



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Reference: Vocational education in schools**

TUESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2003

BURNIE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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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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**Subcommittee met at 2.30 p.m.**

**BROOKS, Ms Fiona, Student, Hellyer College**

**BROOMHALL, Ms Jill, Former Student, Hellyer College**

**COYNE, Mr Sheldon, Student, Hellyer College**

**DARE, Ms Sheree, Student, Hellyer College**

**FLINT, Mr Daniel, Student, Hellyer College**

**FRANKLIN, Ms Patina, Student, Hellyer College**

**HASLER, Mr Grant, Student, Hellyer College**

**MANSFIELD, Ms Cassandra, Student, Hellyer College**

**ROUGHLEY, Mr Aaron, Former Student, Hellyer College**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education and training in schools. I thank the principal of Hellyer College, Mr Michael Brakey, for his hospitality. Thank you also to those students who showed us around today and for the great lunch in your Greenhouse restaurant. As an introduction, could each student or former student tell us what VET courses you are doing, what your involvement in VET is and perhaps what you hope to achieve out of that. The idea of this inquiry, as you have probably been advised, is to give us an idea of how VET in Schools is working and what recommendations we can make to the government to improve it. Be frank with us and tell us what is bad as well as what is good. We want to get an accurate idea of where it is all going.

**Ms Dare**—I do hospitality. I am doing kitchen operations and hopefully at the end of the year I will have a certificate and be able to get a job.

**Ms Franklin**—I am doing a certificate Internet in retail operations. I go out on work placement every Thursday. Hopefully I can get my certificate Internet and then go on to a job at the end of the year.

**Mr Roughley**—I was a previous VET student at Hellyer College. It allowed me to get my current job as a network support officer at Hellyer College. The VET IT course basically prepared me for everything I needed to know to get my current job.

**Ms Broomhall**—I am a very mature age student, or I was. Three years ago I went back to school here at Hellyer, doing VET in kitchen operations because I worked as a kitchen hand for seven years at the Burnie Civic Centre—I still do—and my daughter was involved with Maxine Fennell, the VET teacher here. Maxine encouraged me, at the end of doing the certificate, to take the big leap to go up to Drysdale, which I did. I completed my chef's training up there and they in turn found that I was very good at helping other students. They suggested I do workplace training and assessing, which I did back here in Burnie. I loved all of that. Having said that, I

note that the qualifications I gained over the three-year period turned out to be a hindrance to me and not a help.

**CHAIR**—We would like you to expand on that, but we will come back to it.

**Ms Mansfield**—I am doing a certificate Internet in community services. I am hoping to get my certificate Internet at the end of the year and then go to TAFE to get my diploma.

**Ms Brooks**—I am doing a certificate Internet in tourism. I chose to do the course because I want to go to Drysdale next year and do the hotel management course. I need a VET course in either hospitality or tourism to help me go to Drysdale. We just do four work placements a year and they have really helped me gain a lot of experience and confidence.

**Mr Hasler**—I am doing the certificate I in workplace skills. I go out into the workplace and the course gives me the skills I need there.

**CHAIR**—What year are you in, Grant?

**Mr Hasler**—I'm in year 11.

**Mr Flint**—I am doing the certificate Internet in the music industry, which is basically setting up for bands when they come down to Tasmania.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. We might start with some questions. Jill, we will return to the point you made. You said the course you did was a hindrance rather than a help. Could you elaborate on that for us?

**Ms Broomhall**—When I started here I was very lucky because of the teacher I had, Maxine Fennell. My previous life skills were based on work in a kitchen. She accommodated some of the problems I had, because I have a family. She encouraged me to go on to Drysdale. They were terrific to me up there. My certificate IV workplace training and assessing teacher here, Mary Duniam, was very encouraging as well. I have nothing but praise for the teachers I had in the three jumps I made. The problem is that I came out with all these qualifications and nobody wanted to employ me. I applied for a job within government and I was told, 'You can cook in a kitchen and you can do this at a school.' They did not want to know; they did not want to recognise my skills. They saw all my qualifications as a threat. It was not just once; this happened several times.

**Mr SAWFORD**—How did you become involved with VET? What sort of process did you go through? Was it from parents or your peer group? How did you get to learn about the VET course? What made you decide to do the VET course you are doing now?

**Ms Dare**—I did study catering but after year 10 I just wanted to work in the hospitality industry.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You knew that yourself.



**Ms Dare**—I knew that. I just did the course and counselling and they suggested it. I am glad I did it.

**Ms Franklin**—Last year I did not do a great deal of study. I just thought: I need to do something for me, not for everyone else. So I went through the course book and found something that I liked. I thought I could be good at it. I had thought beforehand that I would like to go into the retail industry but it had not occurred to me last year, so I thought I may as well jump to certificate Internet and see if I could do that. Apparently I am going really well, so I am quite pleased about that. Apart from that, it is just what I chose to do.

**CHAIR**—Where do you think that will end up in the retail industry?

**Ms Franklin**—I am hoping to go to TAFE next year and do my certificate III in management and then go on to do my diploma.

**Mr Roughley**—I got into it because I did a basic computing course in grade 11 and found that computers seemed to be my thing. That course was not enough, so I decided to do certificate Internet in information technology in grade 12, which looked tempting because it combined a number of things. It had occupational health and safety and work placement plus in-class study. That seemed good to me. The support side of IT seemed to be the way I wanted to go and the work placements confirmed that.

**Ms Broomhall**—My daughter was doing front of house VET in year 11 and she encouraged me to come to school here to start the process of getting some formal qualifications. Both of my children are big on getting the pieces of paper. I loved it while I was studying.

**Ms Mansfield**—I heard about it through some teachers from Hellyer College. They came to our school and talked to us. I knew I wanted to work with children, so they recommended I could do a certificate Internet course in community services. I really like it.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I will come back to the point you made in just a moment.

**Ms Broomhall**—I always knew I wanted to be in the tourism industry. I had the choice of doing the tourism course, which led up to the VET tourism, or I could do the VET tourism. I wanted to do the VET tourism more because I would have more hands-on experience. I had four weeks of work experience, and that was why I chose to do that.

**Mr Hasler**—I chose to do mine because I thought it would give me good experience for the skills needed if I went out into the workplace.

**Mr Flint**—I chose mine because I have always had an interest in the music performance side of things. I saw it in the handbook as well.

**Mr Coyne**—The reason I chose mine was that I wanted to get some TAFE experience. I originally did not want to come to Hellyer; I wanted to do a course at TAFE. Then I found out that I could do both and have a TAFE course while I am at Hellyer.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Cassie said she was introduced to her VET course by people from Hellyer going to her school at year 10 level. Did any of you have a similar experience? What happened at year 10 for you, Sheree?

**Ms Dare**—The course counsellors came and discussed it when we were about to leave for year 11.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Just once?

**Ms Dare**—Yes. It was only the once, the last time they came. That is when I heard about it.

**Ms Franklin**—They came twice to Parklands. The first time was to tell us about the courses we could do here and the second time they came back to confirm what we wanted to do.

**Mr Roughley**—It is a fair while back now, since grade 10, but I am pretty sure they only came to see us once. The course counselling I received did not really tell me about the VET courses or what they offered.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So you worked it out for yourself.

**Mr Roughley**—Yes, eventually. To be honest, my grade 11 year was really a waste of time. If I had had better course counselling I could have done the VET IT course in grade 11 and then gone on to other things in grade 12.

**Ms Broomhall**—I got into the loop through my daughter, who introduced me to Maxine and she was terrific.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It was from personal contact.

**Ms Broomhall**—Yes.

**Ms Brooks**—I was the same as Cassie. They came to our school twice: the first time to let us know about all the different courses and then we had to write what courses we wanted to do; then they came and explained to us more about those courses and confirmed that we could do them.

**Mr Hasler**—The same as Patina; they came twice.

**Mr Flint**—Yes, basically the same.

**Mr Coyne**—Yes, same as Grant and Patina.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Do you have a taster day here at Hellyer? Do you come in and spend a day or two in the college going through tasters of subjects—a type of orientation day? How many of you did VET orientation here?

**Ms Mansfield**—I did.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—The others did not?

**Ms Mansfield**—Yes, some of the others did.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—I would like to move on and ask about the relationship between you entering the workplace and what happens in the workplace and then back here at college. Anyone can reply. Is your college work, what you are doing in-house here, relevant to the workplace you are going to? Are you able to relate your experience in the workplace to the people supervising you here, your teachers? Do you feel that communication is open and accessible and useful to you?

