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Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

Wednesday, 3 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 and Mr Sidebottom

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

WITNESSES

Subcommittee met at 9.01 a.m.

REDFERN, Mr Kevin, General Manager, Industrial Relations and Training, Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce

YILMAZ, Mrs Leyla, Industrial Relations Manager, Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education and training in schools. I welcome representatives of the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for your submission and thank you for coming this morning. We look forward to hearing what you have to say to us. As a formality, I remind you that proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. I invite you to make some introductory comments, if you wish, and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Redfern—Thank you. By way of background, the Victorian Auto Chamber of Commerce—VACC—has been involved in vocational education and training since its inception in 1918. Our focus is very much on the retail side of the automotive industry. We have some 4,500 members in Victoria and Tasmania. Those 4,500 employers employ some 50,000 employees across a range of trades and occupations.

We have major concerns, obviously, as an employer organisation in ensuring that our members have access to young people who want to enter the industry as apprentices and trainees and also that there is a capacity within the education system to ensure some ongoing training and education for those employees who are already there, such as motor mechanics, panel beaters and the like. The reason we say that is that technology on motor vehicles has increased enormously over the last decade or so. It is no longer a 'hit it and hope' process. You look as though you are agreeing with me on that point, but it is a major issue to make sure that people are equipped to handle the technology of those systems, and that goes across engine systems, braking systems, steering, suspension and the like.

We employ some 260 apprentices. We are a little bit different from other organisations that engage apprentices, in that we employ them directly. They remain within our employ during the period of their indentures. We also employ some 30 school based New Apprentices and, again, those young people are directly employed by us. That is somewhat different from other group schemes, which merely engage and facilitate the engagement of apprentices out into the work force. We retain the involvement, control and supervision over those young people during the period of their engagement.

We started our group scheme in 1983 and we have had some 700 young people go through the scheme over that period. It is not a big scheme compared with others, but we believe it is a quality scheme, and I think that is underscored by the level of retention. Better than 96 per cent of the people who have come through our group apprenticeship scheme have stayed in the industry, which is a very high figure. A lot of trades, as I am sure you are aware, have a high churn rate in terms of people doing their time and then moving on to other things. We now have people who have come through the scheme who either own their own businesses or are in managerial positions.

We have been interested in how the VET program has worked over the last few years, and we have maintained very close connections with a number of schools which have been involved in the program. Our experience when it started was that there was a negative attitude on the part of at least some schools as to what the program was all about. We found that there was not a lot of support, at least in the early days, from school principals and we felt that there was confusion amongst careers teachers and the like as to what VET programs were meant to do.

We hold an annual forum to try and better inform those principals and careers teachers, particularly in secondary schools that have automotive type programs, to underscore the career opportunities in our industry, because there is a real misconception out there that if you come into the motor industry it is a dead-end job, it is dirty, it is greasy and there is no future in it. One of the biggest tasks that we have is trying to change that perception. That is not easy because in our experience there is still resistance in a number of schools to encouraging young people to pursue a career in the retail auto sector. Partly, that is based on a lack of understanding, which is what we try and correct.

As part of the work that we do with schools, as you will see in our submission, we have a mobile careers unit that we have been running for some three years. It is a bit hard to describe it, unless you see it, but it is towed behind a Toyota four-wheel drive. It is a big van. It has a lot of audio-visual stuff in it; hands-on stuff where young people can get in, sit behind a computer and so forth. It is equipped with videos. We try and give those young people who go through the van what we believe to be the correct idea of what the industry is all about and encourage them to look at the career opportunities, not necessarily just as apprentices, but in other occupations within the industry, although, because of shortages in skilled tradespeople, there is a very heavy emphasis on the skilled occupations within the industry.

CHAIR—Thank you, Kevin.

Mrs Yilmaz—Since we introduced the VET in Schools programs or the school based New Apprenticeships, we have also taken on three full-time trainees. Since we introduced that program, we have had 55 kids graduate through the system, and a lot of them have been offered ongoing employment within the industry. We believe that there are a large range of benefits in this type of program. One is that it opens up a range of pathways for VCE students and offers additional options for those students.

With regard to the academic and technical curriculums—the mix of those two curriculums—we believe that it assists with the development of competency that allows the transition from school to work. Whilst they are undergoing workplace training, they are learning some employability skills, which we think are essential for any vocation they may choose to go into in the future. It also, in our view, provides a linkage between school activities and the world of work.

Our members very much support the programs, which is indicated by the numbers of apprentices and trainees that we have been able to take on. They obviously ask for more, and that unfortunately sometimes is limited in terms of the numbers of kids who are interested in these types of opportunities. We believe that a lot of the programs, particularly those that we offer, provide for articulation into ongoing training. Those kids who are undertaking a traineeship can articulate to a trade level apprenticeship and even further beyond that. We also have a College of

Automotive Business Management that offers articulation to degrees, so there are diploma and certificate levels which give them a clear career pathway.

The other advantage, in our view, is that if a young student enters into a new apprenticeship through the VCE system and finds that their perception of the industry is different from what they thought it would be, it gives them the option then to undertake a different field altogether. In other words, even if the student finds that that particular career is not suited to them, it gives them the opportunity to go and do something else. At least they have had the opportunity to do that before the commitment to a four-year apprenticeship and, obviously, the expense of such a training program.

We have also found that, through participation in VET in Schools, there has been a reduction in the numbers of cancellations of those undertaking apprenticeships, simply because they have a better understanding of what that area of work is going to entail, and we found that the types of systems that work the best are where the technology programs in the school communities are clearly supported by the teachers, the school community, the careers teachers and parents.

The demise of the technical schools is something that our members clearly have an issue with. They advise that they believe that there has been a drop here in the interest in apprenticeships because of the abolition of the technical schools, so in many respects this is an opportunity for them to bring technology back into schools, to give to those students who are better suited to technology type careers access to those avenues.

There are a large number of cluster group training programs. However, the programs that we undertake with our students are not a cluster system based. As Kevin indicated earlier on, we engage those apprentices and trainees, we induct them completely, and then we send them off into the workplaces, so they are equipped with the necessary skills before they enter into a workplace. Once they are there, we monitor them, we manage them and we check their progress. Then, if there is a need to change to another workplace where they are going to gain different skills, we can do that, and that is greatly supported by our members. That also gives us the opportunity to continually manage the workplace in which these students are placed.

Our only concern with regard to vocational education and training in schools is where there may be a duplication of existing vocational education and training through certain schools. There has been an analysis of the cost of delivering VET and, understandably, in our particular industry, given the reliance on technology and the rapid change of technology in our industry, the set up of those types of programs within schools can be very costly. Therefore, it is our view that it is most important to rely on existing structures wherever possible. If there is a TAFE school that is close by that provides those sorts of facilities, our view is it is best to rely on that type of partnership rather than try to establish new systems to cater for that sort of technology.

The other important thing for VACC is that any training that is undertaken by these students must be underpinned by the national training packages that are applicable to this particular industry rather than by the creation of new types of training packages. That is essential, in our view, because that allows then the articulation on to either a trade or certificate level.

It has been a concern of VACC that there has been a lack of delivery of basic science and auto technologies to VCE students. That has become apparent to our members, who indicate that their

level of knowledge when they enter into the industry is an issue. It is assisted by way of the vocational education and training in schools program, such as the school based New Apprenticeships system.

The other issue for us is that it is important that the mode of delivery of these types of programs is consistent with industry standards and that there is a level of expertise delivered, and consistency across these types of programs as well. That should, obviously, assist with occupational health and safety and skill development. If there is that level of inconsistency, those skills and the occupational health and safety level of knowledge are very clearly undervalued.

VACC observes that, whilst these students are coming into the school based apprenticeships program, it has become quite apparent there are some limitations in certain schools where the timetabling of the work placement is an issue and that is something that we are constantly working on with schools, because in our view it is essential that there is a level of discipline to the time in which the student needs to undertake work placement in order to gain and retain those sorts of skills. If they are at the workplace once a week, there already is an issue about retention because it is only one day a week. Therefore, if that timetabling system is affected, that is going to adversely affect that even more, and that for us is an important issue. I think that summarises effectively the submission that we have put to you, and we are happy to take questions. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your comments. Your comments regarding technical skills would have struck a strong chord with our deputy chair, who is not here today. It is a favourite thing of his. You both made mention of the perception problem and the difficulty attracting students into your industry. Kevin, you mentioned the view that it is generally perceived as involving dirty, dead-end jobs and so on.

Mr Redfern—Yes.

CHAIR—And, Leyla, you talked about the difficulty in even getting enough apprentices. How do you think we should go about addressing that? I know your mobile careers education unit is a step in the right direction. Could you perhaps elaborate a little bit on the effectiveness of that? What sort of response are you getting from students? What sort of access are you getting to schools? Are most schools welcoming you with open arms or is there some reticence there?

Mr Redfern—I will take your last point first. The attitude of the schools is generally very positive. We have no difficulties in that regard. The person we have in the unit is a young man who is from a trade background but is currently a teacher who is on secondment to VACC. To be candid, we need somebody with a youthful appearance. It is no good somebody my age, for example, going out and trying to tell young people that they should take on a career in the motor industry. We have tried to pick that point up.

The schools do make us welcome, but I feel that they are sometimes ill prepared. I should not make generalisations, but I will say there is still an attitude on the part of some careers teachers—again, I think mainly through a lack of knowledge—of, 'Okay, let's get the kids who are good with their hands.' That is the old phrase—'good with his hands; not much good for anything else; hasn't got the academic expertise'. Frankly, our industry cannot afford to take that type of young person on. We need young people who have at least a minimum of year 11, if not

a minimum of year 12, with good passes in maths and English et cetera. That is an issue that we have to keep beavering away at.

One of the problems, of course, is the cycling through of careers teachers. We still find that too often it is assigned to somebody who has a little bit of free time rather than somebody who necessarily has expertise in, or at least an understanding of, a range of careers across a range of industries; it is a fill-in. We think it is too important to be left as a fill-in position.

It is also difficult if the careers teacher has graduated from college, university, whatever, without any direct experience other than moving straight into a school and beginning to teach as a professional educator. I think it is difficult for anybody who has not had at least some exposure out in industry, if I can categorise it in that way generally, to have some level of understanding in some sort of field.

As to the means of addressing this, there are two angles. We have to accept that we have a shrinking youth population. I think the stats verify that we do not have the numbers of young people in the community anyway; it is a smaller part of our population base. We think we will have to address it in two ways. One is to continue the work that we are doing to promote automotive careers in schools, and try and encourage the best qualified and most enthusiastic young people into an apprenticeship or a traineeship. The other aspect we are exploring at the moment is to look at people who are in the industry. They are probably in semiskilled occupations. They may be doing work such as muffler fitting, tyre fitting or general routine service work. We believe that we are going to have to ramp up the skills of those people, using what resources we can from the education system to help them acquire the necessary level of skills.

There are all sorts of concerns about that. One is that there will be a dilution of the trade skills, that there will not be the positions available for young people to enter into the industry, but frankly we do not have enough young people coming in, so we are going to have to explore those types of opportunities. I think, though, that that is not inconsistent with the concept of lifelong learning and acquiring skills as you move through life. We believe that that will represent some sort of an opportunity, but there are some difficulties. One is helping them make the transition. Another is making sure they acquire the level of skills and competencies that they will need to work at a higher level on current motor vehicles.

The other part of it is the technology programs in schools that Leyla referred to. We see that as a key element, in terms of getting young people enthusiastic about picking up an industry sector that will give them an opportunity to exercise the skills that they acquired in their secondary education.

CHAIR—Focusing on the mobile careers unit, are you seeing a response there from students along the lines of: ‘Gee, I didn’t realise there were so many opportunities. Yes, I think I will pursue a career in the automobile sector’? Is it having an impact in terms of changing perceptions?

Mr Redfern—Yes, it is. We can tell that from our own experience when we advertise for our yearly intake of apprentices. As part of the application form, there are a number of questions,

'How did you come to us? Why did you come to us? What triggered it?' And we have the careers van as part of that—

CHAIR—Do you think this is an approach that could be used by a broader cross-section of industry? One of the problems is that the perception problem that you indicate in the automobile section is not isolated just to your sector.

Mr Redfern—Very true.

CHAIR—There is a perception problem about jobs in industry generally. Do you think there is a means by which schools could more effectively coordinate a similar approach—with mobile resource vans or whatever—in a much less ad hoc way, but a much more structured way, of having industry representatives coming in to raise awareness?

Mr Redfern—I think it is at two levels. One is that schools, because they are in a community, tend to focus on the employers who are in the immediate vicinity. If I was running a school, I would be doing the same thing, but it does not necessarily put it out on a broad enough front. It is very limited. They might invite local employers to come down. We see this a lot in country regions, where there is a closeness in the community—far more so than in, say, metropolitan Melbourne or Sydney—but we think that has limitations.

To pick up your point, we encourage schools to address it through industry organisations like ours, because we think that connection can be made in a much more disciplined way. 'Disciplined' is probably the wrong word, but in a more structured way, where things will get done, where more people will become involved and where more people will know about what the school is trying to do. It does not matter whether it is employer organisations, trade unions and the like, as long as there is some structure to it rather than, as you correctly point out, the well-meaning but frankly ad hoc approach that is taken at the moment.

CHAIR—Have you been into all schools?

Mr Redfern—No, not all schools, but we have a target of going around to 100 secondary schools in Victoria this year.

CHAIR—Have you had knock-backs from any?

Mr Redfern—No, we have never had a knock-back. These are not just schools in the state system, but Catholic schools and other schools within the education system.

Mrs Yilmaz—During Automotive Week—the week in which we have our International Motor Show—we have a range of seminars that we provide to secondary schools. Essentially, what occurs is that the secondary schools book their students to sit through the program and they have an opportunity to hear from young apprentices in the industry undertaking different types of vocations within the industry. It gives them the opportunity to ask questions and obtain additional information. There are representatives from the industry across the board at that particular forum. That, in our view, has been a little bit more successful than the traditional careers expos.

Years ago we used to put up the displays et cetera, but found that a lot of students felt they had to just collect all this information. That was the perception. They collected the information, did their homework and presented that to the schools. They would simply collect bits of information, and we had doubts as to what degree that was being effective. The careers van that Kevin is talking about has been more successful, because that involves the booking of the van at a particular school. Whilst it is there, the teachers know which students are going in. We have small groups of students come in and go through the system, and we can track who has had an interest in the industry and who then comes back, either through us or through one of our members, to undertake some form of training. That, for us, has been a lot more effective, because when they take that piece of paper away they are more likely to read it and follow up with that. We have supported that through web sites and so on.

Mr Redfern—The point that I should underscore with the van is that we do make sure, particularly if it is in a country town, that the local employers—our members—know it is there, and they have an opportunity to go down. Again, I think this underscores the point you were making of trying to do it in a more structured way.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Redfern—It is something we have to keep beavering away at. We have been doing this now for three years and it costs a lot of money, notwithstanding that we have the personnel secondment. That is a help, and that is done in part through a Commonwealth grant. The unit is worth $200,000. I do not count all the bits and pieces in it, but that is what it cost us to set up. Perhaps that underscores the level of importance that we give to this.

In relation to the point you made in terms of industry representatives, yes, although I think it has to be in a way that is appealing to young people. It is not much good somebody going out and saying: 'This is a good industry. Get into it.' You have to have something to demonstrate. You have to be able to show the technology, which is what we do in part in the van. We show some of the systems in modern motor vehicles by way of audiovisuals and computers and so on. You have to give young people those opportunities to see, feel and touch.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I was thinking while you were speaking that motor sports have never been more popular. In fact, I think I am getting a Ford shirt for Father's Day, and I am not into cars that much. I am not saying they all want to be drivers, but the image is there. It is a young person's sport as well. It is interesting, therefore, when you try and correlate that with severe skills shortages, because they show shots of the people who do the wheels and the technology and the whizzbang stuff that goes with it. That imagery is there.

Mr Redfern—That is part of it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You made a very telling comment earlier about your concerns about the lack of science. You didn't say 'science and technology', but 'science and technology teaching' and the value behind that it in secondary schools. Would you like to elaborate a bit on that?

Mr Redfern—In part, that is my background coming out, as a person who went through the technical school system. Of course, my generation—a very lucky generation—had the

opportunity of an almost unlimited career paths. If you came through a school and you picked up a trade, you were set for life. That was the general view and, as I say, I was one of those very fortunate ones to come through that process.

I think the point that you are making about what is taught is to enthuse people in the practical application of that science and technology, because that is what I got as a young person going through a technical school system. In those science projects and things that you did, you could see it happening in your metalwork class or in your fitting and machining or in your plumbing or in your carpentry. You had the opportunity to do the mathematical calculations and then to put it into practice. That was one of the great parts of it.

Times have moved on since technical schools, and I think our industry has accepted that, albeit it grudgingly. Some of it was historical, in the sense of, 'This is what we did. Why are they changing it?' As I say, time has moved on. I think there has to be some return to that application of mathematics and science, in a practical sense, in trying to make the connection between trade skills and trade knowledge in a technical type career. There is a limitation on what we can do as an industry body in terms of secondary school curriculum. Certainly, we can do a lot in terms of the training packages et cetera, because we have the opportunity through ANTA, as the packages are developed, to have the input into what should be taught in the apprenticeships and traineeships. That is a very practical application. The curriculum in secondary schools is a bit harder, quite frankly. I am sure all industry makes noises from time to time about the lack of mathematical abilities or skills and so forth, but it does not seem to take hold. How we make that connection and how we get through to the educators that that connection needs to be made is something that we will have to address, clearly.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Would you like to see something like a return of maybe skills centred based schools?

Mr Redfern—It would be fantastic if we could see some resumption of that, but again we have to accept that there is a limitation in financial terms as to what can be done. I think we are seeing an interesting cycle at the moment. We have gone through the sunrise industries, the excitement of IT and so forth, and I am sure you will all recall a few years ago that the attitude to industries like ours—the automotive or the metals or the electrical—was very much: 'Well, they're rusty; they're falling off the table. We need to look at these new and emerging industries.' But people still have to have their cars fixed. They still have to have metal products; they still have to have electrical and the like there. There is always going to be that level of skill base that is required. How that could be introduced into secondary schools I do not know, but from an industry perspective we would support and applaud any move that government was able to take in that regard.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I found it a very interesting submission. You made the comment that your organisation employs your school based apprentices.

Mr Redfern—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is an interesting model. No doubt you have reasons for doing that.

Mr Redfern—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Can you tell me what the benefits of your model are, perhaps compared to the model that is not as structurally formalised as yours?

Mr Redfern—Certainly. We started off with 15 people back in 1983; it was a very small beginning. Right from day one, we wanted to have a quality scheme. In 1983 we had a lot of members who were small businesses. They were microbusinesses. They were employing in the 10 or fewer bracket. They were not big business by any stretch of the imagination. We were finding that there was a diminution in the number of those businesses that could engage a young person as an apprentice and keep them for the entire four years of the apprenticeship. What we did find, however, was that there were businesses out there that could not employ an apprentice for four years for technological reasons—for example, they might not have the variety of work that is required over that four-year period—or, for economic reasons, they could only keep them on for 12 months, say. That is one of the reasons we said, 'We will give these young people continuity,' and I am proud to say we have never stood any of them down over the entire period of time. Even through a lot of downturns we have kept them engaged.

The other reason, quite frankly, is a quality issue. I will not name the schemes, but I think there are schemes out there that find a young person, pop them into a workplace and forget all about them, which we find unacceptable. That is not the way we would want to see our scheme run, and we believe that by exercising that level of control over the scheme we can ensure quality.

