

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-demand Industries

Melbourne—Monday 17 November 2025

#### MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Roma Britnell

Anthony Cianflone

John Mullahy

Nicole Werner

Dylan Wight

#### WITNESSES

Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor, and

Professor Jessica Vanderlelie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, (Academic), Deakin University;

Professor Julie Cogan, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, (Academic), Australian Catholic University;

Professor Sarah McDonald, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Experience, and

Professor Wayne Hodgson, Dean of Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University;

Professor Gregor Kennedy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, (Education), and

Professor Andrea O’Connor, Co-Director, Victorian Medtech Skills and Device Hub, Shanahan Chair in Frontier Medical Solutions, University of Melbourne; and

Professor Sue Bennett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, (Academic), and

Associate Professor Emmaline Bexley, Academic Director, Widening Participation, La Trobe University.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to this panel hearing for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-demand Industries. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website. While all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the committee during the hearing will be published on the committee's website.

We are going to run this session like a Q and A format. Committee members will have some questions for you all. We may not get everyone to answer every question, but if you would like to, you can jump in or raise your hand, whatever is easy. But if you could just help us by stating your name and where you are from before you start to speak, that would be helpful. If there are any important points that we do not make today, though, that you think that we need to confirm or if you would like to add further information, you are more than welcome to write to the committee as well after today.

I am going to just let the committee introduce themselves. Then I will hand over to you and we will do the same—you can state your name and organisation or university—and then we will jump straight into some questions. I am Alison Marchant, the Member for Bellarine.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Hi, everyone. It is great to have so many people here. I am Kim O'Keeffe, the Member for Shepparton.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** I am Anthony Cianflone, the Member for Pascoe Vale.

**John MULLAHY:** John Mullahy, Member for Glen Waverley.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit.

**The CHAIR:** We might start this end, if that is okay.

**Emmaline BEXLEY:** Emmaline Bexley, La Trobe University.

**Sue BENNETT:** Sue Bennett, La Trobe University.

**Andrea O'CONNOR:** Andrea O'Connor, University of Melbourne and the Victorian Medtech Skills and Devices Hub.

**Gregor KENNEDY:** Greg Kennedy, University of Melbourne.

**Wayne HODGSON:** Wayne Hodgson, Monash University.

**Sarah McDONALD:** Sarah McDonald, Monash University.

**Julie COGIN:** Julie Cogan, Australian Catholic University.

**Jessica VANDERLELIE:** Jessica Vanderlelie, Deakin University.

**Iain MARTIN:** Iain Martin, Deakin University.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We have had some other committee members state their favourites. I am an ex-Deakin student, so I will show my favouritism today as well. Thank you, Deakin, for being here. Kim, I am going to head to you first.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Thank you. We are trying to actually go through questions that perhaps we have not asked the panel prior, because we are getting some repetitive things, but we also want to know your take on some of those questions. I am trying to just go through and make sure we are getting a really good balance and

having the opportunity to hear a range of different things. My first question is: how do universities ensure that graduates have the skills necessary to effectively participate in the workforce?

**Andrea O'CONNOR:** Thank you. Happy to start on that. We started the Victorian Medtech Skills and Devices Hub in response to skills gaps, particularly in the MedTech manufacturing sector. This is an initiative supported by DJSIR that was started in 2023, and we have found that working closely with that industry sector has enabled us to tailor experiences for students to develop courses and subjects with industry and to raise awareness of career potential pathways that students generally are not aware of. We have done quite a lot of surveying of students and found that they did not know about jobs in MedTech. So, we have been able to increase their awareness and increase practical training with work experience that suits the student and industry—we found constraints around flexibility and economic aspects there—and provide more practical training, so working with that industry sector and with some people in the hub who have deep industry knowledge. And then we collaborate with multiple universities. It is an initiative of University of Melbourne, Swinburne and RMIT, but we have students from all of the Victorian universities who come along to activities. That has worked really well.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** And do you feel they have successful job placements once they have graduated because of that?

