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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Vocational education in schools

TUESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2003

DEVONPORT

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Tuesday, 30 September 2003

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

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

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

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Committee met at 9.46 a.m.

CAREY, Miss Rebecca, Student, the Don College

COOPER, Mr Grant, Student, the Don College

Van TATENHOVE, Miss Rachel, Student, the Don College

WILLIAMS, Mr Joshua, Student, the Don College

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education and training in schools. I thank the Don College and the principal, Mr John Lee-Archer, for the hospitality and for hosting the visit today, and I thank the students who showed us around this morning.

I welcome our first witness. Thank you for your time this morning. The purpose of this inquiry is to give us an idea of how vocational education and training in schools is working across the country so that we can make recommendations to the government about how it might be improved and what sorts of areas need to be addressed. We appreciate your input. Be relaxed, be frank and tell us what you really think about it. To start with, just tell us about the VET course that you are doing. Why did you choose that VET course and how does it fit into your schooling and your aspirations? We will then throw it open to some questions.

Miss Carey—I am doing VET work related and learning enterprise. I chose it because it is something different for me to do. It is also helping me learn business skills and get a head start before I go out into the workplace and do some work.

Mr Williams—I am doing a certificate II in hospitality operations. I chose this course because I have always been interested in eventually going out into the hospitality industry. I like working with people and it has really given me a head start when it comes to the work force. I did not really have an idea of what I was expected to do when it came to working or anything like that. I feel a lot more confident to go out and work.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you have a part-time job, Joshua?

Mr Williams—I did have a part-time job in Sheffield as a salesperson in a retail store.

Mr SAWFORD—What about you, Rebecca?

Miss Carey—No.

Miss Van Tatenhove—I am doing VET tourism. I chose the subject because I have always been interested in other people and cultures. I wanted to learn what I had to do to get my face out there and to be recognised so I can go into the tourism industry when I finish college.

Mr Cooper—I am doing VET IT. I did VET hospitality last year. I found out that was not for me, and that is a good thing. I just moved to IT this year with Rob Scanlon and Jo Duggan, and it is great.

CHAIR—Terrific. We will go to specific questions. I am interested in how your VET course interacts with your TCE subjects generally and particularly your university preparation. Are any of you planning on going to university? Do any students in your school who do VET also plan to go to university or?

Mr Williams—No.

CHAIR—Is it mostly a choice that you make at this stage?

Mr Cooper—Especially in IT. Say you go for your degree, it is only valid for four years, so it is really a decision to go out in the workplace and get on-the-job training. You are getting paid for it and you are getting the experience you need. Having those many opportunities gives you an advantage over someone who has a degree. From an IT aspect, pre-tertiary subjects, if you delve into them, are not that good an option.

CHAIR—Would you all agree with that comment? That is a pretty interesting comment.

Miss Carey—Yes.

CHAIR—In a lot of other states, students who do VET courses can also use those to qualify for tertiary entrance, but Tasmania and one or two other states are a bit different. Grant, you are saying that is not a problem at all; that in fact, it may be an advantage to forget that and focus on what you want to do in terms of a career.

Mr Cooper—Yes.

CHAIR—That is interesting.

Miss Van Tatenhove—The VET program does not really lead to a university course. You still have to do pre-tertiaries to get into a university course. It is going down a different path: avoiding university and going straight into the industry.

CHAIR—So it does not cause a problem, in terms of cutting off your options, by making that choice early on?

Mr Cooper—You have to make a decision. You cannot go halfway with anything, because they expect a lot in the VET subjects. Pre-tertiary and VET subjects in the same year would be quite a bit of work. At the start of the year you have to make that decision and stick to it.

CHAIR—You made that decision at the start of year 11, I guess. Is there a culture in the school that there are two different groups or two different levels or standards? How do the pre-tertiary students view VET and how do you view yourselves? In some states they say the VET option is not as good as a pre-tertiary option; it is a sort of second-rate option. Is that the case in Tasmania?

Mr Williams—I find that the people who are picking the VET courses know what they want to do and it is going to lead to something in a career. The people who pick pre-tertiaries know they want a career somewhere.

CHAIR—So the two are seen as equal in terms of status.

Mr SAWFORD—Rachel, do you have a job at the moment?

Miss Van Tatenhove—No, I do not.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you had a job?

Miss Van Tatenhove—No.

Mr Cooper—I umpire NTFL; that is how I earn my income. I used to work at McDonald's but I now umpire.

Mr SAWFORD—What was the key attribute or key feature that decided you to take the VET courses that you are undertaking?

Miss Carey—It was just teamwork and being able to be involved. With VET work related and learning it is very relaxed. You work at your pace, yet you still have things set to be done. You work at your pace and it just flows along like that.

Mr SAWFORD—Do parents or teachers or peers have any influence on you?

Miss Carey—My brother actually said to me, 'Do VET work related and learning enterprise. You'll learn heaps and it's a very good subject,' so I chose to go along with it.

Mr Williams—I chose to do the hospitality course because I did not want to just sit around and do theory for the whole year. I wanted to actually have a taste of the work force and find out what I really want to get into, to see if it is the right thing for me. It has been really good so far. I am on my third work placement at the moment. All three of them have really given me a different taste of what to expect when I leave school and what I am going to get into.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you had any job ambition out of your work placements so far?

Mr Williams—Yes; I worked at Lemonthyme Lodge. I want to get involved in front of house, and that is what I did when I was up there. I got a taste of everything from a little bit of kitchen work to bar work and serving people. I have now been offered a job there.

Mr SAWFORD—Are you interested in running your own business?

Mr Williams—That is eventually what I want to do: own my own business, hopefully up in Sydney somewhere. Yes, management.

Mr SAWFORD—What influenced you? Were there any particular influences?

Mr Williams—I started in grade 10. My first work placement was at The Cove. I spoke to one of my teachers there and he encouraged me to do a VET course. They started something up in

Sheffield but they did not have what I wanted to do there, so he suggested I go to Don College and give it a go. I have liked it ever since.

Miss Van Tatenhove—The thing I like about it is that it goes on a double line, two lessons. The whole idea of being in the one class for that long just appealed to me. It is very relaxed and you get to know each other really well, so you can help each other along.

Mr SAWFORD—It is a good learning environment?

Miss Van Tatenhove—It is a good learning environment. You learn teamwork skills and how to get things done on time.

Mr SAWFORD—Did I detect an ambition to travel from your earlier comments?

Miss Van Tatenhove—Yes.

Mr Cooper—The person who influenced me was probably my mother. I did the first VET subject out of curiosity.

Mr SAWFORD—That was in hospitality?

Mr Cooper—Yes. I did not really know what VET meant at that point but I quickly learnt that it meant a lot of hard work. I was not going to do it this year but some people influenced me and I am glad I did. I was probably influenced by people that do not really know what VET is about, because in society or just out in the community people do not really know much about education standards. It has changed since our mums and dads were teenagers. There is no real idea of how VET operates.

Mr SAWFORD—How did you handle the change from hospitality to IT?

Mr Cooper—I loved it.

Mr SAWFORD—But how did you know that hospitality was not for you?

Mr Cooper—In the first couple of weeks I just knew it was not for me.

Mr SAWFORD—Did it take a bit of courage to change?

Mr Cooper—Yes, and it took a bit of courage to stay in the course the whole year because, at the end of three months, I was sick of it and I just slugged it out.

Mr SAWFORD—Did you get any benefit out of that?

Mr Cooper—I got a certificate.

Mr SAWFORD—But you were convinced you were not going to do that?

Mr Cooper—Yes. That is something I do not want to do, so I can tick that off.

Mr SAWFORD—It was probably a useful experience to have, anyway.

Mr Cooper—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Grant, I am really interested in your comment about IT: you said it was only valid for four years if you are at university. It is a very interesting outlook on that one. Do you people think that VET qualifications should be able to count towards a university entrance score?

Miss Carey—Yes.

Miss Van Tatenhove—Yes.

Mr Williams—Definitely.

Mr Cooper—Yes.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I would like to hear your views on that.

Miss Carey—I reckon it should, because a lot of people, with their resumes, have a lot of VET stuff they have done. Basically it would help in leading up to more skills and developing knowledge of what you want to do in university.

Mr Williams—I know that in my class we work pretty hard. I do not know what the pre-tertiary subjects are like. I do one, and I think they are pretty equal, as in the workload—how hard you work and the goal that you want to achieve. To get a certificate at the end of the year, like a certificate II in hospitality, really should count if you want to go on to university. They do hospitality at university. That is just a foundation and you could continue on.

