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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Vocational education in schools

TUESDAY, 1 JULY 2003

JUNEE

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Tuesday, 1 July 2003

Members: Mr Bartlett (*Chair*), Mr Sawford (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Albanese, Mr Farmer, Ms Gambaro, Mr Johnson, Mrs May, Mr Pearce, Ms Plibersek and Mr Sidebottom

Members in attendance: Mr Bartlett, Mr Farmer and Mr Sawford

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

WITNESSES

BARRETT, Mr Jason, Ex-student, Junee High School.....	739
BARRETT, Mr Robert Keith, Inaugural Chairman and Member, Junee High School Vocational Education Committee.....	781
BRAY, Mr Norman, Partner, Hart and Bray	781
BUTT, Mr Anthony John, Managing Director, TLB Industries trading as T-Line Steel.....	781
BYRNE, Mr Frederick John, Careers Adviser, Junee High School	764
CLINTON, Mr Andrew Peter, Managing Director, Junee Railway Workshop	781
COOPER, Mr Ian, Secretary/Manager, Junee District Cooperative Society Ltd	781
COOPER, Mrs Leonie Joy, Ancillary Support, Junee High School	764
DIETSCH, Mr John, Head Teacher, Junee High School.....	764
DRUCE, Mr Neil, Managing Director, Green Grove Organics	781
FULLER, Mr Aaron Peter, Community Development Officer, Junee Shire Council.....	781
GENTLE, Mrs Judith Margaret, Hospitality Teacher, Junee High School	764
GRANT, Mr Christopher, Principal, Temora High School.....	715
HEWSON, Mrs Sharon Dianne, Intern, Junee High School	764
KNIGHT, Mrs Marie, Vocational Education Coordinator, Junee High School.....	739, 750, 764
MACAULAY, Mr Colin John, Manager of Engineering Services, Junee Shire Council.....	781
MASON, Mr Garry, Principal, Cootamundra High School; Chairman, CTJ Workplacement Group Inc.	715
MOORE, Mr Roger James, Partner, Moore Ford	781
NORTON, Mr Bruce, District Vocational Education and Training Consultant, Department of Education and Training	715
SMITH, Dr Erica (Private capacity).....	750
SWEENEY, Mr Mitchell, Ex-student, Junee High School	739
WOOD, Mr Philip, Deputy Principal, Executive in charge of Vocational Education, Junee High School.....	764
WRIGHT, Mr Lee, Principal, Junee High School.....	715, 764
BALDRY, Carl; CARTER, Amanda; COUCHMAN, Shara; HEINJUS, Amy; LAWSON, Mitchell; McNAMARA, Courtney; SMITH, Thomas; WATTERSON, Melissa; and WOODALL, Jenna, Students, Junee High School.....	739

Committee met at 11.37 a.m.

GRANT, Mr Christopher, Principal, Temora High School

MASON, Mr Garry, Principal, Cootamundra High School; Chairman, CTJ Workplacement Group Inc.

NORTON, Mr Bruce, District Vocational Education and Training Consultant, Department of Education and Training

WRIGHT, Mr Lee, Principal, Junee High School

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you, Lee, for your hospitality and the school's hospitality. Thank you also for having us here. To the other gentlemen, thank you for the very valuable submission and for your time with us today. We know how busy you are. We are looking forward to hearing what you have to say to us. We generally ask that all evidence be given in public but if for any reason there are any comments that you want to make privately, just let us know and we should be able to arrange that. I will ask you, first of all, to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

Mr Norton—I am probably best placed to give a district perspective because it is my role to coordinate, promote and facilitate VET across all the schools in the district. I could look at the bigger picture and give a different perspective. Firstly, there are nine high schools out of a possible 10 in the district delivering VET in Schools. There are TAFE campuses at Young, Temora, Cootamundra and Wagga Wagga, so there are four institutes of TAFE which deliver in conjunction with those schools. The schools are in two clusters. There is a Wagga Wagga cluster, which is based on six schools in the Wagga Wagga area—Koorringal High School, Mount Austin High School, Wagga Wagga High School, Lockhart Central School, Junee High School and Coolamon Central School. There are three schools in the Wagga Wagga cluster very closely located geographically in Wagga. Then there are the three outlying schools, of which Junee is one, and Coolamon and Lockhart, the others. They all have significant issues regarding travelling to Wagga should they require access to VET delivered through TAFE. We will come to that later. The other schools in the district are Young, Temora, Cootamundra and Murrumburrah. To some extent they are rurally isolated so they have to fend for themselves. Cootamundra does have a TAFE in town, as do Young and Temora, so there is some linkup with those TAFEs for those particular schools. Basically there are differences in the way VET operates in those two clusters.

The district is now, as are all districts in the Department of Education and Training, a registered training organisation, which means that it conforms to the AQTF standards that relate to that. Schools are auspiced to deliver qualifications under the AQTF. Our schools can deliver certificates I and II, which are the industry based qualifications. It is all part of the reform training agenda which is taking place across the nation. It does mean, though, that every school is answerable to both VTAB for the AQTF standards that they have to meet and the Board of Studies requirements that relate to HSC outcomes. For schools to meet both of those outcomes is a difficult ask, but we think we are doing a pretty good job of it.

I have tabled a copy of the figures for VET which is taking place in schools in 2003. It is based on the two models I talked about—the northern schools cluster and the southern schools cluster. The northern schools are Temora, Young, Cootamundra and Murrumburrah. The figures show the numbers of students who are accessing various courses, both TAFE and school-delivered VET courses in those schools and TAFE. Towards the start of the year they totalled about 511 students. Of those students, 100 were in a TAFE setting and the other 411 were through school-delivered courses in those schools. There is one exception. The business services course was delivered at Temora TAFE in that instance, which is a bit of an exception to the rule. That tells you the extent of the courses being delivered in those schools.

On the second page is the southern cluster of schools, which is associated with Wagga Wagga TAFE. There are higher numbers there. There are 357 students in school-delivered VET in year 11, 223 students in school-delivered VET in year 12 and 178 students in TAFE delivered VET in the last section of that. That gives a total of about 758. Altogether you have about 1,200 students who are doing school-delivered VET. That is a huge increase over the last four or five years. It has quadrupled and quadrupled again. Most of the VET has been a response to the new framework courses which have been put into the school, of which there are now nine. There are nine framework courses which count towards the HSC and produce an industry qualification AQF level 1 or level 2 or a statement of attainment towards either of those things.

The huge growth in VET is due to the explosion in the number of courses which are possible. That presents its own problems, because schools have to present those courses in competition with everything else. They are competing with every other subject that is on offer. What it has meant is that there has been considerable realignment of schools and the structure of schools. Teachers are moving into teaching those courses as opposed to traditional academic courses. So there have been considerable shifts and changes. My colleagues will be able to tell you about the impact of that on their staff, which has been considerable.

All the framework courses which are delivered in the schools have an optional HSC examination. If you look at a TAFE delivered course, which we regard as a content endorsed course—that is what our board calls it—there is no HSC examination aligned with them. If you look at the school-delivered courses, which are these framework courses, there is the optional HSC examination. It is optional, but it is there if the student wishes to count the VET course as part of their HSC to give them a university entrance mark—a UAI, so to speak. It is an optional thing. There is a valuable document which has just come out, the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors Conference Technical Committee on Scaling 2002 report on the scaling of the New South Wales Higher School Certificate. It tells me that of the 12,500 students who sat for the VET exam last year, 50 per cent applied to go to university.

The thing about these VET courses is that, if you do a framework course, you can still leave open the option to use the VET course—the framework course—to get university entrance. Of the 50 per cent that applied to go to university who did the VET course, half of them received an offer to go to a university. That is a little bit less than the whole of the HSC cohort—in here it says the whole of the HSC cohort. Seventy-one per cent applied for university and 69 per cent received an offer. It is an example of the fact that students can still count the VET framework courses to get university entrance while still meeting the industry qualifications, the industry outcomes, the AQF qualifications. Meeting the demands of both of those places a lot of strain on schools but I think they are coping very well. As I say, you will hear more about that later.

I want to talk about the collegial delivery of VET in the Wagga cluster. I talked about the northern cluster. There are groups of schools that are much more isolated and basically they have to do things by themselves or in conjunction with a local TAFE. In the Wagga cluster they have tried very hard to work together as a group—and they have succeeded quite well. We will have a VET Link day when all the students come together on that one day. We are trying to run with that next year. There will be one day when all the students can travel from Junee, Lockhart and Coolamon on the one day and access a range of the VET courses which will be on offer on that day. I have given you the prospectus which details for Wagga, Temora, Murrumburrah, Young and Cootamundra—have I given you that one?

CHAIR—Junee, Wagga, The Rock, Lockhart—

Mr Norton—That is the Wagga cluster one. There is another one here for the outlying schools cluster. If you look at the index for the Wagga cluster, you will see there a range of courses which will be made available to all students in the Wagga cluster. There is a range of framework courses, which are predominantly delivered within schools, and then a range of non-framework courses, which are delivered in the Wagga TAFE campus. So on the VET Link day we will have students coming in from, hopefully, Junee, Coolamon and Lockhart and from the other three schools in Wagga to access that range of courses. We are trying to eliminate duplication so that not every school is trying to deliver every VET course and the students can access the range of the non-framework courses, the TVET courses, which are there as well. I think we have achieved a lot, and it is an ongoing process.

In response to the requirement to produce AQF qualifications, we have to have access to industry standard training facilities. Groups of schools did band together a couple of years ago and sought funding through ANTA to build the skill centres in schools. They were quite successful. It was a very difficult, very time-consuming process and it is just coming to fruition now. In the northern cluster, Young High School and Hennessy Catholic College combined and got ANTA funding to build four skill centres. They got about \$250,000 from ANTA and they were able to build two commercial kitchens, one in Young and one in Hennessy, and a retail centre and an information technology centre at Young High School. They are basically the only industry standard facilities that the schools have to deliver those courses apart from what is available in the TAFE, and there are problems associated with that.

In the Wagga cluster, they banded together and got \$575,000 from ANTA, which was a huge boost for us in terms of vocational education in this cluster. They are building a commercial kitchen, which is almost finished, at Mount Austin High School. A business services centre went into Mount Erin High School, an information technology centre went into Christian College and a retail centre went into Koorimal High School. Those centres are almost completed. They are the first industry standard facilities that exist in schools in the district. Otherwise they are just the normal stock standard woodwork/metalwork room and the stock standard kitchen put in by the department of education, and those facilities do not really meet AQF qualifications under the new training agenda. There are problems associated with that. We have had some success but it is pretty patchy.

I want to talk to you very briefly about our school based traineeships. School based traineeships are a federal government initiative under the New Apprenticeships scheme that you all know about. We have only 20 of those in existence across the district. They are very difficult

to organise because of the time requirement that is part of those traineeships. For every new apprenticeship or school based traineeship, it has to be done over two years. The New South Wales Board of Studies have said they have to meet Board of Studies requirements as well, so they still have to meet an HSC outcome and they still have to study five subjects as part of their HSC whilst they complete their new apprenticeship. The new apprenticeship generally amounts to 1,400 hours of paid employment. So here you have a student who is completing HSC and doing 1,400 hours of paid employment—almost an impossible ask for the majority of kids, although some students have taken it up. They are all difficult and, as I say, we have only 20 as opposed to the 1,000 students who are doing VET across the district.

Of the 1,000 or 1,200 students who are doing VET across the district, only 20 are trainees. The point is that the 1,000 students who are doing VET in Schools—something which I think is unique to New South Wales—have to do a compulsory work placement. The compulsory work placement is 70 hours, which is two weeks in employment. I have 1,000 students who have to go out for two weeks into employment here and in Wagga. That is mandatory; if you did not do those 70 hours, you do not get the HSC credential and you lose everything. It is a unique point for New South Wales, but it is causing problems with employers, and you will probably hear some more about that later on today.

There is possible overload and certainly stress from the amount of effort that has to be put in to get employers to come onside. Employers are being hit on every side by traineeships, the new apprenticeship models that we talked about, and the school based work placements which are part of the stage six curriculum. There is also still a lot of work experience happening, which is the year 10 model where a kid just goes to the employer and works for a couple of weeks. It is not based on a curriculum, so it is a trial to see whether they are interested in it.

I also want to report that employers do see a very high level of satisfaction with HSC VET students. They reckon they are well prepared, they are work-ready and they have entry-level industry skills, which they really appreciate. Employers tell me that it is fantastic to get a work placement kid because they have the basic skills, they are work savvy, they can answer the telephone, they can relate to customers and you can put them to work virtually straight away; they are very useful for them. They do not say that about work experience students who have come out from year 10 but they do say it about our VET students, even though they are still saying they are getting overstressed by the whole thing.

Funding for VET in Schools is an issue, and you will probably hear more about that. Basically our system is saying that there is no additional funding that has attracted the delivery of VET as opposed to physics, chemistry or anything else. So our schools are basically labouring under the requirements of AQTF—having to give kids access to industry standard facilities and all that sort of thing—yet there is no additional funding to speak of that the schools attract from that global budget or for staffing. It means that it is very difficult for the schools to meet the additional requirements that relate to those courses because they are not just Board of Studies requirements, they are industry courses. You will hear a lot about the issues that relate to funding from other principals.

I want to finish on one point. School based delivery has been the major point of success in the district because it is in a school setting that the kids are most comfortable. It is in a school setting that the school can see VET as part of the whole curriculum that a student is working towards. If

we take a student out of that setting and put them into a TAFE setting, in many cases TAFE assumes another basis. TAFE assumes in many cases that the students are working in employment, so they are getting their hands dirty in the trade to start with. That is not the case with a school student, because they are doing the normal curriculum. In many cases, the TAFE regards the student as an independent learner. We know that in many cases kids in stage six are not yet independent learners. So the success of school-delivered VET has been due to the fact that they can support the kid and put them in the appropriate course. Whilst that is problematic, and you will hear the issues, it is where the strength of the whole thing has been. It is in school VET that the success has been.

CHAIR—Thank you, Bruce. Would any of the principals like to make some introductory comments?

Mr Wright—I believe that Junee High School is unique in the way that it structures VET. I have been here since 2000 and the school was well established in vocational education and training before that. In 1993, we were one of the first schools to go into vocational education and training. VET here is a core part of our school culture. We believe in the value for the students but also for the school and for our community. I would like to outline just a few of the differences or the things we believe make us unique.

We have all of our students begin the process of getting into the VET program in year 10. They have to prepare a resume, they have to go through an interview process with our employers and they have to be committed to the program before they come into it. We structure our year 11 with a day free of lessons on Thursdays so they have a free day when they can go to workplace training. We offer four work placements in year 11 and two in year 12. It is something that we have developed ourselves. As new curricula have come in, we have adapted to meet their requirements. We have formed VET here on the basis of the needs of our school and our community and we would like to maintain that.

We see a tremendous value for our students in VET. We see the value in terms of the experiences and skills that they get. But we also see qualities like maturity, responsibility, motivation, self-esteem and things like that that the kids gain out of work placement. We see kids return to school who might not otherwise have done so. We hold a high retention rate here. In 1996 and 1997 we actually had more kids in year 11 than we had in year 10. We still have a significant proportion of our kids involved in VET placement.

We believe that the school benefits from the VET program. It benefits in terms of that retention that allows us to then offer a broader curriculum in the senior school. We received an award from the director-general in 1997 for the breadth of our senior curriculum. It just happens to be there behind you at the moment.

CHAIR—Very convenient.

Mr Grant—Does it always sit there?

Mr Wright—Yes. We believe that because the students are more motivated in a VET subject that motivation carries across into other subjects. We believe that we have a very small proportion of our students who lack a connection with the school. We believe that we have a

good work ethic in years 11 and 12. We believe that that model flows back to the junior school so there are benefits to the school wider than just to the students in the VET program.

The point I would really like to emphasise with you is the benefits that we believe accrue to the community from our VET program. You will meet with our employers this afternoon and I believe that you will see tremendous support from those people. They are very experienced and they are very knowledgeable about the program. The Junee community believes that it owns our VET program. Our Vocational Education Management Committee has equal numbers of employers and teachers and is chaired by a local businessman. So when I go along I am just a member of that committee.

Mr SAWFORD—Is it still the same businessman?

Mr Wright—Yes. You will meet him this afternoon. We have a very active employer network that supports our students. I had a student just a fortnight ago who had not been turning up to classes and had not been attending work placement. One of our employers took him aside and spoke with him. We have got him into the work placement and he is getting tremendous reports from that—and in fact he has been going there longer than just the fortnight. Flowing on from that now is improved attendance in class and the work there has improved. So there is a link being forged between the school and the community and it is a link that I have observed since I came here. I believe there is a positive view of youth in Junee. I believe that our local people see our kids in the workplace and we place them there each week—it is not just a block—so they are seen constantly in the town in a responsible role and I believe that they are seen positively. That has reflected well on the school and on our students. I think there is a tremendous advantage for the community in that.

Junee has been struggling a little bit. I think that has turned around recently but, since the downsizing of the railway, Junee has been losing people to Wagga. The VET program here started, I believe, as an equity measure, as a way of giving our kids an equal chance in life. They were competing with Wagga kids and we wanted them to compete on favourable terms, and that has certainly been achieved. Our kids receive very positive reviews here and in Wagga when they apply for interviews. The employers tell us quite clearly that you can see who has been involved in the VET program and who has not. I know that last year we had five students employed in the Wagga Wagga Marketplace. That is the central retail area in Wagga and, you can imagine, there would be 70 or 80 applicants for every position there. So we are really pleased with the quality of the students that we turn out in our VET program here. I wanted to make the point that there are advantages more than just for the students. Can I say something about challenges, or do you want to move on?

CHAIR—You will be meeting with us again this afternoon, won't you? Perhaps we will come back to the challenges in a few minutes, if that is okay.

Mr Wright—All right.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Wright. Mr Mason?

Mr Mason—I would like to emphasise and reinforce everything that Lee said. We see VET at Cootamundra High School as very important. We have over half of our students in years 11 and

12 studying at least one VET subject. In year 11 this year we have a number of students studying three, either framework or non-framework subjects. They have done that because they have worked out their career paths and that is where they wanted to go. That has given them a lot of opportunities; it has also presented them with some challenges back at school. Coming out with the HSC, TAFE and national accreditation is really important for the kids who are studying VET. The work placement is, as Lee said, very valuable to the students because they are finding expertise that they did not know they had. Many of them, as a result of their work placements, pick up either part-time work or, when they finish year 12, they are offered traineeships and apprenticeships in the areas in which they have done their work placement and, in a lot of cases, with the employers that they have used, because the employers see their expertise.

Again, as regards enhancing the links in the community, in a small country town such as Cootamundra there are many issues with work placement in terms of the size of the town and the numbers of placements and that is a real issue as VET has expanded. For example, in metals and engineering a lot of our kids have to go to Young, and some have to go to Wollongong, because there are just not enough places to go to. IT is another one where they have problems getting work placement areas within Cootamundra. At the same time, enhancing the links with the community is really important. And that is where our workplace coordinator is a very valuable member of our VET team.

One of the real issues I have at the moment, and one I would like to talk about, is the changes that our three schools have been forced into with changes in funding for work placement. I think that is going to cause some major dislocation to our work placement programs in the future. I would like to come back to that.

CHAIR—We will return to that.

Mr Mason—The other very positive thing is that our teachers have taken up VET with a huge amount of enthusiasm over time and they have worked really hard under a lot of pressure. VET is one of a number of classes that they do but, because of the different way it can be taught and the different expectations of supervision in the workplace, it is a huge amount of extra pressure on the teachers, and the schools, to be able to cater for that without adequate resourcing and funding to enable schools to do that. As an example, when our year 11 students go on work placement in three weeks time next term, the teachers, in that week, have to go and supervise them. They are also teaching other classes at the time. It would be nice to be able to free them up for the whole week to go and see every student, but the lack of casuals in the country town limits that, so we have to manufacture ways to enable them to do that. That puts a lot of stress on the teachers concerned and it puts a lot of stress on school organisation.

We have, in the Wagga district, a very good VET network system for all of the framework courses. It is really positive for the teachers to be able to meet with other teachers teaching retail, hospitality, or IT, to talk through issues and to develop assessment tasks and programs. But again, the distances and casual relief are an issue. But for the vast majority of students VET is a really positive experience for them and, in the long run, they will get the benefits from it.

Mr Grant—I agree with what my fellows have said there in terms of the positives of VET. Temora is a rural, fairly isolated community, yet the school has embraced VET wholeheartedly and we are one of the few schools in the Wagga district that offers all the framework courses on

its campus. That has great cost in terms of staffing, but we are able to do that. In fact our students are able to access up to three VET courses in their HSC curriculum. I see lots of positives with that and there are lots of positives that derive from VET courses, but there are some challenges and I hope I get a chance to come back to that. A lot of our students do find employment in the local community. As a case in point, one of our metals and engineering classes last year had 22 students; this year it is down to four, and all of those students have found full-time employment, either in the local area or in Wagga, in metals and engineering. So they are some of the positives. Certainly we are able to attract and retain a lot of non-academic students because of the breadth of our VET curriculum. They are all positive things.

