



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Reference: Vocational education in schools**

WEDNESDAY, 2 JULY 2003

WAGGA WAGGA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

**Wednesday, 2 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, 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.

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**Committee met at 9.11 a.m.**

**ATWELL, Michael, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**BURGESS, Hailey, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**EDYVEAN, Nathan, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**GARNSEY, Megan, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**HAZELL, Matthew, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**RICHARDS, Caleb, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**TABER, Sally, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**VIDLER, Mitchell, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**WEST, Nelson, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**WESTBLADE, Kristie, Student, Wagga Wagga High School**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this hearing into vocational education and training in schools. Firstly, I would like to thank Wagga Wagga High School and the Principal, Mr Bill Rogers, for hosting us today. Thank you to the students who have shown us around, and thank you for spending time with us this morning. To fill you in on what we are doing, first of all, and how this works, we are visiting a number of schools around the country and talking to teachers, students and also to employers and bureaucrats. We are trying to get an idea of how well vocational education and training in schools is working. We want to know what the problems are with it, how we can improve it and what sort of recommendations we ought to make to the government about how they should be implementing policies to improve VET in Schools. That is the idea of this.

What you say to us this morning will help us get an understanding of how it works and how it could work better. There is nothing tricky about the questions; we want your honest opinions. If you think there are things that are not working or there are things that should be done better, let us know. It is not much good if you just give us the answers that you think we want to hear. We really need to know what is happening. First of all, can you tell us your names, which VET course you are doing and why you are doing it.

**Nelson West**—I study information technology and electrotechnology. Electrotechnology is done over at TAFE.

**CHAIR**—Why did you choose that course?

**Nelson West**—I chose the electronics course because I like electronics and it is an industry I would like to get into. I also like computing, so I chose information technology. I think they are a good combination for getting a job in the future.

**Matthew Hazell**—I do IT and electrotechnology at TAFE as well. I do electrotech because I want to be an electrician or an electronic technician.

**Nathan Edyvean**—I do primary industries, which is held over at the school farm. I chose it because I come off a farm. Also, I want to develop any skills that I have not already developed. I feel it would be an asset in getting a future job in the primary industry area.

**Michael Atwell**—I do IT, construction, and metal and engineering. I would like to be a builder when I grow up, so those courses will help me in the future.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You are going to be the millionaire!

**Michael Atwell**—Hopefully!

**Mitchell Vidler**—I do IT and primary industries. I do IT because I think it will help me in any career that I want to do. That is the way our future is going. I do primary industries as a break from all the other academic subjects I do.

**Caleb Richards**—I do IT. Like Mitchell, I chose that because it seems that our future is heading in the direction of a lot of technology. I thought that no matter what career I go into it will have a lot of IT involved in it.

**Hailey Burgess**—I do information technology because I like computers. Also, every job you go for has got technology and computers and you have to know how to work them properly.

**Kristie Westblade**—I do business services and retail operations at TAFE and hospitality. Hospitality was just a break from the other business services, because when I leave school I want to do management in retail.

**Megan Garnsey**—I do hospitality operations. I chose this because I enjoy cooking and hopefully I will be able to go into that industry after school.

**Sally Taber**—I do tourism over at the TAFE and I also do IT. I chose to do IT to back up my tourism course, because I would like to get into the tourism industry.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. There is a great cross-section there. In the last few years there has been a rapid rise in the number of students doing VET in Schools courses, largely in order to improve their chances of getting employment in those areas later on. That seems to be the story that we are getting. Are there any of you who would not have come back to school if you had not been able to do a vocational course? Was that the main thing that brought you back to school?

**Nathan Edyvean**—Yes. Basically, I found it helped me stay at school. You can learn things—for example, by doing the chemical user's course. Sure, I could do that at TAFE, but I would not be able to do that with my mates as well. I feel that it has helped me stay at school. You feel a lot more comfortable with your learning, because you know the teachers and students, and you can develop your skills better. You say to yourself, 'Right, I'll stay at school for an extra two years—'

**CHAIR**—So if you could not do that course here at school, you would have left and gone to TAFE to do it there but, because it was offered at school, it was easier to stay on?

**Nathan Edyvean**—Yes. I would have done an agri course at TAFE. But the courses at TAFE are a lot more advanced and, unless you know the basics, it is a bit hard to start out straight on the advanced courses.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Does anyone here have a different opinion? In other words, would you prefer to go out of the school system into either a TAFE or some other structure at year 11 and 12—something in between school and TAFE, like a senior secondary college? Does anyone have an attraction to any of those sorts of structures?

**Mr FARMER**—Or any strong objection to that as well, and why. If you would rather stay at school and do it, could you tell us why?

**Sally Taber**—I like doing tourism at the TAFE as well as going to school, because at school I am studying the basics like English and maths and all the other classes that interest me as well. I am getting a wide variety of topics that I can study, but I am also concentrating on the one that I want to get into. Just in case that falls through and I do not like it for some reason or other, I have got all these other areas behind me.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you need to be more confident to go to the TAFE than you need to be in the school system?

**Sally Taber**—Not really, because they are pretty much similar, although they have different atmospheres and you are meeting new people from different schools. It is also good to discuss what facilities different schools have in the way of other subjects. The teachers are helpful, like the school ones, so it is pretty even.

**CHAIR**—Is the standard pretty similar to what you do here in year 11 and 12?

**Sally Taber**—Yes it is—they have their module to follow. It is good because the teacher at TAFE specialises in that one area and they normally have a career in the tourism industry. That is also really helpful.

**CHAIR**—That is an interesting point. Can you notice the difference in the way they teach if they have come out of that industry compared to your teachers at school, who have perhaps been teachers all their lives?

**Sally Taber**—Yes I can, because they have had the hands-on experience—actually in the travel agency or out at the airport—and are able to answer some of our questions about travelling overseas and the experiences they have had when they travelled. They are really knowledgeable in the area that they specialise in.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone else agree with that? Who else is doing a TAFE course?

**Kristie Westblade**—I am.

**CHAIR**—Do you have a similar sort of comment?

**Kristie Westblade**—Yes. It is more that the TAFE teachers have more hands-on experience. For different modules for retail we have different teachers, and they have more hands-on experience. The teachers at school have experience but not as much.

**CHAIR**—Have any of your school teachers had industry experience as well as teaching experience, or are you not aware of that?

**Matthew Hazell**—A lot of the IT staff were in industry before they came here. They set us up for jobs. My TAFE teacher was an apprentice. He worked as an electrician and then got his Dip Ed so he could teach.

**CHAIR**—So the difference between those teachers who have had experience in industry and those who have not is noticeable?

**Matthew Hazell**—I think so, especially at TAFE. Our TAFE teacher speaks more matter of factly, telling us how it is out there, not how it is in the classroom.

**Sally Taber**—I think that the TAFE teachers also handle senior students more often and they know that they are serious about the subject that they are doing. It also helps that they handle seniors most of the time. They do not handle the younger students, who need a lot of direction. They direct us, but we are pretty much set on what we want to go into. That helps.

**Nathan Edyvean**—Within the primary industries course, Mitchell and I have had both Mr Gillard and Mr McMillan. I know Mr Gillard lives on a farm, whereas Mr McMillan does not. I guess you could say that Mr McMillan is more of a textbook person, whereas Mr Gillard is a lot more—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Practical?

**Nathan Edyvean**—Yes. He has had that experience and knows that you do not have to do it this way and that there are easier ways, while being practical.

**Mr FARMER**—Following on from that, it is obvious that if you are a full-time teacher you do not have the time to get out there and be on the farm or in the industry or whatever. Do you see it as better to learn from somebody in the industry than from somebody who is in the school environment, or do you think that, because the teachers are very used to the way that you behave, the way that they nurture you and can work with you is a better way to introduce you to these new courses?

**Nathan Edyvean**—I am not saying Mr McMillan's ideas are wrong because he learnt the things he knows at uni. He also has very good ideas. He is not a bad teacher, and he knows what he is talking about, but sometimes you need that little bit—he is not disadvantaging us—

**Mr FARMER**—I understand what you are trying to get at. What I am trying to get at is: would you rather know the matter of fact, bits and pieces of what the industry is all about, what



is going on with it and how it really is out there, or would you like to continue with your school learning and be nurtured along and gradually eased into it?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Or do you need both?

**Nathan Edyvean**—I guess sometimes you need both but, personally, I would like someone who has been out there.

**Mr FARMER**—Is it the credibility of it, is it the way that you are taught or is it a bit of both?

**Nathan Edyvean**—Sometimes it is the way that you are taught. I know other stuff, and to me it sometimes feels like they are not teaching it right and there are other things they are not going over. I am not being cocky, but—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Let us move onto your work placement. Maybe we can go right around everybody again. How was the work placement organised, who did it, what sort of area were you working in and what were some of the plusses and minuses about it?

**Nelson West**—The work placement I did was through TAFE and it was at Telephone Techniques. Helen Renshaw in Wagga organises most of the work placements.

**Mr SAWFORD**—She is a work placement coordinator?

**Nelson West**—Yes. I did not choose the place to go to; I was told. It was really good, because you got a lot of hands-on experience. I did not know much about the industry before that. When I came out of the week, I was really pleased with the industry and what you can do in it.

**CHAIR**—Was that organised through the Wagga Wagga Compact?

**Nelson West**—Yes.

**Matthew Hazell**—I did one of my work placements at a television repair place in town. I had always thought that was what I wanted to be—an electronic technician. After doing that for a week, I thought it was boring and did not want to go into it anymore. When I did the placement with the electrical contractor, I had more fun and preferred that, so that helped me choose that as where I want to go. My one criticism is that there is no outline of what we have to learn or do. They just say: ‘The student studies electro-technology at TAFE. Would you take them for a week?’ They say, ‘Yes.’ When I sat down with my employer at the end of the week he asked me what I thought would improve it, because they have to fill out a form that asks that. I suggested there be some guidelines on what we do know and do not know, and on what we should know by that time in the course and the things that the employer could help us learn.

**CHAIR**—Do you think that could be improved if there had been communication between your teacher and that employer before you did your work placement, where the teacher said, ‘This is what he has been learning and these are the things we want you to focus on’?

**Matthew Hazell**—Yes. It is easier at TAFE, because we have modules. If the teacher just gives them the headings of the modules and what has been gone over in those modules, the

employer can put more emphasis on that or show us new things. At TAFE we have just done resistance in a circuit, but I was also shown that in the work placement.

**CHAIR**—Would others agree that your work placements would have been better if they had been more closely related to the modules you are doing, or the particular topics you are doing at school? You might just comment on that as we go around, if you can.

**Mr SAWFORD**—There is one other thing you might want to comment on. I think what Matthew said about going into an area thinking ‘I would not mind doing a bit of this’ and then suddenly finding out ‘This is not my cup of tea at all’ is a good experience, because it tells you what you do not want to do. Has anyone had similar experiences?

**Nathan Edyvean**—I did one of my work placements down at Bulls Run Station, a fairly big station owned by a Sydney chap. With primary industries, because there were not as many people who do IT, there are more options and we had a choice. I thought that was good. I am not sure whether the IT boys would have liked to do that, but they did not have much choice. I was down at the station for the whole week. I know the manager. As I said, I have come off the land and I knew what was going on. I learnt their operations and how they manage the business side of the property, but it has not really affected my thoughts of going into the primary industries area. It did not really have much of an effect on me.

**Mr FARMER**—Do you all think there was enough diversity of courses presented to you when you had the option to take up the VET course, or was there something you really would like to have moved into but which was not covered? Is that the feeling you get from other people in the school or not?

**Nathan Edyvean**—It depends on people’s opinions and thoughts as to what they want to get into. I personally thought there were plenty of selections. You will have to ask the other guys.

**Michael Atwell**—I did a work placement in metal and engineering. I had a fair idea of what it was going to be about before I got there, but when I got there it was totally different.

**CHAIR**—Better or worse?

**Michael Atwell**—I thought it was going to be more organised than it was. But it was not; there was stuff everywhere.

**CHAIR**—Has that turned you off a career path in that area?

**Michael Atwell**—No, not really. I thought it was pretty good.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But you would be a bit more organised if you were running a metal workshop? Is that what you are saying?

**Michael Atwell**—No, I would probably be the same!

**Mr FARMER**—As a group, how many of you are looking at moving into careers that your parents are already in or that your parents are guiding you into? How many of you may be

looking at completely different careers to what your parents have anything to do with? Put your hand up if you are looking at careers that your parents or family are already involved with? Only three hands. So out of this group of 10 people here, only three have had that influence; the others are looking at something completely different. Is that from the experience that the school has provided you with or from the experience that outside knowledge has given you? Where have you got these ideas of what you would like to get into from?

**CHAIR**—When you answer that, keep talking about your work placements; throw that in as well.

**Mitchell Vidler**—As I did two VET courses, I did four work placements. One was at a school for IT. I thought that was pretty ordinary. I thought they would know what a work placement was meant to be like, but they did not really give me any challenges or anything that really helped me at all, so it was a boring week. With primary industries I was at a mate's place, and he and I did the work placement together during the holidays. We put up a fence, built a chook yard and did a fair bit at his place, so that was pretty good. What was your question about families?

