HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people

CANBERRA

Thursday, 5 June 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Members

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Peter Baldwin	Mrs Gash
Mr Barresi	Mr Marek
Mr Bradford	Mr Mossfield
Mr Brough	Mr Neville
Mr Dargavel	Mr Pyne
Mrs Elson	Mr Sawford
Mr Martin Ferguson	

Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

WITNESSES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Factors influencing the employment of young people

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Thursday, 5 June 1997

Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Baressi	Mrs Gash
Mr Bartlett	Mr Mossfield
Mr Brough	Mr Neville
Mr Dargavel	Mr Pyne
Mrs Elson	Mr Sawford

The committee met at 9.05 a.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The purpose of this inquiry is to consult widely and produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of our youth. The committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings and school forums throughout Australia, including many in regional and remote locations. This is a very broad-ranging inquiry.

Matters raised in submissions so far include the attitudes of young people; the work ethic of young people and their familiarity with the requirements of the workplace; the adequacy and relevance of the education and training systems; the importance of developing better linkages between schools and the business sector; the need for a more flexible industrial relations system; and the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs to assist young people to find employment.

That is not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues which the committee will consider or which might be raised. We are entirely open to the views of everyone who wishes to make an input to the inquiry. We are hear to listen, to learn and help improve the prospects of young Australians.

[9.05 a.m.]

MUNNS, Mr Cecil Frank, Principal and Chief Executive, John Paul College, John Paul Drive, Daisy Hill, Queensland 4127

CHAIR—Mr Munns, would you like to make a statement to the committee about the issues that we are inquiring into?

Mr Munns—Yes, if I may. Firstly, John Paul College is a relatively new school that was established in 1982. It is a coeducational ecumenical school of 2,300 students, catering for the education of the young from child care through to year 12. This year we also opened an international college as part of John Paul College to cater for students whose first language is not English but who, after graduating from our international college, will move into the body of our school. John Paul is the largest school in Queensland.

We appear before you this morning as a school which has a fine record for producing graduates who are highly prized by employers in our region and beyond. In discussing the employability of our graduates, I believe it is appropriate to note that John Paul College is situated in the centre of Logan City, which is not one of the more socioeconomic advantaged areas within our state or nation. It is an area where youth unemployment runs between 35 per cent and 40 per cent. The large majority of our parents indeed struggle to meet their fee commitment. We draw on students who are predominantly from the Logan City area.

I believe it is also appropriate to note that tertiary education is not an option for 30 per cent of our graduates, of which 240 graduate from our school each year. We therefore recognise and are obligated to pay due attention to the immediate employability of this 30 per cent of our student population who do not enter tertiary education. We also provide a job placement service for the ex-students of John Paul College who have completed their tertiary degrees at a university or any other tertiary institution.

The programs policies and attitudes that we have adopted in producing these employability results are based upon what we believe to be relevance to the employment market, rather than merely upgrading career education programs from a previous era. Our program which produces such a high level of employability of our graduates is not based upon passing on narrowly based workplace skills which, we believe, could be redundant before the students enter the work force. As such it is a program which is proactive rather than reactive. It is a program which organises itself to produce students who can be successful in the twenty-first century rather than a program which tries to solve the problems of what was happening at the end of the twentieth century.

Consequently, we understand that there is a clearly defined group of generic skills and attitudes of mind which must be passed on to graduates if they are to progress

comfortably and successfully into the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century.

Our success is based on a process that is enshrined in what we call our holistic approach to education, but is based—and I believe this will be important for our discussion this morning—on four major components, that is, the program to produce this level of employability. Within the environment in which John Paul College exists year after year we place 98 per cent to 100 per cent of our students either in further education or employment by the passing of two months from the time of graduation.

Our success, therefore, is based upon four areas. The first of these is our curriculum, which recognises the pre-eminent place of modern technology in our contemporary world. We immerse each and every one of our students in a program of modern technology across the entire curriculum. I do not intend this morning to go into the nature of that immersion program in modern technology and I would invite any of you to John Paul College to see it in operation. It is indeed the most comprehensive program of immersion in modern technology in Australia, and, as I know from my travels, in the world.

This program of modern technology across the curriculum is fundamental to the employability of our graduates, in that it provides each of our students with the most relevant work force skills we can provide in this age of information and communication. But, more importantly, it provides each of our students with an attitude of mind which allows them not to be fazed by the rapidity of change but indeed to be excited by that change and to be able to contribute to the nature of change, rather than be a knee-jerk reactor to change forced upon them by others.

As such we are a school which understands that we needed to break the nineteenth century mould of education which still permeates most of the schools of this nation. We have realised that we need to be a school which is willing to change the nature and the place of learning; that we need to be a school which is willing to change the nature of the classroom as we have known it since the mid-nineteenth century and indeed which still exists in most of our schools today. In other words, we need to be a school which is willing to be innovative, dynamic and progressive in developing curriculum. We have done this by introducing modern technology across that curriculum.

The second factor which we believe is very important in the employability of our students is that we have an understanding and an expectation that the young of our nation have a tremendous capacity for commitment, for dignity, for poise and for graciousness. We believe that the education system of Australia has missed this factor in the young. Therefore, we believe that overt social skills are important assets for youth seeking employment. We know that this attribute of our students—that is, knowing how to act with dignity, poise and graciousness and knowing how to keep a commitment—is one of the major gifts passed on to them by our college which makes them such an employable product within the community.

Some people have pointed out to me that the first objective involving immersing our students in modern technology, which presupposes that we must change the nature and the place of learning and the nature of the classroom as it has been known for a long time, is such a radical and liberal way of looking at the educative process that it is in some way incompatible with a rather conservative way of understanding that our students should be adept in dignity, poise and gracious and knowing that they will keep a commitment. We do not see them as incompatible. Indeed, we see these as the two main factors which make our students an employable commodity within the community.

The third area which we emphasise in developing our careers education program is to develop an inclusive and realistic careers education program. This is a program which begins in preschool and culminates in year 12 and which meaningfully links students' aptitudes, abilities and interest to the realities of the job market.

This program, under the leadership of our Director of Careers, creates individual profiles on every student as they systematically align their potential and aptitude with relevant and realistic career choices. It is not a program which has at its centre work experience for every student.

Fourthly, we include the creation of meaningful links with industry in order that individual students may gain experience in specific areas of vocational interest, rather than insisting that all year 10 or year 11 students participate in an orthodox work experience program which we believe would merely divert many young men and women from valuable academic time, a process which in itself would be counterproductive to students' employability in this modern age.

