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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING
(SUBCOMMITTEE)

Reference: Vocational education in schools

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Tuesday, 2 September 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 Pearce

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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Subcommittee met at 10.46 a.m.

GIGLIOTTI, Ms Bernadette, Treasurer, Career Education Association of Victoria

RYAN, Ms Julie, President, Career Education Association of Victoria

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education in schools. I welcome representatives of the Career Education Association of Victoria. Thank you for your submission and for appearing this morning. I remind you, as a formality, that the proceedings in this committee are considered the same as proceedings in the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. I invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions.

Ms Ryan—The setting in which we have presented the submission as members of the Career Education Association of Victoria is that in most cases careers teachers in Victoria have taken on the role of VET in Schools coordinators. It is a kind of de facto relationship. When VET was first introduced, it was thrown in the careers basket, for good or for bad, so most of our members have taken on the role at some stage—and many continue to do so, although in some schools there will be a separate VET coordinator.

We represent 600 careers counsellors working in schools across the three sectors—Catholic, independent and state—so we believe that at the school sector level we have a fairly good overview of what is happening in terms of VET in schools and, in the wider context, vocational learning across the school system.

A lot of the coordination, implementation and energy behind introducing VET into schools has fallen on our members, who are generally single individuals in schools and often not very high in the pecking order. They are people who are implementing or have implemented significant change but who are not working at the administrative level within schools. That has been one of the elements that has created some barriers to the way that VET in schools has been taken up across the curriculum and in terms of parental acceptance.

We would like to address a range of issues—and I will hand over to Bernadette in a moment—but most of us would see vocational education as being much broader than just VET in schools. There is a perception in schools that VET is this separate and singular entity that somehow fixes a whole range of problems, mostly to do with young people who do not fit into the system generally, whereas my personal view—and that of many of my colleagues—is that VET is a curriculum offering within the framework of post-compulsory education. It is one element in broadening pathways and opportunities for young people and it should be seen in the context of the curriculum. Vocational learning is much broader and much wider than just VET in schools.

Ms Gigliotti—I will pick up on some points that Julie raised. In our submission I think we made a very succinct statement that I would like to go over. We stated:

In summary, our dilemma is precisely this. That the federal government and, to a lesser extent, other stakeholders have collapsed the whole field of *vocational learning* into the VET in schools basket.

That is particularly true of Victoria. We find that as careers teachers we are asked most of the time to deal with VET in schools as an adjunct to the curriculum. There are many schools in Victoria that have taken very bold steps towards embedding VET in their curricula—and have done that very successfully—but that is not the case in the majority of schools.

One of the dilemmas that we face is that VET in schools is seen as the answer to careers education and to vocational learning. It needs to be seen as part of the curriculum—part of the overall offerings of the school—and it needs to be looked at in the junior years. At the moment, we do not have any framework for vocational learning. We certainly have some information coming out of the department of education in regard to vocational learning, but it is just not part of a framework—and VET in Schools is certainly not the framework or vehicle for delivering vocational learning. It is, as we see it, part of the curriculum; VET needs to be recognised as one of the offerings.

There also needs to be some ownership by the departments. I certainly believe that in many of the Catholic and independent schools the departments themselves within schools or faculties do not own VET. It is an adjunct. It sits out there and it is an offering—or possibly even a marketing tool used by the schools to increase numbers and to maintain numbers at the senior level—and it can suffer as a result. As Julie mentioned, it is something to offer those students that do not quite fit the mainstream—an alternative program. The program can suffer from that perception in schools of what VET is and what it is offering to young people.

VET also needs to have its own independent coordination, and it needs to have time and resources tagged for that purpose. As Julie mentioned, many of our colleagues are both careers coordinators and VET coordinators, with very limited time given over to VET. The careers areas in secondary schools are huge. They are far bigger than one person, yet in most schools you will find only one careers counsellor, who deals with not only the careers needs of young people but VET needs, work placement and work experience, while also teaching as part of their allotment. That is not an uncommon role for many of our members. That is really what they do.

You can see how VET can be relegated to the backburner quite easily: you have everything else happening—you have subject selection, you have teaching, you have careers pathways, you have work experience and then, superimposed on top of that, you have the type of coordination that VET requires. It is a huge ask. Many schools only stick their toes in the water of VET programs. Some schools that have taken up the challenge of VET programming do it very well. They cluster. The college where I work has become part of a cluster of 21 schools, which is a way of trying to broaden the VET options for students at our school. That is certainly a step in the right direction.

There are three major points that I would like us to consider. The first is that we need to see that VET in Schools is a very positive step in the right direction for young people. VET in Schools needs to stay, to become part of the curriculum and to broaden. In fact, we need to start looking at VET offerings lower down in the school system, trying to build the framework of a coordinated approach to careers, to vocational learning and to VET. We need to start much lower down in our school system. We are concentrating all our efforts at the post-secondary level, and very little is happening at that year 7 to year 10 level. We need to make sure that we have some sort of a framework for careers and for vocational learning within that careers framework.

The second thing we need to consider is resourcing. A large barrier to many schools taking up the VET offering is that it is not correctly resourced. Because it is sitting out there as an adjunct to the curriculum, schools are not putting in the resources. Schools are not getting sufficient funding from the federal and state governments to maintain the interest in VET and to push it forward. The numbers in VET double every year. The more programs that we introduce—and the more linking that we do with industry—the more interest we have from our students, but we do not have adequate resourcing to maintain that focus.

The third point I would like to raise relates to the perception of VET in Schools. We still have a long way to go to convince our administrators—certainly the principal class and our curriculum coordinators—that embedding VET into our curriculum and simply making it part of what we offer as a comprehensive curriculum to our students is very important. We have not got there yet, and I think there is still a lot of work needed in that field. Certainly, as an association, we run some professional development for our members and we target curriculum coordinators, but I think a lot more needs to happen in that area.

The other area that requires a fair bit of work in relation to the perception of VET is with parents. I come from a private school, and we have a big challenge there to try and get parents to see the positive steps in taking a VET program within a VCE program. We have a long way to go still with the parents.

The last point I want to make is that our funding model is grossly inadequate and has not really changed over the last eight years. Certainly, we are finding in the Catholic sector and in the independent sector that our numbers are tripling every year and with the amount of money we are receiving we cannot sustain the type of program we would like to run, and the parents are picking up the shortfall. The long and the short of it, in the private system, is that it is the parents who are picking up the shortfall—or the programs just do not run.

I will give you an example. Participating in a program to do a Certificate I in engineering costs a year 11 student \$1,000 a year, over and above the funding that is attracted. So there is a real problem there. If that student was to leave school and do the Certificate I in engineering, it would cost him \$400, so there is an issue with funding. The model that we are using at the moment is inadequate.

Ms Ryan—In conclusion, I would like to say that from our perspective it is a positive to have the link between vocational education and training courses and higher school certificates like the VCE. It is a positive to broaden options for young people—and certainly careers teachers have been the ones who have pushed the broadening of these options in schools, but it has been very difficult without whole school support in most cases. So whether the programs have become embedded in curriculum in particular schools has often depended upon the proactivity and the personality of the individual. That is not good enough in the long run. We need a much wider framework and a much wider understanding and acceptance.

CHAIR—Thank you for those comments. In your submission, you referred to the downgrading of careers guidance that has occurred as a result of VET—that VET seems to have taken over there. Was careers guidance, in your view, adequate before the growth in VET?

Ms Ryan—No—that is the simple answer. In Victoria, it is not mandated that there be careers positions in schools. Schools make that decision from their global budget. Most schools will have someone in a careers position, but most schools in Victoria—certainly those in the state system—will have someone who is not full time. So it was not adequate before and once the VET coordination was thrown into the mix it became less adequate—anyone who has done the coordination between TAFE colleges or set up schools as an RTO will know that it is a huge job. There are some schools in my region where I know for a fact that the position is called ‘careers’ but it is VET coordination and no careers counselling goes on, because it is not possible in the time.

CHAIR—So that has reduced the amount of actual careers counselling that does—

Ms Gigliotti—Yes.

Ms Ryan—Yes. I know of actual examples where no careers counselling exists.

CHAIR—The Victorian department of education submission says that in most schools there is a load varying roughly between 0.2 and 0.8 of a teacher allocated to careers.

Ms Ryan—Yes.

CHAIR—But you are saying that most of that time would be spent in VET coordination rather than—

Ms Ryan—If they are also the VET coordinator. There are also, of course, MIPs—Managed Individual Pathways—in Victoria. That is another program that falls in the careers basket. It falls quite neatly for careers teachers, because it is what they were doing, but it is another government initiative that is being delivered through the careers person in the school.

CHAIR—The transition coordinators are in there as well. Do they effectively provide constructive careers counselling and advice for students?

Ms Ryan—The MIPs coordinator will be the careers coordinator in many schools—not in all schools, but—

CHAIR—But is there a division of focus then?

Ms Ryan—It is very hard to divide the time. You usually work on the most important thing at the moment, and the VET coordination often will have time lines. You will have issues about tracking students who are going outside the school to access TAFE, for example. Those sorts of day-to-day tasks will have to take precedence, because the program will not run unless you have done all the paperwork and unless you have done all the coordination with all the people in the loop. So then the careers counselling, which is not so timely in terms of the way it needs to be delivered, in many cases will take that back focus.

CHAIR—How do you respond to the department’s statement that a lot of careers advice is covered in some of the units in the SOSE syllabus?

Ms Ryan—I believe that does not happen.

Ms Gigliotti—It is certainly not happening in the Catholic education area or in the independent sector. There are very few schools that have careers education programs targeted at the correct time. They may have a unit within SOSE, as you mentioned, but even that is inadequate, because many schools split their SOSE units. You will have some students that have SOSE in the first semester, where you have all the subject selection and counselling happening, and some students who do not get that unit until the second semester and they have already picked their subjects. So it is inadequate.

Ms Ryan—Some work education is part of the learning outcomes in the SOSE CSF. It exists there, but it is very small. What happens is that most SOSE teachers are history trained, I believe, in Victoria. Some have geography training, although not many. Very few of them have any careers or work education experience. Most people will teach to their area of interest and expertise, so the reality is that a little bit will be done in year 10—around the work education program often—and mostly that is about it.

CHAIR—What would you recommend as a minimum in schools, both in terms of the careers counsellor's role—careers education—and the VET coordinator? Are you suggesting the two roles cannot be intertwined—they should be separate people—and, if so, what percentage of the load should they take?

Ms Ryan—Because of the view that we have expressed that VET is curriculum, I believe VET sits with curriculum. It is one of the curriculum offerings. It does take a lot more coordination than just delivering physics, maths and history, but it belongs with the person who does the VCE curriculum coordination. So I would see a VET coordinator as a separate person or maybe someone who has some connection with curriculum management. Careers ought to be separate, but obviously those people would be most effective if they worked as part of a team. As an organisation, we would like to see one full-time careers counsellor in each school. I have 600 VCE students, for example, and I teach—although I am lucky in that my teaching load is only 0.2. It is impossible to see every young person.

CHAIR—Is it realistic to have one full-time teacher, in terms of budget?

Ms Gigliotti—Yes. In a number of independent schools there is one full-time careers counsellor, and those schools work most effectively.

CHAIR—And that person counsels, as well as teaching some units in careers awareness?

Ms Gigliotti—That is correct.

Ms Ryan—In New South Wales, for example, there is one designated full-time careers counsellor in every school.

Ms Gigliotti—They actually have a framework for careers.

Ms Ryan—They have managed to do it within their budget, so it is certainly possible.

Ms Gigliotti—They also have a framework for careers education. Within that framework, they have vocational learning units. They also have units that look at VET—they look at industry and at employability skills. It is a very well-defined framework for careers education, and it is mandated, which means that every student is going to have access to it at the crucial levels of year 9 and year 10, rather than at the post-compulsory level.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr PEARCE—Thank you for coming today and talking with us. Is the Career Education Association funded by its 600 members through their membership on an annual basis?

Ms Ryan—And partly through the Department of Education and Training.

Mr PEARCE—The state department?

Ms Ryan—Yes. We have an executive officer and about a third of her wage—I think somewhere between \$20,000 and \$25,000—is a grant that is given to us, as other subject associations are given grants. The rest of her wage and the wage of the administrative assistant are paid from subscriptions.

Mr PEARCE—I want to talk about the perception of VET. You touched on that issue, and it is one that we have been finding right throughout Australia as we have been chatting to people about vocational education. You mentioned that there is a long way to go still in the various sectors—with the principals of schools, the administrators and also the parents.

Ms Ryan—Yes.

Mr PEARCE—At the end of the day, we are a committee that has to come up with a report with a series of recommendations. Are there any tangible recommendations or ideas that you would like to put forward today about how that perception could be overturned?

Ms Ryan—I think in Victoria we have partly worked towards it through curriculum, by having VET recognised—with equal status with other VCE subjects in year 12.

Mr PEARCE—Are you saying it should be like that?

Ms Ryan—This is what is happening. It is evolving at the moment, and I know this is not the case in every state. It has certainly been a positive in terms of counselling young people and having parents accept that young people do a VET in Schools study, because in many cases they are also now assessed in line with other VCE subjects so they can be counted as part of the ENTER directly. That is relatively new and still taking time to have its impact, but I think that is the way you have to go. You have to put VET into the structures that are already there, to create that level of acceptance. That is certainly one thing.

Mr PEARCE—Just so I am clear on that, are you saying that has happened in Victoria?

Ms Ryan—That has happened in Victoria, yes.

Mr PEARCE—But you still have the perception issue in Victoria.

Ms Gigliotti—We do have that. A lot of parents may feel that VET is something that the student will do if they are not successful in their academic studies.

Mr PEARCE—That is the crux of the matter, isn't it?

Ms Gigliotti—Yes. We also still have an issue with the universities—and the TAFE colleges themselves—recognising the VET certificates as gaining extra standing. Once they are applying for their particular courses, students still have to go through an RPL process to have their certificates recognised by the TAFE organisations, and I do not think any of the universities recognise the TAFE courses at all.

Mr PEARCE—What do you think could be done in terms of trying to overcome that problem, particularly in relation to tertiary institutions? What do you think governments could do?

Ms Ryan—That is a really difficult question. At the grassroots level, anything that is mandated for schools will suddenly become important. If it is in global budgets and if it has outcomes that need to be addressed in order to get money, then things start to happen. Certainly, the problem at the moment is that schools need to fund VET in Schools through parents paying or by taking money out of their own global budget. If we take my school as an example, that is very difficult. The decision has been made not to subsidise the VET programs out of the global budget, because it is needed for other things. I know the MIP—Managed Individual Pathways—program has had a very good uptake, partly because there were separate cash resources given to schools to implement that program.

Mr PEARCE—Ms Ryan, is it just a matter of the almighty dollar, do you think?

Ms Ryan—Schools are very strapped for cash. There is money needed in many directions, and I do not think that is a completely cynical way of looking at it. It is a reality that if young people are being charged \$9.50 per contact hour to do a TAFE course at the local TAFE college and the funding from the state department is about \$4.50 an hour—and an average VET in Schools course for one year that equates to units 1 and 2 in the VCE is 175 hours—that is still an awful lot of money per student to get that program happening in your school. You will pass it onto parents or you will subsidise. Parents in many sectors cannot afford to have their children choose a VET subject as part of their VCE. Resourcing is at the bottom of most of these decisions. It would be the single most important thing that would make VET on a parallel with other subjects. It is an equity issue, partly.

Ms Gigliotti—That is right.

Mr PEARCE—That would help at the grassroots level, but you would probably still have universities and TAFEs thinking to themselves, 'These are second-rate students.'

Ms Gigliotti—Can I make a point here? We have a system in Victoria where the universities, when they are selecting students, certainly select on the ENTER. If they have two students on

the same ENTER, they may go back and look at middle band bonuses. I am sure you are familiar with that.

Mr PEARCE—Yes.

Ms Gigliotti—Nowhere is there a university offering middle band bonuses for VET courses. When I raised that at Deakin University for their sports and recreation course—why can't they also offer middle band bonuses to certificate II in sport and recreation, along with physical education, information technology and everything else—I found that they are not even talking about it. There is no discussion happening. Certainly, there is room there for the universities and the TAFE colleges to see for themselves that these certificates are of value and they are at the same level as the VCE subjects. Therefore, why give preference in something like the middle band to only the VCE subjects and completely ignore the VET studies?

That is happening in both sectors. It is happening at the university level and it is happening at the TAFE level. They are not even applying middle band bonuses for VET certificates—and there are 32 of them—when they are selecting their students. I think that is a bit of travesty. They should be at least having that discussion, and that can be done from the government level. At least have that discussion. If we are serious about these certificates adding value and improving employability skills for our young people, why aren't we putting them on a par with the academic studies?

Mr PEARCE—What about the parents? I use the words 'education program', but is there a process that needs to be followed to better inform parents about the benefits? I think you alluded to it. Not every student is going to be a rocket scientist.

Ms Gigliotti—That is correct.

Mr PEARCE—Is there work that needs to be done about informing the parents of the real benefits of the VET program?

Ms Gigliotti—Most schools with a VET coordinator would have that discussion with parents. It is seeing the outcomes and bringing back the students that have been successful in their VET programs—and maybe have even gone through to universities, including their VET programs as part of their program. That is really the most impact that we will have with parents.

Mr PEARCE—Some sort of student mentor program—

Ms Gigliotti—Exactly right.

Mr PEARCE—where students that have gone through it—have gone out and done well—are brought back into the classroom to talk to students about their experiences.

Ms Gigliotti—Yes, or at the information evenings when the parents are there. Having industry on board at the parent information evenings is important as well. The LLEN that is being developed in Victoria now is going to assist us there. They are certainly talking about having education programs for parents in regard to VET. Personally, I would like to say that I think that

TAFE is still seen as a poor second cousin to university. I do not think people understand that they are very different systems.

In my role as a careers counsellor at the VCE information evenings, I make the point that they are completely separate systems and that we need to educate parents that the railroad just to university is not for everybody. The systems themselves are different, and there should be pathways across. We have the AQF. We still have not been able to get across to parents that a student can start in the TAFE system, with its benefits, and then move quite comfortably across to the university level, when they are ready. I am not sure that we have done that very well in past years.

Mr PEARCE—You started off by saying that the reality is that in a lot of schools in Victoria the careers counsellor has been burdened with the VET responsibility as well. In your experience and the experience of your members, what sort of training and professional development is offered to careers counsellors? VET is one of those things which is very industry based, and therefore it is changing quite a lot et cetera. What sorts of suggestions or recommendations or views do you have about that?

Ms Ryan—We would obviously like some professional development. There is no professional development for careers counsellors or VET coordinators in any official sense.

Mr PEARCE—Is that right?

Ms Ryan—The CEAV provides the only training for teachers who have taken on the careers counselling role. We run a 2½-day new careers coordinators conference in February each year.

Mr PEARCE—So the department does not offer any programs?

Ms Ryan—The department offers no careers counselling programs. But the department does offer what I would call ‘briefings’. When there are changes in policy or arrangements to do with VET in Schools, there will be regional briefings, and VET coordinators and/or careers teachers—whoever is in the role—will attend those briefings. In the early days when VET was changing every few weeks while it was developing there were a lot of those sorts of information sessions, so we certainly were given information. How you then dealt with that information and how it was then introduced at the school level was then left up to individual schools.

Ms Gigliotti—We did have a program in the early days in 1994-95, where teachers or new VET coordinators going into that role could do a 10-day professional development program. At the end of it, they received some credit into a masters degree in a particular field. That has fallen by the wayside and is no longer available, and there has never been a careers program like that in the last 10 years. The only professional development that we have available is this 2½-day program at the beginning of the year for new careers teachers.

Ms Ryan—That we run ourselves.

Ms Gigliotti—That we run ourselves.

Mr PEARCE—Is there any evidence that the students themselves have a lower perception of VET because it is somewhat stuck on the end of the careers adviser's role and not given a dedicated focus?

Ms Ryan—One of the big problems is that we all, I think, have a tendency to forget that VET is equally applicable to any student across the spectrum. It is very easy to see the VET in Schools program as the answer to the troubled young person or the young person who does not want to be at school or the young person who is good with their hands.

Ms Gigliotti—I agree.

