HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people

WAGGA WAGGA

Wednesday, 9 April 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

SCHOOL FORUM

Factors influencing the employment of young people

WAGGA WAGGA

Wednesday, 9 April 1997

Present

Mr Marek (Acting Chair)

Mrs Elson Mr Mossfield

The committee met at 9.05 a.m.

Mr Marek took the chair.

PARTICIPANTS

Kooringal High school
Emma Jamieson
Matthew Zadow

St Michael's Regional High School
Tim Cooper
Jason Heffernan
Orren Stephenson
Jason Turner

Mount Erin High School
Kelly Dalglish
Cecilia Judge
Margaret Nugent

Trinity Senior High School
Clinton Brown
Andrew Cheng
Jamileh Harling
Daniel Hayes
Daniel Ward
Emma Ward

Wagga Wagga High School
Natasha Anderson
Dominique Cook
Laura Gant Thompson
Ruth Sanders
Melissa Young

Wagga Wagga Campus, Riverina Institute of TAFE
Terry Bourke
Melissa Casey
Clare Hush
Emily Kay
Ashley Lucas
Joanne Morey

ACTING CHAIR—Good morning everybody. I declare open this school forum on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The purpose of this inquiry is to consult widely and to produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of young people.

The committee has conducted similar school forums in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. Students and members of the committee agree that these forums are a valuable opportunity to share concerns and express views about this important issue. This school forum is one of a series with students in Nowra and Wagga in New South Wales and Sale and Seymour in Victoria. The committee considers the school forums to be an important part of the inquiry process.

So far, the committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Alice Springs and several regional centres in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. For the most part, the evidence collected has come through employers and government and non-government agencies.

Through this school forum, all of you will obviously have the opportunity to voice your views and opinions on this very important matter. The agenda and issues for discussion have been sent to you and you have had the prior opportunity to study these issues. Some of the issues we wish to discuss include the effectiveness and appropriateness of the secondary education system, vocational education for schools, employer perceptions of young people, apprenticeships and traineeships, youth wages, income assistance and any other issues you may wish to discuss.

To help structure the debate, I will make a few comments based on evidence that has already been provided to the committee and I will seek your comments and views on the matters under discussion. Just to get things going, I will start off with couple of questions.

Have all of you been involved, or had experience, with guidance officers, in particular about when you complete your education and where you are going to go? In other words, have you spoken to guidance officers? Have they sort of tried to push you into vocational or university type careers? Does anybody have any comments on that? Does anybody here want to go to university?

(About half raised their hands.)

ACTING CHAIR—What are you going to study?

CECILIA JUDGE—I am 15 years old and go to Mount Erin High School. I hope to do a degree in speech pathology.

ACTING CHAIR—Who pointed you in that particular direction? Have you always wanted to do that, or has it been your parents or the school system?

CECILIA JUDGE—My mum did do a bit of speech pathology when I was younger. I do not know. I just like it. I do a lot of acting and drama. I think, especially when children are younger, it is important for them to develop certain sounds so they can speak properly when they get older, basically.

ACTING CHAIR—Anybody else?

ASHLEY LUCAS—I am 18. I attend the Wagga Institute of TAFE. I am interested in doing a university course, probably in business management. I think that came about because of my interest in business studies, which I found very interesting. I have been to the careers office at TAFE. I was interested in computing courses. They seemed to recommend more vocational training rather than going to TAFE.

ACTING CHAIR—That is interesting. Have many others come across that—in particular, that career officers have tried to push you into an area like university rather than vocational studies such as apprenticeships or those sorts of things? How many in the room here were keen on doing an apprenticeship or a traineeship like that? No? What about the defence forces? Is anyone interested in going into defence? I notice that some of you have raised your hands. Would you like to comment on that? What do you want to do in particular? What areas do you two want to get involved in with the defence force? The reason I ask is that we have found that last year the quota for the defence force intake was several thousand down.

KELLY DALGLISH—I am 15. I attend Mount Erin High School. I am in the air training corps, which relates to the RAAF. I find that really interesting. It gives me an opportunity to look at life in the RAAF and in the defence force. I would really like to get into the RAAF, maybe as a pilot. I think it is a really good experience. It helps me. The school really has not had anything to do with it.

ACTING CHAIR- Is there anybody else who wanted to go into vocational studies such as apprenticeships or anything like that?

Mrs ELSON—I noticed that a large number did not want to go to university. I wonder if you could let us know what you would like to do when you leave school. Unless you tell us these things, we cannot change the system for you or help you get jobs when you do leave school. So don't be shy. Let us know what you would like to do when you leave school.

DANIEL HAYES—I am from Trinity. I am 16. I would like to be a film reviewer. I do not see any need to go to uni for that, and that is what I would like to become.

Mrs ELSON—Is someone showing you what you should be doing to become one?

DANIEL HAYES—No, I have not really asked. I have just come in contact with Paul Byrnes, who does it for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I had a talk with him, only for a little while. Apart from that, no-one else, really.

Mrs ELSON—So you have actually experienced the area you want to go into, to make sure you are certain?

DANIEL HAYES—Yes. He is one of my friend's uncles and he was there for a holiday. I was talking to him about what he does and how he became one. It was very interesting.

Mrs ELSON—That is excellent. You are focused and know exactly what you want to do. That is good.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Could we get some indication of how many are in year 10, year 11 and year 12? We have got a pretty good mixture. How do you feel about the education system? Do you feel as though it is equipping you to be able to go out into the work force to get suitable employment? Do you have any comments about that?

TERRY BOURKE—I am 17. I attend the Wagga Institute of TAFE. I am doing a pathways thing at TAFE, where I do other subjects with it—some vocational subjects. Part of that involves preparation to go into the work force. The normal high schools do not get to do all of that. It gives them a bit of a disadvantage and us a bigger advantage over the others because we have done preparation and stuff for it.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Is there a balance between vocational subjects and, say, tertiary/academic type subjects in the schools generally, to give you an idea of both areas of education?

JASON HEFFERNAN—I attend St Michael's Regional High. I am 17 years old. St Michael's runs a community living skills course for those kids who are leaving or thinking about leaving at the end of year 10. This course teaches them how to live out in the community, how to get a job, how to apply for a job, how to bring themselves forward. I am not in the class but I know a bit about it. It seems to be a good program. The kids get work experience every second week, I think. From that, I have heard of a lot of jobs or apprenticeships coming through.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So they get work experience on a regular basis every second week.

JASON HEFFERNAN—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—One day a week?

JASON HEFFERNAN—One day a week.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What year did you say that was?

JASON HEFFERNAN—Year 10.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about other years? Are there any work experience programs that any of you know of for years 11 and 12?

DANIEL HAYES—I am 16 and from Trinity Senior High School. The only thing I have heard about was a TRAC at our school—that is another course in which every two weeks, same as at St Michael's, you go for a day of work experience at several places. Apart from that, the only thing is that program of two weeks work experience at the end of the year at St Michael's. Other than that, I have not heard anything.

ACTING CHAIR—The gentleman with the cap was talking about that program he was on. Do other students get that preparation for work program or is it only available to your school?

TERRY BOURKE—Do you mean other schools?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes. That program you were on was pathways or preparation for work. Are other students or other schools using that process as well or is it only your institution?

TERRY BOURKE—Not that I know of. I do not know any other schools that get that preparation for the work force. We get given skills in how to go looking for work—interview skills and all that.

ACTING CHAIR—It is something that has become very common. We have spoken to many school groups now and they have all said the same thing: that they do not get preparation for interviewing and those sorts of things when they go for jobs. It is wonderful that you have. Have other students in the schooling system so far been taught how to handle interviews, how to dress appropriately, what should be expected of you during an interview and what you should expect? Has anybody been through that process of what to expect when you go for an interview with an employer? Do you think it would be helpful? I get the impression that you think it would.

Has anybody sat down with you and explained what your careers or what you are going into would be like—what an employer would expect of you? We have seen young people take on careers or apprenticeships only to get a year or so into them and think, 'This is not what I want to do.' What would you think of a scheme for students like

yourselves at the end of years 10, 11 or 12 to do work experience for three and four days a week and only do one or two days back at school on mandatory subjects like maths and English? Would any of you be interested in that sort of scheme, particularly those who want to do apprenticeships? Those who would be interested in going into mechanical trades just quickly put your hands up. I just want to get a quick look at faces. Okay.

ASHLEY LUCAS—I am 18 and from the Wagga campus of the Riverina Institute of TAFE. At TAFE, we do a lot of communications skills and we have a career development adviser that we can talk to. I do not think there is enough emphasis on explaining different types of jobs and fields, especially in year 10. When I was in year 10, I did not think there was much. A lot of students were leaving year 10, but still did not know about a whole lot of jobs out there. It would be a good idea to implement some kind of program to reinforce it.

Mrs ELSON—Can I get a show of hands of students who have done work experience while at school? Okay. Can I ask those four students if they would mind letting us know how they found it and whether that would be their chosen field when they leave school?

EMMA JAMIESON—I am 17 and from Kooringal High School. I went for work experience for one week on our usual program in year 10. I went to an architect's firm and discovered I do not want to be an architect. It was really beneficial. I found then that I wanted to go somewhere else and try a different field but I did not have the opportunity.

ACTING CHAIR—Okay, so you are saying you would like to do more so you can have better opportunities to look in different fields.

EMMA JAMIESON—And not necessarily a whole week at it—just a few days to understand a bit more.

Mrs ELSON—Can we hear from the gentleman next to you what his opinions are?

MATHEW ZANDOW—I am 17 and from Kooringal High School. I am interested in doing law, but I decided that it would probably be a bit boring to spend a week washing up coffee cups and doing filing for a law firm, which happens quite a bit. So I decided I would go to the local radio station, 2WG here in Wagga. I had a really good week. It gave me an insight into what employers expected: what they wanted you to do, how they wanted you to dress and what things they expected from you. It was a really good week. I made a lot of good friends there during that week and I found it really beneficial to me. Now that I am in part-time work as well it gave me a really good focus on work.

Mrs ELSON—Excellent.

RUTH SANDERS—I am 15 and from Wagga High. Last year, in year 10, I did two weeks work experience with a lawyer. Law is something I had always wanted to go into. But, being a work experience student, I did not get to do much. I got to sit in the courthouse all day and just watch cases. I did a lot of photocopying at the office and that kind of thing. I figured that it was not really what I wanted to go into any more. I am still interested in the law and I talked to the lady I was working with about different branches of the law, not necessarily going into law as a barrister, but just different aspects of it. That helped me a lot.

Mrs ELSON—Excellent. Would you like to do another work experience to see if there is something else you like?

RUTH SANDERS—Yes, I would. But I do not think they usually do that in years 11 and 12.

Mrs ELSON—No, they do not. Only in the one year, don't they?

DOMINIQUE COOK—I am 16 years old and from Wagga High. Last year I did work experience as well. I did two weeks at Charles Sturt University, the first in the public relations department. That was really good. I used to want to go into it, but I don't any more. They let me do a lot of things and I was not washing up coffee cups all day. I actually got to write press releases and all that sort of thing. In the second week I was at the language part of the university, where they teach English to foreign students. That was good but I could not really do much there because I could not teach them. It was still good to meet people.

Mrs ELSON—And you would like to try another work experience to make sure that whatever you want to do next you get an insight?

DOMINIQUE COOK—Yes.

EMILY KAY—I am 17 and I am from Wagga TAFE. We did two weeks work experience in year 10 and that was really good. But year 11 and year 12 is really where you need to because more people are starting to stay for years 11 and 12. We are not getting the experience in the workplace in years 11 and 12, which is when we really need it to make contacts and whatever. In year 10 you are not really prepared to do all that.

Mrs ELSON—That's right. You have not made up your mind by then, have you?

EMILY KAY—No.

Mrs ELSON—Thank you all very much. That has given us another insight into the education system.

ACTING CHAIR—With respect to what you have just said, how do you feel about the talk of raising the school leaving age to 17?

CECILIA JUDGE—I think that, even if you are going to raise the school leaving age, it is still not going to make students want to be there. You are better off letting them leave because they want to leave than having a whole group of students who do not want to be there and who are not prepared to work.

MELISSA YOUNG—I am 15 and from Wagga Technology High School. If you get a good opportunity before you turn 17 then you should take it because you might not get another one after you turn 17.

ASHLEY LUCAS—I was recently on an exchange program to the United States. The school leaving age there is 17 or 18 and they cannot leave at year 10. You can tell by the classes that it has affected them. A lot of students who should have left are basically sleeping through years 11 and 12. They also had a program, like you were saying before, where they could do core subjects like English, maths and science for a couple of days a week but then they could also work at a job for a couple of days a week. I knew students who liked that. It was a way to get out of doing years 11 and 12 for two years but a lot of students who were in class really should not have been there. It was kind of a waste.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I would like to go on to another subject. When we are talking with employers a lot of them say that when young people leave school they do not have very strong literacy and numeracy skills. Would you like to comment on that? How do you feel your literacy and numeracy skills are and the skills of your friends? Do you think the school adequately trains you in those particular fields?

LAURA GANT THOMPSON—I am 15 and from Wagga High. I do not know very much about English. At primary school I was taught a bit about nouns and verbs and adjectives but we have not really carried that on until this year. We have not learnt anything in years 7, 8 or 9 about it. I think that they should study a bit more how to speak properly and other parts of the language.

RUTH SANDERS—I am 15 and from Wagga Technology High School. I agree. It just seems that if you have not gotten the basics in primary school, if you do not do well in year 6, then in secondary school they do not really enforce it well enough. A lot of the emphasis is on creative writing and not on structured writing such as how to write like this or how to write like that. There isn't emphasis on learning exactly how to write newspaper articles or things like that—things that will benefit you. There is more emphasis on creative writing and analysing text and not on the basic skills of writing English.

ACTING CHAIR—This has become a real worry. A lot of employers are saying this, yes.

ORREN STEPHENSON—I am 14 and from St Michael's Regional High School. I had the opportunity last year in Griffith to help the students who had trouble with their reading and writing in their HSC. There was a large number for the size of the school. There were about 10 or so students in year 10 who had trouble writing and reading. They had gone through primary school and years 7, 8 and 9 without much help.

CECILIA JUDGE—There is a lot of emphasis in primary school on kids who have trouble reading and writing. They have special teachers to help them in that, but there are still a lot of kids who are getting through the system and getting into high school who still do not have the basics for reading and writing. Once you are in high school you are expected to have those basics. Without those basics you do not get very far.

MARGARET NUGENT—I am 15 and from Mount Erin High School. At our school the girls who have difficulty are personally helped through it. In the English classes, they are personally trained to get whatever level they need to get through school and it is doing really well at Mount Erin. Most girls at Mount Erin are getting through it really well. The teachers are doing really well with teaching the girls how to speak properly and learn what they really need to do.

NATASHA ANDERSON—I am 15 and from Wagga High. Emphasis in primary school is on reading and writing and things like that, but when they get to high school, as someone else said, there is not much push to make you read and write. They need a one-on-one arrangement, maybe for 20 minutes or half-an-hour every second day, or something like that, with a teacher to help them to bring up their skills in reading and writing and to make them more confident with it because some people are really embarrassed about it. Like that boy just said, I helped a guy a couple of years ago in his School Certificate. He had no idea. He went through primary school and high school without knowing how to read or write properly. They need a one-on-one arrangement, maybe a teacher at lunchtime or something like that, to help them with their schooling.

DANIEL HAYES—I am 16 and from Trinity. A lot of us have been talking about English, but with maths, after about year 7 or so a lot of maths becomes pointless. You learn some formulas that you will never use in life again or else by the time you come to need them, you will have forgotten them. The basic skills are not emphasised.

ACTING CHAIR—I hope you are not talking about trigonometry!

DANIEL HAYES—With logarithms—

ACTING CHAIR—You will need that if you are going to become a tradesman, a fitter and turner or something.

DANIEL HAYES—I asked my teacher why we are doing this and he said, 'You probably will not need it but we have to teach it.' That is just a joke.

JASON HEFFERNAN—Coming back to English, about how they said it is more to do with analysing text, understanding the text, that is all the School Certificate is based on. We are doing trial moderators and we are taught how to write creative writing, how to analyse a piece of text because that is what you need. You need to be able to read a poem and then tell the examiner why it is attractive, why it will sell, and what is the main point to it. Knowing nouns, verbs and adjectives does not really come into that side of the exam; it is more on what you know and how to get that across to your examiner.

RUTH SANDERS—With maths, there are a lot of people who do not like it because of the way it is taught. A lot of the maths that is taught in secondary school is basically rote learning. You are told this and you have to remember it for the exams. It is not made fun and it is not to do with problem solving. It is basically just learn this, and they do not tell us why we need to learn it or what its relevance is or anything. That is why people are not interested in maths or are bad at it, because they just do not see that it is important to them.

ACTING CHAIR—Do the TAFE students agree with that?

ASHLEY LUCAS—Our mathematics classes are relatively good. We are taught the basic HSC stuff and we get through it fine. Just going back to English again, I was finding it interesting what was said earlier about how we are taught how to read through and understand text and find meanings and what not, but then most of our tests that we do are essays. We have probably got the skills to analyse it but when it comes to write an essay it is like, 'What do we do now?'

JOANNE MOREY—I am 17 and attend Wagga TAFE. With maths, a lot of it is irrelevant for what people want to do. It should be separated into more groups. You do not need all the different maths skills in certain jobs. You are taught it all but you know that it is irrelevant to what you want to do and so you are not interested in it. However, you need to know it for the HSC exam and if you do not pass it then you are still not going to get the job you want because you did not get a good enough pass. However, it is irrelevant to what you need.

ACTING CHAIR—In the subjects that are offered, is there still social maths, then maths 1 and maths 2, which is then probably tied up with physics? Do you still have those three different maths groups?

JOANNE MOREY—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—I want to come back to what this gentleman here was talking about before. That program that you were talking about, tutoring or helping other students, how did that work?

ORREN STEPHENSON—Each student had a reader who read the questions, the

articles, and then they had a writer who wrote down what they wanted to write down so that it was readable. We read and wrote. That was virtually it.

Mrs ELSON—Did it improve the person you were teaching?

ORREN STEPHENSON—I think it did. They did not have to sit there and think and then start writing and feel uncomfortable. It just made it easier for them to understand.

Mrs ELSON—How long did this process take that you spent with him?

ORREN STEPHENSON—They got an extra 10 minutes or something on each question. They just did it with the moderator and the trial moderators.

Mrs ELSON—How often? Was it for a week or a month?

ORREN STEPHENSON—There was just a trial for each—English, maths and science—and then we did the actual certificate.

LAURA GANT THOMPSON—We have a program here like that called DEAR, drop everything and read. Sometimes there are people who have trouble reading and they go with a person who can read well. I know a few people in my roll call who have done this program. I think it would have been quite effective but the problem is people are asked to volunteer and I think they do not want to do that because they are embarrassed that they cannot read or write very well. So what the teachers have to do would be pick out the people who cannot read very well and who do not have very good literacy skills and teach them specially.

NATASHA ANDERSON—As this young gentleman said, they were getting help with their trial moderators, moderators and then the actual exam. That helps them get through the exam but it is not going to help them when they leave school. They are not going to have someone there when they are going for a job, reading out the questions for them and then someone sitting there writing it down for them. It does help them get through their moderators and things, but, as I said before, they really need someone to help them leading up to it to actually get them more confident in themselves to read and write when they actually leave school and get their own job and their family and things like that. It should be something that will help them in the future, not just in the moderators.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I am impressed with the fact that there is obviously so much effort being made to bring everybody up to speed with literacy and numeracy. That is good. It is a recognition that some people do need additional help. I would like to come back to something, I think, that Mr Marek raised earlier in the piece, which we did not address—you were probably a bit shy at the time. Career advisers play a very important part, we have found, in advising people and directing them into what career to follow.

We have had various views put to us by other groups relating to the effectiveness of career advisers. Would you like to make any comments about that? Do you feel as though your career advisers are giving you the wide range of job opportunities that are here in the area and are they fairly accessible? We did find in one other location that they did not have enough career advisers and young people at that school found it very difficult to get to them and seek advice. Is there any comment on that sort of thing? Do not worry about speaking out if you think there is a problem. It is the only way we can solve it.

JASON HEFFERNAN—Our career adviser for our community living skills program is mainly there for those boys who, in all probability, will not go to university and will not go to years 11 and 12. He will advise them on how to get an apprenticeship and how to get a job doing what they can do best. As for myself, I would like to get a degree in veterinary science. I cannot really go to him and say, 'All right, how do I go about it?' because he probably would not know. I think career advisers should be able to advise the kids, whether they want to become a labourer or whether they want to get degrees and doctorates and what not.

