to it, make sure that it is sitting properly in nets and look after the long-lines that they hang from. It is just general work around the sea.

CHAIR—What do they earn?

Mr Hanigan—They start off at $24,000 and go up to $35,000 or $40,000. A foreman would earn $40,000.

Mr BARRESI—Is that based on a 40-hour week?

Mr Hanigan—No. It is based on two weeks on, one week off. It is based on a nine-hour day. They work seven days a week when they are there and then they take their week off. They are paid a salary, so they are quite happy with this work.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you have any difficulty recruiting people?

Mr Hanigan—Not at all. They just come through the door. We do not have to use the CES or any referring agency.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So you would actually be taking in quite a few new employees each year if you had that sort of turnover rate?

Mr Hanigan—That is right, yes. We try to employ local. We try to employ Aboriginals, if possible.

CHAIR—In addition to the jobs you described to us on the pearl farms, do you maintain your own vessels?

Mr Hanigan—Yes, we have our own vessels. We have some local Aboriginal divers working. It is a very rigorous testing procedure for divers—you have to be not only fit but capable of diving. Whether you are European or Aboriginal, the same conditions apply. You have to have an open water ticket and you have to pass a diving safety test through the Pearl Producers Association. So everybody has an equal chance. We probably have 10 per cent Aboriginal workers on our boats.

CHAIR—What about mechanics and electricians?

Mr Hanigan—Yes, electricians or mechanics are usually employed out of Darwin, and they are usually European.

CHAIR—Do you have apprenticeships for them too?

Mr Hanigan—No, we do not. We do not have facilities on the pearl farms. The reason is that it is fly in, fly out. We have limited space on planes. We cannot carry apprentices. We cannot train them on pearl farms. Economically, it is not feasible for us to do it.

CHAIR—I mean apprentice mechanics in Broome.

Mr Hanigan—We do have apprentice mechanics on our boats. We have one apprentice mechanic on each boat. Actually, I have tried to employ one fellow. I sent him up from Broome. His surname is Puertollano. I sent him to Darwin to work in the workshops. He did not like being away from Broome, and I think there was some sort of a personality clash with somebody in Darwin. It did not work out, but we endeavour to put our young Aboriginal people through that but have not been successful.

CHAIR—In a lot of the places we have been and talked to people, we have heard of the sometimes very difficult cultural conditions that tend to discourage young people from finding employment outside of CDEP, where that works. Since the big changes in the late 1960s or early 1970s in the pastoral stations a different culture has developed. For instance, in Kununurra one witness told us that he had no applications whatsoever from Aboriginals for jobs as stockmen—not one. Why is it that they want to work for you in the pearling industry, whereas many other occupations seem to be unattractive?

Mr Hanigan—No. 1 is the proximity of our office in town—it is right in the middle of Chinatown so it is very easy for somebody to walk into the office and apply for a job. Also, the word gets around amongst the local population that the pay is quite good and when you have no overheads it is quite easy to save. I think the conditions are very good. We have very good conditions on our pearl farms. It is an exponential growth industry. There is a lot of opportunity. It might come down to our employment conditions as well.

Mr BARRESI—Is the tax the same as for any other job, Russell?

Mr Hanigan—Yes, the same taxation conditions apply with the area allowances and—

Mr BARRESI—It is just that we were hit this morning with something that none of us ever knew: in the horticultural industry up in Kununurra they pay only 15 per cent tax for the first six months. You don't have such an anomaly?

Mr Hanigan—No, I haven't heard of that one.

Mr BARRESI—Neither had we, so we thought we might start applying. The skill level required to come in at the base level in your industry you would say is year 10, year 9, zilch? What would it be? In relation to literacy/numeracy standards, what do you actually require as a bare minimum?

Mr Hanigan—Zilch.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about those that become divers?

Mr Hanigan—Those that advance have to fill out records. We have a training system where we train them how to fill out records but, if they can't read and write, it makes it very difficult.

Mr BARRESI—You are saying they can go through their various licences to become a foreman on a boat. Is that just simply an in-house qualification or is that transportable to, say, the prawn industry or to the crayfish industry down at Geraldton?

Mr Hanigan—It is an in-house qualification, but in doing that you are also trained to do a coxswain's ticket through your sea time and your seamanship training and also you can do your master class 5. A master class 5 enables you to take—

Mr BARRESI—Going back, therefore, to the comments that we made to Robin earlier, how well known is that as a career progression and opportunity amongst the general population of school kids here in Broome? Are they aware that they can actually get an alternative qualification?