The benefits of the scheme are, first, the retention rate and, second, the quality of the people that we have coming through. At each graduation, these young people have acquired a vast number of skills. As part of the process, you will be aware that there are a certain number of hours off the job. In Victoria it is 960 hours. Our young people tend to eat that up very quickly, so they bank up a credit. They finish their basic theoretical studies more quickly than the norm and, as a consequence, we move them into a variety of other courses before they finish their time.

They will come out not only with a ticket but also with formal qualifications across a whole range of skills that a lot of people in the trade who are in the 25- to 30-year-old bracket do not have. These are young people coming out at 21 and 22 who have acquired those skills and abilities. So the issues are retention and quality. I think that is the reason that they stay in the industry: because they have that knowledge; they have that capacity; they know where they are going. They are very focused, in the main. The quality is also reflected in the fact that since 1983, out of 600-plus young people we have seen only about nine who have not stayed with us after their probationary period. That again is reflected in the retention, selection and the like.

One of the downsides is the high cost. We have five people who are supervising those 260-odd apprentices on a continual basis. They are monitoring their progress in schools. They are going out to the workshops on a regular basis. They are talking to the employers. They are seeing that the apprentices are being taught and supervised properly. They are seeing that the young people are being looked after. Again, I think that is part and parcel of having a quality group scheme, but it does cost a lot of money. That scheme is around $4 million a year for us, if you take wages and the like into account.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Does much poaching take place at the end of the season?

Mr Redfern—No, not from our scheme, and we are actually the biggest employer of apprentices in the retail motor industry, as it has turned out over time. What we do find is that a young person will start off in a shop and they will work through three or four other shops during their time. In their fourth year they might say, 'Hey, I'd really like to go back to that first shop I was in' or the second shop they were in, and we are happy for that to happen; we will facilitate that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Great.

CHAIR—You said those students that are involved in these apprenticeships are involved one day a week. Is that how it works?

Mr Redfern—No. We put them out in a block release.

CHAIR—How many weeks a year?

Mr Redfern—We are talking about six to eight weeks in the first year.

CHAIR—And they do a day a week at TAFE as well?

Mr Redfern—No, usually a week at a time rather than one day.

CHAIR—A block of a week at TAFE, at school.

Mr Redfern—Yes, that is right.

CHAIR—And five weeks in work experience.

Mr Redfern—Yes.

CHAIR—And that would be repeated for each of the two years.

Mr Redfern—Yes, that is right.

CHAIR—They are generally year 11 and year 12 students?

Mr Redfern—That is right, yes.

CHAIR—You don't do any in years 9 or 10?

Mr Redfern—Frankly, they would have to be exceptional for us to take them on.

CHAIR—Perhaps you could give me a better idea of the range of automotive apprenticeships. You have mechanics, panel beaters, spray painters, the whole range?

Mr Redfern—You have covered most of them. Heavy vehicle mechanics; marine mechanics for light marine; motorcycle mechanics; farm machinery and equipment; light power equipment—chainsaws, post-hole diggers et cetera.

CHAIR—While they are at school and they are doing this, they are getting paid the apprentice's rate?

Mr Redfern—Yes, and we pay those wages as their employer.

Mrs Yilmaz—Can I clarify that? School based apprenticeships are a little bit different from our group scheme full-time apprentices. Our school based apprentices are often doing training towards a traineeship that can articulate into an apprenticeship—the certificate III. They are doing a certificate II level training. That might be underbody, steering, those sorts of different types of traineeships, and that would involve the one day of work placement, the one day at TAFE, and the balance of the three days is usually spent completing their VCE studies.

CHAIR—That articulates then into the apprenticeship?

Mrs Yilmaz—Yes, and then when they complete their VCE, that training they have conducted both at TAFE and at the workplace counts towards time for an apprenticeship if they wish to articulate to an apprenticeship; otherwise, it is just a completion of any balance of training they need to do to finish the certificate II traineeship.

CHAIR—Do you have 30 school based apprentices as well?

Mrs Yilmaz—We do have 30, yes.

Mr Redfern—But some 55 have gone since we started that, since we implemented the scheme.

CHAIR—And those 30 school based apprentices are paid the apprenticeship rate?

Mrs Yilmaz—That is right; they are paid a part-time rate. Kevin was talking about the group scheme apprentices of which we have 260. They are often kids we take on directly, or they have come up through the system of the school based apprenticeships. That is where they have the block release. We have quite an intensive induction program. Once they have done that, they go off to do the five or six weeks of block training. Then they get put into work placement and generally what would occur is that they would do the four or five weeks and then one week of block until they complete their TAFE training. Once they have completed their TAFE training—as Kevin said, often quite early—that is when we offer them the additional training programs that they can undertake at VACC's expense. They obviously need to qualify for those.

Obviously, if they have done their TAFE schooling early they are showing commitment. That is when they will be offered those additional training programs. They might include additional certificate courses, although we also have had some students interested in doing management type training programs, so we have given them the opportunity to do our certificate or diploma courses through the college.

Mr Redfern—Leyla mentioned earlier our College of Automotive Business Management. We have an excellent relationship with Kangan Batman TAFE, which is the major automotive TAFE in Victoria. In 1993 we formed a partnership with them, as a joint venture, to deliver management level training programs, initially at certificate IV. Some 500 or 600 people have gone through that. A lot of them were people in the industry who were in a supervisory job and ready to take the next level up or they were owners of the business. Bear in mind that a lot of our people are from a trade background and, while they might be excellent tradespeople, they need to acquire that level of business skills.

We also provide, where appropriate, an opportunity for our apprentices when they are in fourth year to get into that program. You can judge whether somebody is a high-flier and is going to be able to make that shift across, and we encourage those people who we think have the capacity to jump into it early. Others, we just remind and say: 'Don't forget about this. This is all part of your ongoing career. The apprenticeship is a building block.' That is what we reinforce; that it is a jumping off base. What we are trying to get across is that it is not the end of the journey.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. It was very interesting and very helpful.

Mr Redfern—Thank you for taking the time to hear our submission this morning. I hope you enjoy your Ford shirt!

[9.46 a.m.]

GRAHAM, Mr Maurice, Chief Executive Officer, VICTEC Ltd.

GREEN, Mr Philip, Chief Executive Officer, National Electrical and Communications Association Victoria

GULLAN, Mr Robert, Executive Director, Electrotechnology, Printing, Information Technology and Communication (EPIC) Industry Training Board of Victoria

HARGRAVE, Mr James, Employee Relations Officer, Printing Industries Association Australia

McCORMICK, Mr Sean, Member of Divisional Council, Electrotechnology, Printing, Information Technology and Communication (EPIC) Industry Training Board of Victoria

CHAIR—I welcome members of the Electrotechnology, Printing, Information Technology and Communications Industry Training Board of Victoria. Thank you for joining us today. As a formality, I remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. Thank you for your submission and thank you for your time in coming in today. I invite you to make some introductory comments, if you like, and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

Mr Gullan—Thank you. I drew the short straw in terms of having to do that.

CHAIR—The long straw, I am sure!

Mr Gullan—Thank you for inviting the EPIC ITB to present to this inquiry, although we are somewhat surprised as a state ITB to appear before a House of Representatives committee. It is not what we expected in terms of our submission. EPIC is a broad church of industries, and it is certainly a very bipartisan group of people. We are equally represented by employers and employees across the divisional councils and whatever.

From our point of view, the industries are important, if not essential, to the Australian community. If we took this inquiry at the moment without our industries, it would be without light, without heat and written in pencil rather than all the other things that go with it. Our industries are important in terms of what the Australian communities are about. Consequently, skills development is of high importance. That is where we are coming from and that is where we work. Skills development which occurs in schools is one critical part of that.

When we look at our submission to the inquiry, it gives a broad agreement, in the main, from the constituents of the EPIC ITB. In the detail—because each one of the industries is different, with different constructs and different constraints—everybody has their own interpretations of what it might mean to them. That is why my colleagues here are representative of their primary colours—their primary industries—rather than everybody coming here and saying, 'We

represent the view of the EPIC board.' It is on that basis that we come as a broad group of people.

In our submission we stress four or five headings. We certainly stress plain English terms. There is a level of confusion in relation to the interpretation of VET in Schools across the system. We look at equivalence of funding, because we see funding as a dynamic that impacts significantly on the effective delivery of VET in Schools programs. Access to work or to the work environment is a critical component of a VET in Schools program.

I heard Kevin Redfern comment about what we would call industry empathetic teachers or counsellors within schools. That was certainly an issue that we made comment on in our submission. Also, we made comment about some further evaluation of the effectiveness or efficacy of VET in Schools programs. We just do not know enough about their success in terms of what they are intended to do. We also made reference, when the submission was written—which was a year ago—to the fact that in our IT area we have about 5,000 VET in Schools students in this state at the moment; of those, about 3,700 are certificate III students. Because those students were certificate III when they went out from the school, no employer had access to employment incentives, because they had already done a certificate III. That has been fixed, to our understanding. That is out of our equation in terms of this particular submission, but at that stage it was still a matter of debate and concern.

What our submission really tries to stress is, if nothing else, that we have VET in Schools and we see it as making a very important contribution to our community and to our young people, but from our industry's perspective and particularly that of the electrical world it has to be done safely. Safety is a very critical determinant and Philip and Maurice will both comment on that particular aspect. The other one is the parity of esteem: parity of esteem in terms of standing within the education community—in other words, it is a worthwhile event—and parity of esteem in terms of vocational education and training qualifications standing up. Even though they have been done in schools they stand equally with those that have been done either on the job or within a TAFE college or within some form of private RTO or whatever. That is where, at this stage, there are some considerable issues.

I make the comment that in this state, as I have just said, we have nearly 5,000 students doing vocational education and training programs in schools in IT and yet a major government department in this state recently put out a skills snapshot completely ignoring that cohort, even though they went to some detail about the numbers of people enrolled in various IT qualifications around the state. What that is doing, unfortunately, is creating the impression that these particular qualifications or students undertaking this are not necessarily as valued or held in as much esteem as are people who do it in other places. That is certainly a critical part of where we are coming from; certainly safety and parity of esteem underpins all that we have been talking about.

Collectively, as a group of industries, we are covering electro-technology, which is everything from generation to light switches and whatever; IT and what all that might mean, with a telecommunications component as well; printing and the various dynamics of the printing industry and its pre-press/post-press introduction of IT arrangements; and we have a small interest in skills development and vocational education and training in schools.

What we would like to see coming out of this particular inquiry—and if I go back there is a bit more light on what is happening with vocational education and training in schools—is some heat into the debate. I do not think at this stage it has necessarily got the level of public awareness or interest or the industry or government awareness that it could have, and we need some broad based communication about what is happening with VET in Schools programs.

We are certainly a group of people committed to making it happen, but there are significant constraints, from our point of view, in making it happen successfully. Some of them are educational and some of them are industrial. We come back to that safety issue in some of the areas we are involved in. Having said that, I would welcome your questions. We are happy to elaborate individually or collectively in terms of the questions you may have about our submission.

CHAIR—Thank you, Robert. In your submission you talked about the difficulty in attracting student interest, young people's interest, in careers in your industry, perhaps with the exception of IT in the other areas. What sorts of initiatives are you undertaking? What sorts of initiatives do you think could be undertaken to increase that level of interest? We heard from the people from the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce about their mobile career unit that goes from school to school informing young people of career opportunities in the automotive industry. Is that sort of approach viable? What other approaches have you made to get into schools?

Mr Green—Within NECA, we have been part of a federal government funded initiative called electrotechfutures, which was all about promoting the electro-technology industry to secondary schools. That kicked off a couple of years ago. It has involved the development of a web site and of a whole range of written material that was mailed to every secondary school in the country. From memory it was 18 months or two years ago. The web site is alive and kicking and, as I understand it, it gets a considerable number of hits. That is really about promoting electro-technology as a career option for young people in secondary schools and giving their teachers some resource material so that they can similarly promote the industry to their students. I think that has been successful.

CHAIR—How do you measure that?

Mr Green—I am not closely involved with the program at this stage but, as I understand it, we are looking at a monthly hit rate on the site of some thousands of hits. So, from that perspective, people are going to the site. In terms of whether we are attracting sufficient numbers of young people and the right quality of young person to the industry, I do not think that has been measured as yet. I do not think that those figures are available, be they quantitative or qualitative figures. I do not know that that in fact has happened.

CHAIR—Is there an intuitive sense across the industry that things are getting better there or not?

Mr Green—I think it is too early. We are talking about a time frame of about 18 months at this stage, so I think it is too early. We have done work in other areas, as part of that project and as part of other projects, which suggests that the trades—because that is essentially what we are talking about in our area—are viewed as somewhat old fashioned, blokey, dirty, smelly and not the sort of career that we should be steering young people into. That is the sort of feedback they

are getting from teachers who, as we would understand it, generally have no experience of our sector of industry. But, more importantly, parents are going to hear a lot about IT, multimedia and so on and so forth and say, 'Isn't it wonderful,' as are their peers.

CHAIR—Given that problem, do you think there needs to be more direct access into the schools? Given those prejudices, if you like, of teachers, the fact that you are sending software and so on into the schools means that it is not likely to be promoted in the sort of way that you might expect. We had, for instance, witnesses from the National Farmers Federation and witnesses from the agricultural sector saying the same thing: that they have sent material into the schools but that the material does not seem to be promoted very energetically within the schools. Do you think there is an avenue for your industries to pursue more direct access into the schools to communicate directly with students to try to raise their awareness of the opportunities?

Mr Green—I do not think the avenues are there. I do not think we have the resources to do it on our own. The problem with something like electrotechfutures was that it was a federal government funded project. It was a one-off. As I understand it, there is no ongoing funding. Those things make an impact at a point in time, but only at that point in time, and as time goes by—

CHAIR—Do you think, then, that there is a need for some sort of jointly funded arrangement, not just in your industry but in other similar industries, where perhaps the federal government kicks in something and your industry association kicks in something so you have a permanent promotions-careers officer for your industry visiting schools, taking in the information, doing presentations to students?

Mr Green—I certainly think some sort of approach is warranted. I am not even sure if most schools have vocational guidance officers—which is, I think, what they were called when I was at school, and that was an awfully long time ago.

CHAIR—There is a problem there too.

Mr Green—I am not sure if most schools have those sorts of people. That is a broad area that needs addressing. Maurice deals with young people a lot.

CHAIR—Does the approach that I have just suggested sound feasible?

Mr Graham—I think it is probably a good idea. I worked in Rob's position some years ago, and we put together a career booklet and a video. It went into all the Victorian schools and ANTA also funded us to send it around Australia. The problem is that there is a lot of ignorance within schools about what industry is about. In the sorts of industry sectors where we work, if you said to someone, 'What sort of work is undertaken in the electricity industry?' most people would have no idea. We recruit line-worker apprentices each year for a number of companies in Victoria and we physically have to take young people out and show them what the job is about, put them on machinery and so on, because they just do not understand. I do not think a lot of teachers understand the process of industry—for example, how you make motor vehicles, glass et cetera. It is very difficult for them if they have not been exposed to the broader industry and what sorts of jobs are out there. If you sent booklets and videos, I think it is problematic.

CHAIR—They will often end up on the shelf, and that's it.

Mr Graham—Yes. Career guidance is very important. There is also concern about the articulation arrangements between schools, TAFE, university and real work—how you try to link that all together. There has been a lot of effort by all governments in Australia to try and improve that, but I think it is an area where there is still a lot of ignorance: people really do not understand how it all fits together.

CHAIR—We have a real paradox, haven't we? There are skill shortages in many industries—the automobile industry, the electrical industry et cetera—and they cannot get the apprentices they need. On the other hand, we have young people leaving school who cannot get work. Those young people probably have the ability to fit into the sorts of industries that you represent and there is a real mismatch there. Going back to the suggestion I made, would it be feasible, from your industries' point of view, to configure perhaps half of the cost of having someone there with the passion and knowledge of your industries to represent those career opportunities to students in schools? Is it financially viable?

Mr Gullan—The issue is the size of that exercise. We are not necessarily just talking about one person. For example, let's say it was based at the EPICITB and of the nature that you are talking about. The dynamics of the electro-technology industry, the printing industry or the IT industry across the state would make a difference but it would be a relatively small difference. For example, if we said one person for electro-technology, that is different from one person for printing, which is a bit smaller, which is different again to one person for textile, clothing and footwear, which again would be a smaller exercise on the industry.

All people are arguing about the same sorts of issues: how do we get young people more interested in and more aware of the types of futures that they can enter into? That aspect of industry liaison and grouping of people would probably best be looked at through school based activities to see what can happen from within the schools; rather than industries pushing them into the schools, the schools having people who are aware enough to invite industry into their community. It is a different dynamic. We can take a horse to water but we can't make it drink. We can go out to schools but, unless they want us to be there, unless there is a champion within that school, it is just another person that goes into a school to talk to them about careers.

CHAIR—The problem is that often the horse doesn't know where the water is! There are significant shortages of careers advice in schools. It varies from state to state. Victoria has some real difficulties. Most schools do not have a full-time careers adviser. But even in those that do, the careers adviser often has very little industry experience and insufficient industry knowledge. Often it is someone who is plugged into a careers role in the school because they have some free periods or they have just come out of university. They are rarely people with a broad industry knowledge. Even if you have someone in the school with a coordination role, people in industries such as yours and in other industries still need to be brought in to do that job.

Mr Green—An individual for electro-technology, for instance, in Victoria would be a drop in the ocean, but a more structured approach, such as a cluster of schools in an area where you had a careers expo—it might be the eastern suburbs—

CHAIR—Do they work?

Mr Green—I do not know. I have not seen them in action, to be honest. One of my children has just started high school. A number of schools in a certain area got together and displayed their wares and, as parents—shopping around—we found that quite useful. Why wouldn't schools provide industry with an opportunity to come? Otherwise I am going to employ somebody who is going to be ringing school X, saying, 'Who do I talk to?' 'They can't talk to you now; they'll get back to you.' You can imagine one individual in Victoria trying to promote electro-technology: half of their time would be spent driving around; the other half of their time would be spent on hold, trying to talk to the right person in a school. It would be a wasted exercise, in my view.

Mr McCormick—Part of the issue is how vocational education is viewed in a school environment. It is partly to do with parents and society's view of where kids in years 11 and 12 should end up. Most parents who have their kids there want them to go on to university and I think the track is narrow and in essence sidelines that. It is seen as coming in second place.

I work quite closely with schools for Cisco. In the IT industry, there are industry certification programs that are unique to that industry sector and we integrate them with public education—be it TAFE, school or whatever. The bulk of my work is to do with integrating it within the various high school education systems so that a kid can get a contribution towards their university entrance, as well as undertake an industry certification. For some kids that is within VET in Schools, for some kids it is assuming the pure South Australian Certificate of Education, for example.

One of the main issues for getting kids into vocational education and to broaden their horizons in that sense is that there has to be a framework. We should not narrow their pathways. A lot of schools that are the frameworks for VET tend to have it at the side. It is a filter. If you are not going on to university, it is the catch-all basket for something to come out with, whereas a closer integration of that whereby you can do that and get a contribution towards university—you are not shortening your options—would seem to be a positive.

There is another issue that runs through schools: if you do not go to university, academically you are lower on the rung. That is driven as much by the university sector as by the schools, I would argue, and that filters back down in the system. You need to have a look perhaps at structures that would allow for VET to be seen as just another avenue that you can choose and to look at quality issues, because there are quite a number. A lot of what we do in terms of providing teacher training and so forth has to fill the gaps. Typically it is a physics teacher who has been given VET IT to do or been given our Cisco program to do, and the person is a bit lost.