Ours therefore is a proactive stance. It is designed deliberately and thoughtfully to ensure that our graduates are eminently employable within the contemporary world. We believe that what happens on our campus is not only of benefit to our students but of benefit to our nation.

However, although ours is a success story, although year after year we place all of our students in employment or in tertiary education, it is a success story which we believe receives very little official recognition or encouragement from governments, either state or federal.

Because we are a school that provides such a program of immersion in technology across the curriculum and therefore gives the students the necessary skills and attitudes of mind to be successful in the rapidly changing world in which we all exist, and because we are a school that provides our students with the opportunity to develop the appropriate literacy in the new medium of their time, which is digital, interactive, multi-media, and because we provide a holistic educational experience which deliberately makes each of our students such an employable commodity within our community, we find that because of this proactive and relevant response our parents, who have already made significant

financial sacrifices to resource this educational product, are now to be penalised by the present ERI formula used by the federal government to determine the level of funding for each of the non-government schools of our nation.

Fifteen years ago when John Paul College was established there is no doubt that our college would have been the most under-resourced school in this nation. However, we are intent on giving our students the best start in life and to make our graduates eminently employable within the Australian community. Consequently, we have over the years responded enthusiastically to the urging from both sides of politics to improve our resource levels within our school and to enhance the educational outcomes for our students.

Fifteen years later, our college is recognised as leading the nation in the provision of a quality educational product that meets the needs of students who will live out their adult lives in the rapidly changing technological world of the twenty-first century.

However, we are acutely aware that because of a fundamentally flawed formula which has been applied by federal governments over time, to determine the category of funding for schools, we are now in a position of facing severe financial discrimination and penalty for no other reason than that, in the past 15 years, we have proved to be one of the nation's most progressive, innovative, dynamic and responsible schools, doing the most for the young people of this nation.

We could have sat on our hands. We could have left our resource level at a low level and irrelevant to the needs of the students who are entrusted to us. We could have been satisfied with average outcomes from our school. We could have been satisfied with being mediocre. And if we had done this, that would have satisfied the requirements of a totally inappropriate ERI formula for determining per capita funding, and would have left our funding intact. But, instead, we responded to the encouragement of successive governments to lift our resource level, to improve our educational outcomes and the employability of our students. Consequently, I now have to explain to my Logan City parents that, because of their past sacrifices in providing better resources for their sons and daughters within their school, they will be penalised and discriminated against by our federal government.

As each of us is aware, the federal government is presently reviewing the future of this ERI, that is, the education resource index. Our thesis is that the present system is so fundamentally flawed that, irrespective of how it may be tinkered with in any review by DEETYA, it will continue to discriminate against new, progressive, innovative and dynamic schools—the very schools which, we believe, are the schools that are doing the most to facilitate our nation to take its place as a competitive and successful player in the global environment of the twenty-first century.

If we are to be able to continue to serve the youth of Logan City, as we have been

serving them, we will need assurances about the stability of management and certainty of funding beyond the year 2000. In essence, our school needs time. John Paul College will be compromised in what it is doing to provide the employability of graduates if sufficient time is not given to allow us to restructure our management and finances. We will certainly require more time than is available up to the year 2000.

Our proposal then is that the present categories of funding be maintained until the year 2004 in order that the government has time to come up with a system more appropriate to the encouragement of the progressive and dynamic education of the young of our nation, and in order that progressive new and dynamic schools such as ours may be afforded stability of management and certainty of funding in the meantime.

CHAIR—Thank you for that opening statement. What are the college's fees?

Mr Munns—Our fees are approximately $4,000 for secondary and $3,000 for primary.

CHAIR—How many single parents send their kids to John Paul College? I know the Logan City area and have been there a number of times.

Mr Munns—About 20 per cent come from single parent homes.

CHAIR—I am a little fuzzy on the careers education model. I understand you start early.

Mr Munns—Yes.

CHAIR—We commend you for that. One of the things we have found throughout Australia, whether in the cities, in the regions or in the outback, is that kids just do not any more have a good grounding in what careers there are likely to be when they exit the school system and what sort of career path and jobs are available to them. They all know that there is university, they know there is the dole and the rest of it is a bit fuzzy. So we commend you on doing that. You talked about student aptitude. Do you do aptitude testing?

Mr Munns—We do aptitude testing of all students when they leave year 7 to go into year 8.

CHAIR—How long have you been doing that?

Mr Munns—Since we commenced our school.

CHAIR—Are you aware of any other schools that do aptitude testing?

Mr Munns—I don't know of any other school that does the battery of testing that we do. We take for granted that no individual single test can be totally reliable, but we have found that if you do a sufficient battery of tests on students, covering aptitude and all their other potential, including intelligence testing and so on but across the individual disciplines, this battery of tests is always a very accurate measure of the potential of the individual. Then of course the trick in education is to see that performance equals potential.

CHAIR—How much criticism have you copped for doing aptitude testing?

Mr Munns—None.

Mr BARRESI—Do you develop your own benchmarks on those tests?

Mr Munns—Yes.

CHAIR—When I went to school I had to go through aptitude testing too, but it was a long time ago!

Mr Munns—The aptitude tests are not only employability-designated.

CHAIR—No, but I assume that you use them to help guide the students in directions. In other words, if someone has no aptitude in maths, you would not encourage them to take a choc-a-bloc full science and maths course to become an engineer, for instance?

Mr Munns—It becomes part of their employment profile.

CHAIR—You encourage them in directions where the testing said they were likely to have more success?

Mr Munns—Yes, unless their subsequent journey through the school proves otherwise.

CHAIR—And how reliable have you found the results of the combination of the testing?

Mr Munns—Very reliable.

CHAIR—And how many hours worth of pen and paper does it involve to take the tests?

Mr Munns—Four or five hours, all up. But, more importantly, every student by the time they reach year 10 would have spent individual time with our careers people; in

year 11 every student would spend at least one hour with the careers person; and in year 12 it is unlimited.

CHAIR—And the aptitude testing is in grade 6?

Mr Munns—At the end of grade 7.

CHAIR—You have talked about careers advice. To what extent and how, particularly with the young students, do you tell them the range of careers and work opportunities?

Mr Munns—What we seek to do in a very simplistic sense from the very early years on is to give them an understanding of the demands and the expectations in individual career areas, and then very gently bring them to an understanding of a comparison between their aptitudes and abilities and the demands of that area of employment. Therefore, we find that all of our students as they move through year 12 are being directed into areas where they are likely to have success in life, rather than being directed into areas such as parents may wish them to go.

