

TRANSCRIPT

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 7 May 2018

Members

Mr Nazih Elasmr — Chair

Ms Dee Ryall — Deputy Chair

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr Peter Crisp

Mrs Christine Fyffe

Ms Jane Garrett

Mr Cesar Melhem

Witnesses

Ms Tracey Jeffery, Skills and Jobs Centre Adviser, and

Ms Keelie Hamilton, Director, Student and Industry Engagement, The Gordon;

Dr Arnaldo Barone, Director, Policy and Advocacy, Victorian TAFE Association; and

Ms Jodee Price, Manager, Skills and Employment, Goulburn Ovens TAFE.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearing of the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee 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 invite you to state your name before you start. My understanding is that each of you have 5 minutes to make a presentation.

Ms PRICE — My name is Jodee Price, and I am representing Goulburn Ovens TAFE in the Hume and Goulburn Ovens region of Victoria. First of all, I would like to thank the Committee for inviting GOTAFE to present here today. As we stated in our submission, GOTAFE is very passionate about the subject of careers advice in schools, so much so that over the last two years we have heavily invested in this space ourselves. GOTAFE delivers vocational education and training programs ranging from certificate I to advanced diploma level, and it is also a provider of VCAL programs. Like I said, we are throughout the Hume, Goulburn Ovens, and we have major campuses in Shepparton, Seymour, Benalla and Wangaratta.

The youth employment rate in the Hume region has been identified as the highest in Victoria and amongst the top 10 in the country. Of the approximately 30 per cent of students that do complete the VCE certificate in our region, only 30 per cent take up a university spot. Alarming, only 18 per cent are choosing study at a vocational institute. We believe these figures are very alarming, particularly the fact that of the 70 per cent of students not moving onto university, as I said, only 18 per cent are choosing a vocational course.

Through the work of our youth engagement team, which has worked alongside careers teachers, VET and VCE coordinators and school welfare staff from approximately 27 secondary schools in our region, we have formed the opinion that there are some obvious reasons for the low take-up of vocational education and training. Careers education in many schools is not given the appropriate attention, and we have provided quite a bit of information about this, as you would see in our submission. Secondary schools are overly focused on ATAR scores and university entrance. Most teachers do not understand VET and VET pathways.

An example I would use for that is probably nursing. We have many young people present at our schools and jobs centre and also to our youth engagement officers saying that they want to be a nurse and they have to go to university, and this is in fact quite inaccurate, and schools and school careers teachers just do not really understand that. The better option for young people is to go through the TAFE pathway, stay in their community, live at home for as long as they can, and obviously have lower HECS debts and now I guess next year, when we will have a free diploma of nursing, save themselves a lot more money. So there are a lot of advantages, but the schools just do not understand that.

When our youth engagement team started contacting schools to offer our services, most schools were reluctant to let us talk to their students. A few schools initially welcomed the assistance, and as time went on our reputation grew, and by the end of the first year we were working with 23 of the local schools. The aim of the service was to assist careers advisers and other teachers working in this space to understand VET and to provide information sessions and specific programs that focused on VET as a genuine career pathway. At first we were given access to VCAL classes only, and then teachers were beginning to identify students that were starting to disengage from school and at risk of dropping out. Gradually we became known for our work in providing individualised one-on-one career assistance to disengaged youth, and within our first two years we provided 450 young people in the region with a vocational plan and re-engaged them in school. Our whole plan is to actually keep a young person at school for as long as possible, but if they do drop out early, they have got a plan. They have got a vocational plan and a goal that keeps them going.

Unfortunately the schools were—and many still are—reluctant to let us speak to the VCE and Year 11 and 12 students. The goal once they get to that point is purely about an ATAR score and a university entrant, and as I said, in the region it ranges from 25 to 30 per cent that actually achieve that. So we strongly believe for the sake of the young people and local employers in regional Victoria a more holistic and inclusive view of careers advice in secondary schools is the only way forward. What our service has been able to do is bring the conversation of vocational pathways into the classroom and into the homes of young people and to assist schools and individuals to connect with local industry and provide opportunities for students to experience VET through unique taster programs. We strongly, strongly believe that careers education is not the sole responsibility of secondary schools; we do understand the pressures they are under to deliver that. However,

schools should be an enabler for universities, TAFEs and industry to engage with their students to adequately provide careers advice.