I agree with Garry about this ECEF incorporation. I think it is an absolute pain in the neck and it is going to destroy the separateness—the individual identity—of our three work placement communities. I am really concerned about what is going to happen there in the future.

Mr SAWFORD—Can you just expand on that a bit?

Mr Grant—Sure.

CHAIR—Can we come back to that problem?

Mr Grant—I am happy to come back to that.

Mr SAWFORD—All right.

CHAIR—I would like to explore that in depth separately.

Mr Grant—Another concern for Temora is that it is wonderful to have skill centres in Wagga and skill centres in Young, but our students cannot access those because of the transport and the time it takes to get to those centres, so we have to provide our own facilities. Our cooking facilities are 50 years old, our kitchen is pretty antiquated, yet I have staff there trying to deliver hospitality. So they are issues of equity of funding and equity of access. But certainly the positives are there, and I agree with the boys on that, but I have a number of challenges I would like to discuss.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Grant. We will come to the challenges in the moment. Can I ask two questions for clarification to begin with? Mr Norton, I think you said about the curriculum framework courses that roughly 50 per cent of the students doing those courses go to university. Are all of those courses accepted by all universities for the UAI?

Mr Norton—They are all category B courses for the university, which means that you are only allowed to count one of those.

CHAIR—One of those for the UAI?

Mr Norton—Yes.

CHAIR—But two units from any of those nine courses?

Mr Norton—They all count.

Mr Grant—Yes, they all count, as long as the student sits the examination.

Mr Norton—But as far as the HSC is concerned, in the HSC year you have to have 10 units. The units come from any of those courses. They all count as two units in the HSC.

CHAIR—For the UAI as well as the HSC?

Mr Norton—Well, for the HSC, if you want just to get an HSC you do not have to sit the optional examination. You only need to sit the examination if you are looking to use that as part of your UAI calculation. You still get your HSC; you are still credited for that course on the certification, so that you meet the Board of Studies NSW requirements for the correct number of units. You only need the exam for that entrance into the university.

Mr Grant—There is a concern about what the University of Sydney does to that VET course when it gets the marks.

CHAIR—That is under review, as I understand it. They are looking at a new scaling system, aren't they?

Mr Grant—Are they?

Mr Norton—They have. There is some interesting data in this report and I would refer you to one table. In terms of counting towards the UAI, the UAIs are in bands: 90, 80, 70, 60, et cetera. There is a table which says that the percentage of students who got above 90, of all applicants, was 21.8; while of the VET applicants, it was 4.6. That is in the above-90 band.

CHAIR—The question then is: is that because of the type of students doing those courses or because of the way the university scales their VET?

Mr Mason—It depends upon both, but the main area will be the way the universities will scale. If our students who are studying VET go into the HSC looking for a UAI, I strongly advise them to do 12 units as a buffer—yet some of them do not take that offer up. I advise this because, looking at the statistics, if you go very well in a VET subject, you will not be disadvantaged. If you go slightly below very well, you are more disadvantaged than if you go just below average in a normal board course. Students who are doing, say, two VETs are significantly disadvantaged, because they are only going to be using one. There is some argument that you should channel kids into UAI university type courses and vocational education streams, but there are many courses. The best example is probably IT. There are students who might be doing extension maths and CIT as a very valuable additional course of skills—which it is—when they go into university or the work place. But they could be at a disadvantage because of the way the universities treat their scaling.

Mr Grant—I agree with those comments. If a student is looking for a good UAI and they are doing a VET course—and a lot of ours do—they end up doing 12 units for the HSC.

CHAIR—The other question of clarification I have is: do any of the TAFEs in the district offer curriculum framework courses that students can use as part of their HSC and UAI?

Mr Mason—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—In the submission it says that 1,400 students have applied to study two VET units this year. Out of what quantum is that? How many students is that?

Mr Norton—The trouble with the figure of 1,400 is that there is some duplication there. There are some students who are doing two or three. But it is certainly over 75 per cent of all year 11 and year 12 students who are doing VET courses across the district.

Mr SAWFORD—Which is what it should be.

Mr Norton—Yes.

CHAIR—Moving to more substantive issues, the question I want to start with is: why is VET so successful in this region compared to other regions? The second question is: what are your key recommendations to us and to the government on what we need to do to make it work better? Obviously, the whole issue of the funding arrangement for work placement is one thing. They are two fairly big questions. Could you quickly answer the first, and then go on to the second?

Mr Mason—I think the success is due to the commitment to VET that the schools and the teachers within the schools have. When VET first started, teachers had to put their hands up and say, ‘This looks really good. I’m going to be trained.’ And there is still an issue about the continual retraining of teachers. As one teacher said, they shift the goal posts every time you get qualifications, then the industry will come in and say we need more to run VET. But the groundswell was in schools and among teachers. They saw that they were very valuable courses for many students, and the success it has achieved has been self-perpetuating. When you get a community onside by taking work placements very easily, especially in small rural communities, that just adds to the success of it.

Mr Norton—I go back to four or five years ago when the previous district superintendent made the statement to all principals that all students will have access to all of the framework courses. It was our brief as principals and as the consultant—I am not a principal—to facilitate access to all of those framework courses as a matter of equity. So we used that as the basis to get all of the collegial cooperation and collaboration happening in the schools and TAFE.

CHAIR—Did that happen in other areas to that extent?

Mr Norton—I do not think it did, no.

Mr Grant—I think VET, too, supports the local rural community, in that courses such as construction and metals and engineering are seen as important skills that farmers require. A lot of our boys who are going to go back on to the farm pick up VET and come back to do years 11 and 12 to do VET courses. They are not that interested in English and maths, but they do their VET courses and then leave with those skills and qualifications.

CHAIR—What about the challenges, then, and those funding issues?

Mr Mason—I will talk about the work placement. At Cootamundra High School, we have been funded up to this year by BVET.

Mr Grant—We have BVET.

Mr Wright—The New South Wales body?

Mr Mason—Yes, the New South Wales body—and Lee, you were ECEF, weren't you?

Mr Wright—Yes.

Mr Mason—When we started this program three years ago we developed—from Cootamundra's point of view—a very good work placement coordination program which is much more than just a brokerage. In other words, in brokerage terms, someone would say, 'We have 50 students doing VET; we have to find 50 places,' and someone would ring up 50 employers and get a name and that is it. All the information would go back to the teachers and be their responsibility. In the work placement program that we have run our workplace coordinator does that, but she also provides a lot of the work readiness for the students before they go to work placement. It is a whole orientation program. She has very close links with the employers because she is a local. She is actually a casual teacher so she knows how schools work. That is a real plus, and it is virtually the same at Temora and at Junee. Because the funding arrangements have changed and we are now having to go through ECEF—which is no longer in existence—we have been forced to incorporate and to amalgamate. So, instead of having a Cootamundra High School or a Temora High School work placement program, we have a body which is called the CTJ work placement group, which is an incorporated and amalgamated body of the three schools.

The biggest impact that we are going to find is that, because the funding arrangements have changed dramatically, I can see that each of us is not going to be able to run the same programs next year because we will not be able to employ our coordinators as casual teachers—they will have to be employed by the incorporated body. Some of them may say, 'No, I am not prepared to do that because I can earn more money going back to being a casual teacher.' If that occurs, the biggest impact will be that we are going to lose huge amounts of local expertise that we need because there are many local issues in the three separate communities. So we are really concerned that, with this massive change, we are going to lose out in what we consider to be our very valuable work placement programs.

Mr Grant—I certainly agree with what Garry is saying there. But also just the amount of time that we have had to put in for this incorporation, for no benefit at all except to agree with the funding model that has been proposed by ECEF, is a big issue. I am a principal of a high school; I am not a member of an employment body or an incorporated body. I did not become a principal to be part of that; I became a principal to be the leader in the school for school issues, and I see that this is dragging me away from my school in terms of the workload. We were funded quite well previously and I cannot see why we are being forced into a model which does not suit our rural isolation at all. I can imagine we are going to be doing a lot more travelling, a lot more meeting, to get the same result as we have had all along.

Mr SAWFORD—This incorporation and public liability—isn't this just a government avoiding its responsibility?

Mr Grant—I agree. I think so.

Mr Wright—Very much so.

Mr Norton—There is a difficulty with work placement. I think you are going to hear from Wagga Wagga Compact. They are a work placement organisation who are not in the schools. They are separate. They are in an office which is part of the business sector. They have very close links with industry. That model is working very well in servicing the dozen or so schools—including the independent and Catholic schools that are part of that model as well—in Wagga. It does not work so well in these situations where they need a much more local focus in the work placement program.

CHAIR—What is the best model? If we were to make a recommendation to government about the optimal way of—

Mr Mason—The incorporation itself is not a major issue. It was the amalgamation. They would not fund independent programs. So I could not incorporate as Cootamundra High School Inc. or make up a name.

CHAIR—So you are saying that what you need is to have independence in terms of your work placement.

Mr Mason—Yes.

CHAIR—Aren't there benefits in a cluster coordination of work placements?

Mr Norton—There is in Wagga.

Mr Mason—There is in Wagga Wagga, but in rural and isolated towns there is not.

Mr FARMER—It sounds to me like there are unique situations for some of the towns. Where there is a big business centre all the schools can work in with one coordinated base, but when you get to the more rural areas it is very specific to the actual schools. I have observed areas throughout New South Wales. It looks like some of the schools—and it all comes down to the principal and the teachers and how much effort they want to put into VET in the schools—are extremely successful because they build up a relationship with business in their area, and others are not so successful. The ones that are not so successful are the ones that would benefit most obviously from this amalgamation. The ones that are self-motivated and that are very much protective of and working hard for their own particular school and students would obviously benefit more from being singly based. Our dilemma is trying to work out what is the best thing for the various areas. It seems that there is not one model for everyone.

Mr Wright—It is very much an urban model. You do not want workplace coordinators competing with each other for employers in the major centres. But it is a purely artificial link between our three towns. There is not that competition—neither because of distance nor because

of any social or economic ties. Junee is basically a satellite of Wagga, and our transport and our work placement is all in that direction. We believe that the work placement ought to be within the school. VET is a mainstream part of the curriculum, and the staffing of it ought to be a mainstream activity. We should have workplace coordinators—

Mr SAWFORD—Is there something happening to that mainstream concept? Let us look at VET up until 1973 in this country. Basically it got big bonuses out of two world wars and three depressions. The only intrinsic goodness that it got was in the seventies. The rest of the time it has really not been treated terribly well. It flat-lined between the Karmel report of 1973 and 1993. Not only in a school like Junee High School but in lighthouse schools right around Australia, often the principal or some key person in the town suddenly grabbed the VET thing and ran with it, often against the wishes of the bureaucrats of the day.

It seems that in the last 10 years VET has not flat-lined. It is actually starting to grow from a very small basis and governments are often using those figures in an exaggerated form. When you think in the terms that 70 per cent of kids ought to have access to accredited VET and in this state it is not even 40 per cent—and that is after 30 years of trying—that is not actually a great record. Other states are worse. Our committee has gotten to a stage where there are a whole lot of holes everywhere when you look at VET. I cannot find a rationale. We asked the bureaucrats, ‘Can you articulate a rationale for VET?’

Mr Norton—Can I—

Mr SAWFORD—Let me finish. I want to go on to a few other things and I want you to respond to this. This afternoon we are going to meet someone who has said exactly the same thing. There is not an articulated rationale. There is no funding equivalent to the HECS scheme. Should there be? The funding that is coming from governments is, in real terms, starting to reduce. There was really nothing in the federal budget for vocational education, and the Labor Party governments in the various states—I am not trying to make a partisan point here—have often gone the other way and have added to the burden. The funding is not right.

There is competition for students at a high level. I regard VET not as a second-rate option but as a different option that is equally first-rate to universities, but it seems that the universities will not cooperate. If you had asked me 10 years ago, as a former school principal, ‘Should we have a degree in TAFE?’ I would have laughed at you. I am not laughing now. I actually think there ought to be a competitive structure. I very much looked forward to coming here and I have welcomed the contributions thus far. I welcome our visit here because in many ways this is technical education as it ought to be, with a benchmark of 70 per cent of students being catered for and given opportunities. I think that ought to be a standard across the board. It ain’t, and I want to know why. It is not necessarily because of the significant difference between rural and urban areas.

I will stop there and go back to rationale, funding and structure. I can assure you that we are also all having difficulty with this—in fact we are going to have to meet in the next couple of weeks to try to find a better direction for this committee in terms of putting forward recommendations. We do not want to put forward recommendations that harm the good work we recognise in places like this. We want to put the bar up. We want to put pressure on both state governments and the federal government to recognise VET for its intrinsic worth not just in

meeting the needs of industry, as it should, but also in meeting the needs of independent learners. It is that dilemma, isn't it? We want both of those things to happen. We want to know the best structure or variety of structures in which they can happen. Give us an articulated rationale, give us some thoughts about big-picture funding and give us some thoughts about structure.

Mr Norton—The rationale for what we are doing is providing appropriate courses for students, recognising that the great majority of students will not go directly to university; it is down to 30 per cent or even less now. We are providing a pathway to a form of further training—a pathway to employment which is appropriate for their needs. I have always believed that the normal HSC curriculum and the normal patterns of study which evolved until the nineties were inappropriate. The whole focus was on driving students through to the university option. We have now seen that that is not appropriate for the great majority of students.

Mr SAWFORD—And never was.

Mr Norton—It never was. This is the response that is needed in schools for curriculum relevance for the great majority of students.

Mr Grant—And at the same time we are enticing kids to move on to further training. Some of the framework courses entice kids to continue with that after school and move on to TAFE and further qualify. They might end up with a certificate I or certificate II. A lot of these kids then move on to TAFE.

Mr Norton—It is about opening up pathways—that is the critical thing. It is about giving kids multiple options so that they can start down a pathway of further education and training that takes them into employment without the university option that is there. I can see students just flocking to it because they can see the relevance; they and their parents can see where it is going.

CHAIR—Have you got any measurements for the last few years of the number of students in the district who have gone on to further study in related areas and employment figures et cetera compared to what they used to be?

Mr Norton—One of the difficulties is how to measure success. We are trying to survey post-school destinations but that always falls over because of classes like Chris's, where 18 kids out of 22 have gone and got employment. We never measure those kids. They have gone off and got employment but we have never measured them. They fall off the bandwagon and we say they are failures because they did not complete the HSC.

Mr Wright—Our ECEF destination surveys tell us where they are in the following year, but they do not tell us where they are in five or ten years.

Mr FARMER—That would be very valuable information, because not only would it show us that they have gone into employment, which is what all governments want, but also, and more importantly than anything, it would show us whether they went into something that has set them up for the rest of their life—a career path that they were truly and genuinely interested in—or whether it was just the only option that was available at that school or TAFE at that particular time. The big picture of the whole situation is that areas like Junee, for instance, might be big in the metalworking industry, but the kids may only take that option because that is all that is they

have in the area. Once they are in the workplace, other opportunities open up for them. They have the money to be able to travel and, later on in life, maybe move into something else that they really have a passion for.

Mr Wright—We believe that the skills are transferable. Our employers believe that. Our annual surveys show that many of the students do go into areas related to the VET subjects that they have studied. Equally, many go into other areas but use the skills that they have acquired.

Mr SAWFORD—I come back to the rationale in terms of the age-old dilemma on which a technical education in this country is based—the dilemma between meeting the needs of industries and meeting the needs of more liberal education in terms of independent learning. Could you comment on a lot of the propaganda which I have read and which has been put to this committee so far. I call it propaganda quite deliberately. It tends to come from people who are defending the status quo of what has been happening in VET. This theme of integration, which goes back to the Karmel report, is that you cannot have differences or diversity and you must have uniformity—the concept of comprehensive high schools et cetera. Can you comment on the dilemma and on this theme of integration that we come across all the time in the writing and even some of the evidence that is put forward, particularly by people who want to defend the status quo?

Mr Wright—Can you explain the dilemma a bit more?

Mr SAWFORD—In 1973, we had separate technical systems, we had champions at a bureaucratic level and we had a director of further education. They had their own budgets. They could have their own initiatives. Until 1973, technical education was doing extremely well. In my home state, technical schools took all the maths, physics and chemistry prizes, much to the consternation of the high schools and the universities, because of competition and because South Australia had a champion at a bureaucrat level who let these people have their heads—and it became a landmark around the nation. All of a sudden, that stopped and we had this comprehensive high school system. You are not a comprehensive high school; you are a technical school. When I read your stuff, I read ‘technical school’.

Mr Wright—We certainly believe that we are a comprehensive high school.

Mr SAWFORD—We will come back to that in a minute. That is integration. The definition of the word integration is: diminishes, is uniform, is conformity. That is what integration means. In my view, the best systems in the world are the diverse systems. You do not get innovation in integrated systems—or you do with great difficulty, but you have them in isolation. That is what I mean by integration. We used to have diversity, and the public are voting with their feet. There is a huge no confidence vote in public education at the secondary level right across this country, including in this state.

Mr Grant—Not in Temora.

Mr SAWFORD—No, but look at the big-picture figures. They are picking up and running. They are running because the system is not delivering what those parents believe ought to be delivered to those kids. They want diversity. But even in the private system they are not getting the diversity that they sometimes want. That is what I mean by integration.

Mr Norton—I think in the Wagga cluster and, as Chris is saying, in Temora, Junee and Cootamundra it is through the diversified curriculum that we can provide in conjunction with TAFE that we have given our government schools a competitive advantage. And students are flocking the other way—I should not use the word ‘flocking’.

Mr Grant—Flocking in Temora!

Mr Norton—If you talk to various schools in Wagga—I will not mention names—there is significant movement towards the government school sector, where you can access a much greater curriculum choice. Admittedly there are other agendas happening, aren’t there, but our brief is to do the best we can with the resources.

Mr SAWFORD—Your brief is diversity; it is not integration.

Mr Norton—It is diversity, and I think we have done a very good job in doing what we can with the resources that we have been given. And that is what we are trying to do—to maximise the options for our students.

Mr Wright—We would see our role as meeting the needs of our community, and clearly a large number of our community want VET skills for their kids. And even for the kids who are pursuing an academic career, the parents and the kids can see a value in work experience and they will take the course in year 11—possibly not in year 12, where they will concentrate on the UAI, but they see the value of those skills. So I do not think we are seen in the community as a technical high school at all.

Mr SAWFORD—I do not say that as a negative; I say that as a plus. My memories of technical education are far superior to those of high schools, so I do not have this sort of inferiority complex about technical education; I have a superiority complex about it.

Mr Wright—Yes, whereas we still have a group of students—we had three in the 90s last year—who are aiming very high academically, and they appreciate having the Thursday structure for study purposes and that sort of thing. So it is meeting their needs as well.

Mr Norton—The philosophical debate about where VET lies—what we have seen here today—is over. We are sure it lies in the school system. We think the parents and students have recognised that, and that is why they are there. That is why they are in those courses. We have not forced them into the courses. They will get that VET prospectus; they will make their subject choices. Quite often there are all sorts of hidden penalties in accessing a VET course, because of the extra demands that those courses place on them, but they are there. The proof of the pudding is in the movement we have had into those courses.

Mr SAWFORD—Can we just quickly move on to the funding?

CHAIR—I was going to ask about the funding. Can you hold on for one second, Mr Farmer, while we just pursue the funding?

Mr FARMER—Yes, that is all right.

CHAIR—What is the key area of need for funding? Is it to have a community based workplace coordinator? Is it for a person within your schools who is individually dedicated to VET? Where is the best area?

Mr Grant—It is pointless in our situation to have an incorporated body across the three schools—it is over 60 kilometres to Temora and 50 kilometres to Junee.

CHAIR—Even though in Junee you have your vocation management committee—

Mr Grant—And we do to.

CHAIR—and some other schools have similar sorts of arrangements, partly funded, is it better to fund an outside person such as that liaison person with industry or better to have an extra school staff member totally dedicated to VET so that you do not have the problems of time pressures and so on?

Mr Mason—There are different issues. The work placement is one issue, but then within schools there is a need for some form of staffing supplementation for the teacher in charge of VET. In Cootamundra's case one of our head teachers, as well as being head teacher HSIE, is teacher in charge of VET, with no extra allocation, no extra funding or time. So he is in charge of the four other teachers.

CHAIR—So that really needs to be a dedicated role?

Mr Mason—Definitely.

CHAIR—Would you all agree with that?

Mr Grant—Yes.

Mr Mason—Yes, I think the teacher in charge of VET should be a dedicated role.

Mr FARMER—It is great to get that consensus across the board. Could I define that a little bit more? Do you think, from your knowledge, that it would be better if the person who was dedicated to the job within the schools came from a TAFE background, came from an industry background or came from amongst the teachers and was educated in that field? Do you know what I mean? The question is whether you should take the teachers already there, select one and teach them specifically for this type of environment or take somebody from the TAFE environment and put them in the school environment.

Mr Norton—My perspective is that work placements should be industry related; they should have come from industry. I do not believe it should be a school based position.

Mr Grant—Are we talking about the head teacher role here?

Mr Norton—No, I am talking about work placement here. I am saying that the work placement organisation should be more closely related to industry than to schools.

CHAIR—So that should be a separate role from that of your school person?

Mr Norton—No, you are talking about funding within a school, which is a different question altogether.