Mr SAWFORD—Yours is one of the few secondary schools that are planned. People may disagree with your plan but you have actually got a plan, whereas many secondary schools, both public and private, in this country do not have a plan. In terms of the four point plan that you put to us earlier in terms of curriculum, social skills, careers education, links with industry and so on, how long has that been formed? It wouldn't have been there in, say, 1982?

Mr Munns—It certainly wasn't. If anybody were to step forward and ask, 'Why are John Paul College students so eminently employable?', I would say because they can look you in the eye naturally, which is so much part of our ethos at John Paul College, call you 'sir' and 'ma'am' and know how to keep a commitment. You don't survive within the environment of John Paul College unless you keep that commitment.

Secondly, I would say that every student that leaves John Paul College at the moment has the one basic employability skill that is necessary, and that is not how to use a saw or to make a cabinet or whatever, but is how to be comfortable in the environment of the digital world. Every John Paul College student is immersed within that as no other group is. I am not talking about superimposing modern technology on outmoded structures and practices. I am talking about changing the whole nature of the place of learning in order that modern technology becomes the fourth 'R' if you like or another essential literacy that young people have to have to move into the world.

If you put those two things together, I believe you could almost get rid of the other two and you would have a John Paul College student who would be going very well. But necessarily you have then got to go through the process of an absolute program that runs

from preschool through to year 12. So you need your careers people and you need your links with industry—but not the type of links that most schools have where everybody stops work for one week or two weeks a year. If they go into a work experience program, you find it counterproductive because most students are not too sure what they want to do and you fit students in where they fit because there happens to be a hole there with your contacts with the community. We have lots of people going into the community, but they go out specifically into areas that are designated as of interest to them. Well, we feel that they should get the experience.

Mr SAWFORD—One of the most complimentary things I see about the way you put your schools program together is that in this inquiry, if one took the trinity of the three groups that impact upon young people seeking employment, you find evidence that some schools are not taking the employability matter seriously. You find the brokers are the ones who are trying to guide people into careers advisers in the schools or maybe employment brokers. Then you get industry itself and you see the breakdown in links. You are a rare commodity in that you have taken those three responsibilities on yourself and are not dependent upon industry or brokers coming to you, and you have that geared up right from the very beginning. I compliment you on that because you are the only group of people I have come across in this inquiry as identifying that trinity.

May I ask you about the number of people you have in careers advice? In our inquiry—and this is not a criticism of secondary schools but is a criticism of the management and resources available to secondary schools—we have often found examples of 1,000 to 1,200 kids with only one careers adviser available for sometimes 20, 30 or 40 per cent of the school week who for the rest of the time has teaching commitments. How do you organise that careers education program in your school, how many people have you got, how do you fund it, what are some of the problems you come across? Would you like to talk a little about those aspects?

Mr Munns—We have a Director of Careers Education. This person, John Carroll, is a senior member of staff and, as such, answers directly to me. It is his responsibility to develop a careers education program from preschool through to year 12, and that is integrated into the pastoral care program of the school. Therefore, every pastoral care teacher within the school is directly answerable to him to see that his program is implemented throughout every class. Outside that general program we then need to have specific advice, and every year 10, year 11 and every year 12 student is timetabled with two careers people within the school, of whom John Carroll is one, to get specific advice on careers over that three year period. Their careers portfolio is built up and contains not just direct careers information but has at the earliest possible time our projection of what OP a student should get. Therefore, when a student comes along saying, 'I'm desperate to get into medicine', we certainly don't say, 'But hold on, you won't get an OP to get you into medicine'. We start to discuss other alternatives along that career line if indeed the aptitudes are in line with what is wanted.

Mr SAWFORD—How many people have you involved in the section? You have a director, John Carroll. How many other people?

Mr Munns—One, so there are two. They are the people who are liberally available on a one to one basis. But all form teachers implement John's program throughout the whole school. It starts in preschool with the preschool teachers sitting in the sandpit saying, 'What does your dad do?' Then the kid says back to the teacher, 'What do you do, ma'am?'

Mr SAWFORD—So if I go down to your year 4, year 5 kids and go around the whole lot and say to them, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?', are they going to give me the normal answers such as that they want to be a teacher, a fireman or policeman or whatever, or are they going to answer by saying, 'I am going to design the best cutlery system in the world' or 'I am going to design this or that.'? Are they creative in the way in which they respond in terms of careers?

Mr Munns—I believe they would give you no more definitive answer than would kids in any school. But they are coming to grips with the demands of individual employment opportunities.

Mr SAWFORD—Is this because you have a very conservative program in terms of social skills commitment? Do you think that is limiting? I do not say that as a criticism as I am very impressed by what you do.

Mr Munns—I wouldn't call it conservative.

Mr SAWFORD—I think you called it conservative when you described it.

Mr Munns—Some people see it as conservative—that the John Paul College student can look you in the eye, will call you 'sir' or 'ma'am' and if you walked on campus you would have at least half a dozen people come out and ask, 'Could I help you, sir?' If they go into an employment situation, they will look you in the eye as an employer and give you those same courtesies, but they would do it very naturally. I don't think in any way that would have an effect on their ambitions in the employment world. It would probably give them a far greater opportunity than if they didn't have those qualities.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you any ex-students from your school who run their own businesses?

Mr Munns—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—How big a percentage do they comprise? Have you done any

study into that?

Mr Munns—No, I haven't.

Mr SAWFORD—Are there many such people or just the odd one?

Mr Munns—Well, for people of their age there are more than would be normal. For instance, we have two young people who last year decided not to go to university but to set up their own software creation business in Logan City.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you offer scholarships?

Mr Munns—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—How many?

Mr Munns—We offer eight full scholarships and eight half scholarships per year.

Mr SAWFORD—At what level?

Mr Munns—At year 8.

Mr SAWFORD—How many disabled children do you have in your school campus?

Mr Munns—I wouldn't be able to tell you exactly, but we certainly have many students who need special assistance.

Mr SAWFORD—So you have a special education program?

Mr Munns—We do. We have a foster centre which has five special education teachers in it and they cater for approximately 10 per cent of the school.

Mr SAWFORD—Who chooses your staff—you?

Mr Munns—Not me directly. We have people in senior posts who do those things.

Mr SAWFORD—Did you do that in the beginning?

Mr Munns—I did. In the beginning I was everything from the headmaster to the janitor.