We also believe that the overemphasis on ATAR scores and university entry is not only putting undue pressure on students; it confuses their parents and is doing a great disservice to the local rural communities and industries that service these communities.

The CHAIR — Thank you. It is up to you if you want to provide something, or we are happy to go straight to questions. But I will leave it to you.

Dr BARONE — Mine will be very general. I will leave it to the expertise of my colleagues here, who are our members, but essentially I just wanted to raise four points that the VTA highlighted in our submission. The first one is obviously the kind of thing that Jodee was referring to—the need for accurate advice, the need to move away from a university-VET dichotomy, the need for a professional career adviser workforce. At the moment the career adviser seems to be an appendage or an add-on to an existing role. In our submission I specifically and purposely used the word ‘career advice seeker’, to move on to my next point, which is that the career advice seeker is more than the student but increasingly the lifelong learner, the adult. I understand the terms of reference of this Committee were limited to that student role, but I think that, given that lifelong learning is becoming increasingly important, some thought needs to be given to that.

Finally, I highlight that our members operate across the AQF and we offer VET courses and higher ed. courses, but we also offer senior secondary schooling courses, but many of the students who do undertake secondary schooling in TAFE institutes—and we have got some research that shows it is about 6000 students—currently do not have access to the same levels of support, including I understand career advice support, that would be available to students in traditional secondary school settings. They are the four points that I basically wanted to highlight, so over to my learned colleague.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Tracey, would you like to say anything?

Ms JEFFERY — Yes, I will just introduce myself, and I have got a couple of points that I would like to go over to start with. I am Tracey Jeffery. So Keelie Hamilton and I are here representing The Gordon today, so thank you to start with for having us. I am a skills and job centre adviser, but I am actually also an ex-career practitioner from a secondary school, so I guess I wear two hats today, but I am here today representing The Gordon, so I am a qualified careers counsellor as well, so I can give a bit of a perspective from both situations and on working as a skills and job centre adviser—so working giving careers advice to members of the community in my role.

You have got our submission from The Gordon. There are just a couple of things that we wanted to raise and from my work within schools as well. Something that we have proposed within our submission is that we think that it really should be a careers adviser—and this is probably something that you touched on as well just with some of your comments—that is, a careers adviser rather than a careers teacher.

Something that we have found is it is really under-resourced within a school, having a careers adviser not being a time fraction within a school but actually being a role where you can have a specialist key staff member that just focuses on careers advice, having them paid as a specialist staff member not as a low-level staff member. I know some schools are putting it in as an ES, like a 1.1 or something, but actually having them paid as a specialist key staff member paid at a teacher’s salary we think is something that is really important.

Regarding having it appropriately resourced, we know from an industry point that it is really hard for industry to get involved when there is a staff member that is so poorly resourced that they just do not have time to make those key relationships—that there is industry that is really trying to get in and to speak to those students when they are at a young age and they are making those decisions and that it is really hard for them to get in and to speak to that careers professional when they are so poorly resourced. So we think that that is something that is really important—for them to have the time to be able to make some of those key relationships.

Another point that we have made through our submission as well was just with the MIPs process and having that being ...

Mrs FYFFE — Excuse me, what is MIPs?

Ms JEFFERY — The managed individual pathways, so that being a bit more auditable. We have found especially with our skills and jobs centre funding, with the amount of hoops and reporting that we have to do on our funding, it has just been surprising I guess that the reporting is not the same with the funding that is received at a school level. With our submission that was something that we thought would be a really good idea—to have that really streamlined across the schools and to have them have to report on that so that it was the same across the schools rather than the schools getting the funding and then deciding what they need to do with that.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Would you like to add anything?