Ms Ryan—I think in schools that attitude or understanding still exists fairly strongly—that the physics and history teachers are delivering the academic things and the office administration teacher, the furnishing teacher and the certificate 3 in IT networking teacher are delivering those other things for those other kids. That is the perception that needs to change. The schools are as bad at that as anybody in many ways.

Ms Gigliotti—I was at a school that had an intake of 12 VET students. Within three years that increased to nearly 250, so the students themselves are the best advertisements for VET programs and why other students should take them. I think if we can tap into that and deliver it in a similar way to the rest of our academic community and colleagues the benefits will far outweigh the obstacles that are there at the moment.

Ms Ryan—And we need to see it as a genuine choice for all students. As an example, I had two students last year who applied for KPMG cadetships—KPMG is one of the big five accounting firms, and those cadetships are very difficult to get. Those girls, who are twin sisters, had both done certificate II in office administration. When they went for their first interview, they were successful. In the second interview, they were asked to do some tasks, one of which involved sending an email. Many of the other young people who had gone for that interview from other schools—often schools in the private sector—came out of their interviews and said, 'I didn't know what to do.' My students said, 'We did certificate II in office administration—along with accounting, economics, maths and English—and we are so glad that we did. We believe that's partly the reason we ended up getting the cadetship.' Those are the sorts of stories that need to come out.

CHAIR—Regarding the other aspect of training for VET teachers and careers advice—the pre-service training—you suggest in your submission that there should be an inclusion of a VET awareness program in undergraduate courses.

Ms Gigliotti—Yes.

CHAIR—What about training for careers advice, though? What would you recommend there? Should there be a specialist careers advisers course or a couple of units that all pre-service—particularly secondary—teachers do as part of their undergraduate training? What do you think would be the most workable model?

Ms Ryan—We have discussed this at length as an association. There is no clear direction, except that there needs to be access to some training. There needs to be a qualification that

people need to gain in order to work as careers counsellors in schools. Too often people are tapped on the shoulder because they have a gap in their allotment and two extra periods that need to be filled, and they are asked to do careers. It seems to us that a certain amount of experience is helpful in taking on careers counselling. Many of our members would say that a postgraduate qualification in many cases would be more useful than just a couple of units in a basic education degree, but we would be very happy to see anything that gave some direction.

CHAIR—Yes. Given the tap on the shoulder phenomenon—and that is likely to continue, given timetable restraints and contingencies in schools—wouldn't a compulsory unit for all secondary teachers ensure that those who were tapped on the shoulder would at least have a good place where they could start?

Ms Gigliotti—That is right. It would also encourage many of our new, up-and-coming graduates to take careers seriously—to see that it is a valuable career path for them. We do not have that yet. The average age of our members is 45 and rising. It is interesting that at the beginning of every year we have about 80 new careers counsellors coming along to our New Careers Teachers Conference. The turnover is very high, so we need to make some changes to try and get people to see that it is really a valid pathway within a school.

Ms Ryan—I would also like to add that there needs to be some ongoing access to professional development, because, as you know, having looked at what is happening in careers, vocational education and VET, it is a changing world. You might do something in the second year of your degree, but by the time you are working in the sector, three, four or six years later, you may not be up to speed with the latest developments.

CHAIR—Is it unrealistic to expect that we could get to the point where we would be training career advice specialists—people who would do one major that they would teach but who would have a significant part of their course focused on career advice, so that when they came into the schools—

Ms Ryan—I do not think that is at all unrealistic.

Ms Gigliotti—That would be very useful for us, along with some psychology.

CHAIR—But that would require, of course, an agreement on the school's side to allocate a full-time load to a careers person?

Ms Ryan—Yes.

Ms Gigliotti—It has to work the other way as well. I was in a school of 1,500 students and the allocation was one person full time. That was unusual, and still that is insufficient. It is a numbers game and it is just huge at the moment. Julie has 600, I have in my senior levels 900 students. So there is one careers counsellor for those 900—and I am not full-time in that role.

CHAIR—I think, Bernadette, you mentioned that TAFE charges \$9.50 per hour and schools are subsidised \$4.50.

Ms Gigliotti—In the state sector. In the Catholic sector, it is lower again.

CHAIR—You pay the whole \$9.50?

Ms Gigliotti—No, it is a banded system. There is approximately \$1 million available for all VET students in Victoria and the Catholic system allocates it.

CHAIR—The schools receive a subsidy?

Ms Gigliotti—They receive a subsidy per certificate. Some certificates are not funded at all.

CHAIR—How big a barrier is that charge to preventing students in schools taking up a VET pathway via TAFE?

Ms Gigliotti—In Catholic schools, if a student presents and they cannot afford it, the school covers it. Pastorally, we have a duty of care to our students. If a student cannot afford it the school finds the money from somewhere, but it is a big barrier for a lot of students, yes. For example, in something like hospitality, where the charge would be \$600 per year, and then on top of that you might have a uniform charge or a knives charge or a materials cost charge, it can get close to \$900. It is totally prohibitive for some students.

CHAIR—Is that a factor within the Catholic sector, for instance, that encourages schools to duplicate what is already happening at TAFE? If you did not have that cost barrier there, would schools be more inclined to plug into TAFE, rather than running parallel courses themselves?

Ms Gigliotti—Yes.

CHAIR—I am afraid the time has gone. Thank you very much. That has been most helpful.

Ms Ryan—Thank you.

Ms Gigliotti—Thank you for the time and the opportunity to have a say. It is much appreciated.

[11.27 a.m.]

DALTON, Ms Jennifer, Committee Member, Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (SGRLLEN)

HENRY, Associate Professor John, Director, Research Institute for Professional and Vocational Education and Training and Course Coordinator, Master of Professional Education and Training, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

CHAIR—Welcome this morning. Thank you for your submission and for appearing before the subcommittee this morning. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Dalton—Yes. I work at Deakin University, and I am appearing as a representative of the Smart Geelong LLEN, because I am a member and there was nobody else who could come, because they are very busy with a strategic planning day. I do not claim to be an expert on the LLEN, but I am a member of the LLEN.

CHAIR—Thank you. I invite you then to make some introductory comments, if you would like to do that, and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

Prof. Henry—In my introductory comments, I will be referring to the written submission that was tendered in September last year. The points I want to make relate to a conclusion that came out of the Eldridge report 2001. In that report reference was made to the need for a paradigm shift in the institutional relationships and organisational arrangements at the level of local schools and their interactions with local communities. We are of the view that that is a core issue when looking at vocational learning and expanding vocational learning within secondary schools.

The bulk of the submission that the faculty put forward elaborates on that core issue. For example, under the first term of reference we see vocational education in schools as an innovation and as a departure from long-established program delivery. For this reason, it is proving difficult for schools to accommodate vocational learning easily within their institutional structures and within the existing institutional culture of secondary schools. That then raises a whole list of subsequent issues around institutional change to accommodate an expanding need for vocational learning—particularly in the post-compulsory years of school—within our contemporary society.

The challenge for secondary schools is maintaining their VET in Schools learning programs as high quality educational options for a wide range of young people, without those programs becoming pigeonholed as some sort of remedial option for young people and therefore seen strictly as alternatives to other established, more ‘academically oriented’ programs. This has implications for teachers’ professional development and for the teaching profession. We see that the direction required here for the profession goes beyond school based professional activity, but we need to think about teachers developing their professional capacities beyond schools themselves, establishing networks and relationships with other educators and trainers, with community service personnel and, importantly, with employers beyond the typical boundaries of the school teaching profession as it exists today.

We see some examples within Victoria of schools—and teachers in those schools—moving progressively to embrace a wider and more complex world of community and work within their teaching, but we see that the threat, for want of a better word, to vocational learning is that the existing established way of being a teacher and of operating as a secondary teacher in schools can operate on vocational learning programs in such a way that they become somewhat diminished as quality curricula and become moulded into forms that are more easily accommodated within the existing culture of schools, without necessarily being catalysts for change.

The introduction in Victoria of a Vocational Education and Training in Schools curriculum and the way that that got accommodated into the senior school certificates provides a strong example of that—and I think you will find the same thing in states other than Victoria. In Victoria, VET in VCE actually changed the vocational learning experience from what seemed to be the original intent, so that the programs themselves became much more academically oriented and less about preparing young people for employment or for a pathway into the tertiary TAFE vocational education and training sector. They became more bookish in the form of experience that students had, and there was a diminishing of the work placement experiences and the sorts of activities that would prepare young people for the world of work. That is an example of how, over the past five years or so, not only in Victoria but elsewhere, VET in Schools programs have become shaped to fit the school culture and not the reverse—the vocational education and training programs, in other words, acting as a catalyst for substantial transformation.

In the submission that was put forward by the faculty, we noted five critical development needs. They are listed there. I have essentially talked to those. The other point I would like to make is to do with teacher education itself. I work in a teacher education faculty. I put it to you that at the university level there are real difficulties in accommodating the necessary changes. So I am not presenting a rosy picture here. The same issues that I raised about transformation in secondary schools could apply equally forcefully to transformation of faculties of education within universities. The established patterns for preparing secondary teachers through pre-service programs are set in an image of a secondary teacher that existed back in the sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties. Where faculties of education are employing academics who have a long history in the field, their experience has been shaped by the previous regime in secondary schools. So there is a challenge that needs to be met by universities in relation to the preparation of teachers, and I am happy to talk about how we are trying to do that within my own university.

The second reference is:

The differences between school-based and other vocational education programs and the resulting qualifications, and the pattern acceptance of school-based programs.

The point I want to make in relation to that reference is that, from the work that we have been doing, the key issue is the quality of the structured workplace experience and how that is recognised by the potential employers of the young people coming out of VET in Schools programs. Once again, that is a key issue for schools attempting to accommodate high quality vocational learning programs. Building in structured workplace experiences of appropriate intensity puts the school organisational structure under some stress, and the ever present power of the timetable operates to make it difficult for schools to accommodate the quality workplace

experiences that an employer would expect from a young person coming out with a vocational learning qualification.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms Dalton—From the point of view of the LLEN, teacher training is a major issue as well. The LLEN has been looking at ways of improving teacher experience of industry in order to try and break down the sense that, ‘It is out there and not part of our experience.’ The LLEN has looked at the possibility of short-term TRIP programs, where teachers might go out to industry for three or four weeks and become part of that industry. There are arrangements in place to try and organise that.

They held a very successful manufacturing day last year, where teachers were able to go around some of the industries in Geelong and see what it was like to work in an industry. They were trying to build the picture that industry is not just dirty work—that there are a lot of other things that can happen in industry. Until the teachers in the schools get a sense of what it is like out there in the workplace, they are not going to be able to pass that on to the students, and you are left with the impression that doing VET or getting a job is second rate compared with going to a university. The LLEN is working in that area.

The LLEN has a VET working party as part of its organisation. We at Deakin are very much a part of an initiative called the Education and Training Partnership with Industry, which has involved funding a number of pilot projects—trying to build connections between local industries and schools. We are learning a lot from that. It has not been wonderfully successful at this stage, but we are learning from it, and it is our job to collect these experiences and draw from them, to find out what we need to do.

Difficulties in communication occur between industries and schools—difficulties for industry people in getting through to teachers in schools. The teachers are so busy all the time and so people cannot easily ring up a school and get to talk to who they want to. There are difficulties in getting students who can go out and have industry experience. Even though we have one particular industry that is really keen to offer places to students to try and develop employability skills, that communication—the arrangement, the organisation and even the understanding and trust—between schools and industry can take a while to build up.

There are a lot of industry-school connections in our area in relation to work experience, which is the one- or two-week placement in year 10. There are also about 400 placements a year, I think, for VET in Schools students. But now we are needing to expand it further for VCAL, which I presume somebody has already talked about. That requires more work placements, and it is quite tricky for employers to understand what the difference is between work experience, structured work placement and school based apprenticeships. They are some of the areas that the LLEN is working in, to try and improve the understanding of what is happening with VET and VCAL and industry in order to build those partnerships. Another major area that the LLEN is looking at as well is that of employability skills.

CHAIR—Thank you. There are a lot of issues we could take up there. John, you mentioned earlier that you think that the incorporation of VET in the VCE has somewhat compromised the original aims of VET and made it more bookish and so on. Would that be partly addressed if

there were a mandated structured workplace learning component of VET courses? I understand in Victoria it is not compulsory.

Prof. Henry—That is right.

CHAIR—Do you think that is a way ahead that might help achieve both aims?

Prof. Henry—I think it is a way ahead. We have been involved in a number of research projects and did the evaluation of the pilot VCAL in Victoria last year. We were commissioned by the Victorian Qualifications Authority to do that evaluation. This year we are doing further evaluations of additional pilot programs that the VQA has set up in Victoria. We have also completed a small research project in Geelong for the Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council, which was set up under the ECEF funding to coordinate work experience and work placements for VET in Schools students in the Geelong region. Jenny talked about the partnership project that we are involved in with the LLEN.

On the structured work placement project that we did for GRVEC—that is, the Geelong Regional Vocational Education Council—we looked specifically at the effects of including or not including work placement in VET in Schools. We looked at the influence it had on the students' experience of VET and on the pathways that students took beyond school. We found that the work placement experience was very significant in terms of how the students responded to their vocational learning programs—how important they saw it as being and how worthwhile for them and for meeting their needs at that point in their lives. We also found that when we talked to students who had left school and gone into further study or employment the work placement was a significant experience for them.

We are doing further analysis on this at the moment, but what surprised me out of that data was that the work placement did not necessarily need to be all that long. Just having it there, having the students being able to move out from school to a work experience—to a work site—where they interacted with other workers, who were adults other than teachers, in a learning experience had a significant effect on them.

CHAIR—Do you think the rapid growth in the number of students undertaking VET courses makes it sustainable to have compulsory structured workplace learning? Do you think that in conjunction with a LLEN, for example, we could generate enough interest from employers to take on the growing number of students doing VET?

Ms Dalton—That is the challenge. Without it, VET can be a very half-baked sort of arrangement. It is not easy. The experience we are having is that the communication issues are fundamental and are going to take time. But we have to start somewhere. Making it not compulsory because it is too difficult is not ultimately going to help anyone. It will diminish the credibility of the school based VET certificate with employers. A lack of work placement also detracts from the program's credibility among the students themselves. As John said, it just becomes another school subject.

Prof. Henry—The LLEN project—that partnership project that we are involved with—has within it a subproject if you like. That involves working with the Geelong Business Network on this very issue, looking at ways of informing employers about what is coming over the horizon.

It is building an information network with employers and at the same time informing employers about the obligations they enter into in making their premises available for extended work placements. Under VCAL in Victoria, for example, that is where the pressure is really going to hit, because the VCAL programs are much more flexible than VET in VCE. There is a greater component of vocational learning built into VCAL, and there is the opportunity for a whole range of course options within VCAL—one being school based new apprenticeships, another being one or two days of extended structured work placements. That puts a lot of pressure on the local employers.

CHAIR—Thus the need for an organisation such as LLEN to be involved there. Has the advent of VCAL exacerbated the problem of the perception that VET in Schools is a second-rate option—the perception that there are two tiers of education, the academic and the non-academic?

Prof. Henry—It has foregrounded that issue in a way that may not have been the case before. Because it is a different post-compulsory years certificate, it is a very clear option now that is facing young people and their parents. The issue is foregrounded and it is being struggled with, frankly. The VQA and the Department of Education and Training in Victoria are aware of it. They are attempting to ameliorate the issue but it is a deep-seated cultural theme in our society that has a long history. It is not going to be easily overturned.

The way it will be overturned depends on the way schools respond to VCAL. If schools respond to VCAL so that it becomes the poor cousin, irreparable damage will be done to VCAL—if it is seen as just a way of picking up the kids that schools are stuck with because of the increased retention rates occurring in the post-compulsory years and as a way of sweeping up really difficult, resisting students.

CHAIR—It almost seems as though the initial aims of VET have been replaced by VCAL. As you said, VET became bookish and was incorporated into the VCE to give it, perhaps, higher status.

Mr PEARCE—That is correct.

CHAIR—VCAL has come in and taken the role there. This is one of the challenges in providing real opportunities for students who are not academic while also having VET available for academic students. That would allow the greatest flexibility in terms of interchange.

Prof. Henry—That is right. Exactly. Students can select a study program that moves across what was traditionally the academic program and then moves through the vocational learning program. Some students will stay with the academic strand; other students may well stay with the VCAL strand. As you know, VCAL was only rolled out this year fully—well, almost fully—to 200-plus schools, from 20 schools last year. We are now hearing from principals who are saying that they are rethinking how they are going to promote VCAL in their schools. They are recognising that they made a mistake this year in having VCAL available for the most difficult post-compulsory years students. They are now saying, ‘That’s a mistake. We need to position VCAL at another level within the course options made available to our students.’

You might be interested in our report from last year, which is in Minister Kosky’s office. It includes a number of case studies—about eight detailed case studies—of the VCAL program in

operation, as well as an extensive argument. The report is about 200 pages long, so there is a lot of information in it that would be relevant to your inquiry.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Prof. Henry—In the report, we have looked at the issue of the perception of vocational learning in schools. We think there are some issues to do with the way VCAL is structured at three levels. There is a foundation level, an intermediate level and a senior level. The foundation level is included in the accredited certificate. We think that is a mistake, given the issue we are now discussing. A student coming out with an accredited foundation level VCAL is not ready for work. If an employer picks up a student with a VCAL and it happens to be foundation and the employer is not discriminating, that will give VCAL overall a negative connotation in the employer's mind.

Ms Dalton—What employers do with VCAL is going to have a lot to do with how it continues to develop. We find that employers often ask for VCE but what they are really looking for is a student who is 18 and has stuck it through to the end of school. If employers can make that change and see that VCAL is also an end-of-school certificate and that it has attached to it a whole lot of more practical skills training, the potential is there for VCAL to be as attractive, if not more attractive, as the VCE as an option for many employers. That is one of the main differences between VCAL and VET as such. VCAL incorporates VET but it has a strong emphasis on the broader generic employable skills.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr PEARCE—I cannot help but get the sense from your submission and from what you have been saying that at the end of the day we could probably talk about changes to VET in Victoria and other states across Australia all we like—until the cows come home. I think what you are saying—and correct me if I am wrong—is that you think the whole structure of the system is where the fundamental problem is. Do you agree with that? Do you think we need to maybe take a step back and really look at the way that the whole VET issue is incorporated and try and get that right fundamentally, before we start worrying a bit too much about some of the other issues?

Prof. Henry—I will say yes to that. VCAL, I think, has been a fairly bold experiment in Victoria, because in the post-compulsory years it really breaks away from the VCE and all of the trappings that go with the VCE and so on. It is trying to do something markedly different, and accommodating that therefore puts schools, whether they like it or not, under increased degrees of pressure. They cannot easily accommodate it, given the bandaided approaches that have happened with vocational learning through VET in Schools. When you look at what has happened with VET in Schools, they have really stitched together easy options and tried to roll on as before.

Jenny has been involved in another research project in Geelong where she has gone out and interviewed teachers who are involved in trying to put together VET in Schools programs, and the impression that comes out of that is one of ad hoc bandaided approaches.

Mr PEARCE—That is the point I am getting to. I think the danger that we have going forward is this continuing bandaiding—we have a problem here so we fix it there and that

creates another problem and so forth. We have been hearing a lot of evidence and reading a lot of material about the fact that it flows through in the way teachers are recruited into the area, the way they are trained into the area, the way the schools incorporate the program into the area, the resourcing behind it. I am almost at the stage where I think the whole thing needs to be rejigged. As I said, I think we need to take a step back and look at the whole structure of it, and then we can start looking at the resources and what needs to be done along it. It seems to me that that is what you are saying.

Prof. Henry—That is what I am saying.

Mr PEARCE—A very fundamental issue.

Ms Dalton—It would not be cheap to do it properly. What seems to be happening now is that we are trying to do it on the cheap. Some of the VET coordinators that I interviewed in the schools in Geelong may have as few as two periods a week in which to do their work. I have an example of one who has two periods and I have an example of another who actually has two days to do VET and his MIPs work but increasingly, because there is so much work to do in VET, the VET encroaches on that. Another of my examples is VET coordinator, VCAL coordinator, careers teacher and year 11 coordinator. That person also teaches 18 periods a week. That is what is happening to VET in Schools, and we are expecting schools to do a good job. They say it is too hard and there are so many changes. That is one of the things that comes through: they say, ‘We don’t want to do it any more because every year it changes. It is too hard to keep up with. The paperwork is horrendous.’

