

TRANSCRIPT

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 7 May 2018

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Witnesses

Ms Sinead McKenna-Reid, VCAL student, and

Ms Tnaysha Halemba, Former student, Hester Hornbrook Academy.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearing of the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee’s Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing are not afforded such privilege. Hansard is recording today’s proceedings; we will provide a proof version of the Hansard transcript so you can correct any typographical errors. I would like to invite you now to state your name for the record and maybe an opening statement for a couple of minutes, and then we will go directly to questions.

Ms McKENNA-REID — My name is Sinead McKenna-Reid, and I have been a student at Hester Hornbrook for almost two years now. I started off with Youth Connect and then moved on to full time everyday in South Melbourne, and it has just been a really good experience for me so far. I have enjoyed it.

Ms HALEMBA — I am Tnaysha Halemba. I am a graduate of the Hester Hornbrook Academy and a current student at Deakin University studying an associate degree in arts. I am considering majoring in sex and gender, and history.

The CHAIR — Thank you and welcome. My first question is: what kinds of career development activities have you found to be the most useful?

Ms McKENNA-REID — There is a HEAT program that we do with our school. It is run through William Angliss; I do not know if that counts, but you get your cert. II in kitchen operations, which I found was really good and it opened up a lot of doorways to certain fields in the hospitality industry. I found that was very good and really good to have along with school.

Ms HALEMBA — Following on from that, with the HEAT program we also did an open day at Victoria University. I found that quite handy, because they did kind of elaborate on the studies that you can continue with through that. I think having more of those within education would be important because it can highlight career opportunities and possibly highlight something that those who are considering leaving school might be interested in and give them the motivation to continue through that.

Mrs FYFFE — Thank you, and congratulations on Deakin University. That is good.

Ms HALEMBA — Thank you.

Mrs FYFFE — My middle son went there. How can schools improve their career advice for students who are losing interest or want to leave school? How do you think schools could help more?

Ms HALEMBA — I think schools need to be—I know it is a big leap, but they definitely need to be more individualised. Amongst the students attending school you have a lot of intersectionality that goes on, and the current school system does not really focus on that. Each student is obviously going through different things and they all do not want to be lumped into one category.

Ms McKENNA-REID — I personally believe that they are unsure about what they want to do, and we have programs where on Fridays we have certain people come and show us different ways, different job opportunities like, say, computers and tech and stuff, like we have those things, but it is really finding one that makes someone wake up and go, ‘Oh, I might like that’, because they might not know it exists. That is one thing, but that is also very difficult to narrow down as well. I understand that.

Mrs FYFFE — Do you think a lot of the stuff is just boring because of the way it is presented?

Ms McKENNA-REID — No, I believe the young people have a lot on their minds, like everyone does, but it is really telling them, ‘You can do this—you don’t have to, but you can’, and that it is doing something you enjoy, but it is finding that. That is very difficult. I thought I wanted to do hospitality and I did HEAT, and I enjoyed it, but then I realised I like animals and that is really my passion. But that was just me; everyone is different.

Ms HALEMBA — I think to some students things presented might come across as boring depending on how the student learns. For example, I am a discussion learner; that is how I learn. If you put something in front of me, I am not going to take it in. So for someone like me, if you are presenting me with a lot of paper and a lot of reading, I could find that extremely boring and I am not going to want to continue, despite university I am not

going to want to continue. So I understand you need to manoeuvre opening ways to learn. But if you are presenting a lot of different students who learn differently with the same thing, kids are going to lose interest.

Mr CRISP — Tell us a little more about how those Friday afternoons work. Is it industry that comes in or are they career practitioners?

Ms McKENNA-REID — It is basically someone who works in that industry. It is not really a routine-like place. It is just someone who works in a certain field. They give you insight into what they do and how to do it and some of the things they do. It opens your mind up a bit, so if you wanted to do things on the computer like editing, they show you bits on how it is all done and little snippets so you get an idea, which is something good.

Mrs FYFFE — So it is quite practical in some ways.

Ms McKENNA-REID — Yes. It is good. It gives you some idea, which we would not usually get.

Mr MELHEM — Thank you all very much for turning up, giving us your time and addressing the Committee. It must have taken a lot of courage to come in.

Ms HALEMBA — Thank you for having us.

Mr MELHEM — You are obviously very talented. You talked about individual learning outcomes and that has been your main focus, because if you are given a book to read you get bored very easily.

Ms HALEMBA — Yes.

Mr MELHEM — That it is very important, and it is going to apply to everyone really.

Ms HALEMBA — I think that is one of the biggest things that applies. The good thing about the Hester Hornbrook Academy is they try and incorporate that the best that they can, but I feel standard schools systems—you get a textbook, you get a work sheet, that is how you learn. I do not think that they are taking into consideration that a lot of kids do not learn like that, and I think that is where it is failing and that is why a lot of kids are losing interest and dropping out.

Ms McKENNA-REID — And a lot of mental health issues as well.

Ms HALEMBA — Yes. Going back to the learning styles and stuff, I think a lot of schools need to have a look at their pedagogy, I believe the word is, and the way that they teach and the way that the students learn and incorporate that, because I feel that that would probably help to reduce the number of kids losing interest and wanting to drop out.