Mr Hanigan—No, it is not well known. I came to this high school three years ago and spoke to some leavers but haven't been back since. I haven't made any effort to because I don't need to. I'm not looking for workers. They come in through the door, and I'm having to sort through them.

CHAIR—So you have more applicants than you have jobs?

Mr Hanigan—Yes.

CHAIR—So if we lose our seats at the next election we can't be sure that we can get a job as a pearl cleaner?

Mr Hanigan—You can be sure: I don't think you look quite fit enough.

Mr BARRESI—So we can't be sure?

Mr MOSSFIELD—You are pretty right about that.

Mr BARRESI—Just one last question on this: is that career progression in your industry able to be developed into a recognised traineeship?

Mr Hanigan—Yes, it is. In fact, I have asked Robin to look into that because we have responsibilities under the Occupational Health Act to train our workers. We have just had an occupational work safe audit on our pearling areas—a voluntary audit; it was not forced upon us—and we have found that, for example, our managers and our undermanagers need to know the Occupational Health Act, that they don't know it and so

on. I thought that perhaps with these traineeships we could use that for training in occupational health in seamanship and in training with pearl shell cleaning and pearl shell husbandry, and sort of encapsulate it all into one and use a provider to do that.

When we looked into it, the first thing that came up—and I was quite annoyed about it—is that there was a request that there should be a training wage. We can't entertain a training wage. We pay our people to work out on the sea. We have to fly them in and out, and feed them. We want to pay them the correct money to do the job.

Apparently, there is an $1,100 incentive to do it. We are willing to use that money to employ a trainer to go to the pearl farms and work with our trainees, but it seemed to stop at this, 'But you must provide a minimum wage or a trainee wage. We cannot help you unless you do that,' and, of course, we are not prepared to do that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—But you would be paying higher.

Mr Hanigan—Yes, it is higher. It is above award. There are no awards.

Mr BARRESI—Under the new MAATS system would you not have the flexibility to be able to pay a higher wage?

Mr Hanigan—I have not heard any answer. It was sort of thrown back to some people in Perth and it has not come back to me.

CHAIR—Bureaucracy is confusing sometimes, isn't it?

Mr Hanigan—It seems to be a bureaucratic stumbling block, but we cannot progress and I think we should be able to progress.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I do not think you will find any opposition if you wanted to pay above award wages. It has always been open to an employer if, for their own reasons, they want to pay above the award.

Mr BARRESI—I would have thought it might be the nine-hour day seven days a week that might be more of a stumbling block rather than a wage with a trainee.

Mr Hanigan—Yes, it is two weeks on and one week off. We have to work that system.

Mr MOSSFIELD—There could be some things. Other award conditions might come into it. You made the point that, if other employers in the town were able to adapt some of your skills to the employment of Aboriginal people, there would be a benefit. What steps can you take to pass on your experience and knowledge to other employers to enable them to have the same success rate that you have in the employment of Aboriginal

people?

Mr Hanigan—I guess the best way to do it is through the chamber of commerce.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Is anything happening?

Mr Hanigan—I have not been proactive in that. Perhaps I should.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I recommend that you consider that.

Mr Hanigan—Yes, it is something I should do.

Mr BARRESI—You have your personal contact.

CHAIR—Russell, thank you very much for coming to talk to the committee. It has been absolutely fascinating. I am not sure I understand exactly how you go about growing pearls, but anyway—

Mr Hanigan—We do not want too many people to know, actually.

CHAIR—Fair enough. Thank you for coming.

[6.38 p.m.]

DEARLE, Mr Gregory Robert, Principal and Managing Director, Millar Refrigeration and Airconditioning, 2 Haynes Street, Broome, Western Australia

CHAIR—Greg, thank you for coming to talk to us this afternoon. You have heard all the introduction before.

Mr Dearle—Yes, I have.

CHAIR—I would assume you have a thriving business.

Mr Dearle—It keeps me busy. You do not get a lot of time.

CHAIR—Greg, you know the issues that we are here to discuss. Would you like to make a statement to the committee about employment for young people in your industry in Broome?

Mr Dearle—The main issue is that the kids today—I really should not say 'kids'; they are young people—are very ill prepared and do not even understand what is in today's workplace. I look back to when I was in the first or second year of high school: I had already decided where I was going and what I was going to do. Most other kids at the same time did the same thing.