CHAIR—So really what you are saying is that you need two people—a dedicated person within the school and a dedicated workplace coordinator?

Mr Wright—Yes.

Mr FARMER—Maybe I did not make myself very clear. I was saying that when you get a person from industry they, obviously, understand industry and how to sell. Excuse me if I am coming across in the wrong way on this, but they are not someone who has been at school then studied and then gone back to school to teach; they have actually gone out there and worked in the industry, so they understand how that side of things works. They are from that part of the field. All their position in school is to understand VET and make sure VET works for that school, with industry on the outside.

Mr Norton—I agree with that model.

Mr Grant—I certainly do not. Within the school you need an administrator and a person who understands kids as well. For example, you may have a head teacher of creative and performing arts who may know nothing about music but still accepts the head teacher role; they are organisers—and there is so much paperwork in VET. Also, you certainly need a workplace coordinator, and that needs to be flexible. It can be an industry person, but in my community I might not find a suitable industry person—a teacher might be the best person possible for that role.

Mr FARMER—Then the best of both worlds would almost be to hijack a TAFE teacher—who has got the teaching skills, understands the school system, understands they are answerable to the school principal but also understands industry because they have been out there and worked in industry. What I am really trying to define is: is that the sort of person that could do both the roles within each individual school, as opposed to having this body of people outside the schools? I think we have established that in some areas, like this, it is just not going to work to have a whole body of experts—separate to all the schools—that all the schools work through.

Mr Wright—Pat, to give a slightly different perspective, I think the secret of success is skill in communication, a willingness to get out into the community and to understand what industry and retail want and what the requirements are. I probably lean towards having that industry background and understanding what happens there. But the important thing is involvement and willingness to communicate.

Mr Norton—There is a mixture of roles happening here. There is the work placement coordination role—facilitating, organising and liaising with industry.

Mr Wright—I am talking about the workplace coordinator.

Mr Norton—I think there is consensus here that that needs that industry focus. Back in the schools is another issue, which we are talking about, about coordination and management of VET. That is a different issue altogether. That is where you need—as these fellows are saying—a school based person. The difficulty with the current funding model is that there is no money in the school system for a coordinator of VET. He has got 10 VET teachers. There is no head teacher of VET.

Mr Mason—It comes back to a school decision. I have six head teachers at Cootamundra High School. I could make one of those head teacher of VET, but at the same time it would mean that other faculties would lose—because that is all I get. As I said, the teacher in charge of VET is a head teacher, so he has four teachers under him and all the HSIE subjects to coordinate and oversee et cetera, plus he is the teacher in charge of VET. There are 10 teachers from right across the school—all different faculties—who are teaching VET, and he coordinates those as well.

CHAIR—Would it not be better if—instead of having four different teachers who taught some VET, some HSIE, some maths, whatever—you had one or two dedicated VET people, depending on the size of the school, and call him or her the coordinator and they could manage the whole of the VET—

Mr Mason—Yes.

Mr Grant—That would be wonderful, but we do not get funding for that.

CHAIR—There is the first challenge: to convince the state education authorities to do that within the school.

Mr Grant—Good luck.

CHAIR—Do you have a head teacher in VET?

Mr Wright—No.

CHAIR—Would that work well?

Mr Grant—My head teacher of technology and applied studies is head teacher of VET too. But he oversees the retail teacher, the hospitality teacher and the IT teacher as well as his own TAS faculty—similar to Garry's model.

Mr Norton—It goes back to that competition. There are no additional resources put into the school because you are delivering seven VET courses. They are treated just like every other course. There is no additional supplement for the global budget—they are just normal courses.

Mr SAWFORD—The best VET schools in Australia—and there is not a great number of them, by the way—are where the principals went: 'Whacko, we're a VET school. Like it or lump it, that's the way we're going.' That creates waves at a parent level and at a staff level and so on, but they are the people who have actually broken through and have led the VET debate. That is what they have done, and they started in about 1993.

CHAIR—Do you think there would be many principals who would be resistant to having—

Mr Grant—Extra funding? No.

CHAIR—Let me qualify that. They would certainly not be resistant to extra funding, but would they be resistant to dedicated funding that had to go to a VET coordinator?

Mr Grant—I do not think so.

Mr Wright—No.

CHAIR—So there is the issue, and that is a state government issue. From the federal government's point of view—and this is where we can perhaps have a bit more influence—I gather from what you are saying that there is a need for an increase in funding, and security of funding, for some sort of a workplace coordinator role to liaise with industry. Lee, in your school is your vocational management committee partly funded through ECEF?

Mr Wright—No, it is voluntary.

CHAIR—Totally voluntary?

Mr Norton—It was traditionally funded through ECEF. The workplace coordination program was originally funded through ECEF.

Mr Wright—Yes. The workplace coordination program came in under that.

CHAIR—So is there a role in regional communities—and I would say in all communities—for some sort of a government funded position for that person to liaise and coordinate between school and industry, particularly when you have the problem of competition between schools all vying for a growing number of work placements?

Mr Norton—That is why in Wagga all of the work placements go through that federally funded position, which was originally funded by ECEF.

CHAIR—Is that a good model or not?

Mr Norton—It is a very good model for Wagga.

Mr Wright—Within our community it is certainly not. From our point of view, the major requirement of funding is for a workplace coordinator. We firmly believe that, just as the subjects are mainstream curriculum, the staffing of it should be mainstream.

Mr Norton—Can I come to another point in relation to funding? It is a different point and it relates to the comparison of the funding model for TVET and SVET schooling. Is it appropriate to bring that up at this point?

Mr SAWFORD—Go for it.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Norton—In our department when we purchase—which we do—TAFE delivery of VET, we pay for it at a module cost. Each module attracts an actual student contact hour grant, an ASCH grant. The module costs range from \$3 per student per hour up to \$16 per student per hour. If I were to deliver primary industries in a TAFE—in other words, say I said in the Wagga cluster, ‘Why should we deliver this in Wagga Wagga High School? Why don’t we send it out to North Wagga TAFE, which is a logical thing to do because they have a skills centre there’—the average cost would be in the order of \$10 per model per hour per student. So if I put in 15 students at \$150 per hour for 240 hours, you work out the maths—it is over \$10,000 or \$12,000 which TAFE would get to deliver that course. If I put a primary industries course into Wagga Wagga High School—which I have done—they get nothing. They get no additional funding to deliver that course, apart from their normal global budget and their normal staffing allocation. So TAFE see VET as a revenue-raising opportunity. The schools are regarded as the second-best customer of the Riverina Institute of TAFE, underneath both Kapooka Army base and the Air Force base.

CHAIR—Surely there is a need for a whole-of-government coordination approach. Ultimately, the money is coming from the state government, whether it is for schools or for TAFE. Surely they ought to be coordinating that a bit better and have some means of subsidising the course, wherever it is, to an equal value?

Mr Norton—That is what we want: we want transparency and equality in terms of the way VET is funded for a schoolkid. Whether it is in the school system or in the TAFE system, we do not care.

Mr SAWFORD—We have just visited two contradictions in the last five minutes with the last two issues, haven’t we? This seems to be symptomatic of the whole VET system across this country. Is there a person in the bureaucracy in New South Wales who is a champion of VET? That is a really loaded question, isn’t it?

Mr Grant—There is a person, but I do not think he is a champion.

Mr Wright—The proposed restructure will do away with the VET directorate.

Mr Norton—It is being fragmented again, but it will still be there. So within the state system there will be a complete realignment of it. There is an attempt to drive schools and TAFE together.

Mr SAWFORD—That is the integration thing again.

Mr Grant—That is a big move.

CHAIR—I want to return to the issue of overlap. Bruce, do you think that purchasing price problem is, in many instances, causing schools to duplicate what is happening in TAFEs?

Mr Norton—There is another factor that we did not talk about. If I send a student from a school to an external facility, such as TAFE, the school loses staff and global budget. Therefore,

when they transfer their kids out of a school to a TAFE, they lose money. So not only does the TAFE gain money through their funding mechanism but the schools lose it.

Mr SAWFORD—I would like to talk about the disbanding of the VET directorate. What is going to happen?

Mr Norton—That is all part of the restructure happening now.

Mr Wright—We do not know at this stage.

Mr SAWFORD—Who is driving that?

Mr Grant—The government.

Mr Wright—The state government.

Mr Grant—It is doing this in order to honour its election commitments. It is supposed to be cost neutral.

Mr SAWFORD—But that is a rationale that is 30 years old and has been proven in VET to be broken. Yet we are going to go back and refine it even more, are we?

Mr Grant—Apparently.

Mr SAWFORD—That is wise!

Mr Grant—It is hard for us to know. We are just in a consultation period at the moment. We have not been given a lot of detail.

CHAIR—I would like to pursue this a little further. So you are saying that there is a double-whammy there that is discouraging schools from using TAFE courses when they could be using them?

Mr Norton—Yes.

CHAIR—Is that a problem? Is that leading to the duplication of courses too frequently where we could be getting much better value for money in a total sense?

Mr Norton—Yes, absolutely.

Mr Mason—The issue is that we lose staffing levels to TAFE, but those kids are still our kids. Luckily, Cootamundra High School is right next to the TAFE, so our students go across there on Wednesdays. But all the student welfare issues, the board of studies entry requirements and anything else to do with the administration of their Higher School Certificate are still a school responsibility. So we actually lose staffing for them to go to TAFE, but those students are still our responsibility.

Mr Norton—Or to go to another school. We could set up the primary industries at Wagga High School, but the feeder schools would still lose their staff and resources.

CHAIR—So within this district then it is fair to say that, if you did not have these financial disincentives, there are courses that could be done better at TAFE than at schools or courses that the principals would prefer to be taught at TAFE?

Mr Mason—It would depend upon the school. In my case it is far better for our kids to go and do metals and engineering at TAFE, because everything is set up there and we do not have the facilities to run it.

Mr Grant—Why don't you send them to me?

Mr Mason—Are you going to pay for all the transport?

Mr Grant—That is the other issue, and it is an equity issue in terms of accessing TAFE. My TAFE campus only offers business services. There are no non-framework courses. So we do not offer those courses to the kids. If they wanted to pick those, they would have to travel to Wagga to do them—and it would cost in terms of travel.

Mr SAWFORD—How far away is Wagga?

Mr Grant—About 85 kilometres. That is one of our issues as a district: looking at paying students to access, on the basis of equity, courses which are a long way away. We have a number of buses and taxis which are taking kids to courses at TAFE, and we pay for that.

Mr FARMER—It sounds to me like, no matter how much money is poured into a system or who we shift the blame onto, we are never, ever going to be able to cater for every student's whims and desires to do whatever courses are available world wide.

Mr Grant—I agree with you.

Mr FARMER—Hiring taxis and buses to take them out of the district to courses in other areas and these sorts of things gets to a stage where it is completely ridiculous and flawed. Students may spend so much time travelling that they lose their work ethic as far as school and TAFE are concerned.

Mr Grant—That is why we decided we would not be part of that.

Mr FARMER—You do it within the school.

Mr Grant—We do what we can at our school, and that is it.

Mr FARMER—Realistically, there seem to be two models. There is no way in the world you can have the same sort of model across the whole of New South Wales—or even across the whole of Australia, for that matter—because in the rural areas, because of the distance between industry, between the schools and TAFEs and between the schools and the courses being offered, it is just not practical.

Mr Grant—I will finish with two little things. Firstly, you asked whether other principals were agreeing with a model of a VET coordinator in schools. This is the latest annual report from the New South Wales principals' council. I will give you this. It has a VET in Schools report from the committee that does that, and it mentions that one of their possible solutions is to have a funding model from the state government to create a VET coordinator in schools. Secondly, in our school we are finding that the teachers are becoming overloaded with the paperwork. A case in point is that I have an agriculture teacher who is also a primary industries teacher. They are saying to me that they will not teach primary industries, because there is too much paperwork involved, and that they will stick with their agriculture. The same is happening with hospitality and food technology. Teachers are not prepared to put in all that extra paperwork because of this ECEF and RTO compliance and board of studies entries. That is so unwieldy. They are two further issues.

CHAIR—That is a problem we have heard before. Thank you very much. That has been very helpful. We would have liked to have gone longer, but we might continue informally over lunch.

Proceedings suspended from 12.56 p.m. to 2.03 p.m.

KNIGHT, Mrs Marie, Vocational Education Coordinator, Junee High School

BARRETT, Mr Jason, Ex-student, Junee High School

SWEENEY, Mr Mitchell, Ex-student, Junee High School

BALDRY, Carl, Student, Junee High School

CARTER, Amanda, Student, Junee High School

COUCHMAN, Shara, Student, Junee High School

HEINJUS, Amy, Student, Junee High School

LAWSON, Mitchell, Student, Junee High School

McNAMARA, Courtney, Student, Junee High School

SMITH, Thomas, Student, Junee High School

WATTERSON, Melissa, Student, Junee High School

WOODALL, Jenna, Student, Junee High School

CHAIR—Thank you for taking your time to appear before us today at this federal parliamentary inquiry into vocational education in schools. We want to find out how vocational education is working in schools around the country so that we can make recommendations to the government about improving VET in schools. We are visiting a number of schools and talking to different people. We want you to tell us from your point of view how well VET is working and what your experiences have been with VET, careers guidance, your work placements and all of those sorts of things. Thank you for giving up your maths lessons, your English lessons or your work time to come here. I will ask students to tell us what year you are in at school, what VET courses you are doing and where you are doing your work placements. The two ex-students can tell us where you are working and how your preparation at school fitted into that. We will then proceed to questioning.

Carl Baldry—I am doing a VET course at TAFE in accounting and I am working at Hart and Bray in Junee.

Jenna Woodall—I am doing retail, business services and real estate by correspondence and doing a traineeship at Scotties IGA.

Amy Heinjus—I am in year 12 and I am doing business services at this school. I am employed at Moore Ford on a traineeship.

Shara Couchman—I am in year 11 and I am in retail. My work placement is at Junee Newsagency.

Mitchell Lawson—I am in year 11 and I am working down at Moore Ford with voc ed doing mechanics.

Amanda Carter—I am in year 11. I do business services and I am working at Moore Ford on Thursdays for my work placement.

Courtney McNamara—I am in year 11. I am doing retail and working at Deb-on-Hair hairdressing salon on Thursdays.

Melissa Watterson—I am in year 11. I am doing hospitality. I do not have a work placement.

CHAIR—You do not have a work placement?

Melissa Watterson—Not yet.

Thomas Smith—I am in year 11. I am studying hospitality and I do my work placement down at the Commercial Hotel.

Mr J. Barrett—I work at PRDnationwide Realty in Junee. I was one of the students in the first year that TRAC, as it was called in those days, was run back in 1993. I finished school that year and did TRAC as part of year 12.

Mr SAWFORD—And you are still with the same employer?

Mr J. Barrett—No, I did not start there. I have been with PRDnationwide for five years. I got a job in Wagga in real estate when I left school and was there for five years.

Mr M. Sweeney—I am from PRDnationwide as well. I did the voc ed course at nationwide in Junee and got offered a traineeship there when I finished.

CHAIR—So that came out of what you were doing at school?

Mr M. Sweeney—Yes, that is right.

CHAIR—How effective do you think VET in schools is in terms of helping you into the job market? It is a bit hard looking ahead of time, but how effective is it, say, in terms of keeping you at school and getting you focused on where you want to go after school? You two ex-students said it helped you get started in terms of traineeships and so on. Would any of you have left school if it were not for the VET courses that you could do in year 11?

Carl Baldry—I would have. It breaks up the week. I find it helps what I am doing at school; it makes it relevant. Getting offered a job this year just cemented that, I suppose.

CHAIR—Would any of you not be here if it were not for being able to do VET in year 11? No, you would have all stayed on anyway.

Mrs Knight—To help you out a little, Jenna might explain her experience at the beginning of year 11—from where you started and where you are now doing three VET subjects.

Jenna Woodall—I started off really unhappy; I was doing courses that I did not want to do. Then I spoke to Mrs Knight and chose subjects that would suit me better for when I left school. So I knew more what I wanted to do.

CHAIR—Tell us again what your three VET subjects are?

Jenna Woodall—Real estate, retail and business services.

CHAIR—Do you think if you were not doing those courses that after six months or a year you might have dropped out?

Jenna Woodall—Yes, maybe.

Mr SAWFORD—What sort of careers advice did you receive and how did you swap those subjects over? What were you doing before?

Jenna Woodall—Before I was doing courses like ancient history and legal studies that I did not like at all.

Mr SAWFORD—Why were you doing those subjects?

Jenna Woodall—Because there was not really any other subjects I wanted to do.

Mr SAWFORD—So you chose them?

Jenna Woodall—Yes, at the end of year 10. Then last year, when I started year 11, I changed subjects.

Mr SAWFORD—So what sort of process did you go through in realising you were unhappy with those subjects and that you wanted to do something else? What happened and how did that happen?

Jenna Woodall—There was a job offered and a course to do with it in Wagga Wagga. That was business services. So I did the course. After that I changed to retail, because I wanted to do that as well. After doing work experience I started the real estate correspondence course.

Mr SAWFORD—So it was the work placement that actually changed your mind?

Jenna Woodall—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Did that happen to anyone else?

Mrs Knight—In Jenna's case she was placed into a business services work placement at a real estate office. She loved real estate so much that when she came back to school we knew she still was not comfortable at school. So Jenna, her mum, the careers adviser and I sat down and came up with a plan and found a way to do the real estate through OTEN. Jenna has been succeeding in distance education in OTEN. The other thing that has happened in her case is that the business services and retail have complementary competencies within them, but they are all valuable to her and have all meshed together. Jenna will not say it, but she went from being a very unhappy camper in term 1 of year 11 to being much more comfortable with what was happening. Without the work placement she would not have found that direction.

Mr SAWFORD—Or found where she wanted to be.

Mrs Knight—Yes.

Mr FARMER—This is a question for anyone across the board to answer. Do you think that those subjects that are available to you in years 10, 11 and 12 are all relevant—obviously some of them are—to your future life and what you might end up becoming one day? It was interesting to hear from you, Jenna, that you were doing an ancient history course and you decided you did not like it. First of all I would like to know why you picked ancient history. Was it because of the other kids in the class or that you thought it sounded interesting to do? Could you comment on the relevancy of those sorts of courses to your real life.

Jenna Woodall—There was not really much else to choose from on that line of subjects. I just chose ancient history because I thought that would be the one I would like best. I did not really like any of those subjects at all.

Mr FARMER—Were you interested in history?

Jenna Woodall—A bit, but the other subjects worked out better.

Mr FARMER—How many of you knew what you wanted to do before you had the option of VET in schools? Did any of you go through primary school or later years at school and think to yourself, 'I always wanted to be this,' or, 'This is what I want to be?' Did any of you think, 'I always wanted to be in catering,' or something like that before you had the experience of it?

Carl Baldry—In year 10 I did work experience. I wanted to be a vet to start with. For work experience I did veterinary and then a fill-in week at accounting down the street. In the end I did not like veterinary and I loved accounting. So that kind of changed my mind. I was going to do primary industries through TAFE, and it changed my mind into doing accounting. Then work placement fitted in. I was originally going to do a part-time traineeship and that did not work, so I have gone back to vocational education.

Mr FARMER—Do you think it is a bit like going into a shop and the sales assistant comes up to you—and I will just put this in your terms—and says, 'Can I help you?' And you say to him, 'I don't know what I want, but I know what I don't want. I haven't seen what I want yet.' Is it a bit like that?

Carl Baldry—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—What sorts of things convinced you about accounting? Was it people or what they were doing?

Carl Baldry—I do not know.

Mr SAWFORD—You felt comfortable?

Carl Baldry—Yes. I felt more comfortable in that area. And I love maths—I love doing maths. With work down the street, the people there are excellent. I loved it. So that is the reason, I suppose.

Mrs Knight—Mitchell is one student that I would introduce differently from the way he may introduce himself. Mitchell came back to us midway through term 1 before he started year 11. He had some very firm ideas about what he wanted to do. He did not necessarily wish to go through the hoops or the process. Mitchell eventually went through the process of the interview with the employer. Mitchell, you might pick up the story from there. You have taken your focus away from landscaping and into mechanics. Would you like to explain what one of the employers did for you in that interview process—when you finally turned up after the third go? Would you like to, or do you want me to keep going?

Mitchell Lawson—Yes.

Mrs Knight—Mitchell was very hesitant about the process of writing a resume and doing an interview. He went to the interview. His resume was not what we would call very good, but he did turn up for the interview after our third attempt at organising it. The employer gave Mitchell the option of either being told that the resume was not good, having a five-minute interview and being told see you later, or having the employer explain how Mitchell could improve it and what he could do to build on it. Mitchell chose the second option, and the interview lasted an hour. As a consequence of that, Mitchell has gone to a work site and his reports from the work site are astounding. They are not quite the Mitchell we had in week 6 of term 1. They are amazing reports, and that is to Mitchell's credit—having someone point out ways of doing things and he has taken that on board. But he is being very shy today.

Mr FARMER—Mitchell, would you say that, because you can physically see, touch and put into practice the things that you are learning at school, you understand how things work and the relevancy of it all?

Mitchell Lawson—Yes.

Mr FARMER—As opposed to it being out of a textbook or having somebody try to explain it to you?