CHAIR—You said you think the amount of work you do is as hard as pre-tertiary.

Mr Williams—Yes. I am doing drama and hospitality.

CHAIR—Compared with your other mates who are doing pre-tertiary, would you do as much work as do they?

Mr Williams—It would come pretty close. It is different; they do not go out into the work force.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you think that part of that is that the teachers in VET, in terms of having to establish their credibility, try a bit harder?

Mr Williams—I am not too sure. I know that they want to do their best to get us up to the standards.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I have not heard comments from the others yet, but, if they want to go on and do tertiary studies, do you think they should count?

Miss Van Tatenhove—If you do pre-tertiary subjects to go on and then you do tourism at university, you do not have quite the hands-on experience that you do if you have your VET subject behind you, because with VET you have your work placements throughout the year and they provide such hands-on experience in the industry that you are prepared for what comes at uni. I think it should count towards it. I do pre-tertiaries as well and I work harder in my VET course than I do in my pre-tertiaries.

Mr Cooper—In many aspects the VET program is probably harder than a pre-tertiary but I would probably disagree with it being counted towards university because, if we went down that path, theory might become an even bigger aspect of the VET course. I would hate for VET to lose its integrity because hands-on experience is vital to the subject. If you lose that, it is just another course.

CHAIR—You have made a good point there, Grant. That is the real dilemma most states are facing: how much of a theoretical component you need to include if you are going to make it qualify for tertiary entrance.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You were saying a number of you are doing pre-tertiary subjects as well. Do you find having your VET orientation and goal has been a positive influence on your other studies or doesn't it matter? Would you prefer that to the others? I am interested in marrying your normal traditional HSC subjects to your VET studies.

Miss Van Tatenhove—It has been a negative experience for me. Now that I am doing my VET subject I seem to be not putting as much into my pre-tertiaries as I should, because I have figured out that tourism is what I want to do. I do not seem to be aiming towards my goal of reaching university.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—In other words, it is either the university goal or tourism. You do not see getting your other subjects as helping you do tourism?

Mr Cooper—It is probably the work ethic that VET teaches you that cannot really be measured by a tick on a sheet of paper. You can apply that work ethic to other stages of your life. It is something you cannot really learn in a classroom. In that aspect it is pretty good.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Finally, in terms of those people who counselled you in the first place and whilst you have been doing VET, how do you find the counselling process? Is it clear? Do you have lots of people you can access? Do you know who they are and where to go?

Mr Williams—When I first enrolled I was not actually sure. I did not have any idea of what VET meant. I sat down with a counsellor who explained everything in full detail and I got the whole picture.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—But you did not get that prior to coming here?

Mr Williams—No. I had little hints of it from teachers, but I still could not understand what it meant.

Mr SAWFORD—Do universities have too much control over education? I am going back to a comment Rachel made and taking in some of the comments Grant made. Would it be better for a group like TAFE to set up their own degrees in an area which would have a much more hands-on approach? I believe universities have had too much control and got away with murder for too long. I am not sure what the answer is, but I am asking you: do you think that, if an organisation like TAFE, which is much more hands-on and more practical minded, were able to offer a certificate IV and then even an equivalent to a degree level, that would be a better option, particularly with what you are doing?

Mr Cooper—The big deal with a lot of it, especially in Tasmania, is moving down to Launceston or Hobart. You start here, you do your VET studies here and you can get a job here. With university, you move down there and it costs a lot of money and is a lot of hassle. Many students probably just can't be stuffed moving down there because it is too much of a risk. You have that safety zone with VET. Maybe TAFE should offer a diploma and then a degree on to uni. That would probably be ideal. At the moment, yes; I think universities have too much power. Online learning should be looked at a whole lot more because all the brain power from regional areas is going to the cities. Sooner or later we are all just going to be country hicks.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Did you know they had online learning at Burnie?

Mr Cooper—Yes, but only in the first year.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—But you can continue with online learning.

Mr Cooper—Yes, but then you have two years down at Hobart.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—The dreaded Hobart!

Mr SAWFORD—Rebecca and Joshua, what do you think about it?

Mr Williams—I would like to go to university but, honestly, I don't think I would be able to. There is a certain number of pre-tertiaries you have to do to get to university and the subjects that you do the pre-tertiaries in I am not really interested in. But, if there were a hospitality course offered, where I could get into university without going through all the pre-tertiaries—

Mr SAWFORD—What about at TAFE at diploma or degree level, via the TAFE system?

Mr Williams—Actually going there and finishing the courses?

Mr SAWFORD—Maybe even here?

Mr Williams—Would you be able to run the question past me again?

Mr SAWFORD—Instead of going to university, why not use TAFE as the authoritative body for a more vocational course? Ignore university; 70 per cent of kids in this country do not go to

university. Why not create an academic and vocational pathway for them by using TAFE much more broadly so you get a diploma, not only a certificate IV. You could get a diploma which would give you a degree in the particular area you were doing, which is hospitality—front of house, business, management. There is a whole range of high skills involved in that. In a couple of states in this country we have international schools of hotel management. If people are successful—and they are very difficult courses—they allow access all over the world, yet they are done by people who have very hands-on skills.

Mr Cooper—If that happened to TAFE, would HECS fees be the same?

Mr SAWFORD—That is an interesting question. For 150 years, Australia has suffered considerable skills shortages. You would think the government of the day, whether it be Labor or Liberal, would have more intelligence in terms of trying to address those skills shortages by investing in them.

CHAIR—With regard to your work placement, how closely does it fit with the study component you do at school? Are your employers clearly aware of the requirements in terms of skills and content or do they see you as extra labour that they can use and hope you will pick something up along the way?

Miss Carey—They have a training book that goes out with each person. They have certain criteria: for example, ‘competent’ and ‘not yet competent’. At the end of the work placement they tick you off on what they think you are competent in.

CHAIR—What is your impression of how committed they are to that process? Do you think they see that as a burden and that they just have to tick the boxes at the end or do you get the impression that they are closely following it to see that you are developing the key competencies required?

Mr Williams—I think it varies depending on your work placement. I have been up to Lemonthyme and they asked me what I was interested in doing and the criteria that I need to be assessed on and set me to work there. Some places just tick it off.

CHAIR—So there is quite a degree of variation. Grant, Rachel and Rebecca, would you agree with Joshua’s comments on that?

Mr Cooper—Yes. Going back to that other question about work placement, I found the previous year in hospitality that a lot of the time it was just washing up, day in, day out. It is not very appealing to be washing up eight hours a day. This year I have been doing work placement mostly with government bodies and schools, and I have found it fantastic.

CHAIR—Fantastic because of their focus on the competencies and the course requirements?

Mr Cooper—Yes; education is in their face, so they know where it is at.

CHAIR—Returning to your hospitality experience, would you say that would not be typical of all hospitality work placements, though—that you would be put on washing up for

three months? You might have been unlucky there. Joshua, what sorts of things have you been doing?

Mr Williams—I think that is unfair, to be stuck on something. For VET hospitality, you are meant to go out and experience a whole range of things.

CHAIR—Just fill us in on the range of things that you have experienced.

Mr Williams—I have worked in the kitchen doing washing up and the basics and salads and all the preparation. In bar work, I got a little understanding of the responsible service of alcohol. I did waiting and the serving up of meals. They do not put you on too hard a thing, because you are just training. Yes, it really does vary, depending on the workplace and how well they are filled in. You have a list of places to pick from. They are all to do with the hospitality industry, so all the employers have an idea that you are coming from this course.

CHAIR—Have any of the employers suggested at any time, or have you gained the impression, that the assessment procedure required of them was too much of a hassle?

Miss Van Tatenhove—I went to one work placement where, throughout the week, I was not questioned about my skills or anything like that. At the end of the week it seemed like a hurried job to fill in my booklet. I was not sure if he had been watching me and had seen my skills or if he had been watching with half an eye to see if I had done anything useful.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I want to go back to the counselling issue, because it is related to what you are saying. If you have an issue about washing up for a week or you think: ‘I don’t know how well I was supervised or observed,’ what is the procedure for you to input into your VET course and your supervisors about those responses?

Mr Cooper—The normal procedure is to go back and tell the teacher. If it is an extreme case they might bring it up with the workplace. But I think there is an unvoiced expectation that if you are doing the washing up every day you toe the line and do not say anything; you just put up with it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Is that what it is like in the workplace, do you think?