Some of the areas you might want to have a look at would be bringing teachers up to speed with what happens in industry—if they are about to teach, what is supposed to happen in an industry—and their technical skills. Some teachers have never set foot outside an academic institution, yet they are thrust into a classroom and told that they are supposed to be teaching student X to become a trainee printer or a trainee IT technician, and they have never been outside that environment. To a certain extent, teachers are being hung out to dry in that regard, and some support for them would be useful.

Mr Hargrave—We seem to have a slightly different problem. Over the years we have attempted to spread the word. We have produced interactive CDs which have been distributed to

schools. We have distributed information to careers teachers and, once every four years, we have an exhibition which is called PacPrint. It is always held in Melbourne, because it is the only area we can use. We invite career teachers to come in and see technology working in the printing industry.

We have produced booklets for distribution to schools. We have attempted to have career nights with Rotary, Apex and Lions and in major shopping centres. But there is a perception—and it is, I think, one of our problems—from the parents' point of view: 'My son or my daughter is going to work in a printing factory and be covered in ink from head to foot, and therefore it is a factory job.' A lot of our printers, when they are qualified, can earn six-figure amounts; it is not unusual for them.

One of our other problems is that in each of the states we only have a monopurpose college. In Melbourne it is RMIT. As Mr Sidebottom will be aware, we do not have one in Hobart in any longer, so any Tasmanian apprentices will have to come to the mainland for training, which does have some problems, both from the parents' and the employer's point of view, as well. We have a very limited VET in Schools which is based in Maryborough, here in Victoria, which takes about 42 in the whole scheme, but we do not seem to get any input or requests for schools to come to us.

We are probably the third-largest manufacturing industry in Australia. We are now starting to experience quite substantial skills shortages. If it is not resolved in the near future, we will have to look to immigration and employer sponsorship to bring in sufficient skills. One of the problems that faces the industry is that it is a high-tech industry, integrating very much with IT and data coming in. What we had in the old days, of putting ink on paper, has now gone. It is very much computer controlled. As part of that, in conjunction with ANTA, we are in the final processes of reviewing the competency standards for the whole of the industry. Hopefully they will be finished by the end of November or beginning of December this year. That is where the printing industry is coming from and its situation. We are having problems recruiting labour.

Mr Green—Some industries say that sectors have a better fit—in terms of VET in Schools—than others and IT has a good fit. We have real concerns with electro-technology in terms of the capacity of a science teacher—because that is probably who it is going to be—to teach the program. There are issues of safety. There is a whole range of issues that have meant that, in the main, VET in Schools programs for electro-technology have not really eventuated.

Mr Graham—In my experience with secondary colleges, it depends on the principal of the college. If they are very progressive they will get involved in the VET sector. In Victoria we sometimes are looking at sometimes part-time apprenticeships, VET in Schools and a new certificate called VCAL. Each school may run each one of those different programs, but you get schools who have not embraced it to a large degree. There is also a concern that they will be marginalised to some degree and considered an old technical college, reinventing itself. There are also concerns, if there are a couple of schools close by, about who is going to get the students. There are all those sorts of issues. I think it is problematical; if the principal supports the system or does not.

My other concern is with tertiary rankings going up. Last year it was 92 or 93 to get into university in Victoria for a lot of courses. There are going to be more people who are not going

to get through to university in the future. That is the whole thing about legitimising VET—as I think Sean was saying—and making it a proper career path. I think also a lot of people do not understand the career path in that you can go into traditional areas. In our area, in electro-technology, you can do a lot of additional study and become a para-professional in technical areas. I do not think a lot of people understand that. That is not really clearly spelt out to the young people who are coming through.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You certainly put your finger on it when you said the message about VET in Schools is not loud and clear or, probably, frequent. I think you are also right when you say that the public at large—and you mentioned parents—do not understand vocational education and training outside of schools. There is a general ignorance. For instance—just to give you a practical example—I am having my electorate magazine printed. My knowledge of the printing industry and what goes into that process comes from when I was involved with marketing 20-odd years ago. What is happening now is astronomically different. I do not think the average punter understands half these things anyway, whereas before you knew there were trade schools, so that was where the trades were. You knew that if you were going to university for the trades that came out of that, you would go to university. There was the general stuff, like going into retail, and you could leave school and do it. It is not like that now. You were quite right to highlight that it is not just in schools; it is outside them.

I have only one question, because you have covered it pretty clearly. In recommendation 6, you say:

Vocational education and training qualifications completed by students whilst still at school not be a factor in determining eligibility for future new apprenticeship employment incentives.

I wonder if you could explain this so that it is on the record.

Mr Gullan—We have excised that one because it has been fixed.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—It just goes to show I read it. I am on the ball. I could not understand what that was about.

Mr Gullan—I will tell you what that was about. The incentives for employment were predicated on people not having achieved a certificate III level qualification by any pathway. What was happening with our IT students who had done a certificate III in schools was that, when they went out to get a job, if they wanted to move into our vocational programs, they were told by the employer or they were told by effectively the federal government, 'Sorry, the employer that wants to take you on won't be eligible for any incentive payments because you have already got a certificate III.'

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—So it has changed since.

Mr Gullan—Now it has changed. That is really what that recommendation was about.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is fine.

Mr Gullan—We would not have that as a factor in the consideration. That has now been achieved.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—It is great to see some things are catching up.

Mr McCormick—Another area that people have not touched on and which is problematic across all the industries—it is less so in our industry because there are obviously not as many occ health and safety issues as there would be in the other industries—is work placement as part of vocational education. Again, it comes back to that issue of: how can you teach kids about what goes on in an industry without them actually being there? To a certain extent you can simulate that environment a lot easier in the IT industry with role play et cetera. But I know in other industries you just cannot. That brings with it a raft of other issues—and these guys can probably talk about it better than I can—such as WorkCover issues and insurance issues. There should be some sort of support or whatever for schools to be able to do that well.

Even in our industry we have had instances where the same employer was rung up about five times in a row by different bodies involved in this process. Some sort of coordination and understanding of that would help industry, because it is a bit of an impost, to a certain extent. Industry want to help but the process could be made a bit easier—you guys have your particular issues in that regard—and some coordination of and support for that would be useful as well. We could perhaps get students and teachers out of the mind-set of: 'Head down, get your ENTER score or your UAI'—or whatever it is in the particular state that I am working in. That is what it is all about. Unfortunately, a lot of teachers still have that.

Mr Graham—There is a problem with work placement. I was involved in a project going back about nine years ago—a Dual Pathways program in Victoria. The students in a high school were undertaking a certificate in basic electronics. I got about 20 of the students placed at NEC and Siemens in the telecommunications manufacturing area. The companies put the young people on because of links we had with them and were doing us a favour. The problem we had was ongoing: how are you going to get someone to say, 'We're actually going to work with you in the future and bring classes in every year'? I think Alcoa, at Point Henry at Geelong, also ran an AVC going back about six years ago. That had the same problem: the sustainability of getting the industry there to work in with VET on the job.

Sean was right: in our industry—electrical—we would have concerns about safety issues. My company employ apprentices and we still have real concerns about them. We are a group training company so we send our apprentices out to our client host trainers. There really are safety concerns about passing on the duty of care to the host employers. That whole thing about duty of care for young people working out in VET in industries for work experience really has to be looked at. Some industries are much more dangerous than others, if you just look at their WorkCover premium ratings. Some occupations are far more problematic. Some of the things that have to be looked at if there is going to be work placement are whether it is practical, sustainable and ongoing.

CHAIR—Would you support compulsory work placement then? You would probably find real problems with that, yet some states structure workplace learning as a compulsory element of VET in Schools.

Mr Graham—Yes. I do think it is problematic in some areas. In some areas you could probably do it. Maybe in retail and hospitality you might be able to do it a little bit easier but I know there would be some occupations that would be very dangerous. If you put a young school person on Melbourne's Queen Vic site—there are about 2,000 tradies there; there are all sorts of occupations there—I would shudder. We have to spend a lot of time with our own apprentices, make sure they have been inducted properly and have proper mentoring, and it could be problematic in some areas.

Mr Green—One area that is on the wane is the traditional work experience, be that something that the school might have organised for school holidays, or young people through their own initiative might have organised. That is waning. Employers are not prepared to take the risk anymore because we are much more litigious, obviously. People are much more aware of WorkCover and OHS issues. As a young person I might have rocked up to whomever and said, 'I've got a few weeks of school holiday; can I hang out with you?' and he might have slipped me $5 a week—that sort of thing. It is traditional. It is a good entree, good exposure, to a potential vocation. That sort of thing is withering on the vine. Certainly if any members of ours ring us and say, 'What do we do?' our advice is, 'Well, we would suggest you don't because the risks are too high,' unless it is some sort of structured program via a school, where there are proper insurances et cetera put in place.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I was going to ask about recommendation 3—whether it should be compulsory.

CHAIR—You referred earlier, and you do in your submission as well, to the problem of relativity between VET in Schools qualifications and VET done through an external provider. Could you just quickly elaborate on that, perhaps how you think we can address that issue, or is it your view that we ought to be focusing more on VET outside of school rather than in schools?

Mr Gullan—It is one of the issues that there is not a single solution to and there is not a single cause of it. It is that whole community perspective of vocational education and training, as well as the resources and the teachers—that whole construct. For example, we recently had our state training awards and we had an electrician who was the apprentice of the year. At the end of last year, similarly we had a whole lot of young people who did exceptionally well in the VCE. All of those young people in the VCE were interviewed, profiled in the paper with their families, with whatever. What did we hear about the young electrical apprentice who became the apprentice of the year, selected throughout all the state at a dinner of 300 or 400 people? What we are looking at with vocational education and training in schools is that if it is going to have that parity of esteem, we must have a much broader front of activity, and it is not just a single person promoting it or giving schoolteachers more entree to the industry or giving them more technological skills; it is a much broader package of activity.

Mr McCormick—On another issue, and again it is to do with parity: one of the things that is good with schools is currently there are about 50 schools in Victoria with an industry certification program. We do it worldwide and there are about 200-plus schools across Australia that do it. In terms of parity, you have to undergo an independent assessment to basically get your piece of paper to say you are certified and whatever to do a certain type of function. The good side to VET in Schools is that, when it is resourced and done well and the teachers are provided with skills, the kids come out with exactly the same certification as the students who do

it in Monash Uni, or would do it in the University of Sydney, and there is exactly the same recognition worldwide.

You can do it. It just needs to be assessed and coordinated to ensure that, whether it is in school, TAFE or even university, as the case may be, the outcomes are comparable. Otherwise, as I find in my travels around each of the states, there is quite a degree of variation within the school system, within the TAFE system, and even within the university system, of what a qualification means when you exit. I do not think it is an issue just with VET. It is an issue with the education system as a whole but, because of the nature of VET and its being a poor cousin within the school curriculum to a certain extent and how it is viewed when students use those qualifications to go further into TAFE, certainly a good look at ensuring there is parity of esteem of that qualification is highly important, otherwise it will fall off. It is hard enough to get interest anyway but, if it is viewed outside as being not even a good VET qualification, it will just die on the vine.

Mr Graham—Probably another thing about that is that industry has to support whatever is put into VET. If you want a lot of these young people to get real jobs out of it, we have to be confident—similar to what Sean has just said—with the quality of the training and the quality of the actual certification and that we are listened to to some extent. We can be taken out of the equation to some degree. People should listen to what our industries want and what is acceptable to our industries as well.

Mr Hargrave—We have a similar situation, particularly looking at cross-border training. To give you an example, an apprentice in our industry down here does 960 hours of training as part of their apprenticeship. In New South Wales they do 800—the same trade—so we have a complete disparity between the states, whereas if Tasmanian ones were coming here, they would be on the 960, but if they go to South Australia they are on a different figure again. It is less than the 960. But I do not think there are too many Tasmanian apprentices going to South Australia at this stage; there are more coming here. But that is a problem that would need to be addressed, that if you are going to have VET in Schools in Victoria, New South Wales or Queensland, then we need to have it as a fair dinkum one and not play around with ours, and that may come back to state government financing, which is the problem between Victoria and New South Wales.

CHAIR—Thank you. I am afraid our time has gone but we certainly appreciate your submission and your input this morning.

[10.31 a.m.]

HAMILTON-NOY, Ms Tamara, Project Officer, Textile, Clothing, Footwear and Leather Industry Advisory Body Victoria

MAKSIMOVIC, Ms Andrea, Project Officer, Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia

TREE, Mr William, General Manager, Light Manufacturing Training New South Wales

WOODWARD, Ms Susan, General Manager, Light Manufacturing Training Australia

CHAIR—I welcome representatives of Light Manufacturing Training Australia. As a formality, I need to remind you that proceedings here today are considered legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. Could I invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions and discussion.

Ms Woodward—Thank you for the opportunity to provide extra feedback to our previous submission to this inquiry, which was submitted some months ago. Light Manufacturing Training Australia and its stakeholders have some fairly clear views about VET in Schools because of the potentially terrific opportunities it does provide both of our key industry areas of textile, clothing and footwear and furnishing.

As a little bit of context for our submission, I might spend a couple of minutes going over the roles and responsibilities of Light Manufacturing Training Australia and a little bit about our industry areas, which are perhaps slightly different from the previous industries you have had some discussions with today. Light Manufacturing Training Australia is a recognised national industry training advisory body and as such it is the peak national training policy body which is responsible for developing training for TCF and furnishing across Australia. Our scope of work is in the vocational education and training sector, which covers all training from entry level certificate I—including VET in Schools, of course—going up to advanced diploma. While our focus is VET, we are interested in those linkages back into schools and up into higher education.

Our key roles at the moment, particularly as defined by ANTA, are to identify industry skill development and training needs; develop, implement and continuously improve training products and services for our industry; and to assist the industry and enterprises to integrate skill development with their business goals. What we would like to see from the VET in Schools area is some sort of extension and a wider strategy to look at all of those areas, as well as the specifics of the vocational education and training area.

In carrying out these roles, Light Manufacturing Training Australia works with a variety of stakeholders, including industry associations, key companies, unions and particularly its state ITAB counterparts—a number of my colleagues are here today to assist with some feedback to this inquiry. Before we outline some of the initiatives that the states have undertaken and provide some comments in relation to the VET in Schools area, we will talk a little bit about our industry areas. They are quite diverse and perhaps unique in some ways to other industry areas.

LMTA coverage encompasses a range of diverse industries that can be described within two broad light manufacturing categories. As I mentioned, they are textile, clothing and footwear and furnishing. There are a number of features of those industries that perhaps distinguish them from other industry areas. First, they are not homogenous in any sort of way. They range from longstanding traditional export manufacturing companies to others which only serve the local markets and therefore have not been impacted at all by overseas competition. Some of the companies are contracting, certainly within recent years. Others are developing and looking at new niche markets and new ways of doing business. The size of operations is vastly different right across the country but light manufacturing comprises mainly small business.

Both of the areas of the industry are significant employers. We have approximately 200,000 employees across the country in both of those categories. It is probably fair to say that it is a mature industry and both of the areas are developing skills and products that are important components of the economy. In terms of the sectors that LMTA coverage looks at, we range from early stage processing, both of natural and synthetic products—for example, early stage wool processing, cotton ginning, hide, skin and leather products—to production industries in the clothing and textiles area. Other examples are furniture making and bed and mattress making.

We then look at a range of areas in the production service industries; for example, floor covering and finishing, glass and glazing, dry-cleaning, laundry and footwear repairs. We really cover a very full gamut of sectors. For the purposes of the advice we give to ANTA in terms of our industry VET plan, it actually covers some 32 quite distinct industry sectors. In fact, they all see themselves as separate industries.

The other part that is significant about our industry is that it has been undergoing a sustained period of change and transition over recent years in light of such factors as globalisation, new consumer tastes and preferences and new technologies. It is evident that with continued overseas competition and other factors impacting on the industry, this restructuring is likely to continue over the next five to 10 years. That will, I suspect, include the further aggregation of businesses across both industries and development of niche markets. More sophisticated exporting will be required from the industries. It will also involve the introduction of innovative practices and new technologies, possibly with the relocation either in part or whole of companies offshore.

In that environment we really need targeted education and training assistance programs, both in relation to upskilling and retraining current staff. We also need the capacity to attract the full range of new employee entrants. The light manufacturing industry believes that the attraction and retention of new entrants is going to be important to their future success and development.

The industry, perhaps like some other manufacturing areas, does suffer from community perceptions about the capacity of the industry to deliver sustainable and desirable careers for young people. It is certainly telling when you do some research across the country in relation to that. Generally we believe the time has come to strengthen the relationship between the building of the work force and its skill development in fairly broad terms, of which VET in Schools is one part only. We would like to see VET in Schools as part of a broader picture in terms of that sort of strategy.

As part of its VET plan for the next few years, LMTA will be seeking the support of a broad range of government agencies to work with the industry to ensure that young people are, first of

all, aware of the career opportunities within the industry and also the value of training, perhaps as opposed to undertaking higher education courses. That is going to require a sustained and multifaceted approach that engages industry, government, the wider community, parents, schools, the VET providers—such as TAFE—and young people themselves.

We see VET in Schools as an important part of this overall broader strategy. LMTA has already undertaken a series of initiatives at the national level to facilitate the promotion of VET in Schools. For example, in our new furnishing training package we have developed a whole series of special projects at the certificate I level which will enable young students to undertake specific projects in each sector area, with the hope of enabling them to experience what a picture framer might do, what it is to make a table or a cabinet or a chair, or to work on some other specific project.

We have also been involved with the curriculum corporation to develop a planning and implementation guide for the TCF training package because, again, while the clothing area is an important part of VET in schools, there are a number of other occupations in textile, clothing and footwear which we would like to see young people exposed to. Recently we have been involved in the Victorian initiative to develop a certificate III concept development for clothing production, which goes past just sewing skills to design and perhaps some other areas that are of a little bit more interest to school students. We are hoping that that Victorian initiative will be introduced into the review of the TCF training package which is under way at the moment.

We have also developed a careers booklet for furnishing, which we have promoted through our state ITAB network, which looks at the whole range of furnishing careers. We are hoping, with the implementation of the furnishing training package, that more people will be exposed to the range of careers involved in furnishing. We have also participated in a joint manufacturing ITAB careers project which is promoting careers for manufacturing generally right across the country, with involvement in initiatives like RoboCup and Manufacturing Week.

In closing, though, there are also some important issues regarding the implementation of VET in Schools across the country which we believe might make it more or less effective. Some of these issues have been espoused in our submission—for example, the appropriate integration of theory and practice; the involvement of industry in VET in Schools programs; the importance of the establishment of partnerships between industry and schools and also between registered training organisations such as TAFE and schools in terms of their implementation; proper and appropriate employment outcomes and pathways, and in relation to that there are also fairly significant health and safety issues, certainly for our industries, which it is important to put on the table.

Our industries are also concerned about the skills and qualifications of teachers delivering these programs, certainly for our industry areas, and the resourcing that may be available for our particular areas in order to deliver those programs appropriately. They are just some of the issues that we see as important for the delivery of VET in Schools for our industries, and we look forward to discussing those issues further with you today.

CHAIR—Thank you, Susan. Do your industries suffer from the same problems as perhaps some of those others that we met this morning: that it is difficult to attract young people? That is a common problem, is it?

Ms Woodward—Very much so.

CHAIR—What is the impact of some of the information packages that you have developed and some of those approaches you have just outlined? Have they started to have an impact? Are you seeing a growing awareness, a growing interest, among young people in careers in your industries?