NATASHA ANDERSON—As that young gentleman said, he wants to be a veterinary scientist and his career adviser should be able to advise him on that. I want to be a police officer when I am older and I want to leave school after I do my HSC. I find it easier to talk to my uncle, or other people that I know who are actually police officers, to get more inside details than actually talking to a careers officer who is going to say, 'Well, they do this and they do that and you need that.' If you talk to someone who is actually in the police force, or someone who has been in the police force, they give you more information on what you actually need to get in and if you want to specialise. My uncle told me that I need to get a pretty high TER to get into what I want to do. I find it easier to talk to people who are actually in a career that you want to be in to find out more about it than your careers officer.

EMMA JAMIESON—I am 17 years old and from Kooringal High. Our careers officer is really good. But it is easier and you get more information out of him if you go there with an idea of your own and if you just want to get guidance on where to go, what university, that sort of thing. He has a theoretical knowledge, but he does not seem to have the practical, obviously hands-on stuff because that is not his job. Maybe if he could give us contacts in the field it would be a lot more beneficial to us.

CECILIA JUDGE—At Mount Erin High School this year we have a joint careers adviser with Trinity, because they are just next door to us. We have actually set up a careers room which has got a computer program. You can go there and say what sort of thing you are interested in and then it can show you all the different jobs there are available in that field. Also, people come from different fields and they give talks about what their jobs involve and what sort of things you have to do. It is pretty good.

Mrs ELSON—Would they be business people or are they in academic fields?

CECILIA JUDGE—Yes, both. There has been a media talk and a social work talk—all different things.

Mrs ELSON—Does your local industry come to your school to let you know what opportunities are available in their industry?

CECILIA JUDGE—I am not exactly sure on that one.

Mrs ELSON—That is okay.

KELLY DALGLISH—I am 15 and from Mount Erin High School. I am involved in Compac and that is really beneficial to me and the students involved in it. It gives us a look at careers that we might be interested in, we have speakers from certain industries and we get to participate in vocational education—not actually at our school because our school does not run it—run by other schools. They run programs and information days and give talks from people in certain professions that we would like to hear about. It is something that we have to volunteer for. If you are really interested in certain careers you go and listen to what these people have to say and it gives you hands-on experience. You get to talk to the people and they tell you what you need to do, how they have got to where they are and what they have achieved in their careers.

Mr MOSSFIELD—It sounds like a very good scheme. What does Compac stand for?

KELLY DALGLISH—I don't think it stands for anything.

ACTING CHAIR—How do you feel about vocational trades? There is a perception in the community that there is a lack of tradesmen in the country, particularly boilermakers, electricians, carpenters, fitters and tuners and so forth. How do you perceive a vocational trade like that compared to university degrees and those sorts of things?

ASHLEY LUCAS—At TAFE, we have a program called matriculation where we can do our HSC courses and we can also do a trade. My friend sitting beside me is doing welding. People can pick electronics, spray-painting—all the trades. I think TAFE is one of the main places for trades. A problem with doing it in the HSC is that often it is not recognised as an HSC unit. It is certainly not recognised on a TER that they might want to go to uni afterwards. It works out well. A lot of students get apprenticeships from it. It is fairly practical.

JASON HEFFERNAN—I have heard a lot of people say out in the community that there are too many chiefs and not enough indians, meaning that too many go to university and not enough are in apprenticeships—labouring sorts of jobs. It is all fine and good for a person to do a university degree in electrics and become an electrician, but unless he gets employed or joins up with another person, he might not have the financial

backing to actually go out for himself—Joe Blow, electrician—and do jobs. He needs that financial backing. If he wanted to be hired by an employer, it comes down to the experience side again. An employer might say, 'What is your experience? What have you done?' and you say, 'I've got this degree.' He might say, 'Can you prove to me that you can do it?' You cannot say yes because you have not done it yet. So it is all fine and good to get the bit of paper, but to go out and actually do it is another thing.

EMMA JAMIESON—I think once you hit years 11 and 12 the focus is mainly on university. They lose track of the fact that we do need tradespeople in the community. Everything you do at school is then focused on getting you that TER mark and heading to university for a degree. Kids these days have got the idea that we have to get our HSC to get anywhere in the world. We cannot just leave at year 10 with our school certificate. It is not going to get you a decent income later in life and it will not advance you. So we have got this image in our minds that we need our HSC, we have got to get a good TER. By going through high school, years 11 and 12, and then university, we lose track of trades in the community. We somehow miss it because we are so focused on uni.

ACTING CHAIR—The trades are now becoming extremely highly focused, technical type work—fitters and turners, motor mechanics. A lot of it is computer work now and you need that HSC or grade 12, but you can still handle it at the end of year 10. The two gentlemen in the front here, were you looking at doing trades? What areas were you looking at going into?

JASON TURNER—I am 16 years old and go to St Michael's High School. I was looking at going into welding and trying to get a job in that area afterwards.

Mrs ELSON—Are you going to go through to year 12?

JASON TURNER—I am not quite sure.

Mrs ELSON—Has anyone shown you what your options are?

JASON TURNER—No.

TIM COOPER—I am 15 and go to St Michael's. I was thinking of going into a joinery trade because at St Michael's they have courses where you actually do cabinet work—building things. I like making things with my hands.

ACTING CHAIR—Frank and I are both fitters and turners. We are both tradesmen. What were you, Kay?

Mrs ELSON—My first job was in a factory.

ACTING CHAIR—How many of you are concerned that you will not get a job

when you leave school? It seems that about half of you are concerned. Why is there that perception? Why do you think you will not get a job? Would anyone like to comment?

ASHLEY LUCAS—You hear a lot about it. In the news, you hear about eight per cent unemployment. They say the high rate of unemployment usually involves school leavers. A lot of friends who go out to find jobs seem to be banging their heads against a wall. They run into so many obstacles and they cannot find the work they are looking for. Some of them end up going back to school, anyway.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Where are the employment opportunities in Wagga? Where have those young people who might have left school last year and the year before found positions, if they have found positions?

NATASHA ANDERSON—One of my really good friends left half-way through this year. She was having trouble with school. I find that some of the people that I have known who have left school are getting jobs at Maccas and at places like that. In a couple of years time they are not really going to find it beneficial if they want to leave that job and get another job. For instance, my friend does not have her School Certificate, so she has not really got anything to say that she has completed year 10 or any other schooling like that. She did not really go to school in year 9—or year 8 for that matter. She was not really school- minded. She decided to leave school and get a job, but if you do that, at Maccas, KFC or anywhere like that—Big W, K Mart—if you leave after that, you think, 'Oh yeah, 18 now. I really don't want to work here. Where am I going to go?'. You have not got any actual skills. After you leave school and get a job and then leave that job, you have no skills at all.

ASHLEY LUCAS—I found that a lot of my friends have been getting into trades. We have a few examples where they have been doing their year 11. A lot of students like to leave year 10 and then go straight out into the work force instead of studying. At TAFE, a lot of them do year 12 and then do their trade. They also apply for numerous trade courses and just keep doing their education until they get a job. We have had certain examples where people have gone into horticulture, spray-painting and particular trades. But it is hard to find a trade. It has taken a couple of people a year and a half of throwing their name around to actually get a trade.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you accept the fact that you may have to leave the community in which you reside to get a job? We have just been up through Alice Springs and that part of the country. There are jobs to burn up there for chefs in the catering trade.

TIM COOPER—With regard to what was being said about Big W—that once you reach 18 in retail, you might not want to keep going—there are a lot of trainee managerships being offered there for people to carry on through there into business management. It leads them to a higher place in the work force.

DANIEL HAYES—With a lot of it, the employers want experience. Once we leave, we do not have any, apart from maybe the two weeks that we get at the end of year 10. But if you get a job at Maccas or somewhere like that, at least you have got some experience, which usually gets above most other people.

NATASHA ANDERSON—What I was getting at was the fact that you might get to a certain age or a certain part of your life and think, 'Oh, I've done enough here.' I was just using 18 as an example. You have a job and you think, 'Yeah, this is so cool.' You work there for a couple of years and think, 'Oh, this is okay, I'm getting somewhere, but I'm not. I want to make more of my life.' Yes, they have their skills in communication with people in the work force, but there is nothing really there to say that they have done it. They might get a little piece of paper from their work saying they have worked here since such a time. They have skills, but they do not have skills.

ACTING CHAIR—How many of you have part-time jobs? Just under half. How many of you work at McDonald's? One. From people we have spoken to—employers in particular—we have heard that if three individuals went for a job and one of those three had experience at McDonald's, that person from McDonald's would usually get the job. It is interesting. Would someone like to comment on that?

EMMA JAMIESON—I have been working at McDonald's for about a year-and-a-half now and I applied for another job at K Mart. I walked into that job because I had worked at McDonald's and they recognised the experience and the training and the sort of person that McDonald's wants. So it has been beneficial to me.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Just going back to the trades, what I am suggesting that you could be doing is looking at some of the major and even minor companies that are operating locally. Obviously, you have plumbing companies that work locally, you have electrical companies and you probably have small engineering companies around the place. We would suggest that, for anyone who is interested in a trade, they are the organisations you should be going to. You should be knocking on their doors and asking them if they have any positions available and asking them what standard of education and other experience you need to enable you to get into a trade.

EMILY KAY—I am 17 and from Wagga TAFE. A lot of people are leaving at year 10 and wanting to get trades but they are in competition with people from year 12 who are also wanting to get trades. There are a lot of people offering apprenticeships or traineeships but there is increasing competition to get those jobs. Even though there are quite a few there is heaps of competition. Apprenticeships are pretty stable because you are indentured but traineeships are becoming more unstable. It is easier to lose your job, even if you have not done anything wrong, maybe because the company is failing. There needs to be more stability in things like that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Traineeships are generally for 12 months, aren't they? They

are not as long term as apprenticeships. Just on the issue of years 10 and 12, certainly you should not leave school at year 10 unless you do have a position. But there is really not a problem if you do get a position or an apprenticeship, even though you are only in year 10, because you can still continue your studies. We would encourage you to do that, even if you are studying part time. We felt in other places we have been to that there was some pressure to keep people at school until they were in year 12, irrespective of whether they had employment opportunities or not. We do not think that is a good idea.

We think that if an employer is prepared to take you on after year 10, and you are happy with that particular career opportunity, that you should take it but you should certainly continue your education. On the other hand, we would not ever put it into your minds that you do not need a good education to take on a trade. You do because it is getting more sophisticated all the time. The machinery that Paul and I had when we first started our apprenticeships is probably a lot more sophisticated today. So you need to be better educated. The other point we would make is that a lot of you will change your careers several times during your working lives so it is a good idea to have that good basic education to start with to help you if you need to move from one position to another.

ACTING CHAIR—There was a comment there particularly about there being a serious skills shortage. If fellas here wanted to get into trades like welding there should be jobs around here.

Mrs ELSON—I am interested in the business interaction. There does not appear to be too much within the school system. Do you know a lot about the industries in your area? Can anyone tell me what your main industry is and whether jobs would be available in town rather than you having to leave? I am asking this question to see if the businesses in the area have promoted themselves enough to allow our young people to know what is out there for them.

Nobody knows? It says a lot for the school system, doesn't it? And for business interaction also. They do not always blame it on the education system because businesses out there have the same responsibility to make things available. Is there anything you wish to tell us today about how the school system could or should change to make you more job ready? You have given us a lot of ideas but I just wondered whether someone out there knows something else that has not been mentioned today.

CECILIA JUDGE—At Mount Erin we do not have any opportunity to practice for interviews. We should have something like mock interviews. I also think we should have a bit more contact with the local universities. I know of some people who think, 'Oh, yeah, I'll do my HSC then I'll go and do this degree.' Then they get out to the university and they start the degree and realise, 'This is not what I want to do.' But they have not had any experience with the universities. They do not really know what is expected of them and what they have to do for that degree. By the time they get out there it is too

late.

Mrs ELSON—That is what we have noticed while travelling around Australia: at all schools, the students tell us exactly the same thing.

ACTING CHAIR—I have spoken to a lot of university students who have finished their degrees, and they still do not know what they want to do. It is interesting. You mentioned that you were interested in defence positions. What is the general perception within the group here about the defence forces? Why would you not consider an option to move into the defence area, where there is quite possibly a vast range of jobs available?

ASHLEY LUCAS—To a lot of my friends who are out looking for jobs, the defence forces seem like the last resort: 'I can't find a job, so I'm off to the army.' It seems like the last thing—a fail-safe option, if you like.

KELLY DALGLISH—I would like to get into the defence forces because I think that will offer me a lot of opportunities. There are so many different careers from which you can choose. They offer you lots of benefits. You have a lot of opportunities to advance your career within whatever force that you choose to join. There are so many things that you can gain from it, such as different skills in teamwork, management and self-discipline. I think that more people should be interested because there is such a variety of things that you can learn from these kinds of careers.

EMMA JAMIESON—I have been recommended for an ADFA scholarship. Looking at ADFA now, I like the idea; but the idea of that military environment pulls me back, and it is what a lot of kids are scared of. We do not understand how it all works, and to us it is like a prison. They have a lot of control over you and we do not want to get into that. We like our freedom and, to us, that is a loss of freedom.

ACTING CHAIR—There is obviously that perception out there of the defence forces. If you are not up to scratch and not up to standard and your education is not neat and tidy, quite often the defence forces will reject you. It is interesting that they are looked at as a last landmark as far as jobs are concerned. Does anybody else want to talk about the defence forces? No? We will proceed.

Mrs ELSON—Yesterday, when we were at Seymour, a couple of rather large retail outlets suggested that students should do work experience after school or on Saturdays rather than through their schooling time. That is the time when the shops are the most busy and the students would get the best experience. What are your comments on that?

JASON HEFFERNAN—That is how I got my job. I got off my backside and went and saw a local veterinarian and asked for a bit of work experience. After two

weeks, he was begging for me to work there. I now work there on Saturdays and I also work there on Sundays as an emergency night surgical nurse. It was the best thing I have ever done.

Mrs ELSON—Excellent.

JASON HEFFERNAN—That is how I know I want to become a veterinarian. My boss is also on my back to get my nursing certificate. He believes I can do it 'like smoke', and he is trying to organise with the University of Melbourne so that I can get it. I can get my nursing certificate through TAFE, but I must have a year 10 school certificate and several other things—which is fine for me, but I have found out that you must work in a veterinary hospital for about 20 hours a week; but young people cannot do that while they are still at school. Only people who are, like me, employed in veterinary nursing can get that. It is an unfair disadvantage to everyone who would like to become a veterinarian but cannot because there are probably no jobs available at that hospital.

Mrs ELSON—So you would have to leave school to do your 20 hours a week, if you were not prepared to do what you are doing?

JASON HEFFERNAN—I would have to leave school, yes.

NATASHA ANDERSON—At weekends and after school some people have homework. At the moment, I have got four major assessment tasks and people just do not have time. I am trying to fit my work in around everything else that I do. People also have sporting activities—football, netball and things like that—which are on Saturdays and Sundays. Having a job on Saturdays and Sundays is really beneficial, but social activities such as football and netball also teach you skills. It just depends on the person and what they do or do not do, as far as getting jobs on Saturdays and Sundays goes.

Mrs ELSON—I can truly understand your four hours a night. I have had a number of children. I could not believe over the last five years, with the youngest ones, the amount of homework they have had once they hit high school. It is tremendous. I would have to pat anyone on the back for holding a part-time job.

MATTHEW ZADOW—I have been employed at K Mart for about 2½ years. I think that the employer groups were wrong to say that they should come in on the weekends because I know from my experience there that most of the technical and background work is done through the week. It is quieter, but that gives you the chance to learn how to present stock and how stock inventory works. You are not always running out onto the floor to serve customers. You get to learn how to input implements into the system like bar code readers.

I have only just learnt how to use one piece of equipment that I should have learnt in the first six months that I was working there because I am only there on the weekends.

We are open through the weeknights now, but that still does not offer a greater opportunity. You do not get that chance to learn the skills and to learn how the business operates if you are only there on the weekends.

JOANNE MOREY—A lot of people find it hard to get volunteer work. If they have a part-time job, like I have, they do not have time to do volunteer work. I want to work in a child-care centre and the best way to get in is to do volunteer work. But I work all weekend and go to TAFE all week do not have time to do it. Every afternoon I go home and do homework, then all weekend I work so I can afford to go to TAFE. I do not have time for volunteer work.

ACTING CHAIR—Do any of you have any friends on the dole who left before year 12? Some of you do, I see. How are they going? Is there any particular reason why they left do you think? Have any of them been trying to get work? How do they perceive the dole? Do they perceive the dole as being an alternative to work?

CECILIA JUDGE—The sister of a friend of mine went to get a degree in psychology and then, halfway through the degree, she decided she did not like it and did not want to do it. She was on the dole for a while and now she is waitressing. That is basically because she did not really know what she wanted to do. She was on the dole for six months or so.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there anybody else? How do you perceive the dole? Is the dole perceived by anybody as another form of income or employment compared to getting work?

TIM COOPER—I am 15 and from St Michael's. A lot of people find the dole an easy way just to get the money. But now they are going to bring in that work for the dole system in some places, they are going to have to work for the money that they are getting and do a community service and learn trades. They will be training while they are on the dole.

ACTING CHAIR—How do you feel about working for the dole? Does anyone have a perception? Would you like to comment?

KELLY DALGLISH—I am 15 and from Mount Erin High School. I think it is a really good idea. I am not really sure, but isn't it taxpayers that are—

Mrs ELSON—Paying the money.

ACTING CHAIR—It is taxpayers' money, all right.

Mrs ELSON—Some of the parents' money.

KELLY DALGLISH—Some people do not feel very comfortable if they are paying tax and then it is being given to other people for not doing anything, even if they do have certain reasons. I think it is really beneficial not only for the people receiving it and the people paying tax. The people receiving the dole are learning skills from it and also getting that bit of money on the side. It is pretty good.

NATASHA ANDERSON—I think it is a good idea that you have to work for the dole. As the lady said, it brings out people's skills and teaches them to learn skills, which means the taxpayers will not be thinking they are taking our money and all they are doing is sitting on their butts all day doing nothing when we are out here working for our money and yet we have to pay tax. It is a good idea that they are trying to bring in the work for the dole scheme.

JASON HEFFERNAN—I strongly agree with the system of working for the dole. My concern is workers compensation. They might be out cleaning up the riverbanks and fall over and—in the extreme—break their back. What happens then?

ACTING CHAIR—We accept that there would be an administrative area where people who could get hurt would get workers compensation. The government would have to look after that. Just on the profile of the scheme, obviously administration will look after that and make sure that is all put in place. The concept is good to hear.

JOANNE MOREY—I think it is a good idea, because once people have been on the dole for a certain amount of time and have gone out looking for their two jobs a week and been turned down so many times, they give up. They just sit at home saying they cannot get a job and they get lazy. If they have to go out and actually work for the dole, it gives them an incentive to keep going. It gives them something to work for.

ACTING CHAIR—We have found a lot of employers, if they see an individual having a go doing part-time work or at least in this work for the dole scheme, will think that is the kind of person they want. We have spoken to a lot of students and they have talked about various subjects offered like physical education. They say, 'What is the relevance? Why should I have to do physical education? Why should I have to do work experience? Why should I have to do work for the dole?' The idea is that, at least if you are stimulated, you are doing something. It puts you into that circle where people can see that you are interested and you want to have a go and are not lazy. It is very, very important that you project that you are keen and that you want to have a go.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Are you comfortable with the title 'work for the dole'? Do you think that is a little demeaning in some ways? Would it be more attractive if you had a different title—this was suggested in one of our other forums—such as 'working for the community'? Would that have an influence on you?

NATASHA ANDERSON—I think it would. If you are in a general conversation

with a friend you have not seen for a while since you left school and they say, 'I am a doctor now. What do you do?'and you reply, 'I am on the dole,' some people feel ashamed. A friend of mine, who has a job now, chucked in a perfectly good job in Tumut to move down here and live with his girlfriend because he was going to get transferred to another place. In the end, he was not. He was on the dole for five months and he basically just chucked in a good job for the sake of it. He was one of the really good managers in KFC in Tumut. He was earning really good money and then got on the dole and got really depressed. The word 'dole' is exactly what it says—dull, grey, depressing. You really do need another title for it. It does not embarrass. It lowers their self-esteem when people say, 'I am on the dole.'

ASHLEY LUCAS—I agree it is strange that you have this idea of the dole bludger. That is a really low status in the community. I think 'work for the dole' sounds like we have nothing better to do so we will slap you on a couple of days of work. If you did have a better name—community assistance or whatever you would like to call it—

ACTING CHAIR—Any suggestions?

ASHLEY LUCAS—You could rename the dole 'part-time work allowance' or something.

ACTING CHAIR—Think about it as you go.

DANIEL HAYES—I don't think anyone would care less. Everyone knows that social security payments are working for the dole. They do not care. I do not think it would change anyone's perception. It would just give it a little fancy name. That does not mean much.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Some employers have said it is a good idea. Others say that it does not go far enough to really get people ready for employment. Do you think it could be improved by having a training package attached to the work aspect of it, so that when a person did complete that period of work, they would be better qualified for employment? Would that help?