**Andrea O'CONNOR:** Yes. The program only started in 2023, but we have had about 4000 people participate in activities that we have run. We have had about 200 students in work placements, and we are seeing an increase in engagement. A number of those students who do a work placement then end up working for that company. We are seeing a growth in that employment, but it is still relatively early days. I think it will continue to grow.

**Iain MARTIN:** For Deakin, probably like many of the universities here, it is multifaceted. Every single one of our major program groups will have an industry advisory board whose role is to talk about the context of the curriculum in light of their discipline. We have a number of degrees. I call out engineering, which is almost entirely project based, and many of those projects are dictated by industry partners. 'Can you help us work on X?'—which is both a project and a way of ensuring that our graduates meet those requirements. Many of our programs are professionally accredited, and whilst accreditation can be a two-edged sword, it is absolutely a validation by the profession that what you are doing is meeting the needs on the day. Finally, we make sure that each year our governing body meets with a range of employers to get their views on what we should or should not be doing to make our students not just job-ready but career-ready.

**Julie COGIN:** Some of the things have already been said, but for us at Australian Catholic University, it is about ensuring that our curriculum is co-created with industry—this is over and above placements or accreditation bodies—and also starting to build authentic assessment tools into our courses. Universities cannot keep up with AI and ChatGPT and other forms of assessment. But having industry come in with projects outlining what a problem is and getting our students to help them has been a really good way of giving them the credentials. If you have got an e-learning portfolio that captures those skills and working with industries during your whole course, then being able to embed that in LinkedIn as a social media tool provides you with credentials when you are going out and looking for work. Some of our industry partners guarantee our graduates an interview. For instance, St Vincent's Hospital guarantee an interview for our nurses. The Australian QILT survey measures the percentage of satisfaction industry has with the graduates of a university. I was delighted that we were ranked first this year in public universities. But it is a good way to measure and track how you are doing.

**Sarah McDONALD:** I would just like to reflect on many of the things that my colleagues have said. But at Monash University I think for us industry collaboration is fundamentally embedded in everything we do. While we had just shy of 36,000 student industry experiences and placements last year, we work closely with industry on developing experiential learning opportunities above and beyond placement, giving students the opportunity to work in cross-disciplinary teams and build the skills they need not just for this moment in time but the networks and connections that are going to carry them through the various facets of their career. We have also developed an AI career development hub where students can go and practise interviews. They can put in jobs from different sectors and be assessed on their responses to that based on the sector they are interested in, recognising, while obviously the discipline of their degree is really important, they might be taking that discipline into a range of different areas. We have a whole range of modules that we are looking at that develop

students across the board. All of our students, undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students, also have developed work in a similar vein for HDR students, who may go on an academic trajectory but are likely to work in some of our most important research industries. We can see that very strongly in some of the work that is happening in medicine. I do not know if, Wayne, you want to comment.

**Wayne HODGSON:** I think Iain has already indicated that the accreditation side is very important, even though it can be a two-edged sword. The advisory board is important, to have that voice come in looking at the curriculum and, you know, helping us develop our course outcomes, which then hopefully drive what the industry is looking for.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. We might go to Anthony.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you, Chair. My question is around basically how we can better promote or work to promote universities as a pathway through secondary schools and through connecting students to in-demand industries. The question is directed at all of you of course, but particularly Melbourne University and La Trobe University. As an MP from the north, a lot of my residents study and learn in terms of health and med tech in particular—nursing and the like—across your respective campuses and then go on to work in those very health precincts through Parkville in particular and the Northern precinct as well. We heard earlier about Free TAFE and the amount of work we are doing to promote Free TAFE through schools, which is of course fair enough. But in terms of universities, what do you see in your respective opinions that we could potentially consider and recommend?