Ms Woodward—They are beginning to have an impact, although there are a variety of contradictions still in schools. There is still very much a tendency to promote higher education qualifications and going to university. There are still perceptions of our industries being dirty and not having a variety of career options. Most people, when they think of TCF, think of just clothing, or maybe fashion, but not much else. When they think of furnishing, they think of perhaps making a table or chairs—cabinet-making, woodworking occupations—but not glass and glazing, not picture framing, not bed and mattress making, not the range of other areas that are involved in furnishing. I think perceptions in the community and in schools and the perceptions of young people are still fairly narrow.

CHAIR—How do we effectively address that? You have talked about some of the packages you are putting together and so on. Will they do the job in themselves or do you need to get into schools more, to actually communicate that in person?

Ms Maksimovic—I think one of the fundamental problems is the information that careers teachers have. What seems to come up a lot when you talk to schools is that they do not have a lot of information. Certainly programs like VCAL in Victoria are good and important, but, because of that parity issue that our colleagues before were talking about, a lot of parents are saying, 'Why would I suggest to my child that they go through a program if at the end they cannot go on to university even if they might want to go and do a TAFE course first?' There is a real issue there and that is restricting people from doing it.

Our industry has to take some responsibility as well. There is no shortage; there is a dearth of people who want to do fashion. There are hundreds of thousands of kids out there who are interested in fashion design, merchandising, sourcing et cetera, but what we need to be doing and what we are starting to do—and I think the LMTA has done a bit of that through that project with the other manufacturing industries—is to say: 'Look, these are not dirty occupations. Some of the new textile areas around technical textiles are very high-tech R&D, really important small niche industries. They are clean, they are interesting and you can earn a lot of money.' We need to do a lot more promotion of that.

CHAIR—To get the message across, yes.

Ms Maksimovic—As well as the image of manufacturing being a dirty industry, there is the image of manufacturing being a dying industry, and that is something that obviously we confront. We know that there are a whole lot of small businesses starting up that are doing new, innovative things, but delivering it in a school context is really hard, because it is small.

CHAIR—Have you tried to do that? Have you tried to get into schools?

Ms Woodward—Yes. For example, our furnishing state ITAB a couple of years ago had some specific state government funding to support a project officer who went out into schools and promoted furnishing. That produced some quite significant results. But what it does need, I think, are the resources to have the capacity to go out to schools and talk to careers people and the students. That certainly resulted in quite significantly increased numbers of students going into furnishing courses of all sorts.

CHAIR—Funding is a barrier.

Ms Woodward—It is about people on the ground. You can produce all these nice resources and, at a national level, that is the main thing that we can do, but you also need people on the ground at a regional level to go out and talk to the students about what sorts of career options they have in these industries.

CHAIR—Would it be feasible to have project officers partly funded by your industry and partly funded by government to do that, say one per state or a couple per state, going around to schools all the time, promoting the material that you have and engaging students directly? Is that sort of thing likely to be effective or not?

Ms Hamilton-Noy—I would see that as highly effective. There need to be resources put into engaging with the teachers so that the teachers then engage with the students to advise them of the range of options that they have available to them. The Victorian IAB has spent some time approaching schools, with little success, in terms of going to speak to students about their options in the TCF industry.

CHAIR—Why with little success?

Ms Hamilton-Noy—Our impression has been that the curriculum is so jam-packed in years 11 and 12 that there is not a lot of time to speak to students and to take time out from other commitments.

Ms Maksimovic—But in terms of industry support it is difficult. It is a bit disheartening possibly, just because of the uncertainties, and we are having a lot of trouble placing apprentices. Most employers will say to you, 'My best TCF mechanic is going to retire in five years time.' It takes seven years to train an entry level tradesperson. You say, 'Okay, are you going to start doing that now?' 'Don't know. Don't know if I'm going to be here.' All those kinds of issues make it really difficult to encourage that. Then, of course, there is no TAFE based TCF mechanic program any more because they can't get the bums on seats. If you are going out there and pitching part-time apprenticeships to kids in school, are they going to continue on? All those kinds of issues are quite difficult. But resourcing is the major issue for VET in Schools because we are asking schools to do a lot. That is where all the problems flow—everything from asking kids to go and spend two days doing on-the-job training when that cannot be fitted in because of various timetable issues et cetera to the notion that you can become competent in a particular unit through simulated environments.

What is happening—and what manufacturing is experiencing—is that the kinds of programs that are easy to offer schools are the most popular ones—tourism and hospitality, business and clerical, computing—because it is cheap. They can do it. They do not have to set up anything.

Northland Secondary College is about to set up a manufacturing skills centre. They have been given $250,000 by ANTA, but that is not going to be nearly enough because they are meant to be covering food, furnishings and auto. To get any kind of state-of-the-art facility which is going to be current is going to cost a lot more than that. That is where I think the partnerships have to develop between industry, TAFE and schools, because schools cannot be asked to do it all. Employers certainly, from my discussions with them, have a lot of scepticism about someone who comes out with a certificate II, having been deemed competent through a simulated environment, and they refuse to put them in a textile factory or in any other kind of factory because of all the OH&S issues.

Mr Tree—A lot of the furnishing sector is small businesses. From New South Wales' point of view, although there is quite a deal of furnishing within the schools—there are some 250- or 270-odd schools that deal with furnishing in New South Wales—we are not seeing the students in those areas coming through into the TAFE courses. A lot of that is because of the state based sector. The state centre at Lidcombe is an isolated area. Therefore, country students certainly have some concerns about getting down to the TAFE. Those concerns extend from the employers on block release to their parents who have concerns about young people coming down to the TAFE after they have been through that sector within the school. They are certainly getting some hands-on experience at school, but it is very minor.

The other thing, as we have already stated, is the recognition of those skills coming into the TAFE course, because they have been issued with a certificate II. The way that we need to address these areas is to make very strong pathways to show people that there is a career path within our industries and to show them that possibly things have changed in the perception of parents and others regarding what trade areas are. I have heard it mentioned a couple of times here that there is good money to be earned out of trade areas, and I think that needs to be emphasised.

The trades are, I suppose, what you make of them. It is much more efficient today. There is a change in machinery and a change in aptitude of people coming in. Talking of aptitude, that is an area that we need to target in schools. We need to put down a profile of the types of people that we require to get the skills and abilities that they need within trades, because there is a bit of a misconception that academic subject areas have no relationship to trade. They do. Mathematics, for instance, is absolutely essential in any trade area. Hand-eye coordination comes with that aptitude. There is a bit of profiling that needs to happen regarding the pathway and where we end up and how we better involve people in it, because we are an ageing industry and we certainly need to attract more people.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Your submission certainly makes it clear that you believe that Australia, in particular, does not value practical based education. You gave examples of Germany and Japan. I think the telling one was the attachment from Michael Reid, where that very good teacher said that there is no such thing as vocational education. Good God! If that is what you are battling, that leads me into my question. You said, both here and in your submission, that you have concerns with the difficulty of trained industry professionals becoming teachers—in the secondary system, in particular—although you do say that the union qualifications in TAFE are different. Can you elaborate? It seems to me that you are really saying, 'Look, people out in industry have got qualifications. Let's make it easier for them to get into schools in order to teach.' At the same time, that would allow a better dispersal of

information and knowledge about these industries. You list 30 of them. It is mammoth! Is that what you are saying?

Ms Woodward—The answer is more about partnerships, as a couple of people have already mentioned today. It seems to me that if we are very serious about VET in Schools and we want to expand it into the manufacturing areas—particularly our industry areas—firstly, there would either need to be new forms of teacher training at the schools level to deliver that sort of training; secondly, there would need to be involvement from local companies in order for the students to be aware of the latest practices; and, thirdly, there would need to be partnerships with local TAFE colleges that have the equipment and the skills. There needs to be a whole range of strategies in order to deliver our programs properly, I believe. Again, it is not looking at one thing in particular; it is about integrating the whole range of those three things in order to deliver the programs appropriately.

Ms Maksimovic—We cannot assume that every person who is a good tradie is a good teacher. That is why there are professional standards for teachers which should be upheld. I agree with Sue that it is about partnerships. To give you a funny example, my housemate is an art teacher. He was employed to do some art teaching, but then was asked to teach furniture technology and then was asked to do some welding. He was given a video on some OH&S stuff to do with welding and then told, 'Go off and teach it.' He refused, but schools are under so much resource pressure that they do not have the money to employ someone like a TAFE teacher to come in and teach that particular subject. They have to do it with what they have. It is ridiculous and it is unsafe. Fundamentally, it is a dangerous thing to be doing.

I also think teachers could be sent out into industry. There are programs that are run for TAFE teachers about return to industry. That same thing could happen. I think that all of that is about being a tradie or a trades teacher in a high school, an occupation that is seen to be desirable and that is seen to have a future. It is about professional development and the esteem of those kinds of people and valuing their skills.

Mr Tree—I think there is a little bit of reverse perception too from the trade point of view, with people maybe viewing themselves as not being educationalists. They may be able to train an apprentice on the job, but putting them into a classroom is a bit of a frightening situation. I consult with a company in the floor area. We are going through the process of putting tradespeople in as certificate IV trainers. There is resistance there, because they are concerned about what we are really after. The fact is we are really after them just saying, 'Yes, we can do it,' because they have already done it for a long period of time. To take those people and put them in a classroom situation on their own would be difficult. Putting them as support to a trained teacher is probably a good way to go and, hence, comes back to the partnership arrangement.

Ms Hamilton-Noy—I can talk about the partnership arrangement from a VCAL perspective, in that one of our TAFEs within metropolitan Melbourne is delivering VCAL to approximately 80 students this year and has set up partnerships with a number of schools in that region to provide training to the students who perhaps would not otherwise have that opportunity if it were to be delivered in house. That is seen as quite a successful model across Victoria in terms of the potential that partnerships can bring.

CHAIR—You say in your summary of issues in attachment B that some practical studies can only be assessed through workplace training, and that is probably true in many sectors. Would you support a proposal in relation to VET in Schools that there be a mandatory structured workplace learning component? Do you think that a sufficient number of your members would take students? Would there be enough work placements available for students wanting to do VET courses in light manufacturing generally perhaps, rather than industry specific?

Mr Tree—In that area the campaign would be as big in getting students involved as it is in getting host employers involved. Because of the size of the industries, they are always hesitant about putting numbers on that are not productive. They would see that probably as some cost area, so it would be important to put something in place that would show them the benefits of it. While ever people perceive that training is a cost, it is a problem, and we need to go the other way and show the training as a benefit to all who get involved.

Ms Hamilton-Noy—I would like to see it as highly encouraged but perhaps not essential to passing the competencies, because I would not like to think that a lack of industry commitment to VET in Schools in that particular year would lead to a student not being able to undertake that program.

Ms Maksimovic—There needs to be a whole lot of work done on the regulatory arrangements around WorkCover and all sorts of other liabilities. As the previous panel said, we are becoming a very litigious society and employers are scared of that, so it needs to be made simple, there need to be small amounts of paperwork and the benefits, as Bill outlined, need to be explained to them. I do not think you can make it compulsory but I certainly think that in particular industry areas what you can do is just work out what can be delivered in the school and what cannot be delivered in the school, and then just fund that employer to deliver those extra couple of units.

In things like construction or electrical et cetera, I certainly would have problems with people coming out with certificates and then being put on a building site and working on live power boards and stuff. It is not going to work, but for our industry I certainly think there are many areas where you could have people who complete the certificate without the work placement, even though the work placement is the most desirable element of all the vocational programs in schools, because it gives them a taste of what the industry is really like and hopefully leads them to a job.

CHAIR—There is a bit of a dilemma here, because on one hand employers are saying that unless a student has a significant amount of on-the-job experience then the VET in Schools qualification does not mean anything but, on the other hand, there are difficulties in some industries particularly, because of the OH&S/WorkCover issues that you mentioned, in actually getting them on the job, so somehow we have to work out a way to resolve that problem. Finally, do you think there is a place to be expanding VET in Schools or do you think we ought to be revisiting the use of TAFE and moving back towards greater use of TAFE for VET courses?

Mr Tree—I think there is some concern from TAFE that schools are taking over some of their roles and therefore there is some concern about the quality that is coming from the school area. Again, we should be using partnerships in gaining the students from school and having that progression. There should be a pathway, a solid area, so that there is an answer to the question, 'What's at the end of it for me?' We should be using the TAFE facilities that are available to

alleviate that funding cost of putting the equipment and machinery into any number of schools. From that point of view, a state centre is probably a good thing in that a lot of stuff can be driven into there at a one-off cost, rather than doing it in numerous other areas, but it is probably a case of seeing exactly what sort of a course area we are going to put together, what the expectations are and what equipment is required to facilitate what the schools require in that course area.

Ms Maksimovic—One of the most important things that needs to change is that we need to link all the vocational programs to actual skill shortages and industry needs, because there is no point in churning out people on tens of thousands of retail traineeships when that is not going to be their chosen career path and is of little value.

CHAIR—That is a message we keep getting, but the real challenge is how we link those VET courses to—

Ms Maksimovic—Some mapping of outcomes is a good start—to have a look and see where people end up once they have done their VET in Schools program, to see whether there is a mismatch, and then talking to industry about its needs.

CHAIR—That is very helpful. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 11.07 a.m. to 11.31 a.m.

COULEPIS, Dr Tony, Executive Director, AusBiotech Ltd

STEVENSON, Mr Brian, Program Manager, Gene Technology Access Centre

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you for your submission and for your time today. We invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Stevenson—I welcome this opportunity to present to the committee the GTAC—Gene Technology Access Centre—program. I will start by saying a little bit about the program. This is coming from a very educational school perspective, but it does address many of the problems that no doubt the committee is considering and trying to find resolution for in terms of vocational education and emerging industries in the 21st century in Australia.

We are primarily concerned with enthusing students about science and, if that happens, we are sure that more will take up careers in science. We have a particular focus on molecular biology and the biotechnological applications which stem from work in molecular biology. We are also mindful that in preparing students for work in these fields they need also to have an awareness of the impact of such biotechnological applications on society as a whole.

The program addresses students in two ways: it seeks to encourage scientific literacy and it also enthuses students to consider careers in science. We also try to encourage students to see science careers as having particular diversity. They do not all have to wear lab coats to work in scientific careers. We are very keen, as Professor Suzanne Cory constantly reminds us, to ensure that Australia has a particularly talented and skilled base for the knowledge economy in the early 21st century.

We are also interested in giving students and teachers access to eminent research scientists in Australia. We believe there is a real need to show students that Australia does have scientific heroes and give them the opportunity to meet those people and adopt them, to some extent, as role models. We are equally keen—and the program addresses this—to upskill or increase teachers' awareness of contemporary biological issues and, I put it in this way, to enrich their own storytelling. We believe that the effective teacher is a good storyteller and that their storytelling, addressing contemporary biological issues, needs stimulation and enrichment.

We are also interested in addressing some of the pre-service education issues with teachers-to-be. For some time I lectured in biological method at Melbourne University to various groups of Dip. Ed. students. About a third of the last three years intake of students had no experience in what we could describe as basic tools and techniques in biotechnology or working with DNA. We have taken those students and given them GTAC workshops to introduce them to basic skills in DNA manipulation tasks. This shows a diversity of Dip. Ed. students who are coming through and, in the following year, they will end up being teachers, so we are trying to address that.

I have a few points about why we think the GTAC program has been a success. It started off in the mid-nineties with Professor Suzanne Corey, who is the director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research. She visited Cold Spring Harbor in the US and came back all

excited. She said, 'Why doesn't Melbourne have something like that?' To understand this project you also have to understand the unique geography of the area. University High School is opposite Melbourne University and it is next door to the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, so within a one-minute walk in any direction we have all the stakeholders who are involved in the GTAC program.

Professor Corey started off doing summer schools for teachers in about 1995. Over about five years 120-odd teachers attended those summer schools. It was an intensive laboratory course in DNA science. After five years the numbers dropped away a little bit. I was head of the senior school at University High School and I was also the senior biology teacher, so she rang me up and said, 'Brian, why aren't we doing something—it is right next door to us?' We got together and applied for various yearly grants under the Science in Schools Strategy program of the Victorian government. That is how the current phase of GTAC started. Other aspects of the history are in the literature in the package.

On the success of the program so far, by any judgment it has been successful and it continues to be successful. The state government, to their credit, a couple of years ago recognised that the program had a long way to go and they funded the building of a centre which is currently being built at the University High School. That building is a unique, dedicated facility to this program. The building is currently funded at $6.3 million and it is for all Victoria and, we would hope, beyond Victoria as well in the future. The success comes down to a small group of individuals. No doubt you have heard previously from many people talking about partnerships between industry and schools and getting teachers into industry and getting industry into schools. What we have done is to develop a successful partnership between the secondary, tertiary and research sectors in Melbourne.

The learning environment in which we put both students and teachers is to immerse them in what I describe as the creative end of science. They are actually working with young scientists, PhD students from the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute and Melbourne University. These PhD students are some of the best the country has. They are totally committed and passionate about their science. To see year 9 and 10 students—and year 12 students and teachers—come in and, in very small groups where the learning environment is totally supportive, spend two and a half or three hours working with somebody they have never met before on a task is empowering in a sense. It gives us the impetus to go forward.

If you ask a group of year 9 or year 10 students to put up their hands when you ask, 'How many of you really like science?' about 50 per cent, on a good day, will say, 'Not much.' However our students all go away thinking that working with a young scientist and being immersed in the process and being supported and not left alone and being communicated to—not just about science—has suddenly improved their outlook. Some of those outlooks, one hopes, will stay with them a bit longer and give them a second chance to get involved in things. I am sure later on you will have questions about this.

The partnership is important, the learning environment is important. And through, no doubt, the reputation of Professor Suzanne Cory from the Walter and Eliza Hall institute, as well as being supported by the state government, the program is also supported by philanthropic funding that WEHI—Walter and Elizabeth Hall institute—has managed to obtain. That has given us a

certain amount of security for the next three years in terms of where this program can go—hopefully being housed in this new centre, which should open around March next year.

CHAIR—Thank you, Brian. Tony, do you have any comments to make?

Dr Coulepis—Yes. I am the CEO and executive director of AusBiotech, which is the biotechnology industry organisation in Australia. I will give you a bit of background. AusBiotech is a national organisation. We are the peak biotechnology industry organisation, representing the entrepreneurial biosciences, including human and animal health, medical devices, agriculture, diagnostics and environment—the umbrella of technologies which are encompassed under this word 'biotechnology'. We have about 1,700 members across Australia. That is composed of corporate members and also individuals and students. We are one of the few—if not the only—industry organisations of our kind in the world which embraces students and has a student category for membership.

We recently launched a special interest group for students. That was launched because the Australian Biotechnology Students Association, which was an independent organisation trying to do the sorts of things that Brian was talking about, found it difficult to operate in the environment where insurance companies and the like did not wish to underwrite its events. The organisation had lots of ideas, lots of energy, but could not go anywhere. We spoke with them and, because we had a student membership category, we have undertaken to take them under our wing, and so the Australian Biotechnology Students Association has now become a special interest group of AusBiotech. We are now looking after their insurance and their activities—mentoring them. That was launched at the recent biotechnology meeting in Adelaide which brought together 1,200 stakeholders, of which there were many students—and we were delighted with that. Basically, what we are going to be doing is trying to encourage the students to take control of their destiny. They are very keen to help their members come into the industry, be retained in the industry, and then create activities that are dedicated to students.