**Mr Roughley**—I found it very useful. We started off the year learning some basics before they sent us out on work placement. Most of what we learnt was useful. We did learn a lot of things in the workplace. We brought that back with us to the college, where the teachers extended it with us. When we were doing something in the workplace where we needed help and more time than the workplace supervisors could provide, the teachers would go through it with us.

**Mr Flint**—In the course I am doing, we had about a month of in-school training before we were allowed to go out to the work placement, into that sort of environment. It was basically training on how to set up the PARLIAMENT systems and that sort of thing, so that when we were out on work placement we had some idea. We did all our first aid training and the first aid certificate in the school as well. That was pretty helpful.

**Ms Franklin**—In my course what we do in class is what we are assessed on in the workplace, so it is vice versa. What we do in class we do as a practical in the workplace, so it does not get confused. We learn as we go along. The communication between the workplace and school is very good. If we have a problem at work but we cannot talk to the work person about it, we can talk to Alana and she will help us out.

**CHAIR**—Can you give any examples of any problems you have had?

**Ms Franklin**—Boredom. At some department stores the day does drag on. At my last work placement, before the one I am at now, I was stuck in a storeroom for six weeks every Thursday. It bored me stupid. What I did at that workplace was basically walked straight in, went to work with a cash register all day and I felt it was not challenging enough for me just to be standing there unpacking clothes all day. Alana went to my supervisor and said, ‘Can you give Patina something else to do?’ But by the time that happened I had already gone.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Six weeks of it!

**Ms Franklin**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Are there any other examples of where you have had to call Alana to come in and fix something that was not working properly?

**Ms Franklin**—No.

**Ms Dare**—What was the question again, sorry?

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—How did you manage in terms of the training you had here and its relevance to what was happening in the workplace and, if you had any communication issues, what were they like?

**Ms Dare**—In class, the theory we had to do was cuts and kitchen safety. That was just excellent. We put that in place in our work placement and it helped us. It gave us an idea of what it was like.

**CHAIR**—How aware do you think your employers are of what you are learning at school and what vocational education is supposed to be doing? Are they really closely looking at your diary for the competencies you need to be developing and the course content? Do you think they just view it as, ‘Yes, we’ll take this person and they can help us out on the work site for one day a week or for the week long’? Do you think they are really focused on what you need to learn?

**Ms Mansfield**—At my work placement they were. My supervisor would go over things with me and go through my workplace diary as well.

**CHAIR**—Good.

**Ms Mansfield**—It was really good.

**CHAIR**—Any others?

**Ms Brooks**—At my work placement I do not have set days at a time, I go for week-long blocks. I have been down to Strahan and Cradle Mountain and places like that where I do not have contact with the school. I have to phone them if I need contact. The very first work placement I went to, they did not know what qualifications I had or anything, so they just put me in and taught me a lot of things that I could take to the next work placement. I just had to say that I had done it before and they let me do whatever.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—This is a practical example of communications. Do you think if they had known what you were doing—perhaps they did not have enough time to even find anything out—it would have been easier?

**Ms Brooks**—Not necessarily, because every work placement is different. Each program for booking people into a hotel is different, so I would have to learn everything from the start again.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—They each have a different system.

**Ms Brooks**—Yes. Things like greeting customers are all the same. You have to be friendly. It is all the same with those, so they knew I could do things like that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—How many of you have part-time jobs?

**Mr Flint**—I do.

**Mr Roughley**—I have a full-time job.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Jill and Aaron are exceptions.

**Ms Broomhall**—You were talking about the word ‘placement’. When I was placed, I had to do exactly the same as all the other students, the problem being that I already knew most of the things that we were going to be assessed on. I was actually assessed on the things that were in the workbook. I work now. My son has bought a business that I work in. I am hoping that we will take a VET student from here next semester or whenever. I hope that I will be able to train and assess that student correctly. The person I was talking to—who was assessing me when I was out on work placement from here and while I was at Drysdale, where I had to go out on work placement as well—was saying that the students they had from here previously had been well trained. They were probably not as well trained as me but I am older and had been in the industry. In hindsight, now that I am an assessor, I can see they were doing it correctly.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Who is involved in organised sport or organised arts and crafts or drama or whatever? One person. Is that a problem in terms of what you are doing? Does it restrict your life outside school?

**Ms Franklin**—No, not really.

**Mr SAWFORD**—How many intend to go to university? Two of you. What do you hope to do, Fiona?

**Ms Brooks**—The Drysdale course that I want to do next year in hotel management goes for two years and then one year at university.

**Ms Mansfield**—I would not mind doing counselling but maybe later on though; not right now.

**CHAIR**—Is there a problem for you in that your VET course does not qualify you for university? Or is that not a problem because you plan to do university later on?

**Ms Brooks**—The VET course would not qualify me for university because you need the pre-tertiaries.

**CHAIR**—Is that a problem?

**Ms Brooks**—Yes, because the VET course takes up two lines and you need five pre-tertiaries to get into university. If you take up two lines, that means your other three have to be pre-tertiaries, so you are pretty full up.

**Ms Mansfield**—It is too much for me.

**CHAIR**—In some states the VET course does qualify as a pre-tertiary. Different states have different systems. Just thinking about the intentions of this inquiry, are there areas of VET in Schools where we can do better? If you had to recommend something to the government that needs to improve, what would you be recommending?

**Ms Brooks**—Probably the pre-tertiary points.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Accreditation of VET.

**Ms Brooks**—Yes.

**Ms Mansfield**—Yes.

**Ms Broomhall**—There needs to be a greater communication between the VET here at Hellyer or in matric colleges and the next level up, which is Drysdale. They need to come together, once a year or whenever. I am talking hospitality here; I do not know about other VET. The people teaching VET here have to know that what they are teaching their VET students is going to give them help and is what Drysdale wants. That might already happen.

**CHAIR**—That is helpful.

**Ms Broomhall**—There needs to be coordination and understanding so, instead of everybody looking after their own position on the totem pole, the teachers here need to know that what they are teaching the students will be relevant if the students go on to Drysdale—and a lot of them do; Drysdale is terrific, equal to Hellyer. The teachers need to get together on some level and know they are working for the student and the common cause. I am not saying there is a problem; it is just something that I feel as an older person—it might not apply to younger people. I feel the teachers need to get together occasionally and see if they are all doing the right thing.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, Jill, that is helpful. Are there other suggestions?

**Mr SAWFORD**—You all came from year 10 in different schools to year 11 here. What is it like? Is there a bit of tension or a bit of intimidation because you came in from different schools, or is there previous contact?

**Mr Flint**—I do not think there is, really. It is a lot more relaxed.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Why do you think that is?

**Ms Mansfield**—People treat you like you are older.

**Mr Flint**—Yes, exactly.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Is that students or teachers?

**Mr Flint**—Everyone in general.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You have almost a semi-adult learning environment. Is that what you are saying?

**Ms Brooks**—Yes. You have more responsibilities and you have responsibility for yourself.

**Ms Mansfield**—You have to do more things for yourself.

**Ms Dare**—The people who are in your classes want to be there to do the same things and they cannot stop you from learning. In grade 10 there were people that did not want to be in English and they would stop you from learning.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Is there any tension between the VET students and the pre-tertiary people?

**Mr Flint**—Not really, no.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Not really, Daniel? Come on, tell us the truth!

**Mr Flint**—No, there isn't.

**CHAIR**—There is no tension, but is there any sense of status difference? Do the pre-tertiaries think that they are at a higher level than the VET students?

**Mr Flint**—Sometimes it seems a little bit unfair because it feels like in our VET course we are doing an equal amount of work as the other students but we are not getting the qualifications for university.

**Ms Mansfield**—They will be going to university but we are not.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Quite a number of people would agree with that. Your effort in the VET subjects is often higher than what it is in the pre-tertiary subjects. That is a common feeling across Australia.

**Ms Broomhall**—But universities do not want to know. I started university and threw it in because they do not recognise people's life skills or anything else. I went in as a mature age student and threw the towel in because after the treatment I had at Hellyer, Drysdale and TAFE—which was absolutely terrific—to go to university was just soul destroying.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—This is a little bit off the track. You were talking about your positive views about coming into a college. How many would have preferred to have been able to do grades 10, 11 and 12 at their high school?