Ms HAMILTON — I will just add a couple of points if I may, thank you, just for a couple of minutes. My name is Keelie Hamilton. I am the Director of Student and Industry Engagement at The Gordon. I have been in that role now for the last two years, and prior to that I worked in the economic development industry with the local council for nearly about 10 years, so my background is more in industry and business engagement, but I am also a parent of two children. One goes to private school and one goes to public school. One of those students is now doing Year 12 and the other is doing Year 9, so I have direct examples on both sides of things around the careers counselling that occurs in the school environment.

In relation to one of the points that Tracey was mentioning, I think funding is really key in this environment—that it actually has some level of longevity. For the programs that are offered very often what you end up having are a number of programs, and therefore the careers teachers or the careers advisers have a short-term buy-in to those particular programs.

I can think of a number of examples in Geelong. One of those that has had enormous traction is called the Upstart program. Now, that Upstart program is around teaching entrepreneurial skills which build in the skills that industry are articulating that they are looking for—so it is the teamworking skills, the soft skills, the actual thinking laterally, doing things a little bit more differently than perhaps just the standard skills schools are providing. That particular program, which now has the engagement of over 12 schools locally, has had to be run outside of school hours with teachers who are just I guess passionate about providing entrepreneurial skills, because it is very difficult to run those kinds of programs within the school curriculum, and as part of that the funding that goes with that as well is incredibly difficult to find. So it has always been year on year. It is a couple of passionate individuals, and therefore the schools do not have the buy-in to that program that would fundamentally change the business landscape I think in a regional area like ours, because those students are the ones who are going to create businesses.

We know that about 98 per cent of businesses are small businesses. They are not the large industries, particularly in a transitioning economy like Geelong's has been. There are not those roles that create that career path, unless people are actually creating their own jobs in a centre like ours.

Another one of the key things that we just wanted to highlight is that the Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework is actually boring, and that is the feedback that we get—it is a paper-based boring framework basically. I am getting some nods down the end of the table. It is not experience based. It is not getting that hands-on learning. It is not saying to a kid, 'Here's a pair of scissors, have a go at cutting the hair over here' and 'Here's a brick and whack it down and make a brick wall with that'. It is not actually showing you that that brick might not just be bricks and mortar that you do anymore; it might be technology that you might bring into that. It might be automated bricklaying. It is not showing the full scope of things for our students; it is literally, 'Here's a paper plan. Let's talk about your career and what you want to do'. How do you have a meaningful conversation, particularly with a young person, about what they want to do when they do not know what is out there to be done? We all see those fabulous, wonderful YouTube clips at the moment about the technology around driverless vehicles et cetera, but how much is that coming through to our children through the careers advisers or the teachers? I do not think very much. I think they are having to see it outside, then they are having to tell their parents about it and their parents just do not have any knowledge at all. So me as a parent, what do I then do? I say, 'Go and do the pathway I did, daughter/son. Go to university. It'll be great. You'll get a job'. That is really not the pathway.

I really concur with Jodee as well that there is not enough information at the school level about vocational education, and we do always talk about vocational education as a pathway. I actually really do not particularly like that terminology, because it is an outcome of its own and it is a meaningful outcome that leads to terrific careers. I can tell you now that I will never earn the amount of money in my lifetime that my electrician is pulling every hour. So there is a different way to do things. I will leave it at those couple of points.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Our questions will all just be on VET and VCAL as well. So on the quality of career advisers, how well are school career advisers meeting the needs of students and what aspects of careers advice need improvement?

Ms PRICE — I think the big point that we are all making is that it is so inconsistent. It just really depends on what the focus of the school is and who the person is that is allocated to that. It seems to be, from our experience, the teacher with the lightest load or the one that might have put their hand up for it. I think absolutely it should be about careers advice, and I think they are not accessing all the resources that are out there for them. They are not actually utilising them to provide the accurate information. I guess in short the answer is it is so varied. There are a few schools that do it really, really well, but I expect on the whole that they are the exception rather than the rule.

Dr BARONE — And by resources, from what I hear from the members, it is not just these sorts of resources—some papers and whatever—but it is relationships that you build with industry and community to give students that experiential kind of workplace/career experience that is lacking. The other thing I have heard from members is that schools have a vested interest in promoting that ‘all of our students got ATARs above X and 90 per cent went to university’ et cetera. Sometimes the careers adviser will push the students towards university because that is what parents want to hear, but realistically what might be the better option for the student would be a VET qualification.