AusBiotech, as an industry organisation, doing all the sorts of things that industry organisations do, is also involved in students. That is underpinned by AusBiotech's business plan, which basically has six key elements. The first key element is awareness: how do we create awareness of biotech? The second key element is nurturing young enterprises to make sure that they grow and become successful enterprises. The third element is all about people: that is where the student element comes in. The fourth element is about linkages: how do we link the communities together and all the stakeholders that form the mosaic of what is biotechnology? The fifth element is a competitive regulatory environment, and the sixth element is a competitive financial environment. The last two are national and international rather than state based activities.

In terms of AusBiotech, one of the reasons we were delighted to accept this invitation to address you was because we want to address vocational education in new and emerging industries. We believe this is very important. There are a number of barriers—for want of a better word—which we believe should be tackled in the education system early on, so that as we then go through the process of students in primary school, secondary school, tertiary education deciding where they want to go in life, they have a clear idea of what the career options are; thus removing some of the barriers which we are now finding in industry—and Brian may wish to

comment on this later on—where there is almost an untold barrier between academia and industry.

If you talk to the academics, they say, 'Well, the industry guys don't really have it all together.' If you talk to the industry guys they say, 'Well, the academics don't really quite have it all together.' There is this idea of the taintedness of commercialisation in the research arena. If you are a researcher and somebody says, 'I'll give you some money to focus on your project,' it is almost as though it is not really kosher. That is a cultural issue. In other progressive economies—such as Canada, the US, and also Israel and Ireland—where they have addressed this issue and taken away the stigma associated with commercialisation, academia and industry work together and the productivity is much greater.

Let's go back to the first issue of education and emerging technologies. We would like to suggest that the words 'commercialisation' and 'career paths' should be introduced early on in the education system. Why shouldn't primary and secondary and tertiary kids know that, for example, in the sciences you have the material sciences, numerical sciences, biological sciences, and in biological sciences you have biotechnology, and in biotechnology you can be anything from a lawyer in biotech, to a bench scientist in biotech, to a business person in biotech, and have that come out early on in the piece?

You start then by saying, 'How do we address the issues of the planet?' which are some of the things that Brian mentioned. The problems of the planet are the ageing population, environment, hunger. Those issues are not going to be addressed by conventional methods. They will be addressed through biotechnology or scientific endeavours and solutions. Telling that to students when they are at the point of making a decision could cause some of them to say, 'Science is where I want to go.' If they start thinking early about science and what science does and how they can enter into a research phase that could help the ageing population or help the environment or help global warming, it is a very important concept. If we now tackle that as an issue that we believe education can deliver—education targeting those areas to make sure that students are informed of the opportunities at the outset—that will have a massive impact, we believe, down the track.

How is that delivered? We have a series of over 500 corporate members of AusBiotech, CEOs who are happy to contribute, to go out and talk to students. We have a students special interest group and part of their major objective is to talk to students, so that you have a mature age student talking to a student about, 'This is what I've done and what I've done. This is why I've done it and why I've done it'—a similar concept to what Brian was talking about.

In terms of industry involvement, we would like to think that, as an emerging industry in entrepreneurial sciences, we could be involved in these sorts of discussions, which is why I am delighted to be part of this inquiry, to seed the thought of engaging industry early on in the discussion, early on in the policy formation so that we can then build things that (a) work with teachers, (b) work with students, and (c) give us a solution down the track to many of our current issues.

Our CEOs in the industry are saying, 'We need to have students who are work ready.' To make then 'work ready', why not introduce into the curriculum the concepts of some of the commercialisation issues, such as intellectual property. It does not have to be done in great

detail. If the students are into science, the concept of good laboratory practice could also be introduced—what does it mean?—a one-liner that creates a culture of thinking about what good laboratory practice means. What do 'ethics' mean? What should or should I not do as a scientist? To do that, you need the teachers to be focused in that area. In order to do that, you need the teachers engaged with industry so that industry can say to teachers, 'These are the issues we're facing'. For example, teachers need to be informed and able to talk to their students and give them a balanced view about the genetically modified food issue—and not necessarily their view but a balanced view about what the pros and cons are and then let the students make up their own minds.

Retention in science can only happen if you drum up the sort of interest that our student special interest group has; the passion that they are actually going to join with AusBiotech to try and make a difference. We need career opportunities up front, early on in the piece. Students get to VCE and then start thinking, 'Gee, what am I going to do with my life? I've got all these subjects.' We need to nurture partnerships with industry. Partnership with industry means partnership with academia. The education system is a great way of bringing these people together.

Finally, there is global competitiveness. Let's not anchor ourselves into only Australia; let's look at what is happening overseas. What I am talking to you about are not novel ideas from AusBiotech or from AusBiotech members; it is what members have said to us. They have said, 'Look at what is happening in the rest of the world.' Let's not reinvent the wheel. Why not just pinch some of the things that are working and apply them to Australian innovation? Global competitiveness should be something that is in the curriculum when students are being taught. That is basically my message from my members to this committee, and thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIR—Thank you, Tony.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What you are saying makes eminent sense, and I am really interested in the GTAC House; it is very exciting. How do we engage, in a culturally informative, relevant way, both publicly and in schools—particularly with teachers and students and their parents—about what you call emerging industries? In actual fact, they have emerged beyond that. They are emerging further ahead. How on earth do we make these exciting prospects knowable to teachers and students and their parents in schools?

Dr Coulepis—What you are talking about is one of the key issues, about which our board of directors have said, 'That's great, but how do we do it?' We believe that it needs to be an attack at multiple levels. No one solution on its own is going to create the scenario that addresses your point. We need to be looking at, first of all, teacher training. If the education system says that once a year teachers have to find the time to come to the AusBiotech annual meeting, if we bring all of the industry together once a year, we would be delighted to put on a biotechnology for non-biotechnologists stream so that teachers can be educated, so that you have got a forum that they can go to. We did it in Adelaide. If they cannot get to that forum, there could be the mechanism of distributing a CD to teachers as an annual deliverable, to say, 'Here is what's happening in biotechnology. Here it is. Please look at it.'

There is the face to face. There is the electronic media. Then there is the opportunity for teachers in their curriculums to have a KPI that says that each school needs to invite somebody—whether it is one of our students from our student special interest group; whether it is a CEO of a biotech company—to come and give an address to teachers to update them, to bring them up to speed. Then there is the public. We have been toying with the concept of Biotechnology Week, rather than just having our own conference. We have Science Week; we have all the other weeks. We are toying with the concept of a biotechnology week, so that when we have our annual meeting—which is the jewel in the crown for people in the industry and therefore they want some level of technical detail which might go above the community—we could also have Biotechnology Week, which means that we will have the sorts of things we were talking about for teachers addressed to the community.

The final point is: engage associations such as ourselves. We are always not-for-profit and run on the smell of an oily rag. We have thousands of members, and if you engage us, the Australian Society for Microbiology, the Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and several other societies, there will be contact with thousands of people who could spread the message in a very cost-effective way, so that we will not be coming to ask you for money. Engage those groups. Say to them, 'We need your assistance to get the message across.' Scientists are bad marketers, in general. I am not sure if you would agree with me on this. They are good communicators but they are bad marketers. We know what we do well and we know what the benefits of biotechnology are, but can we portray that? We have to learn those skills, but in the meantime nothing will do the trick any better than having those skills extracted by a process whereby we are invited to participate.

I do not believe that there is a single easy answer, but if you make it a mosaic of activities then the answer can be found and achieved in a cost-effective manner and with relatively quick results, because all those things can happen in a very time effective way. A CD can be produced by AusBiotech. In fact, we will just create a CD from all of our member companies in an easy form of science and send it to the rest of the teaching community. Those things can be done relatively easily. It is a matter of a focusing effort on how we become globally competitive in education outputs, and then a series of mosaics—people like Brian and his colleagues. There is a whole wealth of talent that can be mobilised to achieve that objective.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—When you talk about teaching training, it is interesting. In the past, you could have said, 'We're a biotech set-up for teacher training. Anyone teaching science had better come and see us,' but you have highlighted about six careers that are not science based at all.

Dr Coulepis—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Law and ethics, for a start. So there are very wide implications for the whole of teaching.

CHAIR—In terms of career options, most of the careers in the biotech industry—gene technology and so on—are post-tertiary careers, aren't they, whether we are talking molecular biology or legal ethics or whatever? What are the possibilities for students who do not go to university?

Mr Stevenson—I think there are some. I agree with a lot that Tony has said. One of the reasons why this centre is getting off the ground in terms of being a dedicated facility is to allow people like Tony's group to come and do a biotechnology week and push the particular things they are interested in—some of the things they are talking about in terms of commercialisation. But students, as I said before, do not need to simply see doing science as wearing a lab coat. They can be involved in the scientific enterprise in various ways, and there are excellent examples—graphic artists, computer experts, IT—without going into the tertiary legal aspects. In terms of being an artist, WEHI, for instance, has a huge graphic department. It is really important for the portraying of all the research and all the scientific expertise in that place.

There is a guy there called Drew Berry. Drew is an American who has lived out here for a lot of his life. He never finished school. He played around with computers. He describes himself as a bit of a nerd. He developed himself into an absolute whiz on computers doing molecular animations. He is now the world's best molecular animator. He lives in Melbourne. There is an interactive program based out of New York called DNAi. There is a book. There is a TV program which has been bought by the ABC but not released, which we are disappointed about. A whole range of educational resources is being released in 2003, which is the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the structure of DNA—a big deal around the world. Drew Berry's name appears as the molecular animator on most of them.

They are the most powerful teaching tools I have seen; much better than a teacher playing around with a texta on a whiteboard trying to describe how DNA copies itself or how DNA turns information stored in it into proteins. His animations do it beautifully. He has spoken to students about being a scientific graphic artist. There are a whole lot of other people who do scientific cartoons. There is quite a collection in Melbourne of people who are simply expressing the scientific enterprise graphically or artistically. I watched a group of students listening to people like Drew Berry at the Melbourne Museum when we did a gene tech week. We do a gene tech week in collaboration with the Melbourne Museum, Murdoch University, the Gene CRC and Biotechnology Australia. There were kids who were not particularly interested in science—not the test tubes—but when they saw Drew stand up and start talking about being an artist, it captured their attention. There are ways of getting people understanding about science without being a scientist, without going on and doing a PhD.

CHAIR—Are there opportunities for work placement while at school?

Dr Coulepis—Yes.

CHAIR—They are really at the periphery though, aren't they? Your core business is post tertiary.

Dr Coulepis—There are many laboratory assistants who are not scientifically qualified. IT, marketing, sales, journalism, administration and finance are all peripheral. In biotech these are the people who have an interest in science but never quite made it as scientists. They have had opportunities to work in the industry and there is a huge pool of those people. In AusBiotech we employ a couple of non-scientists who are so wrapped up in it that now you could put them up against scientists and at the first level you could not pick them apart. We have finance people running our biotech companies who are very passionate about science. They never made it as scientists but are really good at admin or finance. I would say 70 to 80 per cent could be the core

but there is 20 to 30 per cent in the peripheral group which is integral to the emerging biotechnology industry. Those people are needed.

CHAIR—Do we have any students in schools doing work placements in gene technology companies but in some of those areas?

Dr Coulepis—Yes, we do. Through our special interest group we are introducing a program to place those students. We will say to the companies, 'Which of you can take students in these areas?' Then we will go out to the educators and say, 'If you've got students that really want to have a running start, please see us and we'll see if we can place them.' We want to try to get the entrepreneurs out early. There is no need to wait five or six years for them to be identified as entrepreneurs. Why not try and get them out while they are still in the system?

CHAIR—What VET courses would those students be doing at school; those that are linked into some of those work placements? They would be doing IT or they would be doing graphic arts?

Mr Stevenson—They would be doing a mixture of things but not particularly straight science courses.

Dr Coulepis—This is where, in terms of looking forward, it would be great to have more multidisciplinary courses. My son is going to a school that has identified this, without any input from me. They have introduced activities which enable kids to experience multidisciplinary activities that then help guide them into the direction they want to go. In those types of activities, kids who are very good at art but like science—they are fascinated by science, although they cannot understand it—can find a niche in those areas.

CHAIR—It would be true to say then that the better approach for your industry is more general skills in the areas of technology, science and so on, rather than specific skills. It is the interest that is the key issue, rather than the specific skills. Is that correct?

Dr Coulepis—In science, in biotech, you have to start with a shotgun approach and give everybody an opportunity, then drill down. What happens is that when you get to the sciences and the biotechnologies in the specialty areas, we can provide that sort of training and mentoring through the sorts of concepts that Brian is talking about. We can develop that down the track once the student has homed in on their area. We would like to see a broadening of the base and then a drilling down, rather than getting too specific too early on. It puts kids off if you try to shove molecular biology down their throats without saying, 'Science is broader than that.' You may not have an environmentalist who enjoys the molecular biology course but down the track the environmentalist, as he goes through, will actually learn some molecular biology because that might be needed in his endeavours.

Mr Stevenson—We also can show year 9 and year 10 students that they can understand some molecular biology in that supportive learning environment I alluded to earlier. They are all addicted to things like *CSI* where they see the new discovery on TV with a person with a micropipetter in their hand putting funny little chips on it. Suddenly in a lab they are doing the same thing, using research quality equipment; using a micropipetter like they saw on telly last night. They suddenly think, 'Gee, I'm actually doing this stuff.' This molecular biology, this

whole thing which they have only heard bits and pieces about suddenly becomes understandable. Their confidence and their interest goes up. Then they might start looking around and saying, 'Well, I don't think I want to wear a lab coat but I may want to do something else.' Most students in secondary schools are pretty cluey about keeping all their options open and not specialising too much. Of course, they are geared to getting the best ENTER score, or whatever the various state equivalents are, to get somewhere else. I have always found most students to be fairly realistic about keeping options open.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—While you were talking then I thought again about the relationship between what is marketed out there in TV land, for instance, and whether there has been a growth in forensic science and forensic policing from this. That is a very important area.

Mr Stevenson—Forensic science is what one would describe as the teacher's hook for year 9 and year 10 students because there is that interest. There is genetics in year 10 and forensic science in year 9. It used to be making cosmetics in year 8. There are those sorts of things which come and go a bit. Students are fascinated to learn that, wherever they have been, they have left their genetic blueprint behind.

Dr Coulepis—To give you an example of how some of these things spread, all the current dialogue about weapons of mass destruction, bioterrorism and biowarfare have created an enormous interest in kids who are saying, 'How do we diagnose these things?' I had a call early this morning about a program a student saw on TV. It was about smallpox and how there is no cure for smallpox. It has been quarantined away in two labs and they are thinking of destroying it completely. It is the only species that man is going to deliberately destroy. If this got out now, given that none of us have immunity to smallpox, it would be a disaster.

This kid started thinking about this and asked if we are doing the right thing by destroying the only two reservoirs of smallpox that are known on the planet. The risk is that it exists in somebody's lab and can be used at some later stage as a weapon of mass destruction. We could be researching it and finding a cure for smallpox so that we can eliminate the threat of that, rather than eliminate a hypothetical threat by destroying the organism. I was fascinated by that. It was very sophisticated for someone who was a second year student at university to pick up on a TV program that played a couple of nights ago, call the biotechnology industry organisation and say, 'Is this all true?' Unfortunately we had to say, 'Yes, unfortunately it is true.'

Mr Stevenson—It is good that they called you.

Dr Coulepis—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. There are some exciting possibilities there, but the key seems to be the awareness issue, doesn't it—making students aware, making teachers aware of the career possibilities, as you say, and not just in molecular biology at the core areas but in a lot of those associated areas.

Dr Coulepis—Exactly, and active programs to make sure that that awareness happens at the two levels. It is not only the students; you have got to get the teachers on board. If you do not get the teachers on board, it will not happen. The third message is that industry, through the sorts of

programs that Brian is talking about, can play a role and we should be considered as partners, not as the end game after the decisions and the policies are put together.

Mr Stevenson—And that is the success of the GTAC program, because it does involve active partnerships between all sectors and they are feeding off each other.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Hopefully this time next year we will be able to go to GTAC House.

Mr Stevenson—I would hope so.

CHAIR—Thank you. Good luck with it all.

Proceedings suspended from 12.13 p.m. to 2.54 p.m.

GOMEZ, Mr Fic, Student, Northland Secondary College

JACH, Ms Zil, Student, Northland Secondary College

KIRBY, Mr Chris, Student, Northland Secondary College

LUTTEREL, Ms Kahli, Student, Northland Secondary College

RAMASAMY, Mr Kanapathy, Student, Northland Secondary College

SARGIOTIS, Mr Arthur, Student, Northland Secondary College

CHAIR—We resume this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education in schools. Thank you to the Principal of Northland Secondary College for having us here today, and thank you to the students and staff. To fill you in quickly, parliament is doing an inquiry into vocational educational in schools to give us a better idea of how it works, what we could do better, what is happening that could be copied and what is not working. We are getting around to as many schools as we can and talking to people about how it is working. What you tell us will be really valuable. Be frank; tell us what you think is good, what you think is bad and where we can improve things. We will keep it fairly informal. To start with, maybe you could tell us what you are studying, why you chose this school to do the course that you are doing and where you are hoping that is going to lead you after school.

Ms Lutterel—I am currently doing the design studies course, but I have done the multimedia course. I used to do it on a Wednesday in years 11 and 12. I found that really good. With the stuff that I am doing now, if I had not done that course I would not have understood it as much. I think the multimedia course is really good, because it is really practical. Rather than reading it out of a textbook, Mark and Craig showed us what to do and it was easier to understand.

I was the only Indigenous student there. I do not have a computer at home, so I was not really good with computers at all. I picked it up. Then I was asked to do compus mentus stuff, which I would not have had the chance to do at any other school. I enjoyed that. I did two weeks work experience over the holidays, where I was trained as a content manager. I learnt how to maintain web sites and stuff. With the stuff I am doing now, I hope to get into photography. I am doing Photoshop stuff, and the multimedia course really helped me with the different Flash programs and stuff like that. It is a really good course to do. The way they teach it is really good, because if I was being taught out of a textbook I probably would not have been able to learn as much.

CHAIR—Some of the work you are doing is outstanding and miles ahead of where I am or could ever be. Am I speaking for you too, Sid?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—No, but they are miles ahead of me. You talked about the work experience. How was that organised and who organised it? Is it part of your school? Do you have work experience organised here?

Ms Lutterel—When I was doing the multimedia course, Lynne Thorpe, the careers educator at the time, arranged for two people from compus mentus to come out. They wanted an Indigenous student to help maintain the careers in performing arts web site. That is how it all came about, and I was chosen because I had been doing the multimedia course.

CHAIR—How about you, Kanap?

Mr Ramasamy—I go to Lalor North Secondary College, so I come here by bus every Wednesday. I found out about the course from my graphics teacher at school. I found that it was perfect for me, because I did work experience at a graphic design studio and they showed me what programs they use and what kind of stuff they do. When I looked at the course, it was exactly what I wanted to get all the experience and all the skills that are needed to become a graphic designer.

At work experience they told us that TAFE was more practical than university and stuff like that. When we get taught, it is not—like Kahli said—out of a textbook. It is more practical, hands-on kind of stuff. When we get design briefs and stuff like that, we think of all the content. It is all our ideas. We get taught the skills. The environment of it all is that we get treated like adults and all mature stuff like that. We are more like friends instead of a teacher-student kind of relationship.

CHAIR—That makes a difference, doesn't it?

Mr Ramasamy—Definitely.

CHAIR—What about you other guys? Why are you doing the sort of course you are doing and where do you want to go with it?