**Mr Flint**—Not really. It is good because you can mix in with a lot of different people from different backgrounds.

**Ms Mansfield**—It is a good change.

**CHAIR**—Are there any final recommendations or words of wisdom? Thank you very much for your time, and good luck with the rest of your studies and your careers.

[3.05 p.m.]

**BEDDOWS, Mr Jeff, VET IT Coordinator, Hellyer College**

**BRAKEY, Mr Michael, Principal, Hellyer College**

**EATON, Mr James, Advanced Skills Teacher 3, Hellyer College**

**HOYT, Mr Stewart, Coordinator, Certificate I Engineering, Hellyer College**

**LYNCH, Mr Christopher, VET Coordinator, Music Industry, Hellyer College**

**McDIVITT, Mrs Cheryl, VET in Schools Development Officer, Advanced Skills Teacher 3, Hellyer College**

**RICHARDSON, Mr Phillip, Advanced Skills Teacher 3, VET, Hellyer College**

**RIST, Mr Ashley Dale, Teacher, Automotive Studies, Hellyer College**

**ROLLINS, Mr Graeme, Teacher, Hellyer College**

**CHAIR**—Again, thank you for your hospitality in hosting this hearing today. We do prefer that your comments be made on the public record, but if for any reason you want to make some comments not on the public record just let us know and we can probably arrange that. I invite you to make some introductory comments and then we will proceed to questions.

**Mr Brakey**—I thought I would outline my involvement with VET and then make four or five points I think will be relevant for the committee. I started working in VET about eight or nine years ago, when I served on one of the initial committees at Don College. Since coming here I have nursed the college through both QETO and RTO processes. For the past four years I have been the representative of the secondary college principals in the VET area. I have statewide responsibility for the college sector in VET. That has involved, in the last two years, the development of the new post-compulsory policy of Tasmania.

There are four things I would like to comment on. Firstly, I will comment in relation to some research published this year from Richard Teese, looking at the penetration of VET nationally into the white-collar market both in schools and outside schools. There is no doubt that VET is the most significant curriculum alternative Australia has seen in the last 30 years and probably the only significant curriculum development we have seen even post Second World War, yet the take-up of VET by students shows a pretty extraordinary leaning to one side. Students from the higher socioeconomic areas and students who get into the white-collar market, particularly through university, almost to a person prefer not to do VET in their final years of study.

We would have to ask: is that an issue? If we decide it is not an issue then it is not a problem. But if we think that VET is a curriculum experience that most students should have the benefit of, obviously sooner or later we are going to have to address the fact that students who are



basically university bound, or bound to the upper end of tertiary education, are choosing not to do VET in any of its forms. That is allied to and associated with the fact that private schools, independent schools, have largely ignored VET offerings as well. There is a perception around the country—probably even amongst the teaching profession and in the community—that VET is a poor cousin to the training for university or the upper ends of tertiary education. If we are going to address that issue and try to get a more equitable distribution of enrolment in VET, simply fiddling around with TE scores and assuming that putting a TE score on VET will attract that tertiary market of students to VET is pretty unidimensional. It will need a multidimensional approach about changing attitudes towards VET and changing the assumptions the community makes about the VET experience.

The second thing is the red tape which surrounds the VET sector. There is no doubt that the VET area itself is a bureaucratic juggernaut, even in its conception and in terms of the training packages, the size of those packages and the requirements on staff to jump through red tape hoops. There would hardly be a coordinator in the state who would not say it is the worst part of VET. It means that teachers, who are obviously trained with a pedagogical focus, find that quite frustrating. If we look through the quality system, the ability for teachers to concentrate on the competencies which are associated with improving teaching and learning are militated against through the red tape with which they have to deal. Some of that has come about because of Australia's—and the rest of the Western world's—concentration on a liability crisis and the need to ensure that every I is dotted and every t is crossed. However, if I could take a group like ECEF, who have handled many tens of millions of dollars—hundreds of millions, in fact, over the years that they operated as ASTF—and give the committee a real-world example: we get about \$25,000 from ECEF and have received that amount in the time I have been here over the five years. We would receive nearly 2½ times that amount from ANTA.

Of the \$20,000 that we receive from ECEF, we would expend close to one-third in meeting the requirements placed on us for receiving those funds. Our acquittal of the ANTA funding is done on a statewide basis and is easily managed by the staff we employ here. The sort of red tape that ECEF has surrounded itself with and the accountability it places on its funding mean that I have said to it on a couple of occasions: 'Look, really, you can keep your \$20,000. We can do without this.' Yet ECEF has the responsibility for developing and generating the community partnerships with employers and industry which are so crucial to the development of VET. It is probably time that we re-thought VET and moved away from the red tape and liability issues and more into the curriculum side. I wonder, too, whether a lot of that has come about because there is almost no representation on the pedagogical side on the writing of training packages. The red tape focus is actually generated by the industry representation on the training packages and the need for them to have some pedagogical assistance in the development of those packages.

The third thing is the penetration of school based New Apprenticeships into this sector. Tasmania probably is the worst performing state in relation to school based New Apprenticeships. I recognise we have to take that with a grain of salt because some of the SBNAs that exist in other states are clearly not the sort of school based New Apprenticeships model that Tasmania would prefer. But for many students school based New Apprenticeships should be a good option. Many of them are already working in a lot of the industries which we would hope support the SBNAs. It would mean that they get a training award, they get recognition for the time that they are in fact working in the couple of years they are at college

and yet they still get the broad and general education that we would expect any college student to get.

It was a salutary experience, really, when we negotiated with a national hospitality group in the state to start school based New Apprenticeships. Strangely, the unions came on side and the company was on side, and the Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training were in place. When we went to the students, they stayed away from the New Apprenticeships in droves. No-one had thought to ask the young people who were working in that industry whether the school based New Apprenticeships would in fact suit them. It fell over because the students' perceptions of what the school based New Apprenticeships would mean to them was not in accord with what unions and employers thought. In the follow-up, students said that in fact they were not interested in working in the industry and therefore were not interested in the qualifications. By and large they were students who were going on to TAFE diplomas or university studies and would only work in the industry while it was providing them with a dollar.

I use that example as perhaps a thought that we need to be negotiating carefully with young people about school based New Apprenticeships because the assumptions that we will make about what is good and what might suit them are not necessarily going to be the assumptions those young people will make. Often the assumptions we make come from experiences that we have had, where we have had training, had one or two jobs and stayed in those jobs for many decades. That is not the experience in work and training that young people today will have.

The last thing I will mention in relation to VET is the quality of trainee supervision. The completion rates for trainees are a worry right around the country. As well as running VET in Schools subjects here, we have a number of trainees who work with us but are in fact on the books of other private registered training organisations. The quality of service we receive from private registered training organisations is very poor indeed. In fact, when I compare them against the quality system that exists in this college, it bears no resemblance—to the point where we have things like contracts not being returned, training not being delivered and trainees not being supervised in the workplace in the way the contracts explain that they should be. As the committee would know, a major report was released some four years ago. It indicated that the levels and rates of completion in both New Apprenticeships and traineeships were extremely poor. There are some ideas before us as to why that might be so, but the sector as a whole needs to improve the way in which we are treating trainees, the way in which we are supervising their training and the way in which we are allowing them to complete their training.

Nevertheless, despite those being relatively negative comments and ones that the committee will no doubt have heard before, VET is the single most important curriculum change that these colleges have seen in the state and probably across the country. Students who work in the competency based assessments of VET generally are favoured by them and in fact favour them over other forms of assessment. The work placements our students go through—some 70,000 days in the whole college sector across the state—are authentic learning opportunities that students would not have had 10 years ago. They are the three focuses which are so important for the success of VET. What needs examination is the fact that the provision in VET has not blurred the boundaries between the educational haves and have-nots. In many ways it has actually firmed those boundaries. The organisational bureaucracy of VET needs a bit of work so that it can focus, particularly for colleges, more on the pedagogical side.

In my final statement I will outline the future as I see it. What colleges in Tasmania will do is curriculum package in a way that we have not been able to do before, which will use VET in a different way. In both the health area and in information technology here, we are planning experiences for students which will enable them to make a decision at the end of grade 10 as to the area of work that they would like to get into. If they prefer an area like IT, then we will package the curriculum for those students. Perhaps 40 per cent of their time will be spent in gaining a qualification in the VET area: for example, in Cisco networking; qualifications in the TCE, the Tasmanian Certificate of Education, which would include pre-tertiary subjects; then off-the-shelf national and international courses in IT.