Mitchell Lawson—Yes.

Mr FARMER—So it is the hands-on experience more than anything.

Mitchell Lawson—Yes.

Mr FARMER—So for those of you who are interested in going into the catering industry—if you feel the same as Mitchell, and tell me if you do not—it is important for you to be in the kitchens because people can tell you how to cook a souffle but, unless you have the apparatus in the school for you to use and see how to put it together, you do not remember it as well. Is that right?

Thomas Smith—Yes, something like that.

Melissa Watterson—Yes, it is.

Mrs Knight—Tom, would you like to explain how you have had two work placements and how different they have been?

Thomas Smith—Yes. The first work placement I went to was at the Loftus, which is a family bar and grill. That was pretty good. Then I went to a pub. They are totally different areas: one is family cooking and a la carte menus and the other is burgers and fries and stuff like that.

Mr FARMER—So you were looking for something in which you could be a bit more creative?

Thomas Smith—Yes.

Mr FARMER—When you were at school, before you went to do that, were you creative with your schoolwork?

Thomas Smith—No.

Mr FARMER—You weren't looking for that extra challenge in your school work?

Thomas Smith—No, I do not think so.

Mr FARMER—It is very interesting for us to know that the workplace provides challenges for you doing something that you like to do.

Thomas Smith—You meet new people doing work placement and you get experience, so it is better.

CHAIR—Do you want to pursue a career in hospitality?

Thomas Smith—Yes, I want to be a chef.

CHAIR—Have you been offered a traineeship?

Thomas Smith—I was given a job at the Loftus, so that was good. I hope to get a traineeship sometime.

CHAIR—So you are working there part time, at weekends?

Thomas Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—And you will continue that after you leave school?

Thomas Smith—Hopefully.

CHAIR—Very good.

Mr SAWFORD—What about some of the things that make it a bit difficult, such as timetabling work placement and schoolwork? Does that cause problems for anybody?

Thomas Smith—Not really.

Shara Couchman—It depends. If you have an exam or something on the Friday and if you have to go to a work placement on a Thursday and you do not get home until five, and then you have to study and come to school the next day, it can get very difficult at times.

Mr SAWFORD—Does anyone else have hassles with timetables?

Amy Heinjus—Yes, I do. I am timetabled to come to classes at school on a Thursday, but I also do my traineeship on a Thursday during school hours, so I have to catch up on those subjects in my free periods throughout the week.

Mr SAWFORD—Can you think of a way of getting around that? Is there a way of organising that differently that would help?

Amy Heinjus—No.

Mrs Knight—It actually has a lot to do with the industry in which Amy has her part-time traineeship, which is business services. Jenna, who is sitting next to Amy, has a part-time traineeship in retail and all her extra hours are able to be done on weekends and later evenings. The business services office closes at 5.30 p.m. on Friday, and there is no Saturday morning or Sunday position. It is peculiar to the business services industry.

CHAIR—Is it hard for you then to catch up on work that you miss out?

Amy Heinjus—Not always, because my sister is in year 12 as well—I have a twin sister—and we do the same subjects that I miss out on, so I can catch up pretty easily.

CHAIR—You organised that well.

Mr SAWFORD—Well, mum and dad did!

Mr FARMER—Amy, do you see that as a good use of your free class anyway?

Amy Heinjus—Yes.

Mr FARMER—Isn't that what free class is for—to catch up?

Amy Heinjus—Yes, it is for homework and to do subjects—that helps too.

Mr FARMER—So are you quite happy to catch up on that type of work as opposed to your schoolwork, and vice versa?

Amy Heinjus—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—What about transport problems in a rural area like this? Are there any problems getting from place to place?

Thomas Smith—Sometimes it gets hard if you are doing a work placement over at Wagga. In hospitality there are split shifts—you do lunch and then dinner—so that is a bit hard. You have to find a place here in Junee.

Mr SAWFORD—So how do you get there?

Thomas Smith—You just do not go over there, I guess; you just do it here.

Mrs Knight—Or what happens is that I give them about a term's warning and in some cases, until the student reaches year 12 and they have their licence, I hold off doing the work placement in Wagga, although we try to broaden the experience as much as possible. So they go for a work placement in Wagga after they have their licence, and that tends to be a way out of it—or a fairly cooperative parent. Sometimes a teacher has brought a student back from a hospitality placement in Wagga because they were coming back. It does expand the experience but, yes, the hospitality one is quite hard. If the rest of them do a placement in Wagga, we have to be aware of not impinging on the placements that are being done by Wagga Wagga Compact—the group that you will meet tomorrow. This is not such a big issue, because at the moment we go a day a week; they work on week blocks. If there is a conflict, I usually speak to the coordinator concerned and check it out with her first. If there is a conflict then I move backwards. In most cases it is very rare that there is a conflict, but that is done in consultation with those people in Wagga.

Mr J. Barrett—Also, Marie, you have to say that the business houses in town do support the program very well and as a result there is not a need for a lot of travel. There is a lot done in the community with the different organisations.

Mrs Knight—The bus company runs school bus routes out. We have a metals engineering work placement at Illabo, which is a small village 25 kilometres in the other direction. The student goes down to the bus depot at 7.30 a.m. and catches the school bus out, then the student is picked up by the school bus—after all the students have been dropped off in the afternoon—and brought back, and the employer meets those working times without it being an issue. So there is flexibility on both sides. But Jason's point is a very valid one. We have work placements where our students in retail—for argument's sake—do everything from the very beginning of retail to the very end, to the end of the day's transactions. We could send them to a shop in Wagga and they would not even get near a cash register because that is not the policy of the firm at the time—they might insist upon a six-week trial first.

Mr SAWFORD—Why do you think the business community in Junee are so cooperative? Why has that happened, from what you have seen and experienced?

Mr J. Barrett—Personally, probably a lot of small town pride—small business owners are happy to be involved with the high school. A lot of them have been to high school here, have grown up in the town, know kids' parents and are happy to help out that way.

Mr SAWFORD—So it is family, basically?

Mr J. Barrett—Yes, almost.

Mrs Knight—The other thing is that a large number of employers are not able to employ students; they do not have that sort of business, but they are able to offer them an opportunity. They will know a friend, a grandparent, an aunt or an uncle—there will be someone there that they have a connection with, and they provide an opportunity. That is probably what it boils down to.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you recognise any people as being the driving forces behind all of this—from a student's point of view or even now, as a young worker?

Mr J. Barrett—No. Marie has always been involved. Marie has been instrumental in holding the whole thing together over the last 10 years that I have seen—as have other staff here at the school. It has always had the support of the chamber of commerce in town and the business houses which are part of that chamber of commerce—or the chamber of commerce and industry, as it is called now. I think the program has been accepted by that group as well.

Mr SAWFORD—When you look back on 1993, the year you did voc ed, what are the things that worked well that come to mind?

Mr J. Barrett—The first question you asked was: what do you get out of it and does it help you find direction as to where you want to end up and help you into a position? I did not find my job in real estate through the voc ed system, but I did get four very good placements. Out of them I got four very good references, people skills and confidence in dealing with people. Later on, these guys will realise that these skills help you get your foot in the door—knowing how to present yourself at interview, being able to talk to people and being able to relate to experiences you have had in the workplace.

Mr SAWFORD—So all the skills were transferable?

Mr J. Barrett—Yes, they are all beneficial in obtaining employment, whatever you choose to do.

CHAIR—Can you think of any ways in which the system could have worked better for you?

Mr J. Barrett—Personally, no. I think it was very good.

CHAIR—What about you, Mr Sweeney?

Mr M. Sweeney—No, I am really happy with the way it worked out. I spoke to Marie about my second placement. She asked me if I had ever thought of real estate. I answered no. I went down there and enjoyed it. I was offered a traineeship, so I could not ask for more.

Mr J. Barrett—And you finished school at year 11.

Mr M. Sweeney—Yes.

Mrs Knight—Mitchell is actually a negative result for the school system because he did not complete year 12, but personally he is not.

Mr M. Sweeney—I could not have asked for more. At that time, I did not know what I wanted to do. Being down there for a few weeks and being offered a traineeship was perfect—I could not ask for more—in my view.

Mr FARMER—Marie, I would like to ask you a question on that last comment you made. You said that you saw a negative result for the school. I found that interesting because it reflects the way that people think about VET in Schools. Do you see it as a negative result if somebody does not finish year 12? Do you see the school's basic priority as creating employment opportunities for the students or encouraging them to go on to further education?

Mrs Knight—As far as I am concerned, school provides opportunities for students. Sometimes those opportunities are for university studies or other further training; sometimes those opportunities are for that person to leave school with a positive result. Both of these ex-students here today have gone on to further training. One of the other students I had planned on having here today has had an astronomical training pathway. She is employed by an accountant, but yesterday was 30 June and today is 1 July so she was unable to come today because of the timing of this hearing. She was our first school based traineeship. She has actually changed the TAFE system in Temora, where she lives, because of something that she did and took further. I see every student that walks out of here with a personal goal, whether it be academic or vocational—in most cases it is a combination of both of those—as a positive result. Each of these students here, in some shape or form, will have brought something back into the classroom purely and simply because they have been at work one day a week.

I feel that a large number of academic students miss out because they do not have that experience. They are the students that turn up to see the careers adviser or me two weeks into the new school year after they have received their HSC results and ask us to help them put their resume together and find some work. So I think there are two results from it. The primary result is the student walking out of here. In most cases, the system is working. We lose a few of the students who are doing the VET courses, but the students doing the VET courses—whether they go on to do the HSC, to study at university or to study at TAFE—have gained something, and a lot of it is the transferable skills that Jason spoke about earlier. Just before we go any further, Thomas Smith has a short speech that he has prepared and I think it is fairly important that he give it.

Thomas Smith—I would like to thank you for this wonderful opportunity to participate in the catering exercise. That was the first time my class has worked together as a team and catered for such a large number of people. I think we did all right.

CHAIR—You did well.

Thomas Smith—Through the hospitality voc ed course I have received a job offer, developed my skills to a great extent and decided to become a chef. Without the course, I would never have known any of this. I would still be wondering what career path to choose. I would have not have received any job offers, and I certainly would not have developed any cooking skills. The voc ed program allows students to go out into the real world and get an idea of what it is like to work in a particular industry. Work placement has given me an insight into what it would be like to work in the hospitality industry. It has helped me choose my career. I have also met new, exciting people and had a good time doing it. Hospitality is the only class I look forward to. We do fun, practical things every day and nothing is ever the same. If it were not for the hospitality class, what would you have eaten today? Maybe something unknown from the school canteen, or I suppose you could have packed your own lunch and brought that with you. We need the voc ed program. It helps kids out and puts them on the right track. Without it they would be lost.

CHAIR—Well said. If you decide not to go into catering or to become a chef you could perhaps become a PR man or advertising consultant.

Mr SAWFORD—'Jamie Oliver, here I come.'

CHAIR—That has been very helpful to us. Thank you for that. Good luck with the rest of your studies and your careers. I am sure you will do well. Thank you again for a great lunch.

Mrs Knight—A number of students have sat down and put some comments on paper, which we have typed up. We will present those to you.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Knight—One of the comments that kept recurring is that it is better than school.

CHAIR—Yet it is school.

Mrs Knight—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you; that is terrific. Jason and Mitchell, thank you for your time too. You probably could have sold a couple of houses in the time you have been in here.

Mr SAWFORD—There is a good message for teachers in there too, isn't there?

Mrs Knight—Yes.

[2.35 p.m.]

KNIGHT, Mrs Marie, Vocational Education Coordinator, Junee High School

SMITH, Dr Erica (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Thank you for your submission, Dr Smith. Would you like to make some introductory comments before we proceed to questions and the discussion?

Dr Smith—I do not think so. I sent that brief submission as I was asked to provide a summary of the findings from the various research projects I have done. I will add one more thing. On the drive up I was reflecting that it is 10 years since my first VET in Schools research, which began here at Junee High School with Marie Knight. Thinking back 10 years and on the distance that VET in Schools has come, VET in Schools has been a very instructive exercise because it has gone from being a very innovative and novel thing to being a real mainstream activity of secondary schools. It is quite instructive to think how far it has come in just those 10 years.

CHAIR—Certainly in schools such as this.

Dr Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—One of the issues that you raised in your submission is the whole question of getting an appropriate supply of well-trained teachers with appropriate industry experience. I would like you to elaborate on that for us if you could. For instance, how do we effectively attract people with industry experience into teaching? Are there ways that we could better do that? Are there barriers there in terms of the training requirements, the practicalities and the drop of income for someone with industry experience undertaking teacher training?

Dr Smith—I think I need to preface my statements by saying that the issue of VET in Schools teachers is not an area in which I have great expertise. My expertise with VET teachers is with VET teachers in the VET sector. Charles Sturt University, where I work, does offer VET in Schools teacher training, but I do not work on that program, although I have colleagues who do. In fact, the colleague who would have been a really good person to speak to—Annette Green—was invited today but is overseas. Having said that, I think many of the problems would be the same as the area in which I do have expertise, which is VET teachers in the VET sector.

CHAIR—When you say ‘in the VET sector’, you mean in TAFE?

Dr Smith—I mean in TAFE and private RTOs. The difficulty in attracting people is, as you say, that almost everybody would have a drop in income when they come from any sort of industry background into teaching, whether it is in schools or in TAFE. However, my experience and I think the experience of my colleagues who work in the VET in Schools teacher training program is that the people who do it do it because they have a passion for teaching and they are very committed and determined to succeed. I do not think I would be wrong in saying that people who enter VET in Schools teaching would be more committed to succeed as teachers in the teacher training program and subsequently in their careers than perhaps young people who

go straight from school into primary or secondary teaching. You probably get a more committed work force. But I know that around the states they are having problems recruiting people. However, I do not know any of the detail of that, I am afraid.

CHAIR—What about in terms of maintaining industry currency for teachers who are in schools?

Dr Smith—Obviously in order to be an effective VET in Schools teacher you need industry currency just as if you are teaching in the TAFE sector. With the Australian Quality Training Framework, that becomes much more of a need to document that, have that recorded and do that in some formal way. I imagine that it is difficult to enforce that in schools, as it certainly is in TAFE, because often—I am speaking now from my experience of the TAFE sector—teachers have a reluctance to go back to industry and expose themselves to perhaps uncomfortable circumstances where they are seen as being learners instead of teachers. Also, the opportunities for doing that would be difficult to arrange, particularly given teachers' award conditions and the fact that you cannot require them to work outside working hours, in the holidays and so on. I imagine that would be a particular problem in the school sector.

CHAIR—Yet without that industry experience and without maintaining it, there is a diminution of industry confidence in the qualifications of the students taught by these people, isn't there?

Dr Smith—Certainly without currency there would be a diminution in the quality of teaching—I know there would be in the student perception of the quality of what is being taught to them and I imagine there would be in the teachers' self-efficacy in what they are teaching. The question you asked was actually getting on to another issue about industry confidence in the qualification. I explained in my submission that I am not sure exactly how well placed that is because I feel there has not been an empirical research base into that. But anecdotally, I know that hospitality courses are being taught by commercial cookery teachers or that sort of thing. So certainly individual anecdotal evidence is that industry thinks it is not so good if they are not current. But I would be hesitant to make a general statement without a broad research base.

CHAIR—Even with the AQTF qualifications, there seems to be varying confidence in that qualification, depending on whether the teacher is in the school system, in the TAFE system or another private provider. Would you agree with that?

Dr Smith—Again, it is the same thing. There is anecdotal evidence that there is not the same confidence but, whether there is documented general confidence, I do not know. I mean, if teachers are delivering VET in schools, the AQTF requires them to have vocational competencies at least to the level of the unit they are delivering. It is problematic to document and prove that even in the TAFE sector and in private RTOs, particularly where there are qualifications in new industry areas. I hope there would not be a VET in Schools teacher who did not have the vocational competencies, but whether they have a statement of attainment showing they have those competencies or whether they are merely proving that they have the equivalent is a different matter. I do not know around the state school systems what sort of compromise departments of education have come to in the requirements they place on their teachers. Does that make sense?

CHAIR—It does. Do you have any suggestions as to how this might be addressed, how we might improve confidence in the system across the board?

Dr Smith—I suppose—and you may be doing this—there would be a real need to examine the rules that state education departments have about the vocational competencies of their teachers to see those documented and perhaps to do spot checks beyond the normal AQTF audit requirements. I guess it would be good for state education systems, if they do not already, to have some sort of rule about updating—like for first aid qualifications, you have to go back and update every so many years. But it may be that these are all in place in different states and territories; I do not know.

CHAIR—It varies a lot. There is a system in Victoria where, in conjunction with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, teachers are released, half funded by the department and half by the chamber, to undertake industry based work experience.

Dr Smith—That sounds great. But I have identified certainly in the VET sector that to go and say to a teacher, ‘You’ve got to go and do work experience in an industry,’ is something that is quite difficult for somebody to do. I imagine that if I were told I had to go and do work experience as a TAFE teacher, that it would be quite an uncomfortable thing to do. So I guess my belief would be that, if there were some sort of educational program that they undertook where they were seen as being in a legitimate position of perhaps doing research or perhaps acquiring specific skills, it might be much more comfortable than just saying, ‘You have got to go and do some work experience.’ It is the same for kids on work experience; it is not an easy and comfortable thing to do.

CHAIR—It might not be comfortable, but isn’t that what industry really requires?

Dr Smith—I suppose it depends on what you think the purpose is. If you think they have to update their skills then you could give them—much like a work placement—specific skills to work on and that would be good. If you want them to find out more about the industry then a research project would be the way to do that. But if you want them to experience being a worker in the industry then the work experience model would be right, just the same as for school children. I am thinking about what might be more attractive to teachers, what might engage them more and what they might be willing to do—unless it were compulsory, in which case they would have to do what they were told.

CHAIR—Thanks.

Mr SAWFORD—Erica, you make mention in your submission of the lack of articulation of a rationale for VET in Schools. That is something we have certainly found. It was fascinating to hear at a previous public hearing that bureaucracies around this country do not seem to be able to do it either. Why is that so?

Dr Smith—Looking back over the 10 years that I have been researching the area, when it started it was to try to reduce youth unemployment. I think that aim has probably disappeared to a large extent because youth unemployment is not so much of a problem as it was 10 years ago. Along the way, people found all sorts of other benefits from programs like the initial TRAC program.

Has Jim Athanasou from UTS appeared in front the inquiry? Jim has called this the ‘beneficial side-effects’ of VET in Schools. All the other things that have happened as a consequence of kids doing these programs have made people realise how valuable they are. Some people have probably been privileged to some beneficial side-effects more than other people, so I think everybody has a different view as to what they are for. It might be that that does not matter, but from time to time it bothers me that people are not really clear what they are trying to achieve because then you do not know how to measure the success.

Mr SAWFORD—It is bit of an educational frailty that, if you do not know where you are going, you will probably end up someplace else.

Dr Smith—Possibly.

Mr SAWFORD—Not possibly, you will. The trouble is you will not even know when you have got there, because you do not know where you are trying for in the first place.

Dr Smith—Yes. The other way you can look at VET in schools is that it is now just another curriculum subject like biology, SOSE, or whatever.

Mr SAWFORD—Is that the way to look at it?

Dr Smith—It is one way of looking at it. I am coming to the view that it might be the most valuable way of looking at it now because it is so mainstream.

Mr SAWFORD—Mainstream?

Dr Smith—Yes. Forty per cent of kids are doing it. That is a lot.

Mr SAWFORD—Universities often have a de facto hold and ownership over secondary schools, particularly the academic secondary schools. Unfortunately, they do not do anything for that; they just control in a covert way. Do you think perhaps TAFE would be better off if it had its own secondary technical schools?

Dr Smith—Do you mean if kids went to TAFE instead of doing VET in schools?

Mr SAWFORD—In other words, basically, the old high school was an academic high school with a bit of vocational add-on—that seems to be fairly easy to do. Why can you not do it around the other way so that you have a VET focus in a secondary school—and also cover the academic—but the relationship is not with a university but with a much more highly regarded TAFE?

Dr Smith—I am not sure what you mean by the relationship.

Mr SAWFORD—Basically, the public perception of TAFE and VET is not terribly high. That is the reality. It has never been high over the last 150 years, except when the wars were going on and you needed the skills or when depressions were occurring. The only intrinsic impetus that TAFE and VET have had in schools, in the whole 150 years, was in the seventies when a whole lot of money came out. But other than that, it is not even on the public agenda. Part of the reason

the minister has given this inquiry a bit of pre-eminence is, in fact, that there is a problem; there is the public perception that TAFE and vocational education have fallen off the agenda. State governments, in the budgets they have recently brought down, have not done very much about increasing funding for VET or TAFE. The federal government has done the same. It is not on the agenda.

Dr Smith—I think there are two issues. There is the status of VET in itself—which is mainly TAFE and other RTOs—and then there is the status of VET in schools. I agree, they are both—

Mr SAWFORD—What I am leading to is this: is there a model or a structure that would benefit VET rather than the current one?