DANIEL HAYES—I believe so.

ACTING CHAIR—Are there any other views on that? I suppose it is an obvious thing.

ASHLEY LUCAS—I finally thought of another name. Maybe train for the dole. That way you would not be taking work away from employees.

Mrs ELSON—I have a question. It appears by the answers we are getting here today that we have some of the brighter students of your schools before us. I have no

doubt that no-one in this room would think of the education system as something they are going to go through until they decide to leave and go on the dole. But are there others in your classroom who give you the impression that they are just going through the system and only intend to go on the dole once they get through the other side of it?

CECILIA JUDGE—I think there are people like that in every school. They do not really care and just think the whole education system is a big joke. For a lot of them, it is not until after they leave school that they realise the importance of it—when they have to go on the dole because they have no alternative as they mucked around at school and do not have a school certificate, a HSC or anything.

Mrs ELSON—Are they slow learners or do they not want to learn?

CECILIA JUDGE—I think some of them could be slow learners and they are embarrassed about that so they cover up with the big attitude of 'I don't care.'

Mrs ELSON—And they are the ones you think come into high school without the literacy and numeracy skills?

CECILIA JUDGE—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Back to the school subjects, curriculum and those sorts of things. How relevant do you feel the subjects you are doing are in preparing you for later life? We sort of touched on it before, but has anybody got any comments on the relevance of the subjects you are doing?

KELLY DALGLISH—I do not feel that Mount Erin offers us many hands-on subjects. The boys at St Michael's do cabinet making and things. Our school does not have the facilities and we do sewing, cooking, artwork and things. They are good subjects to do. They are not relaxing subjects, they are leisure subjects, but they are not actually teaching us hands-on experience with subjects that we might want to do, such as agricultural subjects or things like that. Our school really needs to do more of them.

NATASHA ANDERSON—I know in our school in year 7 it is compulsory to learn a language. When I was in year 7, I had to learn German. I thought, 'Why do I need to do this? I am never going to go to Germany.' I think it is a good idea to teach people a language, but they learn to count to 10 and say, 'Please. Thank you. I need to go to the toilet.' They learn how to say their name. It is not really going to help them when it comes to other things. Learning Japanese or whatever language should be your choice. You should not be made to learn it because you are not going to use it ever.

It is like maths. You are going to use maths sometime in your life. You are going to use English because you need to spell and talk. As for science, maybe. But I think languages should be your own free choice. You should not be made to do them.

MATTHEW ZADOW—It is a good question. The problem is that once you start doing the HSC course you really have to think about what you want to do with yourself. Do you want to go to uni? What course do you want to do? That is the main problem.

I will use myself as an example. I want to do law. The only thing I need is English, and I find myself having to look through other courses at school. English is compulsory. I have done legal studies obviously. It is a good background, but you find yourself doing maths, which you do not need but you will use for personal skills later in life.

But you also have to look at, 'What mark do I need to get into uni? Does this subject scale well? Will I get a good mark in it?' That is the main thing. It is not so much, 'Is this relevant to me?' Rather, it is, 'Do I like doing it? Will I get a good mark in it? Does it scale well? Will I get the TER I need to get to university?' I think that is the problem. You have to make a decision early on as to what you want to do in uni so you can choose the right subjects to get into uni for prerequisite courses.

CLINTON BROWN—The computer course at Trinity is basically for beginners. If you have ever used a computer before, you can breeze through the subject in the preliminary course. There is no 'You're an advanced, so start there.' There is no way you can skip all the introductory computer courses. You cannot do a correspondence course at TAFE. There is no start at TAFE.

Trinity offers the most subjects in Wagga but, if you pick a subject and not enough people pick that same subject, you do not get to do it. There is a subject at Trinity called engineering science, but I could not do it because not enough other people wanted to do it. I also heard that, at university, the whole course of engineering science is covered in a year in an engineering degree. If you have done the course at the HSC, it makes it a hell of a lot easier in university for you to get a higher mark.

CECILIA JUDGE—The girl from Wagga High and others have been saying things about languages and maths such as 'Why should we do this maths? We are never going to use it.' I think that when some kids go to high school they have no idea. You were saying before that some people have finished uni and they still have no idea what they want to do. I think it is important that they do have at least a semester or a year to experience doing something like a language. They might start off thinking, 'Why do I have to do this? I am never going to Germany, France, Japan or whatever.' But they might do it and think, 'Well, I like this; I could pursue a career through this language' or 'I like this maths; I might want to pursue a career in this'—which does not happen often. So I think it is important that we all experience most things so that, if we do not know what we want to do, we might think, 'I like doing this subject; maybe I could pursue a career in this area.'

ACTING CHAIR—Are you saying that it would be good to do all the subjects up

to, say, year 10 and to start specialising in years 11 and 12 or just having it structured for you right through to the end of 11?

CECILIA JUDGE—To use language again as an example, it is also compulsory at our school all through year 7 to do a language—either French or Indonesian. I did French in year 7. I decided that I liked it, so I have continued doing French. If I had not done it in year 7, I probably would not have kept on doing it. I think it is important, especially for year 7s, to experience a year of something like that so that they can decide whether they like it or not.

LAURA GANT THOMPSON—I agree with Cecilia's view, because there are people who might think, 'I do not want to learn that language; I do not like those people'—they might be racist—and because of that they do not want to do it. But by making this language compulsory to them—for example, I did Japanese—they might find that they actually like the language and, through watching videos about the people's culture and things, they might actually find that they do like the people and they might want to go to whatever country one day to learn more about the people themselves.

JASON HEFFERNAN—I have a suggestion. As we all know, in year 7 a language is compulsory. With our literacy skills being mediocre to pretty bad, why should we be teaching everyone a different language? We could take those mediocre to pretty bad kids in year 7 and teach them English skills, while the other students who can learn another language do. We could give them a second English class or just that little bit of help in year 7 and they could get that little boost up that they need. I think that would really help instead of sitting them down to do another language when they do not really know that much about English or do not have many literacy skills. You need to understand English to learn another language and, if they do not, they are really not going to learn the other language to the full potential, so it is really a waste of time.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So you are suggesting that they should reach a certain level of skill in English before they go on to learn a second language.

JASON HEFFERNAN—Yes.

KELLY DALGLISH—At our school on orientation day, we have certain tests that then grade us in maths and English classes and things like that. The people who do not go particularly well or who seem to struggle—for example, in the English test—are recognised as having difficulties in reading, writing and comprehension. They are not put into a language class. They are put into an extra English class where their skills can develop in reading, writing, understanding text and things like that. They do not actually have to do a language.

DOMINIQUE COOK—I agree with the two people in front of me who said that they need to be taken out and taught English and the basics. I did not learn about nouns,

adjectives, adverbs and all that until I did Japanese in year 9. My teacher took so long. He had to teach us English and Japanese. I do not think it is really right to have to learn like that. You need to know English before you learn a different language.

NATASHA ANDERSON—I agree with those two people in front of Dominique that they should make it optional—not optional, but like the test they have at Mount Erin. They should try and get in something like that, so if people do struggle in English or a certain area in English, they take the language away from them and give them another English lesson. This would mean that, by the time they get to the moderators and things like that, they would actually know how to read, write and understand text properly and not just have someone read it for them.

ACTING CHAIR—One particular thing when I went to school—and it was only some 16 years ago that I was at high school—was that we had special education units. It was like another class. If you were falling behind in maths, English or a particular topic, you could possibly forgo certain subjects you were involved in and then go and work heavily in that area. I guess that is moving back to a slightly older fashion or a different system they used to have years ago. How do you feel about the education system getting back to basics? Do you think that is probably a good idea?

CECILIA JUDGE—My mum is actually the head of the special education unit at Tollan Public School. Before she had that job, she worked for seven years at Willans Hill School, which is for people with disabilities and that sort of thing. She still works with those sorts of people, but not as severe obviously. They do a lot of work integrating them into the mainstream education system. I think that is pretty important because a lot of people do not understand people with disabilities, so when they join the work force or something and there is someone like that there, they do not know how to handle it. So I think it is a very good idea to do that sort of thing.

Mrs ELSON—Just listening to you here this morning, do you believe that the schools should teach more grammar in their lessons? It seems to be something we have heard around different parts of Australia and it seems it is the same here. Could we get an opinion on when you should start learning grammar, when you should not stop learning it or when you did actually learn it?

KELLY DALGLISH—We do a lot of public speaking, debating and things like that in our English classes, which I think is very beneficial to our students. It is compulsory, but we also have the school debating teams, mock trial teams and things like that which help develop our social skills and our public speaking skills. They are voluntary things, but we do learn it in class as well so everyone gets to have a go at it.

We also have extra English classes and extra maths classes that you can take, but you have to choose them. It is not that, if you are failing in a subject or if you are a bit behind, then you can swap a couple of your classes and get put into a class where that

will help you. It is more that, at the beginning of the year when you look at the subjects you want to do, you pick an extra English class or an extra maths class to help you along in the year. It is not something that you do when you start falling behind. So you cannot really swap classes.

EMMA JAMIESON—Talking about grammar, I do not think I have ever learnt at school how to speak properly. It has only been my parents' influence and the people in the world around me. It has not been through school that I have learnt to speak.

Talking about debating and public speaking, I do a fair bit of that. In a school, you have either the kids who can speak and who do the public speaking or the kids who cannot. The gap just gets wider because the ones who can, go out and do more and obviously get better at it with more practice. We need to address that in our schools. Our school does not at all, so we lose our grammar.

Mr MOSSFIELD—The point you have raised there is that while the good achievers do public speaking, the ones who are not so good at expressing themselves do not get the opportunity, so clearly there is a need to involve all students in the area of public speaking. I thank the young lady for raising that because it is one of those things that we have probably overlooked in the area of public speaking.Do all the students here take part in debating?

Mrs ELSON—Could we have a show of hands of those who do? About eight.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Obviously, there is a need for more of that type of training.

KELLY DALGLISH—I think public speaking and debating come back to our literacy skills as well. I find that the people who do debating or public speaking are rather good at English. They have a better way of expressing themselves; therefore, they are able to do debating or public speaking. So if English was more of a priority, people in the schools would be able to express themselves better and therefore be able to do debating and public speaking.

CECILIA JUDGE—Public speaking, debating, mock trials, acting and drama productions give a lot of people who usually would not do that sort of thing the confidence to do it. So not only is it important for experience in the work force, but also it gives people who are on the shy side the opportunity to get up and make a speech. It is good to have that skill.

JASON HEFFERNAN—I do not know what you have heard from businesses and people higher up. I think in the general community a lack of grammar is seen as Australian. For example, 'How ya doin' mate? What ya doin'?' is seen as Australian. Someone who speaks properly is seen as a bit up here and whereabouts. You might have to change people's view of grammar before you try to get them to teach it and to learn it.

They will say, 'What do we need this for? I'm not going to go out into the playground and use it.' You need to get people to see that they need grammar. Instead of going up to their employer and saying, 'What've I got to do now?' and using slang, they really should be using proper grammar.

ACTING CHAIR—A lot of employers have said, 'Get back to the three Rs—reading, writing and arithmetic.' It is interesting to talk to students. A lot of students say, 'Oh no, we're pretty well right, except I guess for our reading and English, et cetera.' But the employers have a really poor perception of students coming out of the system. In fact, a lot of them are saying that the education system is failing our students. That is pretty scary stuff when they are saying that. I guess we need to try to do something to turn that around. Having heard what you have had to say, I think the input you have given is fantastic.

KELLY DALGLISH—I recently watched a program on television—it could have been *60 Minutes* or *A Current Affair*—about different teaching methods being used overseas. It could have been in Japan or somewhere like that. It concerned the structure of the school, the classroom situation, how we are seated and the way that we are taught things. It seemed to be working really well over there. It is a different society and culture, but maybe it could be trialled in some places to see how it worked. Maybe different teaching methods could be looked at so that we can boost our education system.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I know in some areas—I know it occurs here in one school—you have a stand-alone senior high school, just for years 11 and 12. That may allow these new ideas to be brought in. Has anybody got any views as to whether that stand-alone senior high school is an asset to people in improving your education and improving your employment skills?

JASON HEFFERNAN—I believe you are referring to Trinity Senior High School. At the moment it is in a bit of a bad spot. The diocesan is not funding it, is not throwing its support behind it, and the school is now in dire straits. Teachers are leaving. There is not enough money to pay teachers and there are not enough teachers. Yes, it is a very good school. I am going to go to it because it offers more courses than your average school. But it really needs the support from higher up—the Bishop of Wagga to support his school instead of just kicking it out. It just needs people to support it; otherwise it will not last long at all.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I was interested in the concept. In my area we have had senior high schools, too. I was just wondering whether students thought that was an asset, where you actually break away from the years 7 to 10 and move into a different, more adult learning atmosphere in years 11 and 12 and whether that was going to be to your benefit in the long run?

ASHLEY LUCAS—The subjects that we do were originally structured towards

adult teaching, where it was a completely different environment from school. For a start, it brought in a lot of older aged students that wanted to return to schooling. It has its good points. It is good to break away from years 7 to 10, because it was originally set up for adults, and adults do not want to be incorporated into a school system with their kids going to the same school. It does offer freer open learning. We do not have teachers sitting there telling the students, 'Sit down and be quiet. Listen to what I'm saying.' It is more of, 'Okay, what are your thoughts? Do you understand?'—giving feedback.

CECILIA JUDGE—I go to Mount Erin High School, which is years 7 to 10, and it is all girls. One of the benefits of going to an all girls, years 7 to 10 school—I am not sure about the years 7 to 12 schools—is that a lot of emphasis is placed on the school certificate in year 10. So we concentrate mainly on that. I am not sure how much emphasis is placed on it with the years 7 to 12 schools. That is one good aspect of having years 7 to 10 and then separate years 11 to 12.

EMMA JAMIESON—Our school is obviously years 7 to 12, but we do not have a problem with integrating with the lower years because our school senior years, years 11 and 12, start at a different time. We start at 8.15 in the morning and go until 3.30. We have different periods off and the rest of the school obviously is still in class. The year 12 students have their own common room. We are kind of separate from them anyway. We obviously come across them in the playground during breaks, but other than that our classrooms operate totally differently. There is a lot more teacher-student interaction. I would not go to a senior school, because I still value that interaction with the lower years in breaks; but my education is not suffering from it.

ACTING CHAIR—Please excuse me for being amiss and not mentioning the member for Riverina, Mr Noel Hicks. In relation to government, is there anything that you feel as though government could be doing for you? Is there anything that you would like us to see—particular changes, things put in place for when you leave school, any additional help or anything like that? Does anyone have a perception or something they would like government to do for you, or do you feel as though it is more of a responsibility for yourselves and for your parents? Do you feel as though government should take a greater role or a lesser role in the education system?

RUTH SANDERS—I am from Wagga Wagga High School. I do not know whether the government could do much about it, but there does not seem to be much relevance between TER subjects and university courses. For example, I want to do a mixed degree of law and psychology and I need a high TER to get it. For my TER, I am doing maths, chemistry, English, history and music. It has really got nothing to do with the career path that I want to follow, but I have to do well in those subjects in order to get into the course that I want to do. Apart from legal studies, there is nothing relevant to law and there is definitely nothing relevant to psychology. So it is a bit of a problem. If there were relevant courses, then people, while doing those courses, could decide whether that was the career path they wanted to follow.

Mrs ELSON—I have a question which you may not be able to answer from your own experience, but you may have friends who have just come out of the school system and have had this happen. Have any of your friends been given a course simply because it matched up with their TER score, but they are not the least bit interested in it and are not happy about it? None of you know of anyone. I thought that you might, because we have been told by a few students that they have finished school—and it is relevant to what you have just told us—and they have been given courses at university that they are not interested in, because they were simply matched up to their TER result.

EMILY KAY—There were a lot of people who did year 12 last year who did not get the TER score that they needed to do the course at university that they wanted, and so they have had to settle for less. It is a real shame, because they are not doing exactly what they want to do.

Mrs ELSON—Are they happy?

EMILY KAY—Not really. They might be able to get a transfer, but it is really difficult to start out on something new. It is not what they wanted to do; it happened because their TER did not fit.

ACTING CHAIR—Let us have a look at another area. We touched on part-time work before, and some of you spoke about Woolworths and McDonald's. Would you like to expand on that? Do you feel as though it is really giving you some benefit? Would anyone like to comment further on their part-time jobs?

NATASHA ANDERSON—I am working at KFC as a CSTM, which is a customer service team manager, and I basically serve at the front counter. I find it beneficial because it helps me to interact with different people in society, not only with people of my age, or my parents' or their friends' age. It helps me interact with people I do not see at school or at my house every day, or at the places that I normally go. I find it really beneficial for my speaking skills. I do not speak perfectly, but I try to. My job helps me because I have to speak properly so that I can be heard.

CECILIA JUDGE—I work at Big W and I have been working there for about six months. It is a good job because I do not work on the checkouts, I work on the floor. I do what is called 'recovery', which means that I stay on for an hour after the store closes and tidy everything up. On weekends, I sometimes work during the day. One thing that I have really learned from working there is that I definitely do not want to work in the retail industry. The job is good as casual employment, and I get a bit of extra money and independence, which is good. But it is really just a way I can get some extra money: the job does have good hours and I get good pay, but it is not stimulating in any way at all.

MATTHEW ZADOW—As I said before, I have been at K Mart Wagga for about 2½ years. In that time I have also become a union delegate for casual staff who are

members of the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association in New South Wales. That has given me great standing in the workplace. It has given me great opportunities. I have been able to meet a whole new range of people. It has helped me to communicate better with management. It has helped me to deal with issues with management. The job itself has helped give me the skills to deal with situations with customers, staff and stock presentation. It has given me the skills to deal with people later on in life, particularly in law. You have to deal with everybody later on, and I want to specialise in industrial relations, and so the job has given me the inside edge in that area. It has been a great experience and it has also meant a bit of extra money.

JASON HEFFERNAN—I see going to work every weekend as going to school. It is very good for me. For my job, I must use correct terminology. I am not allowed to say, 'What's wrong with it? ' I have to say, 'What's the diagnosis?' I have got to know what all the instruments are used for and how to use them. I am allowed to take X-rays. I anaesthetise animals and keep them anaesthetised.

I see it as a great learning experience. My employer knows I would like to become a vet, so he is teaching me as he goes along. You could say I am an apprentice vet. I also get to work with people—clients coming in, clients leaving. I find it a really great experience as I am getting to know the people and also getting to know my job and how to do it.

EMMA JAMIESON—At the moment, I am holding down two jobs. I am doing my HSC and I am planning to go to London in four months. So, for me, two jobs, or a casual job, has taught me a lot. I can manage my time; I have to manage my time. I do not just get the money, I also get the people skills, the personal relations skills, management at work and coping with different problems with machinery. To me, getting a casual job is going to be of future benefit because when I say I have had practical experience at McDonald's and I have worked at K-Mart for two years, it is not going to apply just to my money and my bank account now, but hopefully that experience will be recognised. In the meantime, I can manage my life.

ACTING CHAIR—You are very right.

Mrs ELSON—Do you believe you are paid enough by way of junior wages, compared with the people you are working with? Everyone is happy with their wage, then!

MATTHEW ZADOW—No, I don't think so. This pushes me to another point that was in the suggested talking points, which was: is the youth wage enough to live off? No, it is not, because if you are in a casual situation there is no statutory requirement that they give you any rostered work for that week. So you could have 20 hours one week and zilch for the next four months. What people need is stable full-time or part-time positions so they get a statutory benefit and loadings which you do not get by being casual. Sure, you get a little bit of extra money because you are casual, because you can be on call, as it

were, but it is really not worth it. If you are trying to live off a casual wage, you cannot really budget and I don't think it really is enough. It depends on your situation and your circumstances, too, as to whether it is enough. For me, at the moment, yes, it is all right, but if I was trying to live off it, there is no way I could.

ACTING CHAIR—We are talking particularly about the fact that you are at school, you are finishing your education. I guess it should be perceived in some ways that if it was too high, maybe an employer would not give you that lucky break to get that opportunity to get that skill. So I think students should look at that fact as well—that you need to get that experience at McDonald's and those sorts of places that we have talked about. If, suddenly, an employer was put in a position where he had to pay you a phenomenal amount of money, or the same amount of money as one of his full-time staff, do you think that he would look at putting somebody on?

We have come across students who have said they would be happy to go and work for nothing, just to be able to get that work mentality, to prove that they want to have a go and to get a reference, in particular, from employers. How do you feel about that? That is another angle—that you are actually working. It is your choice whether or not you want to work. If employers gave you the opportunity to work at their place for nothing, just to get a bit of an idea, how would you feel about that?

JASON TURNER—With regard to wages, if a person is working just as hard as the one getting a full-time wage, why would there be a difference in the wage?