A student leaving us at the end of grade 12 will have had the opportunity to have 60 per cent of their time in a broader general education and perhaps 40 per cent of it focused in an area of learning of their choice. I can see the same possibilities in health and in the health related industries, where we take the TCE courses, the VET health experience and local community based care, and create a package for students, a curriculum that will in fact stand them in really good stead for when they complete grade 12 and want to enter the industry. That is predicated, of course, on students having made the decision on which area they want to be working in before they arrive at our doors. Thanks very much.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Michael. On this issue of white-collar penetration, I was interested that you seem to indicate that fiddling around with TER scores is not really an issue. Do you not think it is a factor that students aspiring to university cannot in this state get to university if they take a VET component at school?

**Mr Brakey**—I do not think that it is the case. I do not think students are staying away from VET because there is no TE score attached to it. Having a TE score attached to it is not going to attract that group of students.

**CHAIR**—You don't think there is any impediment? You don't think there are students wanting to go to university who would like to do a VET course but say, 'No, we can't, because that way it excludes us from university'?

**Mr Brakey**—No. My experience is that that is a spin the adults in the VET community are putting on it. It is not one that, if we asked the students about it, which to my knowledge I do not think we have—

**CHAIR**—There are two here this afternoon who may comment in that regard. How then would you address the issue of perception?

**Mr Brakey**—Attaching a TE score might change some perceptions of it. We have to find different ways of delivering the VET to young people, particularly in Tasmania. At the moment, to enter VET they will need to do both a certificate and a work placement, so 40 per cent of their time will be spent in VET, allowing them only 60 per cent of their time to pick up the TE scores they are currently looking for, or the subjects they want to do to enter into it. We need to find a way where they can spend less time in their VET experience and still be able to get the subjects they need in year 11 and year 12 for university entry.

The certificate course is probably not the experience that will benefit the students the most. I think it is really the work placement experience that benefits the student the most. The certificate experience is somewhat secondary. Mr Chairman, in answer to your question, partly it is about the way in which we model the curriculum to students, to give them greater flexibility than we currently have—that is, particularly in this state.

**CHAIR**—Do you think we can do that without reducing or undermining the theoretical component of the VET courses? Obviously there has to be a substantial workplace experience component.

**Mr Brakey**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—If we are going to introduce more flexibility and take some time away from the theoretical certificate component, what will that do to the acceptance by industry, by TAFE and by other providers of the VET in Schools qualifications?

**Mr Brakey**—I think we could look for the work placement experience outside the normal school day and school year. I think many students might take on a VET experience if we can block their work placement experiences into holiday periods or non-pressured times during the school year. That is not the case now. In fact, we are actively discouraged from placing students during holidays, which is an impediment to a lot of students picking up VET.

**CHAIR**—Discouraged by whom?

**Mr Brakey**—By both unions and regulations.

**Mr Rollins**—I totally agree. On the tourism side, for my students I have up to four placements a week. That could be at Stanley, up in the north-west; it could be down to Strahan on the west coast; it could be at Cradle Mountain; in the past it has been to Launceston; or it could be down on the east coast, or wherever. It depends on relationships with other colleges. That really does impinge on my group. I have three students doing pre-tertiary subjects. Two are doing accounting with me, and it is a real battle for them to pick up. That might be because of the nature of the students involved, but it really does put some pressure on them. A lot of them are willing to do it in the holidays, or would be, and I think the employers would be. When is the peak time for tourism in Tasmania? It is not in the middle of winter. They could be doing it in the holidays and so on, so there does need to be flexibility.

**CHAIR**—That would vary from course to course, though.

**Mr Rollins**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Obviously in hospitality that works, but in other courses there might be difficulty getting adequate work placements. If you try to compress them into holiday periods, you would exacerbate the problem, would you not?

**Mr Brakey**—No, not necessarily. If we take automotive as an example, the industry tends to want our students in blocks. Whether or not they did those blocks during the holidays or during

term time would make no difference to the number of workplaces we were seeking; we would just be seeking them at a different time of the year.

**Mr Hoyt**—I would like to back that up. In engineering they will only accept block placements, which requires a student to be withdrawn from all courses here for two weeks in a row in order to attend those work placements. We try to do that at the best times we can—for instance, during exam periods—but right away you are impinging upon pre-tertiary students. Three pre-tertiary students started this year. One pulled out because of the commitments to pre-tertiary. Another student chose to take an apprenticeship because it was going to be a long haul to do both; he was successful in getting an apprenticeship and he pulled out halfway through the year. The other student is basically struggling. We try to put them in at the best times, where they are not going to lose too much school time, but we are not allowed to put them in during school holidays.

**CHAIR**—Not allowed by education authorities, by unions?

**Mr Hoyt**—Basically by the system.

**CHAIR**—What system?

**Mr Hoyt**—It is actively discouraged.

**Mr Richardson**—It is possible, but it requires special individual permission to be able to put them out in holiday periods.

**CHAIR**—This seems to be a fairly critical issue.

**Mrs McDivitt**—It is the Workplace Learning Support Unit which is run by OPCET. It specifically says in the guidelines for work experience and vocational placements that it is inappropriate for students to be in the workplace in a vacation time. In that instance special permission, as Phil said, has to be gained. We have to email. It is not a problem for individual placements, but it has not been tested for bulk placements.

**CHAIR**—Do you think it would discourage some students if they thought, ‘Gee, I’m going to have to give up my holidays to do my work placement’? Is that likely to be an issue?

**Mrs McDivitt**—It probably would not be an issue for the students but it certainly is for the staff. Perhaps you should ask them whether they wish to pursue that in the holidays.

**CHAIR**—I am getting the impression the answer is that they do wish to. Do any of you have reservations about that approach?

**Mr Rollins**—Once upon a time I would have had, but I quite enjoy getting out and around, so it does not matter in that instance. But to get a reasonable and realistic number of work placements during the holidays—and I am not saying you should put them all out during the holidays—would give us much more flexibility and give me a bit of flexibility, too.

**CHAIR**—What about staff who want to go away on holidays? Don't you need to have at least the capacity for staff contact with students, if they need it?

**Mr Brakey**—I think what we would do is find a different way of managing our work placements. At the moment, during term time each coordinator manages their own work placements and their own workplace students. Obviously if we had increasing numbers of students working during the holidays then we would look at a different methodology for handling staffing, perhaps employing one person over the entire holiday to manage all our holiday work placements. That would be part of a load. It might not necessarily be a teacher who is doing that work. We have the employing flexibility to manage that.

**CHAIR**—I will return to a question we had before. You do not think, then, that this would be a problem for employers? If all the colleges were trying to compact their work placements into holiday periods, would employers feel they were overloaded during that time?

**Mr Richardson**—I do not think we would be looking at trying to do all the placements in the holiday periods.

**CHAIR**—Would you do a large amount of them?

**Mr Richardson**—I think we would be looking at much more flexibility than we have at present, if the need occurs, to be able to use those holidays periods—certainly in places such as Strahan and Cradle Mountain.

**Mr Brakey**—We got to this point in the conversation based on the question of pre-tertiary students.

**CHAIR**—That is right, yes.

**Mr Brakey**—What we are saying is that, if we had the flexibility to do that, we could in fact cater for those students in a way that did not impinge on their other study. I think that is the critical part of it.

**CHAIR**—Yes, that is very worth while. Thank you.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—The comments you made about the relationship between the white-collar students and the TE scores were very interesting. We seem to be getting mixed messages on that. It is interesting to test it in terms of asking students rather than asking trainers and parents, or educators and university people. For me it is hanging in the air now and it is something we need to look at a little more. Just to explore a few things, you talked about a bureaucratic juggernaut—

**Mr Brakey**—Just to finish that off, what I am saying is that there has been an assumption that VET has not been able to penetrate the broad student market because of TE scores. I am saying that that is a pretty simplistic assumption about what is a very complex issue. The issue of student curriculum choice is immensely complex and is tied largely to the socioeconomic make-up of students and their communities, and perceptions about what is worth while and what is not in terms of education.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Yes, it is interesting. One of the students at Don today came out with an interesting comment. We were asking about whether the university wags the tail of the dog et cetera. His comment was, ‘I would hate to see the university get hold of this stuff because the practical side of VET would diminish and it would be more into theory.’ You made a comment about the bureaucratic juggernaut, which is a view shared by many people wherever we go. Are you saying that there is discrimination in terms of bureaucratic assessment between private RTOs and schools—in other words, between the demands on you and the quality assurance required of you compared to private training organisations?