**Mr FARMER**—It was along the lines of where you got the ideas from as to where you would like to move on to after your VET course. Was it from outside sources, the school's career management side of things or another source?

**Mitchell Vidler**—I was told by a lot of people that the future for the whole world is going into IT, so that sort of helped me decide to go to IT; primary industries was just something different.

**Mr FARMER**—So it was from just general consensus from what everybody is saying out there on the streets?

**Mitchell Vidler**—Yes, pretty much.

**Mr FARMER**—I would be interested in how the rest of you feel about that.

**Caleb Richards**—I think the influence from school has helped me as well to go into IT, because they do press the idea that the world is heading towards IT. They definitely place a lot of emphasis on that, so that helped me decide. I did my IT work placement at McAlroy House. It was very good; I was really happy with it. It must be kind of annoying to have to take on a student just from nowhere, but they really look after you and give you a lot of great experience—or with me they did. They really looked after me. It was a great experience for me.

**Hailey Burgess**—I did work placement at school for my first time. That was not too bad, but I was given boring stuff to do that I had already done before. I did not really get much that I had not done before. There was a bit of stuff but it was not as much as I would have liked. My second work placement was at Bush and Campbell Accountants. I was with the IT manager there. That was better because I was tagging along, seeing what she was doing every day and the stuff that they do in a business. I also had to give them a sheet saying what I had done and what I had not done, and she would give me activities of stuff that I had not done so that I would get experience with that, which was pretty good. So now I have more skills than I had before I went there.

**Kristie Westblade**—I have just come back from two weeks of work placement run by Riverina Compact. My first week was for hospitality at the Sunflowers Sandwich Bar. I thought, ‘Oh great, hospitality—cleaning, doing dishes, mopping the floor,’ but it was really hands-on, making sandwiches all the time, using cash registers and providing customer service. The second week I was at Grace Bros for retail. We were not allowed to use the cash registers. It was really slow. There were sales on upstairs in the toy department, so we wrapped lay-bys, filled out documents and wrote reports on stolen items, which was really interesting. There was a lady who stole over \$800 worth of items. So that was fun—apart from the stolen goods. Both work placements offered me a job, which was really interesting. It was really good. I just do not know what I am going to do. Grace Bros want me to work there full time, but I want to stay at school and finish what I am doing.

**Megan Garnsey**—I did two weeks of work placements: one at the RSL club in Wagga and one at the Pavillion in Wagga. I got a good idea of two quite different places as one was a club and the other was a restaurant business. They taught me new skills. I did a lot of cleaning but that did not bother me at all, because that is just part of the work that people in that industry have to do.

With respect to the skills that we learn at school, the teacher was telling us the right thing. The people at the club thought that I was really good, because I knew how to chop things properly. My teacher came down to both placements to see how I was going and talked about the different things we did with the employer, so it was really good.

**Sally Taber**—I did two work placements, including a tourism one. First of all we were told to write down our three preferences for work placements, and they tried to put us in the work placements of our choice. My first choice was a travel agency, because I wanted to see whether I wanted to get into that branch of tourism. Unfortunately I did not get it and I was upset, but there are only a certain number of agencies that offer work placements to students so that was probably a bit of a downside. I was placed at Wagga Wagga Visitors Information Centre, which is similar to a travel agency. I found it to be great. I had a really good week. I was a bit upset when I went in, because I did not get what I wanted, but I came out really happy that I went there. I learnt more about Wagga—not necessarily world travel—so I gained a lot of local knowledge, which was really good. Also, learning about customer service and meeting people in the industry who are pretty high up in our town was really useful.

**Mr FARMER**—We have listened to a number of students during this committee’s inquiry who have said, ‘I am in year 11. I got an apprenticeship, so I am going to get out of school and this is what I’m going to do.’ They see that they need to go to school to get a job, but because they got a job, they do not need to go to school any longer. If that job incorporated a lot more study, whether it be university, TAFE or in retail and you had to do a business management course, because the company wanted you to, do you see that as a problem? Do you see that as just being an extension of your learning? As far as government authorities are concerned, a lot of people think that maybe you are losing out on education if you take up that option. Do you see it that way or as a way of extending your education in a different field?

**Sally Taber**—I am pretty much set on getting into tourism. If I was offered a job tomorrow, either a traineeship or apprenticeship, and it had training included in it, because I would like to do a course, I would definitely take it straight away. I am aiming at possibly working full time

and doing a night course or something. I definitely want to study as well as work, so I am broadening my knowledge to help me get a better job in the future.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Kristie, when Grace Bros offered you a job, did they offer you training? Did they say you could be the next manager of Grace Bros international? What did they offer you?

**Kristie Westblade**—Grace Bros have interservice training. Before you go into the field, or onto the floor, you watch videos and they train you fully before you go onto the floor. I am also working at McDonalds at the moment. Coles Myer and McDonalds have the same videos.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So it is really just for a floor job; it is not for management skills or higher training? I think Sally was saying that higher training is not really that attractive. Is it just for a floor job?

**Kristie Westblade**—It depends on what section you are in. For different sections you need to have different qualifications. When I leave school I want to own my own business. So, if I get offered a manager position later on, I will have to do higher service training.

**CHAIR**—I am afraid our time is nearly over. Perhaps I could ask one last question that some of you might want to answer. How do you think the system could be improved? Are there aspects of the VET system—for example, coordination with TAFE, work placement, the way that it affects your UAI, career's advice you have had from school or whatever—that stand out and about which you think, 'We should do this; we can improve the way it all works'?

**Mitchell Vidler**—I believe some subjects need some core learning areas that everyone has to do before they can start choosing the options, rather than just saying, 'Here's a whole range of things you can start learning; you choose which ones you want to do.'

**CHAIR**—Do you mean choosing between all the VET courses?

**Mitchell Vidler**—No, in the VET course itself. Like with IT, we have not really been told, 'This is what you are going to learn. This is where you can start off and then you can start choosing some options.' It has just been, 'Learn anything, anywhere.'

**CHAIR**—Was this at TAFE or in school?

**Mitchell Vidler**—In school.

**CHAIR**—Okay, that is an interesting comment. Are there any other suggestions?

**Sally Taber**—I want to comment on work placements. I know it is really difficult to take students out to the industries because of numbers and times and everything, but I found it quite difficult to do my work placement. I still have not completed enough hours, because I had exams during the time that everyone else was going on work placement and I could not afford to take the time off due to exams. I am not quite sure what can be done about that, but it is a pretty hard thing to get around. I found it quite difficult.

**CHAIR**—Was that because the Wagga Wagga Compact did not organise it when you wanted it organised? Or was it simply that there was too much of it to do?

**Sally Taber**—It was not really that. I went out on work placement for tourism and then I came back for a week. I was supposed to go to IT the next week, and it was too rushed because I had exams on the next week. I needed to attend class to know what was going to be in the exams et cetera.

**Mr SAWFORD**—We talked to some students yesterday and they were saying that they much preferred the flexibility of the one-day-a-week work placement that went on for a period of time and they found that they could show a continuum and they got to know the people at different sorts of levels, whereas the block placements were all over. What are your views about block placements and day-to-day placements? What about where one day a week becomes a work placement?

**Matthew Hazell**—I think the one-day-a-week would end up being a disadvantage because I would miss the classes that I have on that day.

**Mr SAWFORD**—No, the whole school is organised so that basically the only things that happens on that day are work placements in those year levels—there is nothing else on.

**Matthew Hazell**—But not everyone does a VET course.

**Mr SAWFORD**—That is the next question. In terms of a structure like that—which is getting back to the question which I think Mitchell was getting to—in the school, the facility or the senior secondary college, if you had more specialisation at years 11 and 12 in VET accredited options, with maybe a couple of core subjects in terms of English, mathematics or whatever, would that be a better system than what you have got in a high school system where you have a choice of the core academic subjects and you add on VET? Is it better for some people to do it the other way around—to specialise in a whole series of VET options and then add on some academic subjects? That is a different framework for a school to operate under.

**Matthew Hazell**—The only compulsory subject for us is English. We can choose all VET if we wish.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So you could do that at the school?

**Matthew Hazell**—Yes. We just have to do English.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But is the timetabling flexible enough to allow that to happen?

**Matthew Hazell**—I am not too sure how the timetable works; all I know is that there are lines and there are certain subjects that we can choose for different lines. If the subjects overlap, we have to make a choice.

**Sally Taber**—If that were the case, we would not be able to get our UAIs. I do two VET courses and I have been told that my UAI will be brought down because I do the two VET courses. That will probably have an effect on it too.

**Michael Atwell**—I am pretty pleased about the courses. I left school in year 11 last year and have come back to do it again. It was the VET courses that made me come back.

**CHAIR**—Excellent. Thank you very much. That has been very helpful. Good luck to you all, both in the HSC and in your careers after school. I am sure you will do well.

[9.47 a.m.]

**GUNTER, Mr Nathan Stuart, IT Teacher and Computer Coordinator, Wagga Wagga High School, Department of Education and Training**

**HARPLEY, Mr Anthony James, Head Teacher TAS, Wagga Wagga High School, Department of Education and Training**

**NULTY, Mrs Janice, Hospitality Teacher, Wagga Wagga High School, Department of Education and Training**

**POWELL, Mr Michael, Deputy Principal, Wagga Wagga High School, Department of Education and Training**

**ROBERTSON, Mr Gregory John, Head Teacher Computing, Wagga Wagga High School, Department of Education and Training**

**CHAIR**—Thank you for joining us this morning and for having us at your school. Would you like to make some introductory comments before we proceed to questions?

**Mr Powell**—I am also the VET coordinator. Bill Rogers, our principal, was going to make some opening remarks, but we ran out of time on that. He will be doing that when he comes to the principals' session, so I will not be giving you any information about the facts and figures of VET in our school. However, I would like to make some observations under two broad areas. One is what I see as the benefits of VET in our school, and the other is some of the issues and concerns that we have. The big plus about VET in our school is, for a lot of kids, that there is a job at the end of it. That is the important thing. We have a number of students who, as you know from the student hearing, are offered jobs during work placement. I know of one student who was on work placement last week and is considering taking up an apprenticeship at the moment. I think VET courses in particular meet the needs of students.

There are two types of kids who choose VET. One type is the more academic kids. I have done some research on the subject choices of students in our school. The more academic students tend to choose IT. As the students said in their session, they chose that because there are IT implications in any job. For them, that is generally their 12th unit. Students know that if they choose a UAI course it will impact badly on their university admission index. We advise them that, if they choose a VET course as part of their UAI, their UAI will not be so good. IT does tend to score better than the others, but the other VET courses score very poorly in terms of the university admission index. For the less academic kids, university is not an issue. Roughly one-third of our students go to university, so for the other two-thirds it is not really an issue.

There are certainly a number of students in our school at the moment who would not be here if it were not for VET. You heard Michael Atwell talk about that: it is his second go at year 11. This year he is doing three VET courses and they are keeping him at school. In fact, about this time last year there was a group of year 11 students—probably about a dozen—who had left our school through the year. They are the sorts of kids that the teachers were doing cartwheels about



as they were not in our school anymore, because they caused all sorts of problems. I could not help thinking that we did not meet those students' needs. This year we made a concerted effort to try to get VET subjects on most lines and also to run work studies for students in year 11 and to run Fundamentals of English to help these students. That has all fallen into place and students such as Michael Atwell, whom you saw earlier, are staying at our school and are doing really well.

However, there is a downside. The downside is that we have a number of students doing three VET courses. If they are all frameworks courses, that involves three separate work placements and that causes problems. I am a history teacher. Kristie Westblade is in my modern history class and she has been away for two weeks on work placement. She turned up yesterday and she had to sit an assessment task, which is a disadvantage. So that is a downside of it.

I will only touch briefly on another issue because Bill will be talking about it in his opening remarks—which will not be at the beginning, of course. We are very lucky with our teaching staff in our school in that we have had a number of staff who have actually had industry experience. It certainly is an issue for people who have not worked in the industry to keep up with it. However, we have network meetings and so forth amongst VET teachers in our district to try to help with that.

Now I will talk about some other issues. One that can be dealt with at a system level is the amount of work involved in achieving RTO status. Each of the 40 districts across New South Wales has to be registered as an RTO. To me that seems an unnecessarily duplication because—let us face it—the Department of Education in New South Wales is not a fly-by-night training organisation. We have been around for a fair while. Education is our core business. For us to have to jump through all these hoops right across the state is just ridiculous. I can understand why VETAB has them for private training organisations—because they do not have that background and they do not have their systems in place—but certainly there is some resentment amongst teaching staff about having to do this on a regular basis.

The other thing is that all our VET teachers—and I am sure that people here today will be talking about this in a moment—over the last couple of years have had to sit a special course to gain a Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment and Training. Teachers know a bit about assessment; that is their core business. I think some of our staff were not overly fussed about that, but I will let them talk about that in a moment.