Dr Smith—Only speaking about VET in schools, I know that sometimes kids are sent to TAFE to do some of their classes, but I would not like to see it taken out of schools and put somewhere else because I think it actually does bring much more emphasis on VET into schools. Although there is a perception that is documented in lots of places that the VET teachers in schools are seen as of a lower status than teachers of English or maths or whatever, I am not sure that it isn't changing as more kids do VET. I have children in secondary school and, from the stuff that comes home from school, I do not really see now that VET is regarded as something that stupid kids do; it is regarded as a legitimate choice. I think the very numbers, and the fact that it is in the schools, are increasing the status of VET in Schools and also VET in general. So I think kids, through VET being in schools, are understanding more about the possibilities that VET has for them after they leave school if they want to go on to higher level qualifications in TAFE or at other RTOs.

Interestingly, just as an anecdote, I was looking at my son's social studies textbook yesterday, which is a textbook that was written in 2002. There is a whole chapter on transition to work type issues as part of the academic study of social studies and there is a newspaper article on VET in Schools, which the kids had to comment on, and I thought this is good. Kids are realising that it is a mainstream activity and they are beginning to look at it as an object of inquiry to critically analyse and so on. I thought that was very pleasing, and it must be good for VET teachers in schools to see that in a social studies textbook.

Mr SAWFORD—In education you go through fads. It always seemed to me that the competition between the technical schools system and the academic high schools was actually good, in hindsight; it was not a bad thing at all, particularly when the technical schools system was in fact funded more generously than the high school system, which was part of the problem that Karmel recognised in terms of his watershed 1973 report. Even though the reason for the generic comprehensive high school was supposedly one of egalitarianism, we all know that that was not true. In actual fact, we might have been better off having three sorts of secondary schools and the public may have responded more positively to having technical schools—not in 1973 mode but in 2003 mode—having academic high schools, which are largely quite a deal with the private system, and having comprehensive high schools that do a bit of both. Do you think we would be better off?

It is interesting that in the UK, for example, they are really questioning the value of comprehensive high schools at the moment. Tony Blair just wants to slash them and he does want to create diversity. Personally I think he is right and I think we could learn a lot from that in

this country. I think competition—the hard edge of education—in this country has gone. It was a much harder edge when we had a directorate of TAFE, a directorate of vocational education, a directorate of primary schools and a directorate of secondary. It was a much more rigorous bureaucracy than the one we have now, which is integrated. As part of that, we went through a period as teachers where people would not use the word ‘competition’. They were frightened to use the word and saw competition as an unhealthy thing. Competition is a part of life; it is a real thing—I do not mean competition by pitting someone against someone else who cannot win. Competition is where there is an unpredictable result. But teaching has run away from that, all sectors of it—except that is not life. Do you think we would be better off having a more competitive edge in education and with our personnel in various sectors?

Dr Smith—I have to say that I have only been in Australia 15 years and I know that there were technical high schools in some states, but I really do not have any deep understanding and feeling for that. My experience—I grew up and had my early adulthood in the UK—of the difference between selective high schools and comprehensive high schools was that it was a very bad system. I would never advocate having selective high schools. So you are probably talking to the wrong person. I know that the UK is different from Australia, but I feel that having everybody together and having everybody have the choices of academic subjects or VET subjects is actually the way to go as long as it can be resourced properly, and I am sure that is another issue that you are looking at. When you look at things like school based New Apprenticeships, my research found that kids who are university bound were doing those for their own reasons, and it would be a shame if those kids could not have access to that option. It is the same for kids who really want to get started on an apprenticeship but who also like history or other more academic subjects. I cannot see why you would want to direct kids, except if there were a resource problem.

Mr SAWFORD—Just because you have an academic high school does not mean that you cannot run VET courses properly as well and give kids both options. The reverse must be true as well, mustn't it? You must be able to have a core VET school offering academic alternatives. It seems that, in this country, we believe that option is not desirable. Yet it has worked in the past and it works now in various lighthouse schools around the country.

Dr Smith—I really do not know enough about it. I would imagine that the better teachers would not want to go to those schools—that would be my first reaction—but maybe that is not the case.

Mr SAWFORD—Why wouldn't the better teachers want to go to those schools?

Dr Smith—Because the best teachers often want to work with the brightest kids; that is a simple fact of life.

Mr SAWFORD—Wouldn't the best teachers go to where the best principals are?

Dr Smith—Possibly, I do not know. I am not an expert.

Mr SAWFORD—Or where the department tells them to go.

CHAIR—That is more to the point.

Mr FARMER—Erica, I agree with what you are saying there in relation to students having a choice. One of the good things that has come out about VET so far—even though we have not defined exactly where this inquiry is headed as far as improvements are concerned—is that students at least have a choice now while still at school: they have an opportunity to see whether they are suited to learning academically or whether they learn better through hands-on experience. That is one of the things that has come out loud and clear. I have not come across a student so far who has anything against VET, because it gives them a choice and gives them opportunities that they would not normally have. So it was interesting to hear your comments on that. I was wondering, from an earlier comment you made, if you think that the problems are not so much with students wanting VET or seeing the value of VET but with the teachers? By that I mean: do you think the teachers are ideally situated to learn the VET courses better at TAFE or at university? I would like your opinion on that matter because you spoke about it earlier.

Dr Smith—Are you asking whether the TAFE teachers should learn their content areas or their teaching at university?

Mr FARMER—The point I was trying to make was to do with what you said earlier on which pointed to a lot teachers not feeling comfortable learning about industry. A lot of teachers that have gone through the university system to become teachers do not feel comfortable learning in industry. Can you see any other way that they could learn those industry skills? Do you think that we are better off having people who are TAFE teachers or industry teachers coming back into the schools instead of it being the other way around?

Dr Smith—I think there would be two ways of doing it. Everybody has their own set of skills that they bring, whether it is an industry background, a TAFE qualification or a teaching qualification. They all need the vocational skills and the teaching skills; some of them come with the former and some of them come with the latter—it is a matter of how they get the rest of it.

Mr FARMER—Should we have a separate coordinating body? Should we really have somebody who is a good teacher and who is able to relate to students learning the industry skills or should it be the other way around?

Dr Smith—I do not think you could say who would be the best VET in Schools teacher. The important thing is that the states take responsibility for making sure that the teachers have both the teaching skills and the vocational skills. In different industry areas states would have different answers as to how teachers gain those skills. Some states may require teachers to do a TAFE qualification. As I said, I do not know the details of the different provisions in the different states. I would not say that an industry person was necessarily preferable to a teacher who goes out and improves their industry background; I would see them as both having valuable contributions to make.

Mr FARMER—It does not help, but it is your opinion. That is interesting, though. I suppose what I am looking for is a defined position. We know where the students stand on it all but we need to find out where the teachers stand on it all and which is the best direction to go in, as far as implementing VET in schools is concerned—whether it is done through TAFE or the schools, or whether we take the teachers from an industry base or TAFE situations and bring them into the school environment, or vice versa.

Dr Smith—Yes. With the rapid expansion of VET in schools I imagine that states are looking at all those avenues and probably recruiting people from all of those avenues, just to meet the growth in demand. It is obvious also that career teachers are natural people to do VET in schools where that is possible with their workload. There are usually existing people within schools, as I understand it, who can move over into that role. And then, of course, there are other people that get involved: the work placement coordinators that are often working at a district type level rather than within the schools. Again, those come from different backgrounds—some from industry, some from teaching backgrounds—and I have a lot more knowledge of that area, probably, than the actual teachers. Then there are other bodies that give professional development, like the state ITABs which, as I said in my submission, used to be very active in that area. I am not sure what is going to fill that hole now that the state ITABs are not in existence anymore. That is a bit of a worry, because I know the input that they had, through personal experience.

CHAIR—Erica, I think you said that VET should stay in schools rather than being in TAFE?

Dr Smith—Yes. I have to say I used not to believe that. I used to believe very strongly that if kids wanted to do VET they should go to TAFE, but now I have seen the success that it has had in schools and the self-esteem it is giving those kids who do not achieve academically, so they are able to hold their heads up amongst their peers and so on, I strongly believe that that it is where it ought to be.

CHAIR—Do you think there is a case, though, for greater coordination between schools and TAFEs? Do you think there are cases where there is a duplication of resources, both financially and in terms of equipment and also in terms of teachers? You just mentioned the growing difficulty in getting trained teachers. Do you think there is a case for greater coordination between schools and TAFEs in what they are doing?

Dr Smith—I am sure there is, and I do not know the different arrangements that obtain in different states. Certainly in New South Wales a lot of kids just go to their local TAFE college for their VET. In Wagga they go over the road from the high school to the TAFE college.

CHAIR—Is that a problem? Do you still see that as being part of VET in schools or do you think it is actually defeating some of the benefits that you alluded to earlier?

Dr Smith—I think if it is owned by the school and monitored then it is okay, but I guess there could be cases where the kids come to see their TAFE studies as being divorced from school—but again, I do not have personal experience of enough modes of operating to be able to comment on that really usefully. Where the kids are doing it as one subject out of five or six, I cannot imagine that they would feel really divorced from their school. It would just be a different classroom that they go to, in a sense. Of course, in rural and remote areas, they might be travelling a long way—I do not know.

CHAIR—Anecdotally, from what we are hearing, there seems to be, more frequently than not—from employers at least—a greater confidence in the TAFE based qualification than the school based one. That varies, but we have had a bit of feedback to that effect.

Dr Smith—I am sure you have. It is a view that I have heard put quite vehemently in places and I have to say—

CHAIR—You would disagree with that?

Dr Smith—It is just that I have never seen it supported with evidence.

CHAIR—You make that point in your submission.

Dr Smith—I am sure that people have given you evidence. It is just that sometimes I wonder if they have really looked at the quality of the students, or if it is just something that springs from their belief that schools are not with it or that they are old-fashioned or too academic. I do not know.

CHAIR—On the issue of careers guidance and counselling in schools—and that is another role—do you think, generally, that students are getting an adequate awareness of what career options are there, or do you think we need to be doing more in the way we train our careers guidance people for their role in schools?

Dr Smith—Yes, I do—and again I am not aware of where every state is at in terms of career teacher training.

CHAIR—Let us say in New South Wales, for example.

Dr Smith—Certainly in my own research—which now in New South Wales is three or four years old—the evidence was that kids were not finding careers teachers all that useful. I often felt sorry for the careers teachers because of the negative comments that the kids made, because I understood that the careers teachers were really busy with the two main activities, which I certainly saw as advising kids on university entrance—which is a big job and needs to be done—and arranging work experience. It did not leave much time for careers teachers to upskill themselves about all the new elements of traineeships, apprenticeships and all that sort of thing. The kids were often quite disparaging about their careers teachers, but I could understand the constraints they were working under and the lack of professional development they had had. So I would see a need for the careers function in school to be considerably strengthened, but of course that is a resourcing issue.

CHAIR—And also a training issue.

Dr Smith—Yes, which again is a resourcing issue.

CHAIR—I guess so, yes. How then do we address that training side? Do you think that there ought to be more specialist training for trainee teachers, more specialist training for VET teachers and more specialist training—in terms of careers guidance and understanding of industry skill shortages, career opportunities et cetera—during the university pre-service training for teachers?

Dr Smith—The problem with putting in pre-service training is that it is out of date in two or three years. I think there is a need for constant upskilling, which could be done through—

CHAIR—But the basis still needs to be there, doesn't it?

Dr Smith—It would need to be there, and I am sure it is in university courses for careers teachers.

CHAIR—Are there many?

Dr Smith—I know they exist. I remember that New South Wales put out a tender for a course not long ago so I know that New South Wales was, at that time, looking at it, but I really do not know, I am afraid—it is not my area. But certainly for in-service—

Mrs Knight—I can answer the careers question. Currently New South Wales does not hold a course for careers teachers, unless it is directly through the department. If you wish to upskill into that area you have to go to RMIT in Melbourne or Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. They are the only other two areas and they are both by correspondence, if you do not live there.

Mr SAWFORD—You are chosen by the short-straw method, aren't you, at the beginning of the year? Isn't that how most careers staff—

Mrs Knight—That is not the case here at Junee High School.

Mr SAWFORD—No, I said in most schools in Australia that is how they are selected. Unfortunately, that is where the reputation comes from.

CHAIR—It would seem to me that there is a real area of need here. In many schools—obviously not schools such as Junee—it is a matter of fitting in the other teaching load: who has a few spare periods or who in the school happens to be interested. There does not seem to be enough work done in that pre-service tertiary training, in terms of preparing specialist VET teachers for schools. Given that there is rapidly growing demand for VET in schools, we ought to be having teachers coming into our system who have spent a lot of their university time looking at career options, industry experience and skill shortages, and getting experience themselves—not just in the classroom but in a range of industry settings and workplace settings—so that they are coming into the school with the knowledge, experience and passion to be able to effectively teach, guide, advise and counsel the children. Is that possible, or am I dreaming?

Dr Smith—Yes, it is possible.

CHAIR—Is it necessary?

Dr Smith—Certainly for the VET in schools I am sure that is happening, because that sort of course is offered, as I said, at my own university. But careers is slightly different and I do not know enough about the way the school system is organised to know whether every school would have careers as well as VET staff. It is on the size, presumably.

CHAIR—I think it varies a lot. Sometimes it is the VET teacher, sometimes it is the senior studies coordinator and sometimes it is one of the other teachers who has a few spare periods.

Dr Smith—A problem is that, as well as learning about careers and options and how you get a traineeship and all that, there is also a bit of an identified gap in getting kids ready for work in a more general sense and having them know what to expect when they start work. A lot of my research has been in that area. It seems to me that this problem has been identified again and again by different bodies—like the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, ECEF and so on—and yet it is probably something that could be fairly simply solved by extra resources. It is not brain surgery. To have an extra person in each school who not only did careers but also prepared kids for work in a sort of structured way and talked to kids about their part-time jobs—because nearly every child now is working before they leave school—is not a difficult concept to imagine, but it is obviously difficult to get the resources for.

CHAIR—Do you think we are going too far down the path of specific curriculum framework courses with specific careers in mind and perhaps ignoring the generic employability and workplace skills that make a student much more adaptable to a wider range of options?

Dr Smith—I think you need to do both. I guess within the VET programs you would expect those key competencies to be developed. There needs to be something for kids that are not doing VET programs, I would suggest, to pick up the employability skills. I would not say that we are going too far down that path of specific curriculum frameworks, because I do not think the kids would do it unless they wanted to. The high increase in demand in itself shows that some kids are really fairly clear about their career interests and they want to get started. Certainly my research has shown that kids often say: ‘I know I want to be a hairdresser’—or a carpenter or whatever—‘so I want to get started now. But I don’t want to leave school, because I want to have year 12.’ I am sure you have heard that again and again. I think there will naturally come a point at which no more specialised courses are wanted by the markets, by the kids. I do not think any artificial stop needs to be put on it.

Mr SAWFORD—I want to go back to funding and demand. Demand for VET, as you would expect, is going to expand. We are told by the New South Wales department of education that they expect that at the end of the year, maybe in most areas, up to 40 per cent of kids who go to New South Wales secondary schools will have access to an accredited VET training course—the aim being 70 per cent. With the New South Wales government not adding any money to VET, that is not possible. Something that was brought up this morning—or it might have been over lunch—was the burnout factor. Many capable people in VET in Schools are being tested to the limit and people can see the writing on the wall. As I said before, it is not on the public agenda, unfortunately. It is not on the political agenda, either federally or at a state level, and that is fairly true right around Australia. You have two political parties involved—I am not trying to be partisan here. That is not very helpful to a supposed expansion where 70 per cent of kids ought to have access, theoretically. That is the mathematics. You mentioned resources. There are no additional resources. There is unmet demand, increasing demand, and the funding is the same and it will not buy next year what it buys this year. What is going to happen?

Dr Smith—VET teachers are renowned for doing a lot for very little. I absolutely agree that the enthusiasm of those I regard as the pioneers—the ones who started the programs off—has carried the momentum along. But that cannot continue forever. When I think how hard the VET in Schools teachers and the work placement coordinators I know work, I do not think that can be maintained as a mainstream educational activity. The other issue that bothers me is that ANTA, as I understand it—and I do not think I have got this wrong—have put quite a bit of money into

VET in Schools, but there is an argument about whether the VET system should continue to subsidise the school education system. I do not know what will happen if that is not continued. I forget what year that is going to finish but I do not think it is far away. I do not know. They are not cheap courses to deliver; that is for sure.

Mr SAWFORD—That is the dilemma that faces this committee, not only in terms of the contradictions. Everywhere you look you find a contradiction.

Dr Smith—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—People are promoting the theme of integration. It has been promoted for the last 30 years in VET, yet it seems that the very successful implementers of VET—those who have a long-term record—have done exactly the opposite; they use the theme of diversity to succeed. Even that does not seem to work. No-one seems to be able to spell out the purpose. That has always been a problem—historically, anyway. We understand that. The bureaucracy at a Commonwealth level last week could not tell us. You ask them to articulate, as you would say, right at the beginning, the purpose of VET in Schools and they cannot do it. That gives you a bit of a sense of concern about the direction it is going.

Dr Smith—Except that if you asked somebody else what the purpose of teaching history in schools is they might not be able to answer that either. It has lots of purposes, I guess.

Mr SAWFORD—It would be nice if they were coherent.

Dr Smith—Even a list of them would be good, I agree. Perhaps a range of purposes would be good.

Mr SAWFORD—I am ashamed to say, when I come from Adelaide, that the Adelaide declaration of schooling is one of the most nonsensical statements I have ever had the misfortune to read.

CHAIR—Did you just say that you are ashamed to come from Adelaide?

Mr SAWFORD—No, I said I am ashamed that it is called the Adelaide declaration. I thought people in Adelaide had more brains than that—in fact they do. What do you think of the Adelaide declaration of schooling as it applies to VET?

Dr Smith—I have not actually read it, I am afraid.

CHAIR—In your submission you mentioned the problem of perception about two tiers of schooling: the academic tier and the VET tier. As you said in your comments earlier, we seem to be effectively addressing that—VET is becoming a lot more mainstream than it used to be—and that perception is, I think, effectively being overcome. The adoption of the curriculum framework courses, such as two-unit HSC UAI-accredited courses et cetera, is helping towards that. Do you think there is a problem, though, that in building in that academic rigour to satisfy the universities we are going to make it increasingly hard for the less capable students to do VET in schools or to do those curriculum framework courses anyway? Do you think that, in a sense,

we are defeating the purpose of what we are trying to achieve in terms of retention and opportunities for the less capable students?

Dr Smith—I see what you mean. It is certainly a problem devising a course that meets both AQF qualifications and board of studies type qualifications. I identified that in my submission as being a pedagogical problem for teachers to teach it in these two different ways. Not working in a school, I would not know whether it was putting off kids who are finding the academic components difficult. I understand that they can come out with the AQF qualification even if they do not get the school qualification, but I guess that if they were finding the academic content difficult then it might be a self-efficacy problem for them. I am sure the teachers would be better placed than me to comment on that.

CHAIR—I am not aware of it being a problem.

Dr Smith—It is conceivable.

CHAIR—I am just speculating given the trend of where we seem to be going with the curriculum framework courses at least.

Dr Smith—I have not looked at any of the New South Wales ones, but I did work on one of the South Australian ones—the retail one—and it did not seem to me that the assessment tasks the kids were being asked to do to meet the board of studies type qualification were overly academic or difficult. Of course, it may be different in different states.

Mr FARMER—Do you lecture at university about vocational education in schools?

Dr Smith—No, I teach a program of teacher training for VET teachers in TAFE and other registered training organisations. I do not work on the VET in Schools teacher training program, but we do have such a program.

Mr FARMER—Who do you lecture to?

Dr Smith—In my program, where we teach VET teachers, we have people who are working part time at TAFE, new full-time TAFE teachers, people in industry who want to go into VET teaching, industry trainers, people working in private RTOs and so on. I know that in the VET in Schools program they are working mainly with people from industry who want to become VET in Schools teachers.

Mr FARMER—So they go to university to learn that, to go back to the TAFEs or into schools to teach that?

Dr Smith—Yes. They would typically be, say, somebody from the hospitality industry who wants to become a hospitality teacher in schools. They come to Charles Sturt University. We have an accelerated teacher training program under contract from the New South Wales government. After 18 months they become qualified teachers and go to a school to become a hospitality teacher.

Mr FARMER—So they have the industry skills and you teach them how to be a teacher?

Dr Smith—Yes. They also have to do another curriculum area, because most schools cannot support a pure VET teacher in one area. So they might pick up some subjects in history, English or whatever as well so they can teach two things. I would imagine it is the same in lots of universities.

CHAIR—You mention that anecdotally—and you say that it has not been empirically tested—some employers seem to be reluctant to take on students who have a certificate II, presumably because they want to take them as trainees.

Dr Smith—Yes.

CHAIR—Is that anecdotal evidence widespread, or are there just one or two cases?

Dr Smith—It was certainly commonly believed when I worked in the ITAB system. I managed a WRAPS ITAB, which is wholesale, retail and personal services—and of course most traineeships are in the retail and fast food industries. Certainly, my fellow directors from around the states would often talk about the fact that, if kids did a certificate II in retail at school as a VET in Schools qualification, some employers did not want to know them, because they could not take them on as trainees once they left school. But I have never seen that empirically tested, so I would be reluctant to confirm it. But it was certainly a very commonly held belief. Think of some major retail and fast food companies. They routinely recruit all their workers as trainees, and if somebody already has—

CHAIR—Are they willing to recruit those people into school based traineeships while they are at school? That would overcome the problem.