**Mr Brakey**—What I am saying is that the accountability we hold as an RTO towards our students is at a far higher level than any of the private RTOs that I have worked with. If we applied the same training assurances to our students as they do—as my experience has showed me they do—then as the CEO of this organisation I would be horrified.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—What you are saying has very interesting industry implications, particularly as you place so much emphasis on quality assurance. I would have thought a lot of this bureaucracy existed—apart from the sheer bandwagon of it—because industry is terrified that schools were not able to provide quality assurance and meet the standards and so forth. Yet what you are telling me is that a lot of private RTOs do not—or cannot—and yet you are discriminated against because of the sheer demands on you. I do not know whether I am reading that correctly.

**Mr Brakey**—That is absolutely what I am saying. We have sat here as an RTO for a number of years now and have not changed. It is not unusual for us to start trainees with an RTO and have them change supervisors half-a-dozen times during the course of the 12 months they are training.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Would anyone else like to comment on that?

**Mr Beddows**—The IT trainee we have at the moment had six changes of supervisor in the first six months of this year from their private training provider. We only saw two of them.

**Mr Brakey**—I do not know whether you can call it a national scandal, but certainly it is well known around the country that there were thousands of private providers and now if you look in this state I think there are only two operating. They have subsumed every other small provider because they are in it for a quid, and a quid is not easy to make in this sector. If you are in it for a quid then your eye on quality is not always what it should be. Whether or not having larger private training organisations will help, I do not know. It probably does give them, just through the margins of size, an opportunity to address some of these issues. The coming and going of private registered training organisations is an issue for every trainee who is signed up with them.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Thank you for that. I would like to explore another area. The take-up rate for VET throughout Australia is quite phenomenal, particularly in states where it is embedded in the curriculum. Tasmania has an emphasis certainly in terms of workplace training and assessment. Is there a measurable relationship between retention rates—for instance, here at Hellyer—and the introduction and ramping up of VET? In other words, we are looking at where there is a demand for this by students. Is it affecting your retention rates? I do not mean just year

12; I mean years 11 to 12. I am really looking at the role of VET in terms of retention. I know that is not your primary aim, but do you see a correlation there?

**Mr Brakey**—The figures we collect are pretty telling. Students who take up VET are far more likely to leave college during the course of year 11 and year 12 and they more often than not enter traineeships and apprenticeships. The actual take-up of jobs by students during years 11 and 12 who are doing VET is very high indeed. The college loses between 100 and 120 students of its 800 to 900 intake during the course of each year. The vast majority of them, close to 80 per cent, go into full-time work. Many of those, of course, are coming out of VET courses.

I think it does affect retention rates, if you are looking at retention as coming into year 11 and surviving until the end of year 12, but, in terms of the new post-compulsory policy, we have been at pains to broaden our understanding of retention. It is important for the committee to understand that retention of years 11 and 12 and then going on to something else is not what we are talking about. Certainly that is a component of it, and another component should be students who are getting on a training or apprenticeship pathway during the course of year 11 and 12. I think those students are still being retained in education and training. Probably students who move on to other training providers—for example, TAFE, who can give them up to a certificate III experience—also ought to be counted in the figures. What VET has done has been to broaden our understanding of what we mean by ‘retention’.

Five or six years ago we would have said, ‘Retaining kids to the end of year 12 is our primary focus.’ That is shifting in this state and shifting considerably. Our focus is on retaining students in education and training, wherever or whatever that might be, and whatever part we might play in that. We have a number of students this year who are on the books who are in full-time work but still continuing study in TCE courses here at Hellyer. We allow them the flexibility of that year enrolment. That sort of flexibility, in terms of retention, is what is on offer now.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Has there been any study following through with the students who indeed have been retained but are going into different areas of education and training? Has anyone followed them through at all for perhaps four or five years to see what happens to them? As you say, you can take up traineeships and apprenticeships but you can go straight out of them, too.

**Mr Brakey**—Certainly we follow up all VET students until the middle of the year after they leave us, but not beyond that. However, there is a longitudinal study in the state, the first year of which is the 2001 grade 10 cohort. Every one of those students was tracked—that is, for the entire state. That will be longitudinally researched for I think the next seven years. In five years time we are going to have a picture of the state, run through OPCET, showing what the longitudinal picture is for students in all subjects. That will include VET.

**Mrs McDivitt**—On the OPCET web site dealing with this longitudinal study which has commenced, it says:

The reasons for improved retention can be attributed to growth in VET in Schools programs, year 11 and 12 programs extending to rural and district high schools and the introduction of the Commonwealth Youth Allowance in 1998.

They are the three reasons given by the state.



**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—On another angle of the perception issue, is there any distinction within VET of old versus new VET courses or old versus new industries? There is obviously interest in IT, hospitality and tourism. Is the same level of interest there in the building trades and the automotive trades—those perceived perhaps as the dirtier, dustier and less appealing industries?

**Mr Rist**—On the automotive side, I want to take up a point Sid made about long-term retention. I have been in the game about seven years and the ones who get a direct apprenticeship get their training with their provider, get the skills and are out of here. I am not just talking about Tasmania; I am talking especially about the local area. For example, there is a lot of Caterpillar training here. They are an international company and they are spouting figures worldwide that they are 8,000 tradesmen down. We are seeing a big push by Caterpillar here to train people. But where I am seeing a lot of long-term jobs are with the guys who probably initially missed the apprenticeship round at 17 or 18, who are now in those associated areas. We have Elphinstone in town, we have Vestas now at Wynyard and we have Mader International at Penguin building ambulances. When I get to those places it is the students I had four or five years ago who are on the floor, and they are not doing the trade stuff but doing the associated trade work. If I had looked at the statistics 18 months or six months after they left I would have said they were not successful, but it is very long-term success and it is a great qualification that they carry for ages.

**CHAIR**—But what is the level of interest while they are at school, in terms of doing VET courses in those sorts of industries? Do you have trouble attracting them into those versus—

**Mr Brakey**—No.

**Mr Rist**—You have to interview to get the numbers down or someone that does not quite come up on a scale is earmarked for a year 12 spot. You work on these areas to hop into the skill.

**Mr Brakey**—We have an interview which will identify those students and place them in the following year if they were not successful from year 11.

**Mr Hoyt**—Engineering has been a very fluctuating industry. It is directly related to the economic success of mining and associated industries. We are based in machining, boilermaking, welding, sheetmetal work and allied industries. When the economy is not going well, we have very few students who want to take the course. When the economy is really hot, like it is now in the local area, we are turning them away in droves. What happens is that this year's success does not necessarily follow on to the next year's success. Next year we expect to have quite a lot of students at the door but not necessarily all of the apprenticeships available.

**Mr Rollins**—Mine is not the dirty side of town. Just last week Federal Hotels advertised for six positions at Strahan. Those positions all had as desirable qualifications certificate Internet in such-and-such. I was talking to a mate at the AFL footy over a couple of beers. He is a forestry worker and works on a harvester, but the number of certificates and tickets he has got to come up with! I do not know if the students are starting to become aware that they need certification to get a foot in the door for the jobs. That is important to sell to them. We just cannot avoid it.

**Mr Beddows**—That is interesting because in IT it is quite different. The national certification in IT in a lot of small business areas is very poorly thought of. They do not really care a lot about it at all. They would much prefer them to have industry based qualifications such as the Microsoft qualification or the Cisco qualification, or A+ or something like that. That is looked on far more highly. They do not really care a lot about the national certification in IT.

**Mr Lynch**—I run the music industry package and I will go a step further and say that most of the music industry is still playing catch-up with any sort of certification. It is slowly changing with public liability laws and whatnot. There may even come a day when band members or roadies need to carry some sort of qualification but the actual piece of paper in the hand is not necessarily important to a lot of employers; it is the skills that the students gain. To back up the work placement issue, with the students that I have it is like an extended job interview over the period of the year they are with me. Working with employers is far more valuable than having a piece of paper at the end of the year—but that is just one industry.

**Mr Brakey**—The answers are different here in a rural area from what you would expect in an urban environment because there is still a very strong interest in the ‘down and dirty’ trades, the more traditional trade area.

