

# 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)*

Brad Davies, Strategic Advisor to the Chief Executive, Independent Schools Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearings for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website.

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Brad, thank you so much for joining us. I know you probably were not expecting to do the Inquiry today, but thank you for joining us. We have got some questions. We have been undertaking this Inquiry for a little while and had a few hearings. I suppose you are going to have a pretty unique view of what you are seeing in schools, so we will probably focus on your expertise in schools. Thank you so much. I might start us off, if that is okay, with a question:

We have heard that career education, or career practitioners in schools, can be very patchy, that there does not seem to be a real system approach and that some students may get greater career advice and others will get basically nothing. I am just wondering whether you can talk about your experiences and your schools about career advice.

**Brad DAVIES:** Yes, excellent, and thanks for the opportunity. I think that is right in terms of not just the quality of the advice, but also the extent to which it is a priority in different schools as well. That partly comes down to resourcing, but also to how committed the entire school is to that. When I think about career advice, to me, there are two components to getting the right advice to students. The leading edge of it is those career practitioners, and often those people have got very full plates and are often seen as delivering an activity rather than a capability in the school. Those people are often looked at as being responsible for work experience placements or running career expos and those kinds of things rather than the kind of more deep-seated advice and programming. I also think the other part of it then is ensuring that careers as a priority is embedded in the leadership of the organisation but right through as well and trying to make it as practical as possible and offer it as early as possible. As we said in the submission, the patchiness too is not only about students potentially not getting the right advice, but not getting it in a timeframe that allows them to make the right decisions as well. Often it is about not doing a subject that they potentially needed to get through. Definitely it is a school-by-school decision in terms of the priority it gets. We see some fantastic examples in our schools of being able to offer a really high quality of service, and for others it is a real challenge. There are competing priorities, a full curriculum—all the things I am sure that you have also heard.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just add on to that, though: can you talk about what some of the independent schools are doing to connect that advice to parents as well?

**Brad DAVIES:** A lot of it comes through the communications to parents about not only what is being offered by way of career advice but also why it is important. I think that is one of the areas, though, that can definitely be improved, and I am assuming not just in independent schools but more broadly. In terms of being able to give parents a more up-to-date understanding and expectations of what the contemporary job market looks like, if we think about the impact of digital and have AI at front of mind—no doubt that has been mentioned a few times as well—and how quickly it is changing industries and changing often not entire roles but certainly impacting on tasks within roles, often parents will have a quite dated understanding of particular vocations and job roles and will have closed off certain careers in their minds. So the schools are trying to get the message out that 'There is a lot changing in this space, and it is really important for your sons and daughters to understand what jobs are out there and what options are out there,' but it is a real challenge. In many ways it is the parents that are the vehicle for bringing about the commitment at home to careers—more than the students. I imagine many students see this as something they have to sit through, but it is the parents that have made big investments and obviously have really high expectations for their kids. I worry, and as a sector we worry, that they are not necessarily getting an up-to-date picture of where the jobs will be and what the competencies are that are required to do those jobs.

**The CHAIR:** We have certainly heard that parents are a big influence on decision-making in terms of career projection. Nicole, I might go to you next, if you have got a question.

**Nicole WERNER:** Thanks very much, Brad. Particularly with the independent schools, we have spoken a lot about the stigma that there is in alternative career pathways. Having gone to an independent school myself, I know there is that—I do not know—responsibility that maybe the student takes on because their parents have sacrificed or paid a lot of money to send them to an independent school. That being said, of course there are some that end up in trades and things like that. I think it is more the stigma that I would be curious about, how you are addressing that and whether that is something that you are actively considering in career pathways for these students.

**Brad DAVIES:** I think it is a really important issue. It relates a little to the previous question. I think in the end our belief is that parents want what is best for their kids, and that is doing something that they love or at least something they like and that is also going to give them financial sustainability and all the things that come with it. I think there certainly has been a bias, I am imagining—and I have not done the actual primary research—against some of the traditional trades and vocational pathways, but I do think that is changing across society as well. Parents are now understanding that some of the most rewarding, sustainable and financially lucrative jobs can also not come from a university pathway. I do think that is changing. A lot of that, though, comes down to what kind of advice the students are getting at home and what sort of exposure the parents have had to some of those changes. I guess that is the opportunity here, that schools, independent or otherwise, should be really focused on being able to give students that information and those choices, no matter what they are getting at home. It is a real challenge. I think some parents have absolutely embraced that there are lots of roads to get to even the career that you want, so that bias is probably a bit less prominent than it was.

I have also done quite a bit of work in Singapore, and they are an interesting system where there were the same kinds of biases among parents around the trades versus university pathways, and because they are so aligned in those vocational polytechnic pathways now to the technology—digital, that has really turned around, because parents are seeing that that part of the sector is really fully embedded in the fastest growing parts of the economy from a skills perspective. So I think they are examples too of where that has been able to be changed quite radically.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Thanks, Brad. Dylan, we might head to you.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you, Ian, and thanks, Brad, for jumping on to talk to us and give some evidence. We have heard across the Inquiry the importance of career education in schools. That has been obvious for a long time in secondary schools, but there have been a lot of witnesses that have also spoken about career education in primary schools. So the question is: what career education can primary schools deliver, what year should that probably start and how is that going to benefit primary-age students?

