

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

Bendigo—Tuesday, 22 October 2019

MEMBERS

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Sarah Connolly

Mr Brad Rowswell

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Theophanous

WITNESSES

Mr Darren McGregor, Chair, Bendigo Education Council, and Principal, Marist College;

Mr Dale Pearce, Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College; and

Mr Matthew Maruff, Headmaster, Girton Grammar.

The CHAIR: Thank you for being here to submit to this very important Inquiry of the Parliament that we have got going at the moment. Obviously as a Committee we have been instructed to investigate the Committee's Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers.

At this point in time all evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proofed version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible.

We really do appreciate the fact that you are here at this very important Inquiry and we as a Committee are very keen to hear your presentation, so if you want to give us your presentation, then we will ask questions accordingly. Thank you.

Mr McGREGOR: Briefly, we are going to present to you for five or so minutes to give context. So, you know who we are. I am going to—

The CHAIR: Darren, if you can for the purpose of the Committee, just give your name before you speak?

Mr McGREGOR: Yes, Darren McGregor, Principal, Marist College Bendigo and chair of the Bendigo Education Council.

What we would like to do to start is to set a context and give you a bit of a story around the Bendigo Education Council—how it was formed, why it is there and how it operates. I think that will help in terms of a context for questions you want to ask us.

If we go back to about 2010, it was an interesting—and we were all in the town at the time; Matt has been at Girton for 10 years and Dale has been principal for 13 years at Bendigo Senior Secondary and I have been a principal at the secondary level in town for 15 years. We were amongst the principals who were brought to a meeting. The meeting was run by the Bendigo Business Council and their education subcommittee. They presented to us a very glossy nine-page document talking about Bendigo becoming an education city and the challenges for education and the way education was going to engage with the community through this education plan. Most of the principals were in the room. At the end of that I expressed my surprise that the business council of Bendigo would present to the leaders of education an education package that we had not been consulted on at all.

The next day I received a phone call from a member of that committee saying, 'Well, Darren, the reason we did that is because the perception of education in Bendigo is that it is highly competitive across the schools, that all the systems work in silos and you don't talk to each other'. In this document it was mentioned four or five times that one of the goals was for schools to talk to each other more. Fair enough. Fair cop.

So what we did, and the three of us were heavily involved in it, was decide to create the Bendigo Education Council. It was not easy. We had been involved in some collaborative ventures but if we fast forward, it probably took us two and a half years, and we then had the Bendigo Education Council which consists of—I have given you there the vision of it. Our vision, as it says there, is simply 'to raise the aspiration of achievement and anticipation of all young people in the City of Greater Bendigo and to help them become more active participants in our community'.

We brought to the table the principal of every secondary provider in the town, representatives from the state primary sector and the Catholic primary sector and also special development schools, tertiary and TAFE. We all committed to the fact that we would only be represented by the heads or the principals of those establishments.

Over the last three and a half years that has become quite a strong council that is now seen, and it probably took us two or three years, as the voice for education both in and out. We make some statements around education but we also have groups come to see us. The Honourable Jacinta Allan and Maree Edwards came two years ago

and met with us and acknowledged that it was quite unique, that it is cross-sectoral, and our aim is not to promote any of our schools, as it says there.

We have also got those four commitment statements to lead the conversation around education in Bendigo. I think the fact that the three of us are sitting here today—this would not have happened five years ago. ‘To have proactive involvement in defining what it means for Bendigo to be an education city’—by the way, the business council of education does not exist anymore, really. We are that. ‘To explore the challenges in our community and how education can respond’, which again ties into your submission that you have, and then ‘to promote the cultural strengths of education in our city’.

So in the last three years the three of us have been regular attendees at that and have really started to see a better quality conversation. Now the tech school, you would know and have probably had a submission from the Bendigo Tech School? No? Okay, so the Bendigo Tech School was set up as one of the technical colleges through the state funding. Really it came about here as a relationship between all the schools, and all the schools are involved in it. It is on the land of La Trobe University, but all the schools access it. That was really one of the celebrations between the schools, industry, business and the university.

