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SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE

CURRENT AND FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS - SUBMISSION PAPER

This paper will address points (b) and (d).

(b) the effectiveness of current Commonwealth, State and Territory education, training and employment policies and programs and mechanisms for meeting current and future skills needs;

(d) the performance and capacity of Job Network to match skills availability with labour-market needs on a regional basis and the need for improvements.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I have been unemployed since January, 2001. Like many in my situation, I have tried desperately to find a job. In the last two years I have made thousands of job applications by every means possible - letters, e-mails, phone calls, cold calling - in response to advertisements or simply inquiring if they have work and leaving my details. I have tried Job Network agencies and non-Job Network agencies. I have looked regularly through newspapers, job search, company and public service websites. I have done a Community Jobs Program, voluntary work and Work for the Dole. Every single day I receive rejection letters. I have been without work for two years and have decided to go into full-time study even if that means receiving the below-poverty line Austudy allowance, because I have come to the conclusion that current Commonwealth and State Government welfare and training systems for the unemployed are a complete failure and a national disgrace.

During all this time I have not received any relevant labour skills training, apart from Job Search training and First Aid Level 2, which aren't exactly skills that mainstream employers are looking for. The new Training Credit scheme where Work for the Dole participants receive an \$800 credit *when they have completed their Work for the Dole requirements*, is a positive but doesn't go far enough. Firstly \$800 doesn't buy much, secondly only people who have wasted six months on Work for the Dole, often doing work which is completely irrelevant to their background and aptitudes. This means that

hundreds of thousands of unemployed people are spending a good part of the year not receiving any training.

I don't deny that some Work for the Dole schemes can be interesting and useful for the right people, the trouble is that one can choose only from the always very limited options that one is given by the Work for the Dole provider. I had a choice of Working in Schools and Lawnmower repairs. I chose the former and now I am learning heaps about stacking books on shelves.

I spent six years as an Administrative Service Officer in the former Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, I have a Diploma in Office Administration, a Degree in Political Science and Languages, a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificate, a Diploma in Spanish Studies, a Certificate in Translation, a Certificate in Accounting, I speak two languages fluently and can read and understand three others, I have worked overseas as English Teacher and Translator - all this and yet no one in Melbourne is interested in using my skills. How is stacking books in a school library, or Lawnmower Repairs or First Aid Level 2 going to help me?

I spent seven years living in Spain which is where I worked as an English Teacher (which I am unable to do here) and where I did a free Certificate in Accounting in 1997 before I was qualified to do any teaching work. In Spain and elsewhere in Europe, anyone who is unemployed can select from a wide ranging selection of Accredited Occupational Training courses, everything from I.T courses to Hairdressing, from Retail to Business Management, from Languages to Web Design. These courses are very popular (and they are voluntary) and refutes the Australian Government's erroneous idea that unemployed people are lazy, an attitude which I found noticeably absent in European countries where the issue of unemployment is given the seriousness it deserves and the unemployed are not treated like "bludgers" or "cheats".

According to an OECD report on Public Expenditure on Labour Market Programmes, Australia spends less than virtually any other country in the OECD. In 2000, Australia spent

0.02% of its GDP on Labour Market Training. Only Poland spent less and the Czech Republic spent the same. Mexico, Hungary, Korea, Japan, U.S. and U.K spent 33%-100% more, but virtually all the remain countries spent in order of **5 to 10 TIMES MORE** than Australia on Labour Market training. When you consider that Australia is a wealthier nation than Poland or the Czech Republic - this makes Australia the scrooge of the OECD.

The Australian Government continually talks of giving "incentives" to the unemployed "to find paid work" as if we weren't already looking for work and as if we could go out and get a job as we go out and get our daily groceries. Unemployment means THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH JOBS and that NOTHING IS BEING DONE TO GIVE THE UNEMPLOYED THE SKILLS THAT EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR. Work for the Dole assumes that it's participants are unskilled which is why they end up digging weeds or painting fence posts. What about upgrading one's computer skills? When I finished the CJP program I was given a Certificate which stated that I had participated in a Computer Support Program, yet I had received NO I.T. training at all - I spent 4 months

as an Integration Aide at a School - I barely touched a computer, except for when I was looking for work.

There is not enough assistance for unemployed over 25 - most traineeships are for school leavers and companies are given more incentives to employ juniors and school leavers. It is assumed that skilled people over 25 have better chances of finding work, yet with all my work and education experience - I have not been able to find a job in two years. Part of the problem also lies with employers who are unwilling to consider applicants who do not fit their robot profile and who are unable to think laterally and consider people who have many transferable skills. European and American employers are more likely to think outside the square and give a fair go to people, who on paper (and therefore in theory), may not fit the "ideal" company profile. Selection processes in Australia are too reliant on paper applications and employers are less willing to conduct personal interviews.

In any case, I am going back to full-time study because, like many in my situation, I am fed up with a system that has failed me and which, at ground level, simply does not work.

I have included my CV to show you the kind of profile which gets work overseas, but not in Australia.