ACTING CHAIR—I guess if you are still at school or you are just starting in a new job, like an apprenticeship, what you would produce and the quality of your work probably would not be up to scratch to the point of a full-time employee. Therefore, that is obviously why there is a variance in apprentice wages from first year to fourth year. I think it is important that you get that first-hand experience.

This is a statement that we had from some of the students the other day. Owing to the fact that it was hard to get part-time work, some of them would be more than happy just to be able to go out there to employers and say, 'Hey listen, I am prepared to come in here and do two hours a week for nothing just to show that I can and want to have a go and to get a reference.' A lot of employers are in a position where they are not keen on letting young people come in and just do work off the cuff because, if they get hurt or injured, there is the impost on small business—legal battles and those sorts of things. So it is interesting to hear. Does anybody else have any further comments?

KELLY DALGLISH—I live at home with my parents and I have a part-time job. The wage that I am getting is enough for me to go out and buy clothes or whatever—things that I would like. My parents still provide for me, but that is just a little extra cash on the side. My wages are fairly good considering some people get a lot lower than what I get. A minimum wage is good because, if it was taken away, we could be getting $2 an

hour. They can just change it to whatever they want, whereas with a minimum wage you know at least what you can get and what you can achieve. In the case of someone saying, 'I would like to go to do some work for you but not necessarily be paid,' you would then be able to see who the workers really were.

I know a lot of people that do not like going to work. They may not necessarily work very well while they are at work, but somehow side-pass managers. The only reason they are going to work is because they want the money. They are not doing a very good job, but they are getting the money, so they keep going. If we had a system where you could go to work and not get paid for it, but just did your job, then it would be good for employers and people in the community to see who really were the workers in our community and the people who really were genuine in what they were doing. You might get job offers from that where you could be getting paid.

JASON TURNER—If you really want a job you have to do some voluntary work. Some employers suggest that you do it so they think you are keen and they might employ you later on as full-timers.

ASHLEY LUCAS—A couple of points about that. You mentioned before about the insurance. That is actually a huge problem. I did work experience once. They had work for me to do—the guy was inundated with work—but he would not give me a thing to do except be a bench warmer just because of no insurance. It is a big fact. Another thing is: if you did work for nothing, you could be open to exploitation. They could make you work your butt off or, the opposite, make you do nothing.

ACTING CHAIR—On the alternative, you would not go there?

ASHLEY LUCAS—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—So then they would not pay you, so then they would have to pay something to get you back.

ASHLEY LUCAS—Yes. A vicious circle! Another problem would be that, if you lower it, somebody who is working their butt off five days a week is getting less than the dole. Nobody wants to be working five days a week and drive a Datsun when some bloke is on the dole and driving around in a Ferrari. It is not just good.

ACTING CHAIR—A scenario touched on before which I would not mind you expanding on as you go is this. We speak about the dole and apprenticeship or youth training wages. Do you think that the dole is probably a little too close to the training wage? Do you think the dole might be a little too much—too close?

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about increasing the training wage?

ASHLEY LUCAS—Yes. I am not sure how much they get on social security. You could have training for the dole and that would be a higher rate than—

ACTING CHAIR—Just getting it.

ASHLEY LUCAS—Just sleep for the dole. You have two different areas. I have a few more points. Also, a lot of my friends that have started off in apprenticeships have the lower wage. They cannot afford to live on it, so they stay at home. At the start of the meeting, you were encouraging people to go into other areas to find work. That would reduce people from going to other areas because they could not afford to live in another area anyway to find the work. They are all my points.

JASON HEFFERNAN—On the point of youth wages, I cannot complain. I am getting paid more than any kid at Macca's or Big W. I think youth wages should be based on what you are actually doing. Should a sales clerk get more than a person where I work? He is stacking shelves and I am assisting in operations—it is things like that. I think there should be some boundary set for kids who do certain jobs and tasks.

ACTING CHAIR—So it should be in terms of productivity or the quality of the job rather than age or something like that?

JASON HEFFERNAN—Then you would have the employer offering fewer jobs. Should the person who cooks the chips at McDonald's be paid more than the person who does retail? Because his job is a harder job or because the job has more skill, maybe he should be paid more than the person who just throws papers at the doorstep every morning.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Our shop steward friend over here will know what I am going to talk about. I was a union secretary. A lot of people would not realise that there is a debate here—and it is spelt out in our documents—on the difference in the age based wage rate which applies in the retail area that you are working in. This means that, no matter what sort of work you are doing, you start off at a rate and it is paid according to your age.

One of the criticisms that has come through on that system is that, when you reach a certain age, the employer gets rid of you. He then employs a younger person because he does not have to pay as much, so that is seen as a weakness. The opposite to that is a base award rate of pay for the job that you are doing. Irrespective of whether you are a male or female or irrespective of your age, you get the rate for that particular job. I think that is what the debate is all about: which of the two systems you feel is the more appropriate. In fairness, the age based wage rate means that younger people do get an opportunity. They may not get opportunities if it was just an award rate. The employer may go for an older person. So you have to balance up which you think is the best system from your point of view.

MATTHEW ZADOW—To comment on that, I have seen age discrimination in my store in my capacity as a union delegate. Our payment system has been open to age discrimination: the older you get, the fewer hours you get. It is even happening to me now. I am 17 and I have faced a severe cutback in hours. They are employing people who are 14 years and nine months to go in straightaway and do the same work that I am doing. My advantage is that I have been there for 2½ years. I supervise several different areas of that store, yet I am being cut back because of my age. We had a recent case at the store where a 21-year-old person was basically getting zero hours a week after being on 25 hours a week ever since she had been employed there—because of her age. It is open to discrimination.

On the point of being paid for what you do, if I go there on the weekend and I supervise three different areas and I get all the advertisements done and I have this done, that done and something else done, it sort of makes you wonder, if you can do that and you are 17 and you can do that when you are on a full-time wage and you are 30, why there is such a huge gap between what I get paid and what they get paid for the same amount of work even though we have less time to do it in. Of course, there are certain limiting factors to that. It just sort of makes you wonder at times whether employers employ young people to do their work because we are cheaper.

JASON HEFFERNAN—On that point, we might be asking ourselves why the 30-year-old would be getting more than the 16-year-old when he can do the same thing. You must also remember that the 30-year-old would probably have a house loan, a mortgage, a wife and kids. In other words, he has people to support. He his got bills to pay, whereas I do not. Any money I earn goes straight into the bank to buy whatever I want. I do not have a car payment or anything like that, so I think it is evened out in the end.

EMMA JAMIESON— That is another argument—that we do not have things to pay for. But I am facing not going to university or going to a university that does not offer my course because I cannot afford to go somewhere else and my parents cannot support me. We are going to have enough trouble paying the HECS without them paying a living allowance or me supporting myself. So where does the balance come in? Don't we have things to pay for or do we—even though they are not the same sorts of things and they may not be as much, supposedly? I think we do have our own costs that some people need to look to.

Mrs ELSON—With regard to the HECS system, at every school we talk to the students are confused and think that they have to pay that HECS up front. It does not get paid until you actually get a job where you earn over $20,000 a year.

EMMA JAMIESON—I understand that but it is still a debt that we face.

Mrs ELSON—But a lot of students are under the impression that they have to find this money to pay to get into uni, and you do not have to do that.

JOANNE MOREY—I agree with Emma that we do have things that we have to pay for. There are a lot of people that I know who go to TAFE and who are like Melissa, who is next to me. She lives away from home, which is in Tumbarumba. She cannot do the course that she wants to do there so she has had to move to Wagga to do the course. She lives in a flat that she has to pay for. Austudy is not adequate enough to support her.

I have a car. I live out of town and I need to have a car to get into town to go to school. I have to pay for that to be registered and insured. I have to pay for the petrol every week. I get Austudy as well as income from my part-time job and that only just covers me. Melissa only gets Austudy, which she has not got yet because of all the forms she has had to fill out; they keep sending them back. So she is basically living on nothing. A part-time job would not support her either but if she were getting the same rate as someone who was doing the same job as her then maybe that would help.

NATASHA ANDERSON—I am from Wagga High. Where I work, for instance, there is a girl who works there who is in year 11 and is doing her HSC. She has a car payment and she pays her mother money every week. So we still have things to pay for—not that we are 30 with a household. I pay my mother petrol money for taking me to work. Employers will not take that into consideration. When I was there to sign up for work they said, 'Why would you want to do that?' I said, 'My mother takes me to work. She uses her time to take me to work so that I can earn money. So I think it is right for me to pay my mother maybe $10 every second week for taking me to work.' She finds that adequate.

Also, at my job, there are people who have been there maybe a couple of years or six or seven months longer than me and get paid more than me—not that I am complaining—for doing exactly the same job. The people who have been at jobs longer think that they should not have to do the things that everyone should do. For instance, we have to stack fridges and put chips on and things. Some people at my work think they should not have to do that because they have been there longer than us and they have the right to say, 'No, I'm not doing that,' when it is their job to do it.

ACTING CHAIR—Does anyone else have anything in particular on any topic that they would like to talk about in relation to the employment of youth?

ASHLEY LUCAS—I know a lot of this is about vocational education. At TAFE we have a mix of secondary and tertiary education. Some of the problems Jo is mentioning about travelling may be a problem with the minister for transport. At TAFE, although I am doing secondary education, because I go to TAFE and I am in classes with tertiary students I have to pay a lot more for transport. For people who are doing the same thing, say at any of the schools here, the transport is free. It is a confusing debate.

ACTING CHAIR—So you are talking about public transport being cheaper, are you? Concessions?

ASHLEY LUCAS—If you are a tertiary student you have to pay tertiary transport fees. If you are a secondary student you get them for free, basically.

ACTING CHAIR—I did not know that.

MATTHEW ZADOW—I would like to make one final comment in relation to point No. 12 in the suggested talking points where it claims that employer groups said that young people often have a poor attitude to work. I find that very generalised indeed. I think a lot of young people are pleased that they are able to secure work nowadays; it is very hard to get. In my experience, I am happy to have a job and I know every single person at my workplace is happy that they are able to have a job. They might not enjoy the work they are doing; but, on the other hand, they are getting money for it and it gives them greater morale to be able to get money for work and to be in part-time work. Perhaps they might be able to look at events in the workplace that may give them a bad attitude towards work, but I think that statement about young people's poor attitude is very generalised, and wrong in some instances.

ACTING CHAIR—I think it also comes from the fact that, as I said earlier, employers have an opinion that the youth do not know what is expected of them. That is probably why we were looking at and talking about this before. As you go through school, do you feel as though the guidance officers, and the people dealing with work experience and those sorts of things, set you up to be able to handle work or know what to expect when you go to work? But, as well as that, there is also the other side of it where you have students or youth who are out of work and are being put into places through the CES and so forth. They might turn up to work with long hair, earrings in their eyebrows and nose and that sort of stuff, and a stubby in the hand, and they do not really want a job. That is a poor attitude to work. So I guess that could have also been where that statement came from. But, yes, we appreciate your comments.

Mrs ELSON—I honestly believe we have not talked to students with that attitude. We were talking to the best of the schools and your attitude is fantastic. You can see that by the responsibility you have towards your job.

CECILIA JUDGE—In response to that previous generalised comment, I would like to make another generalised comment. I think some employees actually have a bad attitude towards younger people: 'Because I am 15 and only in year 10, I do not know anything, basically. Because they are older, they have left school, they have a job and they are managing something or other, they are immediately smarter and basically better than me.' In some cases that is true, but in other cases I can do just as well as they can.

ACTING CHAIR—So you are saying some employees are probably a little bit intolerant?

CECILIA JUDGE—Yes. I think that also is a generalised comment, but that is

just replying to the generalised comment that was made about us.

JASON HEFFERNAN—In relation to employers saying that the kids do not know what is expected of them, I find that a bit biased towards the employers. If the employer wants the workers to know what is expected of them, he should sit them down and tell them, 'I want your hair short. I don't want earrings. I want you to work between here and here. This is your uniform; wear it.' The worker does not know that before he goes there. He knows, 'I can't hang off the ceiling' and stuff like that. Anyone would know that; it is commonsense. But it is really up to the employer, I think, to tell their workers what is expected of them and just not assume that they know.

KELLY DALGLISH—In relation to the expectations of workers, I had no training when I started my new job. I was shown where my department was and everything, but other than that they could not give me any knowledge on products or what I had to do. You learn as you go and listen to what other people say. But they do not actually go around and tell you, 'This is what you have to do.' I learnt by watching other people and seeing what they were doing. When I was going to get a job, it was not so much that the school had prepared me to go to an interview or to write a resume or whatever; it was more to do with my family. My mum sat down and told me what I had to do. A family friend, who is a manager of a company in Wagga, sat down and told me what to expect in an interview, what people wanted to hear from me in the interview, what to put in my resume. It all came from family or friends. None of it was covered at school, and I think it should be.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elson):

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

ACTING CHAIR—Students, teachers and Mr Hicks, the committee would like to thank you all very much for coming and putting your points of view forward today. It has been great information and I am more than sure that your contributions will go forward to helping us in the best part of our inquiry. We will be finished close to late June. We will make a copy of the final inquiry available to your schools, so you may wish to have a close look at it when it is finished. Once again, thank you very much.

Meeting Suspended at 11.05 a.m.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Factors influencing the employment of young people

WAGGA WAGGA

Wednesday, 9 April 1997

Present

Mr Marek (Acting Chair)

Mrs Elson Mr Mossfield

The committee met at 12.24 p.m.

Mr Marek took the chair.

ACTING CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The purpose of this inquiry is to consult widely and produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of young people. The committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Alice Springs, and several regional centres in Queensland and New South Wales. The committee has also conducted school forums, including one in Wagga Wagga this morning, at which young people have discussed their views and opinions with the committee.

The committee is now conducting public hearings in rural and regional centres in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. This meeting is one of a series in Nowra, Merimbula, Sale, Seymour and Wagga Wagga, which will give Australians outside the capital cities an opportunity to put their views and concerns to the committee.

This is a very broad ranging inquiry. Matters raised in submissions so far include: the attitudes of young people; the work ethic of young people and their familiarity with the requirements of the work force; the adequacy and relevance of the education and training systems; the importance of developing better linkages between schools and the business sector; the need for more flexible industrial relations systems; and the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs to assist young people to find employment. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues that the committee will consider or which might be raised. We are entirely open to the views anyone might wish to put to give input to the inquiry. We are here to listen and learn to improve the prospects of young Australians.

[12.26 p.m.]

BARTTER, Mr Peter, Joint Managing Director, Bartter Enterprises, McWilliams Rd, Hanwood, NSW 2680

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome, Mr Bartter. Would you like to make an opening statement in relation to your submission prior to the committee starting our questions?

Mr Bartter—I am not sure about an opening statement. I am happy that I am here. I am pleased that I have been allocated some time to be here because the training of young people is of great concern to our company and many other rural companies. It is great that the government is having this inquiry to look more deeply into it. I really appreciate the opportunity to come here to discuss some of those points that affect our company. I am sure there are hundreds of other companies across the rural areas of Australia affected in a similar manner.

ACTING CHAIR—As your submission has just been forwarded to us and I have not had an opportunity to read it yet, although my colleagues are zipping through it pretty quickly, how many employees does Bartter Enterprises have?

Mr Bartter—I will just run through the preamble. Our company employs about 1,350 employees in Griffith and 100 in other regions doing our distribution. We have bases in Wagga Wagga, Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney and Albury. There are 100 employees in all of those. We are engaged in poultry production and processing and egg production and processing. We are a country based company. We are in the right part of the world for the type of business we run in poultry production. We do not think that Sydney metropolitan or Melbourne metropolitan areas are the correct places to run rural industries.

Unfortunately for us, running our rural industry out here, where the grain is, we lack the inputs of personnel. Human resources are lacking dramatically in the country. If we were a company based in the metropolitan areas, where the big unemployment issues are, I am sure we would not have as much trouble getting people to work. In the small town of Griffith and districts with only 23,000 people, our one company employs 1,300 of them in an industry that covers an abattoir, poultry farming and raising, which is not everybody's kettle of fish. You can see that we are limited on that basis in obtaining human resources.

ACTING CHAIR—How many of the people you employ would be between the ages of 15 and 24?

Mr Bartter—I do not have that figure here. At the moment we have 34 apprentices engaged in our company. That is through the four years of apprenticeship. During the drought year, which was two years ago, we did cut back a little. We were

aware that it was going to be a tough year for us, so we did cut back. We have cut back a little this year with the pending announcement by Mr Kemp that there would be no further subsidies assistance to companies that employed more than 100 people. We thought that was totally disastrous, so we did cut back, then we heard that that was lifted and was not going to be enacted on till January. On that basis, we put another two or three on in expectation that maybe that would be reviewed and the current subsidies would stay.

We felt fairly bad that large industries are really the only industries who employ apprentices. Small industry does not employ apprentices. This is the problem. Small industry and small contractors are owner operators. They do not want to be messing around with having some kids around at their elbow that they have to explain something to. They do not want all that hassle, whereas a bigger company has many tradespeople.I do not have our actual number of tradespeople, but we have a lot of tradespeople who buddy up and become mentors and trainers on the job for our apprentices. Small companies do not want that hassle. They want to get in and do the job and get paid and leave. They really do not want young people around. That is one of our problems.

We train young people, but we find that the smaller businesses in the town, and in other country towns, come and poach the people that we have spent thousands of dollars training. They will offer them more money or some incentive because they are a small operator and need another skilled person. The problem with that is they take our cream. They do not ask us, 'Which guys would you rather not have, Pete? We will take those off your hands and you keep your skilled guys.' They come and poach our very, very best.

We have companies who supply us with the electronic computerised environmental control equipment in our chicken houses. We sent a guy to many electronics courses and this supplier came down and said, 'This is the guy for me.' He offered him a job and took him to Queensland. He now works for that company in Queensland which supplies that kind of equipment to the chicken industry. So we trained a guy who was highly skilled and exactly what we wanted, but the supplier came and poached him. We train guys up and get them very specialised and then they are poached by other people or industries or the similar industry.

It is a real concern for us that there are not enough apprentices in the pipeline. There are not enough young people being trained. The pipeline is empty.

ACTING CHAIR—Peter, bearing in mind the statement you made about Kemp's direction, what could government directly do to assist you to keep putting on young people?

Mr Bartter—You will see in here I am an advocate that the government should totally subsidise the employment of young people in apprenticeships. The government should totally pay their wages. That is where I am coming from. That is what we really need. I do not know whether you are aware of the document that was put together by four

area consultative committees the year before last.

ACTING CHAIR—When you say subsidise, do you mean pay the whole wage?

Mr Bartter—I mean pay their wages. Instead of paying the kids the dole to stay at home and do nothing, the dole money should be put straight across. If that happened, and industry was paid to employ young people to train them, you would have small industries taking people up. They would say, 'Look, I have this kid for free. I can afford to spend some time training him and that will be my balancing input.' In other words, they would be giving something in kind. The government would pay the young peoples' wages, but the employer would give his time and training by putting his tradesmen beside the young person. Admittedly, the young people go to tech one day a week so the employer only has them for four days a week and sometimes less.

In some instances, the young people go on block training, so they are away for a week or two. They could be away for four or five weeks in the year on block training releases. We have a refrigeration apprentice in our operation who has to go to Sydney tech for his apprenticeship on block release. Just his travel and accommodation alone, as you will see in this document, are $10,000 a year that we have to kick in for him to go to Sydney for four or five weeks. We have to pay the young guy or girl as well. We had a young lady apprentice electrician go through a few years ago, so I should not just talk about guys all the time. When I say guys, I am using that for both sexes.

That is a worry for us. You will see in there what it does cost is in time and travel. Between time and travel away, which are issues with country businesses having to send people to the metropolitan areas—we have to send people to Wagga to some courses, some to Albury, some to Leeton—very few, maybe 40 per cent, of our apprentices actually do courses in Griffith. We have to send 60 per cent out of town.

I did some rough calculations on our apprentices. There is one area, in the back of that document, where it says $3,000 a year for Griffith. It is only $2,000 a year for Griffith, because one of those years they have to go to Leeton. There is travel involved. But, if you add all of that up on a per apprentice basis, it comes to $100,000 a year that our company weighs in for training young people. That is a fairly substantial thing. So, in the last 10 years, we have forked out a million dollars.

ACTING CHAIR—With that in mind, couldn't it be seen that the employer or your company should hold a degree of responsibility for paying for that—at least a percentage of that—rather than the government having to pay the whole coffer of their wages? If a company is getting a benefit—

Mr Bartter—What is the benefit?

ACTING CHAIR—The benefit is that you have people—fair enough, I totally

understand the fact that the first year to two years they are not 100 per cent up to speed—who, usually by the second year, are pretty good and, in some cases, they can hold their own with some tradesmen, depending on how good the kid is. I was an apprentice and I have trained apprentices myself. With that in mind, don't you believe that the employer group should have to pay for the person that is earning them a profit margin?