Mr Williams—It is only a week of work placement.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Only a week? How many weeks do you do it? I am interested in other responses to that. I am interested in the way you communicate with employers and your supervisors or your teachers about issues like that. Is there a process? Are you saying that it is unwritten that you do not moan?

Miss Van Tatenhove—If it is really bad there is a procedure you can go through. It goes to higher education people. It can go all the way up and there is a sitting, I think. We were told at the beginning of the year that if we have really bad problems they will be dealt with. We have to tell our teacher and it will go from there. It depends how bad it is.

Mr SAWFORD—In terms of the structure of The Don College, we have been going across Australia and have seen year 11 and year 12 students in various establishments, some where 70 per cent of the students do accredited VET and some where it is fifty-fifty. There are plenty of schools like yours, with 30 per cent doing accredited VET. Is there a problem in only the minority of the student body doing accredited VET? In an area like Devonport, is 30 per cent doing accredited VET a wise decision to make? Would you make a different decision if you were running the show?

Miss Carey—I think it should be included in year 10 to help with the process of going into year 11 and year 12. If not, if you are in year 10 and you want to go out and get a job, then you are going to have some required skills in the place you want to work. I think that VET should be offered around instead of just the 30 per cent that is.

Mr SAWFORD—It is not a question Joshua has answered.

Mr Williams—Thirty per cent of it is the population as well; the number of people we have around here.

Mr SAWFORD—Basically, 70 per cent of kids in Australia—and I would imagine that Devonport is no different—do not go on to university. Sometimes I think that a lot of our secondary colleges and secondary comprehensive schools have got the balance wrong; that they ought to be introducing far wider choices of vocational training. That has assumptions, because it costs more to do that than what they are doing at the moment. Basically this is an academic high school where only 30 per cent do accredited VET. I wonder whether, in an area like Devonport, that percentage ought to be 70 per cent, like it is in Mandurah, south of Perth. What is your view?

Mr Williams—Thirty per cent is not very much, is it?

Mr SAWFORD—No.

Mr Williams—I do not think it should be 70 per cent, because I do not know if interest in VET would be as high as that. It should be something higher, definitely. Probably it would be best to find out from the whole community what the interest is and go from there.

Miss Van Tatenhove—It all depends on the publicity that VET programs get. Before I came here I had not heard about VET until probably a week before I finished grade 10. If it receives a lot more publicity and good words are said about it, it will get higher than 30 per cent.

Mr Cooper—Yes. I remember in grade 10 they handed out a piece of paper to put your name down if you wanted to do a VET project and we had a five-minute speech on it. They really do not stress how it works or the dynamics of it. They need to be more proactive and perhaps give a speech of a good hour on it and say, ‘This is a big decision. This will shape your careers.’ They need to really sell it, in a way. They are not doing that. People will not sign up to something that is not sold to them. That is what really needs to be improved.

Mr SAWFORD—They were good comments from all four of you.

CHAIR—Yes, you made some very helpful comments. Good luck with your careers.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I will watch that IT industry with a great deal of interest now.

[10.20 a.m.]

BAKER, Mrs Pam, Assistant Principal, the Don College

HODGKINSON, Mrs Ann, Teacher, Community Services, the Don College

LEE-ARCHER, Mr John, Principal, the Don College

PURNELL, Mr Phillip, VET in Schools Development Officer, the Don College

THOMPSON, Mr John, VET Programs Coordinator, the Don College

CHAIR—Welcome. Thank you, again, John, for your hospitality and for hosting this hearing this morning. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mrs Baker—I have specific responsibility for curriculum and our VET programs.

Mrs Hodgkinson—I am responsible for coordinating the community services certificate program. I am also a teaching area leader of our students with special needs and intellectual disabilities.

CHAIR—Thank you. I invite you, John, to make some introductory comments.

Mr Lee-Archer—Thank you. I will tell you a little bit about the college. The Don College is the major provider of year 11 and year 12 education in this region. We draw on students from Deloraine in the east to Penguin in the west. This year we have about 960 full-time equivalent students, with a teaching staff of about 60. That is a little under what we would normally be running at, but there are some demographics occurring at the moment.

We offer a range of VET programs designed to cater for the needs of our students in the local community and, of course, our students are able to explore various pathway options by combining their VET studies with the regular TCE curriculum. A number of our programs have been specifically developed for students with low literacy, numeracy and social skills. Other programs have been designed to cater for the broader range of students, including students on the university pathway. Our students are engaged in a flexible, friendly learning environment which provides opportunities to network with community organisations, service providers and industries.

We began with a handful of students and a couple of courses in 1995 and since then vocational training at Don has grown into a program involving 15 courses and over 300 students, which is about a third of our student population, as you noted earlier. All of these students successfully combine VET with their TCE, as I said. The college recognises the importance of VET as a significant component of its educational program. We commit considerable resources, both human and physical, to ensure that it delivers a program of the highest quality. We certainly have established a high profile in the local community and foster within that an expectation of excellence and achievement.

There are three things I want to highlight in our program which I think are key features. The first is the structured workplace learning. All our programs at Don involve extensive industry placement, where employers assist in the delivery and assessment. We currently have about 300 work sites involved in our program, all providing placements at some stage in the year. We also have the capacity in a couple of our programs to provide simulated on-the-job training in our facilities here at the college.

The second thing which is a really important feature is the holistic approach to education and training that occurs within the college. The integration of VET within the program allows us to include the education of the whole person with the specific training associated with the VET program. The key competencies, which are part of every TCE program in this state, can be directly mapped on to the employability skills, for example, identified by the Business Council of Australia, and the development of the personal attributes, identified as being important for employment, is central to the overall educational goals for the college.

It is the blend of practice and theory and the variety of learning environments which promotes and stimulates the learning in the VET programs as well as our other programs. These environments include the traditional classroom, self-paced learning, ICT based learning, use of external providers, peer supporters, community mentors, enterprise and, of course, the industry placements mentioned earlier.

The third key feature I want to highlight is the comprehensive support network our students have. Our VET students have a specific support structure within the VET program, as well as having access to the wider range of support services, such as a social worker; course counsellors; Centrelink, which operates within the college; and Anglicare. We have a chaplain and a whole range of services which are part of our support system. We also have an extensive range of career services, which again are available, of course, to all students.

Our programs are further enhanced by an underpinning philosophy through which our students are empowered and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. The outcome is that our students are very connected and committed to their VET programs as well as their other studies.

The geographical area we serve is recognised nationally as a socially disadvantaged rural and regional community. The retention of students in post-compulsory education is a major challenge and goal for the college. Research—and, indeed, our own experience—indicates that successful retention programs are characterised by things such as relevance, focus, community involvement and contextualised learning within real-life experience. VET programs at Don College feature all of these and thus provide one of the successful solutions for youth at risk, and certainly provide support for students in this community and also people returning to work and study, which are key targets in the Tasmanian VET strategy.

Our support structures also enable us to address the needs of people in those groups which are traditionally underrepresented in VET, and we have a range of strategies which we have successfully implemented to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to participate in our VET programs.

We believe very strongly in the importance of VET in our college. We are proud of what we have achieved and are achieving with and for our students. However, there are a number of key issues which we have identified which need to be addressed if we are to continue to deliver quality education and training. I will briefly list them: the role and status of schools; where schools fit in the provision of entry level training; the cost of VET delivery, including work placement and general administration; access to suitable work placements, particularly in a region like ours; the support for teachers in industry, with the teachers in industry program and giving teachers appropriate exposure there; the training of industry people in the delivery and assessment of VET; the prescriptive nature of training packages and the impact that has on our programs; the recognition of VET in Schools as a legitimate pathway to employment, further education and training; non-VET options, including university; and the overall sustainability of VET in Schools in the context of those things. Hopefully we can explore those issues with you and anything else you have this morning.

CHAIR—Thank you, John. You highlighted a number of the areas of challenge regarding VET in Schools. Could I just go back to some of the comments your students made, particularly about the on-the-job assessment of the competencies. Obviously the competencies as listed have to fit within the national training framework and it is the responsibility of the employers to assess the on-the-job component. The impression we gained from the four students who were our first witnesses here today—I have to commend you on them; they are very articulate and have a great grasp of VET issues generally—was that there is quite a degree of variation between employers in relation to their focus on, awareness of and commitment to the assessment of those competencies. Would that be your experience with the student cohort generally? How do you, as a school, monitor what is happening in the workplace, both in terms of what your students are doing and in terms of assessment by employers of those competencies?