The communication between education and business is non-existent. The reality is that it is just not there. I have been in this town for 8½ years and have never been contacted by any school for work experience or getting involved with the youth of today, who are tomorrow's future. I am one of these slow learner business people who try apprentices every year. We have had 11. I have had one succeed and now he is a competitor.

CHAIR—That happens. That happened to me, too.

Mr Dearle—That is not a problem. I think one of the problems is that the youth of today do not get the same skills of life that were taught to me when I was young: ethics, values and self-worth. Mum and Dad are busy doing something. A lot of the young kids today have no confidence whatsoever. They know their rights and they are very good at advising you what their rights are, but to actually be accountable for their actions—they do not understand what it is all about. I think it mainly comes from the education of kids in schools today.

CHAIR—Is it really the schools or is it parents and society and the whole thing—

Mr Dearle—Part of it is society, but a big part of it is school. The schools have no authority to do anything to the youth today to penalise them for their actions. They simply do not have to be accountable. That would be a lovely world to be in, wouldn't it?

CHAIR—I am not sure of that. How substantially different do you think it is today in schools than when you went to school?

Mr Dearle—We were told to do something and we did it.

CHAIR—But how did that teach you what the world of work was all about?

Mr Dearle—It taught us what would be expected. I saw my father work hard and long hours. There was not a welfare system to fall back on. You basically could not live on the dole, as we commonly call it, all those years ago. The difference between an award wage and unemployment benefits or family allowances is too close. Why go to work? Why not just stay at home? It is very easily done. That is a big problem. There is no gap between the two.

CHAIR—Perhaps I should have asked everybody this. We have tended to ask this question in our travels around rural, regional and outback Australia. Is there any real unemployment in Broome? That is to say, is there any young person—16 to 24—who might not find the job they want but could not find a job if they wanted to work?

Mr Dearle—No, I do not think so. Friends of mine in business—we generally all have the same sort of view. They want a job. One of the biggest problems in training is—as Russ was saying about the pearling industry—the salaries that they earn. $24,000 versus $12,000 the first year in. Why do that?

The other thing is that youth do not seem to be able to see, not today or tomorrow, but three or four years down the road. 'Where am I going to be?' 'What sort of qualifications am I going to have then?' It is a question of income now or income later. They do not seem to be able to comprehend income later and the opportunities that go with that and what you can do once you are qualified.

Mr MOSSFIELD—We have had some comments relating to the expectations of young people when they go into the work force.

Mr Dearle—Oh, yes. It is huge.

Mr MOSSFIELD—They want to start near enough to the top—is that your feeling?

Mr Dearle—Definitely. That is a fact of life. Apprentices say, 'Hey, if I wanted a job sweeping floors and cleaning bins, I would go and get a job as a cleaner. I thought I

was here to be an apprentice tradesman.' I say, 'That is where you start.'

Mr MOSSFIELD—I think the breakdown is that industry is not getting into the schools and letting young people know, from year 10 at least, what is involved in work. Also, young people are not getting the work experience prior to actually reaching school leaving age. So they do not know what it is all about until they actually get out there.

Mr Dearle—I think you need to get them earlier than that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I would not disagree with you either.

Mr Dearle—I think you need to get them around first year high school, which is year 8, I think. That is when you need to get them, not when they get to 15 and they suddenly go, 'Oh, what do I do now? Will I get a job?'

Mr MOSSFIELD—I think the fear of unemployment does worry a lot of young people. They lose their self-confidence and they go the wrong way. It is a dull situation. If they had an early expectation of employment, I think you would find that they would be keener to improve their schooling so that they would be able to get that particular job.

Mr Dearle—That is exactly true. On that question of seeking what is true unemployment, we would probably only have three kids a year who come in looking for an apprenticeship. They come in ill prepared. They just walk in and say, 'Have you got an apprenticeship, mate?' I do not think it is the education or the literacy argument. That is certainly part of it.

Mr MOSSFIELD—But that might be a real big step for that kid to make the effort to come in and front you. Maybe if you could sit down with him and say, 'Well, we have, but the way you are approaching it—'

Mr Dearle—Well, we do that, and they cannot get out quick enough.

Mr BARRESI—I do not know whether you were in the room when I mentioned it before, Greg, but today in the school forum not one kid raised his or her hand to say that they would take on an apprenticeship, which was a bit of a concern. I am not sure whether they fully understand what is involved. Looking at your attrition in terms of apprenticeships, do you believe that the structure of the apprenticeship program itself is a disincentive to young kids because of what you were saying before that they cannot see what will happen later—they can only see today?