Mr Kirby—We are doing music industry skills and training—MIS-MIT—and it is really good. It is over three days and divided into individual sections of the course. On Wednesdays we do certificate II, which is more the basic sort of—

Mr Sargiotis—Foundation.

Mr Kirby—Yes, foundation for the music industry; things like gigs, lighting, sound and stuff like that. On Mondays it is more about song writing and composition and on Thursdays we focus on the technology side, with the computers and recording stuff, doing a lot of stuff in the studio. It all splashes over from day to day.

CHAIR—What certificate level is that?

Mr Kirby—Certificate II and III.

CHAIR—Does it count for your VCE?

Mr Kirby—I do not know.

Mr Sargiotis—If you want it to, yes. That is what I am doing at the moment. I am doing a VET VCE course to get some extra units in my VCE results. It is an option for you. If you want to do it for your VCE, you can, but if you just want to do it as another program—another course—you are easily able to do that.

CHAIR—What do you want to do, Arthur, at the end of school?

Mr Sargiotis—I want to get into the production side of things, like producing dance music and so on, and maybe try and build my own studio so I can produce work and get my stuff out there pretty much.

Mr Kirby—This course opens a lot of doors in that respect. Before I came here—like the studio over there—you had these visions of it costing thousands and thousands of dollars and stuff, but you can get computer programs now that do it all for you and, to an extent, are just as good. It gives you a whole bunch of perspectives that you would not even have considered 12 months ago.

CHAIR—Arthur is doing his VCE. Are any of you?

Mr Ramasamy—Yes.

CHAIR—You are too, Kanap? You still do your maths, English and science and all of that sort of stuff?

Mr Ramasamy—Yes.

CHAIR—At your school, are you—

Mr Sargiotis—I have already done that part of it. I am basically catching up now. My last VCE year was 2001, and I have come back just to complete it and get my AVC.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Let's go forward, if we can. Although you are doing courses related to a lot of industry stuff, does your school assist you in determining a pathway for the future? Do you have someone that you are able to relate to, apart from your teachers, to help you with pathways?

Mr Kirby—Yes. In the last couple of weeks we have been having meetings with Julie Spring, who is the coordinator for that sort of thing here, and working out what we want to do next year; whether we want to continue on and do certificate IV level—music composition, music performance or whatever—somewhere else or what the next step should be for each individual.

I will probably end up doing certificate IV next year in music performance or something like that at one of the other TAFEs. There are all kinds of different people you can go to for different reasons. It is really good. It kind of rounds out perfectly. If you are having trouble with computers or something, you go to that person. If you are wanting to know about something else, there is a round spectrum of people you can talk to and work stuff out with, and everyone is really supportive in the individual sort of thing. Like you were saying before, it is not so much textbook sort of teaching. It really does focus on the individuals and the needs of the individuals.

A DJ has a whole bunch of different needs and requirements in their music path than a death metal drummer has. The course is oriented around the student rather than the other way around, which I think is really good.

Mr Ramasamy—Yes, they get you ready for the industry. At the moment I am getting jobs for design work—doing design work—earning some extra money and contributing to my folio.

CHAIR—Do you all do work experience as part of your course?

Mr Ramasamy—Yes.

CHAIR—How do you organise that? Do you go and find the contacts yourself or do you have someone in the school who organises that for you?

Mr Sargiotis—Either way. A bit of both, yes. The school has a certain amount of contacts that it can get you into, but otherwise you have to do it yourself. The school might be able to hook you up with Billy Hyde at Blackburn or something like that, but if you want to do something else, like go into publishing or something like that, you have to work it out for yourself.

Ms Jach—But the teachers can guide you.

Mr Sargiotis—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I am interested in the size of the school here. Do you think it is a good size?

Mr Kirby—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—It has benefits for you?

Mr Kirby—I think that reflects people being able to focus more on the individual. Half of that probably is because of the fact that it is a smaller school and there are fewer students to deal with. The student-teacher relationship is obviously going to be a lot better, because there is more of a relationship between the two parties, as opposed to a classroom and a teacher. It kinds of levels out more and works out well.

Ms Jach—As a mature age student, I find it less intimidating being in a smaller school. It is funny coming back to a secondary school as a mature age student.

CHAIR—How long ago did you leave?

Ms Jach—Leave high school?

CHAIR—High school, yes.

Ms Jach—1985.

CHAIR—A while back.

Ms Jach—It has been a while.

CHAIR—Are you finding that you are fitting in well and all of that?

Ms Jach—Yes, it is fun. It is great. It has been a really good year for me to find a bit of direction.

CHAIR—This is perhaps a harder question. Our job is to make recommendations to the government about what we ought to be doing with VET in Schools. If you could tell us what you think ought to happen, what recommendation would you make about how it ought to be improved?

Ms Lutterel—There should be more of it. I understand how you have to get an education and stuff like that, but I think towards years 11 and 12 you should be doing more work experience. You should do more work experience in an area that you know you would like to do or whatever, looking towards the future, so that when you leave year 12 you are not just saying, 'Oh, I need to find a job.' Unless they want to go on to uni or get into uni, a lot of students are left saying, 'What am I going to do now?' They should have more work experience and stuff like that, especially with VET courses, because they are really good.

Mr Kirby—A lot of the issue, with our class anyway, is that we are doing certificate II and certificate III and it is not inevitable that you are going to be able to do certificate IV. There are a lot of people who have concerns about, 'If I can't get into certificate IV next year, I'm not going to have anything to do next year.' It is a bit intimidating, in that respect, because we can only try so much to get into these things and, if that fails, then that fails and that is it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Do you think there may be room to explore other options as well?

Mr Kirby—Yes, but I do not think you would want to explore other options. That is the whole reason you started doing certificates II and III in the first place, because you know what your focus is and know what motivates you. If you have a year off and then go back and do it, you are not going to be as motivated and it is not going to be as fresh in your mind—all the stuff that you learnt two years ago—or anything like that. It is just left lingering, sort of thing. With a lot of people that I have been talking to, that is probably their biggest concern.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is why I raised whether there should be options.

Ms Jach—I think what Chris is saying is right. I think a lot of people would like to be able to do a certificate IV as well here, continuing on with the same group of people and doing the same thing. That would be really good for a lot of people.

Mr Sargiotis—I agree with that. That would help a lot, because after doing a year of certificate II and III and then at the end of the year finding out that you cannot do school next year it is kind of a let down. You are left thinking, 'What can I do?' You can get into the industry a bit and try and get some work experience, but in the long run if you want to get some more education it is better if you can continue it on and let it roll on.

CHAIR—There has to be some point at which you move on, though, doesn't there?

Mr Sargiotis—Yes.

CHAIR—If you are linking in with other courses or employment opportunities while you are here, that makes that transition easier, doesn't it?

Mr Kirby—Yes. It is better if it has a constant flow-on effect as well. To be perfectly honest, if I really think about it, a lot of the people who do not get into certificate IV next year would not be motivated to try it again. They would leave it at that, and that would be it. I think that is a bit sad really, because it is a big shame. They have worked all this year. It is obviously what they want to do. Everyone is focused and everyone is motivated and driven to succeed in that area. That is why you have done the course, and that is why you want to go down that path. As soon as that path goes off on another tangent or as soon as you have to stop, there is no real drive to go any further. We have the options here, with people who will help as work towards what we want to do next year, but if you have a spare year in the middle none of that happens and you will probably go off and get a job stacking shelves at Safeway or something like that and keep doing that.

CHAIR—You all have too much ability for that. Thank you for your comments, and good luck. You have impressive skills, from what we have seen around the place. Fantastic! You will all do well, I am sure.

Mr Kirby—Thanks very much.

[3.14 p.m.]

BAAR, Ms Genevieve, VCAL Coordinator, Northland Secondary College

COOGAN, Mr Martin, Music Coordinator, Northland Secondary College

GALATI-BROWN, Ms Raffaela, Principal, Northland Secondary College

RUSSELL, Mr Mark, Multimedia Teacher, Northland Secondary College

SPRING, Ms Julianne, Careers/VET/MIPS Coordinator, Northland Secondary College

CHAIR—I welcome the staff from Northland Secondary College. Could you fill us in on how the multimedia, arts and graphic design student component fits in with the rest of the school? What percentage of your students would be doing a straight VCE course, without doing VET? Or are they all doing some VET component?

Ms Galati-Brown—We have about 324 students. Out of those 110 are in years 7 to 10. Of the remainder probably 20 to 25 students would be doing a traditional year 12 VCE. Another 30 would be doing a traditional year 11, where VET would also be an option. We have about 35 to 40 VCAL students who do some component of VET. We have about 80 students doing the design studies course and another 30 or 35, because some of them are part time, doing the Music Industry Skill Certificate.

Mr Coogan—It is now called Music Industry Training.

Ms Galati-Brown—That is right, Music Industry Training. We have students who come here to do the traditional VCE with VET components in it. Most of them do VET. The VCAL must do some component of VET. But we also have—as you saw with some of the students here before—students who come here basically to do the certificate III in Music Industry Training and maybe also VCE music. Otherwise those three VET courses in themselves are a full-time course. It is considered a full-time course, so they will do that separately. Those students doing design have all completed year 12 and are basically doing a year 13, in a sense. They are repeating year 12 but doing a folio preparation year. This year there is a component in there of a certificate IV in applied design.

CHAIR—We might return to the year 13 in a moment because there are some questions on that. What about—if I can use the term—the non-creative VET courses? Do you have students doing motor mechanics, furnishing, hospitality, whatever?

Ms Galati-Brown—Yes.

Ms Spring—Yes, we do. Do you want numbers?

CHAIR—Just give us the range of courses.

Ms Galati-Brown—The programs.

Ms Spring—The programs that we are currently offering are: certificate I in Vocational Education and Training and for year 10 students; that is a work education program. We have certificate II in Dance; certificate II in Music Industry Foundation; certificate III in Music; certificate III in Music Industry Technical Production; the Cisco Certified Network Course; certificate II in Multimedia; certificate II in Furnishing; certificate II in Automotive Technology, and the VCAL extension pilot—which is the year 13 Raffaela was just referring to—is a certificate IV in Arts and Applied Design.

We also have externally delivered programs. We have students doing the certificate II in Hospitality through Northern Metropolitan Institute of Technology, NMIT. A couple of students are doing certificate IV in Fitness, through Kangan Batman TAFE. One student is doing a certificate II in Horticulture at NMIT. Another student is doing a certificate II in Broadcasting, which is offered by Thornbury Darebin Secondary College. We have also had students doing a TAFE taster in animal and farm practices through NMIT.

CHAIR—Quite a choice then?

Ms Galati-Brown—Yes, quite a range.

CHAIR—Julianne, I notice you have really got your hands full.

Ms Spring—You noticed!

CHAIR—You are a careers adviser, a VET coordinator, MIPS coordinator. How do you fit all those things in?

Ms Spring—With great difficulty.

CHAIR—Do you have a teaching load as well?

Ms Spring—I am not teaching in the classroom, but I do support in the classroom for six periods a week. I am point 8, so that means I work four days a week. I have a lot of difficulty fitting it all in.

CHAIR—Even with a school this size, there seems to be an issue—from what we are gathering in Victoria, just to pick one of those—of perhaps inadequacy in terms of the employment of careers advisers in schools. There is nothing mandated and it seems to vary markedly from school to school. Some people have said—and in fact I think the education department submission said this—that they thought some of their other programs, such as the MIPS program and some of the work studies courses done in SOSE courses and so on, ought to be covering some of the needs for careers advice. Would you agree with that? Do you think schools need a full-on careers adviser?

Ms Spring—Not really, no. There are legal responsibilities, particularly with OH&S requirements now, where somebody has to go out and assess a workplace for its suitability for students.

CHAIR—Is that the VET coordinator's role?

Ms Spring—No, that is careers, or the work experience person's responsibilities. There has to be somebody responsible, in the school, for all the legal side of it and making sure all the documentation is filled out prior to a student going out on work placement or work experience.

Ms Baar—Further to that, monitoring the students as well in the workplace.

CHAIR—Would not some schools call that the VET coordinator's role?

Ms Galati-Brown—Not really. We have work experience from years 9, 10 and 11 and then we have VET work placements as well. One of the really bad things is that there is really no VET funding for the needs of a VET coordinator in either organising work placements or supporting and doing some of the AQTF requirements.

CHAIR—Do you think every school should have a full-time VET coordinator for work placement?

Ms Spring—There are different roles in that. But I would contend that we really need somebody who just concentrates on work placement. It is imperative that the school develop strong links with industry and that industry understands that we, as a school, want our students to learn in the workplace. It is not just work experience. We have certainly found out over the last year that industry or workplaces have had difficulty understanding the difference between work placement and work experience and what we are expecting of them. A lot of time has to be invested in liaising with organisations and setting up the work placements so they are valid work placement experiences.

Mr Russell—Would it be more on a mentorship basis?

Ms Spring—You might do that as well.

CHAIR—In some states and some regions there is a regional workplace coordinator who liaises with the school. If you had someone in this region who was making all the industry contacts and providing the work placements and liaising with you in the school, would that make your role significantly easier? Or do you think that would create more headaches?

Ms Spring—Yes, if it worked well. We have had the experience of having outside agencies organise some work placements for us, but we have found that communication has broken down between ourselves, the organisation and the workplace. That is certainly an issue when you are assessing people on their performance in the workplace.

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Galati-Brown—The other thing is that it is highly specialised as well. If you are looking at Music Industry Training you really need to have people who are aware of and have built up relationships within that area and have all the links. When you have the numbers that we have, you really need someone at the school who is developing all of that and who is doing the liaising

and is then going out to the workplace to do the assessment and to check how the students are going and so on.

CHAIR—On the career side of it, you do work experience in years 9 and 10, but how much actual teaching of careers do you do? Starting in year 7, where you are increasing student awareness of the job market, employment opportunities, different career options, the sorts of education programs and different pathways, all of those sorts of things—do you do anything structured?

Ms Spring—I do not teach in the junior school.

CHAIR—Do you have anyone in the school doing that?

Ms Spring—That is covered by the SOSE curriculum.

Ms Galati-Brown—Studies of Society and the Environment—

CHAIR—Do you think it is adequately covered in SOSE?

Ms Galati-Brown—It is more adequately covered around year 9 and certainly at year 10. I do not think it is extensively covered in years 7 or 8. In year 9, before they do any work experience, there are units of work there that the students undergo. Then at year 10, there is a whole year of really thinking and working. They have recently come back from a four-day vocational education camp.

Ms Spring—We went to La Trobe University and invited a number of speakers to come in and talk to the students about their options in terms of apprenticeships, university, TAFE and what have you.

Mr Coogan—That is part of the certificate I in voc ed, which we do at year 10 level.

CHAIR—Do most schools do that in Victoria?

Ms Baar—No. We deliver ours in a different way. It is part of a leadership program—an adventure, leadership, and future skills program—which has been supported by the Rotary Club of Melbourne for the past three years, and also by the ANZ Trustees. It is meant to target young people at risk of dropping out of school and try to get them to learn leadership skills by doing real adventure type stuff. It could be very difficult bushwalking, caving or abseiling. It works through a program of building trust, developing teamwork and relationships, taking leadership responsibilities, looking at what leadership is, right through to then tying that into future career paths and where they might want to go, to then doing a specific vocational education program. In the past we have had parents who went along and listened to this for one of the days. The last one is the culmination, which is a whitewater rafting type of program at the end of the year. It brings it all together.

That is a program that I know the Rotary Club of Melbourne and the department of education, and certainly the Victorian Schools Innovations Commission, are looking at trialling in regional schools and doing a couple of pilots next year. We have tied aspects of the year 10 curriculum to

that, so that the students will get the certificate I in vocational education and training, but they have done a hell of a lot more along the way.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What is your teaching background?

Ms Spring—I am a trained English and ESL teacher. I have been teaching for 12 years, if you include my TAFE experience. I worked in the Northern Territory for about seven years, in both the secondary school system and at an independent RTO. I have been at Northland Secondary for about 18 months.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I was interested in your background. The role you have is more diverse than most teachers have; it is a huge role. Having come from a college, I certainly appreciate the comments you made about work placement and the work that goes into that. Do you involve parents in your voc ed programs for years 9 and 10?

Ms Spring—They are invited to the information day that we have, but beyond that, probably not a lot.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—The reason I ask that is that people say, 'We've got to get teachers to understand the world of work and what's going on out there, and for students to better appreciate it.' Parents also need to appreciate what is out there, too. We all do, quite frankly; it is an incredible world.

Ms Galati-Brown—We are very keen and interested in that. As you will hear later, we are developing Ntech, which is a manufacturing technology centre, which is looking at areas of school shortages. We are looking to develop automotive and furnishing, and introduce engineering as well. There will be an 18-month campaign to target a change in community attitudes and parent attitudes, in particular, to look at making those sorts of areas their first choice, rather than their last choice.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—These are cursory questions at the moment. Are there skill shortages in the music industry and in design and graphics?

Mr Coogan—It depends on how you want to look at it. Do you mean, are there enough jobs for all the people who come out of the courses?

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is a fair way of putting it.

Mr Coogan—I cannot speak for design, but I think there is probably more scope for what you call traditional type nine to five employment in that than there is in music. You have to look at it from the point of view of not only the demand but the supply of people who want to do that, and the fact that Australia is becoming a much better country for exporting its musical products, and the fact that there is a huge amount of part-time and casual work in the music industry, which can be combined with other skills. A lot of the students end up doing a bit of both. As musicians have traditionally done, they have another job anyway. You never give up your day job!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I appreciate the passion.

Mr Coogan—A lot of our students have been able to go on to certificate IV and diploma, and even degree courses; they have jobs in everything from music shops to recording to live bands. If they put in and they work, and they have the get up and go, they usually create opportunities for themselves.

Mr Russell—Design and multimedia have different outcomes. Design studies is a lot more focused on further study. The outcomes at the end of that further study at tertiary level have been very successful. We have had quite a lot of people from that program working as industry professionals for up to 10 years and good placement rates within that. Multimedia is a little young in that regard and a little bit flippant also. It tends to be an industry where there is an absolute shortage one week and a couple of months down the line there is a surplus. Pay rates go up and down tremendously within the area, but there are also huge individual opportunities. With the online community being very active now, there is plenty of opportunity for individuals who do not want to be involved in a company. A lot of students are forming small online companies. They are having international success without ever leaving their bedrooms, basically.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Do you have a program for following and monitoring your students when they leave here?

Ms Galati-Brown—Yes. We do six months, 12 months and 18 months. One of the good things we can tell you is that there has been minimal drop-out—maybe one or two out of all the students that went on from here. We had 68 or 70 students who went on to TAFE and tertiary last year. I think there have only been two who dropped out or changed their courses. We are able to track those who are in employment or unemployment. Every time we ring them, we give them an opportunity to come back and get assistance from us, in terms of whether they want to come back and do extra training, whether we can help them with employment—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Who does this?

Ms Galati-Brown—The office staff ring them up. I have a special person within the office that does the chase-up calls and then they are referred back to us. They might be referred to the coordinators, or to Julie, or we might refer them on to JPET or other agencies, and we will make the links. Our welfare coordinator has also taken them on board. It is really good, because some students who have been sitting out there and doing nothing do come back and may try something different or we have been able to get them into TAFE or something like that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—We had a very articulate group appear before you. It is great to see that some are not at the school but come here for their education, so it belongs to everybody. I think it is terrific. Chris was articulate about certain things. It was like a catch-22 situation he was throwing up. I suppose it is the conundrum of life, isn't it? He is obviously passionately involved in what he is doing and he said, 'If I can't do it, if I can't go on and do certificate IV or I can't get into the industry, maybe I'll just go and stack shelves.' I wonder how we deal with that. They have every opportunity here; it is wonderful. Is it possible to keep other options open for them, or is that totally unrealistic; it is not going to motivate their learning? In other words, are there options outside of the music or multimedia industry, and so forth?