Mr Thompson—It is a big question. We have a number of nets in place to catch that but we have also identified under issue 1 that there is a need for programs to train industry personnel in VET. We admit there are some shortfalls. However, we take a lot of measures to guarantee we do the best we can. Firstly, we contract the services of a workplace coordinator—it is Jenny Jago here at the Don College. She visits each work site. She meets with the work site supervisor, discusses the training package and assesses the work site in terms of occupational health and safety and work practices. She then makes a recommendation as to the suitability of that work site for the Don College.

If we use that work site, the students are generally sent there with a training logbook. They will have made contact initially with the training supervisor, who will be the person who has responsibility for their workplace supervision. Talking about workplace assessment, quite often the final assessment of whether or not a student is competent in the training package will be made by the Don College teacher as the assessor. It may be in collaboration with the work site supervisor. We see the assessment in the workplace as contributing to that whole process and being part of a formative process for the student and for the staff as well. Where we do have qualified workplace assessors, we can, of course, use them to assess the training package. But, as yet, a lot of our work placements do not have qualified assessors in the workplace.

Mr Purnell—A lot of our work sites are small businesses and in the retail sector. They know very little about vocational training. Some of the bigger sectors, like community services, do

have quite a lot of qualified assessors in there who can be used. They understand the training package and understand the log competencies and what logbooks are.

CHAIR—Do your own VET coordinators and teachers and the contracted people have to have a certificate IV?

Mr Purnell—They have workplace assessor qualifications.

Mr Thompson—Yes, that is correct. Quite often we use that assessment as a formative assessment. Also the point Phil made is very important—that is, if we look across different industry areas and look in IT, a number of our work placements are government and education based. A lot of people in that industry do have workplace assessors. In the community services industry we have put in a lot of work into children's services, in the training up of local managers of child-care centres and service providers in workplace assessment and also in Orana Respite Centre. Just looking at different industry areas, we have different levels of that issue.

CHAIR—What is the name of the workplace coordinator you said you have contracted?

Mr Thompson—Jenny Jago.

CHAIR—Is she employed full-time by the school?

Mr Thompson—Not full time.

CHAIR—Part time?

Mr Thompson—Yes.

CHAIR—To liaise with industry?

Mr Thompson—Yes.

CHAIR—Is she employed in a similar role part time with other schools as well?

Mr Thompson—One other school; our only secondary school. It is our neighbour.

CHAIR—Does that work effectively in building links between VET teachers, coordinators and the workplace?

Mr Thompson—Very effectively.

Mrs Baker—This is the first year since it has been put in place that she has had a combined role in both places. So far it is working quite well.

CHAIR—Do you think that model could be expanded? There are a lot of regions that have variations on that, with someone employed in that role to make connections between industry

and school, to provide the work placements and to ensure that OH&S issues and so on are taken of.

Mrs Baker—There is a fine line between having someone in that role and also having someone linked to the places and to schools. We have explored a number of options for outsourcing our work placements but we like to have some sort of control. That is not really a good word.

Mr Lee-Archer—Some connections.

Mrs Baker—Yes.

CHAIR—Is that because you have ultimate responsibility for the wellbeing of students under your care.

Mr Purnell—It needs someone who has a knowledge of the students and the staff and, possibly, the employers. Bringing in someone from outside on contract from an employer is very difficult. They do not have a knowledge of students, of the education sector or of our staff. It is a very difficult—

CHAIR—Is the ideal model to have someone employed full time for a cluster of schools to do the industry link side of it and then to have a school based full-time VET coordinator with the two of them constantly liaising in terms of the requirements and progress of the students?

Mr Thompson—The model you have described would be absolutely ideal, because we have two levels of management: we have the industry side and the school side. But under our resourcing package that appears to be fairly unrealistic.

CHAIR—It always comes down to dollars, doesn't it?

Mrs Baker—Our set-up this year, linking our college and St Brendan's and the industry body, is dependent on funding. At this point we are not getting that funding for next year, so we will have to go back to the drawing board again.

Mr Lee-Archer—St Brendan's is a small Catholic school. It is the only other school providing level 12 in this area. They have a small cohort.

Mr Purnell—There is the Christian school, which has one or two students. A few other small schools are getting into vocational training.

Mr Lee-Archer—One thing that has not been mentioned in relation to working at work sites and maintaining standards is that our coordinators visit the work sites every week, so the interaction between our teachers and the work sites is constant.

CHAIR—Your coordinators or your VET teachers?

Mr Lee-Archer—We use the term coordinator. It is a VET teacher who visits the students.

Mr Thompson—At least fortnightly.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You might remember that right at the end—I am sorry that Ann did not hear this—some of the students were talking about marketing of VET. It pulls you up a bit when you hear that, doesn't it? I know the resources you put into this, but it is well worth hearing that. Given their comments about the marketing side of it and also the question Rod was posing—a rhetorical question about the 70 to 30 ratio—is there a cap on VET places here? Is there a greater demand out there for this which is untapped? If there is, what are the implications for the college? In asking you about the implications for the college, what I mean is: is the college meeting the real need out there or is it—excuse the expression; I do not mean to be judgmental—still a bit haphazard?

Mr Lee-Archer—I do not think it is haphazard, and I listened with great interest to the students. You should always listen to students when you are a teacher. That is really important. You can have the best marking the world but, if you are not hearing it, then something is wrong so we have to look at it. There are a couple of issues. One is in relation to the availability of work sites. I mentioned in my opening that all our programs have structured workplace learning as part of the program. That is not the case with all the RTOs in this region. For example, there are other RTOs which run VET without structured workplace learning involved. I know that is the case in other states. But we see it as an important part of our model. At the moment it might be fair to say we have difficulty in seeing it becoming too much bigger. We have 300 work sites but it is difficult to find big pockets of industry to accommodate it. That is one of the issues.

Another issue, which I also alluded to, is the role and status of VET. There is still an issue about it in this community and this state. I do not think that is through lack of trying on our part. It is certainly not our philosophy. I heard your question, Rod, and I understand exactly where you are coming from. In terms of retention and participation, the characteristics of VET provide the answer. It may not be VET as we are running it now, though. Our response to retention and participation, which I know would be another inquiry, is to deal with it in terms of enterprise and the sorts of issues that contextualise learning—real-life situations and so on—which are not accredited VET as such but are working along those lines.

Somewhere in there we have a couple of issues—one is availability of workplace and the other is status—which take time. There are still kids who come in, and their parents, who see themselves going to university or want to do the university courses even though statistically we know they will never get there.

Mr SAWFORD—In terms of 2002, what happened to your year 11 and year 12 students? Where did they go? Out of the 900 students, what happened to the year 11 and year 12 students last year? How many left during the year: left with question mark, left to go to a job, left to do an apprenticeship or left to go to university? What is the percentage? That is often a key question which needs to be asked of year 11 and year 12 institutions. If, for example, 90 per cent of your students are going into the local work market or going into TAFE or whatever and you are catering for 70 per cent academic, then you have the formula wrong. A lot of schools in this country do have the formula wrong, and parents and kids are voting with their feet. What has happened to your year 11 and year 12 students?

Mr Lee-Archer—The retention from year 11 into year 12 in this college, those who come back into the college, would be about 70 per cent. The attrition during a particular year is that that we would probably lose about 150 students. The majority of those clearly go to some sort of employment. Often it is not the sort of long-term future employment that one might see as being desirable, but that is the sort of thing a lot of them go to. It would probably be fair to say we lose a lot of students from our VET programs because of the nature of the training that is being provided and employers, having seen them, grabbed them. One of our programs this year—our building and construction program, I think—has been decimated with apprenticeships. There is a sense of there being a pathway there which leads to employment.

I take issue with one of your comments, though: in relation to the kids who are doing non-VET, there are other programs besides university programs which we offer. The pre-tertiary programs, which are those that give accreditation for university, provide a range of skills which are generic and which in themselves still provide pathways to employment. A lot of our kids still use that as a pathway. They go from year 12 into the local community, where they can, with those skills because the sorts of skills and attributes that, say, the business council is talking about, are the very things central to the TCE. The competencies that underpin those courses and the support they get as a result of a learning program, equip them.

Mr SAWFORD—They can also be taught to do VET subjects and are.

Mr Lee-Archer—Exactly, yes. They can be done both ways.

Mr SAWFORD—What is the percentage from Don College who go on to university?

Mr Lee-Archer—About 30 per cent. We are a bit higher than the state average.

