

CORRECTED VERSION

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities

Bairnsdale — 23 May 2006

Members

Mr B. P. Hardman
Mr C. Ingram

Mr R. G. Mitchell

Chair: Mr B. P. Hardman
Deputy Chair: Mr C. Ingram

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms L. Topic
Research Officers: Dr P. Chen, Ms C. Tischler

Witnesses

Ms A Hutson, Chief Executive Officer, East Gippsland Institute of Technical & Further Education (affirmed) and,

Ms C Brigg, Associate Director Learning and Innovation, East Gippsland Institute of Technical & Further Education (affirmed).

The CHAIR — Welcome Angela and Catheine. I will just read this brief statement first. Under the powers conferred on this committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, this committee is empowered to take all evidence at these hearings on oath or affirmation. I wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee, including submissions, is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act, granted immunity from judicial review. I also wish to advise witnesses that any comments made by witnesses outside the committee's hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. We are an all-party parliamentary committee, including an Independent. We are conducting an inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities.

Would you provide your full name and address and, if you are representing an organization, the name of that organization and your position in that?

Ms HUTSON — Angela Muriel Hutson, [ADDRESS REMOVED] Paynesville, I am the Chief Executive Officer of East Gippsland Institute of TAFE.

Ms BRIGG — I am Catherine Margaret Brigg, an Associate Director Learning & Innovation at East Gippsland Institute of TAFE.

The CHAIR — If you could please give your submission for about 10 minutes.

Ms HUTSON — I am just going to give a very quick background to East Gippsland Institute of TAFE. Catherine will particularly respond to terms of reference 1 and 2 and then I will come in at the end and very quickly go through our recommendations and strategies. Thanks to Rhonda and Sheryl for their fabulous map of the local government areas.

East Gippsland Institute of TAFE covers 14% of Victoria, we cover all of the Shire of Wellington and the Shire of East Gippsland. We have 17 physical locations across those two local government areas, stretching from Yarram to Mallacoota, but I am conscious that your terms of reference are more about the more isolated students. We stretch up to Swifts Creek in the north and as I said Mallacoota in the far east. We service a population of around 85,000 people. Last year we enrolled around 11,000 students, of which about 1800 students were under 25. We are the predominant provider of vocational education and training in East Gippsland and in addition to our government funded training we delivered school hours last year to over 800 students in 17 secondary colleges across the two regions.

We also enrolled about 150 Koori people enrolled last year. We have a particular focus on trying to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, particularly young people, particularly Koori people, and displaced workers, which is the public role of TAFE.

Ms BRIGG — I am particularly looking at the first aspect of the inquiry, identifying and examining factors that influence young people to remain in the region. I am going to focus the comments from the East Gippsland Institute of TAFE particularly around vocational education and training. We understand there are other issues related to the availability of work, access to transport and lifestyle choices, and we will refer to some degree to those, but will primarily be talking about vocational education and training.

With that in mind, the first thing I wanted to talk about today was the proportion of post secondary students in the population of East Gippsland compared to Victoria, and just highlight that there is a lower proportion of residents within East Gippsland engaged in University study, both in comparison to that of Victoria as a whole, and regional Victoria. The statistics are in a report for you there. In terms of the availability of higher education places offered from our East Gippsland Institute of TAFE campuses, until 1993 Monash was the primary provider of higher education in the region. Since 1993 our Institute has been working in partnership with RMIT and we have offered programs in business, nursing and most recently a Bachelor of Commerce and we are at a point today where we have in 2005 had 125 EFT places funded by RMIT but delivered from our Institute.

We think that indicates the ability of a regional provider through a partnership with higher education to develop a strategy that will support young people to remain in the community. Obviously, it also provides opportunities for mature age people places. The other thing I wanted to talk about was the availability of TAFE places themselves and how that impacts on the ability to retain young people and to talk about some of the trends we have experienced over particularly the last three years. Angela has mentioned that 18% of our student contact hours with government funded student contact hours, have been delivered to the under 25 age cohort and within that area. One

of the things that has started to occur, a trend we are noticing is we are enrolling less students in more hours. That is indicative of a trend I think to people being keen to take on bigger chunks of study, not always to complete a qualification but to get a set of employability skills which may include a qualification. So that is a common trend for us.

In order to assist people with those employability skills, we have had to turn our minds to the importance of support mechanisms that encourage young people to complete their study and to stay within the region. In terms of the number of awards that we have issued to young people in our report we have documented the fact that the strongest trend for us in the last three years, has been towards an increase in the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships. It is very marked within the East Gippsland region and within the cohort that study with us, that there has been a significant uptake of traineeships and apprenticeships. To the extent that over three consecutive years, we have received additional funding from the government to respond to that need.