Mr Coogan—What Chris is basically saying is that if you do not get into the very limited number of courses in technical production or performance or the music business, which are all

very hard to get into—the people who usually get in are the people who have done a certificate III—then your options are extremely limited, apart from busking over at Northland. What we do is encourage them to have more than one string to their bow. It is so obvious to me, having been in the music industry. I also have a couple of other strings to my bow.

Part of being in a school like this is that they can do a certain amount of music and a certain amount of whatever. I am speaking as the music coordinator. We are constantly drumming into them that they are not necessarily going to make it; that no matter how talented or how motivated they are, while the more they work the more likely they are to make it, apart from maybe movie-making, it is probably the most competitive industry in the country. They all accept that, but it does not make any difference to their desires or the amount of effort that most of the students put in.

Mr Russell—I would like to speak a little on this. There are two very separate things between design studies and multimedia. Because they serve different purposes, they do have to be treated differently. I have an issue with the VET program in terms of multimedia being quite practically based. However, to go on to further study in multimedia is being talked about as being a score only entry. That is a complete contradiction which is overcome in design studies by having such a long ongoing relationship with tertiary institutes that we are able to negotiate alternate entry through the VCAL Extension Program. An area of VET that needs addressing is that it is very much a practically based program. It is the success of our program that we do not organise on a score, but it is a complete contradiction when it gets to tertiary study.

Ms Galati-Brown—The other thing you need to know about design is that the students often come in here with a very narrow focus, wanting to do graphic design. One of the things that they get, particularly through the years and the way this course is organised, is that we open them up to all the varieties of opportunities and careers, some of which they have never thought about, within that. Instead of wanting all to be graphic designers, because that gets filled up pretty quickly, there are various opportunities. One of the reasons we have been so successful in getting our young people into tertiary institutions is because they apply for a range of courses. They also look at other jobs and other careers.

Mr Russell—There are a couple of ways we have been able to overcome it in multimedia. The first is taking advantage of design studies having a different entry point. A lot of the multimedia students are now, after studying multimedia, articulating into design studies to then go on to further tertiary study. We have also had good success through the TAFE sector. A number of students who have gone in there believe they are performing at certificate IV level or even higher in their TAFE diploma courses. The other option is that we also advise the students who do multimedia to put together a bit of a package of computer related subjects. We advise them to do the CISCO network training and to carry on with their conventional IT studies so that they can offer a package and look at different entry pathways into the industry.

CHAIR—This issue of articulation into university for VET is really quite a difficult one. You have the benefit that you have made some very strong connections with a couple of universities and they, it seems, accept your credentials there. That doesn't happen generally in Victoria, does it?

Mr Russell—No.

CHAIR—Is it fair to say that generally there is a problem that students who do aspire to attending university are disadvantaged by doing a VET course? Is that generally the case?

Mr Russell—For further study, yes, they generally are disadvantaged.

CHAIR—Because it doesn't count sufficiently towards their entry score?

Ms Galati-Brown—It is not sufficiently weighted. At the same time, one of the things we do not want to happen is to turn this into some really difficult certificate III type of thing that is going to then deny access to education for these young people by getting rid of the real practical components so it becomes so theoretical that the kids will not want to do it. That is a really fine balance.

CHAIR—That is the dilemma. On the one hand we are getting people saying, 'We want university aspirants and we want everyone to be able to access VET courses. We want everyone to do that in a way that doesn't impede their chances of getting into university'—in other words, that the university accept those qualifications. The danger is that they become too academic.

Ms Galati-Brown—But now they do. All VET in Schools have TER scores attached to them.

Mr Coogan—As of next year. Only some do this year and there were none previously, so it is improving dramatically.

CHAIR—From next year they all count towards the entry score.

Mr Russell—However, the weighting is very wrong.

Ms Spring—That is another issue.

Mr Russell—If you want to get into multimedia at tertiary level, you are better off studying Latin, philosophy or psychology.

CHAIR—So there is a problem.

Mr Russell—And do not go with a portfolio and have no computer skills.

CHAIR—Just putting aside multimedia for a moment, your other VET courses—furnishings, hospitality or whatever—still have a low weighting.

Mr Coogan—It is only certificate III courses that count; not all VET courses.

Ms Galati-Brown—Not only are they weighted down but part of the problem is that universities really drive your senior years. There are also other VCE courses that are really weighted down as well. If you are doing an arts base with drama, media, all of those, they are seen as very soft subjects. You need to do maths, science and Latin to get your TER score to go up—if you do Latin you can get your TER score to go up tremendously.

CHAIR—They still do Latin, do they?

Mr Russell—Some students in private schools are advised to do Latin for that reason.

Mr Coogan—Ancient Greek was good when I was a kid.

Ms Spring—The other issue is that higher education is under the squeeze. Institutions' VET ENTER scores have increased markedly over the last four years. We were at La Trobe University on Thursday and they did a presentation. The entry score for arts at La Trobe was about 68 back in 2000 and last year it was 83. The universities are increasing their ENTERs significantly to cope with the squeeze.

Ms Galati-Brown—Some of the young people we have here are really youth at risk. It is hard work raising expectations with them but the reality is that university is going to be taking fewer and fewer students, especially with HECS going up. For our community that is such a barrier. You have the design studies students, some of whom come from more middle-class backgrounds, but for our community who come from single-parent families or they are homeless, or they are independent, university is not an option. They look at the fact that they are going to have to pay HECS and are going to have to support themselves on Austudy or Youth Allowance and that that is going to be inadequate if they are living on their own, as many of them are. It is such a barrier that they do not even want to consider it. It is hard for us. We have even had students drop out of courses, such as nursing or physiotherapy, because it was just too expensive to go on.

CHAIR—The reality is that we have always had only about 30 per cent of kids go to university anyway. There are good career options via TAFE that perhaps we ought to be encouraging students to take up. When we were walking around we raised the issue of the pluses and minuses of VCAL.

Ms Baar—The plus side is that it has a very strong vocational emphasis and the whole thing is designed around that, so it creates pathways for students. The emphasis is not on academic learning but on hands-on type learning so that things are real to them. It is to put them out into the world, rather than bring the world in via books to them. Those comments came through from what some of the students said earlier on about learning by doing. From that point of view that is a definite plus. It is also a very supportive environment and they are able to get one on one where possible.

On the minus side, I think there still are things that really need to be worked through—for instance, work placement. I teach within the work related skills area, and timetabling is one the things that seem to be at odds with the concept of the VCAL design. VCAL wants students to go out there and access the workplace and gets hands-on employability skills in order to incorporate the industry skills from their various VET areas and apply those skills, but for that to work effectively we really need the time for those students to do two things. The first is accessing appropriate VET courses. Sometimes there is a cost factor or an accessibility factor. For instance, if a student is interested in an area that this school may not necessarily be able to provide, we need to be able to free the student up to access it in some other institution. That seems to be a problematic issue, and there is the cost that might be incurred.

There is also the issue of releasing the student to go out and do one or two days a week within the workplace or to access a schools based apprenticeship, and being able to monitor that properly and still not jeopardise the rest of the student's learning. There are only five days in the working week and in the school week. If we are going to free students up for 15 hours a week from their other areas of learning we are going to have to somehow accommodate that hands-on learning taking place out in industry so that the whole thing comes together for them. That has been one of the logistical problems. I am sure we are not alone in this.

Ms Galati-Brown—What about the actual structure of the VCAL? How you are finding that? One of the issues for us is that it has become more rigid and more demanding.

Ms Baar—It is structured around the strands. As with anything—whether it is VCAL or something else—things can look great on paper, but really it is the outworkings of it on the ground, so that we say, 'Look, they'll need the literacy and the numeracy skills and the personal development skills. They'll need access to the community; they'll need to get out there.' There is quite a bit of documentation. Because of a lot of it is competency based learning, a lot of tracking goes on: tracking out in the community and in the workplace; liaising with people in industry, supervisors and those sorts of people; and tracking their assessment with check lists and observation sheets. In all fairness, VCAL is only in its second year of implementation, so things are still being worked out. Obviously, as we are going, we are fixing it up and addressing certain things.

CHAIR—You mentioned school based apprenticeships. Do you have any school based apprenticeships?

Ms Baar—Yes, we have a particular student who has temporarily been suspended from it because of circumstances. That has been quite successful but there have been frustrations on the part of the student too. The student in this case goes two days a week and then, a week later, comes back on site and things have moved on. So there are things there, too, that have to be worked through on a practical basis so that the student is benefiting from that experience. The feedback is that really it would ultimately serve them better if they could do it full time, because then they are there every day and they have got continuity whereas at the moment there is disruption to that. Of course, there would be the counter side to that, the employer's side, as well: 'Little Joe wasn't here the last three days, and this has happened since then'—and time is money out in industry. The concept is wonderful and there is some value in it, for sure, but how do we find that balance? It is a learning curve for us, too.

CHAIR—I want to ask you about Indigenous education. Obviously you are doing some really successful things here. For the sake of our records, could you outline what is happening and the role of the Koori educators that you have in the school.

Ms Galati-Brown—Yes. We have 76 students out of 324 that are Indigenous, that are Koori, and this is one of the largest proportions of any school in Victoria. The students are spread from year 7 right through to year 12. I think there are about 17 that are in year 11 and year 12. We have one student, home-grown, who has gone through into design and who next year will, we hope, go through into RMIT. One of our biggest concerns in terms of outcomes and pathways for our Koori students is trying to make sure that we broaden their horizons in terms of what they go

into. Our biggest concern is that they may want to work in Indigenous community organisations, and the jobs are not there for them.

The other area that has been of great concern to us has been community employment programs and traineeships that are six-month programs and, at the end, students are nowhere. We had a case where a student had to come back to the school—rather, we were one of the schools that he could come back to—and missed out on doing year 12 because he gained an apprenticeship or traineeship that he thought was going to lead somewhere and then there was no job at the end of that.

That has been a complaint from a whole range of our young people, to the point where we do not encourage these young people to go into traineeships unless there is a real job for them. That is why we have established a relationship with the Department of Justice. We have a formal agreement with the Victorian Department of Justice where they will take on Indigenous trainees and guarantee them a job at the end of it. It has opened up new pathways for us because it means that our students can now also look at TAFE courses in justice, and there is quite a breadth of them, or in community services. The other area that we really want to develop for them is the health services. VACCHO, The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, has always been very keen to get young people into those paramedical areas, and that is something that we are looking at. We have not yet done much in that area. We have done quite a bit in terms of establishing ties in the justice area.

The other area that we are really looking at developing is technology—not just multimedia but in the areas of skills shortage—and creating new pathways to get young people into that. We have got Ford Australia looking at providing 80 traineeships, and real jobs at the end of the traineeships, in the automotive area. At the moment there is no interest there but, through the development of Ntech, we hope to be able to develop a cohort of Koori young people that want to go as a group, because the other thing that is really important is that, in non-traditional areas or in non-Indigenous community areas, if a young person is on their own they will drop out; they just will not continue. So it is absolutely critical to get a cohort approach, a group approach, of having young people go there.

Also, in that first year of them being placed in that area of work, they need to have someone on board from the school that they trust who can be an intermediary. There almost needs to be some cultural training of employers, and the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network is really interested in this. There will be cultural issues, for instance, where you will have absences. Today almost half of our Koori students are away because there is a funeral of someone within the community. Every time there is a funeral in their community, they must go to that funeral, so it means absences. There may be other issues where the family comes first. If there is a crisis at home, that really comes first, so that young person may be away. But what we have found is that, when you are able to explain that to the employer, when you are able to work through that, it develops that trust, that relationship. In the end the young people feel confident in talking to their employers about that and are able to become really productive and very successful workers.

We have two Koori educators here and a Koori trainee, and they are absolutely integral to the way we work with our young people. They provide support for the community, for their families and for the young people. They provide role models. They go into the classroom and work

alongside the young people. They provide advice. We have even had our Koori educators take our young people home, when families have been in crisis, and look after them for months until things are back on track. They work with other agencies to set up housing and all sorts of other support. They provide curriculum input and curriculum support. They are integral. When we set up multimedia, initially we did it with an ECEF grant through the Indigenous section there—WADU. We set it up with the Indigenous community. We had people from the Indigenous community coming and delivering some of the aspects of the program.

Whether it is music, the arts, the humanities or English, we try to involve the Koori community in the sorts of things we deliver, so it is a very inclusive curriculum. I think that is the key to success with our young Koori students. We have been able to track most of the young Koori students who have left here and, unless they have moved out of the area, we have pretty much been able to see them be successful and in jobs.

CHAIR—Marvellous!

Ms Galati-Brown—Before we go, there are a couple of issues that we want to bring up.

CHAIR—Okay; good.

Ms Galati-Brown—One of the issues relates to the fact that teachers have to do the certificate IV in assessment and training. I am not sure whether you are aware of that.

CHAIR—That is because you are an RTO.

Ms Galati-Brown—Because we are an RTO. We are an RTO for all of those eight courses that were mentioned before, and we will become an RTO for engineering as well in the future. As I think I told you earlier, next year we are also looking to introduce certificate II in fitness and certificate II in community services, but we will not be the RTO for those. They will be under auspice. There are some issues with that, and they are very heartfelt. That is why I think we should mention them.

CHAIR—Please do.

Ms Spring—The majority of our teachers in the VET program have full teaching qualifications and many years experience in delivering curriculum, both in the secondary and the TAFE sectors in some cases. Despite this, it is a requirement under AQTF standards that people delivering VET programs have a certificate IV in workplace training and assessment. We have made sure that we comply with that requirement, and that has cost our school an enormous amount of money—to the tune of $5,000—to bring people up to standard.

CHAIR—Per person?

Ms Spring—No, overall. We have had six staff trained.

Mr Coogan—The teacher's time is far greater than that.

Ms Spring—What teachers have had to do is attend a three-day program to obtain three modules of certificate IV and then apply for recognition of prior learning in order to be given this qualification. It is extremely time consuming and, as I said, extremely costly to the organisation, and that is not factored into our funding in any way. It is going to be an ongoing issue, particularly if we are to expand our VET programs.

Ms Galati-Brown—On top of that is the time that is required. Our teachers are having to come here on Saturdays to do that, as well as being given some time off school during the day. On top of that, the feeling about the course that they are doing is—

Mr Russell—It is a waste of time.

Ms Galati-Brown—Over to you, Mark!

Mr Russell—It is looking as if I have had a few words to say on this in the past, isn't it?

CHAIR—We get that impression!

Mr Russell—I will try not to get emotional about this. I also get frustrated about the money involved in this. That sort of funding is only partial to this stage. It might not seem much in the grand scale of things, but in a school environment where funds are short that is a significant impact; that is a program that could be running. In terms of doing the training, personally I found it demeaning. It was basically re-covering stuff that I learnt in teachers college 20 years ago. I do not think I need to go back and retrack. I have been delivering successful curriculum for 15 years now and, in comparison to a sessional TAFE person, I believe I have a far more vested interest in students' futures and outcomes. I see it as being quite superfluous.

Ms Spring—And a big issue for all schools, I am quite certain.

CHAIR—That is valuable feedback. How do you suggest we tackle that? As a generalisation—not everywhere; not in all states—we are getting the message from industry that we are not as confident in VET in Schools qualifications as we are in VET in TAFE qualifications or VET qualifications provided through other RTOs. If the requirement for certificate IV in workplace learning assessment were removed, I suspect that those apprehensions would be exacerbated. How do we resolve that dilemma?

Mr Coogan—I believe that the reason that requirement was put in place was because there are many people with no teacher training whatsoever but a lot of industry experience who are teaching a lot of this stuff in all sorts of institutions, public and private. It was put in place to give a few days of teacher training and assessment to people from industry. There are people that have four years of teacher training that do not need that assessment; they may need more experience within the industry as such. The whole point of it is that it is teaching you the most rudimentary teacher training stuff. It is certainly necessary for people from industry with no teacher training, and in fact I believe they need far more to be teaching these courses. The idea would be that anyone with teacher training should be automatically exempt, by virtue of prior learning, from having to study how to assess and so on along the lines of certificate IV.

Ms Spring—To address that particular point that you raised about industry looking at school based training being as valid as TAFE based training, I think one of the things that could be done is that teachers have some time in industry, if they have not had that. Recent industry experience is certainly being talked about a lot: VET teachers needing some time out in industry. I think that is probably the best way to go about addressing that concern. But to have teachers go through a certificate IV in workplace training and assessment does seem quite ludicrous.

Mr Coogan—We teach the trainers how to assess properly, because they often do not know. They have only done a three-day certificate themselves and are teaching four-year trained teachers how to assess.

Mr Russell—To follow up on those two distinctly different areas—school based and TAFE based—I can understand that the TAFE based have industry strength. But, as Martin says, if there is a place where secondary teachers need to top up their skills, it is in contact with industry. I also freelance as a designer and, because of this vested interest in student outcomes that I am talking about, I have gone to great lengths and called in a lot of favours from many of my colleagues, and friends as well, to make sure that the students have access to direct industry involvement. I have followed that up by putting myself through a six-month mentorship with the same company that offered new systems to Kahli. I found that invaluable. They have linked me into all sorts of areas within the industry. I think if there is an area that needs to be encouraged more it is the industries getting actively involved and delivering to trainers and secondary staff in particular.

VET is a very practical, work based type of program. It suits industry, because it is very practical. In industry, you do not sit down with a theory book; you are trained on the job. VET works in that regard, but it needs industry to come in and talk, particularly to the secondary sector, about what their needs are. I have had to collect that information. They need to also have a bit more responsibility in mentoring students through the whole process and possibly even writing programs themselves that can be delivered within schools.

CHAIR—Very interesting! This is the fifth state we have been to, and we have been to many schools and talked to many people. I think this is the first time that frustration has been expressed. Maybe everyone has been biting their tongues.

Ms Spring—We are usually very blunt here!

CHAIR—I am pleased that you are. It is important for us to hear that.

Mr Russell—As I understand it, the national standards not all that standardised either.

Mr Coogan—Queensland have just said that they do not need to do it, apparently.

Ms Galati-Brown—That is right. The other thing is that the AQTF requirements are incredible. I do not get funded. I do not know if you are aware of it, but we only get about $80 per student as a base. The way VET in Schools is funded is that you get $80 to $120 per student as a base and then the equivalent dollar amount for the purchase of training hours that we had in 2001, plus a little bit of top-up. That is what you get. If your school had very few numbers in 2001, it is basically in deep trouble because that becomes the core of your base for your

funding in the future. Yet if you have huge numbers you are all right, because you get that amount of money as a core. That is really hard when you are trying to encourage growth. I just wanted to make that point.

The other thing is the amount: there is not enough money there, firstly, to deliver the courses with the kinds of materials you need or, secondly, to provide the expertise. In music industry training you get experts to come in to deliver certain things because they are beyond the teacher. It is the same for multimedia and so on. You really need a person like Julie, who is doing that full time, with industry links and doing the workplace organisation et cetera, or just making sure we meet the ATQF requirements. That is an enormous task.

CHAIR—Are you are saying there is too much effort involved in meeting the requirements that are pretty useless anyway? Is that what you are saying?

