

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries

Melbourne—Wednesday 26 November 2025

MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Roma Britnell

Anthony Cianflone

John Mullahy

Nicole Werner

Dylan Wight

WITNESS *(via videoconference)*

Samet Istar, Board Member, Australian International Academy of Education.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee’s Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand Industries.

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Thank you so much, Samet, for joining us today and maybe answering a few questions for us. I might give you, I think I have been told, 2 or 3 minutes if you would like to make an opening statement or remarks, and then we will jump into some questions.

Samet ISTAR: Thank you, first of all, to the Committee for giving me the opportunity to give feedback on this very important matter which concerns our state and our community and that will affect us long term. My name is Samet Istar. I am a current Board Member at the Australian International Academy of Education, which was the first Islamic school in Australia, established in 1983. We have now four campuses with over 2200 students, with over 1100 families coming from 59 different countries. It is a very diverse school, mainly established in the inner suburbs of Melbourne. We have a unique model where we offer VCE and the IB education model at our school. It is a private school, and as mentioned we have both VCE and IB in our schools.

On this important topic I would just like to say that where many of our students—I would say probably 20 per cent—know what they want to do and what occupations they want to move into, 80 per cent, or the majority, actually are unsure and a bit anxious and really do need the guidance and support, I think, like most other students in the state. It is great to see the government doing something about this and opening up or establishing this Inquiry to make sure we do not fall into the traps we are now in with some occupations having a shortage, so thank you for the opportunity, once again.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much for that. Anthony, I am going to come to you first for questions.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Samet and the Australian international academy, for your submission and for appearing today. It is very good that you have been proactive in taking the initiative to do so. As Samet said, the school is Australia's first Islamic dedicated school, over 40 years, with 2000 students and four campuses starting off here in Coburg in the heart of my electorate. We are very proud to represent the school community.

Just going to your submission there, and you have got six recommendations. There are three in particular I think would be very worthwhile for the Committee to hear more about. Recommendation 3 is around the idea of the government establishing a proactive careers bus to go out to school communities and showcase different career opportunities that can talk to that 80 per cent of kids that you are talking about that might be unsure or anxious about their next steps. Recommendation 4 is around mandating universities, TAFEs and other institutions to literally partner with schools to provide those real-world experiences. And recommendation 5 is around encouraging or mandating big business through the procurement process potentially to also partner with schools for job and career opportunities. Maybe you can talk just a little bit more about those ideas and how they might work.

Samet ISTAR: Absolutely, 100 per cent. When I do mention mandating with schools, I mean public and private. It is important that most schools get equal opportunity and access, mostly in the suburbs where people are from CALD communities and low socio-economic communities, where parents do have a big influence in what they expect of their kids and where they want to see their kids. In regard to that, I think the influence is a bit minimised now compared to 10 years ago. When I was growing up it was the three big occupations: you had to be an engineer; in medicine, as a doctor; or in law. But now I think that has eased off a bit with our community. I think financial aspects have a part to play and the way affordability is going and all that.

I think families have taken a little bit of a step back, but it is in the culture that some occupations have stereotypes around them, whether it be females working in that workforce or whether it be long-term prospects in terms of employment in that industry, so there are still some stereotypes. That is why I think it is important that these partnerships are formed with schools, so that we, number one, break those stereotypes, starting off with obviously students themselves, because that may have been inputted into them at a very young age. And the government, like with that bus concept, could come out to schools or communities, festivals or whatever it

may be and actually explain to people, starting off with students and parents, why it believes these are the jobs of the future and why people should look into these options, explaining the process of what the job involves, how it is long term, how there is no guarantee with AI and the way things are going. That is what people are most anxious about: AI and how much it will take over the industry in certain occupations. It is about breaking those barriers and breaking down the concepts in our mind and making it a bit more accessible for families and students. I think the career bus concept could work if it did go out to schools.