Another issue that emerges is the difference in class size between TAFE and schools. I believe schools do a great job in VET and, particularly in terms of the welfare side of things, we are able to deliver VET in a better way than TAFE. However, there is an issue where the DET in New South Wales has made no concession whatsoever in terms of class sizes. The class size for VET is 24—it does not matter what it is—yet in our school there are some areas where we will not wear that. We do put our own caps on it, whereas over at TAFE there are varying class sizes. So that is an issue.

Another issue is the amount of funding that is put into schools. We get a bit of money but not nearly as much as students who go to TAFE. I will give you an example of that. When a student goes to TAFE the small portion of staffing that we would have to teach that student is transferred over to TAFE. This year that figure across New South Wales is roughly \$12 million. So a dollar

figure is taken out of staffing in schools and that is given to TAFE. If we had those kids in our schools we could do that for \$12 million. However, to enable that to happen in TAFE the state government had to chip in another \$10 million. So TAFE is certainly a more expensive option and I guess that is because of lower staff-student ratios and also the facilities that they have.

**Mr FARMER**—Can I just interrupt you there for a minute while we have that train of thought? I would imagine that TAFE should be cheaper because they have the facilities. The schools have to be set up with catering facilities, IT facilities and everything.

**Mr Powell**—They do, but TAFE charge. They charge on a different base—they charge on an hourly rate—and it is much more expensive.

**Mr FARMER**—So it is actually the structure of the way that they charge?

**Mr Powell**—Yes. I take your point. We have in the past accessed some TAFE facilities. We have a memorandum of understanding between schools and TAFE, and if we need to access a particular facility we can do that. The final issue is work placement. That is a worry, and I am sure that has been coming through as you have been travelling around. My big concern is what happens if funding for our Wagga Wagga Compact dries up. Every year that depends on federal government money. If that funding dries up, we are in dire straits. There is absolutely no way that work placement would work in Wagga without a central coordinator. It would not work, with schools fighting each other for work placements.

Also, the impact of work placement is felt when kids come back to school. I mentioned Kristie Westblade, who does three frameworks and two work placements in a row. When she comes back, she has missed a fortnight of school. With the best intent in the world it is very difficult for kids to catch up with that, so they miss out on other subjects.

Another other issue with work placement is that there are some areas, particularly IT, in which there are simply not enough placements in town. Some kids are able to move away to do it. Let us face it: if you owned a business you probably would not be too fussed about a student coming and mucking around with your computer system. I certainly would not want a student in my office, mucking around with my computer, because I depend on it every day. So we have had students placed in schools—that is one of the ways we do it—but we do not have students from our school doing IT work placement in our school. They are swapped around. Some of the students commented that that was not satisfactory.

The other attempt that we have made in work placements to avoid disruption in our school is to have it in two blocks. We try to get all the kids out for a week in term 2 of year 11 and then they do a week in term 4, year 11, which is essentially the first term of year 12. However, it is okay if the kid does one VET course, but if someone is doing three it causes problems. There is a whole range of other things that I could talk about, but I will stop now because I am mindful of time and I think you need to talk to our VET teachers.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, Mick. Would any of you like to make some introductory comments? Also, it was remiss of me not to ask this at the beginning: do you have any comments about the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Harpley**—I am also the GOVET web site coordinator for Metal and Engineering, which I think is a federally funded organisation.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I want to pursue a couple of the issues that Mick raised. The first is the issue of the UAI. You said that around a third of your students intend to go to university and that that is fairly typical. What sort of calculation have you done of the reduction in marks because of the scaling of the VET courses? Do you have any idea of it?

**Mr Powell**—I do not have any direct statistics on hand at the moment. I can tell you that the IT scales not too bad but it is still not good. The others will fall right away. Hospitality, metals, construction et cetera just do not rate at all. Our other deputy principal is more involved in the UAI side of things, and he is able to calculate roughly what a UAI will be. Whenever we do any of the frameworks, particularly metals, construction et cetera, they scale way down. We advise students, ‘If you want to go to university, make sure that the 10 units that count for UAI aren’t from a frameworks course.’

**CHAIR**—Which adds extra pressure on those students, doesn’t it, because then they have to do 12 units?

**Mr Powell**—Yes, it does. Funnily enough, statistics show that students who do 12 units actually do better than the ones who do 10.

**CHAIR**—It might be because of the type of student.

**Mr Powell**—I would suggest that is the case, yes.

**Mr Harpley**—I recommend to my students in metals that unless they really want a UAI they do not sit the test for metals and engineering, because I think the information they get back on their certificates actually detracts from their future employment options because of the way it is scaled down.

**Mr Powell**—To be honest I think the addition of the HSC exams onto VET subjects onto frameworks courses is a waste of time. It was an attempt to give academic credibility to courses that are not academic; they are job based. This is about getting kids into employment and it is a nonsense, to be honest, for kids to do the exam. I agree with Anthony: unless you want to go to university, do not do the exam. And really, if you want to go university, the exam is not going to help you get there anyway.

**CHAIR**—That is a fairly provocative comment compared to some others that we have had. Part of the problem has been this perception of two tiers of secondary schooling: the academic tier for those who want to go to university and the VET tier for those who do not. There have been a lot of attempts to try and change that perception, and one of the means of doing that was to include VET in the UAI. But you seem to be arguing that we ought to separate them.

**Mr Powell**—We need to talk about it. I know that was plan, but we need to talk about the reality. The reality is that the UAI component of a VET course is more than likely not going to get you into university, or it will lead to a lower UAI.

**CHAIR**—Is it a problem in the way the scaling works? There is some work being done on benchmark reference scaling for the framework courses that might overcome that problem—or do you think it is more fundamental than that?

**Mr Powell**—The issue is that the UAI is controlled by universities and, until universities recognise the merits of VET courses, we can talk as long as we like but it is out of our control.

**Mr Robertson**—In the IT area, most of our students who want to go uni are doing the VET course. They are not particularly looking at a UAI to get to university. They are going through TAFE to get accreditation to go back to uni in a couple of years time. It is the only option for some kids. There is no way they will get a good enough UAI to go straight to uni.

**CHAIR**—Is that an increasingly common path?

**Mr Robertson**—It is the best option for a lot of the kids because they will not get a decent UAI to get uni entrance but they can go over to TAFE, do their certificates III and IV, get 18 months accreditation at uni and go in the back door—and we have had students doing that.

**Mr Powell**—Certainly that is one of the things that we tell students: UAI is only one way to get to university; there are other ways. Greg is right; that is one of the options for kids.

**CHAIR**—Is there an age limit on that? Do they have to go in as mature age students after they have done VET?

**Mr Robertson**—I think that it is lower now. I am not sure about that.

**Mr Gunter**—I think it used to be 24, but I think they have dropped it down to 21 or 20.

**Mrs Nulty**—Yes, it is 21 now.

**CHAIR**—So they leave school, they do two years at TAFE and then they can go into uni?

**Mr Robertson**—In a lot of cases, a number of students have actually fast tracked so they can get certificate III and IV done within 12 to 18 months.

**Mr Powell**—Certainly in some cases some of the courses that are done at TAFE—certificate III and IV—will actually give them advanced standing for a university course. We have students doing an Assistant in Nursing course as part of their HSC at the moment—it is part of a pilot program—and while CSU will not recognise it in terms of a registered nurse course, it does allow them into the course. They are treated more favourably, I should say, rather than given advanced standing.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I have a lot of sympathy for the point of view you put forward, Michael. I do not think we are catering for our secondary school population in this country very well at all. We have given them a generic comprehensive high school structure to work in and we allow the universities to have de facto control, as you suggest, over the whole 100 per cent when effectively they should only have control over 30 per cent of the students—or maybe a bit more, to give them a bit more flexibility. What is your view?

Yesterday at Junee, a businessman put forward a framework, two-thirds of which I had a great deal of sympathy with. It basically says that VET needs a paradigm shift. The rationale is not articulated. It is all over the place. There is no champion for VET within the state system or the federal system. They are even thinking of restructuring what there already is. Would it not be better to perhaps upgrade TAFE and make it compete against the universities and have three sorts of schools? Have academic high schools with add-on VET, have VET core secondary schools with some add-ons, and then have a comprehensive high school system. That is the way the United Kingdom is going, courtesy of Blair.

I think comprehensive high schools have been an absolute bloody disaster for public government education in this country. You can look at the figures of where the community have got up and walked because they do not have the confidence in what was a flexible, diverse, alive and innovative public system. Now they see it as a system that is uniform, conforming, 'can't do this' and 'can't do that'. There is a lack of faith in the system. I do not care what you say about it. That is the truth; that is a reality. Would we be better off in taking that businessman's concept and developing it? I like the view of competition in education. I think competition brings out the best in people—it brings out the worst as well. Universities have too much control of education. Seventy per cent of kids are not going to go there. It does not make sense.

**Mr Harpley**—I agree with you when you say that the universities have control, but when you talk about comprehensive education, I look at the students that I teach. I came through as a fitter and machinist 20 years ago. I now teach VET and am heavily involved in the promotion of VET. I believe comprehensive education is the best way to go for most students, simply because, even if they do not want to do metalwork as a trade or as a career path, it gives them other skills such as communication and working in teams. As soon as we remove these kids to another venue to do, say, a VET course—simply across the street in our case—they are at a disadvantage, because they miss out on a period of English over here. The people who look after them are not in complete control of the kid. Education is more than learning about maths, English and science. It is about the whole kid. I believe that comprehensive education is the way to go.

What we need to do to keep VET successful here is to lower class sizes in VET in schools. That is where my concern is. My concern is about the kid I have in my class. If I have 24 in the class, I do not have the flexibility to deliver individual programs. It is not like sitting in English or history, where they are sitting at a desk. It is a very active, mobile and dangerous environment. My major concern in VET is not the program—it is the best course I have ever taught, and I have been teaching a long time. It has changed the lives of the kids that I saw here today. What we need to do is make sure it does not fall over. If we have 25 in a class, it is going to. We need to be able to fund to say, 'Look, I can only take 15 in this class because of the dangers.' Kids can die in my workshop—it is that dangerous. But it has changed these kids lives. It is very important. We must make sure it does not fall over. That is my major concern. My other concern is the pressure on local employers. They are getting work placement students all the time. We need to look at it. I do not know what we can do with it yet. They are my two main concerns. I disagree with the comment about comprehensive education being a failure. It is the way to go—it is the only way to go.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am not saying it is a failure. I am saying it is a failure for the majority of students. I am saying a third would be better off having a purely academic government school, maybe even a selective high school. Some will be better off in that situation.

**Mr Harpley**—I still do not agree with you.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Some would be better off, such as the girl who did the three framework courses. Around the world there have always been successful secondary systems that have concentrated on VET core. There are three aims of education: meeting the needs of the kids, meeting the needs of industry and meeting the needs of employment. They are the three aims that get put forward in terms of VET. You might throw in a fourth one in terms of increasing the professional and human capital stock of a nation. But why would you do that through one structure? That does not make sense.

**Mr Powell**—I echo Anthony's views on a comprehensive high school, for the basic reason that if you go to a two- or three-tiered system you are going to have kids making decisions about the rest of their lives at age 15 or 16, and if you talk to students in years 11, or even towards the end of year 12, a lot of them will say, 'I haven't got a clue what I want to do.'

**Mr SAWFORD**—But they do that now. That happens now.

**Mr Powell**—I know it does, but at least in a comprehensive high school we are able to give them a range of options so that they have some options when they leave school.

**Mr SAWFORD**—They have still got the same options. They have three options. They can still shift.

**Mr Powell**—But there is the logistics of that happening, particularly in the country. It may well work in large cities—it could possibly work in Wagga—but you are going to disadvantage kids right across the state and, indeed, right across Australia in smaller areas.

**Mr FARMER**—I want to ask you another question but, just before I do, I want to say that we are here to listen to what your comments are, so please do not feel that we are pushing our ideas or our views upon you, because we need the feedback from you. That is the whole idea of this.

Just going back a little bit, I cannot help but feel from some of the things we have heard through this committee that there is competition between TAFE and the universities as to where we are to best place students to go on to TAFE or university, when the eventual outcome is really employment, one way or another. It seems that certain courses are available to TAFE and they seem to be courses like catering courses, metal courses, carpentry courses and even IT courses that suit TAFE because they are the sorts of things that TAFE has. I went to a number of high schools and noticed things like gymnasium facilities and so on that might be a learning tool for, say, physiotherapy, podiatry, even a catering course, stepping on into the dietary area, and these courses seem to be more university focused. In your opinion, should we be looking at two models—a VET in Schools one that ideally suits universities and one that ideally suits the TAFE colleges—or are we still on the right track the way it is?