Mr SAWFORD—I am an ex-principal and I have run two good schools where I was given the freedom to select my own staff, poach my own staff, do whatever, and I

had one school where I couldn't shift one person. There is a big difference. How much of that success is due to you and having that flexibility of just choosing who you like?

Mr Munns—Absolutely—not only choosing who I like but having the determination that mediocre people should not continue on staff.

Mrs ELSON—John Paul College is close to my electorate and a lot of children from my electorate go to your college. I have asked employers in the area why they prefer your college students because you have standing in the community for providing very high quality students—whether they go into retail or wherever. The answer I get every time is that it is due to their attitude. In our travels around Australia, this committee has been told that attitude is the top priority. I wondered what was in your curriculum. Does it start by the school setting examples of behaviour and students' attitudes towards people? I have met heaps of your students and they are very communicative. They can speak on all topics and I wondered how you instil this into children because it seems to be lacking in a lot of schools.

Mr Munns—The student we seek to develop is an outgoing, relaxed type of person. There is no draconian discipline at John Paul College, but every student that you meet on campus will be gracious, will look you in the eye and obviously will be proud of the uniform they wear and the school they go to. That is what they take into the community. So many people come to us and say, 'We will put on two apprentices if we can get two from John Paul. If we can't get them, we are not going to do it.' In terms of the 30 per cent who do not go on to tertiary studies, we can place them very quickly.

But going back to your question, it is a deliberate program. Every person on the staff is part of the program. We never pass a student without speaking to them and we don't expect them to pass us without speaking. We do insist that when we speak to students, we call them 'sir' or 'ma'am' if we don't know their names, and they do the same to us. In other words, it is not something that the students do; it is something that is done within the whole school. My disappointment is that sometimes parents come to me and talk about 'This rubbish of sir and ma'am and girls curtsying' and so on when presented with a prize or whatever it happens to be. But this is the number one thing which makes our students employable and yet it is something which seems to be old-fashioned and in some ways subversive if it is pushed within our education system throughout our nation. I would put it right up-front as to why a John Paul College student always gets the job.

Mr MOSSFIELD—On the question of employment, could you tell me the actual percentage that get jobs; secondly, what type of employment they get; and thirdly, the success rate in that employment?

Mr Munns—Do you mean staying in the job?

Mr MOSSFIELD—Yes, if you have a record of that.

Mr Munns—Approximately 30 per cent of our students go into the work force; it could be as low as 20 per cent in some years, but the figure is between 20 per cent and 30 per cent. We always say that we have 30 per cent of our students for whom tertiary education is not an option and therefore they have to be looked after, as well as the people going into tertiary education. Some of them do not hold on to the jobs for too long, because of the nature of the individual, but they always have the opportunity of coming back to us for re-employment. The people we have most difficulty in placing are not the John Paul College students that graduate out of year 12 but the John Paul College students who have gone out and got an engineering degree and can't get a job, or they have done a law degree and can't get articles, but that is the nature of the world in which we live. We have a very high success rate in placing them as well. One engineer has just been sent off to Robe River and she is very happy with the challenge.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about in the trade areas? Have you had any success rate there in getting people into trades?

Mr Munns—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Do you have any figures on that?

Mr Munns—I can't give you exact figures but John Carroll certainly could.

Mrs GASH—How involved is the business community? Do you actively go out and get them, or do they come to you and say, 'We want to be involved with your programs'?

Mr Munns—We have contacts with business where we can send students who need to go out on a needs basis. As I said, we don't have a work experience program as many other schools do. We think that is counterproductive.

Mrs GASH—Do you really feel that is counterproductive?

Mr Munns—Well, counterproductive for many of the students. I would say that for 80 per cent of ours the normal work experience program would be counterproductive in so far as they have been trying to think of a job they can go do, or we would be fitting them in with a hairdresser and they may not be feeling too interested in hairdressing. We would send out 70 per cent of our students over a two-year period to get work experience or to go and talk to people within business or industry or the corporate world, but not on a 'You beaut, let's close down school for a week and send everybody out to have this type of experience.' I think the old type of work experience was very good about 30 years ago

when it was introduced when indeed 60 per cent of your students in year 10 left school, and only 40 per cent went on into year 11 or 12. Now we have throughout the nation closer to 90 per cent going through to year 12 and indeed the best experience we can be giving them for their future employability is in the academic area and technology area of the twenty-first century.

Mrs GASH—So to go back to the original question, is the business world involved? Do they come and see you or do you actively go and see them?

Mr Munns—John Paul College is a little different to the business world than most schools. We regard John Paul College as being in the industry of education and we are probably accepted more than most schools in the corporate world. We see ourselves as effectively running a business and mixing with the corporate world.

Mr BROUGH—You said that there was no draconian disciplinary program. Obviously some of your students are coming in at grade 9 or grade 10, which is their first introduction into your system of schooling. What sort of disciplinary problems do you experience and how do you deal with these problems? We hear that in Queensland you have codes, you are on (1), (2), (3), eventually get in the black book and then in time-out rooms and all that sort of thing. How do you deal with that? In terms of the attitudinal parts that you have spoken about, obviously parents, who are paying $4,000 for their children to go to your college, have a pretty positive attitude about what they want for their children. Do you see that perhaps you are getting a different type of student than the average state school?

Mr Munns—To answer your last question first, that is certainly true. One of the big advantages we have in the independent system is that most parents at least have enough interest in the education of their children to pay for a product which they could get down the road for nothing, though they see it as a different product than that which they would get down the road. Therefore, on average we have students from more interested homes, and that certainly is an advantage. But that is not a covering law. I think we have some parents at John Paul College with a worse attitude towards the education of their children than the average parent from any school, be it catholic, systemic or state school.

When children come to us in years 9 and 10, as you said, they do find it different a little uncomfortable to start with. Yesterday I interviewed a young lady coming in at year 11 from another school in our district. She wants to come into our horizon sports program where we do senior over three years rather than two in order that they can do a good academic program and yet concentrate on sport, if indeed they are good enough to represent at state or national level. She found it very uncomfortable to call me 'sir', but by the end of the interview she was doing it naturally. Within a week or two she will be looking everybody in the eye and calling them 'sir' or 'ma'am' or by their name and be a much more saleable commodity within the community. It is not a great hurdle for them to overcome. We forget that young people are capable of tremendous dignity, poise and graciousness. We just don't in our schools do anything to bring it out of them.