We are lucky to have a full-time careers coordinator as well as a transition coordinator. They are really full-on and hands-on. They are across most of the information that is available out there. Again, I am not sure how equipped our teachers are to do the research about the future prospects of jobs and the way the most in-demand jobs are going. That is why I think the teachers need support and need the data, the statistics and the information to be able to guide students and pick up on their talent, because we might pick up talent in students in music, but the parents may be totally against it. We just need to work together with parents as well as students.

The other main point that I mentioned was mandating big businesses, multinationals, to take part in this conversation as well. If they are the ones struggling to find people to work in their workplaces, they should then get out on the ground and speak to students, speak to people during those mid-semester breaks and give them an opportunity to get exposed to the industry to see if it is something for them or encourage them to get involved in that industry. I think there are number of things, which I have put in my recommendations. If you have got any other questions specifically, I am happy to address them.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thanks, Samet.

The CHAIR: That was a wonderful answer. Nicole, I will go to you.

Nicole WERNER: Thank you. Samet, could you tell us more about the work that you do with parents to inform them? A few different people have talked about that work that they have been doing or suggested that that could be a valuable way to break down those stigmas and stereotypes.

Samet ISTAR: Absolutely. Other than my capacity here at the school as a Board Member, I am involved in other NGOs which are quite heavily involved in the community, the wider Islamic community and the Turkish community as well. We speak to parents. There is stigma around certain occupations, especially for the females, where females generally look at being in medicine, the healthcare industry or the education industry, but there is no place for females to be working in the construction or building industry. Maybe those kinds of barriers need to be broken if there are certain areas for females, like engineering, drafting, architecture and that kind of stuff. The parents are not aware how wide the industry is, and they are fixated on certain things. When you say 'building' they think of bricks and mortar. They do not know how big the industry is and where it is heading. But especially I think parents will struggle more now because of the evolution of AI and the way things are going and how things will be built, even in terms of housing. We are talking about how it will all be pre-made, prefab, in the future the way things are going. So we need to be open to ideas.

I am a parent. I have got an eight-year-old and a 10-year-old being educated here, going through the university process. Our approach is a bit different to my parents, so it depends on what age group we are talking about and if we were born and raised here or not. We need to still keep in mind that there are parents out there that probably cannot read English, so having material available in languages other than English is very important. It does not have to be in print, just available on a website where parents can look into and research certain industries.

My kids are in grade 3, grade 4, and they are going to be looking up to the current cohort of graduates. They are not going to be looking up to my generation, but they are going to be looking up to the current graduates. We need to make sure that those current graduates are setting good examples in the workforce and going into the jobs that are most in need, so they can come back to the schools, visit the community or get involved in the community and people will be more accepting and aware, 'Oh, there aren't just accountants in our community, but we have people dealing in robotics, people dealing in defence.' It is just about people being familiar with the industries. If there are more people exposed, it means the word gets around to the community and the families as well. It is just about exposure, I think. I hope that answers the question.

Nicole WERNER: It does. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Nicole. John, I will go to you.

John MULLAHY: Thanks, Samet, for being here. I am just wanting to know what challenges the AIAE faces providing work-based learning opportunities such as work experience and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. And how can we help to overcome these challenges?

Samet ISTAR: Yes. In our own capacity we have informal partnerships with a lot of local businesses, whether it be pharmacies or supermarkets or whether it be gyms or sporting facilities. But having partnerships with bigger companies and multinationals—just around the corner we have Essendon Fields, we have got large businesses; transport logistics is big in Victoria and I think will continue to provide the role that it does—having those bigger partnerships in place, not just for our school but for all the schools in this area, would be very important. Just to be able to tap into those big businesses I think we need support—maybe a round table or a networking event with schools and with commerce, industry and governments, state and federal, involved; some kind of a platform where the councils can get involved to organise some kind of a networking event where we can as school representatives engage, build relationships, meet these people and try to get partnerships in place. That also goes for the defence industry and also the AFP or universities. It is just about exposure and networking. I think that is our biggest challenge. We have the staff. We can access the resources if the data is available. The partnership part is where when we approach, when we send an email to a company, it does not get ignored, or they are willing to come on board and at least we are on the same wavelength, so we understand what we are trying to do, how we are trying to expose the students, and the companies also understand. It is a win-win scenario. We just need other chambers of commerce on board as well to understand that this is important for our state.