Mr PEARCE—From that flows all the perception issues about the fact that it is just sidelined et cetera. I think that is a fundamental point.

Ms Dalton—The quality issue with VET in Schools has been dumped on schools from the national ANTA quality system, and schools see it not as a process that is helping them to deliver VET in a more engaging way but as nitpicking. It is to do with the correct titles on your paperwork and things like that. That may give them their quality accreditation but it is not helping them to deliver it in more effective and appropriate ways for the students.

Mr PEARCE—Very interesting.

CHAIR—We do not have a lot of time. Could we return, John, to the issue of teacher training. You mentioned that you have done some work on that. I would be interested in your recommendations about what should be happening in teacher training. I was interested in your submission proposals about a two-year Dip. Ed. course, for instance, which I would have expected would be met with some apprehension by potential teachers.

Prof. Henry—Yes.

CHAIR—Perhaps you might just outline for us what you think ought to be done in pre-service training, both in terms of preparing VET teachers and also in preparing careers advisers for schools.

Prof. Henry—Currently we offer four units that are in this space as professional development units at the graduate certificate and masters level. We offer a unit on enterprise education, a unit on VET in Schools, a unit on applied learning—that is a new unit which has grown out of our involvement with VCAL—and a unit which is a VET in Schools or enterprise ed. project. Those units are available off campus and we have small enrolments across Australia in those units. It is pretty exciting seeing some of the work that teachers are doing through those units, so there is a good story—

CHAIR—They are postgraduate, though?

Prof. Henry—They are postgraduate. At the undergraduate level, we are at the moment putting together a planning group in Geelong to look at a secondary teacher pre-service qualification in the Geelong region as a pilot for the faculty. What we want to do there is to set that up. It could be a full undergraduate program or it could be a Dip. Ed. type structure but, importantly, it has to break the mould of secondary teacher preparation, pre-service preparation, that has existed since the 1950s essentially.

The way secondary teachers are trained is that they do their discipline degree, they get their teaching methods of subjects that are curriculum areas out of that discipline degree and then they do some general teacher education subjects around curriculum studies or teaching studies in their method—whether that is maths or chemistry or English or history. That's it. Then they go out into the schools. They are completely focused on academic learning. That is the mould. We have to, once again, scrap that and try and build up something different.

What we are going to do in Geelong is bring together a program that will involve preparation of teachers for post-compulsory years of schooling, the ACE sector and TAFE. We think we need to bring those three together and we need to then look at teaching environments that are not just school classrooms. You need to think of teaching environments that are work sites—adult learning situations. A lot of these kids who are interested in vocational learning are sick and tired of being treated like children and put into classrooms where they are expected to be passive learners. They run a mile from that. It is not as though these kids are low ability or any of that stuff or that they can be stereotyped as just wanting to learn with their hands. They want a much more engaging sort of education and, frankly, our secondary schools are struggling to give that to them. We need to think of learning environments that are out of the classroom. They can include the classroom, but in a different form and also augmented by adult learning environments in the ACE sector, the TAFE sector, and work placements. We need to put together a teacher education program that is focused on a pedagogy that would be compatible with that image of teachers' work.

CHAIR—I think we would probably all agree generally that in teacher training there needs to be much more focus on pedagogy, rather than just academic content, but do you think there is a problem with the sort of proposal you are suggesting—that again a perception that that education degree that has much more practical content in it and so on might be less recognised in the workplace generally, apart from education—and make it more difficult for those graduates to obtain employment if they did not want to be in education?

Prof. Henry—No, I would not think so. It is an interesting question to explore. What you find now is that, by and large, young people who have been through teacher education then decide

whether or not to go into education. The case was in the past that there were not sufficient teaching positions and a lot of young people who went through primary or secondary teacher training found that they had a whole range of skills that made them quite marketable in the general work force. The sort of program I am talking about, I think, would add value to that.

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Dalton—The workplace trainer area is huge as well.

CHAIR—Finally, what about careers education? What do you suggest is the best way? Do you think the careers person in the school ought to be separate to the VET teacher and, if so, how do we best prepare trainee teachers for that role?

Ms Dalton—I do not see that they necessarily have to be separated. They are tied together, careers and VET. VET is vocational. It is about what you are going to go on to after school. I think that the careers teacher needs to have experience other than their own academic development. That is pretty crucial.

Prof. Henry—I think the careers teachers are playing catch-up as well.

CHAIR—Does there need to be a specialist unit in pre-service training?

Prof. Henry—I would not have thought so in pre-service. I think that careers teachers need to be more mature people in the staffing of the school, but they need to be people who have a broad understanding of the pathways that are available to young people and who are able to bring a sense of authenticity to the advice that they give young people.

CHAIR—That is an interesting point. Lastly, what about the idea of at least one compulsory unit in pre-service training on careers, given that a lot of people—because, as we said, of timetable contingencies—end up teaching careers anyway, even though they have not been prepared for that and a lot of informal careers advice takes place in schools by virtue of the fact of the incidental relationships that develop between students and teachers—sporting teams and so on? Do you think there is value in all teachers having some units of preparation for careers advice?

Ms Dalton—I think it depends on how you do it. If you gave them another theoretical unit on what a careers teacher does, it is probably a waste of time. If you were instead to give them experience out in different workplaces, looking at what real careers people can follow, just as an experiential unit, that could be very useful. Otherwise, a lot of them have gone—as I did—from school to university and back to school. What do they know?

Prof. Henry—In relation to the sort of teacher education program that we are going to pilot next year, we would be very interested in opening that up to mature age people who have worked in the adult education sector—maybe worked as youth workers and had experiences quite different to the typical experiences of young people going into teaching—and who have a broad view of the opportunities and the issues facing young people as they make the transition from full-time education to full-time work. We would be very interested in opening up teacher

education more and more to people with that background. They would start to change the culture of schools when they came out fully qualified and worked in schools.

CHAIR—There are a lot of other issues that I would like to pursue, but we are out of time unfortunately. Thank you very much. That has been very helpful.

[12.16 p.m.]

DAY, Mrs Hazel, Executive Officer, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

ROSS, Mr Alan, Member, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

CHAIR—I call witnesses from the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia. Welcome to our inquiry this morning. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Ross—I am currently principal of Billanook College in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Prior to that, I was head of Ballarat and Clarendon College in Victoria for some seven years.

CHAIR—Thank you. I invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

Mrs Day—Thank you. Before I took this position, I was principal of PLC in Western Australia, where we pioneered structured workplace learning 12 years ago. Now, in my role as executive officer, I manage and drive HeadNet, which is a mailing list for principals of independent schools in Australia. I put the terms of reference of this inquiry on that and asked for responses and from those responses comes this submission.

I think that an overall VET education program is required to change some perceptions in the general community. We need to help students understand about employability skills and the value of VET to all of them, and we need to do that at a much earlier age than now. It is important that we convey the value of VET to parents earlier, so that they can understand how valuable VET can be to all of their children, because they have a great deal of influence on them when they are younger. We need to change the perception of business and industry that what is done in schools is not as valuable as what they do when training people. We think both have a role to play and often the best VET programs occur when there is a real partnership between an industry and a school.

Teachers need to know about the value of relevance to students in their school programs and how important it is for students to attain the skills necessary for 21st century living. This is often done, of course, through VET. Principals can learn from other principals how best to manage and lead excellent VET programs in their schools. That is one area that we think needs to be developed. We have an APAPDC, which is a training arm—professional learning arm—for all principals in Australia, and we would like to see much more done in that area.

Mr Ross—I represent the heads of independent schools in Australia in this VET inquiry, and there would probably be as many different views about VET in Schools as there are heads of independent schools. Because of our independent nature, schools approach VET in Schools—as they approach all curriculum and pedagogy—in different ways. My own school is one which has a very strong VET program. We are committed to the implementation of VET in Schools. We have developed strong partnerships with a cluster of schools in the Yarra Valley. There are, I think, eight schools in that cluster. That cluster has been in place for five years now and there is a

sharing of courses, resources and opportunities for students from each of our member schools almost equally across schools. We tend to specialise in different VET offerings and encourage students from other schools to come to the member schools of the cluster.

Seven years ago, when I was at Ballarat and Clarendon College, VET in Schools was only starting to develop in regional and rural Victoria. I am pleased to advise that it is growing from strength to strength, not only in Ballarat but in other regional areas. From my point of view, whilst I can speak quite happily about what happens at Billanook and what happened at Ballarat, I am speaking as one member.

CHAIR—Thank you, Alan. I certainly share your view about the diversity of views regarding VET. In our inquiry we are definitely finding that diversity across the states between sectors and between schools even. To begin with, I would like to pursue this issue of the interaction between independent schools and TAFE. In your submission, you call it a ‘shocking injustice’—parents are penalised because their children attend non-government schools, and students in independent schools should have the same access to TAFE courses.

How true would it be to say that if you had more affordable access to TAFE it would save a lot of duplicate courses being run in independent schools? Are there many instances where courses are run because that seemed to be a cheaper option than paying for your students to do those courses at a TAFE where there is a course available and it is accessible, apart from the cost?

Mr Ross—Again, this would vary a bit from region to region. We have students who attend TAFE courses and VET courses in other schools, as well as providing VET courses of our own in the school, which our own students and others attend. Funding is a fundamental issue. I think independent school heads would agree that if the funding levels were equal across independent schools, Catholic schools and government schools—if the cost of courses at TAFE was less—we would have more students taking on those TAFE options.

Mrs Day—Most of the points came out of New South Wales. One of the difficulties with being a national association is you get different views from different states, and it varies. In New South Wales a lot of our heads find that the students who go from their school to the TAFE up the road pay so much more than the students from government schools that it means that they just cannot go to those schools.

CHAIR—What is the normal response to that issue? Is it that they just do not have access to VET or that the schools run the VET courses themselves?

Mrs Day—No, it just means that they do not do the courses.

CHAIR—Generally, that they do not do VET? In terms of what your view is of an appropriate or fair funding model, would you think that some sort of a pro rata system would be fair, based perhaps on the SES indicator? I think that all state governments would be reluctant to say, ‘We will give totally free access to students from non-government schools in the way that we do for government school students, where it is free,’ or, ‘We will subsidise at the same rate that we do for public schools.’ Would it be feasible, from the independent schools’ point of view, that that could be pro rata, according to the SES indicator—a percentage of AGSRC—so that if your school is funded at, say, 50 per cent of AGSRC the subsidy that you would receive for accessing

VET in TAFE could be at that 50 per cent level? Would that be a workable sort of model to pursue?

Mr Ross—I suppose we would accept that as a compromise, but I would say that if the government's priority is for VET in Schools, and for vocational education and training, it should be made equally accessible for all students in Australia. If there was to be some form of compromise like that, as long as it was transparent and it was consistent and known for a period of time in advance, that would be very important. One of the things about funding that I find is that it is difficult to know from one year to the next what the level of funding may be. If you know two or three years in advance, you can start to plan the courses consistently.

CHAIR—Presumably, the sort of approach that I suggested would be preferable to what happens currently.

Mr Ross—Yes.

CHAIR—What about other barriers that prevent the take up of TAFE courses? Does your association have any concerns, for instance, about duty of care issues? Your students are outside of your school environment and they are in an environment where there are more adults and where teachers do not have the same background as they do in a secondary school context. That has been put to us before. In your view, is that much of an issue or is that relatively easy to overcome?

Mr Ross—It would not worry me, knowing the way in which TAFE schools operate and knowing the fact that, if they are accepting secondary students, they are very well prepared to handle those kids. We would not be sending kids outside the school—whether it was an excursion or whether it was a TAFE course—who we did not think would be likely to behave appropriately, more often than not, so that would not be an issue from our point of view.

CHAIR—What about the logistic problems, timetabling, transport—those sorts of things? Do you think it is feasible, for instance, for all schools in an area that would want to access the one TAFE, to coordinate their timetables adequately so that they could fit in with each other and therefore with courses that TAFE is offering; for example, a hospitality course one afternoon a week, a construction course one morning a week, et cetera?

Mr Ross—In the Yarra Valley cluster, we have negotiated that Wednesday would be the day that we would offer VET courses and students go to TAFE. That works very well. For those students who would be doing a whole-day course in our own school with only four 70-minute periods a day, we would timetable it so they had at least one spare. They would have to pick up on two lessons, and the afternoon lesson would be scheduled as their VET provision. The students who leave for a whole day—and there are not many; they would be the ones who are perhaps doing hospitality or automotive, those sorts of courses—are expected to make up their work, but they do have a spare period in other times during the week when tutors would help them catch up.

But in the Yarra Valley cluster it has worked very well having VET on a specified day, and most VET courses in our region are on a Wednesday afternoon. They start at about one o'clock

and they go till four or five. Transport is an issue. We have to get the students there and back, but generally that works well.

Mrs Day—Yes, we used to do the same. Wednesday was the day that we used in WA for the clusters to work, too. We had a buddy system where the children that were going out of the school had a buddy within the class who took the notes for them and so on, so they helped each other. But what principals' associations would like is some way that principals who are doing this well in schools can tell other principals how you can lead good VET programs, because very often if you have the experience of doing it yourself, it is much easier to persuade other principals that that is the way to do it.

CHAIR—That is a good point. Generally you would argue that accessing TAFE is a better way to go than running courses yourself, at least where those courses are available at TAFE?

Mrs Day—Yes.

Mr Ross—I think a lot of the VET courses run by the schools are excellent. We have students who go out to other well-run VET courses.

CHAIR—In other schools?

Mr Ross—Yes. It is only four at the moment but we have other students who come in to our school to take the courses that we offer, so we share each other's courses.

CHAIR—Is that preferable to the TAFE option?

Mr Ross—I think if they are well run, whether it is run in a school or whether it is run at a TAFE, it does not worry me. The issue is whether the certificate is well regarded and then, I suppose, the cost of the course.

Mrs Day—There is a school in New England, for example, that does aviation courses, and other schools go to that school because some of these are too expensive for schools to have. It is much easier. The cluster system works well, whether it is doing TAFE courses or whether it is doing structured workplace learning, or whatever.

Mr Ross—There are two examples of courses which I think are run better in schools. We run equine studies, horse studies. We are the RTO, and a member of our staff happens to have an equestrian centre as his private business. Schools in the cluster go to his equestrian centre on a Wednesday afternoon and do certificate I, II, III, IV in equine studies. It was horse studies; now it is equine studies. His set-up is just ideal. We could access an equine studies course at Box Hill but there is no equestrian centre that goes with it. The kids from the government schools, the Catholic schools and independent schools in our cluster that go to do equine studies there are better served, I think, in the provision of that certificate I, II, III, IV. That works very well.

We have a course in food processing, wine, viticulture, and we were fortunate enough to receive an ANTA grant for the establishment cost of a four-acre vineyard on our property. We offer that to students from other schools, as well as our own. It is right on site and we do not

have to travel out into the Yarra Valley too far, so the distance is not an issue any more and we are able to manage those things I think more—

CHAIR—Are the students involved in producing the wine or in just the horticulture side?

Mr Ross—They will be, hopefully, this coming summer.

Mrs Day—We have a school in South Australia that has its own winery.

CHAIR—We visited that.

Mr Ross—Was that Willunga?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Ross—That was the school on which we modelled our—

CHAIR—But I do not think the students there are actually involved in the wine production. They are involved in the horticulture but not the wine production.

Mr Ross—Maybe not what they are telling—

Mrs Day—Faith Lutheran certainly is involved in the wine making as well.

CHAIR—It was very good wine as well, we might add.

Mr PEARCE—I notice in your submission you say towards the end:

There is a feeling that no-one understands or cares about the people who work with these students in the classroom or workplace.

You are talking about teachers of VET, I think. Are you saying that is the same in independent schools as well; that there is that level of perception that no-one cares for this area? Isn't that largely dependent on each independent school and their policy, from the principal down?

Mrs Day—Yes. It is different in all schools, certainly, but there is one thing that is the same, or it seems to me to be the same in many schools, and that is that other teachers in a school do not really understand how much the VET coordinator has to do and how hard and onerous that task is. That is an area that is a difficulty for some teachers, parents and students.

Mr PEARCE—Does your association do anything to support the VET programs in your member schools? Do you hold any seminars or workshops for these people yourselves as an association or is there any role that you can play there in supporting the independent schools? Is that something for you as an association or is it outside of your purview?

Mrs Day—We have senior staff conferences in which some of these areas are brought up but we have nothing that is actually VET. We do not run seminars and such because we are a

professional association for principals. We have a biennial conference which we run for principals, three or four days in every second year, and then we have senior staff conferences.

Mr PEARCE—Has VET been included in those conferences with the principals?

Mrs Day—Yes.

Mr Ross—Because of the nature of independent schools, it depends very much on the interest of the people in each individual school. We look at VET as very contextual. In the outer east of Melbourne, the students who come to us are students—

Mr PEARCE—Sorry, whereabouts in the outer east do you mean?

Mr Ross—Mooroolbark, Croydon, Lilydale—in that area. Most of our families are from small business or trades and having their first experience with a non-government school. We are in the Yarra Valley and in the hills. The VET courses we look at are contextual—so equine studies, viticulture, interactive multimedia, music industry skills are the sorts of things which fit into our context and there is an interest by the students. We have staff who have an interest in that area, and it does not take much to feed interests to develop really exciting VET programs.

In my school I am lucky enough to have staff who are highly regarded because of their VET involvement. I know that is not necessarily the case in some schools. I was saying earlier that I had worked at Ballarat and Clarendon College, where VET was not seen as one of the targets for the students who went there. Most of those students were looking at tertiary placements, but we would have perhaps 35 per cent of our students who would not go on to university. They will go on to TAFE, they will go into employment or traineeships or apprenticeships. We are a little unusual in that sense but the students who are doing traineeships, VET courses or going to TAFE, are regarded equally as other students who are going to do rocket science or medicine.

Mr PEARCE—You are obviously a principal, Mr Ross.

Mr Ross—Principal of Billanook College in the outer east of Melbourne; prior to that at Ballarat.

Mr PEARCE—All right. My electorate is in the outer east but not that far out. I know Billanook very well. If we were to ask 30 of your contemporaries, fellow principals at independent schools about VET, what do you think the general view would be—good thing; bad thing? Do you think they would say ‘We do a bit’?

Mr Ross—All of that. I think you would get 30 different answers. The trend would be for schools to be looking more and more towards VET as an option for students. It is a reality that not all students go off to university and those students require some training in life skills. It is an area which is increasing in interest for heads of independent schools.

Mr PEARCE—Do you work with any of the government secondary schools around your area?

Mr Ross—Yes. Our cluster is the Yarra Valley cluster, which has been going for some five years. It is made up of eight schools: ourselves; the Mount Evelyn Christian School; Mount Lilydale, a Catholic school; and five government schools.

Mr PEARCE—Has that worked?

Mr Ross—Yes, it has, very successfully. The VET coordinators meet on a regular basis.

Mr PEARCE—Just another job for them to do, is it, to meet?

Mr Ross—Yes. In our program we have 116 students involved in VET. Staffing is worked out as 1.8 full-time equivalence. The training of those people in professional development is really quite significant. To get workplace assessment qualifications for each of the six or seven staff is \$650 each. Our viticulture teacher is doing a course to upgrade his qualifications. That is \$2,500. There is a lot of financial backing that goes into the commitment we have made.

Mr PEARCE—Mr Ross, what is the one thing you think we could do at the federal government level to support your students involved in VET?

Mr Ross—Support in the funding. It is always difficult to provide funding so that the schools are accountable for the way in which the funds are used. From my point of view as the head of Billanook, as opposed to representing AHISA, it would be for me to get the money to assist the kids to get the courses, and to use it as I thought best. It would probably be in recurrent and capital, it would be in the staffing and it would be in physical resources perhaps. I understand it is not always possible to have programs like that.

CHAIR—What about funding for a cluster coordinator to assist with coordination between the schools and to assist with work placements for structured workplace learning? Would that be an effective use of money, if we were to recommend that the government put more money into some area?