But for every single additional dollar that we have received from the state government, we as an institute have been diverting at a ratio of two is to one, in order to meet the demand for growth for apprenticeships and traineeships in our region. So if we have received 23,000 additional hours, we have diverted 46,000 student contact hours to deliver that additional 23,000. So we are observing significant uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships within our region over the last three years. However, that has come for us at a price, in that it has diminished our capacity to respond to the new trend, or the new message we are getting from the Skills Victorian statement, around the importance of increasing opportunities for all the Victorian workforce to attain qualifications at advanced diploma and advanced diploma. So that by the year 2015 it is anticipated that our workforce will significantly need to increase its skills at the higher order level. So we are in a situation in responding at the certificate and traineeship level we have a diminished capacity to meet that other objective.

Mr INGRAM — Do you have an understanding of what that up-taking of apprenticeships has been about? What is the catalyst for that?

Ms BRIGG — Yes we said that in our report. We have attributed it to I think three things. The close working relationship between the new apprenticeship centres and our institute has been a partial factor, and the group training companies. The tradition of support systems to young people - so obviously looking at strategies to enable them to remain in their study. Obviously things like transport and accommodation are issues for young people. The altering of delivery modes, to perhaps include a block release so that they can come down for one trip, instead of three, or on occasions come for one. We just have to manoeuvre those things and also having regard, to one, there is a stigma, or has been a stigma associated with whether it is good enough to do an apprenticeship.

We are of the view that attitude is changing in our community particularly. We are of the view that there is a growing regard for the importance of apprenticeships and trades and we are also I think that the initiative with VCAL across Victoria, has provided an excellent pathway for young people for traineeships and apprenticeships. So I think they would be the factors.

The CHAIR — What about the local learning and employment networks?

Ms BRIGG — Yes, sorry, I have mentioned the local learning and employment network, with whom we work very closely and they have done very significant work with employers over the last four or five years to improve the uptake of traineeships and apprenticeships.

Mr MITCHELL — Have you been down and looked any metropolitan education facilities yourself?

Ms BRIGG — Yes.

Mr MITCHELL — Do you think they have got the understanding of the needs of rural students what they need to do? Do they have an understanding of what the kids need to bring skills back into their local communities?

Ms HUTSON — Do you mean if the regional students go down to a Melbourne provider, do we think that Melbourne providers know how to cater for those students?

Mr MITCHELL — Yes.

Ms HUTSON — I would say generally not. I think probably William Angliss might be an exception, because William Angliss draws students from all around the state because of hospitality. But generally, my observation and anecdotal evidence and the churn rate if you like, I mean you only have to look at the completion rates of students from regional areas in Melbourne based institutions and you will see the completion rates, there is data available, and the completion rates of young people from regional areas in Melbourne is not as great as the completion rates for young people in regional institutions.

Mr INGRAM — Just in your submission, there is on page 8, a graph showing employment rates after your courses, which is pretty ordinary in 2003 and it has jumped fairly, is that because of the increase in apprenticeships, or what is the reason for that, or is that more targeted courses?

Ms BRIGG — I think we see that the increased trend towards employment outcomes post qualification would be probably the uptake of apprenticeships has been one of the major factors.

Mr INGRAM — One of the issues that has come up, locally around East Gippsland, but also it has come up in the evidence as well, is when courses are not available locally for apprentice training, so basically they have got to do that block of their training component of their apprenticeship, particularly those who have got to go to the metropolitan areas, the wage is such that the accommodation costs more than the weekly wage that they are getting. So actually it costs an apprentice money to complete their training, and that is a disincentive. Have you got a comment on that cost to young apprentice?

Ms BRIGG — We have provided an indication of the cost of living away from home for a tertiary student, obviously for apprentices they are doing it in a block, they are not necessarily incurring that annual cost. But yes, certainly the significance of the cost of going to Melbourne or to another provider in town, to undertake study has accommodation and transport and a whole range of other costs and the wage rate for apprentices is obviously an issue that we regularly hear from our apprentices in relation to the sense of frustration about the time it takes a wage that is liveable.

Ms HUTSON — Currently we are doing some research, this is not in the paper, but we are doing some research on the viability of introducing hairdressing training at the Institute because there is just a huge demand from parents, from young people, from schools. Obviously mainly women, but not necessarily. There is something like 150 hairdressers between this side of Traralgon and the border, an amazing number of hairdressers. The reason I am mentioning hairdressing is that every single young person who wants to do hairdressing in this region has to go straight past here and go down to either central Gippsland or to Melbourne to do hairdressing. But for us to introduce hairdressing we won't necessarily get an extra bucket of hours to do that. We will be told, no you take it away from that area to that area. Our argument is always no, we cannot squeeze those areas any more. We need to be able to offer a fairly broad offering to this community and hairdressing is a case.

Ms BRIGG — I think it would be true to say that as an institute we attempt to be as many things as we can within the region but we cannot be all things to all trades. So in a sense we have had to make some hard decisions around where we think we should focus our effort in order to ensure if you like, that we have the volume of participation that enables us to retain minimum staffing levels to make that program viable. A couple of other things I just want to say before I know Angela wants to talk about recommendations and strategies. I just want to talk about the uptake the Koori students and their involvement in our Institute.

