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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Vocational education in schools

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Thursday, 27 November 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, Mrs May and Mr Farmer

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

WITNESSES

**ANDRUSKA, Ms Aurora, Group Manager, Vocational Education and Training Group,
Department of Education, Science and Training 1423**

**GREER, Mr Anthony, Group Manager, Indigenous and Transitions Group, Department of
Education, Science and Training 1423**

**HEWLETT, Ms Suzi, Director, Industry Skills Section, Industry Training Branch, Vocational
Education and Training Group, Department of Education, Science and Training 1423**

**JOHNSON, Mr Ben, Branch Manager, New Apprenticeships Branch, Vocational Education and
Training Group, Department of Education, Science and Training 1423**

**WHITTLESTON, Ms Shelagh, Branch Manager, Transitions Branch, Indigenous and
Transitions Group, Department of Education, Science and Training..... 1423**

Committee met at 9.18 a.m.

ANDRUSKA, Ms Aurora, Group Manager, Vocational Education and Training Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

GREER, Mr Anthony, Group Manager, Indigenous and Transitions Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

HEWLETT, Ms Suzi, Director, Industry Skills Section, Industry Training Branch, Vocational Education and Training Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

JOHNSON, Mr Ben, Branch Manager, New Apprenticeships Branch, Vocational Education and Training Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

WHITTLESTON, Ms Shelagh, Branch Manager, Transitions Branch, Indigenous and Transitions Group, Department of Education, Science and Training

CHAIR—I declare open the public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education in schools. I welcome representatives from the Department of Education, Science and Training. Thank you for coming in yet again. I need to remind you again that proceedings here today are formal proceedings of the parliament. Unless there are any burning new developments that you want to raise with us, we will just go straight to questions, if that is okay.

I will begin by looking at the issue of work placement, which is one of the critical factors in terms of the success of VET in schools. It is an area where I think there will be increasing pressure, given the growth in numbers of students doing VET and the possibility that it might become mandatory in some states. One of the issues that has been put to us is the need to mandate a structured workplace component as part of VET courses, given that there will be increasing pressure on work placement. I would be interested in an overview of some issues regarding work placement. What percentage of regions in Australia have workplace cluster coordinators coordinating the work placement in schools?

I will run through a few questions generally, if you like. What variation is there in the quality of what they are doing? How carefully does the department monitor the effectiveness of the work of those cluster coordinators? Now that funding has reverted from ECEF to DEST, what is the intention of the department with regard to new funding arrangements? What projections has the department got in terms of funding over the next few years? As well as that, is it your view that there ought to be funding for increased administrative support for those cluster coordinators? The view put to us by a number of witnesses and in a number of submissions was that they are under-resourced and there needs to be extra resourcing. Certainly there will need to be if there is a greater take-up of VET in Schools. What do you see as the features of what that extra funding might be? There is a fair scattering of questions there. Perhaps you might try to address some of them for us.

Mr Greer—We will try to address some of them from the top down. On coverage, yes, as you have mentioned, the government took a decision in the last budget to bring the functions of the former Enterprise and Career Education Foundation closer to government. As a consequence of that, as of the end of September, the department has inherited responsibility for some 220

clusters around Australia, so that largely gives the Commonwealth a national footprint. Those 220-odd clusters, including at this stage about 20 in northern and central areas, which are predominantly in Indigenous communities, give the Commonwealth a national footprint. Those clusters should provide access—we may need to fill some gaps here and there—to all senior secondary schools. Whether the schools take that opportunity is another matter, but access should be there.

At the moment, my understanding is that in 2002 there were about 185,000 students participating in VET in Schools but only, in aggregate, about 112,000 or 116,000 structured work placements were provided. So we are running at about 60 per cent. If the growth of VET in Schools continues, that is certainly going to exacerbate that issue. There have been a number of different strategies and approaches taken to it. There has been a look at simulation provisions and so forth.

As I say, from the department's point of view, we have had responsibility for these clusters now for the past six weeks or so. I think the annual ongoing budget commitment to that is about \$14 million, but I can clarify that for you. That is locked into forward estimates. The minister has recently written to all of the clusters that we have taken responsibility for indicating to them funding certainty through to the end of next year but signalling at the same time that, now that these are the responsibility of the department, we will want to be engaging with those clusters to look at issues of quality, such as the quality of placement opportunities. We want to be revisiting with them the allocative mechanisms within the existing budget. Were there others?

Ms Whittleston—The nature of the provision of structured workplace learning varies across all the clusters. That is, what they are doing, how they are doing it and the timing of it.