Mr Ross—I would rather the money went into the schools where the action was happening, not into the administration of it all. But I understand your—

CHAIR—Within your cluster, what percentage of students in those courses would be doing a structured workplace component as part of their VET courses?

Mrs Day—In Perth, in our cluster of eight, we had a coordinator who handled 100 students. We had to pay that person, so from the point of view of structured workplace learning clusters it would be very helpful if that person was paid for.

CHAIR—I suppose it is hard to generalise, given that in some states structured workplace learning is compulsory and in others it is not. One of the recommendations we may end up making is regarding uniformity in a number of these areas. Just hypothetically, if structured workplace learning were to be mandated as part of VET in Schools, would that be an effective use of money—to have a paid coordinator looking after a cluster of schools and organising and supervising the work placements?

Mr Ross—It is not something I would see as a high priority. Our workplace arrangements are made through community, family and local industry connections.

CHAIR—Informally.

Mr Ross—Yes, and organised by the school and by the cluster itself, who have networks that enable us to get more and more connections.

CHAIR—Doesn't that take a lot of time for your staff who are involved in doing that?

Mr Ross—Visiting those students who are out in workplaces is the major time component. The way our school is set up, that tends to be something that all staff share. We have a program called Exit Week, which is three weeks of each year which are given over to things like work experience and work placements. We have admin staff who place those students—and it is every student, not just the VET ones—and the VET ones would go out during those weeks. That is part of the process for us.

All academic staff are then asked to go and visit people in their workplace. Obviously the viticulture teacher would visit the viticulture students, whether they were from Billanook or from other schools, in the local vineyards. Personally though, it is not something I see as a high priority.

Mrs Day—I think a lot of other principals would see that it was important to have a person to do that.

CHAIR—So again it varies.

Mrs Day—Very often it is the role of that person to go out and talk to people in small business, for example, and explain to them what is required and then place those people; to organise someone to visit them from the school; to make sure the values of those people match the values of the school—all those sorts of things. It is a huge job. If you have 100 students going out, you need at least one structured workplace person to coordinate all that. That would be the other point of view—and we are talking about different schools. I am talking about a city school where the children have to go out into small business, which is really where most of our students end up.

CHAIR—Your submission suggests that really the focus ought to be on generic skills for employment. The others have indicated that as well: there are two different schools of thought here. Given the increasing pace of change within industry and the workplace, perhaps we are more effectively preparing students if we are focusing on general employability skills, rather than industry specific skills. What is your view on that? Should we be focusing on the generic skills in those early years of school and perhaps then in the post-compulsory years focusing on industry specific courses?

Mrs Day—That sounds more like it, doesn't it?

Mr Ross—Yes, I think that independent schools would like to think that the students, by the time they get into year 10, will have a lot of those values and attitudes which would be important

ones for working in the 21st century. The students which we have at our school, at any rate, are looking towards specific skills in their VET provision. They are looking at it as a career pathway. It may not be the career pathway that they follow but they are looking at it in that light initially. Some students are looking at the VET provision that we have as an opportunity to learn skills that can give them part-time or full-time work while they go to university or TAFE. It may not be the pathway they are following. I would be inclined to think that the generic skills are something which we would like to gradually build through the school. The VET offerings would be more specific careers.

Mrs Day—The new framework talks about them from year 5. We are finding that a lot of this work has been done in the middle school or the end of the primary school—a lot of these generic skills.

CHAIR—What sort of specific courses do your schools tend to run in those early years? Is there a work studies course? Is it any specific unit or do they tend to be embedded in humanities courses, for instance.

Mr Ross—I think it is across the board. A lot of schools now, both government and non-government schools, would be looking at the middle years of schooling in a different way and developing attitudes to work and to working together, both process and outcomes. I think the middle years in schools now, from year 5 to year 9, are the ones where students are learning ways of approaching their learning in life.

By the time they get to year 10, in most schools now they would know how to work together in small groups—problem solving and those sorts of issues, which were listed in the submission as being important generic skills. They are becoming embedded in the curriculum.

CHAIR—Thank you. That has been very helpful.

Proceedings suspended from 12.47 p.m. to 1.52 p.m.

[1.52 p.m.]

BEASLEY, Mrs Joanne, Business Manager, Impact Creativity Centre

BEASLEY, Mr Malcolm, Chief Executive Officer, Impact Creativity Centre

CHAIR—Welcome to this inquiry. We appreciate your submission and your time in coming today. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mrs Beasley—Yes. Impact Creativity Centre is a private RTO that delivers VET in Schools, as well as other training.

CHAIR—As a formality, I need to inform you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. We invite you now to make some introductory comments, if you would like to do so, and then we will proceed to questions.

Mrs Beasley—I would like to thank the members for inviting us to be here today. I wrote a paper about our delivery of VET in Schools and the most important thing that we have found in our experience with young people is that they be given an opportunity to experience what real work is. Being paid, which is part of our ethos, to work on commercial jobs has given them a rewarding feeling—they have actually achieved something and it is a possibility for them to pursue in the future. That is my brief introduction.

Mr Beasley—The Impact Creativity Centre came about because I discovered that young people at the age of 15 and 16 really needed to be given an indication of how to work. As the model grew organically, we leant more and more towards the business model ourselves. I have resigned from the teaching profession. We have mortgaged our house to create the training organisation. We run the risks that we expect our students to run, not in the safety of a full-time job and superannuation and all those sorts of things. We have discovered that the students' response has been one of understanding the message that we try and give them because we are walking the walk. The concept of the Impact Creativity Centre and what we are trying to do is that the students are learning work attitudes—what I call metaskills: team working, problem solving, multitasking and client liaison, because in our industry the client feeds and clothes you and pays your mortgage—and realising that there are important central aspects to running a business. They learn that by osmosis because they see us interviewing clients and working with clients—clients working with us and us working with clients.

There is a downside to this, of course. Up until the start of this year I was doing a 90-hour week. I decided that getting up at five in the morning and doing two or three hours before I went to work was pretty silly, because in the end you die. The concept of trying to get the business operating so that we can train students, get clients and give the clients to the students is quite a big multiskilling task in itself.

The results speak for themselves, because our graduates are running their own businesses. They are people who we now work with. I employ only graduates from our course because I want trainers who know the ethos. We have trainers who have done the VET in Schools course, a diploma or advanced diploma course and a certificate IV in workplace assessment with us and

with Melbourne University—that is an important part of sharing the load. They have a really interesting perspective about how that is delivered, because they are young people delivering to young people; they are the message. They manifest what it is to try and get work in this industry.

There are a lot of hidden signals that we give to students in the school and classroom. Students should kick up and say, ‘Why are you expecting me to take a risk and do all this stuff when you’re not?’ To my mind, if we are going to be serious in the 21st century for our young people to be able to get those skills and be competitive on the world stage, we have to model that behaviour, not just preach it. That is what we are predicated upon.

Mr PEARCE—Thank you for coming today. I want to understand the model a bit better for your particular organisation. You have a centre somewhere and you are obviously well decked out there with technology.

Mr Beasley—We have two campuses.

Mr PEARCE—Is one at Eumemmerring?

Mr Beasley—We have left Eumemmerring. We have built a place in Cranbourne.

Mr PEARCE—In a shop or something like that?

Mr Beasley—No. We have a residential house. We went through the planning permit procedures and all of that.

Mr PEARCE—You built a training room on there?

Mr Beasley—We built a training centre. We renovated a house and filled it with technology which we do ourselves in-house. We have another centre that we rent off the Adult Education Centre in Wonthaggi.

Mr PEARCE—These centres are obviously decked out with ICT hardware and what have you.

Mr Beasley—That is right.

Mr PEARCE—The students are coming into your centres once a fortnight, according to your submission.

Mr Beasley—Yes.

Mr PEARCE—You have 16 of them coming in?

Mrs Beasley—No, 138.

Mr PEARCE—Across a week?

Mr Beasley—They come in once a fortnight in groups—every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. Fridays they alternate with our Bass Coast campus, where kids come from about seven or eight different schools—year 11s on one Friday, year 12s on the other Friday.

Mrs Beasley—And they travel a large distance.

Mr Beasley—They travel a long way.

Mr PEARCE—One child will come in once a fortnight.

Mr Beasley—That is right.

Mr PEARCE—They will spend a whole day?

Mr Beasley—Eight hours, from nine to five.

Mr PEARCE—What are they essentially doing throughout the day? Do you take them through a structured program?

Mr Beasley—We set workplace oriented projects for them—‘This is the sort of project that I might have to get you to do if I’m your employer.’

Mr PEARCE—That revolves around the ICT type of thing.

Mr Beasley—Competencies.

Mr PEARCE—If I am an advertising agency and I want to build a web site for my client who is in the tyre business, ‘Here’s how you build a web site.’

Mr Beasley—‘This is how you build it.’ They have to build that within a particular time constraint. We give them professional development sessions—‘Do this exercise, but this is what we’re aiming for you to do.’

Mr PEARCE—How long does the program last for each person who comes in fortnightly? How long will they come to you?

Mr Beasley—It depends on whether they choose to do certificate II or certificate III. The multimedia course has been changed. We move from a curriculum based document in Victoria through to the training package. I was part of the design team for both the curriculum six years ago and this one. One of the things I was really upset about with the older course was that a kid could do year 11, choose not to go on—and that is not atypical; kids often choose year 11 and decide to go on and focus on year 12—and end up without a qualification. I insisted that we change it so that by the end of year 11 they had a certificate II. They then move on and do year 12 for which they get a certificate III. So there is closure at the end of year 11.

Mr PEARCE—Does one person come to you for two years?

Mr Beasley—Yes. We have just gone through the initial selections for year 12 to go on to unit 3-4, the second part of the course. It is a certificate III component. We pretty much got what I would normally expect—about a 70 to 75 per cent take-up rate.

Mr PEARCE—That is staying in for certificates III and IV.

Mr Beasley—Yes, that is right.

Mr PEARCE—Are they generally year 11 and year 12 students that are coming to you?

Mr Beasley—Yes.

Mrs Beasley—We do have some year 10s. They were advancing their syllabus.

Mr Beasley—We have a year 9 kid, too, but that is another story which we may get time to touch on.

Mr PEARCE—Have you done any analysis on the percentage of employment take-up within the ICT industry for executive training of those students who have been with you for a couple of years, done their VCE and left?

Mr Beasley—We have done and it is really poor. The reason for that is that we keep lifting the bar, so employers keep demanding more qualifications. I will give you an example. One of the students that Jo mentioned in her article was a very bright kid. We were probably the first in the country to deliver VET in Schools multimedia back in 1996-97—I think it was in 1997—and this young guy took it up. He was very bright, as were all of them. Unlike the VET courses that I was familiar with, as the special needs coordinator for Eumemmerring—we had 3,500 kids, including 1,000 year 10s—we were trying to get VET involved with that. Typically, a lot of the students who took that up were those who achieved less academically. That is a generalisation—and it is unfair—but it is one that I have to draw. I was surprised at the competency of the students who picked the multimedia course. They were doing physics and chemistry at the same time as doing the VET course because they loved making computer games. They just loved it. This particular kid was very bright and at the end of year 12 he got an ENTER in the nineties. He could have gone on to do anything he wanted.

I was concerned at the time that there was nothing to articulate these year 12s into. I had been saying to them from the start, 'You're going to get a job out of this; you're going to get a job out of that,' but I came to the realisation as a teacher that there was no way they were going to get a job, predominantly because most multimedia industry people are one- and two-person businesses. The industry is mapping out very much like the film industry, where you have contractors coming together to do a project, going away and then coming back to do it. The kids would have to develop the skills to run their own businesses. This is the focus that I was starting to move towards.

I searched around for funding opportunities. The Victorian government run what is called a Priority in Education and Training Program. It is a competitive tender for RTOs only, to deliver to a range of industry priority tags. ICT is one of those. I applied for some places and received 10 places. It was a surprise to the school that we managed to get that. This particular student had

the opportunity to go on to university or to choose to do a diploma in vocational education course with us, and he chose the latter. He is now running his own business, employing other people, and he is 23 years of age. He has the skills. He chose to do that, and that is how I saw the potential.

Mr PEARCE—But overall what you are finding is that, if you have 100 students that have been with you for the two years, a small number are going into the ICT field, while the majority are going into other things?

Mr Beasley—A small number.

Mr PEARCE—Are you trying to interface with business in the ICT field as well? You are trying to expose the students to the technology and skills, obviously.

Mr Beasley—Yes.

Mr PEARCE—Are you facilitating entry into the industry; if so, how do you go about that?

Mr Beasley—The industry is in a serious downturn at the moment, and that is a serious responsibility that both Jo and I have spoken about many times. If you are delivering training to people, it is for an outcome, and the outcome typically is that they can be employed. That is the whole box and dice. As a consequence, we saw ourselves as being responsible for forming partnerships not just with possible employers—there aren't any, particularly in the country—but having an interface with possible clients, with people who could be the consumers of ICT products, whether it be systems, solutions, web sites or multimedia. We act like a brokerage house; we bring relationships together.

Part of the goal is to put a partnership arrangement in place such that we can help students work towards sustaining their own business as a consequence. Of course, if you are running your own business or if you are doing those sorts of things, that means you have exposure in the industry and the experience that a possible employer would demand. How can the kids get work with no experience? We are providing them with that experience in their own self-employed sort of arrangement.

To network with large ICT providers is not our main game in the country. In Casey it has been difficult, because we have been part of a school. As soon as you are seen as part of a school, all of a sudden your seriousness level drops. One of the reasons why we moved out of the school was that I was having great difficulty attracting clients to that idea. In the school space, there would be announcements going on, the bells would be ringing and the kids would be being kids in their school uniforms. Whilst we were doing commercial work, I would have trouble convincing the clients, who were always a bit wary, whether or not we could deliver on time.

Mrs Beasley—But at a professional level as well. It was a credibility issue. They thought, 'They are just students, so I can go on down the road and use a little agency.'

Mr PEARCE—Where are you getting the people who are actually teaching the programs—the certificates—from?

Mr Beasley—They are graduate students.

Mrs Beasley—Some of them are mature age students.

Mr Beasley—Like any business, you groom people. You see talent. You tell people, ‘You’re going really well here. I have a great relationship with you.’ I get on very well with one of my trainers. We had a meeting with the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority last week about mapping the exam for the 2004 multimedia, and he had great contributions to make. He failed year 12 because he did not hand his work in. I gave him a bit of a leg-up and a gee-up and accepted him into our diploma course, and he did fantastic work for a client curriculum corporation. He got a huge amount of confidence out of that, and now he is one of my best trainers.

Mrs Beasley—Our best trainers are people with good communication and interrelationship skills. It is not necessarily the best on the computer.

CHAIR—Clearly, other schools, TAFE and other providers provide certificate II in ICT as well. Why is your course so popular? How do your charges compare, for instance?

Mr Beasley—We do not know what the TAFEs charge. I wanted to make sure we did this very politically. In terms of our funding, we have not had an increase in three years. We get the same student contact hour funding, and we have charged the students and the schools the same for the last three years. I do not know any businesses who could do that, so we are going backwards pretty quickly as far as that is concerned. We rob Peter to pay Paul.

Our commercial work is coming on. Our commercial software with our commercial licences subsidises the training. Our post-secondary training that we do supports the VET training. Of course, they are our future markets, so we have to make sure that they are happy with what is going on. We charge \$450 a student for the school, and the school pays that. Then there are levies that we charge the students, which they often do not pay. They are often in a degree of hardship. We have five kids of our own and—

Mrs Beasley—There are a lot that do pay. We have an access and equity clause, where people can pay the fees off. It is \$200 if you are on a health care card and \$400 if you are not, for the year.

Mr Beasley—We run scholarships. Students are allowed to come in free dress—professional looking—but one student would come in his school uniform. I approached him and said that we had a scholarship if—

CHAIR—Back to the original question: why do students choose your course rather than do the certificate II at TAFE or through school?

Mr Beasley—The South East Vocational Consortium, the organisation that runs the vocational program in the Dandenong corridor, has started to work with us quite closely about delivering some of that training, but nobody else delivers it. The TAFEs do not deliver the multimedia training.

Mrs Beasley—I suppose it is the multimedia aspect, the web sites.

CHAIR—It is that aspect that makes it appealing?

Mrs Beasley—I think so.

CHAIR—What level of industry acceptance is there of your qualifications: better than TAFE or standard with TAFE?

Mr Beasley—Who knows?

Mrs Beasley—They get a first year credit into university courses if they do a diploma with us.

Mr Beasley—It is the AQTF.

Mrs Beasley—Is it a component of their ENTER if they choose it as one of their four subjects?

Mr Beasley—It rates with their ENTER.

CHAIR—It is a full subject that is part of their ENTER. It has the same ranking for ENTER as maths or English?

Mrs Beasley—That is right.

Mr Beasley—They scale the studies.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Beasley—It comes in about general maths. It is the only one that has a practical component in the exam. It is a CD based exam, which I am sure you have heard about. Have you heard of that?

CHAIR—No. Just elaborate on that, if you could.

Mr Beasley—This is fantastic! When we were presented with having to do school assessed coursework, I was dead against it, predominantly because competencies are either competent or not, but we had a graded scaling system so it could fit within the ENTER framework. We have three schools assessed coursework—that is, three tasks that we set and mark ourselves—and there is a central exam. The central exam is done via computer. The kids have a CD. They have to do some multiple choice questions, but they also have to do practical web site design or interface design within the time constraints. The kids are very happy with that type of exam. It is pretty much world beating stuff. We trialled it three years ago and about 2,000 kids have been through it in the last couple of years, with very few problems.

CHAIR—There seems to be a bit of reluctance in some quarters or, at least, there seems to be some disagreement about the value of VET through private RTOs versus VET through TAFE, for

instance. What would you say are the benefits that you offer prospective students over and above TAFE?

Mrs Beasley—It is a real life connection with the clients. When we have a particularly difficult client we can bring the web site into the room and project it up on the wall and say, ‘At the brief with this client, we didn’t get all the information.’ It is very important that you get all of the information you require for the product that they require, because sometimes it can be an ongoing saga. It can take six months for a job that should take six weeks because the person says, ‘Oh, I really wanted a bit of purple on that side,’ and, ‘Oh, could you change that font?’ It is learning how to communicate with the people, to listen and pay attention to what they are saying—it is that interaction, that real life experience. I believe the difference is in working for a real client.

CHAIR—And the one day a week. Because you are working with clients, you are providing work experience on the job.

Mrs Beasley—Yes.

CHAIR—Structured workplace learning as such is not mandated in Victoria. If it were to be mandated, would you be able to accommodate that in that current format, or would you, alternatively, have the capacity to put your students into a block of a week or two weeks in the workplace with one of your customers?

Mr Beasley—We would probably accommodate them in the same structure, but we would issue them with a workstation with commercial licences for that particular duration. You have to be very careful. With educational licences, you cannot produce any work that is going to be for sale. One of the issues, of course, in dealing with information communication technology is the copyright. The kids have to be very aware of it. We are certainly very aware of it. I am looking at a five-year jail term if I do not do that properly, so we are very conscious of those sorts of requirements.

We would embed the students into the Impact production cycle as we are doing now, but more unofficially. Our time lines would reflect commercial work that we would expect them to do during that particular period of time that we could mandate as on the job. But I would like to think that they think they are on the job all the time. We talk to them about their being on the job. They are our trainees. I spoke to a group of year 12s at the Cranbourne campus this morning about life after year 12—their options and their choices.

CHAIR—When you say they are trainees, they are not doing traineeships?

Mr Beasley—No.

CHAIR—They are not paid in any way?

Mr Beasley—No, they are not paid in any way as trainees.

CHAIR—Is that a viable longer-term option for you?

Mr Beasley—I would be very conscious if we started doing that to that extent—

Mrs Beasley—It limits their options further on. At the moment you can enrol in only one traineeship. You may make a decision and after two months you find it is not really what you wanted to do, so you have blown your whole option for traineeships and your career.

Mr Beasley—There is also the issue of us not being seen as taking over a market share. I have had a few people in the Australian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association imply that we might be undercutting. My explanation is that we are creating a market segment that would otherwise not be there, because the people we serve would not afford the product. They would not go to a commercial vendor. We are the people providing a resource, so it is a win-win situation.