The CHAIR: So that is not the trade training centre?

Ms CONNOLLY: No, that is the technology one.

Mr McGREGOR: No, it is the technology stem of that, and that has an industry subcouncil. On the stewardship committee of that, I am on that as the Chair of the education council. So we have now got a fairly broad conversation going on in Bendigo that engages education through the council. I chair it at the moment, and then next year it will be chaired by one of the principals of one of the government schools.

Ms CONNOLLY: There are 10 in Victoria.

Mr McGREGOR: The trade hub?

Ms CONNOLLY: The technology hub.

Mr McGREGOR: Yes, there are 10. That is where the education council comes from, and why I think you invited us is because we represent that. Personally, in terms of this conversation, whilst I chair the education council my journey has been a little bit different to the other two gentlemen because I was principal of a school that had Year 11s and 12s for 10 years, and then six years ago I stepped out of that and started a brand-new school. My personal connection to 11 and 12 and the jobseekers has significantly decreased over the last four years, but we have our first Year 12s this year, so we are back into that conversation. But certainly these two gentlemen have the lived experience of the last four years.

The CHAIR: Dale, would you like to go?

Mr PEARCE: Look, it is a really vexed question, I think, because when you are talking about vocational pathways for disadvantaged youth, the solutions for that really lie, in my view, at the foundation level of education. The most important thing that we can do in education, I think, for all children is to provide them with a good foundation—with good literacy, with good numeracy. There is always a challenge for schools in terms of engaging curriculum, because not every student brings to their educational experience the support of a family that is well-educated and provides them with experiences. Inevitably, as the kids progress through, you find some students who want to head in different directions, and you find students who really struggle to maintain a strong academic pathway, and increasingly they are looking for vocational options.

At our school, we are a Year 11 and 12 school. We are also a registered training organisation, and we would have over 700 students in VET in Schools pathways. I think one of the challenges that we face more broadly is that those pathways are not valued as highly in the community as academic pathways. I do not think they are as highly valued by our education department. If you look at what we are expected to do by the department and what our accountabilities are, they are very strongly geared to academic outcomes rather than vocational pathways for students.

The CHAIR: Having said that, though, I know many people with a bachelor of arts degree that are unemployed rather than having a trade under their belt and earning a lot of money.

Ms ADDISON: Look, it is all right to have an arts degree, John! I am sorry I am not a fitter and turner, but the arts degree is not all bad news.

Mr MARUFF: Can I second that motion?

Mr McGREGOR: The other thing, though, is I wonder how many of those students went on and did VCE and did an arts degree because they chose not to do VCAL—and why did they choose not to do VCAL? That is where I think some of Dale's points are coming in.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is what Dale was saying.

Mr McGREGOR: Yes.

Mr PEARCE: I think there is a broad challenge there for our sector, or for the education sector more broadly, about the standing of VCAL and the integrity of VCAL in the eyes of the community and in the eyes of employers. There has been a range of recent activity around literacy and numeracy, and the reporting intended in some way to try and address that.

I think that for our kids at the margins the individual case management is critically important. I think that historically a lot of our focus on career support and pathway development for students comes too late in schools. I think it very often comes around Year 11 and 12. We need to start that earlier, and so within the government sector it has been really pleasing to see this year the rollout of the new careers initiative. I think that that shows great promise and has been really well received.

In terms of work placement I think that there are some things that we could do more productively there, and I worry about the capacity of schools to be able to maintain an educational offer that supports the development or the progression of students in areas of skill shortages, because I think we have significant challenges in schools in terms of recruiting VET trainers, the criteria that we need to meet. I do not think there is much recognition from ASQA that VET delivery actually does occur in schools, and I think that there is a little more flexibility and acknowledgement needed of the experience of schools in delivering VET.