Mr Greer—But it was important for us in bringing those functions from ECEF into the portfolio to consolidate that and to make that transition as seamless as possible. We have indicated that this is a period of consolidation. In the context of that period of consolidation, we want to engage with them in the course of 2004 to look at the range of issues with a view to seeing how we may be able to more strategically focus our suite of transition programs, perhaps from the beginning of 2005—that is, the new funding quadrennium.

Do existing clusters and workplace coordinators need additional funding? It is premature to argue that yet until we see what is in there. Essentially what we are saying, however, is that once we have these clusters in place, clearly the Commonwealth's thinking at this stage is that we would like to see some evolution of these clusters over time. All of the clusters at this stage are essentially providing foundational services by providing structured workplace learning. We would like to see a second stage of those where they might morph into not only providing structured workplace learning but taking a more active role in VET in Schools and School-based New Apprenticeships. They could then perhaps morph to a further stage of maturity, like a stage 3, where they become quite mature local community partnerships through which they can bring together the range of other support services and mechanisms around that cluster of schools with the objective of trying to keep young people in education and learning pathways, and bringing those other services' and agencies' activities to bear for that objective. However, it will recognise that if students, for one reason or another, do fall out of those pathways, they can fall out in a seamless way and be picked up by the service agency. Not all of those clusters are at that stage

yet. Some certainly are. Some are certainly in what we say is stage 2. Others, predominantly most of them, would be still at stage 1.

One of your other questions is: where to with these? I think we mentioned last time we were here that there are some very important developments coming out of the pilots of career and transition arrangements that we have been funding for the last couple of years. The minister has said that funding for those pilots will continue into 2004. We would like to see some of the very positive learnings out of those career and transition pilots being absorbed into clusters. I do not think you could absorb those functions into those clusters within the existing funding buckets. Certainly the department and the minister are alive to where we would like to take these clusters, but the decisions on funding are decisions for other places.

CHAIR—Certainly. Is it possible, then, that this approach might lead to a rationalisation of some of those programs, perhaps JPET, and greater interaction with the New Apprenticeships Centres et cetera?

Mr Greer—It would not be so much rationalisation, I would have thought, but certainly a more focused and coordinated perspective. That is, rather than a particular program, such as supported accommodation for children—

Ms Whittleston—Reconnect.

Mr Greer—For Reconnect or some such, rather than it just being the provision of supported accommodation for a student who might be homeless, the objective might be to provide that supported accommodation for a student so that the student can stay engaged in education and learning pathways and so they can stay at school.

CHAIR—It is supposed to be happening now.

Mr Greer—It is supposed to be happening now, but I do not think the range of services out there is as effective as they could be. When ministers—I think it was 26 federal and state ministers—signed up to the Stepping Forward agenda last year, we found there were nearly 800 separate programs across the Commonwealth and the states supporting young people. It is an absolute maze out there for young people. What one potential is, through picking up some of this career and transition dimension, would be to find a way through that maze, to make the provision and focus of those programs clearly join those responses up for the child.

In the Footprints review that Captain Eldridge chaired, one of the lasting visions that came out of that was the observation that all of these problems are joined up in the student or in the child but the responses are not. We think there is potential, certainly in the department, through picking up some of the positive aspects of what we are finding out of these pilots, of better joining up those responses in a more biteable fashion. That is, you have a national footprint of 220 clusters out there. You can look at the services around servicing those clusters and provide an opportunity for those clusters to bring those services to bear on students.

CHAIR—I have another question before I pass over to my colleagues. You used the term ‘engaging’ with those cluster coordinators over the next year or so. Could you just elaborate on

what you have in mind. Will it be a formal evaluation process? Will it just be a one-on-one consultation? What do you have in mind?

Ms Whittleston—There are two things happening as a result of ECEF coming in. We now have a transitions manager in each of the DEST state offices who will engage with all those local community partnerships. ECEF did have them but they were located in Sydney whereas we have chosen to have them located out in each state. ECEF had one in WA, South Australia and New South Wales, but we have gone for the whole lot.

There is another project that I will perhaps draw your attention to. In 2004, DEST will conduct a national project which will be looking at structured workplace learning, identifying priority industries, where the expansion of SWL could occur and encouraging industries to expand a number of opportunities. Industry often comments that we have only those four key industry areas whereas it should be more widespread in providing opportunities to young people. The project will also investigate new ways of providing structured workplace learning. This is coming up particularly through the MCYEETA Transition from School Taskforce, and in particular what structured workplace learning means. The taskforce has been tasked to go away and look at what the actual definition of 'structured work placement' is. I am sure you would have found out that in some states it is simulated and in some states it is on the job. It will also clarify the purpose and competency requirements of SWL. It is just so varied across the country that we need to get a better handle on it.