Dr Smith—That is also very common but, if a young person did it as part of a school subject and not a traineeship, I do not know how they would go leaving school, going to X fast food chain and saying, ‘Give me a job,’ because X fast food chain might well say, ‘You already have a certificate II. We cannot take you as a trainee.’ But I do not know if it has been researched.

CHAIR—Thank you. That has been very helpful, and your submission was very informative.

Proceedings suspended from 3.22 p.m. to 3.53 p.m.

BYRNE, Mr Frederick John, Careers Adviser, Junee High School

COOPER, Mrs Leonie Joy, Ancillary Support, Junee High School

DIETSCH, Mr John, Head Teacher, Junee High School

GENTLE, Mrs Judith Margaret, Hospitality Teacher, Junee High School

HEWSON, Mrs Sharon Dianne, Intern, Junee High School

KNIGHT, Mrs Marie, Vocational Education Coordinator, Junee High School

WOOD, Mr Philip, Deputy Principal, Executive in charge of Vocational Education, Junee High School

WRIGHT, Mr Lee, Principal, Junee High School

CHAIR—I again welcome Lee Wright and other members of the staff. I reiterate our thanks to you for your hospitality, for giving us your time and for a wonderful lunch and afternoon tea. Please pass on our thanks to the students. Mr Wright, you made some introductory comments this morning. Would you like to make some further comments before we begin questions?

Mr Wright—This morning we got to the stage of talking about challenges. I will open there.

Mr SAWFORD—You are welcome to use the word ‘weaknesses’ like everybody else does. We do not have to use the propaganda.

CHAIR—We certainly understand that there are challenges or problems there, and that is obviously one of the reasons for this inquiry. You might like to elaborate on that, then any others who would like to comment on those particular areas may do so.

Mr Wright—Funding has had a major effect on our school. Because we started in 1993 when few schools were involved in voc ed, the funding was very good. In 1997, this school received \$42,000 in funding from ASTF. In 2003, we are trying to run the same program on less than \$9,000. So our main use for that funding is to employ Marie as the workplace coordinator. We have had to cut her back from four days to two and still try to run the same program. We have a problem in that, to qualify for that funding, we had to agree to amalgamate with Cootamundra and Temora, which is a purely artificial grouping. We also had to be incorporated, but we really do not see any value in that.

We have a comment which follows up from this morning, when we were talking about structure. This school has a very definite belief in the work placement taking place each week. I know that our employers have that view: they like to see the kids regularly and develop on their skills over the period of the placement. So we do not favour a block placement. There is considerable pressure, though.

You have come here at a crucial time in our experience with VET, because in the next month we will have to make some decisions and face up to the imminent collapse of what we have built up over the years. As I outlined this morning, where we have had four placements in year 11 and two in year 12—and we really believe in that wide experience—we are now forced by the funding to look at reducing those. If we reduce that back to the minimum—and that is all we are funded on—we cannot justify the kids having a day off a week. So our Thursday that is devoted to work placement would have to go. You then have to create extra periods for that Thursday. Our breadth of curriculum has to go; we have to pull in the curriculum as well. There are some major effects, for the school and for what we believe has been a very successful program, from the reduction in funding. We have to look very carefully at what we can afford and what we can maintain into the future. They are just two of the issues that I wanted to follow up from this morning, and I guess they give us a starting point for this afternoon.

CHAIR—Assuming that more funding, either state or federal, were to be made available, how and where should it be targeted?

Mr Wright—We need the funding to employ a workplace coordinator and, as I think I said this morning, we would like to see that workplace coordinator made part of the staff of the school—to see the staffing done in the mainstream in the same way as it has become a mainstream curriculum subject. So we would certainly like to see the work placement coordinator appointed to the school.

CHAIR—To the school?

Mr Wright—Yes, we would support the proposals that were made this morning in terms of a head teacher in VET to coordinate and take over various aspects of the running of VET, but I do think that we have to consider the support for teachers of VET. We need to consider the fact that there are extra demands upon all VET teachers, particularly in having to supervise work placement. The best example you can give in our area is in primary industries, where the teacher may have to travel 30 or 40 kilometres to supervise a work placement. That can affect us too. We can have work placements in Wagga. Our teachers have to try and get over there during school time—and they have other classes as well. So there are significant problems for VET teachers, and I believe they deserve a lighter load.

We talked about the money that is taken from schools by TAFE when we send kids across there. That is definitely a cause of resentment in schools, because we see that we still have to look after the welfare of the students, the administration of the entries and all that sort of thing. Equally, TAFE are being compensated for having those students; our teachers are not being compensated at all for the extra demands that are being made upon them. VET has enjoyed a remarkable expansion, but it has been very much on the back of goodwill of teachers. Whether that can be maintained—

CHAIR—In terms of extra funding, for a school of this size do you think there is a need for the equivalent of a full-time teacher? You said that in 1997 you had started with \$42,000. In those days that was roughly a full-time teacher's salary. Is that what a school would need: one full-time dedicated workplace—and VET—coordinator?

Mrs Knight—That would be very nice.

CHAIR—So that person would cover careers guidance et cetera.

Mrs Knight—As the person who has been fulfilling the role of coordinator four days a week, three days a week and now two days a week, I can say that, with the two-day-a-week model, there is an awful lot that is slipping through the net and not being supported. Four days a week was probably the best we operated at without burnout on behalf of the coordinator. At the moment, the two-day-a-week model is certainly pushing me to the point where, for the two days that I am here, quite often lunch and recess are not an option. I am also not able to chase the students and support the staff in the same way that I have been able to do in that position. I suppose that is the part that is worrying most of us in some way. We do not want to see the erosion of a fairly quality product, but that is already occurring.

I suppose in lots of ways the goodwill is running out. There is only so far that you can go. If you could go to four days a week, some people would see it as excessive, but the careers adviser, Fred Byrne, and I work very closely together. What we offer here at June High School is fairly unique because the vocational education program literally starts with the year 10 students in their careers classes, supported by the VET coordinator in about term 3, when it comes to subject selection. In that way there has actually been a coordinated approach from day one.

CHAIR—Fred, how many periods a week do you have as an allowance for the careers work?

Mr Byrne—I am a full-time careers adviser. At the moment I am teaching three lessons of careers and one class which is four periods a week. The rest of the time is devoted to careers—helping the students and working in with Marie.

CHAIR—So you really need, for a school such as this, a careers adviser plus a VET coordinator?

Mr Byrne—That is correct.

CHAIR—Lee, what you are suggesting—having this person in the school—works in this sort of community where you have a discrete, separate town. But in an urban area where you have a lot of schools in a fairly close geographical area, I would think a model where the VET coordinator was external to the school, looking after a cluster of schools, would be more effective.

Mr Wright—I think so, and I think you will see that in Wagga tomorrow. I think that does work in an urban setting.

CHAIR—You are arguing ‘horses for courses’, I suppose.

Mr Wright—Yes.

Mrs Knight—The other thing to support that is that each of those schools within that city environment would be very appreciative of having one person in that school environment to coordinate with the person who is doing it externally. At the moment, that is an extra on top of someone’s current job description. What we are arguing for is actually that, universally, across

the board, there should be a supplementation within the staffing structure that allows for a person to be dedicated to the vocational area.

Mr SAWFORD—What does this do to your potential numbers—say for next year? At the moment you have said you have 55 to 65 per cent of senior students choosing to enrol in a VET subject. Are you going to get dragged back to 35 or 40 per cent? Is that the direction you are going?

Mr Wright—We have to make some pretty major decisions. If we went back to just one block—I think it would go further than that—I think VET would come back and I also think we would lose a great number of students because the broad curriculum is going to be restricted.

Mr SAWFORD—Sorry to ask this question, but I cannot find a polite way to do it: in terms of the \$42,000, has the quantum of money that you get from the education department, or from all sources, dramatically changed since 1996 or 1997—whichever year you want to use—compared to now?

Mr Wright—The school has always been a major contributor as well. We are not just looking for external handouts. We contribute about \$40,000 a year of our own funding. That is a major part of our school's budget. That has had to grow to make up what we are losing. The other point I would make is that our ECEF funding was based on the quality of what we did for the application. Now we are finding that it is only based on equity simply per capita, not on the number of work placements that we do at all. So when BVET—the state funding body—came into it, they simply said: 'You get ECEF funding. You do not qualify for any BVET funding.' They brought it up to an equal playing field that way. There is no recognition of the quality of what you offer.

Mr SAWFORD—Or that you were ahead of the pack. Now they are going to bring you back to the pack. It is a bit sad.

Mr Wright—We think so. We want to keep going ahead. We have introduced part-time traineeships—we are looking ahead. The money that we get from the state government is comparatively minor. We will get \$3,000 for VET in Schools in the next month. It has taken until now to find out what funding we will get for this year, and we will get that much. There are 14 different buckets of money for VET and it is terribly difficult to know what is coming from where and what all of the requirements are for spending it. So many of them will not allow you to spend it on workplace coordination, which is our major need. So the money from the state government does not help us a lot.

Mr SAWFORD—I would have thought a single funding of VET would have been much simpler to administrate and be more efficient in terms of taxpayers' money. Would you make a recommendation in that area—what would you do? You said 14 funding sources—that sounds grossly inefficient. What would you recommend?

Mr Wright—I would like to see the whole VET area simplified—

Mr SAWFORD—How would you do that?

Mr Wright—into competencies, organisation and restrictions.

Mr SAWFORD—Just sticking to the funding, how would you simplify that?

Mrs Knight—Personally, I have been employed casually as a coordinator for 11 years. Officially the position still does not exist, so I have done nothing for the last 11 years except be employed as a casual teacher. There is no permanency there. I have, through the generosity of the bosses, been allowed to take sick leave through other mechanisms. But if I was looking for permanent tenure, there is nothing there. Yet I have put 11 years on the ground to make this a position and officially it still does not exist. Next year when they try to make it exist, they wish to turn it into a clerical and brokerage position which will save money by not having someone employed in a teaching role.

CHAIR—When you say ‘they’, that is—

Mrs Knight—The department of education.

Mr Wright—I do not understand why there are 14 buckets of money. I think it is to do with there being so many players in vocational education. As to how you would simplify it, my suggestion is simplistic: put it together, divide it up amongst the schools and provide some sort of access to funding on a merit basis.

Mr SAWFORD—Nothing is new in the world—this happened after the Second World War. The federal minister for reconstruction at the time was a fellow called John Dedman, who invited a bright young fellow along called John Walker to devise technical training in Australia for the fifties and sixties. He became Director-General in South Australia, so he was a pretty bright boy. But where is the champion? I have asked this question before. Where is the champion coming to VET, because I do not see one? At a bureaucratic, director-general, ministerial and state government level, it seems that the history of VET does not change until someone like that comes along or we have a war or depression. That is the only time it has ever happened. It is a bit depressing to think that. We heard about Bob Smith. We have not spoken with him, have we?

Mr Wright—You will notice nobody has come forward with that name. Bob is the head of the VET directorate in New South Wales.

Mr SAWFORD—I asked that question again, because we had a mixed response last time. That settles it.

Mr FARMER—Is the reason that 14 different pools of funding come together for VET that there has not been enough emphasis placed on VET? So they are just trying to get little amounts of money from all sorts of different avenues to prop it up and it is just a prop-up thing all the time instead of it being a major piece of infrastructure in every one of the schools around the country. Is it something, as Rod was saying earlier, that needs significant focus as an important part of employment opportunities for all students as they go on?

Mr Wright—Most definitely.

Mr FARMER—It is just that there has not been a major emphasis placed on VET.

Mr Wood—It would be fair to say that it is not core; it is still, in a sense, at the periphery. I think the Board of Studies in New South Wales still sees it that way.

Mr FARMER—But we are talking 40 per cent.

Mr Wood—I still do not believe that it is perceived as core. It is still something that is on the periphery, that has been attached—and I think with some reluctance, because people have simply been told, ‘That is what you will do. You will add this on to your curriculum choices. You will make this work.’ I sometimes think that that is the position that TAFE are in—that TAFE cooperate because TAFE have simply been instructed to cooperate, not because they are willing to cooperate with the aspects where they have to work with schools. It is the directive coming from on high to say, ‘Work with schools,’ rather than a real desire to work with schools where we need that interaction—because some of our students, of course, do not do their VET with us. We do not deliver all the curriculum; some of the curriculum parts are delivered by TAFE.

Mr FARMER—Let us say that funding was taken away altogether, that it was seen as, ‘Okay, we’re right back to zero again, a total waste of time. VET in schools—the whole thing is just a nonsense.’ Where does that put you? What do you see as the social problems, the ramifications, the setback in the schools—the absolute negative of it all? What is the other end of the spectrum, because at the moment everything is just makeshift, isn’t it?

Mr Wright—I believe that this school is firmly enough committed to VET that we would look to continue. People might not realise that this morning I spoke about the positive benefits of VET in the school. I spoke about what I saw as the positive contributions that VET makes to the community—so I guess it is just the reverse of that. I would see a lot of kids in our school who lack connectivity, who do not see any real association with the school, and ramifications there for the community. I spoke about the positive view of youth that I think people have in this community. They would not see the kids out on work experience. We are possibly facing that next year, where they will only see the kids out in the community for two weeks out of the year. I think that will have a spin-off. They will not see the kids as positively as they do at the moment. We will feel it in the school, where we will have kids who are not being provided for as well, who will lose motivation. It will not be just in the VET classes; it will spin off into others. Our seniors are our role models—that will spin off into the junior school. Our retention rate, certainly, I would not expect to be as high. Without the funding the consequences will be serious.

Mr FARMER—Unfortunately it seems to be that, unless things are taken to a dramatic stage, things are just left to roll along or they are left to their own means. It sounds as if, as far as this school is concerned, it is almost at that dramatic stage as far as funding is concerned. We need to know what the scenario—the absolute worst part of it—is then. I suppose what you are saying is that you do not get the attendance at schools, you do not get the employment. If you do not get that then what are the kids doing in these areas? People are moving away from the areas in droves, and you are left with social problems?

Mr Wright—That is right.

Mr Wood—There is another aspect of that, too. These courses have provided an opportunity for students with disabilities that has been quite significant in that these are career areas where

perhaps there are chances for students with moderate levels of disability to participate. It is one of the newer things that we are doing: to have students studying what are called life skills programs within this school. Part of that has been extensive involvement, for those students, with VET subjects, and extensive work placement for them as well. They need those sorts of skills and training—and that is something else that is potentially at risk.

Mr FARMER—That is interesting. Can you give us an idea of some of the employment opportunities there for them—some of the courses that they have done?

Mr Wood—We provide a generic subject called work studies. It is a non-framework course, so it does not have all the cross-accreditation and matriculation possibilities to it. It simply enables students to become work ready and provides them with further skills. It provides opportunities for work placement—there are regular visits to the workplace—and the development of all the good habits of a useful worker. Also associated with it is structured learning, where students do further work on developing more sophisticated resumes and learning about OH&S. One thing that this school does is to ensure that every student in year 11 completes a full senior first aid certificate, which is a requirement of many workplaces. We also train year 10 students, prior to their entering year 11. We run OH&S courses for students who think they may want to go into various workplaces. Further aspects of that can happen in work studies, for instance. Retail has been very strong in the school. It is an area where people with disabilities are more likely to work, and it is an ideal place. We have excellent support from our employers in town in terms of retail work placement. It is just developing, and we have a fear that it is about to stop.

Mr Wright—You met Melissa in the previous session. Melissa works with Ian down at the co-op. There are opportunities for them, and the training supports them.

Mr Dietsch—One of the things I am concerned about, which Lee has mentioned, is that the school supports them with a substantial amount of money. I am a head teacher of core activities, and that comes away from my money. This means that the core activity has already been reduced to appropriate the aspects for that area.

Mr SAWFORD—What is the relationship between the faculty people and the VET people? It is a good point you raise; in some schools it is not that flash.

Mr Dietsch—We wear the same hat with different colours.

Mr Wright—Obviously that is a fair description. People in this school accept the importance of VET, and they do support it.

CHAIR—Clearly the funding issue is a big one. Just moving on from there, the message about funding is loud and clear. What are the recommendations? What other aspects of how VET works need to be addressed? What recommendations would you make?

Mr Wright—I mentioned the amalgamation. Certainly there have been no positive benefits for us from being amalgamated with Temora and Cootamundra.

Mrs Knight—Could I suggest that perhaps the teachers who actually teach the courses mention some of the added overload just as a result of teaching them?

Mr Wright—I think they will have some suggestions. I think the employers will also have some.

Mrs Gentle—I did my training in 1995. Since then I have had to undergo three updates in my training, which has been a fairly big commitment on my behalf. I think I probably teach the same load as any other teacher in the school. On top of that, I have to travel to Wagga to visit students in the workplace at my expense in my car. I have never been refunded for any of that. On occasions I have even gone to a restaurant and had a meal so the student could come out and serve me, and that has been at my expense. We do not get any benefit as far as that goes except that we are doing it for the kids.

Sharon, I am sure, will say something in relation to that too. There are days where we put on some sort of catering extravaganza. It takes a long time. There was a lead-up to this of a week, plus there is the commitment today. I was here at 7.30 this morning, and Sharon was here at eight. It is a long day, and we have not had lunch or a recess break, but we do that for the kids. It is good experience for them. It is a tough call. I must admit that I am getting to the end of ever wanting to teach hospitality, because of the commitment. I find it is too great at the moment.

Mrs Hewson—I have to agree. The amount of time I spent in preparation for today out of my personal time was enormous. I worked last night till 9.30 p.m. I left late on Friday; I went into town because I had to purchase ingredients we could not purchase locally. I then had to go out again on Saturday to purchase more things that had since been added to the list of things we could not obtain locally. I spent three or four hours trying to find bits and pieces that we needed. All three teachers had to raid their own cupboards to get platters and baskets to serve the food. There is just no money to purchase that kind of thing, which is important for presentation. Students need to learn how to put these things together so that the dishes come across as professional looking.

I think the students did a fantastic job; for students who are only at the beginning of their studies in this subject I think they did exceptionally well. But it does take a tremendous amount of time, even just compiling the recipes. The recipes had to be found and the students had to test them. I had to assess which ones would probably be best and then compile a recipe booklet for each student. That all had to be done in prep time or at home and it took away from the prep time I had for other subjects. It meant that most nights for about a week I worked on this VET day till about 9.30 at night.

Mr SAWFORD—What other subjects do you teach?

Mrs Hewson—I teach textiles, food technology, and design and technology. So I have four subjects that I teach. I was here all evening on Sunday marking because I had been so busy with this that I had not marked work from my other subjects. So it does take a tremendous amount of time and several trips in the car to Wagga. As Judy said, nobody refunds you that money; you pay for everything out of your own pocket and then have to present the receipts. So you have to make sure that you have the money to buy those things. Judy had four trips to and from her car to unload and I had a similar number with mine. It does take an enormous amount of effort to put

these things together, but the students really need these experiences and they cannot get them any other way.

Mr Wood—So this has not been done just for you here today; each year things like this need to happen.

Mrs Gentle—We have done quite a few over the years. We have catered for the Meals on Wheels people when they had a function to say thank you. That was a paid thing that we did here in the kitchen and the textiles room. We have done quite a few things. It is valuable for the kids to get those experiences, but it does take a toll on us because we still have to teach all our other classes.

Mr Wright—In terms of a concrete suggestion, I think you would be looking at in the order of a 0.2 time consideration for teachers who have VET classes—or a day a week.

Mr SAWFORD—Do not look up to the sky; that is a reasonable request. For anyone who does practical subjects, 25 per cent non-contact time—or whatever you want to call it—ought to be a given rather than people feeling apologetic about making that request. It is just common sense.

CHAIR—That is in addition to the coordinators role? You are saying it should apply to each VET teacher?

Mr Wright—Yes, that is just in terms of organising and managing their own classes.

Mr SAWFORD—That also applies to faculty people, surely; they have different demands on their time. People need time to do their own things.

Mrs Gentle—The other problem with the hospitality industry is that there is a lot of shiftwork. That makes it even harder for us to place students. There is a commitment we have to make.

Mr SAWFORD—Are four-day weeks being considered?

Mrs Gentle—It sounds good.

Mr SAWFORD—Some of your colleagues in other places actually do it.

Mr Dietsch—Not under the present circumstances.

Mr SAWFORD—You could not do it?

Mr Dietsch—We certainly could, but you are talking about the present circumstances, not where we would like to go. It is for the kids' benefit, and there is no doubt about it: the kids benefit enormously. From the work that I do with kids in metals and engineering they are going to get quite a lot of skills; some of them in the classroom and quite a lot of them in the workplace. It is that coordination and continual mixing of what they learn in the workplace with what we teach them that gives them what they need most; that is, the ability to get a job. Most of

us suffer during the two years from a loss of students. We do such a good job that they actually get jobs and leave us. Then boss annoys us by saying, 'You haven't got many students now. I cannot give you as much.' That is a difficulty.