Mr MARUFF: I concur with what Dale says. I would point you to—you would be aware of—the research of Linda Gottfredson, who is an American developmental psychologist, talking about aspiration with young people, and Dale and Darren have hit it on the head basically saying kids frame their aspirations developmentally between the ages of 6 and 8, not the age of 15 in a careers class. So what Dale is talking about is absolutely right on the money, and there is a research base to support that from a developmental point of view. Along with that, when you look at—again, I am absolutely no expert; I have got an arts degree—the vexed question of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, about disadvantage broadly, it really comes back down time and time again, as Dale said, to case management, mastery of operational literacy, numeracy, those sorts of things. I think the broader thing for a government to consider, or any politician, is the hollowing out of the labour market in this country. Bendigo is—what?—a \$10 billion economy, whatever it is. What are we: 1% of America, 2% of China. We are a minnow, but we talk about being smart. So what we are seeing in my view is a hollowing out of the labour market, so we need more baristas and we need more scientists; we do not need more truck drivers. So what sorts of skills are we training people for and what are schools offering?

In my view when you look at these chaps and what they do in this city, it is staggeringly heroic work, and the fact that these young people are getting the hope that they need is wonderfully aspirational. But they are not well enough resourced at all. When I look at the barriers, when I look at the Indigenous question, I look at the fact that—the bottom line—it is like any group that is disadvantaged, and I speak to that myself as being someone raised by a mother with seven children and my father was in prison. I was raised on welfare. I look at lack of relevance for kids; I look at school leadership; I look at the fact we are all trying to reinvent the wheel; I look at the fact that the policy framework for Indigenous people, particularly from the federal level, has been a monumental failure, in my view, at best. But it is a difficult question, and no-one is saying it is easy. But I think, as these gentlemen are alluding to, what we have here is—people use the word 'somewhat' when they say 'unique'; it is either somewhat or it is unique—unique in this town. People work together cross-sectorally;

they really do. So do not reinvent the wheel, look at case management, look at the collaboration between schools, look at the way the education council has reached out to industry. We have all toured our manufacturing sites. It is very easy to come to Bendigo and not see that. It is a really powerful thing to connect young people into. But I think those personal relationships, as Dale said, with case management are critical—really critical. We are seeing great shakes where we are in it. I think the other factor in a city like Bendigo is local government. They have got a huge role to play, and they have actually got more credibility than they think they do.

Mr McGREGOR: Can I just add to that? One of the things I would really like you to hear today is what Matt just said—and we have mentioned this to Jacinta—that if out of this there were some ideas, some things that were wanted to be trialled, Bendigo is the perfect place to do it now because the school network is close, it is united, it is cross-sectoral, and we all have very good authentic relationships with local government. It is a village, really, and I would love us to take the next step as a city and be saying, ‘Yes, look, as a city of 110,000 people we control something. We can do things here’. The three of us know by first name most of the industry leaders in town, all the local government people. The airport was a good example, when they extended the airport.

Ms ADDISON: Yes, the Sydney flights.

Mr McGREGOR: People were blown away by how close it is—it is a village—in terms of the elders know each other and they work together, and we would love to be involved in something that was really cross-sectoral to try and solve some of these problems.

The CHAIR: Questions? Yes, former teacher?

Ms ADDISON: School teacher of 12 years at Ballarat Clarendon College. And I believe Ballarat would be excellent for a pilot program.

Mr MARUFF: I will ring David Shepherd after this.

Ms ADDISON: Could the Hansard note that, please? I am really interested in post-school options for different kids. Obviously from Girton to Bendigo Senior to the Marist you have got different cohorts of kids. What percentage are going on to uni? What percentage are going on to TAFE? What percentage are doing other stuff, just to get a sense of the different profiles of your schools?

Mr McGREGOR: We have got our first Year 12s this year.

Ms ADDISON: Oh, great. You are off the hook.