As for discipline, we do not have corporate punishment at John Paul College, never have and never will. When you are a teacher at John Paul College, you simply don't touch the students. We believe that no problem has ever really been solved through violence, and neither should the discipline problems of a school. We have suspension for students who are completely beyond the pale. We have expulsion, though that is very rare. It is probably easier in a school that doesn't have corporal punishment and does have standards to get yourself suspended.

Mr BROUGH—That happens frequently or infrequently?

Mr Munns—Suspension would happen across a school of 2,000, of course, at reasonably regular intervals.

Mr DARGAVEL—Do you have a dress code for your teachers?

Mr Munns—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Does the aptitude testing that you do also incorporate a personality test?

Mr Munns—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Do you use either the aptitudinal or personality test as a screening process in kids going on, or is it used purely to develop a profile?

Mr Munns—A profile. These tests are given only after a student is enrolled. There is no selective entry: either straight academic or aptitudinal.

Mr BARRESI—You mentioned earlier that your students are fairly outgoing in nature. I assume that, as in any population sample, you would have kids at either end of the spectrum, from manics right through to your introverts. How do you get those at either end to conform within the standards that you are after?

Mr Munns—They all do. Even if you are an introverted kid, you do find it very natural when in the community of John Paul College to be dignified, poised and gracious. Of course there is a spectrum of that, and there are some young gentlemen particularly around about year 10 and some young ladies around about year 9 who need to be more forcefully reminded about the requirements of the institution.

Mr BARRESI—Is the parent brought in as part of that employment profile process in terms of giving feedback on the kid's profile and on what they can do outside the school system?

Mr Munns—Not normally, but many parents do ask to see John Carroll.

Mr BARRESI—In terms of teacher attitude and dress code, going back to the social skills and the conservative element that you mentioned there, how are you able to get the teachers aboard on this program? Is there a screening process that takes place with your teachers? Is there resistance from the teachers in conforming to such a conservative model?

Mr Munns—I tell my senior staff who do employment these days that in regard to dignity, poise and graciousness the teachers at least have to be fellow travellers. There is a certain standard we expect of teachers in respect of their dress and demeanour around the school. Indeed, their continued employment is dependent upon that. At times we have to talk very seriously to our teachers about support for the ethos, the direction, the vision and the myth of John Paul College. It is what we call leading at the cultural and the symbolic level.

Mr DARGAVEL—I am curious about retention rates. It has been a criticism of some schools in some places that I have lived in that they encourage kids who are not going to successfully complete to move on before it becomes apparent that that is likely to happen. What proportion of people who start high school would complete right through to year 12?

Mr Munns—Our year 12 is the same size as our year 8, but about 10 per cent of our students move in and out per year.

CHAIR—Ten per cent move in and out. What do you mean?

Mr Munns—We are a reasonably mobile area.

CHAIR—How many leave before the end of year 12 to go find jobs and live on the dole or whatever?

Mr Munns—Two or three per year.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 9.55 to 10.15 a.m.

[10.15 a.m.]

SWEET, Professor Richard Laurence, Research Coordinator, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 210 Clarence Street, Sydney, New South Wales 2000

CHAIR—Thank you for coming to talk to us today. Our inquiry is not about unemployment but about employment, which makes it different. The two issues that we have been trying to come to grips with for the past year are how we should help young people to become more employable and how we encourage business, industry, commerce and in a sense the public sector too to make more jobs available for our youth. Would you like to make some general statements to the committee?

Prof. Sweet—I suppose we are an unusual organisation in the country in that we are both independent and non-profit and we combine an interest in policy issues with an interest in practice on the ground. We have been interested in these issues of young people and employability for some years now. It is a bit like a jigsaw or rather like a dark room where a spotlight shines on bits and pieces of the picture. It is very hard to get an overall picture. What seems to be occurring is that people focus on one bit of the jigsaw and believe it is the answer. They believe that, for example, better vocational education programs in years 11 and 12 would be the answer, or better careers guidance, or better aptitude testing, or the chance to spend some time out in the community.

From where we sit, starting from the point of view of the needs of young people, it is clear that in a sense all those things are the answer and that what we lack in Australia is a comprehensive approach to young people's employability that starts during the compulsory years of high school, carries through to the post- compulsory years and then builds linkages between the school and employment opportunities and job-seeking services.

If this committee's report could do any one thing, I think it would be important for it to paint a picture of the sorts of services that young people need in their move towards being employable. I think that picture should seek to fill in all pieces of the jigsaw and argue as coherently for good career education services in the junior years of high school as it argues for good partnerships between schools and employers in years 11 and 12 to develop employment skills, and as it argues for good job-seeking and employment-placement services that build links between the school and the community around it.

The other general remarks I would like to make before we go into some dialogue relate to the issue of the relationship between the Commonwealth and the states and the role of the states. We, as you would know, have been fairly heavily involved in the development of joint school-industry programs in years 11 an 12 that allow young people to spend some time in the work force whilst in secondary schooling, gaining some skills that are recognised by employers and having those built into their senior school certificates and TAFE and VET qualifications.

We know from our experience that when these programs are done well, they significantly improve young people's chances of getting jobs. We know from our experience in follow-ups that we have done of the TRAC program that the unemployment rate of students in those programs is half the national average, and we know that the proportion of them that go on to further education and training is about 50 per cent higher than the national average. Of late we have been doing some work on differences between the states in how they have approached programs of this sort in years 11 and 12. It is quite clear that the differences between the states in almost every aspect of school industry programs are large and significant. In some cases these differences are not material, but in many cases it is very hard to avoid any conclusion other than that they affect the quality of the programs and that they bear very little relationship to either the needs of young people or to the requirements and expectations of employers.

We find, for example, that in a state such as Victoria about a third of all students have to do their work placements completely in their own time because school timetables can't accommodate their work placements. We find that there are enormous differences between the states in, for example, the proportion of programs where the learning that students gain in the workplace is formally assessed. We find that there are enormous differences between the states in the ways in which employers are invited to be partners in this assessment process. These are just some examples. I can leave you with a draft of a report that we are in process of producing, which we expect to be completed within a few weeks. That will give you a flavour of these differences.

It seems from our point of view that one of the things that would be very helpful in at least this part of the jigsaw would be the development of some common standards across the states which would help to drive up the quality of school-industry programs.

CHAIR—Thank you for those comments, and thank you for the draft report. By way of comment, we in our travels around the states have found huge differences in terms of how the state and the education system itself respond to an emerging although not universally recognised view that have to do a better job in getting kids in touch with what the real world of work is all about.