There is one difficulty that I would like to show you. I have some folders here that are for an engineering class I have been teaching for less than a semester. These folders contain the supply of stuff that I have gathered just to administer and teach metals and engineering for a two-year course. I could nearly give the same practical skills to the students in metals and engineering in a subject called industrial technology. Industrial technology has a metal stream as one of its options, in which I could basically do the same as in this course—and industrial technology needs two folders of stuff to teach it; metals and engineering needs nine folders of stuff. Every week, the students go out on work placement with a log. It needs to be checked during class time, and it needs to be photocopied and put in a file. I now have to have a register in here for each of the students. It is continual and repetitive. That is where some of my time is certainly going. I have produced these nine folders in six months, and I can do the whole two-year course with these two folders of stuff.

That is basically because industrial technology is a core HSC two-unit subject. This one just happens to be wood, but there is another one that is metal—it is the same sort of stuff. I could give the kids the same skills. What I could not give them is the work placement. The work placement sounds nice when you say, 'They go out for a week here.' But that is not the case. I have five students. One student will not do work placement this year because he has TAFE on the Thursday when they normally do work placement. Some people have done two work placement blocks for a week at a time. Some people are going out one day a week. I have been at this school for three years. I do not have those contacts. If this school did not have Marie and her support person, there is no way that I would do all this and coordinate people who are going on a regular basis, an itinerant basis or a casual basis. That is just going fall on the floor. I could so easily convert and say, 'Come over here guys. We are just going to do industrial technology, metal.' They would be thrilled. They would get the same skills but not the work placement. It is the work placement—that job readiness—that speaks to our employers. I have lost people before the end of year 10. Some have not even got to me. My best students in year 9 and year 10 metalwork already have jobs because of their readiness, as Phil said.

Mr SAWFORD—I do not understand. Why can you not get a work placement for industrial technology?

Mr Dietsch—It does not have a work placement. It is not a VET subject.

Mr SAWFORD—It is not an accredited VET subject.

CHAIR—So the problem is in the accreditation process.

Mr Dietsch—The accreditation, the book work—I have not even started with their work logs.

CHAIR—How do we address that issue without undermining industry confidence in the VET qualifications?

Mr Dietsch—Marie Knight. Marie is the critical thing that allows me to give my time to this, because she says, ‘John, this student is going off to—

CHAIR—So you are not suggesting reducing this.

Mr Dietsch—No.

CHAIR—You are just saying you need time to do this.

Mr Dietsch—This is TAFE quality stuff we are teaching. It is nothing different to what I normally teach; it is just the way they present it.

CHAIR—If it is the case that it is nothing different to what you normally teach, is there not a problem, in that there is too much documentation?

Mr Dietsch—Not in that. That is what I could teach. It is this documentation that makes the difference. They are the records, the program and the registration. That is what makes the difference.

CHAIR—Is there a means of reducing that, or do you think that is necessary?

Mr Dietsch—Not when you have students doing work placement in four or five different ways.

CHAIR—Is there no alternative?

Mr Dietsch—I do not see much of one. We need time. I think the 0.2 allocation of time is a suitable allocation to register to each VET subject that a teacher is running, to be able to allocate time to be able to go to work placement. I have a camp shovel here as an example of the students’ work. They make things like this and they want to do it, so they are enthralled. When they go to TAFE they do not do that. TAFE is very different. Schools have to make it so that the students want to be there. We set a camping theme, and they walked out with this sort of stuff under their arms and big smiles on their faces.

Mr Wood—Anecdotally, I can say that what has happened this year to people that I know in Sydney—and I will not speak for their schools; they could speak for themselves, if they wanted to—is that they have done things like halve the amount of VET. So there are 50 per cent fewer vocational courses happening in the technology faculties this year, because they simply cannot keep this going—workplace coordination and the amount of administration for VET courses. They have backed away substantially from running it. So some of those things are already happening. Lots of schools are thinking about it because there are board alternatives—industrial technology, food technology and others—in the core curriculum Board of Studies subjects. We do not have to walk away from particular areas of knowledge, but it is feasible for a school to step away and say, ‘We can’t fund it. It is too hard,’ and to provide students with the metals, food and retail via business services. There are ways that we can do it. That is not this school’s plan, but people are actually doing it—they are starting to walk away.

CHAIR—Is there any other way this can be addressed without coming back to the key issue of more money? I ask that because the staffing allocations for schools are largely in the hands of state governments, and we are going to be making recommendations to the federal government. There may be some capacity for us to make recommendations regarding workplace coordinators, but the teaching and coordination load of school staff is a state government thing. Is there any other way you can think of that this paper war can be more easily won?

Mrs Knight—I would just ask you to be very loud when you make some recommendations.

Mr SAWFORD—John Dawkins was loud several years ago. He wanted to take TAFE away from the states, because he believed they were doing such a lousy job, and move it to the federal level. What is your view about a national system?

Mr Dietsch—A national system could certainly do something to put people on the ground. We are getting 14 buckets of money; we are being paid. All we need is an injection of two things: firstly, Marie; and, secondly, time for the teachers.

Mr SAWFORD—Without trying to make a partisan point of view, this federal government and every state government in the country are the highest taxing governments in our history, and they come from different political persuasions. But that is the truth and the reality. They are swimming in the stuff. It is a matter of priority.

Mr Dietsch—But we are not—

Mr SAWFORD—At the moment that is true. One of your big pluses is that at least the minister has had the courage to set forward an inquiry. I do not know what the expectations are, but this committee has worked well for 15 years. It has got some things going. It does not mean we will get things going this time. But here is an opportunity, as the chair said, to put forward maybe some quite radical recommendations. It is interesting that, if you feel a bit deflated about what is facing you at the moment, from our point of view sitting on the other end of the table—and we have been doing this for six months—we are finding it difficult, as we may have admitted to a few of you over lunch and afternoon tea, to get a handle on all of this, because we see so many contradictions. The rationale is contradictory. The process is contradictory. The way it is delivered is contradictory. The structures in which it is delivered in this country are contradictory. It should not be like that.

Mr Dietsch—But the one thing that is not contradictory is the successes of the students. When I see our students walk in, flop a leave form down on my desk and say, ‘I have got a job,’ I think, ‘Bugger, I wanted him.’ But that is where I really wanted them to be.

Mr SAWFORD—I was looking forward to coming here, and I am not disappointed that I have. But schools like yours are atypical of what is going on in VET in Schools; it is not typical of what goes on. Philip was a bit more accurate about what actually goes on.

But there are lighthouse schools like yours around this country which have fought against the odds, changed their priorities and taken on the fight. Hopefully this inquiry will give some strength to those schools, including your own. But if you do, either in the next five or 10 minutes or even in the next three or four months before we hand down our recommendations, think of

some coherent ideology that could bring the TAFE and VET sectors together, we would be more than happy to have a look at it. This is a huge problem, in our view, and part of the reason we cannot get a handle on it at the moment. If we cannot get a handle on it then there is a real problem.

Mr Wood—Given that TAFE have a system of work placement that they do not have to worry about—employers employ people and then send their workers to TAFE to get the qualifications that are required—I do not think they have to look at it or worry about it. It must be fairly simple to find an adequate amount, given the amounts of money that float around, to fund professional workplace coordination. By that I mean that you have a trained teacher who can deal with students at a professional level, deal with employers at a professional level and deal with the department of education or whoever they need to deal with at the professionally trained teacher level. Then you are in a position to see VET work in schools. John has said that directly.

The thing that is greasing the wheels at the moment is a professionally trained teacher doing workplace coordination. Let us say that there is a difficult student and a work placement is not working. You cannot send a clerical person to go and deal with that problem. It takes time, perhaps a significant amount of time, from a teacher who has to do many other things or a workplace coordinator who can go and have an hour meeting without having to worry about getting back for the next class, someone who can work with the employer and the student to resolve the difficulty. Part of the successes at this school have revolved around the ability to deal with problems. If I had only 40 minutes to go and solve a problem before the next class, it would not happen whereas problems are solved now because there is a professionally trained teacher who is the workplace coordinator. This has been a lighthouse school. You can see in the ECEF book that there is a place in Queensland, a place in New South Wales and a program in South Australia.

Mr SAWFORD—In Salisbury.

Mr Wood—Yes. And where else is it? Junee High School. I will blow the trumpet loud and clear. Why is that? Because—from wherever the money came from—we got a professionally trained teacher to do workplace coordination. Marie is able to deliver some curriculum as well, and that is plus. This has meant that all those difficult sticky things that can take a lot of time to solve can be dealt with. We need to have enough funding so that professionally trained teachers can be employed as workplace coordinators, even if it is one between two schools or whatever you have to use for particular situations. Whether it is four days a week, three days a week or two days a week, Marie's time has not been wasted at this school. It has been of enormous benefit to the community and to the students. Look at all the employers sitting here ready to give evidence. They are here because it has worked so well. I think that is at the core of it.

That is something you could do: make workplace coordination work by getting the funding to the schools without people doing crazy things. The department of education insures us and we have not had to pay anybody for insurance. ECEF are talking about setting up structures where you have to have indemnity insurance, directors insurance or workers compensation insurance. They are talking about money being spent setting up structures that we see as totally unnecessary and which do not need to happen. Evidently these have not needed to happen for years.

Mr SAWFORD—And they should not happen.

Mr Wood—They should not have to happen. VET money that could be paying for workplace coordination is going to disappear on structures that have not needed to exist for eight or nine years but which we are now told do need to exist.

CHAIR—Does that have to be in schools though? We looked at a model on the Gold Coast in Queensland where the organisation was covering quite a number of schools. It was not run by a teacher in any particular school. That body managed all the work placements. It did a lot of the supervision although not all of it. It looked at all the placement and OH&S issues and it provided support for employees and so on. Particularly in an area where you have several schools in a fairly confined geographic area, can't that work just as well without the person being attached to a particular school?

Mr Wood—I would need to understand the geography—and the social geography—of that group of schools. That is the difficulty in answering that question. I do not want to say, 'That would not work for us,' because I do not understand that.

CHAIR—Yes, you have a different geography here.

Mr Wood—Yes.

CHAIR—But you seem to be arguing that the person really has to be—or that it would be preferable if they were—in the school.

Mr Wood—Yes, if you talk about as many people doing work placement as we do and you want that sort of a standard. You could say, 'Well, it does not need to be quite that good.' You could say that; I am not going to—I do not want it any less good than it is now, but if you wanted less then you could do it that way. But it has taken a lot of work to get that to happen. I do not know where the optimum is for this school. If we said to Marie, 'You do not deliver any curriculum at all; you do not actually train any students at all' then what is the actual quantum that this school needs? It is scraping along with two days for our population and our volume of students.

Mr Wright—What we have done is substitute some clerical support for Marie on the third and fourth day, so it is not just a simple two days.

Mr SAWFORD—One of the problems is that you have actually got to a desired benchmark—or you are getting towards a desired benchmark—of participation for VET, which every public secondary school should be getting to, except that only four have done so: you, Salisbury, NSW, Queensland. An interesting thing for you, Mr Wright, is that all those principals got themselves in a hell of a fix fighting off bureaucracy, but they won. They all won—and one won at huge personal cost to himself and you probably know that from your own gossip. I do not want to go into that. They all took on the system. They all had the support of their local business communities, they all had their parent support, they all had the staff support—and they won. So there is a big challenge for you, young fellow!

Mr Wright—Thanks very much.

Mr Dietsch—It is interesting that we should have a battle for the sake of the good of our children. I do not understand it. I mean, for goodness sake—obviously, we have been a lighthouse school. That is a statement that I wonder about: is it going to be past tense? If this is not supported—if Marie is slipping from four to three to two days—how long before the goodwill and hard work of people wears thin? Lee says to me, ‘John, what are you going to put into the curriculum brochure for year 10s going into year 11? Will it be metals and engineering?’ Well, next year it will be, and the year after it most probably will, but how long before I just look at this little pile of teaching folders and say, ‘The kids get the same stuff.’ What do we need? We need it not to be a battle that he has to win against the bureaucracy.

Mr SAWFORD—But in 1993 this would have been a big challenge too, Mr Dietsch.

Mr Dietsch—Without question.

Mr SAWFORD—Getting anything off the ground takes a sense of urgency, an impetus of ideas and a huge amount of energy.

Mr Wood—We think we are still running at the front. I do not know whether traineeships have been talked about yet.

Mr SAWFORD—Only part-time traineeships.

Mr Wood—Yes, part-time traineeships—take the time to set one of those up: it is not a simple matter at all. And again, we are in front. We are doing this. We started before other people. Yes, we have had our battles—some monumental battles—to get kids’ qualifications and their work recognised. We keep trying to go ahead but again that has relied on Marie’s skills to be able to work through all of that. There is only so much of it that is just clerical; there is a big chunk of it that is professional.

Mr Byrne—There are also a couple of things that I would like to say. I have been here since 1991. When the program started in 1993 with the TRAC program it was hugely successful, but every year we had to reapply for money and the amount of work involved in those applications was considerable—just talk to Marie, Lee and our previous principal who did most of the work. To me, we are probably one of the best schools around at doing our job, and we enjoy doing it, but what I see going on at the moment is that the lowest common denominator effect is coming in. Instead of schools being dragged up to our standard, ours is going to go backwards down to the lowest common denominator. I do not think that is really fair.

Mrs Knight—You might have noticed that we are not going quietly.

Mr SAWFORD—I am glad to hear that. Most good things in education have always happened after a battle. To use a bit of Scottish literature, Robert Burns said that only the brave turn challenges into victory. It is true in education. It is true in everything.

Mr Byrne—We have been doing it for 10 years.

CHAIR—Fred, do you think you were adequately trained for your role as careers adviser before you began teaching? Did you do any training for that advisory role?

Mr Byrne—Yes. I did a training program with the education department 10 years ago. We did a course through Sydney. Most of it was distance education.

CHAIR—Was that professional development once you were already teaching?

Mr Byrne—Yes.

CHAIR—With the increased complexity of the work force and so on, do you think there is an argument for some fairly rigorous preservice training for people who will go into that role, or do you think it can be picked up with a professional development course once you are in school?

Mr Byrne—When I first did the course 10 years ago it was a brand new course. Prior to that, they had an approximately 14-week course in Sydney. The careers advisers were taken to Sydney for 14 weeks and they did the program. I was in the first year of the new program. I think they have modified it since then to take into account the changing nature of the job and those sorts of things.

Mr FARMER—In summary, all of you do your jobs extremely well. That is why it and the students are such a success. The battle that was being talked about earlier is really not your battle. You are doing your job very well. It is our battle. That is what we are here for. We are here to listen to what you have to say about what is and is not working and to make sure that what is working continues to work and what is not working improves. We will leave you with that. We are not here for the sake of wasting your time.

CHAIR—John, you compared that pile of paperwork to this pile of paperwork and said that it would be far easier just to teach. You said that the content in here is basically the same as in there. How different are the outcomes in terms of school retention and the employability of the students that do this versus that, given that you are teaching pretty much the same content?

Mr Dietsch—Being political, I would draw the students to this subject by having them know that in year 12 they will be making a go-cart, which they would like to do. It draws them in. That will then help the retention rate of this subject. That is one of the things with technology. They are going to do something they see as useful—look at today. So we can retain them with that. The kids that we particularly pick up in the VET subject are not the higher academic groups, and I accept that, because they are going to go into metals and engineering. They are going to be fitters, machinists or welders. They are not going to go to university with a UAI of 60 or something. So they are very happy to come here, especially when they see that TAFE modules are being run and they understand that. Sometimes it is just another course. It is like biology, in that there are going to be practical things to do. Then there is the knowledge in the students. Work placement is going to give them work readiness. Better than that, it is going to give them a job—and that is what they are here for. They are only at school until they get a job, whether that is when they are 19 or when they are 23, after having been to university. They are only in education until they get a job. That is what this does, and it only does that because of that person.

CHAIR—Thank you. I would like to reinforce Pat's comments. You are doing some great work here, and obviously the fact that you are a lighthouse school indicates that. As Pat said, it is our job to try and convince governments, even though most of it is in the bailiwick of state governments, to try and come up with recommendations to enable you to continue what you are

doing and to assist you and other schools to do it better. So congratulations. Do not get discouraged.

Mr Dietsch—Should there not be a parliamentary inquiry by the state government then?

CHAIR—Good question.

Mr Byrne—Terrific recommendation.

Mr Dietsch—I would like to make the recommendation that the state government have an inquiry into VET to take its lighthouse schools at their peak performance and use that as a model to engender success in others.

Mr Byrne—Also, for \$45,000, the taxpayers have been getting excellent value for money here—not only directly but also indirectly.

CHAIR—Absolutely.

Mr Byrne—You are crazy not giving it to us.

CHAIR—Have I got a deal for you. Thank you very much. That has been very helpful. Again, thank you for your hospitality today. It has been greatly appreciated.

[4.55 p.m.]

BARRETT, Mr Robert Keith, Inaugural Chairman and Member, Junee High School Vocational Education Committee

BRAY, Mr Norman, Partner, Hart and Bray

BUTT, Mr Anthony John, Managing Director, TLB Industries trading as T-Line Steel

CLINTON, Mr Andrew Peter, Managing Director, Junee Railway Workshop

COOPER, Mr Ian, Secretary/Manager, Junee District Cooperative Society Ltd

DRUCE, Mr Neil, Managing Director, Green Grove Organics

FULLER, Mr Aaron Peter, Community Development Officer, Junee Shire Council

MACAULAY, Mr Colin John, Manager of Engineering Services, Junee Shire Council

MOORE, Mr Roger James, Partner, Moore Ford

CHAIR—I would like to welcome employers and parents. Thank you for joining us today. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear—whether you are parent and/or an employer? If so, which industry are you in?

Mr Bray—I am here as an employer in the financial or accounting field.

Mr R. Barrett—I am here as an employer as well. I am in the real estate industry and I have been involved with the voc ed committee here since its inauguration in 1993. I was the initial chairman and have been involved ever since.

Mr SAWFORD—You are the original chairman?

Mr R. Barrett—I was on the management committee.

CHAIR—Are you still?

Mr R. Barrett—I am not actually the chairman at the moment.

Mr Moore—I am an employer in the motor industry.

Mr Clinton—I am an employer in the railway industry.

Mr Druce—I am a parent, and employer in the licorice and chocolate manufacturing industry.

CHAIR—We are open to bribes!

Mr Fuller—I am a community development officer with Junee Shire Council and also an employer.

Mr Macaulay—I am from the local council. I am an employer and parent, and also a person with a wide range of observations in the community.

Mr Butt—I am a parent and an employer in the metals and engineering industry. I am also chairman of the voc ed situation at the moment.

Mr Cooper—I am an employer in the retail industry and a parent.

CHAIR—Thank you for your time today. Thank you too for the tremendous work you are doing in giving young people in the area opportunities to gain skills and get into the employment market. Most of you were here listening to the previous discussion. I would be interested in your comments regarding the effectiveness of the workplace coordinator. We were having a discussion about whether that role is better filled by a teacher with a contact in the school, or by someone representing industry or employers in the community. Do you have any views on that?

Mr Butt—Personally as an employer in the business community, we really do not have the time to be chasing kids around trying to organise them. We do not know the kids who are coming through the school. To have a school coordinator who knows the kids and can associate with us and do most of our paperwork for us makes it a lot easier to be able to accommodate this sort of work placement.

CHAIR—What if you had someone paid by the government or whatever from an industry background who was not a teacher who did that full-time?

Mr Butt—Would they know the kids?

CHAIR—That is the question, isn't it?

Mr Clinton—That is the point that I think is really important. In this debate, having read some of the submissions, we have come across the issue of who is best placed to deliver this: TAFE or school. I believe the answer is quite obvious; to us, it is quite obvious. It should be the school. The schools see the kids grow up for four years. Only in the final two years of school are they going into the workplace. Our view is that it should be the school that handles it. With regard to which person within the school—teacher or vocational—the answer is simple: a good communicator. In my experience, teachers tend to be taught to communicate better than many other members of society.

Mr Moore—While we are on that point, Marie is also self-employed, so she is a fairly unique individual. She is teacher trained and her husband is self-employed, so I think that adds some qualities that are very important.

CHAIR—And she has built up connections in the town over a long period of time—

Mr Moore—Exactly right.

CHAIR—whereas a new teacher coming into that role might struggle.

Mr Moore—A teacher who has always been a teacher might not have the feel for self-employed people.

CHAIR—Are there any other views on that question?

Mr R. Barrett—It is important to be able to get the kids into the work force. We find that quite often the student might not fully recognise all the benefits of vocational education in the first instance. Quite often, they are led—almost forced, at times—to interview processes and so on and then, a term down the track, they start to realise the benefits for them. As I see it, it is Marie's role at the school: those students need to have constant contact to help them decide, 'Yes, this is what I want to be.' They do not recognise it in the first instance in the short term all that often.

CHAIR—Can I take it from those comments that you have all been very happy with that support role?

Mr R. Barrett—Very much so.

CHAIR—It has worked well. Can I ask one other question before I hand over to Rod and Pat. This question is probably directed at Robert and Tony as coordinator and former coordinator of the management committee. Are there areas of skills shortage in town or in the district where you have employers who would want to take on someone but they cannot get students who are interested in those areas—or is that not a problem in Junee?