Mrs Beasley—We work with a lot of small businesses in both regions. It is the small business people who come into our environment and they know that they are with students who are learning, so those relationships happen. They are happy to share and give the students a chance to get something that perhaps they could not afford. We pay the students if they are actively involved in the production of it; so we employ them. Some years I have had 60 group certificates to prepare at the end of the year, and it might have only been that they earned \$100, but that is what happens.

Mr Beasley—You have to understand that when we first started doing this, paying the kids was a premium concept. Competency is all about passing money. If you feel that I am competent with what I am delivering to you, you are going to give me some money for it. That is the bottom line. There is no God-given, 'You are competent.' It is about earning money and the capacity to earn money. As a consequence, when we first started and I was getting this work, I would say to the school, 'We want to pay those kids now.' The guy who was first there said, 'Fine, write out a cheque.' Then a new business manager came in and was horrified because you cannot do this. That is why we formed a company—to employ the students.

There is a lot of red tape involved that we have had to navigate through and make sure we have all the i's dotted and the t's crossed: occupational health and safety, superannuation and WorkCover.

Mrs Beasley—It also helps the students to know all about it. We do give them small business management skills as they are going along. That is how Simon was able to go into his own business, and also a few other students.

CHAIR—As a more general question, what would be your recommendations about improving VET in Schools? You are obviously an RTO that takes students from schools and has that link with employment as well. What should governments be doing better to make vocational education in schools work more effectively?

Mrs Beasley—I think it needs to be like work and being in a school environment makes kids feel that they are at school—and they are at school. I tried to get the message across that our only discipline problems were the students who would go out at recess. We rented a large room in a college and we tried to stagger the recess times so they were not out when the other students were out. These guys would be cool in their casual clothes because they were at Impact for the

day, but they would go out and do some rap dancing or something, and get an audience. It was not very comfortable for those kids and for the whole environment. We just said, 'When you come to work, it's really important to act as if you're at work. We're trying to give you an experience of being at work—having a vocational experience.'

CHAIR—That might be accommodated by requiring structured workplace learning components in VET in Schools courses?

Mrs Beasley—I think so, yes.

CHAIR—Would you say that would be the key thing?

Mrs Beasley—I am thinking, take the person out of the school if you can, and put them somewhere where they can do their one day a week work in a working environment. If they are doing automotive, they are at a garage or an auto shop. If they are doing hospitality, they are at a cafe learning how to make a coffee, how to work in a busy cafe environment, not in the home eco department doing a hospitality course, because it is just not the same as real work.

Mr Beasley—It is like managing risk. A vocational education and training course is about giving people the skills to be employed. I cannot see how you can do that in an environment where the only people getting money are the teachers. You could do an office administration course, but that is it. The auto teacher is not making money fixing cars. The home economics teacher is not making money running a restaurant.

Mrs Beasley—But they could.

CHAIR—Maybe gardeners.

Mr Beasley—Yes—people are earning money other than by doing teaching; otherwise you are doing a teaching traineeship. I have had 20 years of teaching. Imagine the decision I had to make with all that super and all that security. To resign from that—and permanent jobs still in Victoria—was a very big step for me personally and did not come lightly. It comes down to the concept that, if I have these young people at the start of their working life, they need to have good practice modelled, not talked about. The only way you are going to model good practice is to do it. The idea is to take a student from a school environment, where the bells are ringing—when the school bell goes now, I still feel like I have to go to the toilet; that is why they have bells in schools, so that teachers can have a toilet break—and to show them another way of working. I might have 30 tasks that I need to do in a working day, as indeed we all do, and we might get three done to our satisfaction. That is not what happens in schools. You have a 50-minute block, and that is it.

As adults we can see the parallels and see that we are doing some simulation or there is verisimilitude between the life skills we want them to do and what we are trying to do in a classroom. Kids are not picking that up; they are picking up our messages. There are 19 schools who send us students and they do so because they see the kids coming back and talking about how good the experience is. They would not send them if the kids came back and said, 'This is a waste of time. This is really bad.' The kids are exhausted by 3.30. They pick up about five. They have a break, for occupational health and safety, at 10.30, 12.30 and three. They are doing a nine

to five day. That is a big day, but everybody has to do it and it is the only time they get the opportunity to experience it.

CHAIR—Finally, do you think your model is viable across a whole range of other courses, be it construction or whatever?

Mrs Beasley—I do.

Mr Beasley—It is all personality driven, to be honest. I cannot see how you would fix this systemically. As an anecdote, a very fine teacher who is a good colleague of mine was doing something in the engineering VET sector. I suggested to him that he could make barbecues. He could get the kids to do barbecues, get a licence from Mitre 10 around the corner or whatever and sell them. The kids would learn how to work to specs, learn to work to time, be involved in the design and it could really work. The answer was that it was too much work—‘It’s too hard. It’s too much.’ I said, ‘But I’m doing it,’ and he said, ‘Look at you, you’re going grey before my eyes. I’m not going to do that.’

CHAIR—Try our job!

Mr Beasley—It need not be that much work if there are support structures more central to this. Private training organisations get a bad name from TAFE, because we are direct competitors to the TAFE market. We have formed a partnership with Chisholm TAFE down in Wonthaggi. They know they cannot deliver what we are delivering there, and we know we do not deliver what they deliver, so we just cross over and send students to each other. It is mutual respect. We are a private training provider because it was the only way that we could get kids the results that I demanded of us. It may very well be that with the AQTF now settling down—and we spend a lot of time meeting those standards, because it is—

Mrs Beasley—As much time as the TAFEs.

Mr Beasley—As much time as the TAFEs, with nine employees instead of 1,000. We meet those standards. We are happy with those standards. I feel that we are in a reliable situation. What we are delivering is meaningful within the context of what the students want; otherwise they vote with their feet. Would they come on an hour train trip? They walk in the rain. It means that they have to leave at six in the morning. They get to our place, and they do it every fortnight without fail.

CHAIR—They obviously see that it is value.

Mr Beasley—They see the value.

Mrs Beasley—They do.

Mr Beasley—Moving from the school was the last bit of the puzzle, because the only discipline problems we were having were with the students who went to that school. They were having trouble because they could not—

Mrs Beasley—Get out of school.

Mr Beasley—Exactly what I was saying! They needed it modelled. They needed to be out of that school environment.

Mrs Beasley—It would be difficult to manage, but I think the relationships can be built with industry. I do not know how, but there is a lot of scope for vision and creativity there. Certainly, real life work is the key.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That is very interesting and a fascinating model.

Mr Beasley—Thank you for having us.

CHAIR—I wish you well.

Mr Beasley—I am not doing 90 hours a week any more.

CHAIR—That has to be an improvement! It is an exciting model.

Mr Beasley—It is a good model. It is certainly something that we have voted for with our own resources and the numbers just keep going up. Finally, funding is a real issue, only because the state government—

Mr PEARCE—Are you getting RTO funding?

Mr Beasley—In Victoria some of the VET in Schools courses are not funded at all, because schools are seen to be able to deliver it within their own global budgets. For example, certificates II and III in information technology are part of the school system. That is not a vocational program. Multimedia gets a funding add-on, but that has decreased over the last two years and schools are meant to pick up the slack. If schools are picking up the slack and they are sending a student out, their global budget may suffer. They are not going to do that. We will be squeezed out.

CHAIR—That is a common theme. Thank you very much.

Mr Beasley—Thank you for your time.

[2.31 p.m.]

DOBSON, Mr Harry, Member, Victorian Independent Education Union of Australia

FAIRLIE, Mr Paul, Member, Victorian Independent Education Union of Australia

HICKEY, Ms Cathy, Education Officer, Independent Education Union of Australia

CHAIR—I call representatives of the Independent Education Union of Australia. Thank you for joining us today and thank you for your very detailed and comprehensive submission as well. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Hickey—I am appearing today as a representative of our federal union, the Independent Education Union of Australia.

Mr Dobson—I am from Penola Catholic College in Broadmeadows and I am a vocational education coordinator, working in this field for many years.

Mr Fairlie—I am the year 11 coordinator at De La Salle College in Malvern, but I have been involved in the teaching of VET and I am certainly interested in individualised pathways for students in the upper end of school.

CHAIR—I invite you to make some brief introductory comments, bearing in mind that we have a detailed submission, and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

Ms Hickey—I will start with brief comments. You have our submission. I want to draw your attention to some areas of concern, particularly the concern that we have that the inquiry is able to draw on the policy directives that have been around for some time. Our submission certainly makes reference to the national framework for vocational education and the Eldridge report, in terms of the youth action plan taskforce. We are very mindful of the implementation plan that was adopted by ministers in respect of the national policy framework. Many of our comments have sought to raise the issues about how schools are going to be able to implement that.

Our concern is that the inquiry is able to look at those policy imperatives and directives and at the material before it. We have attempted to pull apart a range of those issues, looking at how schools are struggling to meet those agendas, and in particular how schools are struggling with the funding gaps and our concern that a thorough cost analysis is done of the costs of vocational education in schools. Our submission goes through a range of the cost drivers in section 7, which in many cases, we believe, are not fully comprehended, even though we are aware that there was a cost of VET in Schools inquiry itself undertaken last year.

We particularly draw your attention to the work that we have done in the submission on the options for the provision of VET in the relationships of schools with RTOs and the significant issues that are arising in schools grappling with the national framework in order to meet the requirements. We believe that schools certainly are committed to providing their students with pathways and credentials, so there is a strong engagement in meeting the national framework and trying to grapple with the real costs of auspicing that are involved in working through the RTO system. My colleagues here will be able to give you some first-hand information about that.

Our submission is the result of a national survey that was conducted through our state branches. Several hundred VET and careers coordinators filled that out. One of the significant issues in that survey is the consistency in approaches, regardless of the state—and there are some state differences, as I am sure you are finding—but what emerges clearly is that the recommendations that arise from policy directives about schools and communities embracing alternative out of the square approaches and the need for partnerships are echoed in what they are saying.

It presents a really significant area of challenge and problem, in the sense that the formal structures that will support that are not really there, even though in Victoria there is some move to structure partnership approaches. This remains a key challenge for schools, because people are saying quite clearly that schools alone cannot deliver what is required: that is, a comprehensive youth action policy to look effectively at enhancing educational outcomes for young people, particularly in vocational education. I will stop there. The various sections of our submission do go to the things that you are requiring in the inquiry.

CHAIR—Thank you. Paul or Harry, would you like to add to that or would you rather we proceed straight to questions?

Mr Dobson—I have one from the heart, if I could. As I indicated, I have been around the vocational education traps for 20-odd years and in the last eight have been involved with VET in my school in Broadmeadows. It has been very successful—200 students and seven programs. I would not deny that it has been supported, but it is a bit in the doldrums. We are in desperate need of some financial support and financial certainty. We feel a bit isolated out there. I have been working sometimes without collegial support, and doing it hard in finding enough employers to support us. Our heart is there, but we need some support and this inquiry is a good opportunity.

CHAIR—That is a message that has come through loud and clear—that is, there needs to be more funding. One of the estimates put to us is that the cost in human resources—teacher input, time and so on—in a school of running a VET course is probably something like 1.25 times teaching a general education course. Would you agree that is a ballpark?

Mr Dobson—Yes, that is roughly right, I think.

CHAIR—One possible object of increased funding would be to provide release from face to face teaching for VET teachers roughly in that ratio, I take it.

Mr Dobson—Yes. It sounds like a good start.

CHAIR—You make the point on page 21 in section 9.1 that there needs to be ‘improved models of funding for vocational education and training across the school and TAFE sectors’. If you had to pick one area where you recommended to the government that that funding ought to be directed, where would it be? You cannot say, ‘Everywhere.’ Would it be best to focus the money on release from face to face teaching? Would it be better to provide for a fully paid full-time workplace coordinator to do work placements in school clusters? Bear in mind that I acknowledge that in Victoria structured workplace learning is not compulsory; it is in some states. If it were to be compulsory or were to be increased, would that be a useful role for

someone? Would it be better that the money was spent providing for a vocational workplace coordinator in the schools? Would it be better used for professional development for your VET teachers and careers advisers? Would it be better used for clerical-administrative support for your school VET coordinator? Again, you cannot say, 'All of the above.'

Ms Hickey—If you had to have one, it would probably be in the area of staffing, in the sense that what you would realise is that the staffing formulas—the way the schools are funded—and the human resource element are significant. We have listed, particularly on page 17, that human resource issue. The administrative and work placement assessment, the partnerships particularly, are things that are above the norm. The actual interaction with employers and the community is not normally staffed, nor is the extensive administration and assessment schedules that are required, which are in the workplace.

There is a human element. Staffing, in a way, allows you to resource release time for all coordinators. That would probably be the biggest area. The significant stress in the school sector is on the time to do it, the time to be released to do PD. PD in itself is not the largest cost. It is the casual release that is required. Again, that is a staffing issue. Staffing formulas can build in those kinds of relief. Staffing also affects class sizes. In needing to have viable but smaller classes, there is a real challenge in schools about whether courses can run. Staffing is a way of addressing that, to some extent. There are other costs which are beyond that and they may go to issues of a cooperative approach and mechanism in terms of the cost of the infrastructure for many of the courses in the setting up of equipment—those kinds of things—and issues of auspicing and so forth; the cost of actually buying trainers.

CHAIR—That leads me to my next point: the cost of running courses yourself, either in an establishment or whatever, when there are other courses available through TAFE, through other private providers. An issue that has come up a number of times with representatives of non-government schools is that there is a serious inequity here. It is argued that public school students can access TAFE courses in some states at very minimal cost but in other states they are heavily subsidised, whereas non-government schools need to purchase those courses. If you could purchase those courses at a more economical rate, would that be a way out? Would that mean that a lot of your schools would not feel pressured to put the money into duplicating resources, the establishment infrastructure costs, et cetera? Would it be a viable option to be able to purchase those courses?

Mr Dobson—Our school happens, by chance, to be next-door to a big TAFE college. We have a very good relationship with them. I do not know that we pay any more than the surrounding government schools.

CHAIR—But your funding comes a different way?

Mr Dobson—It comes a different way, but our costs across the counter to Kangan Batman TAFE would not be any better or worse than a public school next-door to us either.

CHAIR—Do you have sufficient allocation? That funding comes via ANTA, I understand, through the Catholic education system?

Mr Dobson—Through the Catholic Education Office, yes.

CHAIR—Is there sufficient funding at an equivalent rate to public school students to enable all your students who want to do a TAFE course to do it?

Mr Dobson—No. There is a shortfall. That ANTA money coming through the CEO is only 50 per cent of the costs, forcing us to put a levy on students, which is the only way we can make up the gap. We have quite a sizeable levy of \$150 to \$200 per student, and there are 200 of them. When you look at the overall school fees—\$1,500 for the year, and you are now adding another \$150, \$170, \$200 on top of that \$1,500—in a working suburb that starts to hurt a bit, and it has deterred some students who would be well suited to these courses to not proceed. I am worried about it, yes.

CHAIR—Do any of your schools buy courses from private RTOs?

Mr Dobson—Not at all, no.

CHAIR—Why is that?

Mr Dobson—I have had over seven years now with VET and I have had very good dealings with this big TAFE college. It provides most of what we want. It has been a good operator, but the shortfall in the funding from ANTA is not enough.

Ms Hickey—There are some clusters of schools that do work with other private providers.

Mr Dobson—Yes, they do.

Ms Hickey—But the most economically viable are, in fact, working with TAFEs and the issue of schools clustering in terms of providing sufficient students for particular courses, but the gap is the most significant problem: how schools actually pay that. The auspicing fees is the other issue—whether or not you have one course. The auspicing fees are very high and are folded into the cost of the course provision. The Catholic Education Office particularly structure the courses in bands. In a way, the individual costs of some specific courses are higher than others, although the funding band is the same for courses that have lower costs for the provision of either the buying of the provider, in terms of the TAFE auspicing fees, or the equipment when it is run at the school level.

CHAIR—You said that you think your fees are roughly the same as those charged to public schools for TAFE.

Mr Dobson—That would be my feeling. I have never talked to TAFE about that.

CHAIR—That is not the case in every state, though, is it? Cathy, you have a broader view.

Ms Hickey—There are different costs across TAFEs as well. We do know that there are inconsistencies in costs between TAFEs, even in the same city.

CHAIR—One of the things that I suspect we will want to recommend, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on what the members of the committee think, is greater uniformity across the country in a number of areas. There really is a lot of variation between the states, between the

sectors, and so on. Would it seem to you that an appropriate funding model subsidising the TAFE component, the purchasing of courses through TAFE, might be to do it on a pro rata basis in the same way that your school fees are calculated as a per cent of the AGSRC, so that Catholic schools get I think an equivalent of category 11 funding, which is 55 or 56 per cent of AGSRC, roughly?

Ms Hickey—That is right, yes.

CHAIR—Would that be a reasonable model to propose—that you are subsidised to the same level for the purchases of courses from TAFE? Just off the top of my head, does that sound like a reasonable possibility?

Ms Hickey—It sounds like it would meet the costs in a more equitable way than the current distribution. Some say it is distributed differently. It is a problem, I suppose, in getting a grasp on how they do that. There needs to be uniformity in the costs in the sense that there is an examination of those costs, and then the funding reflecting that. Certainly schools have said that in terms of the costs to students for equitable reasons, what is paid needs to be only one-fifth of what the school fees are. There should be a kind of subsidising so that students are not paying more than you would actually pay—a fifth of the school fees.

There are now 41 per cent of students undertaking VET programs in schools. What that means is they are undertaking other curriculum courses in the school. There is a significant proportion of students taking on other courses that are not VET at all, and schools have to manage that. Certainly the out of proportion costs need to be addressed so that schools can fairly say, 'If we're going to be buying the provision or subsidising additional equipment, in terms of equity it should only be a proportion of the school fees.' Then you have to look at the gap between that cost and the full cost. The general feeling of schools is that there is a real problem in schools paying market cost for VET courses. You have TAFE charging 100 per cent, in a sense, of those courses, and an integrated system would somehow enable a more appropriate costing structure because they are paying top dollar.

CHAIR—You think it ought to be able to be integrated, given that it is basically the department of education that is funding TAFE or schools and you are really paying from one pocket into the other.

Ms Hickey—That is right. It is as though you are just buying some kind of adult education course. It is a kind of fee for a private adult education course, and that is not how the policy directives are. It has to be a kind of seamless approach which requires a seamless funding mechanism.

Mr PEARCE—Thank you all for taking the time to come in today. You talked in the submission and in your preamble about the fact that you had surveyed a lot of your existing members about this. Is that the first time your organisation has ever done a survey in VET like that?

Ms Hickey—Yes, in terms of a national approach, because we were writing a national submission. But our state branches—for example, our Victorian state branch—surveyed members on particular issues, such as policy or system initiatives. We wanted to do a

comprehensive submission that jelled with the terms of reference. That was the first time each branch undertook the same survey and that came back to collation at the central point. While our state branches access that data, we use that on a standard format. That was the first time we had undertaken that, which was why it was so interesting; you could see the consistency in the approach, even though some states are quite different—for example, where the schools are RTOs or the dioceses are RTOs, and those structural approaches differ. The general at-school level issues did not seem to differ very much at all.

Mr PEARCE—Obviously a lot of the information from that survey has driven your submission, but do you intend to publish more data relating to the survey—more findings?

Ms Hickey—We have not really got any plans to do so. I suppose time moved on in a way. The data is still there. The problem with the data is that things change from year to year. The other issue we wanted to raise with you is that there is a very rapid turnover of staff among the people coordinating the area so that often you do not have the same person within six months. There is a large burn-out. People move out of the area. It is extremely labour intensive. They move back into the traditional curriculum after a short period. So in a sense one of the concerns we have is that when you do something in one particular year there is always a concern about whether or not it remains exactly the same. So we have not actually planned to publish. We have not placed it on a database, for example, or on a spreadsheet where we can play with that data. We essentially collated the data for the purposes of the inquiry. So it simply remains there as data for us to look at from time to time. But I think we would want to do some further surveying work with respect to any of the issues. It gave us a general flavour.