**Mr Harpley**—I am heavily involved in the metals and I also do the construction. There is a perception that these courses are high-level workplace training. They are not. It is basic entry-level work. There seems to be a perception that to run this course we need all this fancy gear and we need, say, a gas metal arc welder for every student that comes into the room. That is not the case. We do not need heaps of resources; we need flexibility within the system. It is a basic

entry-level course. It is not for high-flyers, it is not fourth-year apprenticeship stuff; it is basic entry level stuff. We do not need fancy resources. We do not need heaps of machines. We need quality delivery. From my experience as the network coordinator for this district, the best delivery that I have seen for kids has been in school. I am not commenting about TAFE's delivery, but the kids do not want to go to TAFE. They start to go to TAFE and then they say, 'I'm not going there,' because they do not have the flexibility of delivery that we have.

**Mr FARMER**—Do you think that is because they are not ready for it until they have done these basic delivery courses?

**Mr Harpley**—My personal feelings are that they are now still attempting to use the delivery methods they have been using in TAFE over the last 20 years and they are failing the kids.

**Mr Powell**—TAFE is essentially an adult learning environment, whereas schools are for younger students. The TAFE work force is increasingly casualised, which causes problems for me as a VET coordinator. Sometimes the teacher who is teaching our students is there only when they teach our students. So, in catching up on assessment tasks or absences and so on, that becomes an issue. It is very difficult for me to contact them. That is why I think schools are better placed to deal with not just the teaching issues but a whole range of other issues.

I chose a student to be part of the panel for the very reason that he was a troubled child last year. He was in a construction class at TAFE. It did not work out. We have run a construction class this year at our school and those students have all stayed. It is at a staffing cost to our school, but in meeting the needs of those kids it has been a huge success.

**Mr Robertson**—Especially in the IT area, I am finding that what needs to be done is along the same lines as what Anthony is saying: a shift in the entire VET TAFE arena. Our kids gain their cert II in IT, and the local TAFE institutions here do not recognise it because they teach a different method. The work we are doing—the competencies and the elements they are gaining in getting their cert II—is not being recognised. These kids have to go back because TAFE teaches in a modular sense, which is not the best method of teaching.

**CHAIR**—What about recognition by employers?

**Mr Robertson**—I have not come across that yet. They understand it, they recognise it, but there is still a lot of industry—

**CHAIR**—There is no greater recognition of TAFE qualifications than school qualification, say up to cert II level?

**Mr Robertson**—Not in IT, to my knowledge. I have not heard of that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Why do you think that has happened?

**Mr Harpley**—I have my own opinions on that. Rumours are often spread by non-teachers or non-department people that the delivery we give the students here is not as good as at TAFE. But I have had dealings with many of the employers—I actually did my trade in Wagga—and most of them recognise the certificates we are giving the kids. They say to the students—or their

employees at the time—'You do not have to do this OH&S course but, if you want to, you are more than welcome to go back and do it again at TAFE.' That is often what is happening in Wagga, in our local district. The employers are on board but TAFE does not seem to be there. They are fighting the battle, and I think they are feeling very threatened about their staffing and all those sorts of things. That probably has a lot to do with it.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Have the links between TAFE and schools deteriorated over the last 10 or 15 years? What was the reason for that?

**Mr Harpley**—In some areas they have, but not in all areas.

**Mr Powell**—As a VET coordinator, I have a very close and successful working relationship with Wagga TAFE. That is probably due to the personalities involved. The TVET coordinator, whom I think you will be talking to later on, is a fantastic lady. She works with our school and is marvellous. As Anthony said, some TAFE teachers feel that they can deliver things better than the schools. There is that bit of animosity—I take your point on that—but I think it is more at the classroom level than at the management level.

**Mr SAWFORD**—At director level?

**Mr Powell**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—A couple of you have made comments about the difficulty of getting appropriate work placements and it seems that that is going to become increasingly a challenge as more and more students in schools do TAFE. Yours are organised through the Wagga Wagga Compact. Does that completely eliminate the problem of competition between schools? Junee High School, where we were yesterday, is quite resistant to getting involved in the compact, despite the department's efforts to push them in that direction. Is there competition from schools such as Junee for the limited work placements in Wagga, or is that not a problem?

**Mr Robertson**—As Mick said earlier, in the IT industry we have 70 students here who have to get work placements. It is the same with the other two high schools, so we are looking at around 170 students. To get them into quality IT companies, we have to look at where in Wagga we can find a decent industry with enough computers and a decent enough network for students to go and spend a week there. A lot of them are going out and doing word processing or filing, which is just not adequate. For us to personally go out and try to organise IT placements would be absolutely impossible.

**Mrs Nulty**—It is the same in hospitality. Because small places like Junee and Batlow do not have enough work areas, students are having to come to Wagga. The compact is keeping that pretty well organised for us, but before that it was really difficult. It is difficult to get the kids into different work environments rather than just putting them into a coffee shop, which does not give them enough. They need to be in a large catering establishment. You cannot get that in small areas and that is why they have to come into Wagga. Kids are having to stay with people for a week. In the hospitality industry, you have to work split shifts. That is a problem when they do not have access to transport—and most of them are not old enough to have a car and a licence—because they have to get to and from work at all sorts of different hours.



**CHAIR**—Is there a problem with competition—if I can use that word—from schools that are not part of the compact?

**Mrs Nulty**—I do not think so. I do not think it is affecting us that way.

**Mr Robertson**—As Mick said, in IT we have to go into schools. The schools are the only sites—after the council, the TAFE and the union, the next biggest institutions are the high schools and the primary schools, so a lot of our IT students go out to other schools. They have to. We have in-school work placement here, where we take our own students. We have a student here from Wagga Wagga Christian College. Probably every three or four weeks we have a student here. It is not the ideal, but otherwise it just would not work.

**Mr Harpley**—The thing about work placement is that you can do it in two ways. You can have work placement as an assessment tool, but I think most people use their work placement as an enhancement of the skills they have learnt in the course. I think work placement is going to be a real burden for us because I know that the people we use in Wagga are getting sick of having students all the time. They are virtually booked up every two-week block—we have a two-week block in terms 1 and 4—and there is too much pressure on the employers to take these kids. We need to look and say, ‘Do we need to give the kids two weeks work placement in the course?’ Most of it is used as enhancement only, as a tool so the kids know exactly what it is like out there. VETAB tell us we have to have the two weeks—I do not know whether we need the two weeks—otherwise the employers are going to fall over and then the courses will. We need to look at the need for work placement.

**CHAIR**—It is a bit of a catch-22 situation, because industry is saying that without the structured workplace component they do not have much confidence in the VET in Schools qualifications. Yet if they are not providing the work placement opportunities, the students cannot get that experience.

**Mrs Nulty**—And they are not providing the assessment time. We are trying to get together with the Wagga people now to set up a program of assessment strategies for the kids to use when they go out for hospitality. We want them to be easy for the worker or the employer, but they just do not have the time in the hospitality industry to be doing the paperwork for the kids. We are getting kids coming back saying to us, ‘They signed my book. They didn’t really look at me but they said, “It’s okay, we will just sign it, but we haven’t had time to do all these bits and pieces with you.”’ So we are having that problem. As teachers we need time to get together with the work people and work out a program for assessment that they can do for everyone that is easy and quick enough for them to do.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What would you suggest?

**Mrs Nulty**—We have a network group, and we work together. We have got together and asked, ‘What are the strategies that we want them to learn or be assessed on in work placement, and who is going to assess them?’ Some of the places have workplace assessors; others have not. We need to find out who has the qualifications and who is prepared to do it, but the difficulty is getting together with them at times that are suitable for—

**Mr SAWFORD**—How much non-classroom contact do you get a week? What percentage is it—zero?

**Mr Harpley**—Not enough.

**Mrs Nulty**—Not much.

**Mr SAWFORD**—People have suggested to us, and I have always thought, that it probably needs to be, with VET people, at least 20 per cent. It would need to be a day a week. No?

**Mrs Nulty**—The assessment and paperwork for hospitality is just horrendous.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So you have basically no free time?

**Mrs Nulty**—No, you do not have any free time; you are just working with it all the time. Hospitality takes over more than all of my other subjects put together. This is the first year I have not taught hospitality since it started and—I must be honest—I am having a lovely year. I am actually able to put so much more time into my other classes, whereas if I was doing hospitality this year and two other senior classes I would just be ripping my hair out.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So there is a burnout factor?

**Mrs Nulty**—Last year was unbelievable. There is just so much to do.

**Mr Robertson**—I totally agree. I think that the workload on the teacher to run the course and do the paperwork is tremendous. Just going back to the issue of work placement, I think the biggest problem, especially in the country, is getting a quality work placement for the students to have the experience, which is what industry is trying to get out of work placement. Ninety-five per cent of the IT work placements are basically useless—they learn nothing. It is only at the larger ones—if they go to a school, council, uni or TAFE or to the base hospital—that they actually get the experience. The others are basically pointless. They may as well not go.

**Mr FARMER**—Do you think for that reason that maybe you are wasting your time doing IT as a VET course in the schools? Maybe you should just be doing the normal school curriculum and taking on a different subject that is not so useless and then just leaving that to take its course when the kids go on?

**Mr Robertson**—No, I believe the course is a magnificent one. I love teaching it. The students who take the VET IT course would not follow through in a normal strand computer course. They would drop it totally.

**Mr Powell**—The other thing is that, if they did the IT at TAFE, the work placement issue is still there. It will not go away. They are still in Wagga and they still have to do a work placement. It does not matter where they do it; they still have to do the work placement.

**CHAIR**—Is TAFE part of the compact?

**Mr Powell**—TAFE work placements are done through the compact, yes. The other issue, to continue with what Greg was saying about class sizes and time to do paperwork and so forth, is that there has not been any recognition by the New South Wales DET that VET is any different to other subjects. There is no allocation for a VET coordinator to do it and there is no additional time—it is just as if you were teaching woodwork, metalwork, English, history or whatever. To be honest, it occurs through the goodwill of lots of staff. I think the New South Wales DET has to get serious about it.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It was not always like that. When you had a separate department for vocational training—or technical training, as it was then called—prior to the Karmel report and the seventies, there was a separate department and there was recognition. That gets back to my original question. The move to comprehensive high schools killed all that because basically all of the departments integrated. I think primary schools have missed out over the last 30 years. The resource that primary schools deserve simply has not been recognised over the last 30 years. Suddenly, there is a huge literacy and numeracy problem. You did not have to be a rocket scientist to be able to predict 30 years ago that that was going to happen. There is a VET problem. We had the Commonwealth department of education come before us last week, and another group behind them, and not one of their representatives could articulate a rationale for VET in this country. They are not the only group. I see that as a big problem. If you do not know where you are going, you will not know when you get there.

**Mr Harpley**—I would hate to see VET type subjects segregated from mainstream schooling, simply because we are then—

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am not suggesting that.

**Mr Harpley**—We are making those students look like they are the tradies—the non-academics. We are putting them in a box, and that is not what it is about. VET is extremely successful, especially in this school. The kids have high self-esteem. They are really doing well. It is a magnificent program we have got here with these kids. I would hate to separate that out, because we are labelling them straightaway. It happened to me 20 years ago. I was labelled as a non-academic trade person and they did me a disservice. It is very important we do not do that. We need to keep them all together and we need to be able to give these kids their science and maths courses and have them feel that it is a normal curriculum. We are certainly doing that in this school. We cannot afford for this to fall over in the school situation, because I believe that is the best place to deliver it. As I said before, we are changing these kids' lives. We failed kids in education 10 years ago. Governments are now wanting kids to stay at school. We have got to make sure that we offer them the courses—and, honestly, these are the courses.

**CHAIR**—So you do not think that the UAI problem we talked about before is an issue?

**Mr Harpley**—It is not an issue for the students that come here to me. One of the biggest problems for my kids is that they go out on their first work placement and they do not come back. That is a problem for me because of staffing and finances. It is fantastic for the kids, but when I have got a class of six the other faculties say, 'We can't staff this. This is a money thing.' We need to be staffed on a lower ratio for these courses, but whatever we do we cannot afford to lose this out of the school situation.

**CHAIR**—Sorry, we are running out of time. Greg and Mick, you wanted to make a comment.

**Mr Robertson**—Last year, we had a student who was a major problem. This year has totally changed his attitude. I think that is purely because he is not being labelled. He is in a normal strand of school and is not being pushed aside as being non-academic, a tradie or whatever. His quality of life is being enriched by these programs, and there are a lot of other kids who are in exactly the same boat. If they did not do the VET course, they would be out getting the dole somewhere. They would not be able to do the mainstream courses.

**Mr Powell**—One of my concerns is that people further up the line in the DET making decisions about VET probably have had no hands-on experience of what it is about—and I take your point, Rod, that they probably cannot articulate why we have VET. I know from some of my personal experiences that the people who are involved with running things, to be honest, do not have a clue about what is going on, yet they are making decisions that affect us at the coalface. That is really important. You do not have to be a metalwork teacher to be in charge of VET. I am not saying that at all. But you need to have a fairly deep understanding of what VET is about and of the sorts of kids who are involved in it for it to be successful.