Angela's mentioned approximately 4% of our community is indigenous and approximately 4% of the Koori community in our Institute is indigenous, so we think we have got a fairly good match there. We had last year a 78% completion rate for our indigenous students and that compares with an overall completion rate for all of our students of 86%. In fact it was above the target for our Institute, but I think the fact that we are really moving hard to provide regional opportunities is critical. We also employed an indigenous vocational pathway officer, because in the area of indigenous training it is our experience, that even with the qualification there are a number of social barriers associated with attaining employment.

So whilst we seem to retain our indigenous young people in our communities, the full participation in every aspects of life within our community has been limited. That is a major issue for our Institute and one that we are tackling with our Koori unit advisory committee and in partnership with brokers within our region, that is a really critical factor for us. Last year particularly we initiated a VCAL initiative with Ramayhuk in Sale to enable our indigenous

students to take up the VCAL option, but it is the beginning of a process, it is not an end in itself. I think at this point we are probably moving into a situation where Angela would like to talk about the recommendations.

Ms HUTSON — First up would be higher education places in situ in East Gippsland, RMIT has led the way but certainly other providers. 125 students seven actual graduates from Commerce last year which was a first for East Gippsland. Articulation pathways, clear transparent pathways, this vocational and educational training talk, but basically we want to know that kids doing something through VCE or through an apprenticeship or through TAFE can articulate very clearly into higher education, and that those pathways, do not take two or three or four years to negotiate. That every TAFE provider has got to negotiate separately with every higher education provider, so in order for us to say to people come to East Gippsland TAFE to young people, we guarantee you do a certificate 4 with us, or a diploma with us, we can get you into Monash, or to Charles Sturt, or to Melbourne or to whatever. But at the moment we have to spend two or three years negotiating those pathways.

Mr MITCHELL — So a more structured pathway?

Ms HUTSON — Structured and very, very easy to negotiate because all TAFE providers are pretty much delivering out of the same training package. Obviously we are looking for additional TAFE places, particularly at the higher end for young people so that we can offer diploma, advanced diploma, so there is no question that the future skill development to the workforce requires high level qualifications and not just tertiary and trade qualifications. Access to broadband technology, I heard Phil Counsel and Steve Baxter from Mallacoota talking about the inability to always run classes in Mallacoota. If we had broadband fast access, basically east of Bairnsdale, that would enable us to offer a whole lot more to young people, particularly in Buchan, Swifts Creek and Mallacoota.

The next recommendation would be that we do not have to keep diverting general profile hours into apprenticeship hours. We understand apprenticeship training is a priority of the state and federal government, but we have to keep having to move out of general courses in accounting, or hospitality or retail or child care over traineeships and apprenticeship training therefore creating less vocational options for young people. The on track data that is put out is very good but we see that there is a need for extra research around what is happening to young people after they leave school for those who are employed. What happens to them, are they after two or three years of being employed in the region, what is happening to them? Particularly tracking employment outcomes for young people after they have been through a TAFE or higher education program when they have stayed locally. We suspect that there would be some interesting data there.

Catherine mentioned the Koori, really it is a whole separate issue in a sense. It is part of what is happening to young people. They are staying in the region, there's no doubt about that, all our Koori young people stay in the region. The capacity to participate in meaningful employment is extremely limited. We think partnerships between particularly, obviously there is government agency partnerships, none of that happens through LLEN, but particularly partnerships with business and tourism associations and changes of commerce in industry to create employment opportunities. We recently had a food and wine tourism network, Feast on East, where 30 of our young people enrolled in hospitality were able to participate in a meaningful event, alongside the Commonwealth Games happening in East Gippsland, not down in Melbourne. So those opportunities for young people to participate in great private sector events.

Partnerships in other states and territories, we have been very conscious about establishing relationships with other providers in New South Wales, in Queensland and in ACT so that our students can do courses here. We can say, come and do something with us but we can also send you to Cairns as well. We can also send you to ACT as well, so those partnership arrangements. Changes of commerce in industry and BTAs again we need to encourage all their members to take advantage of traineeships and apprenticeships. Every single person who is employed in a traineeship or apprenticeship will get a place in TAFE. Government will fund places for traineeships and apprenticeships. They will not necessarily fund a place for a young person wanting to do a certificate 3 in office admin. But if a young person comes in and wanting to a cert 3 in building construction, they will get a place. There are opportunities to take up traineeships and apprenticeships.

Finally, coaching and mentoring programs, I know it was mentioned in the Skills statement, but the more that we can get our local businesses to meaningfully take up mentoring and coaching with young people, and understand what mentoring and coaching means, then the better off we will be in trying to keep young people in East Gippsland. Thanks again.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for taking the time for speaking to us and for putting in your submissions. You will get a copy of the transcript in about two weeks time. You may correct typographical errors but not matters of substance.

Witnesses withdrew