Certainly in terms of the levels, you would not necessarily want to rely for too many years on the data about what schools offer in courses. We did ask for quite specific details about the certificates—what certificates were offered and what level certificates—and tried to tease out as well what was happening at years 9 and 10. That gives an extremely complicated picture of the kinds of VET offerings at schools for the younger students as well. We know that they will change from year to year, because courses will not be offered and they are nil expanded and essentially that data would need to be rechecked. But the data remains the same for the general thrust in terms of cost drivers and so forth.

Mr PEARCE—I notice in your submission that the union represents 55,000 teachers in independent schools. What coverage is that of teachers in independent schools across Australia? Is that the large bulk of teachers?

Ms Hickey—The coverage is across both Catholic and independent schools.

Mr PEARCE—You are covering both?

Ms Hickey—That is right, we cover both. We would say that the coverage in Catholic schools is higher than it is in independent schools—across the independent sector.

Mr PEARCE—But overall?

Ms Hickey—The overall coverage is about 80 per cent.

Mr PEARCE—Eighty?

Ms Hickey—Yes, and in some states it is higher than in other states.

Mr PEARCE—Sure. But overall your representative group can represent 80 per cent of teachers in independent schools?

Ms Hickey—That is right, yes. We also cover ELICOS colleges and business colleges in the private training area. That is a very small proportion of the membership.

Mr PEARCE—Do you have an idea of the level or have you seen any noticeable trend with people involved in teaching VET programs either leaving teaching in the government sector and moving into the independent sector to teach or the other way round—going from the independent sector back to the government sector? We were talking earlier about a high turnover. Where are they going? If a teacher is teaching VET in a government school for five years, are they just leaving the teaching profession and going into something else? Are they moving away from VET and going back to teaching the course that they originally trained to teach or are they going into the independent sector to teach it?

Ms Hickey—It is very anecdotal, because we are not the employer. I think the trend is really that they go back into traditional curriculum areas within the same sector. There is a movement from the government sector into the Catholic and independent sector, but my feeling is that it is not in the VET area per se; it is in other general curriculum areas. I know there is quite a bit of movement in the science and maths areas.

Mr PEARCE—There are quite a lot of people who are really dedicated to VET, who really love it and have been in it for a number of years. There may be a feeling that in the government sector it is just too hard. There might be a little more dedication to it and focus on it in some of the independent schools than in the government schools. Are there any indicators of that sort of thing?

Ms Hickey—I think it is probably the opposite. The feeling would be that government schools are better resourced, particularly in careers ed., because in our schools there is not a standard approach that there will always be careers ed., although most of them have it. That is poorly resourced and supported, and I think generally our members would say that. In their dealings with government people, they feel they have more release time and there is a better support structure.

Mr Fairlie—Some of the initiatives, like the Managed Individual Pathways type programs that have come into the department schools, have not really found their way into our colleges yet—

Ms Hickey—That is right.

Mr Fairlie—mainly because of underresourcing.

Ms Hickey—And that is a beef, that when there is a policy initiative at the state level, in our sector—and it is across all states—often the non-government sector is involved in pilots. The

VCAL pilots are an example. But really, at the end of one year's pilot, there is not actually a flowthrough, certainly in the funding, to support that. The Managed Individual Pathways—MIPs, as we call it—is seen to be a very significant program in Victoria, but the Catholic sector, for example, which operates as a system, has not resourced that very well. There is a struggling kind of shadow program, and the issue of voc. ed. in independent schools is very patchy. There are some schools that are very involved and there are other schools where you would not really say there are any vocational ed programs per se. It tends to be patchily resourced. In the Catholic system, their perception—whether accurate or not—would be that the government sector is better structured and supported.

Mr PEARCE—I am particularly interested to hear from the two gentlemen who seem to be teaching it on a day-to-day basis—or are at least very much involved in it. We have heard a lot of information from a lot of people and read a lot of information about where we find ourselves from an educational and structural perspective in VET today. Largely, as you more than well know, the popularity of VET has increased substantially over the last five to seven years.

Mr Dobson—That is right.

Mr PEARCE—As a result, I suspect that it is reasonable to say that in almost every jurisdiction throughout Australia and in almost every system, VET has emerged into, you know, a little bit of this, a little bit of that and a situation of, 'That person does the coordination over there and that person does a bit of the admin, and we do a bit of this.' It is almost like some patchwork that has been used to try to make up some sort of program, if you like. There have been some suggestions to us that, until it is given a position of credibility instead of being a makeshift arrangement, VET will never achieve the real position of credibility that it deserves in the school system—if you understand what I mean—despite its very positive and tangible results. In some areas you get the feeling it is a higgledy-piggledy sort of arrangement and we really need to take a step back and say, 'What is it that we want to achieve from VET and how does it fit in with the overall curriculum plan, the school structure, the teacher training, recruitment training and professional development of teachers? What is the form and process?' Do you share that view?

Mr Fairlie—I think it is sometimes perceived as the poor cousin to the VCE in our Victorian system. It is seen as attracting the sorts of students that are not cut out for the VCE—and it has probably suffered a bit because of that. By the same token, I think that overwhelmingly the students that go through and do the VET courses are much better prepared in terms of their experience with industry and the skills that they are getting, which are readily obvious and easily transferred into the workplace. When they leave school, they are in a much better sense prepared for the next phase of their lives, because of the experiences they have had through their VET programs.

Mr PEARCE—Do you subscribe to the idea that instead of doing more of the same, we need to have a fundamental change to the structure? Do you think that needs to be done?

Mr Fairlie—When you say a fundamental change, what do you mean?

Mr PEARCE—What is the position of it in relation to the overall school curriculum? Where does it sit? What role does teacher training have in it? What role do universities need to play in

the training programs of potential teachers in relation to VET? What role does TAFE have to play? At the moment, it is all quite informal, isn't it?

Mr Fairlie—Yes. I would agree that there needs to be a greater prominence given to the VET sector within the school setting, and that probably requires a fair bit more professional development of staff working within the schools. These are people that have been successful in school themselves, have gone to university, have come back and are teaching passionately about their particular subject areas.

Mr PEARCE—That is right. We have heard evidence that the vocational education and training coordinator happens to be the year 11 coordinator and the person that takes care of people after school and the person that takes care of people when they are sick and the deputy principal. I am exaggerating my point, but is that what you find is happening a lot?

Mr Fairlie—Yes. I know that driving the program and ensuring it stays at the forefront of thinking is left to the goodwill, in a lot of ways, of people performing multiple tasks within the school, especially when students are making choices about what they are going to do for their last couple of years of school.

Mr Dobson—You are right. The system has grown a bit ad hoc and we need to catch up with some of the initiatives that you have just outlined. I think, though, from my view in a northern suburban school, it has changed the kind of dominant paradigm of VCE only, where schools have geared their whole curriculums just to look after that one-third of students who might go to university. I am now confident in thinking that VET is starting to challenge and change that. Anything that this inquiry can do to shore up VET will enable our sectors to offer something for all students, as opposed to those perhaps 'elite' students who are university bound. I am quite passionate about VET and its role in the curriculum. It has made school bearable for a lot of kids.

Mr PEARCE—In relation to a student who is training to be a teacher right now—today—at, let's say, Charles Sturt University in New South Wales and doing a Bachelor of Education or whatever, what proportion of their university course would they spend on VET?

Mr Dobson—I have no idea—probably not much. They should do a hell of a lot more.

Ms Hickey—The disciplines will most likely be traditional disciplines. I am familiar with the Victorian issue, because we have our supply and demand committee reference group. There is a cross-sectoral reference group. The technology areas are the difficult areas in which to place students in the universities. We have talked about going to other areas, like engineering, and encouraging them into the faculty of education in postgraduate studies, but that remains a problem area in terms of getting people in. The traditional model is having graduates from other areas—say, technology—come into diplomas of education in the postgraduate area.

Essentially, it requires the retraining of people. The major way of staffing is to retrain people from traditional areas. Of course, with maths and science being an area of shortage—particularly in rural areas—you are often looking at a person who is coming out of a humanities area and is really being trained in a technology or information-technology area, where it requires the person to significantly come up to speed with the industry standards required for the trainer. I think that

is a significant area that needs to be focused on in post-service training—which I think is the big gap in the sense of post-initial training—where, in relation to meeting the industry standards requirements of the trainers, there would be a challenge in terms of the qualifications of staff. It is one thing to give the assessor qualification; it is another to be qualified to industry standards in the area in which you are actually teaching. A lot of the focus has been on the certificate IV assessor training, because they are required to have that under the current system, but I think the area that is not focused on nearly enough is the training of people to teach, which is why there is such a heavy reliance on TAFE to get the trainer quality through. Maybe that will always be a significant problem and we will have to rely on a system of TAFE because we do not have people with the skills background or the industry background.

Industry placement is very limited. Certainly, in our sector there is no funding for placement of teachers in industry. It is almost non-existent. One of the concerns is, of course, that when they get out there they will not come back to teaching, which has happened. Anecdotally, they are attracted to working in industry and are often picked up as human resource people or whatever it might be. That is an anecdotal piece of evidence, but certainly the move to industry is very under-supported. So they are the kinds of areas where we believe the Commonwealth could take a lead in funding those programs, because those programs did once exist. A number of states, as I understand it, have continued a limited version of those industry placements.

Mr PEARCE—Have you made representations to the state government about supporting VET in your sector?

Ms Hickey—In a general sense, particularly the VET initiatives of the state government. We support the initiatives, but we have raised with the minister the issue of the funding that has to flow through. Currently our state union is involved in a large campaign to increase the state funding to our sector vis-a-vis the percentage that is paid. It is a big issue, because the general funding is less than in many other states.

Mr PEARCE—Are you talking per student in an independent school?

Ms Hickey—That is right.

Mr PEARCE—In Victoria compared to New South Wales, for example?

Ms Hickey—That is right. Last week there were meetings with the state members and with the minister and, in terms of the initiatives, we certainly have raised the problem of the lack of funding of the MIPs programs and the industry placement. In essence, it is really, 'It's the problem of the system or the individual independent school. You find those resources from your normal recurrent funding.'

Mr PEARCE—That is the reply you get?

Ms Hickey—Yes. As I said, there is a reasonable uptake in the pilot phase and certainly encouragement. That is not a problem in terms of funding schools. Many schools had to be encouraged in terms of the VCAL pilots. There was not a big take-up. I think \$50,000 was the allocation to schools, so we were encouraging, but once the pilot is dropped there is no funding at all. There is a big gap between \$50,000 to participate, which is the cost of a staff member

allocated to that program, and the system then basically having to find that money for an alternative program—sometimes only six students or whatever it is. They need to then be folded into a specific funding arrangement as opposed to one-off grants.

CHAIR—Cathy, you spoke a couple of minutes ago about professional developments—getting teachers into industry for industry experience. What about the reverse process? What could we do to more effectively attract people in industry into school to teach VET—besides raising teacher salaries, which are obviously a disincentive? What else can we do to make it easier for people who come from industry into our education system to teach VET?

Ms Hickey—It is the perennial issue of attracting people into teaching.

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Hickey—As you know, the recent inquiry into supply and demand at the national level has indicated that salaries are a significant issue. The finding of that report is now out.

CHAIR—What about training barriers? For instance, would the Independent Education Union accept that there might be a way for people in industry—experienced TAFE teachers even, who do not have a degree with a Dip. Ed—to be absorbed into the system without necessarily having the same qualifications that you would require of your general education teachers?

Ms Hickey—The experience people have with industry now in work placements raises serious concerns about that model, because their grasp of structured training generally and what is required is not there. The issue of how they deliver courses to that age group, with the kinds of general problems and challenges of that age group, the motivation, the specific curriculum that needs to be there, is, you would have to say, a long way off, because even in terms of their structured work placements they are not grappling with that. That is only a very small part of it. Paul, you were raising an issue.

Mr Fairlie—Yes. In the experience I have had, the workplace visits are overwhelmingly successful for the students when they are out there. They enjoy what they are doing and they enjoy the break from the classroom or from the school environment. But I have found that the employers and sometimes the supervisors that are working there with them do not really have a grasp of what it is that they are doing.

You explain to them about how they are doing, for example, certificate II in hospitality or something along those lines, and they say, ‘Gee whiz, I wish I’d had the opportunity to do something like this when I was at school,’ and here they are, actually supervising these young people with particular tasks along the way. I found, too, though, that there is probably just not enough awareness. I think this is what you were getting at, Kerry: some of the TAFE teachers—they might, for example, be taking a group for sport and recreation—have completed their certificate IV and their VICFIT and whatever else they need to have that qualification to lead that course, but they do not really have much of an understanding of the nature of the students that they are working with. One way of addressing that would be to have them work more closely within the school environment; to perhaps deliver some of their courses within the school.

CHAIR—But it is not formal education that is going to address that lack of understanding, is it? You could have someone from industry with certificate IV come into a school and do almost an apprenticeship mentoring—be mentored with another teacher in the school—and become a very capable VET teacher without ever doing a degree or a Dip. Ed., for instance.

Mr Fairlie—I guess we would see that. We have AFL trainees come into our school, and by the time they have finished their traineeships, having worked with the young boys in this case at our school, they are perceived in the same way that a teacher is perceived, because they have now managed, through the work that they have done, to develop the skills of being able to work and think at the level of the people that they are working with. We find with some of our boys going out to TAFE one day a week that they get a little bit frustrated because it is pretty bland and pretty boring. Some of the stuff is a bit textbook based and involves copying things from the board. They do not come back thinking that they are getting the experience they had hoped for. But when they are out there doing the hands-on stuff they realise all of a sudden that this is what it is about. When they get the opportunity to do a work placement over a week or so, then that is a different experience for them again. I do not know if you agree with that, Harry.

Mr Dobson—Definitely, yes.

CHAIR—Going back to the teacher training side of it, are we being too prescriptive in terms of what training we require of VET teachers—too prescriptive in that that is preventing us from recruiting industry professionals into education? Would the union accept teachers from industry, professionals from industry, with appropriate mentoring and appropriate assistance to begin with, coming into the teaching work force without the formal qualifications of a degree at VET?

Ms Hickey—The answer is no, probably. The problem you have with that model is that it relies on the existing staff spending considerable amounts of time in mentoring—and it certainly does not deal with the issue of course design. It depends on what they are delivering. If they are delivering a kind of hands-on exercise as part of the course, you might say that is fine, you have a machinist doing something. But in terms of the complexity of teaching VET teachers actually have to teach across year levels, of course, and it is quite different to teach year 9 and year 10 students or students at risk and to design, in essence, a course that motivates students. It is a technical view of teaching which is not the reality, and I think you might be right: how is a one- or two-year Dip. Ed. going to work? But certainly it means that you actually have universities looking at those areas, and they are practically supported in the sense that their work placement in schools with teachers at least is structured, as opposed to relying on already stretched teachers to somehow try and teach people how to develop courses. So I think the answer is no.

CHAIR—You sometimes wonder, though, just how useful a Dip. Ed. is in, for instance, preparing teachers.

Ms Hickey—It is a while since I did mine, but certainly they are complex. Whether or not they are sufficient is another topic.

CHAIR—In your recommendations here, you urge that qualified Aboriginal support and teaching staff be dramatically increased in the secondary years of schooling, which sounds like an admirable objective, but how do we get those Aboriginal teachers? Are there potentially enough coming through the system who might be able to fill these roles?

Ms Hickey—In terms of Aboriginal students, our union has a significant profile, I think, of looking at issues to address the very low retention rates of Aboriginal students. We have alluded there to the differences in the retention rates. Clearly, they are going to have an impact on the pathways that Aboriginal students have. What we have said is that we believe there should be numbers of appropriately VET qualified Aboriginal support staff. We are not specifically saying that they should be qualified teachers, because the enormity of the problem cannot wait for that as a solution, and that is not the area. In a way we are looking to urge the government to address the VET area in a comprehensive way for Aboriginal students really. There is a range of programs around. In those, young people work in industry, supported by people who probably are not even VET qualified—in fact they are just industry people. We believe a special program would be required to enable Aboriginal people to work with the students and we believe there should be VET qualifications tailored to assist them to do that. We are certainly not saying that qualified teaching staff are going to be available in the next 15 years to meet that need.

CHAIR—The support staff role is a good starting point?

Ms Hickey—That is right.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That has been very helpful, and thank you for a very detailed submission.

[3.31 p.m.]

CRAIG, Mr Wayne, Member, Australian Education Union

HEWETT, Mr Rex, Federal TAFE Secretary, Australian Education Union

PEACE, Ms Meredith, Deputy Vice President, Secondary Sector - Victorian Branch, Australian Education Union

CHAIR—I would like to welcome representatives of the Australian Education Union. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Craig—I am the principal of Box Hill Senior Secondary School.

CHAIR—Thank you. As a formality, I need to remind you that proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. We have your detailed submission, and I thank you for that. It is a thorough and exhaustive submission, with a lot of recommendations, and it is very helpful to the inquiry. I invite you to make some introductory comments, without going over what is in the submission, and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

Mr Hewett—Thank you. The submission that the AEU made was based on a very extensive survey that was undertaken during 2002. That survey and the subsequent report and recommendations were focused on the impact of the introduction of vocational education courses in schools around Australia. Some 30-odd schools—mainly secondary schools—were visited by our researchers. The bulk of the report is their findings and recommendations, based on discussions with teachers, support staff, principals in schools and also teachers in TAFE colleges.

The focus of the submission—and, for clarity, I add that we wanted to find out from our members about both the professional and the industrial impact of VET on their work, their working lives and their relationships to external agencies such as local businesses, other educational institutions and so on—was borne out in the recommendations in the report itself. The report focuses on the quality of the qualification standards of teachers in schools and the quality of delivery, including looking at support staff and the infrastructure and equipment that is needed to properly deliver structured vocational education in schools; curriculum development, which is a major issue for principals and staff in many schools—adjusting to a new or diversified curriculum regime when vocational education courses are offered in schools; the issue of the qualifications of teachers who would normally deliver academic subjects in schools and are now required to update their own qualifications—not their teaching qualifications but their vocational qualifications—in order to deliver vocational subjects in schools; and the problems associated with the logistics and the coordination, if you like, of timetables, given the choice by students of vocational subjects.

We found that the most effective operation of VET in Schools was through partnerships with local business and TAFE colleges. A lot of the report looks at the ways in which that can be more effectively enhanced. The issue of resources is a critical one. I think some work that was done by Jack Keating from RMIT in Victoria a couple of years ago showed that for schools to be able to

properly deliver vocational education subjects, given the need to upgrade teachers' qualifications and to provide infrastructure and equipment for delivery of those programs, additional resources amounting to 50 per cent of current resources were needed. Perhaps my colleagues can flesh out those arguments a bit more and deliver their own views of the report itself and their own experiences in delivering VET in Schools.

Ms Peace—I think Wayne is far better placed to address the specific issues, in terms of working directly in a school where they are offering VET. One of the difficulties we face is, generally, defining what the role of VET in Schools is. We have a system that was developed and implemented in industry, and it has been overlaid in schools. I am not sure that we are very clear about whether VET in Schools is about developing young people for employment—particular types of employment in particular industries—or whether it should be part of a generalist sort of education which prepares young people to be successful and active members of their community. Certainly in Victoria VET has grown so rapidly in schools that we have not taken a step back to really think about what role we want it to play.

We often determine the success of VET by the sheer numbers of students who are undertaking those programs. Some of the work that our federal office has done shows quite clearly that there are other positive success factors, and those things relate to improved self-esteem, improved engagement by young people and young people saying that they actually want to do VET programs in schools. They do not necessarily want to do them in other institutions or out in workplaces. They feel comfortable in the schools. They have relationships in those schools.

When we look at VET and try to gauge its success, it is important to look at factors other than purely the numbers of students participating. It is not enough to say, 'It must be good, because we've got over 26,000 students in Victoria doing it.' I think we need to think carefully about where it is delivered and what the positives are in those different institutions. I certainly agree with Rex about the partnership approach, because we have seen some of our better programs in those sorts of areas.

The only other issue I wanted to raise was that of qualifications. Certainly in Victoria this is a significant issue. Our qualified teachers feel that they are required to get further qualifications to teach VET. Often they say to us that they do not believe those qualifications are necessary. They believe they are qualified to undertake those programs, even though they are of a specialist nature. Schools are saying to us that it is quite a significant resource impost on them in terms of money, because the schools themselves have to pay for those teachers to go and get the qualifications and they also have to pay for backfilling of teachers when they are out of the school undertaking those qualifications. The funding and the resourcing does not provide schools with enough flexibility to be able to afford those types of things, so that is an added burden in terms of trying to run VET in Schools programs for students. I will hand over to Wayne, because he can give some specifics about how it works at the school level.