Ms Galati-Brown—A lot of them came in to protect young people from fly-by-nighters—organisations that set themselves up as an RTO, run off with the money, do not provide the course and do not provide the pathways. But there are schools that have this level of commitment. There ought to be almost a separate set, a subset, of AQTF requirements. We do all those things and we are accountable.

Ms Spring—We are audited.

Ms Galati-Brown—We are audited. We do all those things, being in the nature of a state school. If there were that subset and some delineation it would really help to offset some of the workload. I went recently to a forum organised by the Inner Northern LLEN. There were teachers from a number of other schools and people from other LLENs, and this incredible frustration with the enormous amount of paperwork came through loud and clear.

Mr Coogan—I want to go back very briefly to the central point about funding. The problem, as Raffaela said, is that the numbers have exploded in VET in the last few years. I started teaching it six years ago and there were tiny numbers statewide. By about 1999 or 2000 there was significant funding for VET in Schools; there was none at all before that. That was done on a numbers basis. What has happened is that the actual amount of money in the pot has not seemed to change, but the numbers have exploded, so per capita we are getting tiny amounts compared with what we were getting two to three years ago, and that was not really enough even then.

CHAIR—That point has been made time and again.

Ms Galati-Brown—That is why we did not put too much about it, but the ATQF we wanted to get in.

CHAIR—Yes. You have made the point and I am glad you have, seriously, because that is not a message we have had strongly before. Thank you very much. That has been very valuable. Congratulations on some of the exciting things you are doing in the school here. You are providing some tremendous opportunities for kids who might not otherwise have had them. Keep up the good work; you are doing a great job.

Proceedings suspended from 4.08 p.m. to 4.18 p.m.

BENTON, Mr Noel, Chairman, Northern Stainless Steel Skills Development Group

GALATI-BROWN, Ms Raffaela, Principal, Northland Secondary College

HARRISON, Mr Peter, Manager, Post Compulsory Educational Pathways, Kangan Batman TAFE

KNOTT, Mr Daniel, Community Industry Partnerships Facilitator, Northland Secondary College

REDFEARN, Mr David, Industry Liaison, Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network

SPRANGER, Mr Frank, Business Development Officer, Darebin City Council

THIESINGER, Mr Wayne, Head of Department, Faculty of Engineering, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Benton—Yes. The Northern Stainless Steel Skills Development Group was formed by manufacturers in the northern suburbs to represent manufacturers as a single voice with respect to communications to school systems within that region.

CHAIR—Would somebody like to make some introductory comments?

Ms Galati-Brown—All the people here are on the Ntech reference group. They all form part of a reference group which includes not just the people that you see around here but also representatives of Kangan Batman, industry training boards, unions—the AMWU—group training companies such as Apprenticeships Plus and VECCI. It is quite a broad based group. This school was looking to try and address the issue of skill shortages. I was on a committee that was looking at skill shortages with some of the people who are around here and Daniel produced a report—we will give you a copy of it—which looked at the issue of skill shortages.

We then looked at setting up a skills centre here, but we did not want to set up a skills centre that was going to fail or was going to be isolated. If it was really going to work it would have to come out of research; it would have to address areas where there was going to be real employment for our young people. It needed cross-sectoral support to make it work. That is where the concept for Ntech came from.

We raised about $610,000 from the Department of Education and Training. That had been given to us to fix up our old trade wing but we decided we did not want to do that. We raised $225,000 from ANTA, through the skills centre money, and we have raised already another $150,000 of our own money. We have about $1 million to put into a new facility that is dedicated

to furnishing, automotive, engineering and, later on, possibly both food technology and electronics. It is looking at responding to the needs of the north in the areas of skills shortage.

Mr Knott—Ntech is part of a process where we are aiming to try to develop a new education paradigm that relates to its locality and its region. You may or may not know that the northern region of Melbourne is a traditional manufacturing area. Manufacturing is still regarded as the lifeblood of the Victorian economy and it employs about 16 per cent of the work force in the state, possibly more. In this region it employs about that. Essentially, across the north of Melbourne, 16 per cent of all jobs are in manufacturing and 18 per cent are in retail trade. However, when you look more closely at the figures, most of those occupations are part time. Manufacturing, by and large, is the largest single full-time employer.

Over the past 30 years, there have been massive changes in the north of Melbourne, with the gentrification of the inner suburbs and the move of manufacturing further north. We also learnt this morning of the massive changes in youth unemployment. They went from about three per cent in 1970—I think the figure was—to around 20 per cent in the City of Darebin. Manufacturing is a major factor in our local and regional economy and there are extremely high levels of chronic youth unemployment.

What do we do as an education institution? What do we do as a community and industry? Ntech is a response to all of that. We are trying to develop a process where young people—in this case it is focused on manufacturing—learn about manufacturing while they are still at school. We do not want them to go back to the older model of the hammers and spanners, where they only learn about the tools. We want them to learn about the industry. Young people going into the industry, if they do find their way into the industry, still do not know about it. There is no difference to when I was an apprentice: you went in, put on the overalls and away you went. We want them to learn about what manufacturing is in the north; we want them to understand where it has been, where it currently is, and where it might go.

That is very much where the government is keen on developing the Victorian economy—in advanced manufacturing. We know we cannot do it as a stand-alone institution; we need to have partnerships and linkages. Some of the linkages that we are developing are demonstrated at the table right now. Noel is a fantastic example of a local employer at the cutting edge of his industry sector, stainless steel. We hope to see more well-rounded figures like Noel—not in a physical sense but in the sense that Noel is a great conversationalist and he appreciates a good drop of red.

Mr Benton—What's that got to do with it?

Mr Knott—A well-rounded figure! There is a traditional image of manufacturing that is a major problem—that is, you are not a great conversationalist and it is all beer and chips. Out of this process, we hope to see young people go into the industry with a completely different impression to what they had beforehand.

Mr Benton—There are some barriers that have become ingrown in industry too. Our industry has looked inside; it has not tended to look outside because it has been a comfort zone—there has been plenty of employment; employees have been easily obtained. That is going back some eight or so years. From that period forward, we have noticed a change in the attitude of young

people coming into the industry. They are not lining up. We have found they do not even know about the industry.

That was the reason for our introduction to a group of people that had a common goal, that needed new young people in the industry. We formed a group under the auspices of a state funded NIETL group. That drew together 20 or so fabricators in the northern suburbs that were dedicated to fabrications and stainless steels. A great percentage of the work done in the north was done in stainless steel. We then approached Northern TAFE and they became involved as well. We went from a small number of apprentices to a bigger group of people, just by having people active—like Daniel—working with the schools, engaging the kids prior to leaving. It grew out of that situation—and I think Daniel has some statistics on last year's enrolments—by working closely with the Epping College and the trade teachers there, with the VET course that was introduced in the last two years.

Mr Knott—What has been central is that young people have not been going into manufacturing, to our understanding from the research that we have done, because they do not know about it. This process we are putting in place will be one which will inform people about what manufacturing is in a holistic way. It will be a whole of industry and a whole of school approach. It will be interdisciplinary. We are not saying they will learn about the history of manufacturing, but they will learn about the history of manufacturing in the north of Melbourne. To do that they will talk with people like Noel who know the history of manufacturing. They will talk with unions. They will talk with women involved in manufacturing and with migrant workers. Thus they will understand where manufacturing has been and, along the way, they will learn about where it is going.

CHAIR—Are you finding that there is a growing interest in students pursuing manufacturing as a career? Obviously for their needs and your needs, that has to be the outcome.

Mr Benton—Once the observation has been made that there is a genuine job in manufacturing and it is not necessarily of the old boilermaking type of black steel thing, then there is a career path where they may start simply as an apprentice. It may not necessarily be as they might have in the past, as a 14- or 15-year-old, but to stay on through their VCE and then come back into the trade system, and coopt through the TAFE colleges to expand—in our industry, it is into engineering, sheet metal, boilermaking; it is still called boilermaking—and once they are in that trade they can go on through to complete an engineering diploma course. There is a whole range of things—such as high-quality welding inspectors—that an apprentice can go on to become. We have seen considerable change in the attitude of some of the kids coming in at a later time, out of the school system at VCE level. They have completed their network systems. They have a better community spirit in that they have an expanded group of friendships to be involved with.

Ms Galati-Brown—Another thing is some of the work that has been done with Noel which has been organised by Daniel. It is everything, as I was saying to you before, about industry visits, breaking down those sorts of barriers. The way we are going to be marketing manufacturing with our young people is by asking, 'Are you still thinking inside the square when it comes to career choices?' Instead of just a machine, we are looking at young people coming out of the box and looking at targeting these, and instead of having manufacturing as a last choice, have it as a first choice. Manufacturing technology often gets overlooked when

thinking about the future. The fact is that it is the future. We are trying to change minds; we are trying to change perceptions. We are going to be having community forums. We are looking to do things which have been done and have worked really well, like getting parents in to have a look at places like Noel's. We are doing that kind of thing.

Mr Redfearn—I am not sure how familiar you are with the Local Learning and Employment Networks.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Moderately.

Mr Redfearn—Part of our role is to promote cross-sectoral activities so that schools, industry and all other players can link to improve retention rates—because the Victorian government has a target of 90 per cent—and to provide meaningful retention rates, you might say. Ntech fits all of that. Our Local Learning and Employment Network, which covers Darebin, Moreland and Yarra, has come in very strongly behind this. I have a statement which I can give to you later on.

It is cross-sectoral and we have managed to bring together very significant people. You have just had a good demonstration of that with Noel. We have TAFEs on board and local government—Frank is from the City of Darebin; the union movement; industry of course; and, most significantly, local schools. Part of the submission that we helped fund to put to ANTA as part of that process was canvassing schools in the area. Local schools are right on board, including one I know very well—Northcote High School—which had a very academic focus, and has not wanted to play in this area but now has come on board and has recognised that there is significant value for some of their students to be able to take on VET through Ntech. We regard that as an absolutely phenomenal achievement.

LLEN has been a player in the reference group. We helped Northland and others get this together and we brought some people on board. The chair is Michael Grogan, who is the CEO of Sutton Tools, which is a leading manufacturer in Thomastown. People like Michael and Noel put significant energy into this, because I think they recognise that this is really where it is at, that this is where it starts. It is a seamless movement into TAFE and other pathways ultimately, but it is a good point to start, and that is why we are on the Ntech train.

Ms Galati-Brown—I do apologise for Michael, who wanted to be here. He has been putting in many hours for Ntech, with a meeting last week and another meeting yesterday with the Manufacturing Industry Consultative Committee. He could not be here today, but he is very concerned, as Noel is. He is about to move 11 positions from Thomastown, here in Victoria, to New Zealand because he cannot get young people going through as apprentices into his area. He has the same problem in Maryborough. He has the same problem in the plant in Hamilton. There are very few young people wanting to go into that area or even seeing it as a pathway.

CHAIR—Which is a great frustration when youth unemployment is so high.

Ms Galati-Brown—That is right.

CHAIR—It is a communication problem, isn't it?

Mr Benton—It certainly is a problem of communication with the kids at school.

Ms Galati-Brown—Also a change in the perception that a TER score in university is not the be-all and end-all and that there are valuable and worthwhile and more highly paid jobs and opportunities to do a hell of a lot more if you did start something like engineering.

CHAIR—Are we seeing signs already that this is starting to work, or is it too early in terms of numbers?

Mr Benton—No, the indications are that where the engagement has occurred the results are positive and the kids do understand there are real jobs in the manufacturing sector.

CHAIR—Is that translating into applications for jobs and apprenticeships?

Mr Benton—Yes, it certainly is.

Ms Galati-Brown—Yes.

Mr Benton—The difference is quite astounding in just one or two schools.

CHAIR—Great.

Mr Spranger—From a Darebin local government perspective, we have been involved in education, employment and training programs for a number of years. Obviously we are not the primary provider of those services—that being state and federal government—but we play an active role and certainly we are quite excited about the Ntech concept as it moves forward. We see it certainly as 'a solution'—albeit not 'the solution'—to the incredible number of youth who seem to fall between the gaps. The problem is that is either uni or what? On the other hand, as we have just indicated, Noel and a number of other manufacturers out there cannot get those skills. Someone put a point to me not so long ago, that when we were kids there were about 50 applicants going for every one apprenticeship and nowadays there are about five and only two will turn up for the interview, more or less. It is a very different dynamic. The model almost does not work in one sense, yet there is a tangible solution before us. We are pretty excited about that.

What concerns us, from Darebin's perspective, is the high rate of unemployment. Daniel touched on it, but generally taking non-youth unemployment from the 2001 census, we are 2½ per cent higher here than the rest of Melbourne; and when we take youth unemployment into consideration we are actually six per cent higher than the rest of Melbourne. We do have a problem and we do have a solution.

Mr Theisinger—To reiterate and pick up some of the threads everyone else has talked about, at NMIT we are quite willing to support any environment or any program that can increase the awareness of young people about manufacturing engineering, because it has been a problem for so long. They are leaving school not even knowing what it is, let alone whether they can make a choice. If there are programs out there which can be developed to increase awareness, promote the industry and develop employable skills in those people, then we are fully behind it and fully willing to support it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—It is as frustrating as hell. This is phenomenal. We are coming to areas of high unemployment. You mentioned a few other areas in Victoria and I am thinking of

Tasmania as well. We have skill shortages, we have demand for labour and skilled people. Do you see the demise of technical schools as being a factor in all this, between industry and tech schools or trade schools?

Mr Benton—That is when industry dropped the ball. They used to have a relationship with the technical system, in that industry often provided the teaching staff through graduation from industry to teaching. That path has changed. There is not as easy a transition from trade individual to trade teacher. That is a frustration too, I would think, for the providers.

Ms Galati-Brown—We are very concerned about the looming skills shortages. My automotive teacher is someone who taught in TAFE and is actually an industry person but he is getting on in years. My furnishing teacher is getting on in years. We are lucky that we are in partnerships with NMIT and Kangan, certainly in having some engineering people, but eventually I want someone on site here to work hand in hand with the TAFE teachers. The question is, where do you get them from? They are so rare on the ground and they are not coming through. We are going to have to look to industry to somehow get them involved and get them trained up. We are not going back to an old trade school approach, the old tech school. This is more of a 21st century approach.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I am not suggesting that you do.

Ms Galati-Brown—However, there is no doubt that their demise meant that in most schools everyone got rid of all their equipment, most of the technical schools have been closed—we are a former technical school—and in some way even that sort of pathway has lost status. It was a pathway for the students who were less able. It has lost even more status, in the sense that people say, 'I don't want to work in this area because it's dirty,' or whatever. They do not have knowledge of the area, so we are now having to raise the profile. It is making our job that much harder in terms of really having to address it.

CHAIR—Obviously this is an absolutely critical issue. It is not just in manufacturing. As you said, it is also in the automotive area and we had that this morning from VACC. We have also had it from the rural sector with NFF; we have had it from food processing industries, meat processing industries—livestock—and it is repeated time and time again. Yet standing alongside these significant skill shortages is high unemployment. Is the model that you are developing here easily replicated to cover these other industries? Related to that, what is the best way of doing it? Should it be industry based so that if we are dealing with manufacturing we have similar programs running with automotive and with farming? Or should it be location based, where we are trying to build the industries in a region—in the minds of the local students—as a career option? Which do you think would be the more effective model?

Mr Benton—We would perhaps see, in our selfish group, that the area attack is where we are finding the success. But the overall plan needs to be taken up by the manufacturing associations, perhaps AiG and such groups that can model satellite components of their organisation with a similar structure to what we have struck up locally.

Mr Knott—What Noel is referring to there is the notion of regional industry groups in metropolitan areas. They do not have an identity. In regional areas in New South Wales and Victoria you will find regional trades hall councils or regional chambers of commerce. In the

urban areas they get lost and most small to medium sized companies do not find themselves represented in VECCI or in AiG..

The model we are trying to develop here is you could take away manufacturing and you could put on rural skills and you could move it to Mildura. The idea is essentially about school institutions linking with local partners. Mildura is in a major wine growing area and there is stainless steel also up there. It could be a regional grouping of that industry sector partnering with local schools so as to address the whole issue of skill shortages.

Mr Benton—We were talking earlier of schools within the VET program requiring industry to deliver some of the program. It requires an interested group of industry people to facilitate the schools' total program that they are intending to deliver under the VET program.

CHAIR—What do we need to do help?

Ms Galati-Brown—There are a range of things.

Mr Benton—The industry group at least has stood up to be part of the VET program in the north. We have 20-odd students out in different parts of industry. Industry is prepared to pay for the kids to come into the workplace, so it takes some of the cost of delivering that program out of the pockets of the parents who find the VET program expensive.

Ms Galati-Brown—We are moving the centre from around the back. It is part of making manufacturing really important. We are moving it to the front of the school. We raised $1 million but we are still looking for more funding for that. The whole centre will cost $2.5 million. To really make VET in Schools work effectively, to create that seamlessness, the transition from school to work or to TAFE, you really need to have some dedicated people—for example, like Daniel—working there and making those links with industry, really working closely with all the various industry groups and then someone else working with him to ensure the work placements are there, the same sorts of things that Julie was doing before. That will make it work.

We expect over 100 students from lots of different schools to be coming here when it opens in 2005, to take advantage of it. To do that, to make sure that they actually feel a part of the place, that they are all placed in industry, that we have those sorts of links made, is very time consuming. VET in Schools will not provide that, so perhaps one of the things that really needs to be looked at is where you have these strategic solutions or these—as they will be, in the end—national projects, because they will be lighthouse models for other areas. We really need some solid funding to go in there for the first two to three years whilst they get up and running.

They are targeted at areas of real skills shortage. You have 20,000 young people in Victoria that are doing courses in IT and hospitality and retail, and we have a small number of young people in areas where there are real jobs. There has to be some give there and some real recognition that where there are really innovative projects that are doing the sort of stuff we are doing, which is really leading edge and has not been tried in this way before, they really need to be supported.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—But it will not be a tech school.

Ms Galati-Brown—No, because we want a 21st century approach.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—But it is still a centre you are talking about, and bringing them round, so you are starting to specify again and link.

Mr Redfearn—And probably part of a cluster of schools, with different schools having different specialisations. That is certainly something that is being looked at.

Ms Galati-Brown—And having a centre that the community sees, and sees that it is important. There will be people going by; it will be used by the adult community education sector; the Koori community want to run stuff there on the weekend. The fact that it is going to be like that will help to embed it in the community as a place of value and start opening up people's minds to it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Wonderful.

CHAIR—Any other final words?

Mr Knott—I would like to reiterate what Noel has said. In manufacturing, for example, a course could put a student anywhere between $200 and $600 in debt. The industry has said that it is a real impediment. Why does it cost so much for a student to do something in the manufacturing area? That is one of the reasons why industry has put up its hand and said, 'Well, we'll pay students a flat rate of $20 to $25 a day while they are in the workplace,' voluntarily to try and offset the cost of the courses.

Mr Benton—With coordinators and industry assistance in providing safety equipment for the students doing those courses.

Mr Knott—On top of that they have to buy their boots, which can set them back $100.

Mr Benton—The safety equipment is being provided by industry.

Mr Knott—Overalls and so on—and industry has stepped up on that, so industry was very concerned about it.

CHAIR—Fantastic, yes, and an exciting project. I am afraid our time has gone. You have some information for us?

Ms Galati-Brown—We have packages for you which will explain Ntech. There is also a paper in there from the NACC on manufacturing in the north, and the northern economy. You can take all that away with you.

CHAIR—Marvellous, a show bag! Thank you very much for your time. What you are doing is very exciting, and I hope it is a model that we can replicate somehow.

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

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

Subcommittee adjourned at 4.48 p.m.