**CHAIR**—That is interesting. Can you just briefly outline your interaction with TAFE. To what extent do you use teachers from TAFE? Do you send your students there? To what extent are you duplicating what TAFE is already offering?

**Mr Brakey**—It varies around the state.

**Mr Hoyt**—We do not have the facilities to deliver the engineering package at this school. They do exist next door at TAFE. We have a partnership agreement with TAFE and they deliver all those competencies which relate to the type of capital equipment required, which is multimillion dollar, as you probably know. We depend on TAFE as a partner and it works extremely well.

**CHAIR**—It is obviously a lot easier because they are right next door. Would you still use them in the same way if they were five kilometres down the road?

**Mr Hoyt**—If it was five kilometres, yes, but they tried to get us to go to Devonport and all our students pulled out of the course, so they maintained it at Burnie. They will not travel.

**CHAIR**—Did they maintain it because of the—

**Mr Hoyt**—Students will not travel. We are a rural school. They already travel for three-quarters of an hour, or an hour and a half in some cases, to get here. They do not want to do 45 minutes more to go down the road for a special course.

**CHAIR**—Are there further opportunities to use what TAFE is providing, perhaps to replace what you are doing here or to supplement what you are doing here?

**Mr Richardson**—We have had some negotiations with people at TAFE regarding natural resources. They are more than happy for us to use their facilities and our teachers if we are able to get a natural resources package up and going.

**Mr Brakey**—In automotive they deliver.

**Mrs McDivitt**—In the hospitality area we have good relationships with TAFE. Although Jill was unaware of it, we do have regular meetings with TAFE in Drysdale. There has been a definite improvement and a reduction in the tensions that used to exist because VET in Schools was regarded as inadequate and unable to deliver the same quality as VET in TAFE. VET in Schools and VET in TAFE are still seen as two different things, when we are the same and our qualifications are the same.

**CHAIR**—This is something we want to pursue with the employers.

**Mrs McDivitt**—Yes. We use TAFE to deliver responsible service in alcohol units of comp in hospitality—we have an MOU. We use it in automotive. We have investigated, for instance, introducing beauty and hair care but TAFE delivers that in Devonport and in our local region that is seen as too far to travel. We do not have a good public transport system to support cheap travel.

**Mr Brakey**—Across the state there are 50,000 training hours shared between TAFE and the colleges. Many of those are in the more traditional areas and new ones are in electrotechnology.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Should VET training be compulsory in teacher training?

**Mrs McDivitt**—There are VET development officers. There is one attached to each college and three rural VET development officers. We have already, as a state group with Mike representing the principals, set out a paper for the university, indicating that there is a need to include qualifications in VET and a recognition of the structures and the bureaucracy that surrounds VET, so that people understand AQTF, they understand standards, they understand occupational health and safety, and they have a knowledge of workplace training and different teaching styles to those that we use for our traditional cohort of students. We have provided this information. It is still being examined and we will continue to refresh people's minds over time.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Was that yes or no?

**Mrs McDivitt**—They don't yet.

**Mr Richardson**—The answer is definitely yes. Anybody coming into VET finds themselves on a very steep learning curve at the beginning. If you have people who have some understanding initially, it will make it a lot easier.

**Mr Rollins**—If you ask any non-VET teacher in the college or in the state, 'Do you want to get into VET?' they will run. I am surrounded here by the auditor, the boss and all of that. They are the pressures. The bureaucracy is real.

**CHAIR**—The thing you are saying to us generally is that the allowance ought to be 1.25, roughly, compared to general teaching. Is that pretty much ballpark in terms of your period allocation?

**Mr Richardson**—That is a bit under.

**Mr Brakey**—We probably need to follow that question one step further. The issue that Chez was alluding to was the fact that there is not a great deal of awareness about VET amongst teachers. That is a real problem, coming back to the first question that Kerry asked. When teachers in primary schools and high schools are asked about VET, invariably their answers are based on total ignorance of what VET has to offer. They have had no experience with it themselves and no experience in their training, including the young teachers. The attitude towards VET is that it is vocationally oriented. That is the way teachers would see it. I think that they would have a very blue-collar view of what VET can offer. If we are going to sell VET to a wider population of students, we will need to address both the perception and the reality of advice that is given to students in primary schools and high schools about what VET can offer them.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—That is why I asked the question. I did not specify secondary or senior secondary; I meant training, full stop.

**CHAIR**—What is the situation in Tasmania with regard to careers training? Does each school have a full-time careers adviser, so that it varies from school to school?

**Mr Brakey**—There are almost none since the whitewash of Cresap at the beginning of the nineties when those positions were removed. It would only be the colleges in the state, by and large, who have dedicated careers people.

**Mr Rollins**—In a lot of cases students are told to go and find their own work experience. That is up to grade 10.

**CHAIR**—There are two issues here—the work experience and the VET courses—but there is also the whole issue of informing students as to what careers are available, what VET courses are available, what options there are and guiding them through that. Do you think there ought to be a full-time careers person in each school?

**Mr Brakey**—The methodology we use here is far broader than that. It is a model based on the number of counsellors who have responsibility for picking up the students at the beginning of grade 10 and taking them through to the end of grade 12 and beyond, with individual pathway and career planning. That is the sort of model that most colleges would adopt. The careers person will be only one of a number of advisers that a student will encounter one to one in the time that they are here at the college.

**CHAIR**—What sort of training do those careers people have?

**Mr Brakey**—Dave goes to national conferences of careers advisers twice a year. He follows it up through that. A lot of the training is on-the-ground stuff that he picks up himself—and incidentally. We run the training for the counsellors here internally, using the expertise that we

have on the ground. There would be almost no professional development available in the state in this area at the moment.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Should there be?

**Mr Brakey**—Obviously. It is a responsibility that has been lost over the past decade and people are slow to come into it because it is also an area that is fraught with liability. Advice that is given now can often come back to bite someone many years later, particularly if the advice has not been well thought out and students have been given advice that later proves to be wrong and it has affected their life chances. It is a serious issue in terms of both what you say to students and what you do not say. There is a professional learning need there that should spring up around what is career counselling in this day and age—it is no longer as clear-cut as it once was—and what we should be telling students. The new post-compulsory policy in terms of individual pathway planning for students offers a lot of advice on what the appropriate training will be, and it is well worth a look. The youth pathways paper for that policy in particular would show where we are going in this state. That is probably a landmark for the country.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I am afraid time has gone. There are other issues we would like to pursue, but that has been very helpful.

**Mrs McDivitt**—Chair, I would like to table, on behalf of Hellyer College, a paper which covers quite a lot of what we have already discussed.

**CHAIR**—Wonderful, thank you. Thank you again for your hospitality.

**Proceedings suspended from 3.55 p.m. to 4.06 p.m.**

**GIBBONS, Mrs Jennie, Human Resources Officer, Burnie, Australian Paper**

**LILLICO, Mr Mark Anthony, Senior Assembly Supervisor, Caterpillar Elphinstone**

**SCOLYER, Mr Grant Andrew, Services Manager, Onecare Umina Park**

**WATSON, Ms Judith Ann, VET Coordinator and TCE Coordinator, Marist Regional College**

**WEBBER, Mrs Rhonda Kaye, Coordinator, Coastal Family Day Care Scheme**

**YOUNG, Mr Kevin Xavier, Managing Director, Angus and Robertson, Burnie**

**CHAIR**—Thank you all for spending time with us this afternoon. We look forward to hearing what you have to say. Could you please outline for us the capacity in which you appear today.

**Mrs Webber**—I am the coordinator of Coastal Family Day Care, which is a home based child care service. We cover from Penguin right through to Smithton, the west coast and King Island. We are currently servicing 450 families, with 720 children in care and 50 carers providing that care.

**Ms Watson**—I am the VET coordinator at Marist Regional College, which is a Catholic college of approximately 700 students. I am also very new to this role. This is my first year of involvement in VET. Since I have just come back from long service leave, I have had the sum total of 13 weeks being involved with VET.

**Mr Lillico**—I am from Caterpillar Elphinstone. We service the underground mining division. We have about 500 employees on the books at Elphinstone in Burnie. I am the senior supervisor of the assembly process in the South Burnie division.

**Mr Young**—I own and operate the Angus and Robertson bookshop here in town, so I am in the retail sector. I have had VET retail trainees for a number of years.