Mr Craig—Before I move into the specifics, I agree with Meredith about the need to be clear about the purpose of VET in Schools. Certainly in Victoria it is used to mop up what I regard as the failures of the senior school certificate. Then we have another layer underneath with VCAL, which was designed to mop up the failures, essentially, of the VET in Schools program. Until we are clear about VET's purposes, we are probably always going to struggle with how we go about providing this part of education.

The funding issue is clearly the most significant one. We work closely with Box Hill Institute. They will be pulling back, to some extent, from VET in Schools next year. John Maddock, the CEO of the institute, has indicated to me that they are subsidising VET in Schools by somewhere between \$0.5 million and \$1.5 million a year, and they are basically paying for that out of other operations. They deliver VET in Schools to a large number of schools.

From our end, we have been identified a number of times in a number of studies as being particularly efficient providers. We have more than half our student population doing VET in Schools programs and we will be subsidising by something in the order of \$70,000 a year this year to keep those programs running. The other element that I think is an issue for schools is that there is something of a cultural clash in terms of accountabilities. If we look at senior schooling within the VCE, the accountabilities focus on student achievement, whereas accountabilities in VET programs are actually audit trails—whether or not you have the right pieces of paper—and maintaining all of those pieces of paper is a huge job. We have been through a full audit this year. We ran 13 programs in our own right and received a clean bill of health through the audit process, but the pile of paper is about three-feet high. The resourcing and the layer of bureaucracy that sits over the top is a significant issue for a lot of schools and I think it turns a number of schools off totally.

CHAIR—Thank you. Meredith and Wayne, you both asked the same question about what we are really trying to achieve with the VET in Schools programs. Meredith, you said we need to perhaps take a step back. What is your view of what we ought to be focusing on? Is it the general work readiness, employability skills or industry specific VET courses?

Ms Peace—I lean towards the more generalist view. I agree with Wayne. It has sort of been developed out of a system of trying to catch those students whose needs are not being met by the VCE system in Victoria. The reality is that there are often very academically bright students who undertake VET and get an enormous amount out of it. It can often lead to them seeing that there might be something other than the university course they thought they were going to do. It broadens their options. I think it should be seen as a model where, yes, it will engage some people who are not particularly engaged at schools. At another level, it might well be developing students for particular industry skills. At yet another level it might be a student who wants to go to university at some point in time but wants to broaden their education and see the whole spectrum. I think the system should have enough flexibility in it to be able to meet the needs of all those students; that we should not have a VET system which is designed to meet the needs of a small group of students and direct them into employment because they are never going to be able to do a university course. It offers far more than that to all students.

CHAIR—It seems that there is a lot of variation across the states as to the acceptance of VET in Schools as a bona fide senior post-compulsory course. There is a lot of variation as to university acceptance of VET in Schools for university entrance—the ENTER you call it here; UAI in New South Wales, and so on—and that certainly impacts on the sorts of students doing it. Is it your view that it is a problem that there is so much variation, or would you argue strongly for a much more uniform regime across the country?

Mr Craig—I suspect it should be more uniform. I am not sure that Australia is big enough to be running half-a-dozen different systems that have half-a-dozen different sets of emphases. My gut feeling is that it probably should be uniform. I am not so concerned about whether the

programs are generalist or industry specific because they are entry-level courses and a lot of the skills are transferable anyway.

The other interesting thing is that Richard Teese at Melbourne University has done a lot of work on what students want out of school. They want essentially two things: good results, because they can trade on them, and they want job skills. It does not matter whether they are going to be doctors or lawyers or plumbers or whatever, basically they want the same two outcomes. He describes academic achievement as a social disease we all have, and the need for job skills is something that kids generally see as an important part of education. I think the argument for it being uniform across the country is that all students should have access to some level of vocational education. Probably you tailor within that to meet the specific needs of specific groups of students, but I do not think they would vary that much from state to state.

CHAIR—I would like to pursue the issue of cooperation between schools and the TAFE sector. You make the point quite strongly in a number of places, including in recommendation 4.4 in which you say that the provision of VET to secondary school students should avoid wasteful duplication of public funds and should be underpinned by cooperative arrangements between schools and TAFE, and so on. That is a theme that runs through a fair bit, and you are not the only people to have made that observation or that recommendation.

How do you think the funding for that ideally ought to work? Again there is variation between the states. It seems that generally what we have is TAFE selling their courses to schools at a subsidised rate and, as you said, Wayne, having to pick up the difference in terms of cost to the TAFE. Given that school funding and TAFE funding comes out of the same government's pocket really, is it not more workable for the state governments just to pay the TAFE directly for courses provided to school students, rather than the schools having to pay and TAFEs being left out of pocket and getting some money from the governments? Is there not a much more efficient way of working out that funding arrangement?

Mr Craig—I would have thought that funding sooner or later will have to follow students and not institutions. A classic example is, at the moment we have a group of students doing a pre-apprenticeship course in plumbing and we will not continue with it next year, basically because if they do it at school it will cost us \$17,500 to deliver. If they are not enrolled as students of the school, it will cost \$3,500 to deliver exactly the same program because it is charged at \$1 an hour if they are TAFE students but while they are secondary students it is charged at something like \$85 per hour per group, and there are two groups of students. As an example of cooperation, John waived that amount this year, so he dropped \$14,000 from the charges, but he is not in a position to do it next year. That is a classic example. It is the same course.

CHAIR—Generally, you would argue the funding follows the student, so that if the student is doing one day a week equivalent at TAFE, then that funding should be directly from the state government to the TAFE to cover the cost of that course?

Mr Craig—Yes.

CHAIR—What about where students do a course through a private provider, a private RTO? I notice you make the point in recommendation 13.5 that public schools do not use private

providers unless there is no public provision available. Ought not schools have the option, though? If a public school sees that a private provider can provide a course adequately and meet the flexible arrangement the school wants, ought they not have the option of using that provider? Why should TAFE be mandated?

Mr Hewett—I would have thought that TAFE should be mandated because it would be a duplication of resources to set up another system or where there is one that already exists for the public provision of education to students. That is the first thing to say, I think. The second thing to say is that the bulk of vocational education funding is from the VET system as a whole. We have two different funding models here, remember. We have the schools which are funded substantially by the state governments, with all of that originating from the Commonwealth through states grants. The bulk of the funding that goes to TAFE institutes for employees' wages is from the states, but the bulk of the funding for new initiatives and for VET in Schools type programs would normally be initiated from the Commonwealth, so there is a split between the responsibilities, if you like, of the levels of government.

What we are suggesting in recommendation 4.4 is that local schools and local TAFE colleges should be the first point of departure for trying to get together on developing the range of skills. The primary aim of VET in Schools, as I think is being suggested by the AEU, is to give students choice about their career options beyond school, and preparing those who might normally drop out of school with options at school. That is primarily a public funding responsibility and should be delivered through the provision of public education, not necessarily through private providers who are less likely to have the staffing, equipment and infrastructure that would come along with that.

CHAIR—How would you respond to a school that appeared before our inquiry and said that they found a local private provider offered more flexibility and better access to work placements for their students? In this particular instance they were using a private provider rather than the local TAFE. I am not suggesting this is happening on a widespread scale by any means but in some instances, if a school can find an option that suits their needs better, ought that not to be at least a reasonable option?

Mr Hewett—I would have thought that, as I said in my opening remarks, it would be the last option rather than the first option, because you already have in most instances the availability of public provision. But certainly, if there is no public provision, it would be open to any school to seek alternative qualified institutions. In the end the value of a VET in Schools qualification is only as good as its currency beyond school. There is no point in doing a course or undertaking learning in school unless it is of some value beyond school, whether that is through university or in a job or through further education.

CHAIR—If we were to recommend going down this path of greater use of TAFE, rather than schools duplicating what is happening there, what would be your recommendation as to how non-government schools would be incorporated into that model?

Mr Hewett—My understanding is that non-government schools use TAFE institutions now.

CHAIR—They do but they pay directly for those courses. How would you do it if the government was paying? You suggested, Wayne, that the funding should follow the students.

How would you suggest it would work? In your view, would it be that funding would follow perhaps in the same percentage of AGSRC as their normal general education funding? Would that be a workable proposal?

Mr Hewett—On that question of private funding, you would have to look at the capacity of the school. Obviously private schools get funding from both government and private sources. In those private schools where the bulk of funding is from government, surely they would be in a position to seek and receive TAFE training provision options.

CHAIR—In roughly that same proportion?

Mr Hewett—Yes.

CHAIR—What about some of these other issues of duty of care and the different mode of teaching? For example, TAFE teachers generally are used to teach adults. Some of the students who do a VET course in schools are taught by teachers who are perhaps much more familiar with the needs of adolescents. Do you think they are significant issues or could they be fairly easily resolved in order to allow greater access to TAFE?

Ms Peace—This has become an issue, particularly in Victoria with the introduction of the VCAL—the Certificate of Applied Learning. A number of the initial pilot schools had students undertaking courses at TAFE. They were year 11 students and they had significant problems with the duty of care issues because the students were put into an environment they were not familiar with. They were unsupervised during lunch periods. They came from a school where that was all very structured. The students in this particular example I can think of did not cope at all well. Certainly in the reports that have been done for government about the VCAL program, the issue of welfare support for these students and the duty of care issue have been raised as significant issues which need to be addressed if we are to continue with that program, which I suggest we will.

It is not good enough for those students to be removed from a school environment. In many cases they need that continued support, which is of a much greater level in the school system than it is in the TAFE system. They are issues we need to be very conscious of. The students who have been doing VCAL require high levels of one-on-one support. When they are put into an unstructured environment, that is often not provided.

CHAIR—We have some work to do if we are going to go down that path.

Mr PEARCE—Thanks very much for taking the time to come along today. You say in your submission that the union represents 155,000 educators across Australia. What coverage is that of the number of educators?

Mr Hewett—The AEU represents approximately 90 per cent density of the potential numbers of teachers in public schools, whether they be primary or secondary. In TAFE institutions it would be less than that—probably 75 to 80 per cent density. In early childhood institutions, where we cover early childhood education teachers, it would be less. I am not sure what the density would be—maybe 50 per cent of the total.

Mr PEARCE—You mentioned in your preamble, and also in the submission, that your submission is based largely on a research project that you carried out during mid-2002 called *Vocational education and training in public schools: enhancing student career options*. Is that a published report?

Mr Hewett—Yes. That is on our web site.

Mr PEARCE—So that is available to us and we will get a copy of it. Was the research project done via a survey? What was the methodology?

Mr Hewett—The methodology was essentially consultation with our members in schools and TAFE colleges by the researchers.

Mr PEARCE—Through a questionnaire format?

Mr Hewett—No, it was very unstructured, although they themselves did have a set of questions which they asked consistently of all respondents. There were a number of smaller focus groups that were convened in order to provide feedback to the researchers.

Mr PEARCE—There wasn't any formal questionnaire or survey form?

Mr Hewett—No.

Mr PEARCE—It was like a one-on-one interview style, was it?

Mr Hewett—That is correct.

Mr PEARCE—Is it possible for the committee to get a copy of the questions asked?

Mr Hewett—Yes. It probably might be more fruitful if the researchers themselves were to talk to the committee. I understand that one of them has—Dr John McCollow from the Queensland Teachers Union.

Mr PEARCE—I would be interested in seeing what the questions were, because clearly you represent a lot of people. It is very interesting and you have put forward a very detailed submission. I would like to understand the methodology and where those questions came from. Wayne, why do you teach VET at your school?

Mr Craig—Basically because there is a demand there for it. I believe that all students should be exposed to vocational education. Our mission statement talks about three parts The first is 'Make a life', which is basically about gaining the broad general skills you would expect after 13 years of schooling. The second is 'Make a living', because we measure ourselves in a lot of ways by our work, so we want our kids to be familiar with it before they leave school and to have an understanding of what is involved. All the research indicates that it is an important priority for students which for a long time has been neglected.

Mr PEARCE—Are you working in a cluster of local schools, together with other schools around your area?

Mr Craig—Not really. We are big enough that we do not have to. We have 650 kids in years 10, 11 and 12—mainly 11 and 12—so we are large enough to get the economies of scale and not need to work as part of clusters.

Mr PEARCE—You are working directly, mainly with the Box Hill Institute?

Mr Craig—Yes.

Mr PEARCE—Almost exclusively with them?

Mr Craig—We have delivered, via telematics, to some remote country schools at various times. Basically the relationship is with Box Hill TAFE when we need it. We deliver a lot in our own right; we are a registered training organisation in 13 areas. In some cases we employ Box Hill TAFE teachers to come and deliver on our site, rather than have students go to the TAFE College.

Mr PEARCE—Who is doing the teaching of VET in your school?

Mr Craig—A mixture of Box Hill TAFE teachers and our own teachers.

Mr PEARCE—Are your own teachers dedicated on the VET program?

Mr Craig—Some are, some are not. Because it was a former technical school, there are still people with quite strong industry backgrounds and there are a large number of others who, since they have come into the school, have picked up qualifications that enable them to teach VET.

Mr PEARCE—Is that point you just made about it being a former technical school making it a little bit different? Is that part of the reason why you have such a large group of students? Is it making your school a little bit unique compared to others? What do you think?

Mr Craig—It is probably unique for other reasons. It is a stand-alone school. There are not many of them in Victoria. We have a third of our population travelling 3½ hours to four hours a day to come to the school, but they do not come for VET; they come for the curriculum options in an AL's environment. VET is just part of it. We do not treat VET as anything special; it is just one of a number of programs, and for me that is where it should sit. In most schools it is seen as being for kids who are second rate in some way, and that is not my attitude. My attitude is that it is important. Our biggest program is sport and recreation, with 120 students.

Mr PEARCE—Do you think that is the attitude of your contemporaries?

Mr Craig—No, but it is changing. I think five years ago it was very much that if you were good with your head you could do a real program and if you were not so good we could put you into VET. I think that is changing. Cultural change always takes a long time and it has changed a lot. The impediments now are things like funding arrangements. They are the impediments. I think culturally most places now are ready to take it on in a big way, but it is the funding and organisational arrangements attached to it that, in my view, are the biggest impediments now.

Mr PEARCE—In relation to VET, what sort of support do you get from the state education department?

Mr Craig—Some funding, an occasional PD—but not much.

Mr PEARCE—An occasional PD?

Mr Craig—Yes. The Victorian system is quite devolved, so I do not know that most schools are on the lookout for the system to provide professional development. It is more a matter of sourcing it yourself. Essentially, it is some direction in terms of administrative requirements and some support in professional development, most recently in terms of meeting the audit requirements with the changes to the structure, and funding. But it is a different system to highly regulated systems.

Mr PEARCE—With VET, in terms of the Victorian department, and an occasional bit of PD, do you get an occasional bit of PD in maths from the department?

Mr Craig—Yes. Most professional development in Victoria is now outsourced to other agencies and schools pay for it. They get an amount of money for professional development—it is something like \$200 per teacher per year—which, if you are really lucky, would buy you a day somewhere. It is supplemented elsewhere. But the department itself is not in the business of providing professional development in a big way to schools. It just says, 'Here's your money; you go and source it from whatever place is most appropriate for you.'

Mr PEARCE—Some of the evidence we have taken suggested that VET is much more PD-intensive compared to a lot of other areas, largely because of the dynamic, ever changing nature of it. We have had a lot of evidence to suggest that there is a great need for a significant investment in PD. Would you agree?

Mr Craig—Yes, I would. Just the move to training packages—which really just specify what is to be delivered with not much of a framework around it—in my view, across the system, necessitates more PD than the really structured layout you would find in other programs operating in schools.

Mr PEARCE—I will ask you to imagine that you are a student in your own school.

Mr Craig—I will try!

Mr PEARCE—From a student's point of view, what is the best thing about VET and what is the worst thing about VET?

Mr Craig—From a student's perspective I do not think there is a worst thing. The best thing is that it gives them experiences they would not normally get in a regular school environment: they work with adults; they take some responsibility in an adult environment; they learn in ways that are quite different to the ways—

Mr PEARCE—So there is no downside.

Mr Craig—I cannot see a downside to it.

Mr PEARCE—From a principal's point of view, what are the best and worst things?

Mr Craig—The best to me is that it is another way of celebrating achievement and recognising that we are all different and we all have different skills and abilities. The downside is managing it, doing it on a shoestring. The bucket in Victoria has been the same size essentially for a number of years, whilst student numbers have grown. There is just not enough money to do it effectively. In the time I have been involved in education, there has never been enough money. It is part of the mantra: there is not enough money to do what we want to do.

There is no question at all: if you look at the figures, with the amount of funding going into VET in Schools and the number of students, the pie has stayed basically the same size and the number of students eating that pie has grown significantly, and so there is just not enough money to do it effectively.

Mr PEARCE—Thank you.

CHAIR—I have a few questions on university entrance. In recommendation 9.1 you make the point that the states and territories need to explore further ways of counting VET for the purpose of tertiary entrance. We would all agree that that is an important issue, particularly if we are going to increase the appeal of VET for academic students as well. You make the interesting point that that ought not to include increasing the number of certificate III competencies into VET in Schools courses. Why do you make that point?

Mr Hewett—This was a result of consultations with high schools about trying to push the boundaries in order to achieve qualifications or competency levels to fit the university entrance parameters. There are a lot of certificate Is and certificate IIs delivered in schools around Australia that are some sort of pre-trade and so on. A certificate III would normally be a full trade course. If a school were to deliver, let us say, a full trade course in electrical trades it would be a pretty fantastic outcome. Some schools would like to try and achieve that in order to satisfy the entry into post-school educational institutions. I think that is the point which is trying to be made; sometimes we try to stretch too far in order to satisfy external agencies, rather than, as Wayne has said, to celebrate the achievement in itself.

CHAIR—That is a fair point. Rex, would you agree that we ought to be exploring further means of accessing university via TAFE? Students who do VET in Schools and go on to do TAFE courses ought to be able to take so much of their course in terms of credit—or at least ought to have access to university.

Mr Hewett—Yes.

CHAIR—Yet there is a lot of variation between the states in that regard. From your understanding of what goes on, which state model would you say is the best, or which state provides the best access to university via the TAFE system?

Mr Hewett—I do not think there is any 'best' model. I think it depends on the way in which qualifications at the senior certificate level are regarded by TAFE institutions or universities.

That does vary quite significantly from state to state. There are courses in New South Wales which are called board approved courses—which are VET courses—which get full credit towards a post-school qualification. Because the board approved courses are VET courses which are training package based, competency based, very few of those qualifications will be recognised by universities for their full value, because universities regard learning outcomes rather than competencies as the requirement to satisfy their entry examinations. That is a major issue, not just for schools by the way, but for people who are articulating from post-school VET courses, TAFE courses to universities. Normally you would only ever receive 50 per cent of that qualification as credit towards a university qualification; whereas the VET sector argues that there should be full credit.

CHAIR—It would seem to me—perhaps you might disagree and I would be interested in your comment—that the critical issue is not so much the accreditation of the course that you have done, in terms of providing credits towards your university degree, but the acceptance of your course as an entry requirement, because in some states in the year 12 certificate—be it the VCE or higher school certificate or whatever—VET units that have been done count towards the ENTER or the UAI and in other states they do not.

Mr Hewett—That is right.

CHAIR—That would seem to me to be the bigger issue if you do a VET course and it does not count towards your university entrance. In other states, I think Western Australia, only your best four units are counted, so you can do a couple of VET courses anyway. Would you agree or disagree? Do you think the bigger issue is that we need a uniform system? The New South Wales system has curriculum framework courses that universities will accept as part of their entry requirements. Should we be moving more down that path so we have VET courses that students can do, with a structured learning component, with acceptance by industry, but which also count towards the UAI or the entry requirement for university?

Mr Hewett—That would be an ideal world and it would encourage students at school to have a choice of pathways, with equal status being guaranteed for those pathways.