If you were writing this report and you had the opportunity to make recommendations on how we address this issue of careers advice, and starting at any age you like, what would you recommend we do in a modern sense to let kids know what careers or jobs might be available in future?

Prof. Sweet—The first thing you would want to recommend is that access to career education, careers advice, career information be an entitlement and a right for all young people in the compulsory years of schooling. This is the case in other countries. It is the case in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand, and in the case of New Zealand at least some funding is put aside to ensure that that entitlement can take effect. But we have never taken that view in Australia. Our suspicion at the moment is that there is probably a

decline rather than an increase in the availability of career education career guidance services in this country.

The second thing I would suggest is that we change our approach to careers education and guidance from one which says that it all has to be on the shoulders of an expert careers adviser in the school to one that says that it has got to involve much more strongly local employers and the local community. It has to be an approach that gets young people out of the school into workplaces, brings employers into schools, an approach that brings ex-students back to schools to talk to students in language that they can understand, and an approach that gives teachers—not just careers teachers but all teachers—the chance to get out of school and to spend time in real firms getting some sort of understanding of the world of work. Instead of spoon-feeding kids, it must be an approach that gives them the opportunity to take some responsibility themselves for finding out about the world of work and communicating that back to their peers. So in addition to developing information that they know, it helps them to develop some skills in working with groups of other kids, skills in writing up information and reporting it, and thereby developing employability skills at the same time as taking part in career education and careers guidance.

I think the model that says that one expert careers adviser in the school can do it all, without any recognition by the rest of the school as to the importance of that job and that one expert careers adviser can have access to all the information that is required in order for kids to make an informed choice, and that they are the only ones that give advice to kids, and not parents, employers and the community, is a model for the past. We have to think about a way of approaching careers education that involves the whole of the school, all teachers in the school, and one that ensures that all the school is focused towards jobs, employment and careers.

CHAIR—If again you were writing the report and had the opportunity to make a recommendation on what measures we could take to expand job opportunities in the real employment out there for a youth, what would it be?

Prof. Sweet—If you look at what has been going on in the youth labour market over the past 30 years, it is clear that, as we all know, there has been a significant drop in the availability of full-time employment, and yet there has been no aggregate decline in employment as such. We have seen, for example, since we came out of the recession of the early 1990s that there has been significant expansion in full-time employment. So we cannot ascribe the decline in the employment of youth to the fact that the labour market as a whole is not creating jobs. That raises the question as to why, in competition with adults who are gaining all the full-time jobs that are being created in the economy, young people are not gaining jobs. I think the answer to that is to look at the situation from the point of view of an employer who is under no obligation to give a job to a young person. They can hire whoever they want and why do they give preference to adults when they are taking on new labour rather than to young people? Conventional economics would say that they

are mad because an adult is more expensive, but it is the value they get for their dollar that is the key.

I think the answer lies in a mismatch between the skills and the employability of young people and what an increasingly demanding and more highly skilled labour market requires. The days have gone when a young person could walk into an office and muck around for a couple of years and pick up a bit of copy typing just in the workplace, make a few mistakes and grow towards employability in the workplace. It is difficult for offices to employ young people these days unless they can handle computers, word-processing packages, phone systems, complex photocopiers and so on. All that argues for an increase in the skills base of the work. We have sat there and watched an increase in the skills base of the work and have done nothing about trying to make sure that young people's skills rise commensurately before they leave school. If I would argue for any approach, it would be one that says that gaining increased access to work on the part of young people will occur only when their employability and skills are raised. This means a very significant change in the way that schools look at the way that they prepare young people for employment.

Mr BARTLETT—Professor Sweet, you said that employability from the point of view of an employer depends on value for dollar. Skills base obviously is one component of value for dollar, but the dollar cost is also another component. Isn't it true that for some industries at least it is not so much the educational quality of those applying, say, for apprenticeships as the cost of employing in terms of straight wage costs plus all the on-costs as well, particularly in those areas that could provide apprenticeships in areas which perhaps are not so technical—say, building trades, for instance, where a lot of employers are willing to take on apprentices but simply can't afford them because of the wage costs plus the on-costs?

Prof. Sweet—If you look at what has been occurring in youth apprentices' wages and relativities between adult and youth wages in recent years, it is pretty hard to argue that an increased cost of apprentices is a factor in declining chances of young people getting an apprenticeship. As far as on-costs are concerned, I don't have any evidence to show that those on-costs have risen significantly enough to explain the decline in demand for apprentices. It might be the case, but I am just not aware of it.

A couple of other things have been going on in the labour market which seem to me to be more important factors in explaining why the ratio of apprenticeships to tradespersons has been dropping in recent years. One is that the education quality of those who leave school and go into apprenticeships has been falling as school retention has risen, and more and more of the able kids who used to get a trade now go on to year 11 and 12, there is an academic curriculum and they decide they want to go to university instead of getting into a trade.

The other thing that is happening is increasing growth of outsourcing and

contracting as a way of firms obtaining their trade level skills. As firms switch from having their own tradespersons on site to do maintenance and so on to contracting and outsourcing, it reduces the opportunities for there to be an experienced and qualified tradesperson to act as the master, if you like, within the apprenticeship arrangement. So I suspect that those sorts of changes in the labour market and in the way kids feed out of schools into the labour market are probably more important than wage factors in explaining what has been going on. But whether the total cost factors are important I just don't know.

Mr BARTLETT—I am referring to anecdotal evidence. With the current upsurge in demand in the building industry, for instance, small builders say to me, 'I would put on an apprentice but I can't afford it. It is the cost factor. We have a lot of people knocking on our doors willing to work as apprentices, seeking work, with enough qualifications, but we just can't afford it. And we can't afford it compared to the cost of a qualified tradesman and the value that we get for them.'

Prof. Sweet—One of the big costs that occurs in taking on an apprentice which is often not recognised clearly enough is not so much the cost of the wages or the on-costs, it is the cost of the supervision time in that first year of the apprenticeship. Once they get over that hump of the first year, the supervision costs decline quite significantly. It seems to me that a sensible way of addressing that issue is by ensuring one way or another that young people are more productive at the point when they hit the actual apprenticeship. I think that is a good argument in favour of the sorts of vocational education courses in years 11 and 12 that link into apprenticeship and give the kids the basic foundation skills that they need to work on a site—occupational health and safety, quality standards, use of tools and so on, at the point when they hit the point of formal indentures.