**Mr SAWFORD**—There are a thousand kids in the school. How many of those kids are doing accredited VET?

**Mr Powell**—Bill has all those figures because he was going to bring that up in his opening address. Off the top of my head, in year 11 roughly 71 or 73 per cent of students do at least one VET course. In year 12, it drops back to about 54 per cent. When Bill makes his remarks later he will be able to give you those figures. There are also facts and figures on how many students are doing two courses and how many are doing three.

**Mr Gunter**—I think that the VET course also enhances some of the other courses that we do. If you are the sort of student who would be interested in doing some sort of engineering course in the future, it could be that you would like to do construction as an enhancement to the physics and advanced mathematics that you do. I think it is important that we get a cross-flow of those students in all subject areas.

**Mr Robertson**—Following on from that, in my year 11 IT course probably 70 per cent of the students will not be continuing on with IT in industry. They are going out and becoming hairdressers or working in the tourist industry. They want that basic IT understanding and the skills. They are using the VET course to get them. If they did not have the VET course, they would not be able to do that.

**Mr Gunter**—The other courses do not cater for that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—If the IT course is as good as that, can't the kids do that and not worry about the work placement?

**Mr Robertson**—No, because work placement is a compulsory part.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But what if it became a non-framework course but was still the same course?

**Mr Robertson**—I would say that a lot of students would go that way.

**CHAIR**—What about the two-unit computer studies course that does not meet the same needs?

**Mr Gunter**—It does not exist any more.

**Mr Robertson**—It has gone.

**Mr Powell**—There are two others, but they are totally different courses. Certainly at the moment we follow a syllabus. The work placement is part of the syllabus, so that is what we have to do.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. That has been very helpful. Congratulations on the obvious success of what you are doing.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.33 a.m. to 10.54 a.m.**

**GISSING, Mrs Judy, TVET Coordinator, TAFE NSW—Riverina Institute**

**RENSHAW, Mrs Helen, Workplace Coordinator, Wagga Wagga Compact**

**CHAIR**—Thank you for joining us this morning. Before we proceed to questioning, would you like to make some introductory comments?

**Mrs Renshaw**—I will give you the background of Wagga Compact. It is 12, nearly 13, years old. It started as a provider of career education for all the Wagga schools, so it was cross-sectoral to start with. The schools pay for the career education and always have. In about 1996, when ECEF started funding workplace coordination, it seemed like a logical vehicle to use for workplace coordination for the framework courses. Career education still continues.

**CHAIR**—The view that has been put to us is that Wagga Compact is very effective in terms of coordinating the work placements needs of students in the schools in Wagga. One of the issues that has been put to us, though, is the difficulty in keeping up with the demand for work placements. Is that much of a problem, from your point of view?

**Mrs Renshaw**—Yes. We talk about employer saturation. Because Wagga is a regional centre, it is not only Wagga schools that are using Wagga employers. At Wagga Compact there are three of us who work part time, and we see our main aim as fostering a really good relationship with our employers. So we visit, we give them back the evaluations and we have a Christmas function where we give them an award, but the main thing is that face-to-face contact when the students are out or when we are recruiting. We are finding that we have gone up to 650 placements from what we used to have, which was less than 100, but we are managing. Luckily, most employers are rather impressed with the standard of the students, so that really helps. If we get one bad student, I always tell them that that is an employer we have lost. Because we are seen as not being part of schools and because we are located in the CBD, the employers see us as industry, so they will call on us if there is a problem. We are available at all times to help solve the problem. That is how we foster the relationship so that we are not reaching that stage where the employers are throwing up their hands and saying, ‘We’ve had enough.’

**CHAIR**—With more and more students doing VET, do you think we will get to the point where there just will not be enough positions available for work placement?

**Mrs Renshaw**—So far we have not. In the IT framework they have addressed that problem by giving the students an option to do half their work placement of 70 hours—that is, 35—within schools on IT projects. We have not even had to use that as yet, but the option is there, because the saturation in Wagga is probably in information technology and tourism. They are the two that we seem to have the most difficulty with in making sure that we do not use the same employer every fortnight. We keep a database, we record that and we look to give them a good break.

**CHAIR**—Just one other question before I hand over to my colleagues: what sort of feedback have you had from employers about the way in which VET works? Have you had any feedback about ways that the system can be improved from their point of view in terms of taking students?

**Mrs Renshaw**—It has been interesting. Some employers prefer the model of one day a week; others say, ‘We wouldn’t touch it.’ It is really hard to gauge what the overall feeling is. If we are given suggestions like, for example, could the IT students come out with an assignment to do in case of the down times, we pass that on to the teachers. We make sure that the employers know that every suggestion they make is passed on and acted upon if it can be. Most schools opt for a one-week block work placement, and it is now getting very competitive with the schools to see who gets in first so they can get their preferred dates. It meets the school timetable’s needs better that way. For example, Wagga High has about 40 IT students. We would say, ‘No way. Not in the same week. We’ll give you 28 July and 19 August.’ So we give the employers a break there. We would send them out in two groups, and the schools are responsive to that. Anything that they suggest, we do try and implement. Being just three part-timers, we work very closely together so that everyone knows what is going on.

**CHAIR**—Are you from an industry background yourself?

**Mrs Renshaw**—I am both: I was a teacher at primary level and then at TAFE, and then I ran my own business, which was in employment and training.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Can I just get a handle on a bit of the history of the Wagga compact. When technical schools across Australia were absorbed into comprehensive high schools in the seventies, VET seemed to flatline for about 20 years. You would have been there right at the beginning of the resurgence in the nineties. Can you explain how that started?

**Mrs Renshaw**—I was not around then.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Okay. How long have you been involved with this?

**Mrs Renshaw**—I was running my own business in the early nineties and came on board in 1998, so I have been here five years.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What about Judy?

**Mrs Gissing**—I am at TAFE and I had been teaching the HSC program before I took over the TVET program.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Were there any significant watersheds in terms of the Wagga compact that made you change direction or re-evaluate?

**Mrs Renshaw**—As I said, I was not around when the initial career education was set up. I gather that it was seen as a better idea to make sure we had industry contacts coming into the schools for career education rather than just careers advisers. That is how it started and then ECEF must have found the Wagga compact and the structure was already there. I then came on board in 1998. I think they started work placement in 1996 but it has grown extensively.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Is it true that about 70 per cent of year 11 students in other secondary schools in Wagga have access to accredited VET? Is that a standard throughout Wagga or is that peculiar to Wagga High?

**Mrs Renshaw**—From my overall view, the Catholic and independent schools do not do as much VET. They do have access to VET at TAFE and there are issues there that have got nothing to do with me. For example, at Trinity Senior High School and Wagga Christian College, they have VET classes but they do not seem to be as popular. They do not seem to offer the range—if students want to do tourism, for example, they go to TAFE. The same applies for other courses, such as IT and building.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What is the relationship like between TAFE and schools? How would you describe it and which direction do you think it should go in? Now, there is a loaded question for you!

**Mrs Renshaw**—It sure is.

**Mrs Gissing**—I think they get on very well together in the community. We meet together regularly. We have continual dialogue. At TAFE we have a number of students who come in from both the state and independent schools to do VET at TAFE. It seems to be working fairly well. We have a collegiate model where we get together and decide at what times the VET courses are going to run so that the students have access across the region. So yes, on the whole I would say it is good. From a TAFE perspective, perhaps one thing that limits the number of students who come to TAFE is the staffing-funding formula that goes with the VET students. As students come from schools to TAFE, my understanding is that they are losing part of their staffing for each student that moves across, so that becomes a limiting factor.

**Mr FARMER**—This area is a success story as far as VET is concerned. To have a figure like 70 per cent is really a shining beacon as far as the rest of the country is concerned. Do you put that down to the fact that we have one coordinated base here in the Wagga Wagga area, as opposed to schools doing their own thing and working directly out of the schools? Do you see that as being an integral way of putting industry together with the schools as opposed to the school teachers having to build up the rapport directly with the businesses?

**Mrs Renshaw**—I think it is crucial. I was talking to our federal member because her office takes work placement students, and even she said that what used to happen quite often in their business was they used to throw up their hands in disgust and say, ‘I can’t take any more,’ whereas if they know that there is one person recruiting for all years 11 and 12—and that has taken about three years for them to understand that—some businesses are now saying, ‘I only deal through compact.’ We are in competition with work experience which can also be a problem if an employer has had a bad experience. I think it is crucial because employers feel that they can at least come to us if there is a problem and we are available. We do not have to wait to finish a class to ring them back. With the coordinated approach, they know that I understand that students coming in can take time, so therefore I will give them a break. It is terribly important. The hierarchy of the schools in Wagga have realised that it is just so important for some kids to do VET subjects; otherwise they would not be there.

**Mr FARMER**—With that type of success, in this area in particular, do you think that in future you are going to have to expand outside Wagga Wagga? Are you going to have to look at implementing all sorts of different programs—maybe even looking at billeting in other cities and major centres to give the students a wider experience of what is available through VET?



**Mrs Renshaw**—We sometimes do that, particularly if a student has a contact in Sydney or Canberra, but there is that supervision factor. There is also a problem with safety in the workplace. That is still a grey area. Coordinators are in no position to determine that the workplace is safe because we are not industry specific. Teachers do not have the time to inspect every workplace, so that is a real grey area. We live in hope that everyone abides by workplace safety, but it only takes one thing to go wrong and we are in trouble.

**Mr FARMER**—You would never be able to control that anyway, because—whether it is school teachers, TAFE teachers or the coordinators themselves—you cannot stay on the job with the students for 24 hours a day.

**Mrs Renshaw**—No, but at this stage nobody has been given the responsibility to inspect the workplace and make sure it is safe—and I do not think you should in some ways, because it would insult employers.

**Mr FARMER**—There has to be trust with employers.

**Mrs Renshaw**—But in this litigious society, people get a bit nervous. We have got extra costs involved because now all our insurance has gone up—naturally—and we have to insure our board of management. Insurances have gone way up in compact and because compact has always been outside the schools, we also have those admin costs that we have to take into account. Does that answer your question?

**Mr SAWFORD**—While he is thinking about that, how many full-time equivalents do you have? You said you had three part-time people working.

**Mrs Renshaw**—There are three of us working 24 hours a week, 40 weeks a year.

**Mr SAWFORD**—And how many work placements is the compact responsible for?

**Mrs Renshaw**—This year, about 700.

**Mr SAWFORD**—That is a lot.

**Mrs Renshaw**—Yes, and as I said, it is not just recruiting and getting on the phone, it is making sure you are available and that sort of thing.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Is that testing the edge of the realms of effectiveness?

**Mrs Renshaw**—Let us say that we do not have a lot of down time, but it has been difficult because there has never been any continuity of funding. There has never been a guarantee of funding, so you are frightened to sign a lease for 12 months—just in case. There has always been that problem. This year that seemed to be alleviated because BVET said there would be funding for three years, but now we have had a change from ECEF to DEST—so it is all a bit uncertain again.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So how many funding sources are there?

**Mrs Renshaw**—We have had two—ECEP and BVET—and also the schools because they pay for career education.

**CHAIR**—I want to return to this issue of TAFE versus schools for offering VET. Helen, in your experience has there been any difference in the perception of employers about the work readiness or the suitability of the courses being offered in schools versus TAFE?

**Mrs Renshaw**—No. In fact, the teachers get to know the employers because they supervise. Often you will find that an employer will say, 'His kids are always great.' I do not think they see it as school and TAFE. Most of these kids are coming out fairly well prepared and that is good. Occasionally we will get a problem.

The IT employers often say that they are really surprised by the standard. The fact that they will take students—Wagga City Council takes 10 to 12 a year; we have a firm that takes six to eight a year—is saying that they are well taught and well prepared. It is interesting that a survey we did of our local employers actually reinforced what the Australian chamber of commerce was saying. The employers are saying that they want soft skills, although they do not call them that. They want people who can fit in and communicate—all of those things. They never say, 'Look, he can't put a computer together.' They say, 'He's a great kid. He fitted in really well. He gave us a thank-you note. He can work in a team. He does as he is told. He will ask questions when he doesn't understand.' Those are the sorts of things that they want, as well as honesty. That is what is reinforced in the workplace.

**CHAIR**—Looking at the TAFE versus school issue, we have had it put to us, for instance, by the directors of TAFE that there is a fair degree of duplication and that there are courses being run in schools that could be run more effectively at TAFE. We have had schools saying to us that the school environment is really a better environment in which students ought to be studying VET courses. What is your view of that?

**Mrs Gissing**—One area that comes to mind is construction. TAFE has industry-standard facilities and equipment. The classrooms in which the students are taught simulate a workplace and these are set up for teaching vocational education. IT is in either place—a computer is a computer. Perhaps sometimes the equipment at TAFE is better. We have our commercial kitchens. Our students are actually taught in a restaurant that operates and is open to the public during the week. I guess we were only talking about frameworks, because the non-frameworks that we teach are only taught in TAFE anyway. No doubt entertainment could be taught in either place. But it is the ones that require the industrial type of equipment and an industrial workplace environment that perhaps could be taught better in TAFE.