CHAIR—In some regions we visited where industry consortiums were heavily engaged, there was terrific interaction between school and industry and a seamless transition from training at school to training at work. It seems to me that there ought to be a capacity to better link the cluster coordinators with industry representative groups. It sounds like you are heading down that path.

Mr Greer—Certainly. Currently, as part of a contribution to the implementation of the Vocational Education in Schools Framework, through ECEF we have been funding a number of national industry associations to work with us to bring their industries along. Collective ministers' views and MCYEETA's view is that the Vocational Education in Schools Framework ought to be in place by the end of 2004. It is shifting. We have already engaged industry on some of these discussions. It is about where to in the future. Our belief is that industry needs to engage more at the cluster level. You can see by engaging at that cluster level you can better provide the work placement opportunities that relate to employment opportunities and industry profile within that cluster area. They may be able to contribute to local skill shortages. We think there are many pluses for industry and business to be championing relevant clusters. I must say that industry has responded quite positively to that, looking forward.

CHAIR—That is a very encouraging development.

Mrs MAY—Thank you for your time this morning. You were talking about industry. It is about getting the advice out to kids. We found during the inquiry there was a lot of criticism about the careers advice available in schools. We talk about emerging industry and new opportunities for kids. There was also, certainly on the ground, a shortage of very good careers advice. In fact, in most schools we visited, it was someone taking on an extra load. They were not able to keep up with those emerging industries or able to deliver the sort of information to

students on the different pathways available to them. Making the transition from school to the workplace as seamless as possible seems to be falling down. I know in my own electorate we have trialled a program for having a seamless transition from school to work. It is about giving the information to those students and knowing where they can go. Very much in schools right throughout the inquiry, the criticism has been about the lack of support for people giving careers advice or even schools having someone on the school grounds to give the advice. Can you expand on where you would like to go with that.

Mr Greer—Certainly. It goes back to some of the observations I made to the chair. One of the very positive findings of our pilots on career and transitions services are very much about that. This is what I was saying. We would like to have the capacity to embed within these clusters a dedicated or an additional career and transition service that would service the students within those cluster schools. The benefits of that are demonstrably set out in the evaluations of those pilots. In addition, we have over the last 12 months launched the national collaborative *myfuture*, which is the national careers information system. It has been acknowledged internationally as an absolutely cutting-edge system. Since its launch, we have had something like 40 million hits on that site. There have been around 10 million page downloads.

Mrs MAY—That is a web site that students or a school can access?

Mr Greer—It is a web site that students and schools can access. The Commonwealth has put the venture capital to build that site. We have worked with the states and territories. It is truly national in the sense that the states and territories and ourselves share the recurrent costs of that. It has state and territory champions and it is increasingly being taken up in schools.

It has a self-diagnostic element. It is essentially available to all Australians, not just students, but predominantly it is being used in schools, where they can sit down and work through and develop transition plans and look at their aspirations. It links up tremendously with related databases from the Good Guides Group and the Job Guide. It links in not only on the education side but with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations regional labour market data as well. At a recent international conference in Canada that was looking at career guidance and career management across 36 countries, the final report of that actually highlights Australia's national career information system as what can be achieved. It puts it up as world-class, cutting-edge material.

Ms Whittleston—We had a forum in August, the Leaders in Careers Forum, where we brought together industry, school principals and some career practitioners. It was very small—about 40 people. We sat down and worked out what kinds of strategies could assist industry and principals to work together in terms of providing that information to young people in schools, to assist the career counsellors or career practitioners in schools and to identify areas of skill shortages. We are coming up with a set of strategies, which we are going to circulate through industry, through our local community partnerships and through the principals' associations. It is strategies like how you identify for career practitioners, through the mass of information that comes to them each day, the careers information forums or skill shortages and things like that. Some very simple things are coming up. For example, in our Job Guide and *myfuture*, we should be identifying the areas of skill shortage which we have never done before. It is things like how we enable career practitioners to work through all this mass of material they receive. Apparently,

they get envelopes every day and yet they are also interviewing all these kids. They cannot just do everything, so they are missing out on what is out there.

Mrs MAY—That has been the criticism—the load is just too big.

Ms Whittleston—From this forum we are trying to build some of these strategies. We are actually now going to have a forum in each state, which will bring together principals, local industry people and career practitioners so they can have some discussions amongst themselves. This forum was interesting in that it was the first time that industry, career practitioners and school principals had sat down together and said, ‘Oh, we hadn’t understood that when we sent stuff into your school it just sat there because no-one knew what to do with it.’ So we are actually going to try to do some practical things with them and come up with a proper action plan.