We have got case studies of students who have studied law, hated it and gone back to do an automotive qualification. One student I think was the tradie of the year who now works for Tesla—a former law student. She was in the finals in the training awards. She was not suited to university. She was pushed that way and is now pursuing a career in the automotive sector, so there is that vested interest. One of the things that I have often heard is that careers advice should perhaps be embedded within the school, but not be part of the school, so almost like a third party. They do not have that vested interest that the school has to demonstrate high ATAR scores and ‘all of our students go to university’—all those things.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes, I would agree that it is so inconsistent across schools. It depends on what the school wants to do, it depends on how well they resource it. It depends on the person. In some schools a teacher might have it as a 0.2 and they also look after VET. I think there was one teacher I was speaking to who looks after sport, they look after VET, they do school-based apprenticeships, they do work experience and they teach Year 12 something. How big is careers really on their radar when they do all of those other things? Then you might look at, say, a private school and they have three full-time career practitioners. So if you think of the level of advice that a student in that private school is getting compared to a student in that public school that has a 0.2 career practitioner that has all of these other things on their load, it is just so inconsistent. And it also does depend on the school that you are in and the principal and what their views are, and the parents as well. If you have got a parent who wants their student to go to university and they are really pushing for that, it is about the marketing as well. They want all of their students to go to university and they want to be able to have a tagline that says, ‘We have 98 per cent of students who went on to university’. So there are a lot of those pressures as well, even from a school perspective.

If you are at a school that is struggling for enrolments, it is really hard as a career practitioner because you then have the pressures of the school saying, ‘Hey, we can’t lose any enrolments to the TAFE or to an alternative program, because that means that our funding is going to struggle’. As a career practitioner, I would always do what was best for the student, but I know that career practitioners end up in a really tough place because they have pressure from the school for the funding that says, ‘Don’t promote any alternative to Year 9 and 10’. If you are losing numbers, your school can really struggle, so you might be not wanting to let TAFE in the door where they might promote their alternative programs and you might lose students to some of those programs. You do end up in a really difficult position.

Mr MELHEM — Sorry to interrupt. What is the answer to that specific problem that you just raised? I think it is a real problem.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes, it is a real problem.

Mr MELHEM — So what is the fix from your experience? Should the government do something?

Ms JEFFERY — Yes.

Mr MELHEM — Should we change the funding model?

Ms HAMILTON — I would actually agree it is the funding model ...

Ms JEFFERY — Yes, I think it is a funding model.

Dr BARONE — And I also think it is policy. Perhaps you have a third party. Take the schools and job centres, which are embedded within TAFEs, but if you expanded that to include universities, industry, community, it is a third-party model. It does not have a vested interest in the school. Schools can access it. They can do outreach to the schools, but they do not have that tension that the school has between doing what is best for the student but also these marketing pressures.

Ms JEFFERY — Or what is best for the school.

Dr BARONE — This third party is devoted to solely to the career advice user.

Ms HAMILTON — There are multiple layers of complexity in the actual school environment. It is very difficult for the school to timetable into vocational educational spaces. If you are talking about a student wanting to do a VET in Schools course or a school-based apprenticeship, for a school-based apprenticeship the school needs to be able to release the student for about a day and a half a week. If you are trying to timetable a Year 11 or Year 12 student, that can be really difficult for schools to do, so something has to give there. If there are not enough spares for the student to pick up that level of time, then the student will not be able to undertake maths or English for that particular time fraction, and the schools are very often saying or the teachers are saying, 'That cannot happen. They must be there for maths and English', or whatever it is.

Ms JEFFERY — It is almost, dare I say, that you need the old tech school model back.

Mrs FYFFE — Yes, it is eye-opening.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes. We have at our TAFE in Geelong what is called GTEC—Geelong Technical Education Centre—but there are not enough places and depending on where you live students cannot travel there.