**CHAIR**—What about the issue of articulation between school based VET qualifications and TAFE courses? Some people have said to us that students will get to certificate II at school—they do all of their courses and the modules—and get to TAFE but find that they have to do some of the courses again because they are not recognised. How do we address that issue?

**Mrs Gissing**—These days I do not know that we could afford to not recognise them—an AQF qualification is an AQF qualification. If they have a certificate II coming from school, TAFE recognises that certificate too. I guess that sometimes, in gaining the certificate II at TAFE,

students who have gained that certificate have had to jump through a few more hoops to gain their certificate than perhaps they did while they were at school.

**Mr SAWFORD**—More hoops or different hoops?

**Mrs Gissing**—I know that in recent times, even though the current syllabuses are not all that old, they have actually been redone to try to align the competencies closer to TAFE modules, so that situation probably will decrease over time. But in recent times there have been extra modules in certificate II—business services was an example but that has been rectified in recent times—where they have actually had to do more modules at the TAFE level than what was actually in the Higher School Certificate.

**CHAIR**—This is the issue though, isn't it? If both are offering certificate II—and you are expressing the view that the TAFE one had more modules in it—that would indicate a different degree of perception of the rigour of the two courses.

**Mrs Gissing**—Perhaps but I think you will find that TAFE does not say to somebody, 'I don't like your certificate II,' because it is an AQF standard and therefore has to be accepted. They might perhaps give them some extra work to do if they want to go into certificate III, particularly if it is a prerequisite for another module for safety reasons or something like that. But I think that over time that will be rectified. Those sorts of changes are happening with changes in the board of studies syllabuses, but we are really only talking about frameworks at this stage.

**Mr SAWFORD**—If you were in an ideal world how would you administer TAFE and VET in schools?

**Mrs Gissing**—I think that in an ideal world there would be an amalgamation of VET at TAFE and in schools into one, so that students could move quite freely between both sectors.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Does that mean you would upgrade the status of TAFE around Australia?

**Mrs Gissing**—Why would I need to upgrade the standard of TAFE?

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am asking the question; I do not want to give you the answer.

**Mrs Gissing**—At this stage I feel that TAFE is providing quality industry-standard education, so a certificate II at TAFE—

**Mr SAWFORD**—All right—I am putting words into your mouth, I suppose. We have recently gone through a federal budget where there was no extra money for vocational education, and we have just gone through a whole series of state budgets around the nation where there was no extra money for vocational education. Am I putting words into your mouth now?

**Mrs Gissing**—More money for implementation, improving equipment, keeping up with technology and those sorts of things is always of value.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I do not mean to be talking in riddles. Here in Wagga and in Junee yesterday we found a very atypical situation in Australia in terms of VET in Schools. Here at Wagga we were told that 70 per cent of students in year 11 are doing an accredited VET. I would have thought that that was a wonderful benchmark for all Australian secondary schools. In Junee it is 65 per cent at year 11 level. In New South Wales the overall average for secondary schools is just over 30 per cent, with hopes of it getting to 40 per cent at some time this year. That means that, with no extra money for TAFE or for VET in Schools, that is not possible. You cannot double the participation in accredited VET—I do not believe you can—without some sort of impetus of funding.

**Mrs Renshaw**—We are always screeching for more funding.

**Mr FARMER**—As an add-on to that, one of the things we heard at Junee yesterday was that it was not just about money; it was about the relationships that were built between the schools, the teachers, the TAFE and the businesses. As far as your coordinating role is concerned, Helen, aside from money what more can you do along those lines and what can government do to assist the build-up of that? Should we be helping industries to take on more students or whatever and maybe give them some sort of break as far as that is concerned?

**Mrs Renshaw**—Tax relief or something like that?

**Mr FARMER**—Yes.

**Mrs Renshaw**—It may come to that, but workplace coordination units have historically had a terrible problem with turnover—you would not want to be trying to feed a family on casual employment for 40 weeks a year.

**Mr SAWFORD**—And funded year to year.

**Mrs Renshaw**—And funded year to year. I am probably in a different situation being towards the end of my working life, but to the young enthusiast with no career path and no certainty of funding it is a real problem. We have had two young people who have left us over the last 12 to 18 months. So that is one thing. Yes, I think that the saturation levels may reach a point where government will have to do something about encouraging employers. Ninety per cent of my work placements are in small business. There is a decided lack of support from government departments. We use sport and rec here in the Department of Education and the Department of State and Regional Development, but so many government departments see it as too difficult.

**CHAIR**—To take on students?

**Mrs Renshaw**—To take on students. I think that is horrific because they could do so much—and I think the state government has just addressed this by sending us a survey to ask how many state government departments participate. At a government level, it would be great if we could have a push for government departments, as policy, to take on work placement students.

**Mr FARMER**—That is a very interesting point, because state governments right around the country are cutting back—they are taking people on contract, as opposed to having a huge work force themselves. The more they cut back the less opportunity they can provide but then the

more it comes back to the individual private sector. I suppose what you are saying is that there is something to all of that. Maybe there is a responsibility for those state departments and maybe that is why they are trying to get in touch with you to see if that is what they need to do.

**Mrs Renshaw**—Maybe. As someone—I think it was Rod—said, ‘You just can’t do this; you can’t do more for less.’ I think that if you have continuity of staff in workplace coordination units you can do more for less because you have already established that relationship.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It would be more efficient.

**Mrs Renshaw**—That can explain how you can do more for less. But we kept telling ECEF we could not keep doing more for less.

**CHAIR**—How many government department offices are there in Wagga which could be taking students and are not? There are quite a number, I gather, both state and federal.

**Mrs Renshaw**—Yes. The Department of Education and Training takes one a term. The other thing I would like to see government do is get a push on for the ANZ or the Commonwealth banks in some capacity, so that we could work things out—all that stuff about privacy. The RAAF base here takes students but Kapooka does not. If we could get it at a national level, that is where governments could really help.

**Mr FARMER**—They should have a national approach to it all as opposed to a spot by spot placement.

**Mrs Renshaw**—It would be good. If federal and state government departments had some sort of unity of purpose and policy, that would help us at the ground level.

**Mr SAWFORD**—We all dream of getting rid of the states, you know!

**Mrs Renshaw**—I think that is a very good idea.

**CHAIR**—Judy, earlier you said that there ought to be better coordination and integration of what happens with schools and TAFE. Are you saying that courses are being run by schools that could be run by TAFEs or that are being run in TAFEs? Are you aware of any duplication in the region?

**Mrs Gissing**—All of the frameworks could be taught at both TAFE and school.

**CHAIR**—Are there cases where they are being taught in both places?

**Mrs Gissing**—Yes, lots of cases.

**CHAIR**—Are you suggesting that that ought not be the case—that it ought be just in TAFE or just in school?

**Mrs Gissing**—I guess this is a little bit of a touchy situation. It depends on the facilities that are available. I am suggesting that the facilities that are available in the TAFEs are of an industry standard and if the facilities are equal to those in the schools then that is fine.

**CHAIR**—Are you aware of cases where they are not of the same standard?

**Mrs Gissing**—I am not teaching in schools so I have never been—

**CHAIR**—You are being very diplomatic.

**Mr FARMER**—Is the feeling from TAFE that this is what you want—you want the students to come there—or would you rather deal with the employment situation—

**Mrs Gissing**—No, we teach something like 315 students who come in from schools to do TVET in the TAFE situation each week. Those students come in from the surrounding schools—from both the state system and the independent system. We are more than happy to teach whatever students come along.

**Mrs Renshaw**—Another thing is that it is not just the facilities. There are nebulous things like students not wanting to go to TAFE because it is scary or they would rather stay in their school situation with their friends, so that has to be taken into consideration when you have the duplication. At Koorinal High, for example, we have a full construction class of 25, but they had 32 so the extra seven went to TAFE. That is how they work it.

**CHAIR**—It is interesting that some students would rather be out of school and doing this, so I guess it depends on the individual.

**Mrs Renshaw**—Some would. In this situation in Wagga they pretty well have an opportunity for both, and tourism is exclusively at TAFE and they have good numbers in the classes there.

**CHAIR**—I am afraid we have run out of time. Do you have a final comment?

**Mrs Renshaw**—No, but thank you for giving us the opportunity to have our say. It is good to see you come out into the country.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. It has been very helpful.

[11.26 a.m.]

**BRABIN, Mr Peter, Chief Education Officer, Wagga Wagga District Office, Department of Education and Training**

**BUCKLEY, Mr Brian William, Principal, Lockhart Central School**

**FEATHER, Mr Colin, Deputy Principal, Curriculum and Staff Training, Mount Austin High School; Member, District Management Committee, Wagga Wagga District RTO**

**LEYSHON, Mr Glyn, Principal, Koorungal High School; Member, District Management Committee, Wagga Wagga District RTO**

**ROGERS, Mr William, Principal, Wagga Wagga High School**

**CHAIR**—Thank you for joining us this morning. I would like to invite representatives of the southern district principals and the area office to our hearing this morning. We have had a very productive day and a half in your region so thank you for that. We are looking forward to what you have to say to us this morning. I invite you to make some introductory comments—those of you who would like to—and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

**Mr Rogers**—I would like to paint a picture of VET at Wagga High to give an indication of what is happening here. The number of students studying VET has grown steadily over the last few years. In 2003, 71 per cent of students in year 11 are studying at least one VET course and 57 per cent of year 12 students are studying at least one VET course. Of the year 11 students, 24 of them are studying two VET courses and we have 11 studying three VET courses, and you met one of those students earlier. In year 12, nine are studying two VET courses and one is studying three. In addition to that, three students have undertaken a school based traineeship as part of their HSC studies. In terms of staff, we have 12 trained VET teachers, each with certificate IV workplace trainer and assessor qualifications, and we are able to deliver hospitality, information technology, construction, metals and engineering, primary industries and business services. One of these teachers was also trained in entertainment this year and we expect we may be able to form a class in year 11 next year.

We have chosen not to deliver retail at Wagga Wagga High School because of a lack of a suitable facility, and Judy Gissing alerted you to that in previous evidence. Students are able to access this course, along with tourism, at the Wagga campus of the Riverina Institute of TAFE, which is just across the road. It is very convenient. In the past, our students have also studied retail and business services at another high school in Wagga as part of their collegial mode of VET delivery, which we will talk about later. Students, particularly those in year 11, access non-framework courses, such as hairdressing, child studies and various forms of automotive, at the Wagga campus of the Riverina Institute of TAFE just across the road. The collegial mode of delivery that I mentioned before enables students from smaller schools—and no doubt you will hear some evidence from Brian at Lockhart—to access VET courses at a school in Wagga or at the Wagga campus of TAFE. It also allows small, non-viable classes to be rationalised into one delivery site. Wagga High has become, for example, the preferred site for the delivery of primary

industries due to the nature of our school farm and the availability of three trained teachers. As is the case with the other schools that are present here today, student work placement is coordinated through Wagga Wagga Compact, and you met Helen Renshaw from Wagga Wagga Compact just recently. That paints a bit of a picture of what VET is like here.

**Mr Leyshon**—I have similar numbers to the evidence that Bill just gave. In my year 11, I have 92 students out of 154 who are accessing a VET course and in year 12 it is 87 out of approximately 140 students. I also have students who come over to TAFE and access TAFE VET. There are small numbers in some of those courses, but the total is 56 students who actually access things through the TAFE as well. Unlike Wagga High School, Koorinal High School students in most cases only access one VET course. I have similar numbers of teachers who are trained to deliver courses. In terms of the collegiate, we offer our frameworks courses perhaps a little bit differently; we offer them from 1.30 to five o'clock on two afternoons a week so that our school is operating later in the day. That allows not only our students but also students from other schools who may wish to come on board to access VET at that time as well.

**Mr Feather**—In a similar way to Glyn and Bill, we have similar numbers. We have staff trained in most of the framework courses, with the exception of entertainment and business services. There is a very strong relationship between the schools in the Wagga district and the TAFE, and there is a lot of cooperation to provide access to the VET courses. We endeavour to allow each student access to at least one of the VET courses. We currently have 213 senior students and 61 per cent of those students access VET courses.

**Mr SAWFORD**—They are all accredited courses?

**Mr Feather**—Yes. In most cases it is one VET course. As a rule of thumb we have one VET course for each student, but if there is a definite career pathway then we certainly look at providing whatever access is necessary. One additional thing that I will add is that part of what we have here in Wagga is the collegial skills centre, which came from funding from ANTA. Koorinal has the retail centre; Mount Austin has the hospitality centre. Mount Erin has business services; Wagga Wagga Christian College has IT. Those are not too far off being operational at the moment, but we are still chasing additional funding to put equipment inside those so we can actually use them.

One of the other things we have looked at doing over the last couple of years—and it is starting to increase access-wise in our school—is where we have students who do not necessarily want a HSC but are not ready for the work force. They come back to school and we do individual career planning with the careers adviser. They may access up to five or six VET courses without doing the other HSC subjects. We assist them in transitioning into the work force by finding suitable work experience and then employment from that.