The other thing I should perhaps draw your attention to is that the minister has been making some statements about providing some professional development for careers teachers. As you have noted, often the careers teachers are doing other things. We are aiming to have a package of three things. One is a careers resource, which will be made available for all teachers in the new school year and which will bring together all the things the Commonwealth provides in terms of careers information. As Tony said, we have *myfuture*, the Real Game, the Leaders in Careers strategic plan and the Job Guide. We have a whole raft of material.

Secondly, we are going to provide online in-service support for those careers teachers who are in school at the present time. We also have a number of programs—such as JPP, the CATs and the POEMs—and we intend to help the people who are running our programs with careers information and support; what to do and where to get information. And then a package could be developed which could be included in a Bachelor of Education. So there would be a unit that teachers might choose to do in preparation for going into a school. We know there are very few courses like that, and they tend to be postgraduate ones. There are only three or four around the country. We think teachers should have that within their packages as they go through to a school. So we recognise what you say and are trying to tackle these issues.

Mrs MAY—I would not like you to forget that one-on-one, face-to-face session with a counsellor in a school, and the counsellor having the time to even engage with industry in the local area. Often in the smaller places we have been to the careers counsellor needs to engage with the local industry. A student still needs that one-on-one session. It is all very well to have a web site and that looks all beaut, but it is knowing what is happening on the ground in that area.

Ms Whittleston—That is a key finding out of the careers and transitions pilots evaluation. We gave you the early draft. The next draft will be out early in the new year. The key finding is that access to a dedicated career and transition adviser is really important to young people and their parents and teachers. It is quite clear.

Mr Greer—As we were saying to the chair, the fact that the Commonwealth now has the national footprint with the workplace coordination, the opportunity is there in fact to embed the careers and transitions service within that national footprint—it would not be being started necessarily from a blank sheet. The infrastructure is there and the networks are there. We know that the careers and transitions pilots have worked very well and, subject to the wherewithal,

there seems to be a logical first step if you were looking at perhaps mainstreaming both the careers and transitions and the POEMs pilots.

Ms Andruska—I thought I should mention another smaller initiative. There is the National Industry Skills Initiative, where we have been working particularly with industry on projects in areas of skill shortage. One of the key things has been developing some careers information, which they have been giving to schools. The information is on CD-ROMs, and there is some very interactive and quite exciting material for students to look at. Industry are realising that they need to actually form very close relationships with schools if they are going to take that next step forward. It is all right getting the material out there, but they need to actually engage them in the areas that they are looking at, particularly the skill shortage areas. They need to have a closer relationship.

Mrs MAY—That certainly came up through the inquiry, particularly with new and emerging industries, and careers counsellors having that information at their fingertips to let students know that those opportunities are actually out there.

Mr Greer—I mentioned to you earlier that the OECD, the European Union and the World Bank have done this major review of career guidance and career management. The key anchor of that, Professor Tony Watts, will be in Australia and, in fact, in Canberra on 4 December. If you, other committee members or the secretariat wanted the opportunity for a debrief we could certainly facilitate that. We are bringing him to Canberra to meet the minister and to give some sessions—from an international perspective—in the department of what world's best practice career guidance and career management processes are like.

CHAIR—That is a very tempting offer.

Mr FARMER—I think it is a great idea.

CHAIR—What about next Thursday morning? Is it possible to arrange?

Ms Whittleston—We will look into that.

Mr Greer—We will rearrange his diary for that. If need be, I can give the secretariat some preliminary papers coming out of that. As I say, Professor Watts anchored the distillation of something like 3,500 pages of thematic review in the area of career guidance and career management from 36 countries down to a best-practice template of about a dozen pages.

CHAIR—That is a marvellous opportunity. We would be crazy not to take that up.

Mr FARMER—Where are those dozen pages?

Mr Greer—I have copies, and I can certainly give them to you.

Mr FARMER—I suggest that we get our hands on them ahead of time so we have a chance to review those pages.

Mr Greer—I will make sure that we get a copy to the secretariat.

Mr FARMER—At least a couple of days before his visit.

Mr Greer—What you might also find useful is the Australian Country Report, unless you have already got it.

Ms Whittleston—We gave it to you.

Mr Greer—Certainly it is a distillation of what is best practice in career guidance and career management. As I say, 14 OECD countries did it. The European Union used the same survey instruments and discipline to look at 26 European Union countries. The World Bank used the same approach to look at what they call eight middle-income countries.

CHAIR—Excellent. That is a great opportunity. I am afraid our time is running out.