CHAIR—Two immediate difficulties are getting agreement from the universities to that and getting agreement from state and territory education authorities to a uniform approach. Given that we have recently achieved some agreement in terms of uniform curriculum outcomes in the next six or eight years, one would hope that we would be able to do it in the VET area as well.

Mr Hewett—If this committee did nothing other than recommend a uniform recognition of VET qualifications towards post-school entry, that would be a great success.

CHAIR—It is good to hear you say that. The next issue is career advice and vocational guidance services in schools. Again, there is massive variation across the states. This may be an unfair question again. Rex or Meredith, perhaps because you have had a broader view of it than just what happens in Victoria, do you have a view as to which state has the best preparation of careers advisers and which state has the best system in place to ensure that there is quality careers advice for students?

Mr Hewett—I am sorry, I do not have any depth of knowledge of the career advisory or guidance system in each state, so I could not answer that.

Ms Peace—I am from Victoria so my view is limited, but I think it is an area that needs support.

CHAIR—Perhaps just focus on Victoria then. It was put to us this morning by the Career Education Association of Victoria that careers advice is grossly inadequate in our schools; that the advisers in public schools vary between 0.2 of a load and 0.8 of a load. Often those people are not trained specifically in careers. They might do a bit of professional development once they have been given the job. Often they are allocated the job because of timetabling contingencies—whoever happens to have a couple of spare periods or whatever—and there are some real issues there. Even then that teacher who might be on 0.8 of a load is also caught up some of the time doing transition education issues, doing the MIP program and a whole range of other things, and does not have much time to really focus on careers advice or general employability skills and careers teaching in the classroom situation. How do we address that issue?

Ms Peace—I would agree with all of those things. I think there is an enormous variation in terms of the quality that students are getting in different schools because people are not trained. Many people have come into these jobs out of interest and have developed enormous amounts of expertise over many years but do not necessarily have any training. I think training would help. Giving people adequate time to actually do the job would also help. Careers educators are quite right when they say careers teachers are often loaded up with a whole lot of other jobs and consequently do not have the necessary time to deliver the sorts of careers advice services that they would like to particular students.

Again there is variation between schools. I know of some schools which deliver really good services to the kids. They have incorporated some of those things into their day-to-day classrooms and into different subjects, and that has worked really effectively. In other schools it is a stand-alone situation and the kids come out of class and see the careers person.

CHAIR—I want to put two alternate views to you, both of which have been put to the committee, in terms of training careers advisers for schools. One view is that as part of your pre-service teacher training we ought to either be giving everyone some work in careers advice, employment opportunities, employability skills et cetera, and/or some specific careers specialist courses in pre-service training.

Another view put to us this morning by Associate Professor John Henry from Deakin University is that the problem with that approach is that you are training people straight out of school, with perhaps not adequate maturity levels and sufficient experience of the workplace to be really advising children as to career options and that perhaps we would be better off taking teachers with some years of experience in the classroom, some maturity et cetera, and giving them intensive professional development as to career options and careers advice approaches. Which of those two models would you prefer or do you think would be more effective?

Ms Peace—Personally, I would lean towards the second one. John Henry was one of the research people involved in the VCAL program. What we have seen through that program is that, of the people coordinating those programs who are often required to give careers advice,

those who have had more success and been able to develop programs quite well are the people who have perhaps come in from other industries and have had some work experience, as well as being qualified and experienced teachers. They have that mix of contacts with outside agencies and that has made it a lot easier. I think it would be far better for an experienced person to be gaining some training than doing it at university.

Mr Craig—I am a bit wary about careers advice generally. The approach we take is that we employ someone effectively to be a good parent, and that is almost his role, and we are trying to teach kids how to learn. One of the things they might do at some stage is learn about careers and so there is a reference point to talk to in the way that a good parent would talk to their son or daughter. My reservations are based on experiences over a period of time with people who really have not done anything outside of the school system, and in a lot of ways their work as careers advisers was actually more course selection advice for university than genuine careers advice.

If you are going to move into a real path of having careers advisers in schools, then I would prefer people who had had real and recent experience outside of the school system. The notion of careers advice is an interesting area because there is a whole range of legal liability issues and, really, I think the onus should be turned back onto students, particularly when we are talking about students at years 10, 11 and 12. Education should be teaching students how to learn. That will be the most important skill into the future, and one of the areas they should be encouraged to learn about is their own careers and they should have reference points rather than advisers.

CHAIR—What sorts of reference points?

Mr Craig—Like this good parent we employ. He can talk to kids and say, ‘These are the sorts of places you can go. These are the sorts of options. You tell us the sorts of options. Here’s packages of information. You go off and do the research’—in the same way that you would hope you would do with your own kids when they are looking at career options.

CHAIR—Yet we do not take that approach when we try to encourage students to learn maths or English or science. We give a lot of guidance and direction. Surely there is a role, at least in terms of information availability and workplace skills.

Mr Craig—Yes, but I am not sure that it is necessary. This probably is not something that the AEU would want to hear, but I am not sure that we are talking necessarily about teachers. The person we have employed at the moment has worked for the Commonwealth Employment Service in the past. He has a really good understanding of the processes involved, but he does a lot of other things as well. He is not a teacher, and I am not sure that in terms of that advice path it is necessary to be a teacher. Even if you look at things, particularly in the later years of education, more and more we are talking about trying to let kids start to plot their own pathways and teachers more in a guiding role than a directing role, and I think maybe that has to be the way we go in careers advice further down the track as well.

Mr Hewett—The OECD has just done some major work in this area of career guidance and career choice. An Australian working for the OECD in their education department, Richard Sweet, has done a major report on this. It is a worldwide, cross-country report and he picks up a lot of things that Wayne and Meredith have been talking about. It might be worth while for the committee, if they get a chance, to have a look at that.

CHAIR—Thank you. As there are no further questions, thank you very much. That has been very helpful. Again, thank you for a very detailed submission.

[4.25 p.m.]

BRYANT, Ms Therese, National Education and Training Officer, Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association

CHAIR—Thank you for joining us today. As a formality, I need to remind you that proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. Thank you for your submission. I invite you to make some introductory comments, if you would like to, and then we will proceed to questions.

Ms Bryant—The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, commonly known as the SDA, is a trade union with approximately 215,000 members who work in shops, the distribution centres which supply the shops, and in the hairdressing, beauty and modelling industries. Approximately two-thirds of our members are under the age of 25 and approximately one-third are under the age of 20. The retail industry, as you may have heard from others, employs almost one in five people in this country and employs almost 50 per cent of those in the 15- to 19-years age cohort.

Of all enrolments in all training package qualifications, the two highest enrolments are in the retail certificate II and the retail certificate III. That indicates that the retail industry has embraced structured, formalised training in a way that in the past it had not. Traditionally the retail industry either did not train or did so informally and mostly in-house.

As background to addressing the terms of reference, I would like to start by saying that the surest safeguard against poverty is for an individual to have a job. The more secure and the better paid that job is, the more this is the case. Education and training are increasingly becoming key factors in whether people can obtain, retain and advance in employment. At the same time our education and training institutions also play a key role in developing the knowledge and skills base of the nation so as to meet the needs of employers to have a work force which can maximise productivity.

VET in Schools embraces a wide area of activity. My concentration today is on that part of VET in Schools which relates to equipping young people with entry level qualifications in a particular industry; more particularly the retail industry. The original aims of VET in Schools were to introduce young people to the VET system as early as possible so as to, firstly, assist in the retention of secondary students at school. Evidence has shown that there are better long-term employment outcomes the longer people stay at school. VET in Schools students stay at school in the latter years because they find it more relevant when schoolwork has a work context and a more practical focus. These programs are better suited to people who learn by doing, rather than the classic talk and chalk methods of school classrooms.

The second aim was to assist secondary students in making a more seamless transition from school to work by giving them marketable skills whilst still at school. The focus is especially those two-thirds of students who do not go on to university. The benefit for the students is that they should be able to find employment more easily. The benefit for the employer is that they should have a new starter who is work ready and able to be productive from day one. The theory is good but I am not sure how well it is working.

Initially, after the introduction of VET in Schools and its predecessors, there was an increased retention of students at school, but that seems to have plateaued and possibly even dropped a little of recent times. Those students who do stay at school presumably gain the benefits of a broader education. The prospects for those students who leave school early are still not good. More information is needed regarding the employment outcomes of graduates of VET in Schools programs. Again, indications are that low numbers gain employment in the industry in which they trained while at school.

Let me take a step back. The name VET in Schools, although it rolls off the tongue easily, is really not quite accurate. It is really 'VET while at school' because the vocational education and training can occur in schools, workplaces and TAFEs. It is also somewhat confusing because it is both an umbrella name for programs of a vocational nature undertaken while at school, as well as the unpaid pathway of accredited vocational training while at school—the paid pathway being part-time New Apprenticeships.

While the retail industry has embraced structured training, by and large it has not embraced VET in Schools, especially the unpaid pathway. Employers say to us that the new starters coming to them, having completed a VET in Schools program, are not as competent as those who have done a 12-month certificate II traineeship. This means that students' skills are not as marketable and they are not likely to find employment any more easily than if they had not participated in the program.

Key factors as to why students are seen to be less competent are the quality of the training, both on and off the job, and the opportunity for sufficient practical workplace experience. There is concern regarding the lack of accountability of registered training organisations and schools, and there is concern about the monitoring of structured on-the-job experience when it does occur. Practical workplace experience needs to be across the breadth of the competencies, not just being stuck on cash registers during peak trading hours. For national companies, there is the added complication of the wide variation in requirements of VET in Schools across the states, which effectively means they need to set up different arrangements for each state in which they operate.

In contrast, while total enrolments in school-based part-time apprenticeships under the New Apprenticeships scheme—the paid pathway—are limited, almost 40 per cent of the total enrolments are in retail. Employers seem to take these students more seriously, because the student and the employer have committed to signing a training contract and engaging in structured on-the-job training. Employers have greater confidence that these students are more likely to have had adequate workplace experience.

The SDAEA's preference is that students undertaking retail VET studies while at school do this as part-time apprentices under the New Apprentices scheme. The fact that they are being paid for their productive time at work means they are less likely to be exploited and there is less incentive for the employer to displace existing employees with these trainees. We believe that all VET in Schools students should sign a training agreement so that the rights and responsibilities of both the students and the employers are clear. Included in this should be an agreed training plan providing for proper structured on- and off-the-job training and ensuring equivalent educational outcomes and procedures for school students as for others undertaking the same certificate.

The industry—that is, the SDAEA and employers—is strongly of the view that VET in Schools programs should not develop as a separate system but be an integrated part of the industry led vocational system. That means that any VET in Schools programs should be delivered in conformity with national training packages. The industry also has a preference that the off-the-job training be delivered in a TAFE or private RTO setting where the trainers and assessors have industry expertise and meet the requirements set out in the training package. Schools are generally not able to meet these requirements. It is also a more cost-effective investment of training dollars, as RTOs already have the infrastructure, equipment and vocational teachers and are funded to provide these. Schools are not equipped in the same way.

There are still issues of concern from the students' perspective. Timetabling continues to be an issue, although less so than it used to be. The logical outcome of classes for both school subjects and VET subjects being scheduled at the same time is that one of those will suffer. This is a good example of where the departments of education need to be prepared to intervene in arrangements made by schools when they obviously are not in the best interests of students and are contrary to industry desires.

Workload is another important consideration for students when undertaking VET in Schools programs. The requirements in some states do seem to be enormous, on top of the school work which is expected in years 11 and 12. Again, it is logical that if there is too much one suffers and the student is set up for failure. The wellbeing of students is of great concern to us. For this reason and for the demonstrated success of VET in Schools programs, coordination is very important. A designated person with appropriate expertise and adequate resources who liaises between student, school, employer and the RTO and coordinates on- and off-the-job delivery and keeps all parties appropriately informed, should be appointed and funded in each school. Where students have been identified as at risk, additional support should be provided.

To assist students in keeping their options open and to make VET in Schools more attractive to both students and parents, VET in Schools achievements should be counted fully for the purposes of university entrance—that is, they should attract an ENTER score. The test of the success of VET in Schools programs will be whether young people develop the knowledge and skills to enable them to acquire and retain rewarding jobs as a foundation to leading successful lives in our community. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Therese. You have discussed the issue of lack of industry confidence in VET in Schools qualifications compared to VET qualifications gained outside of school. Do you think that issue is improving as more students are doing VET courses? Is there an increasing acceptance of the quality of VET in Schools?

Ms Bryant—I do not think so. That is not what the employers are telling us. There is still the focus on needing workplace experience.

CHAIR—Do you think then that we ought to be mandating a certain amount of structured workplace learning—workplace experience—as part of VET in Schools? Some states do that.

Ms Bryant—Yes, I think that is going to be needed, but exactly how much is appropriate is the \$64 million question. I do not have an answer to that.

CHAIR—If an agreement could be reached about that figure, do you think that would resolve the issue? If the agreement was 100 or 200 hours a year of structured workplace learning, do you think that would then—

Ms Bryant—I think it would resolve the issue only to a degree because there are other considerations. In the previous interview I overheard you talking about the certificate III and the issue of that being pushed much more at year 12 level. In the retail industry our certificate III has tended to be aimed more at people who might be in a supervisory role—certainly people with some considerable amount of workplace experience. So the employers say it is not appropriate to have school students who have not had very much work experience—even if they have had the mandated amount of time—training at that level or to be putting them into a supervisory role. Yet, to gain an ENTER score in some states—and certainly this is being pushed in Victoria—it is becoming necessary for students to do a certificate III or at least some of the components of a certificate III, in order to even be in the ballpark.

The other issue is the employers' perception in regard to quality controls. Mind you, I think they have those same questions about quality and monitoring of RTOs and accountability of trainers and assessors in the broader VET system anyway. But then a number of the major companies are engaging in training their own people to overcome that.

CHAIR—What do we need to do then? What else can we do to increase employer confidence in VET in Schools qualifications—or do you think it is just too hard?

Ms Bryant—We need to quite seriously address those quality issues in terms of accountability and monitoring of RTOs, rather than what is going on at the moment. If that was happening, that would be of benefit for the whole of the VET system, not just for VET in Schools programs.

CHAIR—Yet a lot of the schools argue that the paperwork involved in that accountability process is excessive in the extreme.

Ms Bryant—Did you say schools or RTOs?

CHAIR—Schools that are RTOs.

Ms Bryant—We do not think that it is such a good idea that schools be RTOs anyway. That is what I was saying in my introductory comments—that the preference of industry is that RTOs that are specifically set up to be RTOs are better able to deliver.

CHAIR—Do you think there is sufficient student interest, generally, in pursuing retail as a career, rather than just as a casual part-time work opportunity? Do you find it hard to get enough new employees who want to pursue a career in retail?

Ms Bryant—On the one hand I would say that there is not a lot of interest from students. More particularly parents are not very interested in having their children going into the retail industry. It is not considered to be a high-status industry. The career opportunities are not generally well known. Even the depth of skill and knowledge that is required is not generally well known. On the other side of things, there are quite large numbers, relatively, in the school based part-time apprenticeships under the New Apprenticeships scheme. Forty per cent of those

particular types of VET in Schools students are going into the retail industry. Generally it is not a high-status industry and not all that attractive.

CHAIR—What are you doing to try and change that perception?

Ms Bryant—The union is probably not doing a whole lot, I have to say, but the employers are certainly working hard. They are trying to run careers nights through industry training boards and develop career teacher networks to produce literature that is given out to schools.

CHAIR—Is there a role for the union there as well?

Ms Bryant—We have not felt so, up to date.

Mr PEARCE—Thanks very much for coming in today. Your introductory remarks were very comprehensive. You talk in your submission about the use of VET in Schools students as potential cheap labour. Do you think that is very widespread these days?

Ms Bryant—Yes, I do, and I think it is becoming more so. Some major retailers are even setting targets in terms of the numbers that they want a particular store to take on and that is then having a direct effect on the number of existing employees that continue to get their hours, so to speak.

Mr PEARCE—Is that somewhat camouflaging the success of VET? These large retailers are employing these people. On the face of it, it looks very good that they are wanting to employ the people. Are you suggesting that maybe their motive is not necessarily altruistic?

Ms Bryant—There might be mixed motivation, shall we say?

Mr PEARCE—Has the union experienced evidence of that?

Ms Bryant—Yes. In fact in negotiations with companies they have been quite open about saying that they do do things like setting targets for the number of—

Mr PEARCE—Does it work the other way? In a backhanded way, is that good for VET? It is not good in the sense of the motive but if in fact they are creating somewhat of a demand for VET students, whilst the motive may not be good, is the end result actually positive?

Ms Bryant—I do not think we have sufficient information to know what the employment outcomes for those people are. Anecdotally, there would be an indication that those people do not retain employment after they finish their certificate II.

Mr PEARCE—They do not?

Ms Bryant—In some companies we have been able to negotiate clauses where there is preference given to people that have completed their certificate II training to be kept on. If they have taken on a trainee, they have preference in relation to any employment after they have completed. We have managed to do that in a few companies, but not broadly. I do not know that we have enough information about the quality of the training that happens on the job and then

what the employment outcomes are for these people at the end. I think there needs to be a lot more work done on that.

Mr PEARCE—Interesting. Thank you.

CHAIR—Therese, in your submission, I think at page 7, you recommend 10 days of industry placement for teachers, to develop a greater understanding of what is happening in the workplace. Is there any fear that that could lead to the displacement of other employees? Given that the education department is presumably paying for teachers who are there for 10 days, is that appealing for some employers then to put a rotation of teachers on and not have to pay for them?

Ms Bryant—I think it would depend on the numbers that we were talking about. If there were relatively small numbers and the industry was not being swamped with these people, which we would not really expect, then I do not think it would be—

CHAIR—Are you aware of any instances where teachers on industry placement have been so attracted by what is happening in industry compared to the school situation that they have decided to leave teaching and take up careers in retail?

Ms Bryant—Not in retail, but I have come across people who have just been chatting to me informally and said that they were interested in doing that.

CHAIR—What would be your recommendations on what we ought to be recommending to the government in terms of making VET in Schools work better, for the retail industry at least? You have mentioned some problems of perception there, and they seem to be fairly substantive issues. Are there any other issues that we ought to be tackling as governments to make VET more attractive for students and to make it more credible for employers?

Ms Bryant—The whole issue of national uniformity is a huge one, and the other issue of attracting university scores is certainly a big issue in terms of it being attractive to students and parents. In Victoria, for example, students who undertake certificate II in retail do not attract an ENTER score and the numbers in Victoria vary down and I think that there is a direct correlation with that.

CHAIR—What about in other states? Are there any states where certificate II in retail does qualify the student as part of the university score?

Ms Bryant—I know in New South Wales that it does, but there is a requirement for the students to sit, I think, a two-hour exam. That has some problems with it, in that the employers say it changes the nature of the way that the student has to be taught because their competencies are not being recognised. They have to do it in an academic sort of style. I am not quite sure what the situation is in the other states.

CHAIR—This is the real dilemma, isn't it: that in order to satisfy the universities in terms of entry requirements, there seems to be a requirement for a fairly substantial academic component which in some ways mitigates against the vocational expectations or the competency based expectations of employers?

Ms Bryant—Yes.

CHAIR—And also involves that whole issue of perception—whether or not vocational education courses are of the same standard or status.

Ms Bryant—The universities would argue that vocational courses are not rigorous enough. We would have a different point of view. What used to occur in Victoria when VET in Schools programs were first introduced was that the vocational training done while at school was recognised in the bonus element of the ENTER score, so the students still did their year 11 and year 12 and they had their core units, and they were given the scores appropriate for their results to those. If they then did a vocational course on top of that, they were given an automatic 10 per cent bonus on the scores that they had achieved for their other subjects. I think that that was actually a good balance. The rigour that the universities required was being exhibited in the core subjects that they were doing but, by the same token, the work that was involved—and there is quite a lot of complex work involved in completing a certificate II, especially with the workload the students have—was also being recognised. So I actually think that was a good system, and it got over the problem of trying to allocate a score to competencies.

CHAIR—That is an interesting suggestion. That has been very helpful.

Ms Bryant—Good.

CHAIR—Thank you for your time and your submission.

Ms Bryant—That is fine. Good luck.

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

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

Subcommittee adjourned at 4.50 p.m.