**Mr Buckley**—Lockhart is situated 65 kilometres west of Wagga Wagga. We are a K to 12 school. We have 53 full-time secondary students and 28 part-time secondary students. Our school offers two VET framework courses in the senior curriculum: primary industries and information technology. We have eight full-time teachers. Of those eight, two are trained in primary industries, one in information technology and one in business services—which the students do not study at our school. We offer information technology in the computer room and primary industries is taught using the resources of the agriculture department. Our school leases



three portions of land in Lockhart and has stock, plant and machinery on these blocks. We have nine full-time students completing their higher school certificate, two of these have opted to study primary industry and one of these—a girl—is currently completing a traineeship in primary industries on the family farm. All nine students have or are currently completing information technology courses for their higher school certificate.

We have widened our enrolments since the first higher school certificate class began in 1991 by attracting part-time mature age students and we have continued this with the introduction of VET courses. Currently we have 28 mature age part-time students enrolled in information technology, and in 2002 there were 25 such students. These people range in experience from retirees, unemployed people who are looking to upgrade their skills while seeking employment and wives of farmers to small business people who are self-employed and need to upgrade their skills so that their family businesses can become computerised with their record keeping. We have women who have completed their schooling before there were computers and need to improve their skills. We also have people who have just taken up the challenge of wanting to be able to use a computer. Many people see this as a must-do activity each week.

We have been able to block our times with primary industries, and students go out in a five-period block and visit local farms where they can look at competencies. They do not have to travel into Wagga or go to the North Wagga TAFE. We have had students who have travelled to Wagga TAFE to complete non-framework courses and also tourism, which can only be accessed at the Wagga TAFE. We have blocked the lines when these students would be at school doing another elective so that when they leave the school they are not missing out on current work. Because of this, the impact of VET on the school has been minimal, and we have used our own school for work placements for information technology as well as local businesses. For second placements, we have tended to use the Wagga Compact and this has been a very efficient and effective partnership.

**Mr Brabin**—Following on from yesterday's hearing—and I will not go over the same ground that Bruce presented to you yesterday—I will just make a couple of points from a district perspective and about the fact that the district office is the RTO for all of the school sites. I would like to make a couple of comments about that and the collegial model that has been referred to by the principals. As an RTO, we have a legal obligation to make sure that each of the sites are presenting in a way that satisfies the AQF qualifications. We also have an obligation, or it is an obligation that we have certainly encouraged, to support schools in the offering of VET in an equal partnership with other subjects. In some cases that causes some issues, which I would like to touch on now.

The collegial model that has been referred to is an opportunity to work not only between DET schools but also with TAFE in delivering both framework and non-framework courses at the most appropriate site. In some cases that may well be the school, and I heard reference to that earlier on in the hearing. We know that a lot of kids will do their VET courses if they are school based. Some do prefer to go to TAFE, and the principals can certainly talk at more length about that than I can. However, from an RTO point of view, we would like to think that all students have access to all of the frameworks as a minimum. Having said that, it is probably easier said than done, bearing in mind the distances that we need to travel—and you heard a fair bit about that yesterday at Junee when we were talking about some of the more isolated schools.

We have had a bit of mix and match over the past few years in trying to develop the access and equity issue. I think we have moved a little further in the last 18 months towards a collegial model. We are certainly sitting down with TAFE and the key players, especially in the Wagga end of our district, where we will be offering courses that are school based and/or at TAFE, because we would like to minimise the number of students that miss out.

Having said that, it does not minimise the problem we have in transporting students from the outlying areas and the cost of that is becoming a real issue. I think the philosophy of the committee that manages this area is that we may well have to bite the bullet and say, 'We cannot offer every framework to every child in every school. We will offer a selection on certain days and, in the end, the kids will have to make choices, just as they do with all the other subjects when they are put onto lines and put into the curriculum.' I think that is the way we are heading. Having said that, I am not suggesting for a moment that we are not trying to cater to the needs of students in all of our schools—we really have been trying to do that—but I think the reality is that it will not continue at the level it has in the past.

I would like to pick up on one of the issues that was raised yesterday by Rod, I think, about participation rates. I was interested to hear the figures that principals quoted to you this morning. I went back to the office and did a few calculations to give you the district percentages in a bit more detail than yesterday. Overall, in 2003, we have 61 per cent of students studying VET in school—that is the school delivered framework course—plus 23.5 per cent of our students accessing a TAFE course. There are about 15 per cent that are multiple entries, and I cannot give you a more precise figure than that; you heard this morning from Bill, Glyn and the other principals about those. They are not great in number, but it is about 15 per cent. So our take-up rate is about 70 per cent, which is very strong, as you alluded to yesterday.

The last thing is that I would like to table our annual district report. In that there is a comprehensive report on vocational education in 2002, and some of the facts and figures quoted yesterday are certainly involved in that. The breadth of area of support that we give to schools across the district is certainly highlighted in the report, and I am happy to table that for you.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Peter. I have a couple of questions in relation to the staffing situation. You obviously have a large number of staff between your schools who are doing VET in schools. Bill, I think you said that 12 staff were doing workplace certificate IV in workplace assessment. Were those staff qualified at that level before they came to your school, or were most of the qualifications obtained once they were at your school?

**Mr Rogers**—The vast majority of the staff have done the training since they have been at Wagga Wagga High School.

**CHAIR**—Have they done that through TAFE?

**Mr Rogers**—They have done it through a variety of means.

**Mr Brabin**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—What sort of assistance were they given by the department to do that training?

**Mr Brabin**—They are sponsored training positions. We have funding for them to retrain through the vocational education directorate. We have over a hundred VET teachers trained now in our schools, and they have all been upgraded to certificate IV. The allocation of those funds is determined by the management committee within each district, and there is a retraining program in place. Obviously we prioritise the needs of our schools for the following year, and we will put those teachers into those areas. I do not want to go on about it but one of the issues now is finding teachers to take up those positions, because of that burn-out factor that was brought to your attention yesterday.

**CHAIR**—Yes; I want to come to that in just a moment. I would like to remain on the training issue for a bit longer. How long is that training course? If you have someone who teaches, say, IT or home science, how long are they in the training program before they get a certificate IV in workplace assessment and can teach VET?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes, and where do they do it?

**Mr Brabin**—The principals might be better placed to answer that. It varies from area to area.

**Mr Feather**—A good deal of the initial training to deliver the VET course, the certificate II level, is done in Sydney by the VET directorate. If I am correct, it is a three- to five-day course, depending on what subject area you are in. Certificate IV is what we do through the local TAFE. The amount of time required to do that has been a bone of contention with the staff. In some cases they have felt they already have that experience and qualification and that doing it is an unnecessary workload.

**Mr SAWFORD**—How long does it take?

**Mr Feather**—I might be incorrect, but I think it is two days of coursework, one day where they assess a student in the workplace and then a day after that for writing up a report.

**CHAIR**—What quantum of industry experience is there in the certificate II or certificate IV areas?

**Mr Feather**—In terms of the actual delivery of the course?

**CHAIR**—No, in terms of teachers achieving that qualification. To get to certificate IV—to go through the whole process with, say, hospitality—how much time does a teacher need to have spent in an industry work situation getting industry experience?

**Mr Feather**—I think it varies from course to course. We have a couple of situations with teachers. For example, at Mount Austin High School we have two hospitality teachers who have a large amount of industry experience. One of them has worked in and managed restaurants in London and Europe that we could not even afford to get into, and has brought a wonderful depth of knowledge and experience to the school. The other fellow came from Scotland and has managed hotels and restaurants in Sydney. They have very strong industry experience. The only experience that people who were already full-time teachers have had is the Teachers in Business program, which I think might be only one or two days in the workplace.

**Mr Rogers**—It is a week in the workplace.

**CHAIR**—Therein lies the problem for industry confidence in the VET in Schools qualifications. We are not picking this up in this region, probably because your local employers have a close relationship with your schools, but in metropolitan areas we are getting the feedback that industry is somewhat unsure about the qualifications obtained in schools, partly because of the lack of workplace experience—industry currency—of the teachers. I think that is an issue.

Regarding the ‘burnout factor’, as you described it, Peter, you heard the comments yesterday—and we have had the same comments from staff again this morning—that the massive workload involved in coordination and support of students in work placements, and in the paperwork and accountability requirements and so on, is almost impossible for teachers to cope with. There seems to be some agreement that something like a 20 per cent reduction in the face-to-face teaching load is appropriate. Peter, would you support that general view?

**Mr Brabin**—I am sure that the principals would as well, as you heard yesterday. Burnout is a real issue. It is about the support necessary in delivering the course. If we keep coming back to the comparison with other mainstream courses—with other curriculum areas—it appears that there is not the extra workload for history, science and whatever. I am not trying to denigrate those subjects, but it is an inordinate amount of extra work. Teachers are aware of that. They see in the staffrooms that their colleagues are stressed. There is an added complexity to that for small schools—and I guess to some extent for larger schools—where you do not necessarily have a number of teachers trained in that area. If you are running a year 11 class and a year 12 class, that same teacher may well be taking both groups. Taking on two senior classes is a big burden for anyone, let alone a VET course. There is a multiplying factor there as well.

**Mr Leyshon**—I would also make the point that some of those teachers see themselves being bound into teaching nothing but VET, VET, VET. Many of these are some of the better teachers—they are head teachers and very senior teachers. They are bound to VET year after year, but I do not know that they particularly want to become specialists in VET. I think they have an interest in it and a determination to teach it well, but when a good part of their load is in VET all the time, they are not teaching kids in years seven, eight, nine and 10. They are starting to lose some of that contact. As a principal, I would like them to have the ability to move up and down through the curriculum and through years. I would like them to also have the opportunity to come out of VET, teach in other areas in their subject expertise, then move back into it, rather than just being the person that carries the load all the time.

**CHAIR**—That requires a greater percentage of your staff to have VET qualifications, doesn’t it?

**Mr Leyshon**—It does.

**CHAIR**—Again, that comes back to the workload issue and the lack of incentive for many teachers to be involved in that area.

**Mr Feather**—On that note, for teachers moving in and out of teaching VET there is the currency of qualifications. In this district we have a number of network meetings where VET

teachers in a particular area get together regularly to share resources and the knowledge base. If they were moving in and out, the currency of training—it is in big demand; there are a lot of things that they have to do in a year—just would not be there.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Gentlemen, congratulations on achieving the 60 to 70 per cent benchmark that we ought to achieve everywhere in Australia. That has obviously been a self-generation of this area in terms of your local administration at, say, Peter's level and in terms of principals and staff. In cognisance of that, I see no recognition of administration at a higher level showing any direction in VET. One of the things that we were shocked at last week, and even in previous inquiries in various states, is that the bureaucracy cannot articulate a rationale for technical training. We sat in a public hearing like this and asked them to do that and not one of them could. I see that as a problem. If you do not know where you are going—the direction from an administrative level—it is a significant problem. Accredited VET participation in New South Wales schools is about 35 per cent, I understand, with the aim of getting to 40 per cent. That is having access to one accredited VET unit. You are well above that figure.

You must be doing some things right. Perhaps you are assuming that they are not of great importance but they might be of significance to our committee. There was the Wagga Wagga Compact in 1991. So you have come in on the ground floor of the resurgence of VET, which was largely generated by you. How do you transfer that, with all the difficulties you mentioned, such as burnout and not enough non-contact time to attend to administration? How is it going to apply across New South Wales? What do you need to add for that to happen? It is not going to happen on goodwill, is it? How is it going to happen?

**Mr Buckley**—For us it has meant that teachers have seen the relevance of it and where it fits in with the students whom we are teaching. People are prepared to go away for a week; they have colleagues who will cover their classes. Our primary industries fellow went away for another week to show that he was up to speed with the competencies. It is also in the positive response that we have had from our students to the completion of the competencies and the way they have related to the courses. I am the first to acknowledge that, in a central school, you work differently from how you would work in a high school. We once looked at a work-value case and we found that in our normal responsibilities we did 171 things other than teach.

We have many students who will be the first in their families to complete an exiting credential. They see the relevance of what VET is allowing them to do. As I said, over the last couple of years every student in our school has done at least one VET course. That has brought a little refreshment into people's teaching loads. I acknowledge some of the things my colleagues have said. Someone said that it was 20 per cent of their teaching load but it was not 20 per cent of their workload. Somewhere down the track—and I am particularly concerned about the fellow who teaches information technology and is also a senior maths teacher and a head teacher—we will reach a point when we will have to say that enough is enough. I would like to see some acknowledgement of the need for relief or remuneration for people who are taking on VET. It cuts into a lot of your personal time outside of school time when you have to liaise with employers and look at what people are doing out in their work placements. For those of us doing primary industry, you become extremely conscious of OH&S issues. When you go to a farm and try to get a farmer to show a competency that you do not have the resources for and you are suddenly faced with an OH&S issue, you have to say, 'Thanks but no thanks,' and you have to go somewhere else. It all takes up time.