Ms HAMILTON — The GTEC model is not funded as a school model either, so that is another complexity for the TAFEs insofar as these students who attend the GTEC and are undertaking a VCE or schooling are mostly disengaged students or are disenfranchised from the secondary school environment and they are challenged in the traditional secondary schooling environment, so they come to the GTEC. That is not promoted at schools ...

Ms JEFFERY — And schools do not want to know about it.

Ms HAMILTON — They do not want to know about it at all.

Ms JEFFERY — In case they are going to lose that student and that is Year 9 or 10 where you are going to lose the funding for that student, you would probably find the same situation: they do not want to know about it.

Ms PRICE — It is really interesting, that point, because at those year levels they do not want to know about it and they do not want to lose the student. However, I do not know if you find the same after first semester in Year 12. We have many young people knocking on our door saying, 'The school's told me not to bother to complete now, so can you help me now'. We could have helped them two years ago, but we did not have access—'But now we don't actually want your score to affect our outcomes, can you take them over?'.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes. And it is at that point where they go, 'Oh, you're about to fail Year 12'.

Mr MELHEM — Through the Chair, can I ask maybe on notice on that specific one because we could go for hours on this if there was time: are you able to send us a combined view, with some practical thing, maybe something we could consider in our report? I know one particular school, for example, that does pretty well. At the CRC Sydenham they have got the size and they do a really good job, but I am not sure that could be replicated elsewhere. So again if you would be able to send us something ...

Ms HAMILTON — My personal example of that, if I may just really quickly, is I have a daughter who undertook a VET in Schools curriculum through a private school. They did not want her to undertake that at all, because it was seen as a vocational education pathway for her. She also has mental health issues. When she has been struggling during Year 11 and Year 12, their answer to her now is, ‘Well, she can come to school, but we don’t want her to complete Year 12’, so they do not want her to continue to get an ATAR score because of the amount of time she has been away. Now, her grades, she sits around a B and a C. Because she sits at a B and a C, this is a private school who wants her to be achieving more than that. Then we see those kids from private school who come into vocational education. They come in at an older age, whereas they would have been much better suited to coming early. It would have been so much more beneficial for their mental health, but the schools are really challenged to be able to do that.

Mr CRISP — I think we are going to build on what you have been talking about, Keelie. Regarding taster programs and immersion days, just when are we going to put the brick in that student’s hand to see whether that is right or not? To expose students to that work sector, how can we improve our performance in that area and what should government be doing to support taster or immersion programs?

Ms HAMILTON — We had a conversation, Tracey and I, about this on the train.

Ms JEFFREY — The earlier, the better.

Ms HAMILTON — We actually feel that there needs to be dedicated time in the curriculum for careers advice. That careers advice includes industry days and tasters and those sorts of things. It needs to be taken out of the curriculum, because as soon as you again say at a school, ‘We’re going to do a taster day, and it’s going to be on a Friday’, they cannot find the half a day, let alone pay for the bus to get to the taster day, so there are a whole range of complexities that go with that. We also feel that the Tech Schools are a great opportunity for that, because that can be careers advice—the new Tech Schools, the 10 that are being built across the state right now.

Mr CRISP — We have heard evidence that those 10 are more STEM focused ...

Ms JEFFREY — They are.

Mr CRISP — whereas I think you are also alluding to immersion occurring in something in the older tech school model, where someone worked out in Years 7 to 10 perhaps where their skills were.

Ms HAMILTON — Absolutely. I am sure Jodee will be able to have examples. We do the Girls Big Day Out, you know, and a whole range of programs, and it takes such a lead time to actually get it into the school plans.

Ms PRICE — That is right. We actually do run a lot of those real experience taster-type programs, well attended and supported by the schools, but once again only putting forward their disengaged students. So once again we are kind of preaching to the converted and not making allowances for—I think as you heard from industry earlier—the fact that the lack of understanding of how advanced a lot of the technical application is in the VET space and not giving other students an opportunity to try that as well. I think that, as well as getting those things up and running, it is about making it for everybody — making sure that every student gets an opportunity to experience that idea of a technical vocational-based qualification and experience.