Certainly, judging by our experience in terms of the builders we deal with, that would seem to be a significant contribution that you could make to reducing the reluctance of employers to take on apprentices because of the cost factor.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I think we all realise that there is a major problem with apprentices for many of the reasons that you have already covered. I have reached the view that governments have got to step in and do something more than they are doing to support industries to have apprentice training schools such as we saw 10 or 15 years ago in the New South Wales State Rail where even in a recession they put on X number of apprentices, on the understanding that those apprentices would leave. I feel that major industries have got to take on more apprentices so that we don't get a skills shortage—and whether they need some government support to do that or not I don't know. But with the privatisation and corporatisation of government departments, fewer and fewer apprentices are being trained for their own requirements. Do you think such things would assist?

Prof. Sweet—It is ironic that a lot of the debate and argument about apprenticeship levels tends to focus on what private industry should do. But one of the largest declines in

apprenticeship numbers, as you indicated, has occurred among government employers—both the instrumentalities and government departments themselves. That is both at Commonwealth and state level. So I think it would be very useful for governments throughout the country to turn more of a critical eye on their own practices when they express concern about the future skills base of this country.

CHAIR—Coming back to the question of wage rates, it has always appealed to me that one of the reasons why we have heaps of kids in the hospitality industry, particularly the fast food industry employing part-time and casual kids, is that all over the industry it is easy for such kids to find jobs. But if you take a job that doesn't require ultra-high skill levels, such as a builder's labourer, there are no young people working as builder's labourers because there is no structure in the industry that will allow a trainee or age-based wage rates. So why would you put on an 18-year-old to be a builder's labourer when you can hire a 35-year-old who knows what he is doing and to whom you pay the same wage rate?

Prof. Sweet—That is right. There are some major structural problems in the relationship between youth wages and adult wages and between the wages that young people can get when they are training and when they are not training, which I think need to be resolved if we are serious about a wage-based approach to young people's initial vocational preparation. If you look at the way in which most countries prepare kids for work, in some ways they have a choice. You can either do it within the apprenticeship sort of model where the kid leaves school, gets a job and spends part of the time in training on the job, or you can do it in the way countries like France, Sweden and Korea do, which is largely through institution-based training, though often in association with time spent in real workplaces, as in Sweden.

If you want the former sort of approach—and a lot of the heat and light in Australia in terms of emphasis in policy development has gone into maintaining those wage-based approaches—it seems to me you have to have a wage structure which does a couple of things. One is that it gives a kid an incentive to get some skills. In other words, you have got to have demonstrated evidence that after they qualify they get more than they would have if they hadn't done the training. For example, the wage structure in traineeships doesn't really provide them with an incentive to finish their qualifications. If you look at rates of return on apprenticeships, you find that the age earnings profiles for most people who get trade qualifications flatten. In other words, once you get your qualifications, basically the rates that you get are pretty stable throughout most of your working life. If you get other sorts of qualifications such as a degree, the earnings profiles go upwards. In other words, there is an increasing return on qualifications throughout the working life.

If you look at it from the point of view of the incentive to the employer to take on a young person, we are faced with the sorts of issues that have been raised around the table this morning. Compared to other countries which have apprenticeship systems, in

terms of the ratio of apprentices to qualified workers, wages in Australia are probably the highest in the world. Employers still take on apprentices, but that sort of wage structure and those sorts of imbalances in both the traineeship area and the apprenticeship area are a barrier to any major expansion of the training opportunities for young people on a wage-based model.

My view would be that if we can't sort out the wage issues in such a way as to provide a major boost to both the incentive for young people to undertake training in employment and the incentive for employers to provide more training opportunities in employment, then we ought to be serious about switching to the sort of model adopted by Sweden in 1970 when, to all intents and purposes, it abandoned its apprenticeship system and said, 'We will do it through our comprehensive high schools in association with employers, and we will build partnerships with employers that let kids spend time out of the school and provide high quality facilities, teachers and resources in schools and use that sort of model.' By adopting that sort of model, they have managed to get roughly 60 per cent of all their kids into the vocational pathway. Whereas we are still struggling to get more than a quarter of our kids into a good quality vocational pathway.

CHAIR—You said there was no wage incentive on completion of traineeship, did you?

Prof. Sweet—Yes. When traineeships were first introduced in 1985 as a result of the Kirby inquiry's 1984 report, there was debate about how the wage should be structured. A precedent was set compared to apprenticeships and employers were not required to pay for kids' attendance at college for 25 per cent of their time. But in apprenticeship at least you find that if a kid finishes the trade and gets their trade ticket, the wages go up compared to the wages they would have had otherwise. But with traineeships you find that if you are a 17-year-old, for example, and get a traineeship in the retail industry, you finish it at age 18 and go on to exactly the same age-based wage that you would have had if you hadn't done a traineeship. So what is the incentive? The incentive is to use the traineeship as a stepping-stone to a full-time job on the same wage rates. I think that is the explanation for the drop-out rates or completion rates in traineeships being only about 50 per cent.

CHAIR—It is a delicate balance, is it not, between skill level and wages, as well as age and maturity, and the rate of social security payments?

Prof. Sweet—You are right to say that it is a balance between skill and the price. My view is that the wage issues are so difficult to resolve in this country that, rather than giving up completely, it is more sensible to try to approach the issue of the price that employers are willing to pay for young people's work by tackling the skills side of the equation and try to be very serious about improving the level and quality of the skills that young people have at the point when they present to the employer. That is not just the formal vocational qualifications they have got; it is their attitude, their personality, their

enthusiasm, their willingness to work, their understanding of the workplace and all of those sorts of factors.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I want to ask a question on the TRAC program. In travelling around the country, we have found that it was operating in a number of states very successfully and seems an ideal system for the transition from school to work. What is the future of the TRAC program? Is it being supported and what can be done to expand it?

Prof. Sweet—Our view has always been that we were never established to run programs for the whole of our existence. We set it up basically as a national model, a lighthouse program, and our interest has always been in the ideas that are built into it and the principles of it rather than necessarily the program as such. If you look at states such as Western Australia and Tasmania, those basic principles have been adopted not completely but pretty solidly as the basis for the way that they have gone about similar sorts of programs in their school systems. They call them different names but that doesn't matter. Last year South Australia had a very large expansion of the TRAC program, and it has recently released a ready, set go policy on vocational education which takes a lot of those sorts of principles and says, 'That's the way we are going to do it in this state from now on.' As an organisation our view is that progressively we would want programs to be able to be independent, self-supporting, and that the management and detailed operation of the programs on a day to day basis would be increasingly the role of states and of industry bodies themselves, or of collectives of program management groups.