Mr SAWFORD—There is an imbalance there in terms of what happens and what you are doing. We have been going around Australia and some schools, for example, have gone the other way. They have gone from 30 per cent or even less than that to 70 per cent accredited VET; that is, the kids still have access but keep the tertiary option open. In other schools, like Willunga in South Australia it is fifty-fifty; others are thirty-seventy. A lot of that needs to be reconciled with what is happening in those particular areas. I do not see a consistency in terms of what happens beforehand and what happens afterwards. Sid made a comment to your students, and they were very perceptive. A couple made the comment that VET is not sold very well at year 10; it was almost a non-event. That seems to be a consistent message right across Australia, not just here. Perhaps this needs to be looked at differently.

Mr Purnell—The students also pointed out that the strength of their VET course was their work placement. They were out in work. At the moment we have schools with year 10s wanting to get involved in VET, but the real issue is how to do it with the work placement and community resources we have. We are looking at other models but there are only so many work placements out there in certain industries, even in industries which are developing and are going to have employment in future. It is also a very costly business. We have students who travel all over the state to do work placement. We have to get them there and we have to provide them with accommodation, so there is a cost factor as well. There is also an equity issue involved with that.

Mr SAWFORD—Without a doubt. VET is more expensive to deliver and it is often a greater strain on the teaching force as well. Notwithstanding that, I take the example of a school we visited in Junee, a satellite town of Wagga, much smaller than here but having exactly those problems with work placements. Seventy per cent of their kids do accredited VET. They made a deliberate decision in 1993, 10 years ago, to go the other way. I think they have done extremely well. I am not suggesting that you go that way; I am just saying that sometimes you need to take into account just where your students are going and accommodate that. A lot of schools around Australia are not doing that. They are holding on to a concept of a comprehensive high school or a senior secondary college that is no longer valid.

Mr Purnell—We are accommodating it to some extent by introducing enterprise into all our vocational programs as a form of work placement. No, it does not take them out to work at a work site, but it does have real benefit. John Thompson can talk about it.

Mrs Hodgkinson—I can give you an example of that. I have a group of students who are very interested in doing youth work. It is very difficult to place 16- and 17-year-old students in a youth work situation because they are so close to the people they might be servicing. We have a partnership with the local city council and the local youth centre. They supported us in putting together an expo exploring independent living skills. They had to organise it all the way through—do all the consultations; carry it to and promote it in high schools; organise transport for high schools to get here so the grade 10s could be part of the process; and consult with all the service providers—and set it all up. It was a major project. They managed to get \$2,500 worth of sponsorship from the local community. It was really successful. It was an enterprise where I could assess them on all the aspects of their youth work units. That is the kind of thing we can do.

CHAIR—Going back to the issue of status, you were talking about the perception that VET is perhaps a second-rate option compared to university entrance. Is there also a status issue within VET in Schools? I noticed that the four students we had here were from the more popular courses—hospitality, tourism, IT. What sort of interest do you have in the more traditional trades of building, mechanics et cetera?

Mr Thompson—As an example, as part of our marketing of VET we invite all the year 10 students from our feeder high schools into the college and tell them about VET. They go through a one-hour taster session of VET. At the end of that session they fill in a ‘preferred industry area’, as to where they wish to participate. For 2004, 52 indicated VET automotive. Over 20 will be in building—we get the 20 plus into building every year. In primary industries we need the blend you saw this morning to make the class viable as a group. Tourism, unfortunately, attracted only about 15 students. To make the IT group viable, again we need to run that in conjunction with the business package. Maybe what we showed you this morning was not representative of the numbers of students.

Mr Purnell—It was not typical

CHAIR—Your impression or your view would be that the focus of the courses and the student interest reflects pretty well the workplace needs for students coming into employment, in terms of skills areas.

Mr Thompson—I think it does self-regulate to the extent that, if industry is healthy and there are a number of businesses in that area where we can find work placement, there is a form of self-regulation. We try to cater for those needs. If we look at the tourism area, particularly as it relates to the tourism class, it is fairly dynamic at the moment with the new ferries and so forth, but I do not think the forward planning of the students is indicative of what may happen.

CHAIR—What about manufacturing? Is there a skills shortage in manufacturing in the local economy? Are you meeting that with any interest for students?

Mr Thompson—There appears to be in the metal industries, and also with the VESTAS future, a shortage there. We are investigating embedding metal manufacturing modules into the existing TCE syllabus, so some students undertaking design in metal here will also be credited with some VET modules.

Mrs Baker—One of the problems which you are leading to is creating viable programs. With primary industries, for example, there is a skills shortage in agriculture in our area. A lot of students are not electing to go into it. However, to be able to service agriculture, we run a combined primary industries which caters for a number of those industries in the one class to make it a viable offering. In the past we used to run a building and construction and a metal program. Again, not a lot of students elected to go into that, even though it was obvious there was a demand in the work force for it. But to make the program viable, we had to run it in conjunction with another program.

CHAIR—Again, there is a marketing image problem there, isn't there? What industry needs is not necessarily being met by student interest.

Mr Lee-Archer—We need to be realistic in marketing that. This is a very significant social problem in this country. I do not know if you have read any of the stuff that Richard Teese has done. He has done some interesting research in Victoria. It is very clear that subject choice is closely related to socioeconomic status. While we continue to pay people big dollars if they study classical education subjects, that will always be an issue. It is not just a VET issue; it is a deep social issue. Teese talks about the lack of democracy in the curriculum, and I think he is right. I agree with what you are saying—that we are not really reflecting where our kids are going. But turning it around is a very big issue. It just so happens that in this state we are about to head into a significant curriculum review of post-compulsory education, in trying to address these very issues. It is bigger than Don College. It is a big social issue.

Mr SAWFORD—I take note of your comments and you are exactly right. Up to about 1979 in Australia the education budgets of most state governments and the federal government expanded. They grew and the numbers grew. From that time on the budgets have been diminishing and people have been dealing with money going all over the place. So we understand the problem. There is a problem and we need to be able to deal with it far more effectively than we are currently doing.

Even in terms of what Teese is saying—we do not have a good record in this country of longitudinal studies, comparing over a period of time—in the end, when people start using gender, religion, culture or socioeconomic status as a rationale for explaining what is going on, that is a cop-out. Anyone will tell you that well-run schools, the quality of the educational

program and the quality of the people involved will determine the success of kids in terms of where they are going, so I do not buy those other arguments. As a nation we are not spending enough money on education. There is no doubt about that.

We are putting our teaching force, which is aged, under enormous pressure. Where is the teacher training in VET going? It is taking a long time to get around to it. We get the impression, when we go around Australia, that the age profile of people working in VET is about 55 plus. They have been doing it for about 10 years. Their energy level is diminishing and they are looking at their retirement and their replacement. There seems to be a huge problem. Is that a problem here in Tasmania, in Devonport?

Mr Lee-Archer—The aged teaching population is an issue in general, but in VET—

Mr SAWFORD—No-one is training VET teachers, are they?

Mr Lee-Archer—Not specifically, no. Basically in our training program we take people who are already trained as teachers and put them into the appropriate assessor training.

Mr Purnell—We do have in this state, and I guess it is the same around Australia, a structural problem in that you have two types of VET teachers: the TAFE teacher and the VET in Schools teacher. They are quite different, both in pedagogy and skills of teaching and in their industry training. You have to try to bring the two together. I know from my meetings with industry that there is a difficulty in having industry people with teaching skills talking about delivery outside the school situation.

Mr SAWFORD—What is your view? Should they be brought together or should they be treated separately?

Mr Purnell—I do not see how they can be successfully brought together in the one person, which is an issue in itself.

Mr SAWFORD—That is an interesting point. I agree with you. I want to go back to a point that John made in his introduction. There is propaganda coming from VET—and I do not quite understand it—that integration is the way to go. I would have thought diversity would be the way to go in terms of VET. Am I reading the picture the wrong way? What is your view? Integration can sometimes lead to sameness and conformity and narrowing of options. That has been the propaganda in vocational training for the last 10 or 15 years. People at a departmental level, rather than at a practical level, fight for that: ‘That’s the way we’re going to go and that’s the way we ought to go.’ Sometimes I think it is not the way to go. Phillip, what is your view? You say integration does not work at the teacher level. What about the curriculum level?

Mr Purnell—In the time I have been in my work, I cannot see how you can have an industry person with the teaching skills combined; how you combine the two. You have to have them working together. I cannot see how you can have a teacher out in an industry or an industry person in classroom. You can have an industry person working in a classroom but not as a teacher.

CHAIR—Do you think there is greater capacity to use TAFE resources, particularly human resources? Do you think you are adequately interacting with your local TAFE college?