Mr Bartter—You have to look at the tradesmen that the company puts beside these young people to show them the skills; whereas, when our young people are poached and go to another company, they are trained people. They are not poaching our apprentices, I might say. They are poaching them when they come out, when they have been with us for a year or two more—some longer, for that matter. They are very skilled and they come and poach them so they do not have to train them or anything. As a matter of fact, the apprentices are so well trained that they can actually input into that company and contribute something immediately. They are worth a bonus to the company that takes them from us.

ACTING CHAIR—That is right. But that is not necessarily the fault of the government that the staff leave. It depends—

Mr Bartter—The only reason the staff leave—sorry for butting in, Paul—is that there is such a shortage of skilled people in the country.

ACTING CHAIR—I agree with that.

Mr Bartter—All that happens in the country is musical chairs. Whoever can pay the highest money for tradespeople is the winner. It is as simple as that.

ACTING CHAIR—With that in mind, Peter, what we have found, with talking to so many school groups, is that the guidance and career officers are pushing students into university rather than vocational trades.

Mr Bartter—No.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Bartter—We do not have a problem with that. Each year, when we put our applications out, we can have anything up to 100 young people apply for maybe the six, eight, 10 or 12 apprenticeships that we are offering for that year. We do not have any problem having young people apply. We are deluged with them. We are actually taking the eyes out of them. We are picking guys from year 12 with high qualifications. They are smart young people. We do not have any problem getting enough people to put their hand up. I think that is what you are saying, is it Paul, that there are not enough people putting their hand up for training?

My concern is that there are 100 people who come to us to fill 12 positions each year. There are approximately 90 of them sent away disillusioned, saying, 'What am I going to do? I couldn't get a trade.' There are very few other companies in Griffith that employ tradespeople. There are a few, but they have the some problem as us. They are getting more and more wary. We used to employ more apprentices than we do today. We are actually winding back, because we are finding that we are losing them. We are saying, 'We'll join in with the rest of the crew and try and find skilled people.' But, in the bush, we do not have that. That does not work for us.

ACTING CHAIR—What is the cause of that? Is it the quality of the student or individual or is it the quality of the applicant that is making you cut back?

Mr Bartter—No. It is the cost.

ACTING CHAIR—It is the cost; okay. I just wanted to make sure of that.

Mr Bartter—It is the cost of having all these young people on and training them, only to have them taken away from us.

ACTING CHAIR—What is the difference between the cost now and the cost five or six years ago? I was an apprentice and my employer had to pay mediator tax—

Mr Bartter—Five or six years ago, none of our apprentices left, because, in those days, we had the State Rail Authority. They used to employ heaps of apprentices. The government used to do their own civil works and construction. They had heaps of apprentices. There was a big pool of apprentices that were trained by the government, so when somebody wanted an apprentice they would poach them from the government departments. But, nowadays, the government departments are not training apprentices. I do not think there is even a rail department any more, is there?

Mr MOSSFIELD—I think that is a major problem with apprenticeships.

Mr Bartter—There is no pool there anymore. So now it is the employers—industry—training them and the other people who want apprentices are poaching them from industry. The bigger companies are getting a bit sick and tired of training young people only to have them poached. That is what I am saying.

Mrs ELSON—I can see why they have been taking your staff. I think the compliance costs and everything for a small business, with the insurance and superannuation and compensation, have deterred them from taking on apprentices.

Mr Bartter—You will see in my submission that I am suggesting that the government should look at all of those things that you just mentioned and say, 'Let's remove this stuff,' even to the extent of industrial relations, unfair dismissal,

superannuation and insurance. They should just say, 'Let's throw all that at the employer and see if we can get them going.' You really have to start at a high level and say, 'Where can we back back to?' That is why I am saying the government should pay the guys.

Mrs ELSON—And small businesses have been telling you the same thing, that they are not taking on apprentices because of the cost?

Mr Bartter—It is the cost and the inconvenience. It is just an inconvenience and, in this day and age, convenience—

Mrs ELSON—There is no willingness to do it?

Mr Bartter—People are prepared to pay for convenience; it is inconvenience that they just do not want to have anything to do with. You just have to go into the supermarket to see how well convenience sells.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I am in general agreement with what you have been saying. I do believe that it is the large companies that have traditionally employed apprentices, in the main. Certainly government establishments, such as the railways, are not doing it now. I would agree that small business probably does not have the financial capacity to employ. I do believe, also, that the governments will have to make some financial contribution to employers to assist in training.

You said in your submission, in relation to the skill shortage, that the employers are reluctant to employ apprentices. Is it because of the point you have been making, that they are being poached by other companies? Are there any other reasons?

Mr Bartter—The cost is a factor as well. It comes at a fair cost. Admittedly, in the second and third years, as Paul says, they do become more skilled and they can keep up to speed if it is mainly welding or boilermaking—the guys in those areas. But, when it comes to electrical, they really have to go there full term. Even after that, when they are full term, we send guys to Melbourne. We send our electricians to specialist courses over and above that. At this stage they are tradesmen; they are no longer apprentices. We are prepared to do that.

Mrs ELSON—Are you employing more tradespeople now rather than taking on apprentices? Is that what you are telling us?

Mr Bartter—No, we are trying to hold our existing crew. To do that we have to up the ante: we have to pay them more money and compete with smaller businesses that want to steal them from us. It then becomes a cost against our business to compete and to hold our people.

Mrs ELSON—So there are not enough tradespeople out there for you to go and do the same thing?

Mr Bartter—Yes, it is the supply and demand situation. There are just not enough tradespeople in the pipelines for industry, so we are all starting to poach off one another.

Mrs ELSON—It is only going to get worse, is it not?

Mr Bartter—It will get worse and that will push prices up. That will push consumer prices up. That will push inflation up. Where is all of that going to end?

Mr MOSSFIELD—Part of our role is look at the education system. In your case, because you can pick and choose, you obviously pick the best applicants that come to you. Have you got any comments on the education system as to whether it is adequately training young people to enter the work force? Are they getting the required skills?

Mr Bartter—Probably not. A lot of young people that know they want to become tradespeople, if they could actually take an apprenticeship after year 10, would go into it. But either the apprenticeships are not available to them or nobody wants to take them on in a training situation. They say, 'You can come and work for me,' so the kid goes and works there but there is no training involved. Probably their parents are advising them, 'Stay at school. Don't go out and take just any old job. Don't go out and be a labourer. Stay at school and then go into a trade.' But I think we have lost two years of valuable training. If young people know they want to take on a trade, those trades should be available so that they can actually get into them after year 10.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You are spelling out a point that we have been looking at during this inquiry as to what level young people could leave school and enter the work force. You have been saying that, after year 10, it would be appropriate for them to leave, providing the trades were there.

Mr Bartter—Yes. We have some young people that will come to us and say, 'Look, I'd like to take an apprenticeship with you.' We say, 'Well, okay, there is nothing available at the moment, but there will be something coming up next year and you can put your name down.' They will say, 'Look, can I come and work now? Can you give me a job until next year?' We will employ those young people. We quite regularly employ young people that come to us who say they want to take a trade. It gives us a chance to look at the young person. It gives them a chance to get a bit of work experience and be paid for it. Most of the time, because these young kids are keen and dedicated, we give them an apprenticeship the following year. Invariably, they are keen kids. They are up there saying, 'Look, I want to do it. Just put me on. Give me the chance.' They will sit there for 12 months or whatever until the apprenticeships come up again.

Mrs ELSON—You were saying before that when you did have applicants for

apprenticeships you had the choice of some really good grade 12 students with good academic qualifications. If you had to choose between a 15-year-old leaving at year 10 and someone that has completed year 12, which one would you take?

Mr Bartter—I would probably take the year 12. I would still have to say we would probably have to do that.

Mrs ELSON—So the majority of your apprentices are year 12?

Mr Bartter—Because we are taking so few apprentices. If we were taking 30 apprentices on each year, then there would not be enough year 12s, so we would have to take some year 10s. If apprenticeships were made more accessible to business by paying their wages, you would have a lot of other people wanting to take apprentices on. The apprentice pool would actually evaporate.

You would find that there would be some companies that will just take the kids on for cheap labour and not teach them anything. After a while, the kids will learn which companies take them on to teach them and which companies take them on for cheap labour. In a town like Griffith, that would get around. Our company has got a great reputation for training apprentices. They know we are keen and that we follow it up and once they become tradesman we still continue to train them, so we would have no trouble. But the shonky guys would be worked out after a year or two and none of the young people would go to them.

That would overcome the objection that every shonky is going to put all these kids on and not train them, just using them as cheap labour for four years before saying, 'Apprenticeship time is up—out the door. We have had some cheap helpers.' They would soon be found out by the young people around the town. They communicate and they talk amongst one another.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you have the opportunity of addressing school students while they are still at school? We have found that a lot of students do not know what jobs are available out there.

Mr Bartter—In Griffith, 14 June I think is the actual date, there is a careers market day run by the Griffith Rotary Club. I am a member of the Rotary Club there and I will be involved in that day. On that day, most of the Griffith schools come to that careers market day. Our company has had a manned stand there for the last 15 years or whenever it has been running. We run a video showing the different jobs. We give out handouts on jobs available from food technologists all the way through everything that is involved in our business. Invariably, the universities are also there. They attract more attention than our company does. But we are there and available and we talk to some of the young people that come through.

Mrs ELSON—We asked the students this morning if they could tell us some of the industries around the place where they could get apprenticeships or jobs. They could not tell us one.

Mr Bartter—Our company exposes ourselves to that and we advertise for our apprentices. A lot of people know that. Lots of Mums and Dads talk to me through the year and say, 'Look, young Johnny wants to be something or another. Can you fit him in?' I say, 'When the time comes, put his name in and he will be in there with the rest of them.' We choose. I do not have favourites, as such. I cannot really afford to do that.

ACTING CHAIR—In relation to the training you talk of here, have you got a training centre in your operation?

Mr Bartter—Yes, we do. I did not bring my training manager with me today. I did not think it was necessary. We have got a training manager, Stephen Mullins. We have got a training manager, a personnel manager and a risk manager; they are the three people in our human resources. About eight people work in the training department. We have taken up quite a bit of work with traineeships and, in the document here, we talk about traineeships and things. We are looking to extend our training facilities.

We have 50 meat processing trainees on site right now and, through this year, we will employ another 150 trainees in this area. We have a lot of people doing food technology and they are not included in this apprenticeship list. We send our food technologists for training at the moment to Wodonga TAFE; they are not apprentices as such. I suppose our guys should have expanded this document. Unfortunately, it was only completed at 9 o'clock this morning, and it was not really fleshed right out.

ACTING CHAIR—It says here you are still awaiting more information on the MAATS process book.

Mr Bartter—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—In relation to your statements earlier about government assisting—in particular relation to subsidisation of wages and those sort of things—the packages that are being offered with MAATS do have amounts of money for training. It brings us in line with what they used to be offering six to eight years ago. But, okay, that sounds great.

Mr Bartter—We have got a training centre, which has three seminar rooms in it. The biggest room is bigger than this room and the two smaller rooms would be probably this divided in half. We are qualified to do food training. Our training centre is equivalent to a TAFE centre. Anybody that comes and trains with our operation can obtain the same skills that you can obtain in a TAFE in the meat processing area. We can actually give the certificates out.

So we are not messing around; we are fair dinkum with training young people. We know that a trained skilled work force does several things for us. It gives our employees a better feel for the job, they get more enjoyment in the job if they are trained and they know that they are doing it correctly. They do not have to worry; they know they are on the right track.

They get more job satisfaction and it enhances the status of our company in the town as the employer to work for, so that people look at our company as being the best employer in the city. When they are looking for work they say, 'Well, let us start at Bartter's, if we can get a job there, fine. If we cannot we will go somewhere else.' That is the status we want our company to achieve. I believe we have as good as achieved that and we want to maintain it.

We have got a fair commitment to training our people. It saves staff turnover in our business too. That is always a worry with unskilled people. They will come and they will go because they are not sure what they want to do if they have not learnt anything. But they can see we are offering a training career. We are not saying we are offering jobs, we are now saying we are offering you a career. Come and work for our company and you have got a career path—you can work your way through.

The enterprise agreement that was completed last year for our processing plant—which covers 700 of our workers—is based on competency, so the more skills that you learn, the more pay you will receive. Once you have become recognised at a certain skill level, your pay rate will increase. There is a fair incentive for the young people to learn because the more they learn, the more they are paid. Regardless of when they get to that level, they are paid that level. In other words, if they are doing more of a menial chore, but they have got all the skills to do this, they still get this level of pay.

In the old system, if you were a floor sweeper, that was what you got paid for and, if you could handle a knife and be a boner or do some more skilful work, you were paid for what you did rather than what you knew. Our new system is to pay people for what they know. Because we do that, the emphasis comes back onto us to make sure we train them. That is why we have this commitment to training. Next year the training program for our poultry processing work is estimated to cost $1.2 million. That has nothing to do with apprenticeships; that is just training staff—people. What we want is a bit of a fair go on the apprentice end, where the tube is empty. Maybe the government should weigh in for a few years, fill the tube up and then back off. They should put in a program to say, ' We will pay this for five years, and then the program phases out.' Let us fill the tube up.

Mr MOSSFIELD—While we all sympathise with the points you are making, that needs to be thought through. You could almost have a scheme where, if another employer poached an apprentice off you, he should reimburse you for the costs you incurred in training him over the five years. I do not know whether that sort of scheme could ever work. We would probably need to look at it. This is probably slightly different to what we

have been talking about, but do you have any views on the work for the dole program?

Mr Bartter—It is a great idea. It gets kids getting their hands dirty and doing something. We have to keep a bit of work ethic going in the young people. This is the trouble: if they are out there doing nothing and just bumming around—

Mr MOSSFIELD—Could the work for the dole program be implemented within your system: could young people get two days pay, if that is what it is, but work full time for you—you would pay the balance, which would be less than you are paying now? Is there any value in that sort of exercise?

Mr Bartter—That could be worked into the apprenticeship scheme—taking young people on in that area. Or, if you are just talking about, say, taking traineeships on—

Mr MOSSFIELD—Apprentices would be No. 1.

Mr Bartter—There could be traineeships in other areas. The word 'apprentice' is losing a bit of favour, in favour of traineeships. Apprenticeships relate to trades, whereas traineeships relate to every other job around—and there are a million of those. We have traineeships—with government assistance, I might add. We are getting government assistance to train these young people and, hopefully, they will stay and be long-term employees.

What you say is right, Frank, but we are doing all of that now. We are availing ourselves of whatever assistance the government has got. We cannot put people on if there are no jobs. We must be able to say, 'These people are going to stay and work with us,' rather than putting them on, as you may be suggesting, as extras and putting them off after a year, or, if they are good and they work their way into the business, keeping them on. I am not sure where you are taking that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Quite clearly you have got a commitment to training young people, and where I am taking it is that you would train more than your requirement—maybe on a subsidised basis—as a commitment, but there would be no guarantee that the young person would be kept on at the end of the apprenticeship. They might or might not be.

Mr Bartter—That is a bit like the apprenticeships—if they are offered to all industry, fully subsidised and paid for by the government, then everyone will put apprentices on. If you say, 'We want to get work for the dole. We will do a bit more with traineeships or put more money into that system,' you will find more companies—and smaller companies in particular—will take it up and say, 'Look it is cost neutral to me.' One way or another, they will weigh it up. But, if it is cost neutral and they can see some benefits, they will do it.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You mentioned the railways training apprentices. I know, from experience, that at one period during a time of recession—about 1988—they took on quite a few more apprentices than they required, just so that young people could be trained. It was understood by all parties that there was no job for those people in the railway industry when they completed their apprenticeship. But they went out as tradesmen with a better opportunity of getting employment elsewhere. You are probably doing more than most but, to overcome the problem, industry has got to train more than they actually need for their own requirements.

Mr Bartter—That is okay if the poaching program still runs, but if you got on an anti-poaching program, if everybody put some people on, they would train their own people and they would stay. You would actually top up the system so that at least people would be trained.

Two years ago, the Riverina Area Consultative Committee had a program trying to bring tradespeople from Melbourne to Wagga or to the Riverina, and we ended up with two. They talk about all of this unemployment, but nobody wanted to move to the bush. Nobody wanted to move away from their relatives; it was all too hard. That is why we have got to train the young people in the country.

I think there is even a good case to say that country should get preferential treatment over the city in this area, because our young people leave the country, go to the city, set up a lifestyle, get a job and just join in with the big mass. Then they look back at the country and say, 'Oh, forget it, who'd want to go back there.' They go to the city and become trained; they never come back. They meet a young lady or a young boy in the city, settle down there and only come home to the bush to see mum at Christmas.

What we have got to do is give young people training so that they live in a country town such as Griffith, as our apprentices do. They will meet young people in Griffith, they will marry, they will be close to mum and dad. The family unit will be intact, they will have a career there and they will stay. But if we cannot actually put apprentices and young people on and train them in the bush, they migrate to the cities and they never come back.

If you go up to people in the city and say, 'Where were you born,' you will find that half of the people in the city were born in the bush. We have got to stop that migration. You could look at it another way. You could actually use the bush to train all of your apprentices. After that, the bush will keep what they want for skilled trades. After that, the young trades guys can go to the city and get a job.

If you want to create another industry in the bush, you could create an apprenticeship training scheme in the bush, where country businesses and industries acted virtually as training centres for the city. The country would have first crack at employing the young guys who come out of that scheme. After that, these trained people could go and live in the cities.

ACTING CHAIR—Last week we were in Central Queensland, Alice Springs and Mt Isa, talking to employers. They said that, more often than not, they would probably look at taking on rural people, or people from the land, for apprenticeships before they took the city folk. Does that reinforce the statement you were just making in relation to the fact that country people possibly have a better work ethic than some of the city kids?

Mr Bartter—We do not have any city kids apply for apprenticeships at our company, of course, because we don't advertise in the city.

ACTING CHAIR—So the majority of your work force would probably come from rural areas rather than from city areas?

Mr Bartter—Yes, our apprentices and young people are virtually all local country people. They may come from Leeton; they may come from within 100 kilometres of Griffith, if they can get an apprenticeship. We have got lots of young people who live in smaller towns around Griffith. If they obtain an apprenticeship with us, they will move to town, set up digs in Griffith and do their apprenticeships with us. We do not have any city-based people applying for apprenticeships. When I say 'city ',I mean the major metropolitan areas.

ACTING CHAIR—That is interesting.

Mr Bartter—We do not advertise in those areas for them. If we get 100 applicants in Griffith, and we can pick the cream of the crop, we really do not need 300, 400 or 500 applicants. That would be too much. If we took a young guy out of Sydney, even though he may be better qualified to put on as an apprentice, we would think that one day he may want to go back to be near his family and obtain his apprenticeship. So he has got more pull back there. We would rather employ Griffith kids for Griffith work or Riverina kids for Riverina work, so that they are near their parents. That is the reason why we could not get anybody to come from Melbourne. Nobody wanted to shift away from their families. It is too much of a tie to drag away, so they say, 'Look, we'll stay here and cop whatever is going.'

Mr MOSSFIELD—Could I ask a hypothetical question as a test of how you view the education system and the quality of young people? You said you could have 100 apprentices apply each year and you would only take six. If you had positions and the bottom line was okay, how many out of those 100 would you employ?

Mr Bartter—In the current circumstances we would probably put on 15 apprentices. You can only put on so many apprentices, depending on the number of trades people. But if everybody else was putting apprentices on, we would then tailor it to top up the tube for our own company and go from there. You have to remember that everyone else is going to put apprentices on. If the incentives are offered, a lot of people will put

apprentices on. To answer your question frankly, in our case we may go from 10 to 15. We would not say, 'Let's put 50 apprentices on—this is great.' We would not do that. We would still only be looking to see what we need to work in our business.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I will ask the question in a slightly different way. Of the 100 that might apply, what quality would you consider them to be? Are they generally of a high standard?

Mr Bartter—We could have employed 70 of those.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Based on their presentation?

Mr Bartter—Yes.
Mr MOSSFIELD—That is what I was looking for.

ACTING CHAIR—In other words, the kids that are coming to you from the schooling system are more than adequate?

Mr Bartter—I would not say they are more than adequate. I would say they are adequate, and some of them are more than adequate. And with some of them, of course, there are things lacking.

ACTING CHAIR—Their numeracy and literacy, and that sort of stuff?

Mr Bartter—Our biggest problem in the area of numeracy and literacy is with our adult workers and especially the migrant workers. We have got quite a few nationalities working in our company—probably 30. For migrants to work for our company they now have to go through a literacy test. We are knocking back a lot of people from employment with our company because their literacy is not up to speed—and by that I mean, for example, that even when you just said, 'Don't put your hand in there,' or something like that, they would throw their hand up and put it in there, if you know what I mean. Their literacy is not good enough, so that if there was a danger or problem and somebody shouted an instruction at them—'Don't do that' or whatever—they would not know what was happening and there could be an accident.