Mr McGREGOR: But I can speak of the Catholic sector. You go, and we will come back to that.

Mr PEARCE: I am trying to add up the figures in my mind. We get the On Track data, and you will have recourse to that anyway. That will tell you what the data says. We would have around 50% of our cohort that heads to university and a proportion that goes off to TAFE. We would probably have 80-odd kids who go to apprenticeships every year, some who go to directly to work. But we have always got about 8 or 9% of our kids who go to what we would think are unsustainable destinations, where they are heading to a dead-end job or part-time work or they are looking for work. And that is of the exiting students at the end of Year 12, and you are losing students along the way. So if you look into the data in our sector, it will tell you that we are concerned that we have got too many kids who do not even make it to the end of Year 12, let alone where they head after that.

Mr MARUFF: Our place would be much like BCC: almost all of our students would get a university offer, and within our community our culture is you have got the right of refusal, so you do not have to take it. Not all of them do, but it would be 90-something per cent who would go on to university.

Ms ADDISON: Would many of your students go into this unsustainable area that Dale has just talked about?

Mr MARUFF: No, very, very few.

Mr McGREGOR: And at the risk of stereotyping, the Catholic system probably sits in the middle of that. We would probably be around 85% who would go into future studies. Then into that ‘unsustainable’, we would probably have a much lower percentage, but it would be there—it probably would be 2 or 3% of kids across the years. The other interesting thing around the universities: we have seen an increase in the number of students who are going to university that are going to La Trobe University in Bendigo, and that is not necessarily an academic choice; that is a financial choice.

Mr MARUFF: Yes. We have that too.

Mr McGREGOR: Yes. So we have about 50%. Over the last 10 years about 50% of our kids that have gone to uni have gone to La Trobe.

Ms ADDISON: Because that was going to be my supplementary question: how significant is it—similar to Ballarat with Federation University—having a university in Bendigo that is very significant to the community in terms of a pathway?

Mr McGREGOR: Absolutely. And the other universities are starting to get a bit of a foothold in the town. Obviously La Trobe has the main buildings and so on, but Deakin, Monash and Melbourne have all started to realise that you need to be present in the town to capture those kids.

Mr MARUFF: And you look at—if I can—the unusual unholy alliance between La Trobe and Melbourne over the medical: so biomed science, into La Trobe with an 85, which is a low score relative to that number at Melbourne University; finish that degree locally; and off to Shepparton to the rural medical school there for Melbourne, provided you stay in and around the area. And we know that most of the data would say that if they train here, they will stay in the area. So it is a fantastic partnership there.

Mr McGREGOR: And the language of La Trobe University is openly describing themselves as a first-generation—

Mr MARUFF: Yes, a first in family university.

Mr McGREGOR: So to indicate that you have a percentage of first in the family to go to university, that again is a two-edged sword. It is great for getting kids into the university, but I think for some of our students, if the financial ability was there a much higher proportion of kids would go to the city.

The CHAIR: Do the ATAR scores matter in terms of entry to certain universities?

Mr McGREGOR: Not really, because students here can get country bonuses. More and more now the ATAR score is being used less by the universities for their entry.

Mr ROWSWELL: It is true.

Mr McGREGOR: As a secondary principal, the sooner the ATAR disappears the better.

Mr MARUFF: It will go. It will.

Mr McGREGOR: Yes. It is outdated, it is targeted totally in the wrong ways around schools and it is influencing—it is still influencing—the ways schools approach classes. Going back to Dale’s point about VCAL, the challenge up in the VCAL is this measurement of ATARs.

Mr MARUFF: But then you have VCs at universities say, ‘Well, if it’s not the ATAR, then what?’.

The CHAIR: Like if it goes from 50 to 60, for example.