**Gregor KENNEDY:** Thank you. I might kick off and then throw to Sue. The partnership up in Shepparton between La Trobe and Uni Melb and Munarra is just a really good example of a partnership, I reckon, that sings a bit. We worked closely with La Trobe for a while on this, and particularly with the Academy of Sport, Health and Education—ASHE—to provide pathways. It is really focused on what the needs of the community are. It is particularly focused—not exclusively—on Indigenous communities and thinking about the needs of those communities, focusing around sport and looking at pathways that provide people at cert III, cert IV, and then think about going on to maybe a bachelor's program in health or nursing. I went to a graduation last year up in Shepp. You can see the way in which people who maybe did not have an inkling that they were going to go to university, but they started with a cert IV, and then some people who were graduating on that evening were in masters programs in nursing. So you can see the transformational power, I suppose, before throwing to Sue—it is the partnership and the student-centeredness of it in the community where you are responding to community needs. I think it is a really powerful model.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Yes, there is the Munarra partnership, but also the Home of the Matildas partnership as well at La Trobe, which is doing great work too.

**Sue BENNETT:** I think the thing I would jump in and add is that in terms of that school engagement, starting really early is important. There is very persuasive evidence to show that it is actually in primary school that children begin to form ideas about not just what they want to be, but what they are capable of. And this is where you can find that some of those self-beliefs shut down some ideas around, you know, where they are going to end up—you know, 'University is a place for me' or 'Further study is a place for me'. So I think that is really important. We need to start before secondary school. And then it is about those connections, as Gregor said.

And finding the way in often comes through an interest—sport is often a great gateway in regional communities particularly, and also health. We are very much about what is place based and what is really right for that community. Not everybody is able to go away to study. A lot of people are engaging later in life as well. So it is kind of cyclical as well. My message out of this is it is not a straight path and there are many student journeys, so the more that we can keep connecting and keep that door open—and then 'no wrong door' is another important facet; that is something we really believe in.

**Jessica VANDERLELIE:** If I can add to the conversation, we as a sector—each institution does a huge amount of work in multiple schools that they will have partnerships with. One of the things that is missing, building off the comment that Sue made, is a systematic approach to engagement with students and building aspiration through primary school into high school. It is something that, as higher education providers, we could collaborate on, but at the moment there are structural barriers to us being able to do that. So there is one.

If I could ask for one thing, it is helping careers practitioners to have more time to be able to engage with us and then for us as a sector to be able to contribute back through positive partnerships that are incentivised across the entire sector, so that we do not leave anyone behind.

**Julie COGIN:** If I could add around the career advisers, there are differences across universities around prerequisites and so on. So having some sort of tool or a resource where they can get up-to-date information would be good. One thing I would like to share is something that we are doing at ACU, 'step up into university', and we have had hundreds of year 11 students. So what we offer are two courses or two units, and we offer them in the school holidays in intensive mode on the university campus when there are not that many people around. They do those units, and they are classified and accredited in from first year. They are people who have may not have even thought that they had an opportunity to go to university. They are free. And then we have a lovely graduation ceremony with their families and all their schoolteachers, who come to campus, and they have already got two courses behind them. It has been a wonderful way of converting them in. Even if it is not to an undergraduate degree, it is a diploma, and then there are the diploma pathways, so starting in year 11, then into vocational ed and then into a degree. It has been very successful for us.

**The CHAIR:** Are some schools better at doing it than others in terms of career advice and supporting that pathway?

**Julie COGIN:** Yes. That is right, and usually it is the teachers and the career advisers at the front of the room cheering them on at graduations. They are very passionate.

**Wayne HODGSON:** I would like to emphasise something I think Jessica was saying about the collaborations that is important. We have got very similar relationships with Melbourne. So we have a rural school which is very important in driving aspiration. They work with programs, with schools—like Hands on Health, where they go into the schools—and, I reiterate, early. You cannot go into year 12 and then look for the pool of students. They are not there. You need to go back to year 7, early, to raise that aspiration and be upskilling the careers teachers so they are giving them the right advice. If they have not got a careers teacher, that is a very important part of it.

And that relationship with TAFE: we are looking at that cert IV in allied health and then going into a bachelor's degree, getting the credit, and then you have a student that can actually work in the system part-time and study part-time so they are actually being employed at the same time as they are learning.