**Mr Scolyer**—I am employed by Onecare, based here in Burnie at Umina Park. I work for the corporate services division. We are an aged care provider. We have approximately 170 residents. We also have independent living units and provide student accommodation as well.

**Mrs Gibbons**—I work at Australian Paper as the human resources officer at Burnie. I am the chair of the Hellyer College Council. One of my sons did a VET program while he was here. I was on VET committees in earlier days until about 1998 or 1999.

**CHAIR**—What is the perception of the employers in the area about the quality of VET in Schools qualifications versus VET qualifications obtained through TAFE and/or other providers? In some areas there seems to be a perception that VET in Schools is just not quite as good or that students doing VET in Schools do not have quite the same degree of industry experience or

competence as those who would achieve the same certificate level through TAFE or through perhaps even private providers.

**Mrs Gibbons**—I do not agree with that. We place VET students at our workplace and we know we give them appropriate training. When we sign off their VET books we are aware that they have demonstrated competency in a range of generic criteria. If I see that somebody has done a VET certificate, I have no doubt that they have had some experience in a range of generic skills. It might have been just touched on with some of them—it is not deep, profound knowledge—but they are aware of industry requirements for occupational health and safety, timekeeping, punctuality and a range of skills. I would give credence to those skills.

**CHAIR**—Do you think it is of the same standard and shows the same level of achievement as the same certificate level in TAFE?

**Mrs Gibbons**—I don't see why not.

**CHAIR**—Are there other comments on that?

**Mr Young**—Yes. My experience would be along the same lines. The students go through basically the same program and their skills or abilities depend more on where they have been placed, the experiences they have had in the workplace and the quality of the teachers than on the institution they are taught in.

**Mr Scolyer**—I find the VET students come to us with a lot of knowledge and skill and have already been trained, whereas with TAFE students we normally have to take that role on ourselves and provide the training before they go off to TAFE.

**Mr Lillico**—I agree with the other people.

**Mrs Webber**—Anecdotal discussions suggest that it depends on the year and the program and the college. You could say that of anything, really. Different colleges deal with the program differently.

**CHAIR**—In terms of taking on employees, I take it from what you have just said that, if two people came to your door and they had a certificate Internet and wanted a job, it would not matter to you whether they obtained their certificate Internet qualification from a TAFE or a school. What has been your experience of the preparation work done at school—at Hellyer College, for instance—in terms of the work readiness of the students when they come to you to do their work placement? Are there areas where more work needs to be done in terms of preparedness for the workplace, or do you think that has been done quite thoroughly?

**Mr Lillico**—In the mining division it is a new ball game for the students who come down to our premises in South Burnie, so it gives them a bit of insight into things. As far as the occupational health and safety aspect is concerned, I believe the students have a basic understanding and it is up to the employer to carry out the appropriate training to continue on from that.

**Mr Scolyer**—We use hospitality students and we find, especially in our catering department, the students come along with very good knowledge of occupational health and safety, food safety and HACCP requirements.

**Mrs Webber**—In the past, in the child care area there have been some issues but they are not there now—particularly in the last two or three years. For the last three years we have worked very closely with Hellyer College. We run an induction program. The students are screened very carefully. They go into the carers' homes really knowing what they are doing.

**Mr Young**—From my experience of the retail VET students, I find they come with a good preparedness for generic retail. In a specialty store, like a bookstore, with a high degree of specialist knowledge required to do it well, they are perhaps underskilled but the broad base is there and it is up to me to give them the specialty knowledge they need to do the job. They are skilled more to a department store level or for generic retail, where you do not have to have good product knowledge, understand a range of things, have intimate knowledge of computer systems and be able to do more things. So from my experience they are a bit underdone in the retail area but it is probably a quirk of the business I run rather than the quality of the students, or the quality of the training. My biggest frustration with the retail VET course is that its appeal to students is not high enough. Retail VET is put somewhere near the bottom of all VET courses and the quality of the students taking it on is not high enough for the quality of the people we want in the industry.

**CHAIR**—Why do you think that is?

**Mr Young**—I think it is a perception: 'I do not want to be a checkout chick.' It is generally students with lower academic abilities who do retail VET.

**CHAIR**—There is a lot more in retail, in terms of career possibilities, than being a checkout chick.

**Mr Young**—Absolutely.

**CHAIR**—There is an issue there perhaps in marketing the course.

**Mr Young**—It may not be such a problem in bigger centres where there are bigger businesses and people can see there is more progression availability. In a regional centre, where a lot more of the businesses are owner-operator, they perhaps feel they can get a job as a sales assistant in a boutique and that is where it is going to end. There is a perception there, and unfortunately retail does not attract some of the better students whom we would like to have in the industry.

**CHAIR**—There was one student here this afternoon who was doing retail and had quite a clear idea of where she wanted to go in terms of career, diploma course, management et cetera. What about your relationship with the school in terms of the workplace coordinator and the monitoring of the student once they are with you? Does that work well? Are there aspects of that where there are perhaps communication problems or aspects which can be improved?

**Mrs Gibbons**—At Australian Paper I have always had total trust that the students placed there are work ready. Whenever the teacher came down to visit it was merely to have a look at the



workplace and at what we had been doing with the student to confirm what had been happening, rather than a need to check up.

**Mrs Webber**—My experience with the students placed in Coastal Family Day Care in the carers' homes is that they are well monitored, and there is good communication between myself and the coordinator. The coordinator of the VET program visits quite regularly while they are actually placed.

**CHAIR**—There is no uncertainty from your point of view as to what is expected from you and what is needed in terms of assessment and that sort of thing? That is all quite clear? I note a few of you have nodded in agreement.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—We are Commonwealth representatives and it is a Commonwealth inquiry, so we would ask you to think a little in terms of what, if anything, could be done to make the VET system better for your business and better for students. In other words, the whole community will benefit from it. What things do you think could happen to make it better for you, the students and so forth, remembering that we are the Commonwealth with all our resources as well?

**Ms Watson**—Ours is a smaller school. We do not have as many students here because we are a grade 7 to 12 school. We have smaller numbers that are involved in the VET program. It is very difficult to support a very small number with a complete staff member. We have to juggle between teaching other subjects as well as being VET coordinators for a particular area. That is really hard. An influx of some sort of funding would be very beneficial, particularly in smaller schools and schools with small VET participants.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Someone has mentioned it.

**Mr Young**—Following on from what I said earlier, I would like to see the retail VET course marketed better so that people consider it as an option, particularly for economics or as a lead-in to business management, especially as the small business area employs so many people around the country. We want better, brighter kids going into business management through retail.

**CHAIR**—Are there other areas besides retail where it is difficult getting students interested?

**Mrs Gibbons**—I believe office failed for a while because students saw it as a dead-end kind of career. We had a pretty good management committee there for a while with office and retail but students no longer wanted to go down that career path. There is always a need for office workers, so it would be good if office could be marketed a little bit better.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—I was hoping something would be teased out there a bit. There seems to be a lot of satisfaction with it. Another thing I wanted to ask about came from one of the first questions Kerry asked: is there too much bureaucracy involved for you? Some people are nodding, particularly those providing the training. Do you think what is required of you in terms of your assessment of students either is too onerous or maybe could be a little bit more comprehensive? Do you detect a difference between students that have come through VET in Schools compared to private RTOs in the placement of trainees?

**Ms Watson**—From my point of view—and this was my first year as a VET coordinator at a school—I was completely and utterly overwhelmed by the amount of bureaucracy that was involved. My other position at the school is as TASSAB coordinator. I am responsible for the coordination of the enrolment of students from year 10 to year 12 and for coordinating exams. I am also assessment coordinator within the school. Our school is years 7 to 12. In those two areas combined there are 690 students and this year we had 13 VET students. I would have done two to one in hours with my 13 VET students. It does not matter if it is 13 or 300; it is the initial amount of work that is absolutely immense. I must admit, at times I wondered what I was doing it for.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—So do I.

**Ms Watson**—It seemed to me it was completely over the top. I wondered how many times I had to dot this I and cross this t. The bureaucratic side of it seems to have grown and to have a life of its own. It seems to have forgotten that the main purpose of it is for our students. That is where its benefits are. It is a wonderful program for students, particularly in the transition between years 11 and 12. They grow up. They go out into the workplace and come back much more mature. They learn so much in the workplace. They go into a real-life situation where not everybody is their own age. They are dealing with older people and perhaps younger people and they have a different approach to things. But the bureaucracy is horrendous. That is my soapbox bit.