OH&S is a big thing in business today. We are not here to talk about OH&S—and we could talk for another hour or two on that—but that is a major concern for industry today, too. That is another reason why we train our people in health and safety, and all of those things. We have OH&S classes running through our training program. We have got food health and safety. There have been all the scares on salmonella in recent months, but we have been working hard on that for years, of course, being in the food industry.

It is not the young people who are coming who are lacking the literacy; it is the migrants. That is another area that the government should look at. People who come to

this country should be able to speak the language or, if they do not, it should be mandatory that they get in a class and obtain that before they are given citizenship. There should be some firmer and stricter rules for people arriving here who cannot speak the language—

ACTING CHAIR—The government is going down that track.

Mr Bartter—They come to us for a job and government expects us to do the literacy. A couple of years ago we had literacy training for our people. It was organised through TAFE. We had TAFE trainers come out and we took the people off the job, in our time, so we were paying for them to go to literacy classes. But for us to start training back in that area is really getting too far back in the training program. If we have to start training people in A, B, C and what two plus two is we are going too far back. So we have put in a cut-off line and we say, 'If you cannot fill out this particular form to a certain standard, we cannot employ you.' But we know a lot of these people that we are knocking back on literacy would make good workers; it is only because they are not literate. They are good people and we would employ them for all of the other reasons that we need people.

ACTING CHAIR—How do you feel about Hilmer and the competition policy? Do you think that has had a great effect on the country in relation to employment, particularly of young people?

Mr Bartter—Can you give me brief outline of that?

ACTING CHAIR—Competition policies between governments, local governments, business and those sorts of things. For example, Woolworths being able to sell pharmaceuticals or newsagents' products. It does not matter if you do not know where I am coming from.

Mr Bartter—I am not up to speed on that. But another problem is that the local city council stole one of our draughtsmen. There are not many chicken companies that actually employ apprentice draughtsmen. I do not think we mentioned that, that we have got an apprentice draughtsman. We had two apprentice draughtsmen and one guy was an extremely bright kid who works the CAD, the computer automatic draughting. We do a lot of our own construction and we build a lot of our own equipment. But, lo and behold, local government steals our guy and now he is going to be a projects engineer for the local shire.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You must feel very proud.

Mr Bartter—It is great to be the centre to supply the whole town, including local government, with their top people! No, we are jack of it; we are out of there. So you guys had better come up with something for us because we are right out of there, especially

with Mr Kemp saying that the lousy $1,200, which was the only subsidy they had for apprentices, was going to be whipped off companies with 100 and over. So forget it; I am out of here for apprentices. We will just go into the market and pay the price.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. I really appreciate your time and the committee has got some good information as a result. By late June we should have just about completed the report for parliament. We will be more than happy to send you a copy to have a look at and to see what you think.

Mr Bartter—I appreciate you letting me come in today and I wish you all the best with your deliberations and the compilation of the report. Thank you.

[1.19 p.m.]

BYRNE, Mr Laurence Michael, Managing Director, Byrne Trailers (Australia) Pty. Ltd., 278 Hammond Ave, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales 2650

ACTING CHAIR—This parliamentary inquiry is a wide ranging inquiry into factors affecting the employment of youth. Do you have an opening statement you would like to make?

Mr Byrne—I apologise for being late and for not having a submission prepared properly. I have been very busy. I will give you a bit of background about our company. We employ about 120 people in Wagga and in Toowoomba in Queensland. We manufacture heavy transport trailers, work which predominantly involves skilled tradesmen—welders. We build a lot of aluminium equipment, and about 50 per cent of the work is fairly specialised welding. We have a lot of difficulty in finding, employing and relocating skilled tradesmen. A lot of the young people that we train head for the bigger cities.

One of the biggest problems, as I see it, has been that over the last 10 to 15 years in this country the focus and direction of education has been on getting the kids to leave school and go to university. The trades have been forgotten and have become downgraded; the status of a simple welder tradesman has been downgraded to such an extent that you are only getting the people with a poor intellectual capacity who want to take on those trades after they have tried everything else. Last year, the best of our senior, first-class welders earned in the vicinity of $55,000 for the year. You see kids who have left school at 16 years of age and have done a trade for four years and are earning $35,000 to $40,000 a year. Really good welders can earn that sort of money. You see kids doing the HSC and working their backsides off learning accountancy or something like that and, after finishing four years at university, they are not earning anywhere near the amount of money that a good tradesmen is.

But the pay-off against that is the fact that in Australia we are losing our manufacturing industries. Recently in this city a major transport company placed an order in the United States for 60 car carriers. They can land those car carriers in Australia at two-thirds of the price that it costs to produce them here. Our costs are way too high. The price of sheet aluminium in this country is double what it is in the United States. The sheet aluminium for our tipping trailers comes from France. We have got a five-month lead time on it, as it is not manufactured here any longer. I will go as far as to say that, if my business does not go offshore to manufacture within the next 10 years, I will not have anything to build at all here.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you saying that you will have to take your company offshore?

Mr Byrne—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—You will need to relocate your business in another country?

Mr Byrne—Yes. If I do not do that, I will go out of business. Trailer manufacturing in Australia was an indigenous industry until just recently. I disagree with protection. We have made a big mistake in this country over the past 10 or 20 years as far as manufacturing goes: it is a forgotten industry and, if you are in the country, then you really are forgotten. Payroll tax is eating into us. I employ over 100 people and I paid more payroll tax last year than the company made in profit. And that is just payroll tax; in my opinion, it is a disgrace. Year after year—with the greatest respect to the politicians here—we have promises made by politicians about making employment of people easier, but that never eventuates.

Manufacturing is in a serious situation at this time; it is a watershed. Employment is only going to get worse in those industries when a lot of those industries disappear offshore. I know for a fact that a company in Tasmania manufacturing aluminium catamarans is looking to set up in Malaysia. I know that a lot of other people in similar industries to mine have already set up businesses in Indonesia. Howard Porter from Western Australia has set up a company manufacturing in Indonesia.

I visited a factory in Jakarta in December last year. It is a joint venture between Transfield, which is an Australian company, and Baikre Brothers, a big Indonesian company. They offered to build anything we asked them to build—any designs that I had, anything I wanted to build. Their charge-out rate for that is $12 an hour. My current charge-out rate in Wagga Wagga is about $48 an hour. When you look at that and at companies importing the product that I manufacture, you see that the writing is on the wall. I would be a fool not to see it.

So it looks pretty gloomy. Unless we change our whole system of the way we educate kids, try to get them into jobs that have a bit of status and change the mind-set of our educators to the fact that there is nothing wrong with being a tyre fitter or welder, then we have big problems.

ACTING CHAIR—Michael, some of the students we have spoken to have been more than happy with apprenticeships and traineeships and have said that they rate those as high as a course in a university. So it is interesting that you say that. In some ways, do you feel as though—and you half-touched on it—guidance officers are pushing their students more towards universities rather than towards apprenticeships?

Mr Byrne—When you advertise for an apprentice in a place like this, you probably get 150 applications. I can go through 60 per cent of those people by giving them a tape measure and asking them to measure the desk. You may not believe it, but a lot of kids that leave school cannot read a tape measure. So those kids are the kids coming

to get apprenticeships. A lot of the kids that eventually get apprenticeships—there are so many kids going for them and there are so few positions—are on the upper end of the scale, and no doubt there are some whose parents have told them, 'Yes, get in there and get a trade. It's the right way to go.'

Mr MOSSFIELD—There are a number of questions that we should ask you. They may not necessarily specifically relate to your industry, but we want to get a feel for how you see them. If you are saying that you get 150 applicants, would that indicate that the local school students have a fair idea of where the local employment opportunities are?

Mr Byrne—No. A lot of kids will leave school and apply for every apprenticeship that comes up. They are not particularly pushing for a trade. Last week they may have applied for an apprenticeship as an electrician. This week it might be a motor mechanic. Next week it might be a welding position.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Could you run through your recruiting process, starting from point 1—how you advertise—and then go through your selection process?

Mr Byrne—Recently, in association with DEET and TAFE, we started our own in-house training school which we are only just starting to get off the ground. That is not necessarily to train young people. That is to retrain people who may have never learnt anything, who are second-class welders and want to improve or who we can train to actually do the job that we have got them to do.

So we are changing the way we are employing people. We have continually employed apprentices, but we are looking towards the CES to help us in this situation. I am glad to say that the CES has changed the way it does things over the last four of five years, which I think is a big improvement. Years ago when you went to the CES and you had positions vacant, they would send out the people who had been on the dole the longest. This is talking 10 years ago. That was a complete failure. All that did was tell industry, 'You are wasting your time going to the CES.' They are taking on a more professional approach these days, but they have a long way to go to grab back the credibility that they should have always had but lost because of that.

The fact that they will find people jobs and help relocate people with jobs, even though they are employed already, is a very important thing. If you move someone out of a job somewhere else and give them a better job, then there is someone to take the job they have been moved from.

Our process of employing people is that we advertise locally and nationally sometimes. We do not advertise on the Gold Coast. It is very hard to get people from the Gold Coast to come here in the winter time, but we can get people to come from Victoria and Tasmania. The migration seems to be north. We are probably 20 tradespeople short in our operation at the present time.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Is that because you cannot get them?

Mr Byrne—We cannot get them. We relocated one of our factories from Peak Hill in the central west of New South Wales to Wagga during the latter part of last year. We have relocated some of the employees, I think 10. But since that relocation in October, we have employed nearly 40 new positions in the factory, and we have another 20 at the present time that are vacant that we hope to fill by June. But they should have been filled by now.

Mrs ELSON—We have had a lot of problems mentioned before this inquiry where business people have had young people before them for job interviews and have said that their attitude, presentation and so forth is really bad. Do you find that problem with the people you interview?

Mr Byrne—Probably, but it does not really worry me.

Mrs ELSON—You get enough to choose from.

Mr Byrne—There was a time years ago where, if someone had an earring in their ear, I would not give them a job, but I cannot afford to be that choosy these days.

Mrs ELSON—So when you do your interview, it is the person who could do the job that is vacant then.

Mr Byrne—Yes, there are a certain number of people who you do not know whether they really want a job or not.

Mrs ELSON—They are not real keen on showing interest at any great point.

Mr Byrne—No, and I think a lot of people are forced to come for interviews either by their parents, the system or whatever it is for them to collect the dole. I do not know how it works. But they are very easy to pick, so they do not normally get very far. If someone does not want a job, you cannot make them work.

Mrs ELSON—That is right. Are you losing your tradespeople once you get them through their apprenticeships? Are they being pinched?

Mr Byrne—We have got to pay them a lot of money to keep them. But we do. It has stabilised in the last few years, but it is very difficult to keep good tradesmen. Once they finish their apprenticeships, they are usually fairly young and are pretty keen to have a look around. So a lot of the times they drift to the cities, but often they will come back after they have had it. We have been established in Wagga here for almost 10 years, so we are getting the benefit now of the people that are coming back once they find out that the bright lights are not all they are made out to be.

ACTING CHAIR—Mr Byrne, have you had an opportunity to go to the schools or, through business or whatever, tell the schools what you want in relation to apprentices or students finishing school?

Mr Byrne—No.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you involved with the Chamber of Commerce or anything like that?

Mr Byrne—I am a member but I do not have any involvement. The Chamber of Commerce in Wagga is more centred around retailing in the main street than in manufacturing.

ACTING CHAIR—In the trades that you have got, have you restructured through your tradesmen to go more towards fitter-welders, or are you just sticking with the old trades like boilermakers and so forth? Do you still teach straight out boilermaking?

Mr Byrne—No, it is called welding first class or something like structural welding first class or something. I cannot remember what the actual title is but they do not call it boilermakers any longer. In the trailer building industry body building is the correct course that the tradesman should do for that trade, but that course is not taught in Wagga. Body building is not taught in Wagga at TAFE and, if people want to do that, you have to go and block release to Sydney or to Newcastle or somewhere like that. I am not in favour of that.

ACTING CHAIR—If there is anything the government could do for you which would change the way it does things to help you to employ young people in apprenticeships or whatever, what area would you talk about? Would you particularly move towards, say, double tax deductions or payroll tax deductions or any particular incentives? Is there anything that we could possibly do to help you? You have spoken about the fact that, okay, major industry has sort of been left a bit cold owing to the fact that we are not focusing on industry and the rural sector has been left a bit dry. Is there anything that we could possibly start doing now to start turning things around to save you from having to go down that track of leaving this country with—

Mr Byrne—There are lots of things, yes. But if a business cannot make a profit it is no longer in business, and putting bandaids on and employing a few young people and that sort of thing is not going to help me make a profit. I believe that the whole focus on industry and on small business and developing industry in Australia has got to change. The federal government, by reducing the research and development tax incentive, probably has cost me a lot of money. I do not want a handout to help me employ young people.

If I have got a healthy, vibrant business that is making a profit we will be out there employing people, and we are trying to do that now. What else can I do? All you can do

is pull some people out of a hat for me. Paying me a subsidy or anything like that is not going to make any difference because I cannot get the people that I need and the numbers of people are not available for the growth of my business.

ACTING CHAIR—We have asked a lot of people the same question and nobody has really given us a set, defined answer. We have spoken to a lot of people about what are the problems with youth that are coming to you, and everybody says numeracy and literacy, that they cannot read and they cannot write—go back to teaching them the three Rs. Everybody has given us that message. When I have asked employers, 'What can we do for you to help you,' nobody has really defined one particular topic except to get rid of some of the imposts on small business like payroll tax. Nobody has really given us the answer. I guess that is why I keep asking—I am trying to find out what the real answer is.

Mr Byrne—You guys are managing the country. You do a good job of that and you will not need to ask that question. I guess that is why you are not getting any answer.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You are a little bit inconsistent with some of the things you say. Firstly, you said you do not believe in protection but you are quite happy to accept research and development.

Mr Byrne—A big difference. That has got nothing to do with protection. I meant that if trailer imports are coming into this country I would not like to see a barrier put up against that to hide our inefficiencies and the wrong way we do things. It is only going to prolong the problem. We are reaping the results of that sort of thing now. I am only a small business person, but I can see that we have to be part of the world scene. We have got to be able to do business and sell products out of this country on the world market. If we do not do that, then we have got to get out of this country to do that. I am presently quoting on trailers to go to Singapore and Hong Kong. I have done all the work properly. I even got a personal letter from the Minister for Trade to help me get the job. But I know that at the end of the day, unless I bribe someone, the Americans will get the job.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I take your point. The bottom line is that if you have got to spend money on research and development that obviously takes a slice out of your profit.

Mr Byrne—The research and development that any business does benefits the community and other businesses, not only the company that is doing the research and development. I have developed products in the past through research and development that are used right across this country now in the transport of livestock. It has probably effectively reduced the cost of transport of livestock by 25 to 30 per cent. To do that research and development and to have those development costs is a community benefit. Once it is there, it is there—it is public knowledge. Even if it is patented it is still available if it is a good product. But if there is no money being spent on research we do not go anywhere.

Mr MOSSFIELD—We are trying to work with you. As far as the members of this committee are concerned, we are very supportive of the manufacturing industry. Three of us have actually come out of it. We want to work with you to come up with the right solutions. I am a supporter of protection. That is why I took up the point that you made. With all the difficulties that you have got with costs, and even though you do not support protection as a policy, wouldn't it be a better idea now to hold the protection that you have currently got to enable manufacturing industries to at least adjust to the cost structures rather than continue to reduce protection. The end result, as you have predicted, will be that more and more companies will go—

Mr Byrne—The answer is that in our manufacturing business our trailer axles are made offshore. Nearly every trailer axle you see running up and down the highway is made offshore. We do not even make truck rims in this country any more. We make the tyres, but we do not make the suspensions and the brake kits. What are heavy trailers made of? Having a tariff on those component parts is just putting the price up for the Australian consumers. You are not protecting anyone here from doing that because it is not being made here anyway.

Mr MOSSFIELD—If they are not making it here in the first place, of course the tariff does not—

Mr Byrne—That is not true. Another component part for the solid waste trailers that we are building for this job in Singapore is the walking floor mechanism that goes in the floor of the trailer. The worldwide patent to that is held by an American company and we are importing them here. The tariff went from zero to three per cent in the 12 months. Those things are not made here—no-one is going to make them here anyway—but it is an added three per cent cost onto our inputs for no reason whatsoever, other than for collecting tax. It is a tax on industry. It is no different from payroll tax.

Mr MOSSFIELD—A tariff is a protection for something that has already been manufactured in Australia.

Mr Byrne—If that is the case, why was three per cent added on to this mechanism straight away? It is not the case. This component part cost $US12,000 in the United States and there has been a three per cent duty put on that in the last 12 months.

Mr MOSSFIELD—That is obviously an additional cost to you.

Mr Byrne—Yes. I can understand it if there was someone else making the thing, but there is not. It is the same with truck rims and axles. It is the same with everything. At the end of the day, you don't need me to tell you how many manufacturing businesses are leaving this country. There are a lot more people who know a lot more about it than I do. All I know is that if I want to be competitive, if I want to sell stuff on the world market and if I want to have a business, in the next 10 years, if we keep going the way

we are, I am going to have to manufacture offshore, the same as everyone else.

Mrs ELSON—With your applicants, do they have a better chance of getting a job if they have had a part-time job through their schooling years?

Mr Byrne—I don't think so. I think everyone is treated on their own merits. The main ingredients in taking on an apprentice—this might be politically incorrect but it is what I look at—are if he comes from a stable home environment, if his parents are together and they are both working or one is working. Surely, you are allowed to look at that. If the person has had jobs while they were at school as a paperboy or anything else, sure, that shows up as a difference from others who have not done that.

We can only take on a certain number of apprentices a year. The failure rate is a problem, although not in our business because we select very well and very carefully. Drop-out rates can be high. Because there are now a lot of good quality and good standard kids coming out to give apprenticeships to, that has stabilised a lot in the last few years.

Mrs ELSON—Are apprenticeships the only youth jobs you have in your company?

Mr Byrne—Yes.

Mrs ELSON—You don't take on young people for any other reason? Do you have a reason for not taking on young people just as standard employees rather than as apprentices?

Mr Byrne—No. We employ labourers and we do have a trainee draughtsman. That is all.

Mrs ELSON—Are the labourers all over 25?

Mr Byrne—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—How many people do you employ between the ages of 15 and 24?

Mr Byrne—I would only be guessing. I would not know.

ACTING CHAIR—Would there be some under the age of 24?

Mr Byrne—Yes. It would be 30 per cent or even higher, I would imagine.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you believe that the kids are coming to you from school with the right expectations? Do they understand what they are getting themselves into or

are they starting off by saying, 'I want to be a fitter' or 'I want to be a welder' and, after they have been there for six months, do they say, 'This is not what I really wanted to do'? The question has been hit halfway before. Are the kids coming from school prepared, knowing what they are going to do?

Mr Byrne—I think so. We generally pick the people I described there. If a young fellow has come from a farming background, he has probably been working in some way since he was 12 or 13. His parents have probably pushed him into getting a trade and, by the time he gets through the process and he comes to work for us, he is probably pretty motivated. I do not think a lot of them get disappointed.

Mrs ELSON—So your drop-out rate is not high in the first three months?

Mr Byrne—No, it is not that high. They know how hard it is to get a start.

ACTING CHAIR—This is something we found in Central Queensland the other week when we were talking to some employers. They said that they would often take youth from country or rural areas over city kids because they have this degree of work ethic. They are used to going home and doing something rather than sitting in front of the TV. Would you consider that correct?

Mr Byrne—Yes, I would agree with that.

Mrs ELSON—Do you have anyone doing work experience?

Mr Byrne—Yes, we do.

Mrs ELSON—Does that create an interest?

Mr Byrne—Yes. We have had kids on work experience who have come back, applied for an apprenticeship, got it and are still there.

ACTING CHAIR—How would you feel about the work experience program if we opened it up to the point where individuals could come and work for you rather than for just a week here or there, say, for three or four months and, for one or two days of each week, they would go back to school just to keep their numeracy and literacy skills—maths and English?

Mr Byrne—I agree that it should be opened up. If you have a look to see how it is done in Germany—some of our component parts are made in Germany and I have been through some of the factories there—a lot of the places go into the schools to try to pick out kids. They pull them out of school and put them into trades training as part of their school curriculum. Right across the board, from welding tradesmen through to engineers, they start to work and still go to school at the same time. I am not sure how it works. At

one factory, I asked the guy what the retention rate was like, and he said that it was 98 per cent for the kids that they put in this program. They train them and educate them to do the job that they need them to do in the factory. Some of them go on to university and to other things as well, but they still come back to the company.

Mr MOSSFIELD—How many of your apprentices—people who have actually started as apprentices with you and worked their way through—would now be in your senior management positions?

Mr Byrne—None. There are some in middle management—supervisors and the like.

Mr MOSSFIELD—But not to the top?

Mr Byrne—No.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Is the opportunity there for people to work their way up?