Mr MELHEM — Let me take that a bit further. We are talking about the teachers teaching the technical stuff, the careers advisers basically trying to figure out what you like and which sort of career and then you talked about mental issues, so we are talking about maybe looking at another dimension, which is psychological and mental—sort of how you can assess and assist individual students. Is that something we should look at as well?

Ms McKENNA-REID — I actually really do believe it is, because a lot of young people do not actually realise they have mental health issues but they do know there is something wrong and there is something that is making them want to disengage. That is really what is making them disengage, because I believe they are not aware of what is happening. To be able to have someone to sort of help—it is really difficult when it comes to mental health because there are a lot of different factors that come into it, but really it is just so that they do not feel like they are the only ones who feel like that. Also they have an understanding and they can work around that so that is not holding them back sometimes, because that is what really brings people down. They feel sad and they do not know why. It could be for a lot of family issues and stuff.

Mr MELHEM — How do you open that up? Do you have direct discussions between the school personnel and the individual? Do your parents come into it or guardians come into it, or should they come into it?

Ms HALEMBA — I think it is very tricky regarding parents and guardians because there needs to be a certain degree of independence amongst students. If they are 16 or 17 struggling with mental illness and they

are not sure why, if they are not having a very good home life, they are not going to want to drag their family into it and say, 'I'm depressed because this is all going on'. I think that there does need to be a degree of independence, but I also think that schools themselves are not exactly trained to deal with people that have mental illness. Obviously you have school nurses and school counsellors, but they are not really opening doorways to getting them the help that they may require in order to keep them on the track that they need to be on.

Ms McKENNA-REID — Yes, but we do have youth workers. They are really good to have, but then again sometimes people slip through the cracks and they do not realise. But we cannot expect the youth workers to realise what is going on in our head, so it is really for both sides to engage, because that is the key: engaging. A lot of kids would be like, 'I don't care' or 'I don't do this', when really we need to get them to talk and open up about what they want to do. I do not know if that makes sense.

Ms HALEMBA — I think when it comes down to keeping kids on track to follow through on a career path, there are a lot of layers that come into it and obviously that has just been identified here. But I think there needs to be more of an in-depth discussion about the support for students who are falling behind or lacking or considering dropping out from schools. They need to be asked why this is happening and what can be done to help resolve those issues.

Ms McKENNA-REID — Or avoid it as much as possible.

Ms HALEMBA — Yes. There is not really a lot of that. Whether it falls on the responsibility of the teachers, the carers, the parents or the school system, it is not about who is to blame. It is like, 'Okay, something is wrong. How can we fix it?'.

Mr CRISP — Just to build on that and talk much about the mental health issues that can influence career decisions, are there any others? Because you started to talk about some of those other areas that influence the process of making a career decision.

Ms McKENNA-REID — As in getting a job altogether or getting a career?

Mr CRISP — Interestingly you made a leap from hospitality to veterinary and along the way what helped and what hindered you making that transition.

Ms McKENNA-REID — Okay. For me personally, because I cannot speak on behalf of everyone, I had to get an insight into what it was like because I felt that hospitality was great. But for me personally I have always found animals therapeutic, but I never thought of it in that way. I thought if I wanted a job, hospitality is good because Melbourne has lots of coffee shops, lots of places to get a part-time job. But after that experience and a few things I have seen on TV of hospo boys, I decided that probably it was not the best. I got experience; that is what I am happy about. But for something I am going to be happy with for a long time—it took me ages to figure it out—it was animals because they do make me very happy. I would love to just help them for my whole life, but I did not even realise that until a couple of months ago. I was like, 'That's it. I want this'.

Mrs FYFFE — It is good to be focused.

Ms HALEMBA — Going off what she has just said, I think it is important if we go back to whether it is Year 9 or 10 and you go through work experience. You know going back to how far back we should start thinking about a career, I feel like it should be early high school because by the time you get to Year 9 or 10, and they are like, 'Okay, let's go do some work experience', you have got kids that are not doing work experience in the field that they would be interested in. In her case she thought she would like to work in hospitality. She does not want to do that because she had a taste of it. So I think the school system is letting people down because they are like, 'Okay, you want to be a lawyer, but sure, go do workplace in a Safeway'. They are not really getting a taste of, 'This is what it's like to be a lawyer. Do I still want to do it or do I not want to do it? Do I want to stay on the same career path or pick a different one?'. I think that that kind of factors in a lot—the support and being like, 'No, you did want to do this, so how come you have gone and got a work replacement at the local nursery or whatever?'.

Mrs FYFFE — This is a bit more personal. Apart from, 'You will end up this side of the table one day'—you are a great advocate and you are very articulate—what do you want to do?

Ms HALEMBA — Myself?

Mrs FYFFE — Yes.

Ms HALEMBA — I do have a few options in mind. I would be particularly happy with either a history or soc. teacher, because I love history and I love sociology, or a community worker specialising in the LGBTIQ community. But I am not going to lie. Sitting here has actually raised a lot of interest in the opposite side of the table, so that is interesting.

Mrs FYFFE — It is all achievable. I came from a disadvantaged background where you went to work in the mill or down in the pit. You had no choice. And look, here I am here, so everything is possible.

Ms HALEMBA — Congratulations. Thank you.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the Committee, I wish you both luck. I would really like to thank you very much for coming and for your time.

Mrs FYFFE — Thank you for being so open with us. We appreciate it.

Mr MELHEM — For the record, that is the best session we have had.

Ms HALEMBA — That is great. Thank you.

Committee adjourned.