**Gregor KENNEDY:** Can I say just, to reiterate: I think the great point about careers advisers and what you said about some schools doing it better than others is that when I go out and chat to careers advisers or they come to the university, I get a really strong sense that there are some schools that have got the capacity to do it and provide pretty well-rounded advice to their students, but I was again really struck by some of the partner schools that we have where we are saying, 'Think about this, think about that, think about the other,' and they are like, 'We just simply don't have the capacity to provide'.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** We have heard a bit of that today.

**Gregor KENNEDY:** Yes. And so what Jess was saying I think is spot on, which is: how can we as a system provide more support to schools to provide good advice in a really comprehensive way across—

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** If I can ask, Chair, as well, just on that: do you believe potentially there is a role for universities to help in that space directly with schools, providing resources potentially or a stronger partnership in that space? And the other question I had as part of that was: you mentioned there are a lot of barriers to sometimes developing those partnerships and pathways. I guess the question is: what are those barriers, and if there was a world in which it was made easier, could those partnerships with universities and secondary and even primary schools potentially be done or considered on a geographical basis or a faculty sort of basis or a skill set basis? I am interested to hear your thoughts on those.

**Jessica VANDERLELIE:** I am happy to start. One of the biggest challenges we have is obviously our regional schools. The further out you go, the less capacity each individual institution has to be able to support those regional schools, particularly really small regional schools. An anecdote that I will share: I used to live in a very small community in the bottom of South Gippsland, as close to Wilsons Prom as you could get. There are approximately 20 kids in year 12 at the high school there, and the only time institutions come to visit is

when they are talking about their open days or we send a bus up there. There is one careers teacher there that is also supporting wellbeing and a whole lot of other things, so they are really strapped. It is a distance issue, but part of the system challenge we have is there are regional universities that disproportionately are picking up those relationships.

So one of the things that we could do is take a step back and think about what the whole system needs: how we bring all careers advisers together and how as institutions we step beyond our own individual needs to be able to recruit students—because we all want students to come and study. We want students to come to study at Deakin, because it is amazing. We want students to be able to stay in their local places and access education where they are living, because we do not want to draw students away from those communities, but we also want to raise aspirations for students to come and study in metro areas if that is what they need to do. We are funded in a way that means that a lot of us do that work through our higher education participation program funding. There are different models that we could consider, but at the moment we are just not structured in that way. So I think it will take a step back.

**Gregor KENNEDY:** I mean, my sense is that everyone—most of the universities represented here, the ones you have spoken to today—would have their partnership model. They would have their outreach programs and they would have their—I could list the ones that we have, with bringing kids onto campus and whatever it is. So I think it is a good question about what is the right way to coordinate that activity—whether that is regional, whether that is shared materials—but in a way that does not add to the administrative burden of it. So there is a balancing act, I reckon, there.

But going to Jess's regional point, I wonder what a regional fair, where there is a coordinated activity, where we are all doing it at the same time, like going down to South Gippsland, —lovely—in a coordinated way, would look like. For us, we have really enjoyed the fee-free uni ready program from the federal government. The way in which we have invested in that is to look at students who are high-capability students who maybe have not done maths methods because of the access to that or whatever, and so we provide a bridging program. What are the ways in which you can think creatively about that? That would be, I think, a useful conversation.

**Sarah McDONALD:** I would endorse everything that my colleagues have said. I would also just add that additional focus of developing those partnerships between TAFE, universities and industries in specific regional areas to be able to deliver but also support the development of those areas in line with specific outcomes and needs both of the state and of our young people. I am old, but all of our young people—

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** We are all young.

**Sarah McDONALD:** They are all young. Everyone is young. The other thing, just as an aside, is going back to engagement opportunities into these areas, and I think it is something that probably most universities do in some way but definitely could be expanded and leveraged if we had appropriate fit-for-purpose programming and funding, what we find is really successful is our students that have come from regional areas being back in those regional areas and building those aspirations. Our students enjoy that work. It gives them a lot of skills themselves that they can parlay into their own employability, but it has a huge impact on the young people in those areas to see someone who has gone through a perhaps not direct trajectory into university but a pathway into university anyway. I think that is something that we can use. I am sure people do it in varying different ways.