Mr CRISP — On a taster too you need to release them to TAFEs—where the automotive workshop is, or for the plumbers the sandpit, as I call it—or do we need to look within the schools to have those taster programs embedded back?

Ms PRICE — It is interesting. I think that there is probably merit in both of those examples. I guess if we use the VET in Schools program, the difference between those that are auspiced by the schools versus those that actually take place in a TAFE environment or in a vocational provider environment is the equipment facilities et cetera and the experience and currency of the teacher, versus if it is done in a school we tend to choose a subject, because we have got a teacher that 20 years ago might have had a hand in that. It is just about making sure that it is current and valid and that they are getting real current work experience. I think, as well as looking at whether or not you deliver it in a school or in a TAFE, also think about delivering some of it in industry as well.

Dr BARONE — I would think on your boatbuilding qualifications, this is something done through GOTAFE, so an inland TAFE.

Ms PRICE — That is right; the only provider in Australia.

Dr BARONE — Of boatbuilding, but they have actual mobile facilities so that they could go all around the state so that regional students can actually have access.

Ms PRICE — Have access to it, yes.

Ms JEFFREY — I think again it is a bit of an issue about resourcing. There are already amazing programs. We have girls' days, and you have got your boatbuilding. We have got Skilling the Bay, and there are lots of people working on these amazing taster programs, but it is really hard to actually get them into the schools, so the schools are not appropriately resourced with their careers professionals, so they are already really struggling. So then you have got someone knocking on your door saying, 'Hey, how about we come along and we take all your Year 7 students out for the day?', and they are like, 'How on earth am I going to pull this together while I'm already really snowed under?'

When these new programs come in, you get someone in the TAFE that puts the program together, and they put together an awesome program, but then they cannot actually get into the school to get the students. I think that is probably where the issue is—about getting enough people in the school or getting people that sit outside of the school just having enough resources there that you can actually get the program running, so having a new group of careers professionals that work within a number of schools or something like that so that they can actually run it with the students. I sort of feel that that is where the issue is, not so much having the programs. All of the TAFEs have got things and teachers that are ready to run things, but it is just that connection—getting into the schools and having the schools that have time to build the relationships.

Mrs FYFFE — You touched on regional programs, and your boatbuilding sounds fascinating, but with regional students what are the specific issues? How can they be addressed? How can we as a Committee ...

Ms PRICE — It is interesting, because really what we find is that there is a lack of aspiration just totally.

Mrs FYFFE — Parents or children or teachers?

Ms PRICE — Yes. Children come along without any aspiration, and it has got a lot to do with absolutely their teachers and their parents and everybody that influences their life and their decisions. Interestingly our youth engagement team started to be invited into primary schools. We speak at a couple of Grade 6 what they call welfare days at primary schools. They ask us to come and talk about careers. Well, really! What kind of pressure do we want to put on a person at that age around careers? But what we talk to them about is networks, like, 'Who's in your network? How can you develop a network? What do Mum, Dad or your carer do? What do your aunts, uncles and all your friends do? What do you think that job looks like, and how do you get some experience and going out and having a look at it?'

I think that one of the big issues in regional Victoria—particularly in our area, and I am sure that The Gordon experiences that—is that young people just do not know what the world of work is, what it looks like and what jobs are. They think that they just could not possibly do it. They do not have the skills to do it, or they do not understand what transferrable skills really are. As we heard earlier, we use an aptitude test, and a lot of the schools use Career Voyage. I do not know if you use that same application. It really is just helping young people understand what their strengths and weaknesses and likes and dislikes are and starting to funnel them into a variety of options that sit in that space. I think what we really need to work on is developing some aspirations amongst young people and broadening their experiences to as many opportunities as possible, and that has to involve industry.

Ms HAMILTON — Perhaps I could comment on the regional aspect of career aspirations or aspirations for younger people. By way of example, we have the Cotton On Group that sit in Geelong. They would much prefer to employ students who have come from remote and regional areas, come to The Gordon TAFE and done their fashion design or just general design than any other student, the reason being that the students that come through have a work ethos. They may have come off the farm, and since the time they have been four they have been collecting the eggs. They have got up and they have milked the cows. They have worked. It is

the ethos that comes through, because you just have to contribute. That is not the same for a number of students who really are coming through from more metropolitan areas. 'They're a joy to employ', is what they will say.