I think a more important thing than the program itself is what is the future of the sorts of ideas that are the essence of how well that program actually works. There we get back to how governments, both Commonwealth and state, view the sorts of principles that are built into that program. We have been very encouraged that both the previous Commonwealth government and the present one have supported some of those key principles: extended contact with the workplace, strong links at local level between employers and schools, structured learning in the workplace against industry standards rather than simply observation and experience. On both sides of the House, governments have taken the view that those principles are ones they would wish to support.

It is fair to say that there are significant differences between the states in the extent to which they would in practice adopt those sorts of principles in the way that they implement their school industry programs. That is one of the reasons why we would feel it is fairly important at this stage for the Commonwealth to start developing and encouraging the states to adopt some basic minimum standards for these sorts of programs which adhere to those quality principles, simply because it can be demonstrated that the outcomes for kids who go through programs of that sort are so good.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You have drawn attention to the fact that a lot of the work that young people are forced to go into at the early stages is of a part-time, casual and a short-term nature and also to the need to get accreditation for people carrying out that sort

of work, so that even though they might have three or four part-time jobs over a period of time it will mean something at the end. In the context of the work for the dole program, do you have any suggestions whereby the work carried out by those people would be accredited and recognised by employers at a later date?

Prof. Sweet—I will not make comments in the context of the work for the dole program because I don't know anything about it and we have had no experience of it. But on the whole issue of kids when they leave school, there is a world of difference between on the one hand the kids who do the part-time jobs when they are at school or when they are students and use them as a stepping-stone or as a bit of a supplement to their income and who will never work in those industries, and the kids who when they leave school can't find a full-time job and get nothing but part-time and casual jobs. That has been growing very rapidly in the 1990s.

The way that we are trying to approach this is to look at what really determines the employability of kids in those sorts of jobs. We have spent a bit of time recently working with employers who take kids on for those sorts of jobs to look at what they think are the key employability attributes. Our view would probably be that if you want to give them some accreditation or recognition of the skills they develop in those jobs, given that typically the kids will not necessarily stay only in the hospitality industry but will go from hospitality to retail and then maybe warehousing, then maybe do some parks and gardens work and so on, rather than trying to give recognition against the national standard industry modules or competencies you would probably be better off helping kids to develop an ongoing portfolio of two things. One is the particular skills that they get on a particular site. It might be learning to use a bacon slicer on one site; it might be learning how to use a backhoe on another site, or something of the sort.

The other thing to give some recognition to is those real employability attributes that employers think are the key to whether you give a kid a job or not. I am referring to such things as their attitudes, their appearance, their time management skills, how well they get on with fellow workers and those sorts of things. We have been doing some work to develop a simple measuring scale, a checklist if you like, that can be used by employers when kids come into those sorts of work sites that you can use to plot kids' growth in skills and competence. They can then put those things into a portfolio that can be used to help smooth the movement into other part-time and casual jobs and also to build a bridge between those and full-time jobs.

There has been a lot of talk about part-time traineeships and there are examples in the cleaning industry, for example, but they tend to presume that kids will stay in the one industry or occupation. But typically kids in those sorts of jobs move all over the place. So I think that we have to adopt new sorts of approaches to skill recognition that are a bit different from those that we have used in the past. We are now trying out a model of how that might work.

Mr MOSSFIELD—We would be interested to know the results of that model.

Prof. Sweet—Yes. We have four or five sites around the country that we are working with to develop this model program that we call Career Work Keys. We would expect that by the end of next year we would be at the point where we have some results that we can talk about. We would be happy to share those with you.

CHAIR—When I gave you the opportunity to put a recommendation to us you said that careers advice should be an entitlement or a right, and cited England and New Zealand as examples. Do you know of any differences in unemployment rates as between those two countries and Australia?

Prof. Sweet—No, not off the top of my head. And even if I did I don't think I would be too keen to try to bring about a suggestion that simply entitlement to careers advice will make a difference to the unemployment rate. It gets back to the issue of the jigsaw, which is not a single solution matter. The best evidence we have got on how being serious about young people's employability makes a difference to their employment comes from Germany, where one sees that the ratio of youth unemployment to adult unemployment is about half that in Australia. It is about one to one compared to two to one, and it has been going down, whereas ours has tended not to go down. My view is that they tend to get more bits of the jigsaw right than we do.

CHAIR—In the period of over a year that we have been chasing this tail I suppose the one issue that has commanded our attention more than any other issue—it comes up in every discussion, whether with the kids, the employers, employer bodies, education advisers or whoever—is the business of careers advice.

Prof. Sweet—I am very pleased to hear that. It is an issue that we have been doing some work on lately.

CHAIR—I can assure you that we will be addressing it and we all of us, regardless of which side of politics, think it is very critical. We feel we are doing a very poor job nationally in letting the kids know what the hell it is like out there and where there might be jobs. We have a big problem.

Prof. Sweet—To the extent that we have been able to get any feeling for what is going on in careers education, there are a couple of things that are clear. One is that the biggest emphasis goes upon the smallest number of kids, in other words the kids who are going on to university. You walk into a careers advice office and look at what is on the shelves and you see metres of university handbooks. You might find half a metre of TAFE handbooks. But what do you find there about real jobs? The answer is very little. So there is a deficiency in the information flows.

If you look at the extent to which kids have any contact with the local labour

market, you find that careers advisers and schools often have little understanding of what the real employers in the area actually want from their kids, which firms won't look at a kid if they walk in with their Docs on, which firms want you to have a haircut before you walk in the door. It is that sort of practical basic information that we have got to start building up to improve the nature of the careers education that the kids get. It is not just a matter of the glossy brochures from the universities and from the employer associations. It is a matter of the kids getting some real knowledge and real understanding of real firms in their areas and getting the chance to think about that in a considered way.

CHAIR—The situation is worse than that. In Kalgoorlie a young lass said to the committee, when speaking about her careers adviser, that it was like the blind leading the blind, and the careers adviser stood up and agreed with her.

Thank you very much for participating in our discussions today. We assure you that our report will be comprehensive. We will look at the whole issue of employment for young people and make some recommendations that we hope will be solid, achievable and we will not be seeking another inquiry.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Pyne):

That the committee receive as evidence and include in its records as an exhibit the document presented by Professor Sweet entitled *Vocational Education in Upper Secondary Schools: Some Comparisons between the States and Territories*.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Barresi):

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

Committee adjourned at 11.02 a.m.