Mr Byrne—Yes, it is. Our company is only a young company. It is growing. While ever there is growth, there are job opportunities for young people who have started in the business. For the more senior positions, we tend to look inside before we look outside.

ACTING CHAIR—How many people work there?

Mr Byrne—One hundred and twenty. There are about 105 here and 15 in Toowoomba.

ACTING CHAIR—Okay.

Mr Byrne—We have a repairs and sales outlet in Toowoomba in Queensland.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. We appreciate your contribution to the inquiry. I am sure that the information you have given us will help to reinforce what a lot of other employers have said and get us onto the right track. We expect to finish our deliberations and our report by the end of June. When it is finished, we will be very happy to supply you with a copy.

[1.58 p.m.]

STRACHAN, Ms Debra Anne, General Councillor, New South Wales Farmers Association, GPO Box 1068, Sydney

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Would you like to make a brief opening statement.

Ms Strachan—Yes. I am a local farmer and I work locally as well—at the university. I have been asked to come and represent farming employers and prospective employers in relation to the factors that inhibit the employment of youth in farming. Would you like me to give my general opinion at this stage, or should I wait?

ACTING CHAIR—Give us an idea of where you are coming from, and then we can ask questions.

Ms Strachan—I am not sure whether you know but, according to ABARE, the average broadacre farmer is expected to have a deficit of $4,700 this year as their gross income. We are working with suppressed cattle and beef markets and problems with overseas trade. We have just got through a drought and are on the verge of entering another drought. I think it has been a pretty tough decade for farming in Australia. Given that environment, given the infrastructure issues that farmers have wanted to be addressed—particularly in our ports, in transport, in communications—and all sorts of other costs that are being put on farming communities, we are finding the squeeze of the dollar more than we can bear. So employment is obviously going to be affected by those factors.

We have seen a shift in employment in farming communities. Women have tended to go off the farm and work. I am an example of that. I am a very typical example of farm wives, in order to survive, leaving the farm—and the children are leaving—to go to the cities to find work elsewhere. Farming is often not considered a viable career. Debt loadings and things are so dismal at the moment that children are not very keen to stick around, and parents certainly are not encouraging their children to the same extent as they used to.

There are changes in gender issues also. No longer does the family farm get handed on to the son and heir to the detriment of the rest of the family. So there are all sorts of other equity issues arising. Farmers are under a lot of stress. They are left to run a farm without children and wives to assist as the typical unpaid work force. There are issues of workers compensation, and the costs of employment have meant that farmers cannot afford to take on extra work, so they are simply working longer hours and doing without those extra things that need to be done.

As I have said, when the decision is made to employ a person on a farm, the high costs of employment are a factor. A factor also is the risks associated with bringing youth

on to a farm, particularly the safety issues. The high cost of workers compensation is not for no reason. It can be an unsafe work area given untrained personnel.

So one of the issues I would like to raise today is the fact that farmers cannot be expected to take on youth and train them when they can barely afford the cost and when they are carrying that extra risk and are paying for that risk as well. You can understand, given that scenario, that youth are often bypassed for older, experienced staff when farmers are employing because they cannot afford the time of training and the risk.

Someone mentioned to me on the phone last night that the trail of destruction is directly proportional to the enthusiasm of the young people who come on to the farm. So, usually, the keener the people are the more disastrous their work can be. You are working with expensive machinery and expensive stock—at times, expensive stock—and a lot of things can go wrong. That is a big risk that farmers have to carry.

ACTING CHAIR—I take on board your statements, particularly because of the fact that the country has been through such a significant drought in years past. Small business is doing it tough, owing to the fact that the disposable income just is not there any more. That is particularly because so many people have had to put off staff. As for large properties that would probably have had five, 10 or 20 people working on their land and helping them with technology, with the way things have changed they do not need those people any more. They have learned to operate without them. I understand where you are coming from.

As well as that, we have a significant problem in that all this moves on to the banks as well. They are more for a profit margin to look after their customers rather than to look after the people on the land. The Rural Training Council of Australia has identified a number of skills shortages. Are the skills shortages apparent in the industry in your region?

Ms Strachan—In youth, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—If this is the case, has the industry looked at any particular ways to address this problem?

Ms Strachan—Junee High School has developed a vocational education and training program called TRAC. It initially started as TRAC. Peter was the initiator of the rural section of that training. Peter has been a high school teacher at Junee High School. Part of the rural edge of that training was to get some of the students in years 10 and 11 out onto rural properties for a block of time one day a week. I am getting very nervous because I am sure Peter is saying, 'No, that's not right.' They go out for a block of time and receive those basic skills. They are not paid. The students gain that experience. That has been a positive mark in our area.

I am a rural representative on that TRAC committee at Junee. I see that as a really positive thing. Farmers are a bit concerned about issues of safety for those students, while the education department is saying that they are covered under the due care provision, that nearly all accidents that happen on a property are not due to due care and you could probably argue neglect in some way, whether or not you expected too much of that student to be riding that motorbike or you expected an untrained, uncertificated person to be involved.

Mrs ELSON—When the students come out and spend their two weeks are they keen to want to go into that in the future? Do they talk positively about it or was it too much hard work for them?

Ms Strachan—I have not heard a lot of feedback at this stage. Only a few students have gone out.

Mrs ELSON—It's just in its infancy, is it?

Ms Strachan—No, the TRAC program itself has been going for quite a while. The rural section only really cranked up 12 months ago. These students are still working through that process at this stage.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Appreciating all the things you have said and the fact that you are not going to be employing anybody anyway, would you like to make some comment about the education system and whether it is producing the right type of student that you would like to employ if you could.

Ms Strachan—I think the load on students is so enormous now and we cover a wide range of things. We have to look at why we are educating students and what we are educating them for. That is a fairly big picture decision to make about whether you are educating a student to get a good knowledge of everything so that they may make an informed decision about where they want their life to go or whether you are making a decision about that child's intelligence or aptitude for them and directing them into a career of which you decide or they decide at some stage in their life they would like to take.

If you are talking about what is best for farming, more trade based education is probably necessary in order to turn off a child or a youth at 17 who is ready to go onto a farm. Whether that is the best thing for a youth, I do not know.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What we have been told about the education system—not necessarily locally but in other places—firstly, is that young people are not getting the correct career advice and, secondly, the trend seems to be more towards university education than in the trade areas that you have said are so necessary.

Ms Strachan—I will talk about the first one first. As part of this TRAC program

we go through mock interviews with the students. They have to show us that they are keen to take on their responsibilities, whatever they are going into—whether it is in the various retail outlets in Junee or on farms. The first interview is always a shemozzle because they walk in and they have not done their CV. They have had a period a week for the past six months in order to develop a CV and to look at their careers. The children are just not interested in doing it. There is no keenness in it.

They go through the first interview and we generally give them comments later on. The first time I did it, we actually hauled the whole class in and said, 'That was abysmal. You wouldn't have got a job. That was hopeless.' We rattled off all the things they said and we said, 'This is the real world out here; you don't get away with that.' There was this flurry of dust as everybody disappeared and got stuck into doing their CVs. They learnt what was expected and they came back looking a lot more professional the next time.

We have a careers officer at the high school and I assume that everyone else has at every other high school. Those careers teachers talk to brick walls, basically, until the student gets out and discovers why they need this and what it means to them. I think relating high school to reality is probably the big challenge in that area. I am sorry, what is your second question?

Mr MOSSFIELD—It relates to careers again. We have been told that the tendency has been to direct young people towards a university education rather than towards the manual and trade areas.

Ms Strachan—Yes. Everyone would probably agree that that has been the tendency. I think the way that the TER scores are publicised is probably a reinforcement of that attitude. That is an unfortunate thing, and I would like to see that change.

Mr MOSSFIELD—All right. On the same track, how about the literacy and numeracy skills of those young people who have applied for your trainee program?

Ms Strachan—The training and retail commerce program at the high school is directed towards the non-academic students anyway—the students who, by definition, are not going to have very good or may not have very good literacy skills. So, of course, we are pretty shocked that the ones we see cannot spell 'mechanic' or cannot spell basic English words. I think there is a problem with numeracy and literacy, yes.

Mrs ELSON—Are farmers encouraging their own children to go to uni and not stay on the farm?

Ms Strachan—Yes, they are.

ACTING CHAIR—When they are finished at university are they encouraging

them to come back?

Ms Strachan—Not at this stage, no.

Mrs ELSON—Is it because they do not want their children to have to go through what they are going through at the moment?

Ms Strachan—Firstly, farms simply cannot support more than a single family—if they are supporting that, at the moment. So they cannot even afford to pay their children to stay or provide them with some sort of living wage at home. Farmers would love it if children would come back and work for nothing, but that is a bit unfair on the children. I think most fair farming families are encouraging their children to receive some sort of tertiary education, have a career and then choose later on whether they are going to come back on the farm. At the moment, the environment is such that they cannot afford to have them back. In fact, I think that is related to a lot of youth suicide at the moment.

Mrs ELSON—I was just about to ask that one too.

Ms Strachan—I do not know whether you are aware, but suicide is much higher in the country areas.

Mrs ELSON—Yes, I am also on the committee that is looking into that—that is a big problem. Is it high in this area?

Ms Strachan—High enough, yes.

Mrs ELSON—Is that because they are forced to leave their farms and their family life—

Ms Strachan—There are all sorts of reasons. Obviously that is one of them, but—

Mrs ELSON—One other group of people told me that it was because young people feel they are a financial responsibility on their family. Would that be a—

Ms Strachan—There are all sorts of reasons: inability to communicate with other people, the stresses on the family because of the money situation. Often families are not able to get Austudy because of their assets, which means that they cannot afford to send their children away to school, so their career prospects are lessened. They may even be told that they are going to come back and work for nothing because they cannot afford an education and they cannot afford to pay them.

Mrs ELSON—And that would be the reason—

Ms Strachan—It certainly would be one of the reasons. I do not have the facts in

front of me so I cannot say for certain, but those issues are certainly fairly prominent.

Mrs ELSON—Yes. It is very sad, isn't it?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes. Has the size of the properties, particularly down in this area, decreased in size in recent years?

Ms Strachan—No, increased if anything. It is only that farmers have had to amalgamate. A lot of the properties around were broken up into thousand-acre soldier settlement blocks after the Second World War. That was a reasonable living farm area for a family; that is no longer the case. The average size of those properties is generally, I think, 1,600 to 2,400 or something like that. Of course, once you get west of Wagga they are much bigger than that—when you get into the dry-land areas. I come from east of Wagga, which is—

Mrs ELSON—Are farmers walking off the farms and giving up?

Ms Strachan—In my experience, most of the male farmers are still on farm, but certainly, I would say, an increase of 20 per cent to 30 per cent of women are working off farm.

Mrs ELSON—Have they walked away from the marriage, or are they just working off farm?

Ms Strachan—That is a hard one because I can only speak from my own experience in my local area.

Mrs ELSON—Did you have to live away from your farm through the week?

Ms Strachan—No.

Mrs ELSON—Do you go home each day?

Ms Strachan—I car pool with two other farming women every day to the same place.

ACTING CHAIR—I am not sure how well versed you are on this particular topic, but I want to have a bit of a look at the education system, and we sort of half touched on it here just recently. How would you consider that youth are coming to jobs prepared? You spoke before about interviewing processes and those sorts of things, but do you think that the courses that youth are doing in their later years of education are relevant to today's jobs, today's society?

Ms Strachan—In rural jobs, are you talking specifically farming?

ACTING CHAIR—If that is where you are best versed or you know what you are on about there, yes.

Ms Strachan—The joke is I do not know many youth that are going onto farms to work at the moment. It seems to me that most employers in our area who are on farms are employing the sons and daughters of other rural people.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you think that the education system might be focusing youth towards city dwelling or university type project jobs? It is like anything—times change, society changes, droughts come, droughts go, but people still have to be educated for particular jobs or particular roles in society. Would you guess that the education system is probably pushing youth towards university or city region type jobs, rather than educating them on new ways to handle rural type occupations?

Ms Strachan—Many jobs are transferable between city and country—support services, health services, education, teaching, banking—but the jobs are disappearing in the country for those students to take on employment in the country. There are expectations of youth today. There are two sides to it. Some youth think, 'What's the use of any sort of education because I'm going to be on the unemployment heap,' but there are the other students who live in this TV world and think, 'We can all go and get this fabulous job, make lots of money and have a great lifestyle.' This is what we see portrayed on television as the desirable thing. We watch television programs about holidays that we can take and cars that we should be buying and whitegoods, et cetera. To me, students who see that image and chase that image are not going to see themselves as a rural employee.

The education system has a big challenge, like I said earlier on, in providing that overall education about our world. I do not know whether education should be based simply on getting people jobs or whether it is more an understanding of our world in general so that we can understand where we fit in that world. I would like to see education start to look more at a consumer awareness of what our world means and stopping us from this treadmill of trying to consume, to buy and to own.

ACTING CHAIR—If government employers, group trainers, teachers, students, et cetera, sat down and had a fresh look at the education system or the curriculum in this country, do you think that we should possibly be looking at doing something like that, or do you think the system we have is getting a little bit too archaic?

Ms Strachan—No, I think a fresh look would be good.

ACTING CHAIR—A fresh look would not hurt. Moving onto the dole now, which you mentioned just a couple of seconds ago, do you think it is probably a little bit too easy for people to get, with a view of looking towards schemes that make people give something back to society?

Ms Strachan—Yes, I have two views about this so I contradict myself from one sentence to the next. I do think that we need to ensure that people receiving benefits are legitimately in need of those benefits and that they are making efforts to find employment. But I do not know whether work for the dole is the appropriate mechanism for doing that.

There are two arguments. One is that we are training them so that they can get into a job, but pruning bushes in the wilderness or pulling weeds is not training for work; that is just using the labour force. So the government needs to be honest about what it is doing with this mechanism. Are they punishing people for being on unemployment benefits, or are they showing that they cannot get anything for nothing, even if it is useless? I think some more care needs to be put into it.

ACTING CHAIR—I guess the government has already come out and said they do not expect it to be a complete full-on training system but they expect it to be a process to give youth a work ethic. From a lot of the people we have spoken to—and everybody probably has a different opinion but this is mine that is coming through and we have spoken to a lot of young people—a lot of them have said that they have part-time jobs from being at school. A lot of them have said they do not have a problem with employment and they know they can get a job.

With that in mind, with regard to youth who stimulate themselves and have something to do, whether it is a job after school or even just doing a bit of work for the dole to stimulate themselves and to get that work ethic where they are out in the community where people can see them, do you not feel as though that might help get them into the work process rather than sitting in front of the TV?

Ms Strachan—One of the things that separated the different children that we went through this mock interview process with was the fact of whether or not they had undertaken any voluntary work. It was a big thing, and I think Mr Byrne mentioned it before about part-time work as a paper boy or whatever that meant something when you were employing somebody.

Mandatory work for the dole is not going to provide that because that person has been made to work so that benefit is not going to be enjoyed by the person who has done the work. They are not going to be able to say, 'I show initiative because I have done work for the dole.' They can say, 'I show initiative because I went and got a part-time job at McDonald's' or 'I did the paper run' or whatever, so that advantage has disappeared.

Mrs ELSON—Would it surprise you to hear that three-quarters of the youth we have talked to all over Australia actually think it is a great idea to work for the dole because it gives the opportunity for the community to see that they are willing to work—because they seem to have this tag that youth are lazy. We were surprised at this.

Ms Strachan—Yes, but why aren't they doing voluntary work if that is the case?

Mrs ELSON—I think they are like any child. It doesn't matter what age they are; unless they are forced to do something they are not going to do it. That is just my opinion. Everyone needs guidance.

Ms Strachan—If they are happy to do it, I would have no problem at all.

ACTING CHAIR—The ones who did not say yes to that said they would work for nothing just to show that they want to work and just to get that reference. A lot of youth have said, 'If we could just get into an engineering works or somebody's business just to clean up paper or sweep the floor just to let them see we are prepared to have a go. I don't want any money because I am still at school. I just want to be able to get that reference. I want to put my best foot forward.' A lot of kids are also saying that. I guess when you look at work for the dole and you work at the philosophy of the whole thing, the philosophy is just to be able to give youth an opportunity to be able to say, 'I am prepared to have a go.'

Ms Strachan—That opportunity is still there now.

ACTING CHAIR—Well, no, it is not. We have a problem in this country where an employer is scared to death that if he lets you roll on to his property at, say, the age of 16 and you trip over and break your leg then he is up for insurance processes, workers compensation imposts and the list goes on and on and on.

Other kids we have spoken to—and I wouldn't mind if you could touch on this depending on how much you may have heard or know about it—say that we have a group of people in society who are on the dole but are taking a cash income as well. Do you think that is prevalent in today's society? Do you know people who are on the dole and taking a cash income as well?

Ms Strachan—I would say so, unless some miracle has happened.

ACTING CHAIR—Some people have said it would not be happening.

Mrs ELSON—Would rural youth stay on the farms if there was a cash incentive to do so—if there was some sort of government support because the farms are having difficult times?

Ms Strachan—I am sure. There would certainly be children—

Mrs ELSON—They are not leaving the farms because they do not like the industry. It is because of the financial situation.

Mr MOSSFIELD—To clarify your point when you said people now have the opportunity to work, you were referring to voluntary work, weren't you?

Ms Strachan—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You would say that is a better outcome than doing mandatory work for the dole. Employers would see that as young people showing more initiative by going out and getting their own voluntary work rather than sitting back and being forced on to the dole.

Ms Strachan—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. We appreciate your input. We should have finished our deliberations and put it all together by the end of June. We would love to send you a copy of it for your perusal.

Ms Strachan—I would appreciate that.

[2.26 p.m.]

HEMMINGS, Mr Geoffrey, Manager, Barters of Wagga Wagga, 143 Fitzmaurice Street, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales 2650

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for appearing today, Mr Hemmings, to give us your point of view. It will be very much appreciated.

Mr Hemmings—I am the manager of a motel here in town which also has a restaurant. We are a small establishment in motel terms, being 30 units plus a 40-seat restaurant. My interest in talking to you today is the fact that our industry, in properties of our size, has the potential to train young people in a very lucrative and productive way if we have benefits.

At this stage, having come from doing the wages about an hour ago, I look at the penalty rates that I have to pay. This industry works seven days a week, we do work 24 hours a day, and our penalty rates stop us from employing people to the fullest extent. We have the potential to train 16-year-old people in an industry that will give them esteem, travel and potential to work up the ladder very successfully if they have got the initiative. We do not require people to have super- intelligence, using that word extremely loosely, because they may have enthusiasm to do things that can be personality oriented; they do not have to be mathematicians. They can push buttons in the same way that anyone else can.

I am looking at being able to train the average Joe Bloggs from a 16-year-old person, so that by the time they are 30 they are able to manage a property of my size. They are able to manage a restaurant as big as mine or maybe even bigger. It is their enthusiasm that I like to be able to see.

I am looking at our penalty rates now. The introductory level for a waiter or waitress is $11.7232. If I employ them on a Sunday, it is $16.0907. What is the difference between a Friday and a Sunday, to our industry? To me, there is no difference. I would be very much inclined to employ that person for $11.7232 on a Sunday than have to fork out an extra $5 for them and also train them at the same time.

The perfect point is that we have a laundry on our place—our own laundry—and we do that seven days a week. On weekends, because I do not have any other distractions from my business, I can be helping that person learn the process of doing the laundry in our establishment. But I will not employ an untrained person for $16.09. If I put on a trained person, I would be paying $18.02, so for that extra $2 I have someone who could possibly do other tasks on my property. But I have got to pay an untrained person $16.

The other thing is that the penalty rates across the board are a bit out of whack. As a seven days a week business, Saturday and Sunday really mean nothing to us. We have

to be open seven days a week—and I mean 'have to'—whereas if you are office staff it is nine to five, Monday to Friday, and weekends are off. Our weekends are usually Tuesday and Wednesday or Thursday and Friday. So does that mean I have to pay myself a penalty rate, because I take Thursday off, if I work on a Thursday instead?

The hospitality industry, looking at the big picture, is one of the biggest employers of staff across the world. Australia has the potential to produce the best employees because we have a wonderful personality. I have worked in England and I worked in areas there where they employed you because you had that enthusiasm. Australia has the potential to supply these people regularly. Quite a number of the colleagues I worked with in my younger days have worked in England, America, Japan and Asia because they are Australian trained and have the passion to do this industry properly.

What we as employers have to do now to get people to those levels is just breaking the bank. There is an article in an industry based magazine that refers to apprentices and to rethinking having to employ apprentices. It refers to a number of issues: the penalty rates that are incurred, the potential of getting an apprentice to stay with your establishment long enough to train them to be efficient in your industry, and the general risks of it all. That is exactly what is happening.