Mr MARUFF: Look, it is such a reductionist number. In schools like ours we always use them and the rest of it, but it probably evaporates for the kid in two years. But in terms of putting some sort of number of

attainment, if it is not that then commonwealth-funded universities will probably take control of it and have entrance exams and then schools like mine will teach to those. It is going to go. I have got no doubt about it.

Mr BLACKWOOD: With that 8 or 9% that drift off in the wrong direction, is it possible to identify them before that happens? It is a big question. And on that angle, if we can improve the opportunities for work experience, would that help not have so many drift off in the wrong direction?

Mr PEARCE: Yes and no. So the answer to the first question is yes. I would expect that, wherever the nearest kindergarten is, the teachers there today would be able to tell us who those kids are going to be in 12 years time. Trying to break that cycle is a real challenge, isn't it? So work experience or work placement does provide a really good opportunity for those kids, but there is a lot of work, particularly if you are trying, even at a school of our size, to organise and facilitate that. The industry linkages and so on are really significant. The work and the level of case management and day-to-day work to make all of that happen at the school level is really challenging, and I think that there is probably work to be done in that space.

Mr BLACKWOOD: But it is maybe an area that the Government perhaps could help in.

Mr PEARCE: Yes. If you are looking at the work experience arrangements at the moment, there is a nominal \$5 a day. It is useless. It has been \$5 forever and a day. You might as well scrap it. Most employers feel obliged to give a little bit more.

Mr BLACKWOOD: If they come and work for us they get \$25.

Mr PEARCE: Create a tax incentive for them to undertake it and be able to write that off in some way. Look, there are probably a range of things you might be able to do.

Mr MARUFF: I think the other thing to be really mindful of, as Dale was saying there, is that by extension the kids who you are talking about, these 9%, if they have not got that home network and they do not have that basic operational literacy, they need a lot of care. It is easy to say, 'Oh, well, you just get yourself to here or there', but there are distractions on the way. When you have got some kids who have got massive self-advocacy and parents are saying, 'Where are you?', it is much easier. So that needs a huge amount of, frankly, funding and resourcing.

Mr BLACKWOOD: Mentoring.

Mr MARUFF: Yes, it does.

Mr McGREGOR: And that aspirational element of parenting. There is quite a damning statement about education that says, 'The only two surviving bastions of the industrial revolution are education and health, and health is changing'. It comes to your point there that in this industrial revolution model of education—and this is coming from a principal who started a new school, so I have got a bit of liberty—you put the child on the conveyor belt at the age of five and they are falling off all over the place, but we are still only measuring the can that comes out at the end here. Somehow we have got to break this industrial revolution model that says to that kid that Dale has recognised outside that is six, 'Yeah, when we got him at 13 he was always a problem'. The reality is he does not fit the model, so we have got to radically change the model we are trying to put these kids through.

If we be gender specific for a moment, in our 33 years of principalships—the number of boys we have seen that grew up eight years after they have done VCE!

Mr MARUFF: Eventually it's okay.

Mr McGREGOR: And we try to fit them into the model. We have got to change the conveyor belt.

The CHAIR: A Pink Floyd song comes to mind there.

Ms CONNOLLY: Do you think that kind of work experience of one week in a kid's education is actually sufficient to say, 'Well, this is the kind of career path you have said you would be interested in'?

Mr PEARCE: A week does not do very much, does it? If a student is undertaking a VET pathway, they are much more likely to be doing a day a week, so the choice for an employer is if they want to take someone, do they want them in a block placement or do they want them in a more progressive manner? It is not easy for employers either, is it? Someone who comes in a day a week, that might provide good continuity for the student but it is also probably hard to manage for the employer, I think, sometimes. Our school is most often in the mode of responding to what employers want, so we get a combination of block release and day by day, but most of it is day by day. There are some industries where it is incredibly difficult to get kids into. If you looked locally here, Allied Health is an absolute stand-out. We have got a centre of excellence here at TAFE, we have got some terrific pathways through La Trobe University, we have got a \$700 million new hospital. We have got huge numbers of kids, predominantly girls, in allied health pathways and we cannot get them into work placements because there is an industrial blockage there. The hospitals and health services often do not like taking them into that work environment. It is a complex arrangement.