Mr Butt—I have never seen it as a problem in Junee. There are students who want to go further afield. I sent my son to Melbourne to do a course down there because I knew the guy down there and could get a work placement for him, and the school was quite happy to let it happen. I cannot see it as any restriction. I cannot see anyone in the community being unwilling to take any student who wants to come out.

CHAIR—What about the reverse, though? Are there employers who want to take someone in a particular industry but cannot get anyone?

Mr R. Barrett—I have not found that situation at this point, from the school point of view.

Mr Butt—Originally, being in metal engineering, we could not do it. It is only in the last four or five years that we have been able to do it. Basically, it was through the issues of WorkCover and the ages at which people are allowed to use the machinery.

CHAIR—So there is enough interest now?

Mr Butt—Yes.

CHAIR—The manufacturing industry was one where, it has been put to us before, it is hard to get enough students interested in following careers.

Mr Butt—I think that, if less academic students go into work placements in that industry and they enjoy it or they say, ‘This is meant for me,’ they usually come back to school and study the subjects that are going to help them get back into that industry. So it gives them some sort of vision as to where they want to go and how they are going to get there, whereas if they do not have a work placement then they are not going to have the background or the knowledge to study what they have to study and so they could waste a lot of time for no purpose.

Mr R. Barrett—I will take it a step further. I am in the real estate industry. It is interesting. One of the first things I say to the kids when they come in is: ‘I do not necessarily want to teach you real estate. What I want to teach you is some life skills that you can use in any work environment from here on.’ It is amazing. There are two employees in my business who have come through the voc ed program and I know of two or three boys who are in real estate in Wagga who have come through my establishment as well. Initially we were not trying to teach them real estate. They developed a liking for real estate because they were in that environment, but what we were trying to teach them was life skills that they could use in any work environment further down the track.

Mr Clinton—The last three apprentices we have appointed at our place have all been ex voc ed students. The ability to have the kid turn up for eight weeks, to make sure he can turn up at 7.30 in the morning, to make sure that he knows to bring his safety boots and to watch him has taken out a lot of the guesswork and the questions you might have about employing a student if you have had them on the ‘try before you buy’ method. It has been very good for us to do it that way.

We have the experience of someone like Ian Cooper, who probably employs the largest number of youths in this town in running the local co-op—I believe the number is 45 times the staff he has working for him. He tells us as a group that the kids who have gone through the program are superior to employ when they finish. The other thing we find as businesspeople is that there are a lot of good social effects from this—for instance, the kids tell other kids, ‘Don’t rip off the supermarket,’ because they work there. People like Colin hear anecdotal stories about kids telling other kids, ‘Don’t vandalise and don’t rip up the pot plants because I have to pot those things myself during my voc ed course.’ The level of community cleanliness and tidiness is significantly improved in this town compared with other places I have seen in New South Wales. I believe firmly that a lot of the success of the kids in this town is a part of the vocational education life experiences that Rob talked about: it is not about teaching the skill; it is about teaching them how to get on with people.

Mr SAWFORD—First of all, congratulations—this school is a real watershed in the sense that there are only four of this type of school in Australia that we know of. There is one in Queensland, one in New South Wales, one in South Australia and this one. You have benchmarks of up to 70 per cent participation in VET programs, and that is to the credit of not only the teaching staff and parents but also this business community, which is obviously very special. You ought to be congratulated on that.

The difficulties that the staff point out to us is a seeming reality that the 55 per cent to 65 per cent that has been achieved looks like being reduced, and that is an invitation to a battle—hopefully, a battle that you people will win. As a committee we have always put out bipartisan reports. Regardless of which party we come from, we have always worked our way through to give out a consensus report. In this inquiry, which has now been going for six months, we are finding difficulty in dealing with the contradictions. Everywhere you look there is a contradiction, even in the sense of what the purpose is, Robert. A number of people today have mentioned the transition to employment, which is a valid purpose. Historically it has been the dilemma between meeting the needs of industry and meeting the needs of individual students, but you have thrown in a third one, which is employment based and symptomatic of the society that we live in.

This committee is having difficulty identifying the purpose of VET in Schools, having coherent programs and having coherent measures of success. To give you some idea of how difficult this has been for us, we had the Commonwealth department representatives appear last week and we said to them, ‘Tell us.’ They could not tell us. So in a sense we are saying to you, ‘All strength to you. Don’t give up on what you have. It is something precious that you need to hold and protect.’ Nevertheless, the arguments still need to be won. We had this transition to comprehensive high schools 30 years ago, and then VET flat lined for 20 years. It is only in the last 10 years—this school started that program in 1993 and it is still going; others started, some have fallen by the wayside, who have got it up to 40 per cent when it needs to be at 70 per cent. You are where other people ought to be. In relation to the rationale put up for the clusters, the committee has not debriefed today but I would have thought that to be a pretty dopey strategy in the sense of the success that has gone on here.

Mr Clinton—Hear, hear.

Mr SAWFORD—But it is also true that the public debate on VET is not there. Maybe that is something the teaching community is very constrained by, and we understand that. But you are not constrained at all, and raising that level of public awareness ought to be very high on your agenda. My first question, although it is a long-winded way to get there, is: what sorts of things do you think you can do in this town to keep Junee High School and its VET in Schools program on target, as you are doing now? Have you thought this through in terms of how you can keep this going?

Mr R. Barrett—I will pick up on a couple of the points you have made. The reason we kicked off vocational education in Junee was simply that the headmaster at that time, back in 1993, recognised that a large percentage of our kids were never going to go to university and an awful lot of our kids were lining up in interview situations trying to get employment against kids from Wagga. We saw our students as very much disadvantaged by the fact that children from Wagga were able to work at Grace Bros, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald’s or whatever and they were able to get general workplace experience, whereas, in Junee it was difficult for young people to get that, apart from at the co-op, which has traditionally employed young people. There was a program running at Tamworth and the headmaster asked one of the teachers and me to go up and assess that program. After talking to the students up there, we realised that this was a really big thing for Junee. It was introduced for the kids so that they would be able to compete at a similar level to those students and children who were having those opportunities in Wagga. That was one of the reasons that it all started.

People like me have come and gone, but the reason it has stayed is that the students are now starting to realise the advantages that are in it for them. They have seen their elder brother or sister or whatever going through and they and their parents are seeing the advantages. It is really nice for us, at a committee level, to be able to look down the track and see kids who are now 26, 27 or 28 years old out in the workplace succeeding and, more importantly, still studying, because they have recognised that need for ongoing and post-school education. I think that, from our point of view, we need to look at why it came in. As for keeping it where it is in Junee, whilst the students are successful in employment situations and we see the change in these students over the 12-month period that we have them in the workplace, it will always remain a strong program in our society, because the gains are there. The smiles on the kids' faces make it all worth while for us.

Mr Clinton—The girl I have left in charge of my business this afternoon turned 20 on Friday. You should have seen her at 17. She turned up having done a diploma II in office administration and she is now going on to do an advanced diploma in accounting. She has the potential to run our multi-million dollar business at the administrative level at the age of 20. She needs a bit more practice and a bit more accounting knowledge, but she really has the ability to manage it well as a direct result of having learnt through this school. Everywhere you look in this town there are examples of kids that have really come along. I suppose that, in this town, we are mindful of the fact that we have 600 guests of Her Majesty—it may be more now; perhaps it is 750—living on the other side of the hill, so we are fully aware of what happens to children when society breaks down. They go down that ugly slippery slope and get a nice chatty breezy letter from Her Majesty asking them to come and visit Junee. We do not want that to happen to our kids. VET is very important and we really do not want to see it destroyed.

Mr Cooper—Our company is a cooperative which is owned by the people of Junee. It has been involved with VET or TRAC or whatever you want to call it since day one. In 1995 or 1996, we gave the TRAC committee \$5,000 to keep it going and to employ the coordinator for another 12 months. The kids that come to us are shy and raw. What we are giving them are the skills and confidence to go out there into the big wide world to get work when they leave school. I was born in Junee and I went to Junee High School. I wish we had TRAC or VET when I went to school. I left school and I did not know what I was going to do. I had never tried anything. I was going to be an accountant, a policeman—you name it, I was going to be it. I ended up as a delivery van driver for the co-op and I have been with them for 30 years.

I end up employing a lot of these kids on a casual or part-time basis. They come to work and we see them grow. They mature when we offer them a job doing the night fill on a Friday night. They think 'great'. They are not out on the streets, breaking windows and doing this and that; they are doing something constructive. It all comes through the school program, through which Marie has brought them into the workplace, and we have placed them in there.

We do have problems. Marie had to sack one for me the other day. That is where the coordinator is important to us as employers. When we have a problem with one of these kids we have to be careful how we deal with them. So we ring up the coordinator and say, 'Look, you'd better come down and talk to us about so and so.' It is up to Marie then to talk to the kids and say: 'These are the problems. What are you going to do? Are you going to change, or are we going to pull you out? If we were chasing a teacher to do it, it could be three or four days before they came and saw us, and the problem is not going to go away; whereas the coordinator can

come in, fix it—wham, bam!—and take the kid out, or the kid comes back and says, ‘I see the error of my ways, and I’m willing to participate.’

Through the system I have seen a lot of kids. As I said, we employ casually after school and on weekends. Then they leave Junee and ring me up and say, ‘I got a job at Coles or Woolworths in Sydney,’ or they might go to uni in Sydney. They walk straight into work, because they have had that grounding, they have had that knowledge. I say to them, ‘This is not a playground; this is a place of business. There are rules, as there are in schools, but there are more consequences if you break the rules here, because there are then issues around insurance,’ or whatever. So I feel that they learn life skills early.

My daughter, for instance, left Junee High a couple of years ago. She is 21 this year. She was going to be an accountant, a lawyer or something. During the VET course she got a HR placement out at the Junee correctional centre. She came home absolutely beaming: ‘I’ve found my vocation.’ And we said: ‘What’s that dear? You’re going to be a lawyer, aren’t you?’ And she said: ‘No. Human resources. It’s the thing.’ It is so happens that today she was asked to go out for an interview and has got a job with them casually, learning all of those skills while she is still going to uni. She was going to go on another path, but through VET kids get to see different areas of life in their work placements.

We own a supermarket and we own a Retravisation store. I can have up to four placements within our business at the one time. Girls think: ‘Checkout operator. That’s easy.’ But it is not. You have got to stand there, you have got to turn, you have got to twist, you have got to talk to people, you have got to smile—customer service. They realise, ‘Maybe checkout operator is not my kettle of fish,’ and, ‘I’m not going to go down that path now. I’ll go somewhere else; I’ll try something different.’ This is what I believe the whole VET program does. But it has to be coordinated properly, for our sakes as well as the children’s.

There is the success of kids going through the VET system and getting employment not only in Junee—because we can employ only so many people—but in Wagga, or who go to uni elsewhere. I have kids that worked for me who go to uni in Bathurst. They walk straight into jobs because they are confident, they have got the skills. It all came from originally doing a bit of retailing one day a week for so many weeks at the Junee co-op.

Mr Druce—Rod asked a question, which was basically: what can we in business do to keep this program up at 70 per cent? That is a fairly difficult question, but what the businesses are doing today to support the program and to morally support people like Marie Knight and the schoolteachers can help—as well as, when the young people come through our businesses, taking that extra bit of time and working on their life skills and workplace skills.

I find it a very difficult question. I love the program but I have the feeling, although I am fairly new to town, that, if Marie Knight gets service burnout—which is possible—or a few teachers move, the whole program could crash, despite what any businessperson would do. I am not saying this in a disparaging way; I just feel that it is almost hanging on a thread. I feel it is the exceptional and extraordinary efforts of teachers and personnel that are holding it together, and maybe the support of the business.

Maybe something else we can do is make a recommendation to the powers that be. I am not sure who they are, but maybe you can convey this to them. As time has gone forward over the last 40 or 50 years and the workplace has become more remote from the home—and you can see it happening—a lot of people do not know what their parents do. A lot of young people, when asked what their father does, say, ‘He watches,’ or ‘He just goes to work.’ They do not really know. As the home becomes more remote from the workplace—and it is just happening—there needs to be a paradigm shift in education. There must be a paradigm shift in the way of thinking. Sure, we can fill young people up with the knowledge, but things must shift to applying that knowledge into whatever work they do. I do not care if they are working as a doctor or a tradesman, there must be a shift to knowing how to fit in. A lot of those skills are workplace relationship skills.

From what I heard before, it sounds like it is not core. It sounds like it is a tack-on to education. A paradigm shift must move over the top of vocational education and make it core. It is no good teaching someone maths and science and all those things if they cannot get into a workplace and apply them well. Those people are no value if you want to employ them. It is a bit like fuelling a car with high octane fuel and a powerful motor and not teaching the driver how to drive the thing. The more powerful the fuel and the motor are, the more dangerous it becomes. Sometimes you see that at work.

There are books about this—and, sure, a lot of them are out of the United States. In *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* and *Rich Dad’s Prophecy*, what does he highlight as one of the problems of education today? It is that they are prepared in knowledge but not prepared to work, not prepared for the workplace. I do not want to upset anyone here, but if you compare the United States with Australia there is a fairly big comparison. In the United States they have a three-month semester break. If we watch TV we may think that they all go on holidays and do things for three months. No, they do not. The parents get sick of their children and get them employed. For three months or 2½ months they are employed. We have a six-week or less break. That employment that they have for 2½ months is a huge education for young Americans. I believe that they have something, almost by accident, that would be great for us. To go back, there are certainly a lot of things that businesspeople can do, but I still feel, with a change in Junee, it could go. I believe that the recommendation to educationalists in New South Wales or Australia should be to make vocational education part of the core.

Mr SAWFORD—I want to ask the third part of the question, because this is really the guts of the thing. I agree with you about the paradigm shift. I agree with you about the VET being core. In what structure will that work best? That is the next part of the trinity.

Mr Clinton—School-delivered courses.

Mr SAWFORD—School-delivered? Do you mean comprehensive high schools, senior secondary schools, colleges?

Mr Clinton—We live in a geographical location where we are the only school, and it is not as if we can have much of a choice of school here in Junee. In a big city you might be able to split it up.

Mr SAWFORD—I am talking about overall, Australia-wide. What is the best structure?

Mr Fuller—It has to be schools. Schools are communities. One of the foundation stones of a community is the school. Marie Knight works in the school. She does not work in Wagga in TAFE. She has connections with the kids every day.

Mr SAWFORD—You know and I know that most schools are not VET core.

Mr Fuller—Of course, but if you are talking about an overall structure—

CHAIR—Schools instead of TAFEs?

Mr Fuller—Too right.

Mr FARMER—There are a couple of points you have brought up which I would like to go over. I think it was brought up by you, Anthony, earlier on that it has to be schools, not TAFE, because people such as Marie know the kids. They know them like a parent knows their kids. That is one thing. The summary you gave us, Neil, on the American ideal is interesting, because there is another side to it. In America, many people enter university as mature age students. That is because they have left school, worked for a while, developed maturity and then gone back to school—university—because they were ready to study and knew what courses they wanted to do.

The emphasis in Australia is that you have to do a university course—you have to apply for a course. We have spoken to a number of students at schools. When we ask the kids what they want to be, they do not have a clue. They go on to university or further education because it gives them more time to think. They end up doing courses that they are not passionate about, because they have a mark—a number—that suits the course. They end up not really applying themselves to that particular job, because it is not what they feel passionate about. So I take on board what a lot of you have said. And one more thing: if you were setting up a school system from scratch, would you say that the VET system would have to be a part of the high school curriculum?

Mr R. Barrett—Yes.

Mr FARMER—That answers a lot of questions for us.

Mr Clinton—To us it is a no-brainer. The answer is obvious to us.

Mr FARMER—That is one thing that has come through loud and clear throughout the questions.

Mr Moore—If I could go back to the careers adviser, Fred Byrne, I stood out in the quadrangle at the end of the HSC and they said, ‘You are about to go out into the big, wide world.’ I believe I was very fortunate that I was brought up in a business and worked there most of my time. My mother said to go and talk to the careers adviser to see what I wanted to do. I looked at being a policeman, accountant and whatever, but it did not mean anything to me. But because I had had my work background during school, I had a feel for the direction I wanted to go in. With due respect to Fred, you should put literature in front of the kids that will show them the real-life experiences they can get through VET—I just cannot put enough emphasis on that. I

would like to reinforce that when they come in and say, 'Will you take somebody?' all they want from us is a 'yes'. They do the rest. That is why VET has to be in schools. The teachers do not have time, and the person in the middle is critical.

Mr FARMER—If it were consolidated and agreed that it absolutely had to be part of the high school curriculum, it would absolutely have to be funded.

Mr Clinton—Correct.

Mr FARMER—That would solve all these problems, these inquiries—the whole bit.

Mr Moore—There is only one other thing you have to do: make education a federal responsibility, get rid of the states and then you will pay for a lot of other things.

Mr SAWFORD—If only we could do that!

Mr FARMER—I hear what you say—there needs to be a national approach.

Mr Bray—I am an employer, chairman of the local high school guild council and deputy mayor. I have some points which I would like to read out to you. What is the aim of going to school? To me, it is to gain an education and to gain employment. That is what it comes down to. With ever changing technologies and workplace reforms, I believe school does not keep in touch with the workplace. Voc ed allows students in years 11 and 12 to do that, so I believe that voc ed is a most important part of the school curriculum.

The other points I have noted down here are: we need—basically, yes—increased funding, which everybody is chasing; we need voc ed as a recognised part of the curriculum; and for it to be fully funded by state and federal governments to ensure that there is a workplace coordinator there who is actually on the ground at school level. Also, as an employer, I also want to bring up one further point about the voc ed—which I do not think we will have time to cover. I employ a year 12 student in the accounting field. From what I have here, ITAB will not recognise accounting as being an eligible course for approving the business services school based part-time traineeship, however TAFE does. I have not thrown that kid out; what I have done is that I actually fully employ him. I cover him for workers compensation, I cover him for superannuation and I also pay him a wage every week that he is down there, because what he is doing down there is not recognised as part of his school curriculum. Now that is totally wrong and actually, when he does finish year 12, I am going to employ him.

Mr SAWFORD—Good.

Mr Clinton—There are a number of issues about interface with TAFE, and perhaps we can take the opportunity to write to you and put them to you.

CHAIR—That would be very helpful, thank you.

Mr Clinton—Perhaps I can finish what I want to say by saying that King Solomon had it easy: he only had to deal with the one baby and the two mothers. We understand that you are parliamentarians and you are elected to make tough decisions. I would like to quote a wonderful

press release I saw, dated 27 June 2003, signed by one Kerry Bartlett, MP, chairman of a certain committee. He said:

We need to identify the strengths and determine what the challenges are in supporting young people in rural areas.

We reply to that by saying we believe this voc ed should be entrenched as a part of the school based curriculum and run by our high school. Secondly, it should be adequately and fully funded as a stand-alone recurrent school project, and not as part of a merged cluster with another two schools. Thirdly, we believe that we should do whatever we can to remove the burden of the administrative rubbish that has been put on us. Could someone please tell someone to give us a plausible and logical reason why we have to incorporate and carry our own public liability insurance? Who is trying to protect themselves from what? As a specific recommendation, please, would someone from the department of education tell the business people of Junee why we have to do this, because we cannot find that answer. Every dollar we waste on insurance—every dollar we waste on incorporation—is just wasted, because we cannot use it for anything else.

The final point I would like to make is that you have heard a lot about the effort of Marie Knight in this school. It is my belief that her work in this school and this community is the sort of thing that medals should be awarded for. I propose to get a nomination form and I hope that we can get support from the committee inquiring into vocational education to endorse it. Thank you.

CHAIR—Very well said: a great summary. That is probably a very good note on which to finish, unless there is any last-minute burning recommendation—very briefly.

Mr Macaulay—I would like to make the point, which probably has not been stressed all that strongly tonight, that there are huge social benefits from this program as well. My responsibility in the town is to care for most of the town's public infrastructure. I talk to my colleagues in other towns—similar towns—all over the state and all over the country, and we are experiencing something different here. There is something different happening in this town than what is happening right across the state or the country. Things like the examples that were being quoted here before—vandalism and things like that—just do not exist in Junee, or only on a very minimal scale. I think the reason for that is the connection between the school and the community—connected as one thing. The kids feel a responsibility towards their community because they work amongst their community. They meet the people that are part of the community—they meet their employers, they meet their co-workers—and there is this real connection built up. It is hard to put a dollar value on it.

I said in a meeting previous to this that in our works depot we cannot even remember when we had to lose the graffiti removal cans. We just do not have any. Take a walk around this school—take a walk around this town if you have time—and you will see that there is no graffiti, there is no vandalism. If little bits do occur and if we catch the culprits, they are usually very young children who have not made the connection or, dare I say it, they are some of the people who have indulged in a bit too much alcohol on a Friday or Saturday night. But, kid-wise and teenager-wise, we really have solved a lot of social problems. The only thing I can put my finger on is this program. This is the difference between this town and our neighbouring towns, which are all of similar size, and towns all over the state; it is this program.

CHAIR—That is a great endorsement.

Mr SAWFORD—I am sure you are right.

CHAIR—Terrific. Thank you very much. That has been very helpful. Keep up the great work. Andrew, you will send us some further information?

Mr Clinton—Yes. I will make sure you get something.

CHAIR—Thank you.

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

That this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 5.36 p.m.