Mr Dearle—Yes, that is right. Because the world changes so fast now—business is changing every day; expectations are so high now—there is nothing in the apprenticeship system as it is. It is very rigid; it is locked in. My apprentices have to go away to Perth for their training. They learn things down there that are not relevant to their

own work environment. It is really of no benefit. It wastes their time, basically. After a couple of days down there, they suddenly decide, 'Hey, it's party time, I'm not going to learn anything here.' That is one problem.

The other problem is that, where an individual is well and truly above the average apprentice, there is no means or mechanism to advance that further. As an employer and being responsible for their training, I have limited control over what I can and cannot do. The curriculum for their training is set by others and I have no input into it. I understand that is part of being in a remote community. But I am locked in.

Mr BARRESI—Doesn't the industry training board consult with you?

Mr Dearle—You jest!

Mr BARRESI—Or with the refrigeration industry?

Mr Dearle—Zip; nothing. It is controlled from the city. You have six or eight major companies in Perth and a lot of the funding for the technical college comes from them. So the loyalties go that way. That is just how the system is.

Mr BARRESI—You said that your apprentices are sent down to Perth for their formal classroom training.

Mr Dearle—Block release.

Mr BARRESI—How often and for how long?

Mr Dearle—Three times a year, three weeks at a shot. So they are away for nine weeks and four weeks for their annual leave and a couple of weeks for public holidays. Basically, they are not there for a third of the year.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about other employers in the town? How many would take on apprentices if they were able to get the right type of young person? There must be a lot of contractors, electricians and plumbers.

Mr Dearle—We all face the same problem inasmuch as—

Mr MOSSFIELD—Would they be prepared to take on apprentices if they could get the right type of—

Mr Dearle—There have to be some other changes made. Training and apprentices are very expensive. As a simple analogy, if he cuts a piece of timber with the wrong measurement, a simple mistake, that is a hard cost to the business that cannot be recovered. Rather than paying wage subsidies or the like, I do not understand why training

cannot be a tax deduction on a business, which it is currently not, and it is absolutely crazy.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about a payroll tax deduction for employing an apprentice? I do not know what is involved with that financially.

Mr Dearle—Training is a huge impost on business today, and the margins are not there; the profit margins in business today are not what they were 15 or 20 years ago. The multipliers on labour rates are simply not there. That is a fact of life. A lot of the costs that were absorbed by business can no longer be absorbed. One of the things that I truly believe affects the youth of today is the wage subsidies. They say, 'It's not real. The boss is not really employing me. He's being paid by the government to employ me.' I do not think it brings any real sense of reality to the apprentice or the trainee. I think that is something significant that needs to be changed. Whether that is via tax breaks or something of that nature, I think that is a significant factor as to whether they succeed or they do not. It is almost like you do not have to be accountable.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I can see what you are saying, yes.

Mr Dearle—They are the main things that I wanted to address here tonight.

CHAIR—If we go back to Melbourne and Sydney and find a few kids that we know individually and who would desperately love an apprenticeship in refrigeration and airconditioning, we will send them up. They would be keen kids who have got a work ethic and background. If we send them up, will they be right?

Mr Dearle—It is not quite that simple.

CHAIR—That is like my job as a shell cleaner!

Mr Dearle—Given the circumstances—for example, family is an integral part of it. Given that there is family support, yes, that is a very real possibility.

CHAIR—You said you had had 11 apprentices in the last—

Mr Dearle—Eight and a half years.

CHAIR—And only one of them worked out? Only one finished his time?

Mr Dearle—Yes, pretty much. He was the only one who came from a stable family.

CHAIR—And the rest did not finish the apprenticeship?

Mr Dearle—No. A couple of them got to their third year—they had one year to go.

Mr BARRESI—They were all local kids?

Mr Dearle—All bar one—Kim. Kim was from Perth. All local. They do not survive. The peer group pressure is there from their mates. The wage they earn is obviously not very attractive but, by the same token, basically customers are not wiling to pay for the training of an apprentice.

Mr BARRESI—You said you have got one other competitor in town.

Mr Dearle—Four.

Mr BARRESI—Do you know what their experiences are with apprentices?

Mr Dearle—Very similar.

Mr BARRESI—Are they not able to keep their apprentices either?