Mr McGREGOR: And that is without child safety stuff, on which I think industry is probably 12 months behind the schools. Child safety could write work experience off.

Mr MARUFF: And the other thing on that one, too, as Dale and Darren would know, is with the arms race of qualifications, so it is not enough to have an arts degree now; you need a Masters or a PhD. So trying to get a kid into the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Parkville, unless you are a PhD student—forget it. Whereas 10 years ago they would take 16- or 17-year-olds who were interested in biotech—gone. So the opportunities are very difficult to get across.

Ms THEOPHANOUS: We have heard a lot in these hearings about the value of work experience. For a lot of kids their first experience of that is that week at high school where they are asked to go and find an employer. That seems to me like a really important time to capture kids and to have a conversation about their careers. The week—or even the one day a week over a period of time—seems like not enough. Are there any ways that the education council is trying to enhance that work experience that kids get through the school system?

Mr MARUFF: I think the industry relationship is going to be what it comes down to. In an environment like this there are plenty of other opportunities about different kinds of personnel inventories and that sort of thing that we could offer as a free service to families, but again, when you talk about a level of operational literacy and Dale's 9%, there is no way a kid is going to sit down and do a test online—what for? 'You're just assessing me and judging me against other people who I've failed against'. So from our point of view perhaps one possibility is to just keep growing those industry links so you can, as Darren said, get on the phone to someone and say—

You are right about the week. It is a bit of an entrée; it is a taster. One of the things I am surprised about is you talked about work experience. What is the research base on that? I talked about the research base with Gottfredson and developmental psychology. You talked about industrial education—that is a form of it. Who says it does anything? Where is the evidence?

Ms THEOPHANOUS: And I guess the supplementary question to that is: at that point in time generally kids will also talk to a career counsellor. What do you think about the role of the career counsellor in schools and whether or not that person needs to be better equipped to—

Mr MARUFF: It is a very highly specialised area, and that environment has changed after Gonski and all of those sort of things—the deregulation of universities. It is a very highly specific area to the point where people like us, we tell our garden-variety teachers, 'Do not give career advice', because we do not want to be sued for 30 years of lost income.

Mr McGREGOR: And it has got to be earlier in school—again, that sense that at 10 to 12 it is too late for that.

Ms CONNOLLY: Can I just ask: at what age do you think kids should be having career advice?

Mr McGREGOR: Year 7.

Mr MARUFF: Can I just jump in there, Darren? It depends. Define ‘career’. Really in my view we are talking about futures and aspiration. Those kids are going to be working in 2080; what are we going to be doing then? So it is going to be quite different; the labour market is going to be very different. It is about aspiration for me, and I would start that in early primary school. I am in a prep-to-12 school, so we are afforded that luxury. It is very hard for Dale when these kids turn up in Year 11, but I would say the earlier, the better. It is not just about a job per se; it is about what your aspirations are, what—

Mr McGREGOR: The Passions & Pathways program is fantastic. That is engaging kids at 5 and 6. If a student went into Year 8 and had had some sustained experience of industry, then I think their eyes would be more focused coming into Year 8 and beyond. There are a lot of industries that can provide that foot in the door, to see what is really happening behind the walls of industry and business.

The reality is that most kids now have got part-time jobs in 11 and 12. Certainly if you go back 20 years, the number of kids that had part-time jobs, work experience was there—so this is what people do in the workforce. Some of our kids’ expendable income at 11 and 12 is more than their parents. They are working long hours. They understand work, but they have not seen industry and they have not seen business. In work experience, because it is the week, it is very difficult—as we have been saying—to get into industry, business and manufacturing. But if you could get them to do some sort of program where they are at least in the doors and seeing it if only for a day and industry comes to schools, start that conversation in 7 and 8. That begins to engage the kids early.