**Julie COGIN:** Another barrier would have to be cost. We have got a lovely campus in Ballarat and last year introduced a bachelor of occupational therapy there. These were skills needed in that local community. It is very expensive to set up. I mean, the infrastructure, the capital works, to build a facility to teach occupational therapy—bathrooms, kitchens, layouts of apartment—is expensive. To meet those skill needs, that is another obstacle for universities to do that, especially with our campus in Ballarat.

**Sarah McDONALD:** And everything that sits around that. I know with our rural health campuses and our provision of accommodation, that all needs to be funded from varying sources. Even if you are not bringing someone into a metropolitan experience, they are gathering in different areas in the regions where they can access that education and the specifics that they are interested in developing.

**The CHAIR:** I will just come to you. I saw you had your hand up.

**Emmaline BEXLEY:** I would agree with what Jess was saying earlier. We work very intensively with schools around our regional campuses, particularly low-SES schools, from more general outreach for years 7 to 10 but also lifting achievement for year 12s. There is an ATAR barrier there that we can work to support, but we see any post-school outcome that leads to more education, whether it is with a different university or a TAFE, as a real success. I think there is a real appetite for working together. It is certainly not a zero-sum game, because it is raising the numbers of students that are participating.

But I just wanted to touch on—we worked on a Workforce Training Innovation Fund grant for the government recently, which I think we mentioned. One of the things we found talking to young people around our regional campuses was a real lack of awareness of the different things that you can actually do at university. In the regions it is teaching, social work and nursing, so that is why we see such a lack of young boys and men in education. At our Bendigo campus, the home of our education faculty, they are looking for more students. Students in the region are saying, ‘What jobs do you get from uni?’, because when we go out and talk to the students, they do not really know what engineers do apart from building bridges. They do not know about cochlear implants and all the diversity of jobs that are out there waiting for them. So we have got this really strange situation where there is a faculty looking to work with local students, local students looking for local jobs, and as much work as we can do to raise that understanding of what is out there in the local community—that is the real challenge. There is a real role for industry and for state government to coordinate between education and industry so that students can see those local jobs, because staying at home is what so many of them want.

**Sarah McDONALD:** I think it is important for us all to acknowledge—and I am sure my colleagues would agree—that finding ways in for talent, wherever it may lie, to university, independent of a young person’s experience or ATAR or whatever, is really important and a commitment for all of us. But we do need to acknowledge that to provide those wraparound supports to get the kind of success and thriving students that you want to see and then the employability outcomes at the other end is expensive and requires investment—and it is something that is worth investing in.

**John MULLAHY:** That actually leads directly on to my question, which is: how can university admission requirements be made more flexible to encourage more students, including disadvantaged students, to enter courses aligned with in-demand industries?

**Sarah McDONALD:** I am happy to jump off. I mean, I do think there is significant work we can do around recognition of prior learning but also understanding different pathways to come in, including establishing—I know Monash is looking at additional bridging programs, and we already have a program for transition for Indigenous students who do not currently make the entry requirements into university, to set them up and get them thriving in the area that they want to do but also give them the opportunity to experience a couple of different areas of study without committing fully. I might just throw to Wayne here. I think that what we are looking at in terms of a transfer into university from a certificate into a bachelors—some of that work I think needs to be developed further and made easier. I think that is a project partly for universities but it is also for our collaboration with TAFE, and also having greater policy settings around that allows us to do that. I do not know if you want to mention—

**Wayne HODGSON:** I think one of the debates we have had for years is lowering hurdles, and it is very slow. I think removing hurdles is working much better with Indigenous students, rural students. And different pathways, as Gregor was saying, with the cert IV coming in from TAFE and recognition of prior learning—I think that is a much better strategy.

**Sarah McDONALD:** But that requires the wraparounds that we were mentioning, because you want to do this to bring the students in so they can thrive and be successful—they have every capability of doing that. But it is a shift, and we have to recognise that and we need to provide those supports.