Mr Thompson—Because of the number of programs, we cooperate well with TAFE. Another measure we have put in place, especially in hospitality, is to bring industry personnel in to deliver classroom VET; to deliver training within the VET alongside the teacher. We have had industry representatives visit us from that perspective. If we look back at the word ‘integration’, what we have done is to try to integrate the systems of VET as closely as we can to allow students to undertake general studies to contribute to their holistic education here at the college. We do not have delineation between a VET student, a pre-tertiary student and a general Pathways student. We have integrated all the systems. The staff, whether or not they are teaching VET, are accepted as members of the Don College staff. We have successfully integrated student services across all students, regardless of their VET status. I think John referred to that.

CHAIR—Are there other areas where you could be using TAFE more effectively? Do you think there are instances where you are running your own VET courses here and where you could perhaps more effectively be using the local TAFE?

Mr Lee-Archer—There is no doubt that the links with TAFE in this state are not as good as they could be. That is one of the terms of reference for this review. It is an issue. It depends a little bit on the TAFE itself.

Mr SAWFORD—Can you indicate why that has happened?

Mr Lee-Archer—I do not think you have long enough, Rod! There is a bit of history. There was an attempt many years ago, back in Sid’s earlier life, when we attempted to bring together TAFE and the colleges. It was a great opportunity to look at post-compulsory education. It faltered, basically for union and industrial reasons, and since then it has been difficult. The way TAFE is structured here is that it is set up as separate institutes throughout the state with centres of excellence for particular areas. Building and construction, for example, is in Hobart. That is where the centre of excellence is. Automotive is in Launceston. They also operate as independent institutes, even though there is an overall structure—

Mr SAWFORD—Does it require someone at a political level or a senior bureaucratic level to make the change?

Mr Lee-Archer—Yes; very much so.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you all agree with that? Is that change necessary?

Mr Purnell—At the teacher level there are very good relations between TAFE and schools at the lower level. TAFE is based on adult learning and it is also based on fee-for-service, more so than at this level. They are issues as well.

Mr Lee-Archer—It depends very much on the programs. We deal primarily in entry level training. TAFE here in Tassie talks about picking up certificate III onwards and does not look at a lot of entry level. I can see how that should work brilliantly. It should work really well. Where

there is overlap, that should work well, too. The fact that it does not is for political reasons. It does need a bit of political decision making and the appropriate clout to make it work.

CHAIR—Are there problems as well in terms of TAFE recognition of competencies achieved at school?

Mr Lee-Archer—No, I do not believe that is the case.

CHAIR—There is no problem there?

Mr Purnell—No; they would not be able to do that under their RTO status.

Mr Lee-Archer—No, that is not an issue. One place it does work a little bit better than here is at Burnie. You will hear that when you go to Hellyer this afternoon. The TAFE campus is right next door; they share a campus. That makes a big difference. Distance, even if it is only half a kilometre, can be quite a barrier. That is not the main one here. In the areas that John mentioned where we are working with TAFE, it is working very well. That is because of the individual teachers, not because of the administrative structures.

Mrs Hodgkinson—The load is very heavily on the teachers and their networks. The VET program in this college would probably stand or fall on that. Individual teachers have, over the years, established huge networks amongst the community and amongst employers. It is a really important factor in our programs.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there a danger in that, though, if that person leaves?

Mrs Hodgkinson—Yes, there is.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You alluded earlier to the nature of people involved in VET. From my own personal experience, I see there is incredible energy here—above and beyond the call of duty in many instances. How has the college gone about professional development support for teachers in VET? Does that work reasonably well? Are there things you could make recommendations on to assist teachers going into VET? In terms of the training organisation, in this case the education faculty at the university in particular and even with TAFE, can there be a better pathway or link between teaching VET in Schools and training at these institutions?

Mr Purnell—Universities should have a section on VET in Schools for new teachers coming into the teaching force, because a lot of them will end up in VET in Schools. Unfortunately, they will probably end up in isolated schools on the west coast or in the north-east or the south, where they have year 11 and year 12 tops and they have VET. They may be the only VET teacher, and that is an issue. So they do need some training. They may be thrown in at the deep end without training.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Are you saying that should be compulsory in teacher training nowadays?

Mr Purnell—If we have 30 per cent of students doing VET and if that is going to grow, yes, it should be compulsory because that is significant.

Mr Lee-Archer—We see VET as being integral to our program. If you want to teach here, you should be able to teach VET with appropriate support. That is the point being made. There is no doubt that there are differences required in terms of competency based training versus the criteria based stuff that we do in the TCE. That in itself is part of the training and it should be. If we come back to status, teachers themselves generate a status. Most of our teachers are university trained; that is how they come through. Developing that culture of vocational education as a legitimate pathway, just as with any of the pathways, needs to start with the training.

Mr SAWFORD—The kids were very proud of being involved in it.

Mr Lee-Archer—Absolutely.

Mr SAWFORD—That came across. The four of them had a quiet dignity and integrity. They did not see it as a second-rate option at all.

Mr Lee-Archer—I do not think it is seen that way by kids at this college at all.

Mr SAWFORD—They saw it as a better option.

Mr Lee-Archer—I do not think there is a status problem amongst the kids at this college.

Mr SAWFORD—Not with the kids. There might be with the teachers.

Mr Purnell—The difficulty with training teachers is that they have to also get industry experience. If they are at university doing an education degree, they are not necessarily getting industry experience. They cannot really do certificate IV either, which is the certificate they require, until they have gone out and started teaching and they can be given some professional development in the workplace. There is a difficulty merging those together.

CHAIR—Do you have any final words of wisdom or final recommendations?

Mr Lee-Archer—Just give us more money and we will be fine!

CHAIR—It is the same story everywhere! Your local member has the chequebook. Just talk to Sid. That has been very helpful; thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 11.04 a.m. to 11.19 a.m.

JAMIESON, Ms Kerrily, Manager, Jamieson Traders

SHEGOG, Ms Vicki, Manager, Imaginarium Science Centre

WEBB, Mr Frank, Owner/Proprietor, Birchmore

CHAIR—Welcome to this hearing into vocational education and training in schools. Thank you for your time this morning. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear today?

Mr Webb—I run an accommodation property in Devonport, therefore I am involved in the tourism industry.

Ms Jamieson—I have a recycling and transport business in Devonport. My involvement has been having students from the VET programs over a number of years.

Ms Shegog—The Imaginarium Science Centre is part of the Devonport City Council. I have been participating in the VET program for two years.

CHAIR—We will go to questions. From the point of view of an employer, what do you see as the biggest strengths and weaknesses of the way VET in Schools is currently working?

Ms Shegog—From my perspective, the experiences I have had most of the time have been very positive, perhaps because the organisation of the program has been excellent. I get full support. I am the manager of the centre, and I am very much a working manager. I have one other full-time person with me to run the centre seven days a week. We have casuals who are employed at odd times and they also run the weekend program. We run several programs. There are science shows. We change our exhibits several times a year, so there is a lot of activity and many requirements. We are also branching out into birthday parties, teacher professional development and so on. The extra support we can get from the VET program is very gratefully received. That is excellent. We also are very committed to ensuring that we are providing what the program requires from an employer.

The organisation is very positive. I have good communications with the organisers. Before the students come we discuss everything that is necessary—for example, OH&S and everything expected of their assessment—and usually complete it very well with that support. There are no negatives in the sense that we encourage all the VET participants to do their best, to bring out the best in them. We provide them with as much variety and skill based learning as we can.

CHAIR—Thanks, Vicki. We might return to some of those issues in a moment.

Ms Jamieson—My perspective is probably slightly different as an employer in a business mainly dealing with labouring types of jobs, as in recycling. We have mainly been given the chance to work with students who might have a learning difficulty or who see themselves as perhaps not having a working future. What we have tried to do is provide a work experience that not only gives them some life skills and some confidence in what they can do but also makes

them think about their future. They do not necessarily have a program which they have to work through—again, a specific skill—but they can give themselves some life skills. The students that we have are probably slightly different from some of the others.

CHAIR—Your students have not been doing a specific VET in Schools course?

Ms Jamieson—No.

CHAIR—It has been a general workplace experience?

Ms Jamieson—Yes. We have mainly dealt with issues they may come across down the track—OH&S, working in factory situations and working with people—and the life skills they will encounter down the track.

Mr SAWFORD—Is the recycling straightforward or are you a waste transfer station? Is there more involved?

Ms Jamieson—We do the kerbside collection where vehicles are used. Then it is all sorted and processed for the buyers.

Mr SAWFORD—It is not a waste transfer station?