Mr Dearle—I do not know of any other business in town in the refrigeration or airconditioning industry that has completed an apprentice for some years.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you foresee a skill shortage because of a lack of—

Mr Dearle—It is here now.

Mr MOSSFIELD—It is already here?

Mr Dearle—It is here now. Tradesmen that call themselves tradesmen today are not tradesmen. It is here now.

Mr MOSSFIELD—That must retard your business opportunities? You could obviously do more work if you had more tradespeople.

Mr Dearle—Of course you could. Exactly. It retards the growth of your business. An integral part of your business growing, particularly in our industry, is that there are many technical skills locked up within that business. A lot of those skills simply do not get passed on at the end of the day.

Mr BARRESI—Are you able to attract from down south later year apprentices or even those who have come out of apprenticeships to come up to fill the shortage?

Mr Dearle—I don't think I would want to without support from family or close friends. You need external support other than the employer. I cannot be the father. There needs to be family support there. It is vital. It is a critical ingredient of the whole exercise. Very few adult apprentices succeed. Again, at 23 or 24 years of age you are basically the dogsbody. It is a fact of life.

Criticism in the workplace is a normal facet. Your performance is evaluated all the time. The youth of today take that criticism personally and say, 'Shove it up your back door; I don't have to take this.' That is something that they simply do not understand. Criticism should be welcomed with open arms. It is an opportunity to see where your mistakes are and improve. It is a process for improving. They do not seem to understand that. When I sit them down and try to talk to them, sometimes I think I must come from Mars. That is just how it is.

Mr BARRESI—I go back to your point about the training down in Perth not being relevant to what you need up here. What is the difference between refrigeration and airconditioning work up in Broome compared to what takes place in Perth?

Mr Dearle—Extreme humidity, which causes condensation on things. I suppose it is a bit like doing refrigeration in Alaska versus doing it in Alice Springs. It is just the environment. It is a totally different environment.

Mr BARRESI—Is that a work condition problem or is it a technical problem with the equipment?

Mr Dearle—It is a technical problem. Too frequently companies from Perth come to town, do work and have enormous difficulties understanding some of the problems because theoretically they should not happen, but they do.

Mr BARRESI—We cannot change the climate, unfortunately, Greg, so how do you overcome the problem?

Mr Dearle—Give more control to the employer in how his apprentice is trained.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you have a TAFE college here?

Mr Dearle—Yes, we do.

Mr MOSSFIELD—But they don't run—

Mr Dearle—There is nothing there. Three years ago I got involved with Hedron College. We sent one of our fellow down there but, again, it was at arms length. I think the college was ill prepared to try to do anything. I think there were seven or eight modules of the refrigeration course. We could not actually have someone who had an

industry background.

CHAIR—That is a pretty good college.

Mr Dearle—It is a good college; I am not criticising it. I am not castigating the performance of the college.

CHAIR—They have done some fantastic work with telecommunications.

Mr Dearle—I am just saying that it did not quite work. They are having another go at it now.

Mr BARRESI—I know it is outside the state jurisdiction, but are you able to send your apprentices to Darwin, where they would experience similar climatic conditions?

Mr Dearle—I don't think we can. The only way I could do that is if I could find something in their basic curriculum that was not offered at Carlisle technical college in Perth. There is only one college for refrigeration in this state of Western Australia and that is Carlisle technical college. I would have to find something in their curriculum that was available in Darwin and was not available in Perth to argue that point to get them to go to Darwin.

Mr BARRESI—You could try with humidity.

Mr Dearle—That is just a reality.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What is the solution then? Could you expect the TAFE teachers to come up here? Would that be practical when you only have a small group of people anyway? Could they instruct the apprentices on your machinery?

Mr Dearle—Ray, who actually completed his apprenticeship, did most of his by correspondence. There used to be industrial training. They would send up one of their officers once a year and basically do a simple test for a day, evaluating his skills and what he can and cannot do. An assessment was made from that point, both on the employer and the apprentice. That is a very simple basic answer.

Mr MOSSFIELD—It could be a solution.

CHAIR—Greg, thank you very much for coming. We hope to finish the inquiry in June and bring down a report in August or September. We will certainly send you a copy of whatever it is we come up with. It has been a fascinating afternoon.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Mossfield):

That the committee receive as evidence and authorise the publication of submissions received from the Derby Chamber of Commerce for the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people.

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

Committee adjourned at 7.01 p.m.