**Iain MARTIN:** I think all of us along here would look to find ways of ensuring our admission standards balance out the aspirations of the student and their chances of succeeding in the program, because, as has been said, the last thing you want is someone incurring debt and getting nothing at the end of the day. None of us want that. A large number of our students already come through non-traditional entry pathways. Only 40 per cent of Deakin students are actually school leavers, so that means, by definition, they are coming from a wide

variety of backgrounds. Seventeen per cent have a registered disability when they start with us. So there is a lot there.

Pathways we can still do better with. Free TAFE has been an interesting experience. There was a degree of nervousness amongst my colleagues in health when Free TAFE nursing came along. There was a dip in year 1 in numbers. After that students did a free year of TAFE and then transferred in in a way that they would not have done, and that has been particularly important in Warrnambool and regional places, because it has provided that alternative pathway into the workforce. So we are there, but I think we have to recognise that we do not want to set kids up to fail. And yes, we can look at maths prerequisites and other things for programs like engineering, but if you do not have a fundamental numeracy and science background at a level, engineering is a challenge.

**Julie COGIN:** Another perspective is not just thinking about high school students; it is thinking about mature employees who already have professional skills in an area. We do a masters of teaching so that you can work in a school and do your masters. That complements your professional background to then go into a new career—so transition—and the average age of our students of that is around 40. So I think that there are pathways in through the diplomas and foundation studies that we all do, but looking at mature workers as well.

**Gregor KENNEDY:** I was going to say the same thing. From my point of view, the conversation that is happening federally with the ATEC and aligning a little bit to in-demand skills areas in computing or nursing or teaching—one of the things that would be part of it for some institutions, certainly ours, is that if there was more federal funding for those places, we would be able to offer more places, which is one way of thinking about the issue.

The second thing is thinking about graduate programs, and providing you with some sort of inherent flexibility with our curriculum is a bit particular, but in areas like teaching and computing and engineering and nursing and education there is a way in which you can think about people in the future more flexibly entering institutions at the graduate level. That is certainly one of the things I think we should be thinking about as a state.

**Sue BENNETT:** I will just jump in. I think it is really important to think of the systems piece. I think often when we are talking about pathways, we are thinking about: how do we organise ourselves on our side so that there is articulation into courses? The other thing to overlay with that is the student experience. I have often heard feedback from students who are on a pathways program about this disjuncture of the experience that they might have, say, studying at TAFE and university. The more that we can do to bridge that gap in actual experience, so we flip it and see it from the student perspective—that point of moving across can sometimes be a very significant barrier that can really undermine confidence of success. Again, early engagement with the university partner in a pathway is a really critical part of it. Often my experience is that those come through bespoke designed arrangements, so there is a structural piece. I think the more that we can as a sector work out how we talk to each other and have helpful structures, that then allows the tailoring to deliver an excellent partnership that also involves the industry partner. So it gets quite complicated fast, but that is all about having something that ultimately works and is not overly generic.

**Jessica VANDERLELIE:** If I can just add: the enabling pathways make a very significant difference to helping people who have not completed high school to be able to come to institutions. One of the other barriers that we see is when accreditation bodies change the rules. That then means that we can no longer recognise RPL in some disciplines from TAFE qualifications in the same way. A good example of that was the recent changes to social work accreditation, despite the fact that we had longstanding agreements in place with TAFE partners that were proving beneficial and students were being successful. A blanket change can make a big difference to our capacity to support them.

**The CHAIR:** Interesting. We only have time for one more question. Dylan, you can have that one.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Cool. I will just do a really quick one, and it is really just summing up some stuff. We have spoken a lot about collaboration with secondary colleges or the high school sector, industry and TAFEs. So maybe just some elaboration on—it is an easy or a simple question for the dual-sector universities or institutions—how as universities we are collaborating with TAFE and speaking with TAFE about making sure that we are really streamlining into being job-ready.