Ms Jamieson—No, it is not. They get the opportunity to work with other members. They get an opportunity sometimes to operate machinery. Basically, they see what their future can be if they want to get out there and have a go.

CHAIR—Any downsides?

Ms Jamieson—I cannot see any at this stage. Although there have been some mixed results, we have had a success rate of everybody staying the course and participating. As far as I can see, our role is to help them stay the distance for a length of time, and often that is as good as they are going to get.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Webb—My involvement has been over many years. Prior to coming to Devonport I had a cafeteria in Burnie. I have always been involved in the service industry. I must say that the very best employee I ever gained was through this system. The young lady eventually went on to managing a business for me. It gives me an opportunity to meet these people and to see what their abilities and their requirements are. I think it is working quite successfully. One of the negatives I see is that students come to me only one day a week over a period of time. I have discussed that with the people here. It would be much better if they did a one-week or a two-week block so you get consistency, rather than if they just have one day, go away and have to come back and restart. You could give them expanded jobs to do if they were there for a longer period of time.

It is great for the students to come and do this. You see their eyes open, because they do not really know what they are in for. It gives them a good grounding two ways: it gives the students

an idea of what is out there and it gives a lot of employers a good chance to meet these students with the possibility of offering them employment later on down the track.

CHAIR—What about the paperwork for assessing the student's performance? Is that too onerous? Is it not detailed enough? Do you get enough guidance from the school as to how that part of it needs to be tackled?

Ms Shegog—I am finding it about right. The fact is that with each of the VET students you work with them at the end of each day to confirm what they have achieved, so that it is not all lost by the end of the week and you are just ticking a few boxes by guesswork.

CHAIR—You sit down each day?

Ms Shegog—Yes. We work through what skills they achieved and then work towards the final assessment.

Mr SAWFORD—Did you develop that or did you do it from the very beginning?

Ms Shegog—No; it was developed through the program. It has improved since I started. That assessment program has improved from the organising level. We have not actually changed that but we have had input. We were asked how it worked. They asked me how I felt it could be improved, and it has been, which makes it a lot easier.

Ms Jamieson—I have to agree with that. I have seen it develop over a number of years, basically from 'tick and flick' to a system where you do not necessarily have an opinion but you have an idea of what is going on and you can make some discrete comments about the person which may be helpful back in the school situation.

CHAIR—Do you think there is still the danger that some employers do tick and flick?

Ms Jamieson—I think that will always be the case. That can happen. But, if you are going to be responsible enough to take these students, realistically you should not do that either. That is part of the responsibility.

CHAIR—That is a good point.

Mr Webb—I find it quite satisfactory but one of the things that could be done is feedback to people like me which says, 'This student stayed with you and acquired this skill or learnt that.' That way you know you are giving them what they are looking for. I have not had that feedback. I regularly get people come to stay, but it would be nice to know that the students went back and spoke to whoever was involved and that the student was asked what they achieved and what was gained by going to a particular enterprise. That information could come back to us, and we could say, 'We are doing something. We are imparting some knowledge or skills to them.' That is what we hope we are doing. If we are not, we need to know what we have to do to improve that for them. It could be feedback from our point of view, as well.

Ms Shegog—They encourage you to be more accurate in your assessment. When I first got the books they were several centimetres thick. It asked if they did good hospital corners when

they made beds. That is not necessarily applicable to my venue, although it was great in that I was able to skip a huge amount. I made sure I put some comment or even 'N/A' on each page, but it was very time consuming. Now they have really honed it down and it is much more facility specific. It makes my job a lot easier now.

Mr SAWFORD—How did each of you first become involved with vocational training at Don College?

Ms Shegog—I was approached by Don College to see if I would be happy to participate in the program. I saw the benefits for both. I am a teacher, too. I have a varied background. I appreciate what I can do for the students, as well as what they can do for my centre. I have worked a lot in social justice education and so on. I value the opportunity to work with them to get the most out of them and also get the most for the centre, especially with customer excellence. I am very big on customer service and customer excellence and promoting it. It is not easy providing that seven days a week, 24 hours a day—that is basically 364 days a year.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you employed anyone from the vocational training courses?

Ms Shegog—No; they have not applied but they have been encouraged to do so. I have been very happy with the quality of the students. I am really looking at their aptitude for the area. If they are into customer service, I will certainly encourage them. If they are not extending themselves to the customers or if they are not demonstrating to me the skills I am looking for, then obviously I do not see them fitting exactly in that particular area or particular facility.

Ms Jamieson—The experiences we have had are slightly different. The paperwork is designed so that what they are doing is—

Mr SAWFORD—How did you first become involved?

Ms Jamieson—It was a direct approach from the school. That has extended to other schools that are also using the same facility to put even grade 10 students through, even private schools. It was straight-out contact with us. They rang us up, did some interviews and walked through to see what the facility could provide for the students. We developed it as it went along because it was a newer industry in a newer area. They approached us and we set it up one step at a time.

Mr SAWFORD—Were there any factors that determined your involvement?

Ms Jamieson—One of the greater ones is the fact that I have children coming through and my children need opportunities in the same way as other children. At that stage they are still children, in my view. They are going to be the next generation of workers we are going to rely on and they need the experience.

Mr Webb—My experience is exactly the same: I was approached by the schools. Mind you, I was in the system prior to coming to Devonport. I have only been here 10 years, but I experienced this while I was in Burnie. It was exactly the same thing. If there is anything you can do to help these kids get on, you have most certainly got to do it.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there a school board? Is there a Don board or a governing advisory council?

Mrs Baker—There is a Don College council.

Mr SAWFORD—Are any of you on that? No.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you for being part of the program. What we would like to be able to do with our report is to offer recommendations and suggestions in order to allow better liaison between students and obviously their system inside the college and then, of course, from the school to the employer. How do you find the links that exist between the college and yourselves as employers and the communications that go with that insofar as best helping you in going about your business but at the same time training and assessing students? Are there any comments you would like to make? Are they the same people you are dealing with each time for the students? Is there a system that we could make better—a system which you think would help to better communications and liaison between yourselves and the college?

Mr Webb—I find it very good. Every day the student is there, the college representative turns up to assess them and see how they are going. If I have one negative comment, it is that they have never sent me a Collingwood supporter; they always send Geelong and Carlton supporters. I keep asking for one but I never get one—and, after last weekend, I probably never will get one!

The interaction between me and the college has been very good and I do not have a problem with it. I go back to my earlier comment about getting some feedback from the college, inasmuch as saying the student was there and found it interesting or learnt something. We need feedback to know that the efforts we are putting in are getting somewhere and that we are helping. One of the problems I see with the course is that you are bringing somebody into an enterprise. I am only a small bed and breakfast operation. The students go in to service rooms and things like that, although I have them in early and they work on the tables with me, helping me in the dining room. It is only small but it is a beginning. I sometimes think the students want to be able to see what is at the other end, what it is like to be the manager, but you are bringing them in to help clear tables and make beds. They might think it is a little bit menial.

Mr SAWFORD—Are you suggesting that employers like yourselves be brought together on a regular basis?

Mr Webb—No; what I am suggesting is that, once a student returns to the school, the student sits down with whoever is running the program and says, ‘Well, I stayed and this is what I got out of it. I learnt this.’ Or they could say, ‘I didn’t learn anything.’ The school could come back to me—or any other business—and say, ‘Look, these people are coming to you and they are learning this, but could you perhaps do something else with them?’ Then we would know we also are achieving something and that these kids are not just coming here to fill in time.

We want to know the results of the work we are doing and the effort we are putting in. I love doing it, but I do not know if I am achieving what they are hoping for unless somebody comes back to me and says, ‘That student stayed with you and enjoyed it and they learnt something.’ Or they might say, ‘They came back and said they didn’t learn anything,’ for whatever reason. We

want that feedback so it works both ways: so we know we can improve or that we can continue as we are.

Mr SAWFORD—Is there any opportunity for the employers of Devonport who are involved in vocational training work placements to get together? Does that happen, informally or formally?

Mr Webb—As at this time, no.

Ms Shegog—There was an invitation from Don College to a kind of ‘thank you’ at the end of the year, which I was unable to attend. That was the only opportunity.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Getting back to my question; thanks, Frank—that is very good. I noticed people were nodding there. How did you respond to that, Ms Jamieson?

Ms Jamieson—The way it is set up, most of the students we have give us some feedback. The way the books are written is that there is opportunity for them to respond to us. But it would be nice to get something from the college, to see what they think has happened during that time.