Mr FARMER—I have one quick question, if somebody could answer it. Ben or Suzi might be the best people to answer this. I am very concerned that throughout the VET system we keep on going down the same path with the same particular types of courses all the time. Obviously Australia is a very diverse place and we have many different types of industry out there. I want to know what you believe is the best way for us to attack the problem of trying to make the courses that are available far more diverse than they are and how we might be able to assist that process.

Mr Johnson—I will start with a response to that. Critically, obviously, we need to ensure that course formation is driven by industry involvement and that industry has key leadership or activity in actually structuring or guiding the areas of skill formation and their emerging labour market need. In that respect, as I am sure the committee is aware, the industry representatives are involved right through from representation on the ANTA national board, in an advisory capacity on national and state ITABs—industry training advisory bodies—and also are directly involved with the department and relevant state and territory education departments providing advice through forums such as the National Industry Skills Initiative on skill shortage areas and training needs.

I certainly would say that the increased diversity of occupational pathways that are available through New Apprenticeships, which now exceeds more than 500 industry occupations, has increased the flexibility and array of training arrangements that are available to younger Australians, particularly School-based New Apprentices. We do have a system that actively engages or provides industry leadership in that framework. So I see that as appropriate. As Ms Andruska touched on, we are certainly looking to review and further strengthen those arrangements, as is ANTA in terms of looking to review the operation and structure of the national ITAB arrangements to consolidate that as industry advisory bodies to industry skills councils. If anything, certainly the Commonwealth is continuing to work with ANTA and the states and territories to further strengthen and integrate industry involvement in advising on skills pathways and skills formation need.

Mr FARMER—I understand it is improving. Can it be done more quickly through more involvement directly with industry, or is the set-up too difficult?

Ms Andruska—My sense is that industries are aware that there are particular skill shortages. They are starting to see that an avenue they need to tap into is at the school level. Some of those industries have rules and regulations. For example, in truck driving, you have to be 25 before you can drive a B-double or whatever. They are really starting to think, ‘How can we break some of that down?’ So I think there is a move towards trying to get a broader base, particularly in the skill shortages areas, because they see that as a clear market for them in terms of how to get in first with those young people.

Mr FARMER—So would industry be prepared to pay to get those apprentices through, do you think? It seems to me, and it seems to be a recommendation all the time, that a quick fix to every problem we have is to throw more government money at it. If there is a shortage of skilled people in industry coming through the ranks, is industry prepared to work directly with the schools? Is industry prepared to work with the schools and support the schools to be able to do that? Is that a way of fast-tracking the system so that we can get things done faster and get more people into these trades?

Ms Andruska—I cannot give a definite answer, but my observation through the NISI program is that when we work with industry, industry are actually putting up their own resources to work on the sorts of projects that we have had. Over the last few months, I have heard various industries, like the trucking industry, saying, ‘The time has come for us to stop bleating about skill shortages. The time has come, if we want to have this industry and be ready for the future, for us to be prepared to actually invest.’ They are the sorts of words that I am hearing.

Mr Greer—This goes back also to one of the earlier questions we had from the chair. Now that we have this national footprint of 220 clusters, if you map that across the country, you are also able to map where industry is and where skill shortages might be. If skill shortages are in a particular region and that region sits across the top of one or two clusters, industry locally should be engaging with those clusters to look at providing structured work placement opportunities and what have you to encourage students and kids from those regional areas. It takes the context into the areas where they might be able to work.

Mr FARMER—To finalise that point, do you see government’s role in that activity as being a broker between industry and their local areas and schools to work in partnership as opposed to it just being the government’s responsibility, the industry’s responsibility or the school’s responsibility?

Mr Greer—Absolutely. I think it offers great potential for partnerships or social coalitions and the interests of the local industry and the local community. It is about building those partnerships and looking at whether there are skill shortages. Most of the shortages that we are looking at are in pockets. You would be able to map those pockets to these clusters and then encourage industry to actively get in and champion and work with and engage. It becomes a partnership and a coalition arrangement.

CHAIR—We saw some very exciting examples of where that is happening. But it has to be on a regional basis, in my view, because the needs, skill shortages and the opportunities vary from region to region. Tony, we need to call it quits there, I am afraid. We would like to keep going, but I have another engagement. Thank you for coming in this morning. My apologies

again that it has been so short, but we certainly appreciate your input. We look forward to seeing Professor Watts next week. Tony, will you accompany Professor Watts?

Mr Greer—Yes. I am happy to. As I say, he came out and did the country review of Australia and prepared the Country Report. More importantly, he actually did the distillation of 36 countries down to this useful template.

CHAIR—That will be very helpful. We will look forward to seeing a copy of that and meeting him next week.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 9.56 a.m.