Ms ADDISON: Darren, I was at an education forum last night in Ballarat. I have got a daughter who is in grade 5. They said by the time she will be working it will be 2028 or she will be post-school by then. Seventy-six million jobs will be gone that we currently have now, and 130 million jobs will be created by then in different industries. So just very much going full circle to what Dale talked about with your tech school, are you finding that the tech school is actually giving kids some aspirations and some ideas, so all schools use it across the board? Talk to me about the tech school. Is it worthwhile? Is it a good investment for Bendigo?

Mr PEARCE: I will answer that, but I just wanted to go back to that previous comment about recognition of the time that kids spend in the workplace. There is a crediting arrangement for VCE or for a VET work placement—a crediting arrangement back into VCE and into VCAL for that that the VCAA has set up in the last couple of years. The tech school is providing a taste of experience in my view. It is really thinly spread—they have got one facility trying to accommodate a whole range of students from all schools. The key to the success of that is going to be the extent to which they can link back to what kids are doing in school. I think if you are looking to promote pathways into the workforce, in particular vocational pathways, that is not the model that you would use. You would want to revisit technical schools in more of the old fashion of a technical school. It might look a little different to what it did 20 years ago. I lived through part of that experience. We moved to the tech school at one stage, and they closed for good reason. You could do worse than revisit them in some way, but you would not revisit them in the way that these tech schools have been set up, in my view.

Mr McGREGOR: I think the focus—again, having set up a new school—is slowly moving towards being more skills centred than knowledge centred. When we talk to industry, 15 years ago an industry that wanted to employ someone wanted to be guaranteed that they knew how to use a lathe or they knew how to use a particular instrument. They are not interested at all in that now. They want kids who can problem solve, work in groups, show initiative—

The CHAIR: Leadership.

Mr McGREGOR: Leadership, can play computer games—do not laugh because with some of the machinery that they are working with, the kids have got to be able to do that. That sense of an apprenticeship or an entry into applied learning being knowledge based is gone. It is the soft skills and getting a kid in Year 8 to understand that if he is going to go and work in manufacturing, if he is going to go and work at Thales, he needs to be a leader or a problem solver, he needs to work in groups. It is that sort of thing.

Mr MARUFF: And our disciplined approach of disagreeing respectfully, some of you could learn from—no, I am joking. But it is those sorts of things. If Darren and I are having a conversation, you are not trying to win an argument—you are trying to get to the truth on something. They sound, as Darren says, soft, but they

are actually really hard. So they are the sorts of things that between our three schools we are really trying to teach kids. It is a really complex problem though and not easy to solve, especially with an electoral cycle that you guys have to deal with.

The CHAIR: We could go on for hours, but we have come to an end.

Mr MARUFF: Getting the nod up the back there.

The CHAIR: Yes. Thank you very much for your attendance. I appreciate it.

Ms CONNOLLY: Can I just quickly ask out of interest: I have got a tech school in my patch, and I have been there.

Mr MARUFF: Where is your seat?

Ms CONNOLLY: In Tarneit. We have got one there in Wyndham. Is it working? Do you guys think it is working? I know what my crew think. Is it working?

Ms ADDISON: The tech schools in general.

Ms CONNOLLY: No, here.

Mr PEARCE: It is not really touching us at 11 and 12.

Mr MCGREGOR: It has got a lot of potential. I think it will.

Ms CONNOLLY: But it is not hitting the potential that it actually has.

Mr MCGREGOR: I think it is. I think it is set up well. I would triple its size and triple the funding that is going into it, and then it will really do something. But as Dale said, it is trying to cater for a lot of schools and it is limited in its budgets. The last thing I would just like to say is, where we started, the most important thing is that our kids learn to read and write.

Mr MARUFF: Here, here.

Mr MCGREGOR: And add up numbers.

The CHAIR: Very good. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.