Ms PRICE — I think that is a really good point. I heard earlier in the industry session where someone mentioned about entitlement and arrogance. I do not think we experience that as much in regional Victoria. I do not think young people do have an entitlement; they just have a lack of information, knowledge and connection. I do not really believe that they have an entitlement mentality, but they just do not have connections.

Ms JEFFERY — And those employability skills as well. We are hearing that from employers. We were speaking to our engineering department the other day. It is a good thing for Geelong that engineering is back they were saying, which is exciting, but we have got employers that are screaming for engineering apprentices, and even though there are some that are interested, they are just missing that next step with employability skills. So we are finding a lot of the same things as you are finding as well.

Mrs FYFFE — Can you just explain a little bit more about what the next step is? Is it their communications skills? Is it their basic literacy and numeracy skills?

Ms JEFFERY — Yes, a bit of both. Communication, literacy, numeracy—just even basic employability skills like getting to work on time, working hard, where you have got to be and what you have got to wear. They have just never had a job before.

Ms PRICE — They do not understand the world of work.

Ms JEFFERY — No, they just do not understand what it means to work.

Ms HAMILTON — Tracey might be able to tell you more about a couple of programs we put on at our skills and jobs centre, and it is more for perhaps mature-aged workers—so our Workwise Women program and also our Men at Work program. We are looking at doing another one in the youth sector. Those programs plus one that we have got called the returnship program have been incredibly successful because they are about confidence and about getting into the workforce again. I am going to defer to you, Tracey, because you can speak more about the hands-on.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes, so it is just really looking at employability skills—building confidence. Workwise Women is for mums that are coming back into the workforce.

We spoke to the engineering department just last week because they were saying there is that disconnect. Our employers want to employ locally, but they just do not have the apprentices that are ready to go. So they have got, I guess, kids that have just come out of school, but they do not have those skills so they can put them straight into an apprenticeship and that they are going to manage. That is where we are hopefully going to do a bit of work with them to get their employability skills, so we know they can show up at the right time, they have got all the tools they need, that they can go to trade school and they are going to manage at that certificate III level for engineering. So they are going through their certificate II pre-apprenticeship.

I think they said that they have got a few classes and maybe half of them will go into an apprenticeship. The employers are actually going to hold off. I think he was saying that they might even have to look at doing 457 visas if they cannot employ. They said, 'We're happy to wait. Go and find them, and we'll wait for you to get these local kids ready to go'. But obviously there is only a certain time that they can wait.

Ms PRICE — I think the announcement around the three pre-apprenticeships is really going to help in that space for next year.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes.

Ms PRICE — They have been missing for such a long time, so I think that is really a good step forward.

Mr MELHEM — Just on that, Dr Barone, are you able to take us to some successful programs that have improved career outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds? Have you got any comments about the latest budget announcement about making a lot of the courses free, coupled with employers who are able to take someone with an apprenticeship from start to finish? Are you able to take us to some successful programs that you can think of or some other ideas, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Dr BARONE — Yes. For successful programs, probably my colleagues here would have a better understanding than me.

Mr MELHEM — You can delegate.

Dr BARONE — But in terms of the budget announcement, prima facie our first reaction is great, they are really good. I think they will be good for the sector. They are geared towards priority areas. I think they will do much to reinvigorate TAFE. The last four years have been good for TAFE. We have rebuilt. There has been greater, I think, collegiality within the TAFE network. So we are generally supportive.

There are some teething issues, like there are with any policy, but I am sure they will be overcome. But the general consensus is good. That is what I have heard from the membership—quite positive support for the changes that were announced in the budget.