**Mr Leyshon**—It comes from an identity. Perhaps we are unique down this way in that there have always been strong ties. We see ourselves as an entity in this district, in this city and as part of what we would all know as Riverina. That brings a collegiality. Within this RTO if I make suggestions to others across the state you can see that there is leadership in the schools, and we have tried to increase the density of that leadership in relation to VET. In RTO meetings that I have been going to for years now I have increased the numbers who attend. I now bring a deputy and my VET coordinator and I notice that the others are starting to do that as well. Much to the chagrin of some we need bigger rooms because the numbers participating are increasing. When you do that, more people in the school have a handle on what is going on and they are a conduit for the issues that are coming up. That is where some of the strength lies. They are also able to offer support, and the support for VET teachers in the schools in Wagga is quite strong. We make sure that we release our teachers to those network meetings that Colin mentioned. We believe that it is vital as part of their training and development and part of the whole gamut of things with VET that they meet each other and have a handle on what is happening.

There is collegiality between the schools. While there is tension from time to time over decisions about timetabling and structures, there is a genuine willingness for us to say that we have something that is meeting the needs of a lot of kids in this city and its environs; we have gone this far so we had better not try to tear it apart. We need to maintain the structures we have, given that they are changing at the moment and that they will change over time. The collegiality is there. I believe that that brings a real identity. It brings schools closer together and TAFE closer together. The question is: what can we do to give kids offerings to the benefit of those kids?

**Mr SAWFORD**—How is that generated here? The Wagga Wagga Compact started in 1991. Did the principals do that? Who was responsible for generating it?

**Mr Leyshon**—I will hand over to an older principal.

**Mr Rogers**—I certainly was not here when the Wagga Compact started in 1991. It started with the then leading teacher at Wagga High School. Compacts had certainly been formed in other areas of the state and elsewhere in Australia, and Wagga chose to go down that path. Compact is heavily involved in finding work placements for a huge number of students here in Wagga, not just in the government high schools but in the non-government high schools as well. We just could not do it without them. I am sure you have found in other places that the whole notion of work placement is very problematic. In talking to colleagues in the city, particularly in Sydney, I know that some of the framework courses are simply not taught at schools because they cannot find work placements—information technology is one of those. There are students who are ideally suited to taking a VET course, a framework course, in IT but cannot do it because the work placements are not there. We have been fortunate so far in that the work placements have been able to be found, but no doubt—as Helen Renshaw from Compact said to you earlier—it is getting difficult as Wagga is growing and, indeed, as the VET numbers have grown as well. It is not just the government high schools; it is the non-government and Catholic schools as well.

You asked why it is that we are able to do this in this particular district. I think we have a strong record in our government schools of meeting the needs of our students. Let us face it: over the last 20 years the type of student who is going on to year 11 and 12 has certainly

changed. Brian alluded to that as well. We have many students—and you met some of them this morning and no doubt yesterday at Junee and at other places—who 20 years ago certainly would not have even contemplated going on to year 11 and 12. The change to the HSC in recent years has certainly brought about, to my mind, a real need for courses like these. With the so-called strengthening of the HSC, there are no longer English and mathematics courses that are suited to those students who are coming back in numbers. To be quite honest, some of these students would find it difficult to cope with doing six academic subjects in year 11. They just cannot do it. VET is a way out.

I heard the initial evidence of some of the students this morning. Someone was saying that it was to be a break from their academic work. It certainly is, and at the same time it provides them with some competencies, some skills, that they can take out into the work force. We have to be mindful in all of this that, although the majority of students who do the VET courses gain certificate I, not all of them gain certificate II. So their entry level into articulated courses with TAFE is quite low; the level of skills is not that great. What I am saying is that, although the courses are rigorous in their use of the competencies, in terms of the sophistication of the competencies they are not that high. But, as I said, we have a strong record of trying to meet the needs of the kids and we will continue to do so. However, goodwill sometimes runs a bit short, but at the moment it certainly has not here. I do not think we are struggling by any means; we are still doing all we possibly can to meet the needs of the kids.

**CHAIR**—Glyn, were you going to add something to that?

**Mr Leyshon**—I was listening to what Bill was saying and I am contemplating what happens at my place. My only other comment is that principals do a lot of balancing and juggling in schools, as you know, to keep it going. VET has driven that to another angle with the burn-out situation of teachers, but that has been going since 1991. Principals in this area have been going to these meetings on a regular basis during that time. The numbers have increased. The very fact that the numbers have increased to the levels that they have drives your responsibility as well, because you are sitting there and saying, ‘There are significant numbers of kids and teachers in my school who are doing this. I can’t drop off this and nor can I have my school drop out of this RTO, this collegiate. From my point of view, I need to know what Bill is doing at Koorimal, I need to know what Mount Austin is doing, and what the issues are for Brian and the guys as well.’ So I think there is a driver in there that gets its own momentum when you get it going.

**Mr Brabin**—I would like to try and pull some of those together very briefly. I think there are a number of issues that make this Wagga district quite unique. First and foremost is the leadership in the schools—and I am not saying that because they are sitting here. I know my pecking order, and I am obviously not at the top of it as I have the microphone last—

**Mr SAWFORD**—I think that is a very healthy sign!

**Mr Brabin**—I was just more patient. I think the leadership in the schools has driven the agenda and it is also being driven from an RTO point of view. That has added a new layer to the mix in terms of how the department sees VET at a local level. We have certainly taken that on board and we make no apologies for that. The district RTO focus is very important. I think we have a very supportive work force that does accept and is still accepting our students in work placement areas. I was interested to hear the point that Pat made earlier about government

departments taking up that challenge. That would certainly be an area we would be very supportive of. I know that DET certainly tries to do that but there are some big departments in Wagga that do not necessarily pull their weight.

The relationship with TAFE is very positive. I know that at times we have our moments about who should deliver what and who has the best facilities and all of those things but, as you have heard today and yesterday, our relationship with TAFE is very positive from the schools' point of view. Our meetings with TAFE are very productive; it is not an us and them mentality and wherever possible we try to accommodate both sides. TAFE are very positive about that as well. And to a lesser extent the non-govs, although as part of the mix they are certainly involved on occasion, and I think that is unique for Wagga.

From a schools point of view, schools are now catering better—as Glyn and Bill have alluded to—for the needs of their students. The very good point made is that if kids are taking it up in increasing numbers, which they are, then that in itself is an indicator. Schools cannot ignore that, and nor should they. And in fact they do not. We have often had the discussion in staff meetings that the VET agenda is the tail wagging the dog to some extent. I think we have passed that stage now and we are seeing it as an integral part of the curriculum offering to kids because it is relevant and—to pick up on the point that Bill made about the quality of our candidature in higher retention rates—kids are seeing the VET courses as a means to end. That end is, as you heard yesterday through some fantastic figures, kids picking up apprenticeships or traineeships or full-time employment at whatever level because they have been involved in VET courses. That is very real. The figures you heard yesterday are touched on in the report that I will leave with you. They would certainly be mirrored in the Wagga schools as well.

Schools want to offer as wide a curriculum offering as possible. I say 'as possible' because they are restricted in terms of their staffing and facilities, but if we can cater for the kids better then there is a social impact and a welfare impact when the kids are in school. The kids that come back now that would not have come back 15 or 20 years ago are catered for very well in our schools and, I believe, as well as anywhere else in the state—and I have seen a fair bit of the state. They are the things that I would say, to answer your question of half an hour ago, Rod, make this district unique. It is that total commitment to the VET agenda, and I think it is working well.

**Mr FARMER**—I would like to know what else you have in place. Say VET was to be dismantled—which obviously it is not—I want to know what else is in place in the schools as far as careers advice and the careers curriculum are concerned.

**Mr Buckley**—There has been a strong push for school-to-work plans, which are started with students as early as year 7 in our school. There is a growing emphasis for staff to have a strong emphasis across all the curriculum on relating what they are teaching to the world of work. It is not to change what they are doing so much as to change the emphasis slightly. If we did not teach primary industries, we would teach agriculture and possibly a bastardised form of the syllabus so that it would be more competency based. If information technology did not exist, we would probably create our own course.

**Mr FARMER**—So do you see there, without a shadow of a doubt, a need for a change in the curriculum that is more accommodating to the future life of students? The second part of that



question is that, as you have taken it right down to year 7, do you see that as a better progression as well to years 11 and 12?

**Mr Buckley**—Once they are in year 7, students start to get some reality about the curriculum and what they are doing and the relevance of it. So that in a subject like visual arts, where you have many competencies that you may relate to—such as being able to work as a team and problem solving, which are generic employer competencies—a teacher turning around and complimenting people on what they have done and also reporting on that to themselves, because they get their own reports, and to the parents is the sort of thing that we are developing with our years 7 to 10 reports. Some of the outcomes that are reported on are those generic competencies which all employers look for.

**Mr Feather**—One of the issues that we are currently dealing with is that, whereas in our day we had one career that we were trained for and we may have had one career change in our lifetime, they say now that most people look to having five or six different careers. I find that students in schools now have fewer ideas or goals of what they would like to be as they get older. School to Work is in place to address that issue. Previously we did some of our careers training with counselling in years 9 and 10, and they had work experience. Work experience has run out because we are saturated in work placements for years 11 and 12 with the VET courses. A challenge that is there for all of us is how we get that career direction goal setting in the students in terms of what their aspirations are. School to Work addresses that. Without VET in years 11 and 12, I think there would be a big gap there.

**Mr Rogers**—To follow up what Colin said about School to Work, certainly School to Work is particularly strong in this district. We have some excellent careers advisers. We have a strong push from district officers, as far as our District VET Consultant, Bruce Norton, is concerned. We have also got a School to Work consultant. So it is a major push in this district and it has been for a number of years. It has grown from the trial schools to all schools and, as Brian said, he has got it going back to year 7. We certainly have not got that here, but we are looking at years 9 and 10. But all students in years 9, 10, 11 and 12 will ultimately have their own School to Work plan. They have their own log books. As Brian indicated, the employment related skills are being emphasised and alluded to right across the RTOs, right across their subjects; so much so that these log books are filled out in all subjects, and that is certainly the aim. For instance, at Wagga Wagga High School, each faculty has a representative on a School to Work committee, and they go to and come back from those meeting with ideas as to how those things can be put in place in their own faculty.

In relation to your question from way back, Rod, the district model that we have, the emphasis that we have on meeting the needs of our students, has certainly come about, as Peter said, from the fact that the district office is the RTO. But it has also come about from the strong push from the DVET—the District VET Consultant—Bruce Norton, who has been employed at our district office since 1998. He helps to drive what is happening in the district. Perhaps other districts do not have someone of that calibre; I am not sure.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I suppose I should have asked this before but I forgot. For the last 140 years in technical training in Australia there seems to have been a dilemma and a different focus, depending on what decade you were in, about whether to meet the needs of industry or the needs of children. And then it fluctuates during depressions and times of high unemployment to the

needs of employment—you can almost get three responses. Is it correct to say that you have met the needs of students and you have got near enough an ideal benchmark? Or is it because you have met the needs of employment? June were arguing yesterday that the reason they got involved was they had an employment need. It was because of competition with Wagga in terms of getting their kids jobs. They were quite open about it; that is what they said. What is the push here? Is it the needs of kids—that is the way I read it—or is it the needs of industry?

**Mr Buckley**—I would say it is the needs of students.

**Mr SAWFORD**—If I could quickly cross to the others—we are running out of time—do you agree with that?

**Mr Rogers**—I would say students.

**Mr Leyshon**—It is students.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Was there ever a time in the last 12 years when the pressure of the needs of industry clouded the thing a bit?

**Mr Brabin**—I think the two are interrelated. Obviously the needs of students depend on the employment market. The kids see VET as a way to leapfrog towards, or as a stepping stone to, future employment as well as their interest areas. It is double sided; I do not think we can isolate one from the other. From a school's point of view, kids march with their feet. If we offer the subjects and the kids want to do them that is what we will go with, for whatever reasons. It is probably a combination of both.

**Mr Rogers**—That is why these particular framework subjects are offered. That is why there is a hospitality framework; that is why there is an IT course and that is why there is now an entertainment course. There is a need out there in the community for kids to be ready to go into those areas.

**Mr Buckley**—This is probably a water droplet in the Pacific Ocean, but one of the things that you were looking into was the retention rates for Indigenous students. We have had two Indigenous families in the school. They tend to move in and out; one family has been there for a long while. Family A had three students, none of whom went beyond year 10, who have left school. Family B has one student who has got to year 12, who has done a non-framework course in year 11 and has done a framework course through to year 12. I believe that is the only reason he has managed to stay at school. As I said, it is probably only one little droplet in the Pacific as far as your inquiry goes.

**CHAIR**—It is an important droplet though, Brian. It is an issue that we had wanted to pursue further but I am afraid that time has prevented us doing that. If you have any subsequent comments that you would like to make, for instance about VET and Indigenous students in your schools, you can send them to the secretariat. Even just dot points would be very helpful. Thank you very much for your time and congratulations on the fantastic work you are doing here. It has been a real eye-opener for us over the last couple of days. Keep up the great work.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 12.18 p.m.**