Our industry also flows back onto the primary produce industries. If we are using more Australian beef, we are giving the beef industry a better local market. There is also fruit and vegetable production and horticulture, including flowers. We use a lot of linen, so we also affect that industry. Our industry has fingers in many other areas, so if we were steaming along or were far more profitable and with more potential we would have a big base to be able to solve a number of your problems about what we can do with young people.

ACTING CHAIR—I read your article and I hear what you are talking about. We have had a chat to people up in Alice Springs and those sorts of places and they are saying they have a great need for chefs, so I appreciate where you are coming from. But let us look at your argument: to you, the customer gives you a fee which is considered to be your income, your profit; to the employee, their job is their income, their profit. So you can understand the argument of an individual who says, 'If I am going to work, and I am going to work more than so many hours' et cetera. You can understand where they are coming from, but I do appreciate what you are saying about what you could do if it was not so high. When you were talking earlier about the rates I was thinking that maybe you could employ somebody and with that extra $2 or whatever you had left over you might be able to employ a gardener once a month to come in and do some gardening as well. So, yes, I appreciate totally what you are saying.

Mr Hemmings—Again, it gets back to the fact that we have a distinction between our different work days: Monday to Friday is one rate, Saturday is another rate and Sunday is another rate. To me, if you are working Thursday to Wednesday in a week, it is

still five days. Why do I have to pay more for a Saturday and Sunday? You elect to work in the hospitality industry. It has the potential of employing a lot of people. Working in the industry means that you work on a Saturday and Sunday; it is no different from a Monday and a Tuesday.

ACTING CHAIR—Haven't they gone through that process up in the islands—in the Whitsundays, Hamilton Island and those sort of places?

Mr Hemmings—I am not aware of it, I am sorry.

Mrs ELSON—Paying a wage rather than paying by the hour.

Mr Hemmings—Our establishment is that small that I cannot employ people full time all the time. I cannot put all my staff on full time because our industry is up and down all the time. I know I can employ a certain number of casual people. They have to be qualified because I have to have a guy who can handle on his own 30 people in the restaurant. I cannot afford for him to train someone, with it costing me $18 an hour, or whatever it is, on a Saturday. I cannot afford him to do that because he cannot do his work. Do you see what I mean? I would rather train some people in my situation and bring them through the establishment. I would rather multiskill them—multiskill them from being a waitress, or a waitperson, to possibly doing breakfast cooking, to possibly doing house cleaning, to possibly doing laundry work and—

Mrs ELSON—What is stopping you from doing that?

Mr Hemmings—Cost. I mentioned earlier that $11.72 is a standard pay rate. For me to bring them in on a Sunday it is $16.09, whereas a qualified person costs me $16.85.

Mrs ELSON—My son went through that industry in exactly the same set-up as you have. He was given a basic wage. He was on call for whenever it got busy. They took him through every bit of that industry, and it saved them a lot of money.

Mr Hemmings—I cannot do it. Have you read the federal industrial regulations?

Mrs ELSON—What stops you from making an agreement with someone that you are going to pay them a certain amount and they are on call?

ACTING CHAIR—You cannot do that?

Mr Hemmings—At present my understanding is that I cannot.

Mrs ELSON—I will check that one out.

Mr Hemmings—I really would like information or direction on that, because I

have spoken to these people and—

Mrs ELSON—Well, we are in a different state.

Mr Hemmings—No; we fall under federal regulations because we are motel-restaurant owned. I would prefer to be able to turn around to possible trainees and say, 'Okay, guys. I will employ you for 30 hours or 35 hours a week. Your rate will be $11 an hour, and what I will do for you is train you in all these areas.' If you then provided a training officer who said, 'Righto, Mr Hemmings. This guy is not really getting trained in this part of the industry. You need to pick up your act in that area,' that would be fine. You are regulating me, so that is fine. But I know I can afford that person and I can afford to put the effort into putting them into those spots. I would emphatically encourage that to happen.

Penalty rates kill our industry, and it gets back to the cost of our end product. That would drop as well because, again, our product has to absorb penalty rates. Not only do we have a penalty rate from 9 o'clock in the morning to 5.30; a permanent employee who works after 5.30 in the evening has to be paid $1.11 for working after 5.30. When is our business? Six o'clock at night until midnight. So I am forced to pay another fee for someone who is working in our industry when that is our time frame. If I employ someone before 7.30 in the morning, I have to pay them another $1.11 an hour. And when does breakfast start? Six o'clock. Every time I turn around, someone is saying, 'Sorry, Mr Hemmings. You can't do this. Your industry is working out of hours.' Who said our industry is working out of hours? Our industry is working during the hours that we have to be open.

It really would be nice to have these things addressed. I understand unions have to be approached and everything else but, if they are interested in having people employed in the work force, they would be far more interested in listening to programs along that line. I certainly do not mind paying money for work but let us get back to reality. Our industry is 24 hours, seven days a week. Let us get some trains of thought going.

Mrs ELSON—What would be the age group of those you stated would get that $11.72 an hour?

Mr Hemmings—They classify it as introductory level. If I take someone off the street, that is $11.72—

Mrs ELSON—From 16-year-olds—

Mr Hemmings—Sixteen-year-olds—it does not really matter. That is casual.

Mrs ELSON—In the last few days we have spoken to heaps of young kids who would work anywhere for $10 an hour.

Mr Hemmings—Yes, but the thing is $10 an hour is fine Monday to Friday between nine to 5.30.

Mrs ELSON—No, we spoke to a young fellow who was a baker and he was only too happy to get up at two in the morning for $10 an hour.

Mr Hemmings—Yes, but that might be just one person who does this. If I do this and someone gets annoyed with me—

Mrs ELSON—No. I am not saying for you to go and do it. I am just saying there are young people out there who are willing to do that work if the laws could be changed.

Mr Hemmings—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—I really hate to cut it off, but we have another gentleman to see and we have to be out of here by 3 p.m. Geoff, thank you very much for that. We appreciate your assistance. You have a wonderful institution; we stayed there last night. It was lovely.

[2.40 p.m.]

BRAID, Mr Gordon James, Director, Wagga Motors Pty Ltd, 32 Dobney Avenue, Wagga, New South Wales 2650

ACTING CHAIR—Mr Braid, thank you very much for coming and talking to us today. It is good to see that people have the initiative to come along and put their point of view and also assist us with what we are doing. As you may have heard, we are talking about employment rather than unemployment. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Braid—We are a family owned business and have been in Wagga for 47 years. I am not quite that old; my father started the business, I should hasten to add. We employ some 70-odd people at the moment. I have been involved in a lot of industry issues. I was president of the Motor Traders Association back in 1982-83, so we are heavily involved in looking at apprenticeships and employment issues.

It is a matter of where you want me to start, Mr Chairman. I do not know what the other people have covered today, but I am looking at it obviously purely from an employer's point of view. I keep asking myself when all these employment issues come up: who employs people today? The answer is, clearly, employers.

But the system seems to be geared to penalising the employer rather than giving the employer some incentives. In business today, if somebody goes out and sells some more cars for us, we pay them a bit extra or we give them some sort of incentive to do it. But it strikes me that the more people you employ, the more disincentives there seem to be out there or the more penalties the government puts on you in the way of taxation and controls with the current industrial relations legislation. It just seems to be all geared wrong. Why don't we say, 'Let's see what we can do for the employers, because they are the ones who employ people.' You can have all these schemes going but, at the end of the day, you have to find a willing employer to employ somebody.

I have not written anything formally on this; I just looked at a few things. Taxation is obviously an issue that needs to be currently looked at. It is absolutely the greatest disincentive to employers today and all the spin-offs and regulations that are there. Every time you want to do something, there seems to be a hurdle. The current industrial relations system, again, seems to be geared to penalising you.

ACTING CHAIR—The new one or the old one?

Mr Braid—The current one.

Mrs ELSON—The state or federal one?

Mr Braid—I am talking about the federal one, and really the government has done nothing about it. There has been nothing in the current amendments to the industrial relations regulations of late that has helped small business in any way. You can tell me some if you think there are any, but I cannot think of anything. If anything, it is a disincentive to the bigger employers because the government has been saying, 'We might change things with regard to the smaller employers who employ under 15 people.' I think 15 is the current cut-off point. But the unfair dismissal provision has not come through parliament yet, I believe. Is that right?

Mrs ELSON—That has gone through.

Mr Braid—So what happens? If you employ more people, it means that you do not fit into that category.

Mrs ELSON—Yes, you do.

Mr Braid—My understanding is that, if you employ fewer than 15 people, you do not have to go through all the drama of the unfair dismissal legislation. Am I right or wrong?

Mrs ELSON—You are right with that as far as they are on for 12 months and you can dismiss them with a couple of weeks notice. The other one is that you have to do your communication with them and tell them, but you can still sack them without paying redundancies.

Mr Braid—I do not know whether you employ anybody, but you go through drama in trying to put somebody off. I would sit down eyeball to eyeball with you and say, 'Paul, your performance is not very good.' I could have a nice one-on-one chat with you in the old days without getting things too formalised. But now I have to sit down and really put you on notice, because I am going to give you warning No. 1, warning No. 2 and warning No. 3.

The minute I do that, all of a sudden we have this lack of trust type of thing. But I have to do that, because if ultimately I terminate them because they have not been satisfactory—I have been on an unfair dismissal case—I go through all the drama of being asked, 'Did you give the employee the first warning, the second warning, the third warning and go through the procedures?' We used to be able to sit down nice and informally and say, 'If you lift your game a little bit, we will be all right.'

Under the unfair dismissal laws, somebody seems to have it that employers do not want to employ people. In fact, employers want good people. If you have got a guy on the footy field kicking goals, you do not take him off. If you have got good employees, that makes your business a success and you do not put them off. So there seems to be this universal thing that employers do not want to employ people.

The reverse is the case. Employers do want to employ people—good people. At the end of the day, if you are good enough, you stay; if you are not, you go. That applies to me. If I am not good enough in business, I do not stay either—I go. You have really got to say to your people, 'If you stay on the field and kick the goals, you have got a job. If you are not good enough, you go.' I am out of business if my people are not good enough. With any business that is a success today, you can have all the other parameters and all the other things but, at the end of the day, you are only as good as your people.

ACTING CHAIR—I must make a statement in relation to that. Having spoken to a lot of employers in recent weeks, we have certainly come to the opinion that the processes and what has been put in place have not been passed on significantly to the employers who do not understand what is now available to them. We have spoken about such employment programs as MAATS, the apprentice training system. A lot of employers do not understand it. Some have said, 'If somebody sends it to me, I will have a look into it.' It has been available for some months now. There is that, and there is the new IR package that has changed. There are significant changes in the area that you are talking about.

Mr Braid—I employ 70 people. I have got a non-performer, and I still have to go through the procedures of all the unfair dismissal things—is that statement right or wrong?

ACTING CHAIR—Not the process—

Mrs ELSON—You can sack them, but they can go to an arbitrator.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Braid—No. They can come back at me with an unfair dismissal claim unless I can justify why I put them off. Nothing has changed in that area.

Mr MOSSFIELD—If we may take this matter back a bit further, when did you last sack somebody?

Mr Braid—We put off a guy last year. The reason we do not sack all that many is that we work very hard on recruiting the right people in the first place.

Mr MOSSFIELD—This is the point that I was trying to get to. If all that process is done initially, the result is that very rarely would you have to dismiss somebody.

Mr Braid—But there will always be the risk that, of the 10 that you put on, one of those is not going to turn out satisfactorily for some reason. If I think one or two out of 10 are not going to make it, maybe I do not put on the other eight in the first place because it is a disincentive.

Mr MOSSFIELD—With apprenticeships—and I think we are getting off the track a bit, knowing your difficulties and accepting them—there is a fairly structured warning system, isn't there?

Mr Braid—There is a three month probationary period and you are indentured after that.

Mr MOSSFIELD—And you can bring in the apprenticeship—

Mr Braid—It is hard to get rid of a lad or someone within that four years if they are not performing.

Mr MOSSFIELD—But to some extent the unfair dismissals laws are not really relevant to apprentices because you have already had a structured warning system that has been there for ages, isn't that so?

Mr Braid—Yes, but it is three months. May I suggest, respectfully, that that law ought to be taken out to 12 months because it is pretty hard to know within three months if the kid is going to perform. After all, the kid is in adolescence.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Don't you take them down to your apprenticeship commission or authority and say, 'This lad is not performing?' That has always been there, even without the unfair dismissal laws.

Mr Braid—Yes, but it is just the hassle of that and the cost of that. If an employee is free to leave whenever he likes, why should an employer not be free to terminate the employment of somebody who is not performing when he wants to? It is pretty much weighted the wrong way these days. That is what I am saying: the system is geared to penalise the employer and not to encourage the employer. May we talk about productivity for a moment?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, please, I was about to try to change the subject anyway.

Mr Braid—We were talking the other day about getting our people in uniforms. That attracts fringe benefits tax, but don't start me on this one because this is a most ridiculous tax. We want to put our people in uniforms and we do not want to go out to get the real expensive ones from GM because they are not as good as the ones we want, and we want to support local industry. I go out in the morning and I set my ladies up in a nice uniform, but I cannot get it embossed or what have you. If I want to get it embossed, I have to go to some organisation known as the textile, clothing and footwear authority—and you can imagine the drama of going through that so I would not even want to start with that—and, having done that, they have got to be listed for approval by the registrar of approved occupational clothing.

All I wanted to do was to lift the morale of my people—make them look right, with us subsidising it or what have you. However, unless it is an approved uniform, they cannot claim it as a tax deduction, and I have got to pay fringe benefits tax on it. Where is the fringe benefit in asking your people to be nicely dressed? It would be like charging fringe benefits tax to a footy team because they run on the football field all in guernseys.

We have long service awards. Say that you have been working with me for five, 10 or 15 years and we decide to give you some incentive because you have been a terrific employee for, say, 15 years. So we give you a little plaque that says, 'Dear Paul, thank you for your 15 years of long serving employment.' We get a nice little plaque done up—and we go to a lot of trouble. Let us say it costs $200. The rule is that if they take that plaque home and hang it up I pay fringe benefits tax on it. If they hang it up in the workplace—and imagine a guy hanging a plaque up in the service department in the workshop; you can imagine where it would end up—they do not pay fringe benefits tax on it. Do you see the stupidity of some of these things? It is just the impediments that are put in place.

Mrs ELSON—So you would pay more than $5,000 in fringe benefits tax?

Mr Braid—Miles above that. Everything we do in our industry—providing cars, which we consider a tool of trade, but I won't get started on that—we pay fringe benefits tax on. If we have a bit of a function for our staff—and we had one the other night when we opened some new premises—we pay fringe benefits tax on that. If I want to put my people in uniforms, I pay fringe benefits tax on that. If I want to give them a recognition plaque, I pay fringe benefits tax on that. It is absolutely crazy. The quicker the government overhauls the tax system and gets a goods and services tax in the better. Just go and have a look at New Zealand today. It is up and flying. Lord only knows why we have not done it. It is absolutely crazy.

Mrs ELSON—Because business did not want it a few years ago.

Mr Braid—I do not know whether business did not want it. It was the way it was insinuated that there was going to be one tax lumped on top of the other. It was not sold well. We all knew what it was going to be, but it was not sold well. Everybody was led to believe that we were going to have the current series of wholesale taxes with fringe benefits tax lumped on top of it.

ACTING CHAIR—I think timing is extremely important in relation to the answer to that topic.

Mr Braid—It really is the answer. If I was in business and I was seeing my business going down the gurgler, I do not think I would bide my time. I think I would bite the bullet and do it. I can go into a lot of other things with regard to youth employment. There is a suggestion around at the moment that there is a real threat of junior wage rates

being adjusted. Boy, if that came in you would really have some problems in employing younger people. I think that is an ACTU policy at the moment to abolish junior rates.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you expand on this to make sure we get it 100 per cent right?

Mr Braid—Okay. I want to employ a guy to wash motor cars. I have the choice of a 17-year-old guy that I can employ as a junior or a 27-year-old guy. I can take the junior guy on because he is a cheaper guy at this time or I can take on the senior guy who might be $200 a week dearer to me. The risk with the junior guy is that he could be pretty unsettled—he has just left school and not sure what he wants to do. And this is understandable. He is a young guy who wants to go out and enjoy life. He might be unsettled. He might be playing footie and there might be a good chance that he might break a leg or get injured and not turn up for work on Monday morning. So if I have to pay the junior the same rate as I have to pay the senior, who do you think I would employ? This is the risk.

ACTING CHAIR—This is extremely prevalent. We have come across a lot of people who employ older people. This is often where you find the second income for a family—the mother may be working as well.

Mr Braid—If the government was to look at abolishing junior rates, I think you would have an enormous problem on your hands. I think you would want to address that one. Generally, I am saying you need to remove the barriers to employers. It is pretty tough out there at the moment. Talk to retailers or people in industry, particularly, small business. People start to think of small business if people employ five or 10 people. Have a look at the family businesses out there that employ 50 or 60 to do the job who might have turnovers of $20 million or $30 million and probably pay $1 million or $2 million a year in payroll. Have a look at those sorts of people. The backbone of this country is family businesses.

ACTING CHAIR—I take on what you are saying 100 per cent. I had a small business. I had a panel beating shop for 9 years.

Mr Braid—You would know exactly what I am talking about.

ACTING CHAIR—I know exactly what you are talking about. What I do say to you now—and I say to you straight out: it is going to take more than a couple of years to address and put into place a lot of the significant issues that you have just spoken about. It would be good if we could make it happen as quickly as that, but it is going to take some time.

Mr Braid—Sure it is, but you can never complete a task if you do not start it. The government really needs to make a start. Bite the bullet; make the hard decisions and get

in there. Truly, if there is one thing that will turn this country around, it is a goods and services tax. Make the user pay.

In our business, we go out and see how the good people are doing it, and if they are successful we will copy them. Why reinvent the wheel? Have a look at the world today and the most successful countries. What have they got? They have a goods and services tax. I saw an article in the *Financial Review* the other day that said that we have spent $20 million trying to rewrite the tax rules. I think we are about 10 per cent of the way through it. What is it going to cost this country just to lump another tax regime on top of the current tax regime? Burn the current one and start again. What is there is just unworkable.

I am probably out of time, but if we just look at some of the collection issues that a small business has to go through, there is: group tax, the collection of sales tax, PPS tax, child support payments, and then you get into state payroll tax. Isn't that the craziest thing—to have a tax where the more people you employ, the more tax you pay? Payroll tax would have to be the greatest disincentive to employment. It does not need any further expansion, does it?

Mrs ELSON—No, you do not have to say any more about that one.

ACTING CHAIR—No.

Mr Braid—Why doesn't the government have a look at it and say, 'Okay, what are the real barriers to employment?' To get an employee employed, you have to find a willing employer. That is the end of the exercise. You do not have to worry about all the other incentives, all the other schemes and all these other whiz-bang things we have had over the period. Just have a look at why business does not employ people. It is because the hurdles are too high. There are just too many disincentives in there. You should take away the barriers, change the tax system and say, 'Okay, the more you employ, the easier we will make it for you. It should not be, 'The more you employ, the harder we will make it for you.'

Mr MOSSFIELD—We cannot change the world—as much as we would like to—but we could target the payroll tax because it is a state one. State governments have, from time to time, relaxed the payroll tax to encourage employers to take—

Mr Braid—But it is in the bottom end of the market.

Mr MOSSFIELD—They have relaxed the payroll tax to encourage employers to take on more apprentices or trainees. What effect would it have if you were exempted from payroll tax for each additional new apprentice you took on? Would that encourage you to take more on?

Mr Braid—Yes, it certainly would. If they said that apprentices were exempt from payroll tax, we would certainly have a close look at that. There is no doubt about it. My understanding is that if we get a goods and services tax, the payroll tax will go and it will be all part of a package anyway. It is just the philosophy of it, isn't it? It is crazy. The more you employ, the more tax you pay.

ACTING CHAIR—The global picture we have in this country is that we have around 18 million people here and we have a vast area to look after. Other places have a small area with massive populations—say, 60 million people. We do not have enough money to put the two-lane highways from here to Bourke, but people still want it. I guess they are the problems we are facing with taxation.

Mr Braid—I am aware of that. Everybody still wants health schemes and education and so forth, but the real providers of employment in the country are small business. Just ask them what they want to do about it. We have only been here for 10 or 15 minutes.

Mrs ELSON—They took a task force all around Australia.

Mr Braid—Take away the hurdles. That is all you have to do.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Your input has been great. What you have said in 15 minutes is probably what we have wanted to hear over the last three or four days. As you have probably heard, the inquiry will be finished at the end of June. We will send on to you a copy of the report as we have discussed.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elson):

That the subcommittee receive as evidence and include in its records as an exhibit for the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people the document received from Bartter Industries titled *ACC links with regional development*.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elson):

That the subcommittee receive as evidence and authorise the publications of the submissions received from Bartter Industries and the Riverina Area Consultative Committee for the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people.

Resolved (on motion by Mrs Elson):

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

Committee adjourned at 2.57 p.m.