**CHAIR**—The dilemma is that we have to ensure we have national standards that fit in a national training framework and also ensure that employers have confidence in the qualification. Whether it is certificate I, certificate III or whatever, employers need to know that if someone is accredited at that level there is a degree of certainty about what their competencies are. In order to do that you need a fair degree of monitoring and rigour. Do you have any suggestions as to how we resolve that in order to reduce the paperwork and red tape without compromising the degree of confidence that employers and industry have in those qualifications?

**Mr Young**—As a user or a provider in the workplace, I have not found the bureaucracy too bad. The signing off of the competencies is not really a problem for me as an employer and providing the training to cover those competencies is not really a problem in the time we have allowed. I find that part of it pretty good. Judy's problem is not about the relationship with employers; it is in relation to the government.

**Ms Watson**—Yes, it is in relation to government.

**CHAIR**—The government's need is to ensure that there is rigour in terms of the qualifications achieved or awarded.

**Ms Watson**—I do not have a problem with that and I agree with it completely. It seems to me that a lot of other unnecessary statistics and information is required.

**CHAIR**—What sort of other stuff can we get rid of? I am sorry to put you on the spot.

**Mrs Webber**—Are we talking about the RTO requirements here?

**Ms Watson**—Yes. For example, we have an audit every year. I do not have a problem with auditing to see that standards are up to date but the audit can go on for two days. You have to do a self-audit every year. In a school, where you start in February and you finish in November and you have staff who are teaching other subjects, that can become really onerous. You have to find time to do it. I am speaking from the point of view of only being in it for a very short period of time, so I have not been able to crystallise my views. I just had a feeling that it is stifling. There is quite a high burn-out rate with the practitioners at school who are involved with VET. The part of it involving employers I think works reasonably well in this area. It does work well and we get a lot of positive feedback.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—There is also a resourcing issue. If someone decides to do this then you have to be resourced, otherwise you will burn out within a couple of years.

**Ms Watson**—That is what is happening. A lot of staff are burning out in, say, three years.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—If you were resourced to be able to do the quality assurance and all that, then maybe it would not be as much of an issue.

**Ms Watson**—Yes. That does not really answer your question, but I cannot answer your question at this point in time.

**CHAIR**—Are there any other views on that?

**Mrs Webber**—Is that the issue: not so much cutting the work back as having enough time to do the work?

**Ms Watson**—There are several issues. You have to be resourced and you have to have enough time. Depending on the structure of your school, you can or cannot have enough time. There is not enough money to fully fund it. I think that is a problem as well, particularly with smaller numbers. If you only have small numbers it is a battle to be able to keep the program really alive and vibrant. You can still run the program but it becomes mediocre after a while if you do not have staff in there who can keep it vibrant. As for the bureaucracy, one thing I have found really over the top was the database. I have to enter information into the database which is not user friendly. I have a huge folder which tells me how to do it. For the last 12 years I have been entering into TASSAB's database all the results for our students. It is a real struggle for me to work out how to do it.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—This is ECEF, is it?

**Ms Watson**—Yes. It is not user friendly.

**CHAIR**—That has been raised by others.

**Ms Watson**—Particularly for someone at a school who is not doing it all the time. At a TAFE college you would have someone doing that all the time. In a school you are coming back to it every three weeks or so.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. That is helpful.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Did anyone have other comments about how it could be made better? It seems to be going very well.

**Mrs Gibbons**—As an employer, I have never seen that. The work has obviously been done for us before the student comes to us.

**Mrs Webber**—I am certainly aware of the amount of work involved in an RTO. It is enormous. It is all about resourcing.

**Ms Watson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—On a different issue, one of the problems which exists in a number of schools around the country is the difficulty of teachers of VET maintaining their industry currency—having experience in industry and what is going on in industry. Some of them do training courses; some of them do professional development courses. Do any of you have work placements for teachers so that they can be updated on the skills required for careers in your particular industries? None of you take teachers as part of a professional development course, or anything like that? Would you be happy to do that—for instance, in a bookstore or in mining?

**Mr Lillico**—Why not?

**CHAIR**—You could take a teacher for a week or two weeks. Do you think that would be constructive for them?

**Mr Lillico**—Absolutely.

**CHAIR**—The big question, of course, is how we fund it. That varies from state to state. There are some examples where education departments basically continue to pay salaries while people are off. There are others where there is an industry sharing of the cost through a peak body such as the Chamber of Manufacturers and so on. Do you think that is a workable sort of approach?

**Mr Lillico**—Each industry is different, from the retail to the mining industry, and each student needs to select their career path. It is very hard to pinpoint one objective.

**Mrs Webber**—That probably would not work terribly well in family day care. I come into the classroom and talk to the students about issues in family day care and the teachers sit in on that, so they are updated at the same time.

**CHAIR**—Do any of you go to the school to talk to students about career options in your field?

**Mr Young**—I generally speak to the retail VET trainees here at the start of each year. They will organise a group of people to come and talk to them and I will generally speak on that day. It is a one-off for 15 or 20 minutes with some questions and answers in a forum situation, but not as a formal thing in class time.

**Ms Watson**—Within the school it would be our student counsellors who are involved. Many of you would have come in for career expos and similar events. Rather than just having the VET students, you have the whole cohort in that year group.

**CHAIR**—Do you think students are aware enough of the broad range of career opportunities?

**Ms Watson**—Probably not. Those who are really interested would be aware of some of them, because there are steps for them to take to get that information, but probably not the whole broad range. About 75 per cent to 80 per cent of them would know.

**CHAIR**—What sort of careers advice capacity do you have at your school?

**Ms Watson**—We have a pastoral care counsellor who does it, a careers counsellor for year 10. From grade 7 to grade 10 we have a work studies program. Our grade 10 class does work experience for one week during the year. From year 10 they move into years 11 and 12 of our VET. We have a full-time counsellor there.

**CHAIR**—Your grade 10 has a work studies program?

**Ms Watson**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Is the teacher of that specifically trained in careers?

**Ms Watson**—Yes, the teacher who is the coordinator for it. All our grade 10 students do it. They do four periods over a two-week program. What they do is very specific. I think some of you might be involved in our mock interview programs at Marist. They have workplace awareness for one term and then they have work experience. They go through a mock interview program at the school.

**CHAIR**—Do you think professional development training of careers advisers is adequate?

**Ms Watson**—I can only speak for the ones I know, and I would say yes. I am speaking about a very small group of people. There is a lot of professional development that is done.

**CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—There are 13 students who are doing VET, and how is that number broken down? Are most of them doing the one thing in the one industry or area?

**Ms Watson**—No. We offer Certificate I Hospitality (Kitchen Operations). We have a partnership with TAFE and the students do Certificate I in Automotive there. They do some modules from Certificate I Engineering and Certificate II General Construction. At the end of year 11 they complete a Certificate I in Automotive, plus modules, and receive a statement of attainment.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Do they go to TAFE here?

**Ms Watson**—We have a partnership where the OH&S component is provided by a teacher at school. The students come to TAFE every Friday. It has worked very well.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—What is the greatest number of VET students or greatest demand for places you have had?

**Ms Watson**—This year we have just done our enrolments of interest. We now have 30, which I am rapt about, because that is a large increase.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—More paperwork coming up!

**Ms Watson**—It is almost the same amount of paperwork and the same amount of bureaucracy whether you have one or many, just to be the RTO. The number of students you actually have is totally irrelevant. To be the provider you have to do the same amount of work.

**CHAIR**—Just to finish off, what recommendations would you make as to how the whole system should be improved, apart from the paperwork one? We certainly got that message.

**Mrs Webber**—It does not matter what human service you are looking at; we need more people. It is about resourcing and staff.

**CHAIR**—More people aspiring to careers?

**Mrs Webber**—More hours to do the work; more staff hours.

**Mrs Gibbons**—As employers we do not see that side of the problem because we see the students come down and very effectively participate in our work site. The teachers come down and spend the time to have a look at what we are doing. We do not see the underlying bureaucracy and lack of resources. We just have a very successful partnership.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your time and thank you for the opportunities that you are giving the kids to learn in your particular businesses. It is very helpful for them and hopefully there will be benefits for you in terms of better trained students aspiring to careers in your respective workplaces.

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

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

**Subcommittee adjourned at 4.38 p.m.**