**Brad DAVIES:** Yes. It is a really good question, and I think starting as early as possible, but I am not sure that we necessarily call it career education when it is in primary schools. I almost see the objective as being exposing young people to the kinds of demands that they are likely to get later in life, and there are a lot of ways to think about that, and obviously that is the core role of a school. Interestingly, there has been a lot of focus lately in career education, not just on what are some of the technical competencies and what subject do you need to have studied to do a particular course but really focusing on those kinds of foundational skills, the kinds of things that employers universally want. We call it soft skills sometimes or 21st century digital literacy, communication, accountability—all of those kinds of things. I think that is the opportunity in primary school, to frame it in a way that ‘If you learn this, this will help you get a job later’ but being able to give the analogy of ‘This is the sort of thing that if you were working in a supermarket, these are the kinds of skills that you would use.’ So I wonder whether it is maybe slightly less formal in a primary setting. Equally, though, is the value of hearing the voice of industry—and again, I think that is something you could potentially have in primary schools as well. Many primary schools, I am sure, already do this, but that could be the guest speaker who comes in, but rather than just relying on the mum or dad of one of the kids being able to come in and talk about their day to day, maybe being a bit more targeted about it as well in terms of some of the emerging roles and some of the areas where we know there are shortages, because ultimately I think career education needs to serve the state and federal economies as well. We have got a responsibility there to ensure that we are training young people for jobs that are going to exist in the future. I think young people should be able to hear some of these stories and opening up some possibilities rather than the really common vocations that get mentioned a lot. My daughter went through some career education recently, and it was useful, but equally the things that were spoken to her about the sorts of jobs that she might qualify for were teacher, nurse, police, so a quite standard set of vocations. I know those sectors employ a lot of people, but I do not know that her mind was

necessarily opened up to a bunch of other possibilities in areas like sustainability and IT and digital that are really growing at a rate. So I varied off track slightly, Dylan, sorry.

**The CHAIR:** That is great. Thank you, Brad—really, really helpful. Anthony, we might go to you.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thanks, Chair; and thanks, Brad for appearing at short notice and for the submission from independent schools. We have heard a lot throughout the hearing around the need for more industry involvement and collaboration, so just noting some parts of your submission which did touch on this, I want to hear a bit more if that is possible around exactly how independent schools are collaborating with industry to provide students with greater access to career development pathways and experience opportunities and how independent schools can be better supported in regard to building those relationships with industry.

**Brad DAVIES:** Yes, for sure. I might start with the second part first if that is okay. In terms of the support that could be provided—and I know this is an age-old issue—it is as accurate information as possible on labour market projections and forecasts. Again it is incredibly difficult for schools, even for universities and others, to forecast which jobs are growing, declining et cetera. But that really helps to give schools a bit of a sense of due north, because they want to be providing as accurate information as possible. Sometimes the absence of that macro support means that they may be giving messages that are a bit more dated. I also think some of the frameworks around thinking about 21st century competencies and things, so that we are not always looking at things through a completely vocational lens and that a careers adviser has got a sense of some of the skills and how they transfer into employment—some of that scaffolding—are certainly useful. I think one of the challenges for industry in all of this is that getting involved in any careers education activity with an individual school is high touch; it takes a lot of time and is really difficult. I think we also need to be thinking about how we can scale the scarce resource, which is people in the industry willing to give up their time and expertise. I think digital tools could be used effectively here. Obviously a really successful way to expose young people to careers is the traditional work experience or placement, but that does not scale; that is quite hard. Also often you are relying on your parent community to open up those opportunities. Our schools do all of that, but one of the things that Independent Schools Victoria has been looking at is: is there a way to scale those industry experiences? If you have got some business leaders using technology access to provide students some of those perspectives and insights—it would be much better if it was in person, in the same room, but the reality is that is not going to happen—the question is: would students benefit from some of those perspectives? We think they would. It does not mean putting all of it online, but I think industry would become more likely to participate in some of these things if they knew that they were getting to multiple schools and multiple students.

We have probably also had a tradition with industry where it is seen as a donation of their time to take on work experience and exposure in the university sector. I see industry now not looking at it that way; they are looking at it as early access to talent. It is an investment in potentially being able to get students that want to work at their place of employment down the track, and there have obviously been some initiatives around specific vocations like IT skills for women and those kinds of things. I think industry are much more likely to participate if their audience is more than 20 people in a classroom and it takes the same amount of time. I think there are definitely some options there—and as I am sure has happened, also getting the voice of industry in how they become more involved. But it is really challenging, because industry's focus, rightly, is on their immediate needs. They have got lots of other pressures. They are thinking about, 'Who do I need next year and the year after?' They are probably not doing as much of the long-term forecasting, unless you are talking about the really big corporates. I think there is definitely some support that can be provided so that the schools can focus on what they do best, which is engaging directly with their students and community, but making sure that they have got the appropriate scaffolding.

**The CHAIR:** That is an excellent answer, Brad, and I think that is what this Committee is grappling with—how to put the jigsaw pieces together and do this better—so thank you. Thank you so much for your time today. I know you were not expecting to do this today, so we appreciate you answering our questions.

**Brad DAVIES:** No problem at all. Thank you for the opportunity.

**Witness withdrew.**