What concerns me—and I think there should be a little more communication about it—is that a lot of the students I have are on medication. A lot of them have difficulties or behavioural problems. There is very little information given out on those problems. I have had information about them through other sources, which has enabled me to react in the proper way, but we are told very little, because of privacy. When you have machinery and other workers there, you really need to know what these students can and cannot do and what limitations they may have due to their own problems. That information is not readily given out. I understand why, but I think in this situation it should be given out so that we can deal appropriately with situations.

These students are approaching adulthood. Maybe they have already had to opportunity to get a licence and get out on the roads. They say, ‘I’m going to just stop my medication. I’m just going to go and do it.’ You can see by their behaviour that they are probably not ready for it. How do you deal with that? We are employers; we are not counsellors. That information should be made available in a limited way so we can deal with it.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That is an interesting point. Ms Shegog?

Ms Shegog—With the little time I have to spend on this, I am grateful for the few people I do have contact with. If there were more people to describe my situation to or to state my requirements to it would be more time consuming. It is working very well with the three coordinators or organisers I communicate with. I have communications with Don College and St Brendan-Shaw College. I have had VET students from both of those colleges. Don College have been prepared to be very flexible. They will fit in with me. For instance, sometimes the Thursday afternoons that students can spend at the Imaginarium are mucked up by holidays, terms or whatever. It may not be fair or consistent, so we might identify having them for a week, as Frank has already referred to. National Science Week is for me perhaps the biggest event for the Imaginarium Science Centre, so to have a VET student for the week—in fact, I was given two—was absolutely delightful. I supported two students but they were also able to support me during that crucial week. That flexibility is very much appreciated.

I also work with the students with the assessment. At the end of each day I ask them to sign off what they have done and add in extra skills that I see they have not identified. Also, leading up to doing their assessment book, I will pencil in what I think their assessment is and discuss it with them. They have an opportunity to give feedback to me if they are uncomfortable with anything I have identified or if they are—hopefully—surprised the other way, in that they find they have done better than they thought. It is important to give them some feedback but, at the same time, it would be great to get a little extra something back by perhaps asking them what they got from the experience, whether we are on the right track and whether or not it is valued.

The colleges tend to select the students they think have the best attitude, commitment and understanding of what my facility does. I am not getting a random selection but one that is appropriate for my centre.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you.

Mr SAWFORD—What are the advantages and disadvantages you have experienced of having a block timetable as against a one day a week timetable? Do you have any views on that?

Mr Webb—As I said, in the first place you find it rather limiting by the time they get there, get changed and get organised. If they come back next week they have to go through the whole process again, because you do not have the chance to drum it into them, for want of better words. They need consistency. If you have it for one day, they come and do the job and then go away. When they come back they have forgotten things, so they have to virtually start all over again. If you can have them in a block you can have consistency. Also, you can move them on to something else. It is much better to have them in a weekly block, or whatever they decide, rather than one day a week.

Ms Jamieson—It becomes more realistic to them.

Ms Shegog—From my perspective maybe the opposite occurs. The value of having them for a block in something like National Science Week is really good but it is not the true picture of my centre. In a sense, the single first days for six or seven weeks are also very good to get a real understanding of the routine of customer delivery. One day might be full-on; the next day might not be. It is a case of: are you standing around a lot? Are you on your feet a lot of the time? It is not magical all the time. It is routine. It can be humdrum. I like to get that across as well—that it is not all magical with customers coming in and everyone feeling really good. It is a real business.

Mr SAWFORD—Are there any significant differences that come out of that? Some people have suggested that, with the daily ones, over a term or a semester they see development in the individual; they see changes happening. Other people have used Frank's example: that it is much better to give people a valid experience of a week in a business. Is there some validity to the single day thing in terms of seeing people grow?

Ms Shegog—Yes, for me there is. Also, it is not like an adrenalin rush for a whole week and it is all exciting. This is saying, 'Okay, this is it. This is what it's like turning up every week to the same job, week in, week out.' It also has that level of realism. With the weekly one it is great. It is full-on and they are under pressure. They are asked to do a lot in a very short period of time in

meeting a lot of deadlines and meeting commitments to customer delivery in that time. They both have benefits and both have different outcomes.

CHAIR—What is your view of the work readiness of the students when they first arrive at your place of work? Do you think they have being adequately briefed on what to expect in terms of attitudes and commitment?

Ms Jamieson—I think they have been. They are prepared. They come in with an attitude that they are going to do something different in that time. We spend a couple of hours going through OH&S and various things first. We use a buddy system with them so they know they are going to be supported. They are coming in with a good attitude to start with; therefore they must have had that previously.

Mr Webb—All the students that are sent to me have usually approached me prior to arrival—say, a week before—to find out what gear they have to bring, what clothes they have to wear and suchlike. I have always had a phone call at least or they have turned up to see what time they start and everything else. Of course, most of them are a little bit hesitant and shy when they first come in. We have what used to be a coolroom but is a now a linen press. I said to one young lady when she came in, ‘Just go and hang your gear up in there and put an apron on.’ The door was closed and locked and nothing happened. About five minutes later there was a little knock on the door. She was still in there because she did not know whether or not she had to come out. Poor girl! But she was right; she soon learnt.

Then again, if you have good staff—and I have lovely staff who work for me—they take these people in hand. It is important that there is a rapport between the student and yourself or other staff working with you. Your staff also realise they have an important part to play: that they have to help these people by showing them what is going on, guiding them and looking after them. They also have to get a good rapport going by talking to them, having jokes with them and making them feel comfortable in the workplace. I am lucky enough to have three lovely ladies who work for me who do that. They take these students under their wing and look after them very well. We find at the end of the time that there is a great rapport between them.

The other thing I have always done with the students is that if I believe they are good people—and I have been lucky with every one—I say, ‘If you want a reference with regard to this, please come back and see me.’ I have had quite a few come back to see me to ask for a reference in that manner. They also feel that, during the time they have put in working, I have been watching them and that I am prepared to support them further on down the track. That gives them a little bit of confidence. That is what it is all about: giving them confidence to get out there and have a go.

What I have at the moment is fairly limited but there are a few tricks. When they are working on the tables, if they are doing breakfasts with me, I say, ‘Just listen and you’ll hear the knives and forks on the plates. When that rattling stops, you’ll know they’re finished. Then you go in and clear the plates away.’ It is simple things like that. We find that if we talk to them they gain from it.

CHAIR—Frank, you said that you had offered a job in your previous business to one of your VET students. What is the general community perception of the quality of training that a student

gets through VET in Schools versus what they might get through TAFE or through a private provider? Do you have any views on that?

Ms Shegog—I do not like to listen to it, in a sense. As I said, I worked in social justice. When I get a student, that student comes to me unhindered with any tags, labels or anything else. I am excited about having that person coming in fresh. In the first phone conversation we have, I believe in getting across that I am not an ogre; that I am a manager but one with a sense of humour and a strong passion about customer delivery. I chat with them, but I want them to come with no expectation of me or of managers. I try to break down for them and for me any associations the title ‘manager’ has. Don have supported me very well in providing the students they think would best fit my facility, so I am looking at that person being the kind of person who is interested in the role of customer delivery or in some kind of educational facility. We support each other, so there is an expectation. I tend not to listen to that, but to look at each individual on the credentials that they come with.

Mr Webb—There is one positive I would like to mention about this which has come back to me personally. I have had several students—one in particular from Burnie—who have gone through this system. I know of three who have gone through Birchmore in the last 10 years and gone on to Drysdale and done very well. They came back to see me. It is always a great feeling to know that they had a little bit of a start with me and got a bit of an idea. Obviously the college sent them down because they had a bit of a leaning towards the accommodation industry, the service industry—the tourism area.

When they come back and you know they have succeeded in that area, it is very rewarding to think that you had the tiniest little bit to do with it. It also points to the success of the college, in that the college has seen that the student has an aptitude for a particular area and has directed them there. The college has seen that the student has an interest in the service industry or the tourism industry and has not sent them out to a car detailing business or to a tractor factory; it has directed them to an area for which it thinks they have the aptitude. I have seen that success and it is very encouraging for the whole system.

CHAIR—You have already made some suggestions. Do you have any final suggestions on where you think things could be improved?

Ms Shegog—I go back to the point that we would love to get feedback. That is crucial to us. I get communications saying, ‘We’ve enjoyed sending the students to you,’ but I would like constructive criticism saying how we can be better suited to them and telling us how the students feel about the placements.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That has been very helpful. Thank you also for the chance that you are giving to these young people.

Committee adjourned at 11.52 a.m.