**Iain MARTIN:** We have got links with The Gordon, which, although we are not dual sector, almost works like it is dual sector because it has got the advantage of geographical one-on-one location, similar with South West TAFE. Once you get into the metro areas, the boundaries are not quite as clear and you are engaging with multiple relationships. But I think all of us on this table work really hard to try and develop the relationship with their local TAFE. But as I said, I do recognise in Geelong it is easier because you have got a one-on-one articulation.

**Julie COGIN:** Could I reposition that question?

**The CHAIR:** Please.

**Julie COGIN:** With due respect, I think that collaboration with the federal and state governments is absolutely urgent. At ACU we are the biggest producer of teachers in this country, but we have got caps domestically on the number of students we can bring in. We have got caps internationally on students that we can bring in. We have got caps by professional associations—say, for instance, ANMAC in nursing. We have got placement fees that have come, so we are getting charged to place students in some professions now, with paramedicine being one of them in this state this year. And now we have got lots of problems placing teachers in schools, because there are not enough trained teachers in classrooms to take on our students, so we have had to delay graduations.

So in that environment we would love to do more. I would love to have more students coming into STEM and in-demand industries, but with the abundance of caps there, which are often imposed by the federal government, we are limited in what we can do. Or then we have to think strategically about, with this capped environment—and we have got growing costs—where we put our students. It seems like, in one way, there is a perverse incentive for universities then to go into areas and disciplines which reduce costs to teach and do not have the infrastructure, do not have the placements, do not have the complexity. I just hope that the committee would think about that as well. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just add to that—it is then not directly related to in-demand jobs, theoretically.

**Julie COGIN:** That is right. We could give you a lot more teachers, but we are not allowed to take more students.

**Emmaline BEXLEY:** I just want to go back to focusing on the question about TAFE. We have quite an unprecedentedly pleasant and non-competitive relationship with our partner TAFEs—across SuniTAFE, GOTAFE, Bendigo Kangan, Wodonga—and the university leadership and the TAFE leadership meet regularly. We talk about how we can better articulate students through, and even with a really awesome state government-funded project, a project manager and just focusing on health and care, unpacking that—we called it the bowl of spaghetti of the certificates and diplomas. Where the TAFE diplomas are competency based, the higher-ed diplomas are more holistic. Just trying to untangle that was so hard that we as practitioners found it really difficult, and so supporting students to go through that, particularly if there is not a really close relationship between the institutions, we struggled as educational researchers to do it. I think the other thing we could do is undermine that hierarchy, that hierarchical notion. In Victoria I think more students articulate from higher ed into TAFE in the end than from TAFE into higher ed. And in terms of providing people with that kind of practical training after a degree, there is a real role to do something creative there, I think. Some other countries do it a bit differently to us, but we have sort of got this structural hierarchy—we must not speak its name—which really stands in the way, I think, of getting students through and then really ready to do the things in their field of interest.

**Gregor KENNEDY:** I spoke before about the La Trobe, GOTAFE, Melbourne Uni one. I suppose a broader comment, which picks up on some of the things, is that I think it goes a little bit to what Em was saying about an ecosystem view of this—about being genuine about that and thinking about the diverse post-secondary institutions that we have. And that diversity is a good thing in terms of a student-centred sort of choice about where they want to go and also putting the wood on the institutions to work better at seamless transitions between them. I think that that is the ambition that we have got, but it is all about—for prospective students, students in high school—the options that are available and making it clear. If we cannot work it out in the bowl of spaghetti kind of sense, we have got to be clear with them—we have got to provide it for them—so that they can make those choices between the pathways, whatever they want to do. It is not about us. It is not

about 'Come to my institution.' It is about saying, 'Where do you want to go? Where are you going to fit in? What's going to be good for you?' And you may revisit that in seven years, and that is okay as well. Those were just some overarching comments.

**The CHAIR:** You have given us a lot of food for thought today, so thank you very much for your time and answering our questions. As I said at the start, if there is anything further you would like to add, please feel free. You can write to us as well. Thank you for your time.

**Witnesses withdrew.**