I saw that there were some announcements with careers as well. We are supportive of those as well. It is good that they start at Year 9. I think that is great. Again, I go back to my other point, that we need to look beyond just the students. I think sometimes when we think about careers advice, and even when I looked at the terms of reference to this Committee, I still think that implied in it is this idea of the single career—that you will have a career. But that is not the reality any longer, and this goes to your point about, ‘What is the world of work? What does work look like?’. Work is increasingly changing, and need to ensure that our careers advice is able to tackle that.

I think that something else that also has not been mentioned explicitly but I will mention is that I think underpinning a lot of the problems that you have all encountered and expressed is the reputation of VET and TAFE, and I think you need to tackle that. So I think part of the reason you might have trouble getting schools interested in these programs is that TAFE is viewed as either—I often use the term—the educator of last resort or it is viewed as the apprenticeship sector. We always labour this point: we are more than apprenticeships. I get angry with my members when they say—we are not just apprenticeships. We should be proud of that, and we are proud of that. But we are more than that. One of our members is now delivering masters degrees by research. So we are more than that, and it is important for us to remember that.

Ms JEFFERY — Of course.

The CHAIR — So what are you saying, just that it should be more promoted like university, for example?

Dr BARONE — Well, it should be seen as an equal. Someone mentioned earlier, you know, the pathway.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes.

Dr BARONE — I agree. I hate that term ‘pathway’ because it assumes that we are something that you do either because you could not get into university or you do it because it is your pathway to get into a university—that that is the ultimate goal.

Ms JEFFERY — Yes. Just so you can get into university.

Dr BARONE — Sometimes it is an end in and of itself, and sometimes, even though I have got my PhD, I wish I had gone and done, you know, plumbing. Maybe not plumbing but who knows, something else.

Ms JEFFERY — Well, our engineering department was saying that some of the apprentices that they have got have come out of a bachelor of engineering and have not been able to get a job so have actually gone into an engineering apprenticeship to be able to work where they have wanted to, and they have said, ‘I wish I had have just done an engineering apprenticeship in the first place’. Uni was not for them, so obviously the advice that they have got in the first place has not been...

Ms PRICE — So we have got a lot of those examples, and I think it is just about promoting that and getting that word back out there that TAFE is equal to — if we are talking about the ultimate outcome being a job in something that you are good at and you like doing and that is needed and required by the sector and industry, it does not really matter. It should not matter which pathway or which choice you make.

Mrs FYFFE — So it should be more marketing university and TAFE, ‘Look at the courses that suit you’ type of thing?

Ms PRICE — That is right.

Ms JEFFERY — Exactly.

Ms PRICE — And have industry support. I think probably it is something that we are using quite extensively now—looking at brand ambassadors. You know, talking about people that are running their business that came from their local TAFE.

Dr BARONE — I was just going to say, though, that it is not something that has a quick fix. My background is institutional economics, and we look at social and cultural institutions. They take a long time to change, so you need to look at this as a generational thing. We need to change the perception of VET and TAFE, which has been ravaged in the last—you know, we all know what has happened. So you need to take, I think, a longer term perspective, have a longer term goal and work toward that. There is no quick fix.

Ms HAMILTON — If I could just comment, our business entrepreneurs very often come from TAFE. I am in charge of the Geelong Business Excellence Awards, and every single time I get an application that has something to do with excellence in employment—you know, small to medium-sized businesses. These are the employers, and they have TAFE trade qualifications very often. So our entrepreneurs who are creating the jobs of the future, they are coming from the TAFE sector. Those who are going through the university sector, if they can find work—I think the stats are that it takes them five years to find a job in the vocation that they studied, whereas I think it is 18 months in the TAFE sector—they work for others, they do not create employment. I am one of those: I work for others. I do not create employment. I have family members who run pubs et cetera. In fact I am about to go and pull beers at a regional place for my brother because he cannot get staff. So he cannot be there. The supply chain into this is debilitating in every sector. If you talk to the CCF, they are going to need 4500 people. They are not going to come from university; they are going to need to come through TAFE. It is every sector.

Ms PRICE — And this is quite devastating for regional local communities. The whole idea is to make them viable communities and to employ people, but they cannot find people to employ.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the Committee I would like to thank you for your time and contribution.

Witnesses withdrew.