John MULLAHY: Excellent. Cheers.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dylan.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you. Thank you, Samet, for the submission and all the work that the academy does out in the north there but across lots of different communities as well. We have heard in this Inquiry about some of the financial barriers that exist for students going into vocational or higher education but also with work placements as well. That is obviously exacerbated for students that come from a low socio-economic background. What, if any, targeted support does AIAE provide to its students from a low socio-economic background just to help them explore further career opportunities?

Samet ISTAR: Yes. On my brief understanding—because I am not a full-time worker in this space in terms of at school with the careers coordinator—the information I have specifically on the kids from a low socio-economic background, if they have a healthcare card we make sure that they do benefit from that. They are exposed to those free materials, so we do guide the students with all the support that is available to them. That is the basic foundation that we can provide them. But in terms of their work experience, again the partnership we have, if we can link up those students in an area that they are interested in, that is our job, to basically be able to link those students up. But material resources and making them aware of what services are out there for them.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you.

Samet ISTAR: Thanks, Dylan.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Dylan. Samet, just to build on that challenge and barriers that might be financial, do you have any suggestions for the Committee to consider—maybe payment of apprenticeships or payment when you are doing a placement or work experience? Do you have any thoughts around that?

Samet ISTAR: I put that in my submission as well. Most apprentices and trainees do complain about the cost. The fees are nowhere enough to cover their living expenses. If there were a bit more incentive for people doing their traineeship or apprenticeship with their fortnightly payments, that would go a long way. And for a lot of people who do decide to do a career change or who do look into going into a certain area, that can sometimes be a deterrent to the person getting involved. A payment that could at least cover their living expenses would be ideal. Other than that there are areas that I identified in most need, and for the pathways to job employment in those areas we have Free TAFE programs that could also be expanded to those areas or give

an incentive for people taking up those pathways just to make it easier, more viable, more attractive. I think it is very important. It would go a long way.

The CHAIR: On that, though—maybe just to finish—do most of your students from your schools go to university or TAFE? What would be the break-up of that?

Samet ISTAR: Even in a bad year, which was last year, we had 87 per cent go to university. So most do choose university, but even they may end up going and running the family business afterwards. We have got a very diverse background of people who are CFOs, CEOs to white-collar, blue-collar workers. It is a very mixed community, as well as trade and construction industry. So it is a very diverse community. But even those kids who want to follow the footsteps of the family business—let us say construction, whatever it may be—are doing it with an education. I think is a bit different. Understanding the concept of superannuation, for example—most of our parents, that generation, did not value superannuation. They really did not care about it until they actually got to that age and they realised they had nothing. But now kids are getting involved in their family businesses, they understand the concept of self-managed super funds and so on and how businesses should be set up, the tax concept and all that, where that education makes that difference, understanding the tax office is a part in the business, it is not something you need to run away from or shy from. It is just that mentality, getting your head around business and how it all works, so I think it adds that kind of benefit to it. When you do get that education, having a bigger picture and understanding of where you sit and how you contribute and what that means makes a big difference. Now, you cannot blame my parents' generation, that generation; they did not get the education. They did what they could; they did it to their best capacity. But yes, the new generation, when they take over, they will take it to the next level and hopefully to a bigger level as well.

The CHAIR: And the students who do the IB, do their pathways look any different?

Samet ISTAR: Not really—I think the IB mainly benefits them if the students are thinking of moving overseas, continuing where they left off. There is not much difference.

The CHAIR: Okay. Well, thank you so much for your time today. We really appreciate you answering some of our questions and giving us lots to think about, so we thank you again.

Samet ISTAR: No problem. I thank you and the Committee for the work it does. I really do appreciate it. I hope, in this lovely state of ours, in the future it is better and brighter. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

Committee adjourned.