

TRANSCRIPT

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 7 May 2018

Members

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Ms Dee Ryall — Deputy Chair

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr Peter Crisp

Mrs Christine Fyffe

Ms Jane Garrett

Mr Cesar Melhem

Witnesses

Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated;

Ms Emma King, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service; and

Mr Gabriel Aleksandrs, Policy Adviser, Carers Victoria.

The CHAIR — Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearing for 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 now invite you to state your name and where you are from, and then we will go directly to questions. Shall we start with Gabriel?

Mr ALEKSANDRS — Yes, my name is Gabriel Aleksandrs, and I work for Carers Victoria. I am a Policy Adviser in the areas of young carers, mental health and diversity.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Lionel?

Mr BAMBLETT — Lionel Bamblett, General Manager of VAEAI—Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated—and I am here representing the organisation today.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Ms KING — My name is Emma King. I am the CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service. Thank you for having me here today.

The CHAIR — Thank you for coming, and of course our questions will be directed to all of you and if you are comfortable, please answer. My first question is: submissions show that there are low career aspirations and expectations among some disadvantaged students and their families and teachers, so how can low aspirations for disadvantaged students be addressed? How can we fix that? Whoever feels comfortable.

Ms KING — I am happy to start on that, and I am sure I will be ably assisted by others on the ...

Mr MELHEM — And watch it. It has been handballed so ...

Ms KING — That is right. I think one of the challenges that we often have is the so-called ‘soft bigotry’ of low expectations, which we see particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is an assumption that simply because students may live in, for example, housing commission areas or be from low-income backgrounds or particular nationalities et cetera therefore there is less expected of them in terms of their schooling and other areas when in fact that is simply not reflective of what their capability and their capacity is overall. We would want there to be high expectations for all students. Part of that is making sure that when students come into our schooling system—if you look at, for example, the census that is undertaken, so many children are entering prep and they are behind on two of the more of the domains under the census ...

Mr BAMBLETT — AEDI.

Ms KING — Yes, AEDI, and we know that if that is the case, we need to actually make sure that we are able to pick that up really quickly and invest quickly in students, because we know also at the same time that if we have high expectations, generally students are able to live up to those as long as we are able to put other supports around them as well. So I guess one of the key things is having high expectations for all students in our system irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances and at the same time making sure we put supports around them so that they are able to achieve the very best from their intellect and ability as well.

Mr BAMBLETT — I would echo those comments, especially around low expectations. What we have found over generations really, and with consultations right across our community, is that there is a high degree of low expectations in the education system and in society generally about Aboriginal people and Koori people. I tend to use the word ‘Koori’ instead of ‘Aboriginal’, but it is Aboriginal. Basically there is a low expectation of our community’s ability to achieve, and that is reflected in the education system. We have entered into numerous arrangements with several governments over the generations to overcome that. The latest is the Marrung strategy, which we are currently working with the Department of Education and Training in relation to. Part of that is also to lift the expectations around Koori students’ ability to achieve. That is a target within the Marrung strategy. We are looking for its implementation right across the board. We believe that career advice needs to be not just configured around the senior levels of secondary schooling but actually back into the

education system. I do echo the thing about the early years, but also back to primary schools. If we are going to start preparing our children for the future, and this is not just Aboriginals but generally, then obviously we need to transmit the information about career opportunities.

Mr ALEKSANDRS — From the young carer perspective, what we find is that early intervention would be the key to assisting in raising the expectations of our young carers. A recent study, the longitudinal study of Australian children, has identified that of young carers, girls are behind by 1.6 years in their NAPLAN and boys are 1.9 years behind in the NAPLAN. I think the career expectations really rely on education outcomes, and career advice activities will meet the needs of young people if those young people can get to that point in their education where these are provided. What we are finding is that the spirits of young people are considerably lowered because of their academic achievement or the difficulties of achieving the way that they would want to and then seeing that their options are limited because of poor outcomes, so that is definitely one thing.

The other thing too is that confidence is very important for our particular cohort, so finding ways to build career options that are flexible and part time is vital. A lot of the young people that we support at Carers Victoria might be one of two main carers in the household, and that other carer may be getting a carer payment, so the young carer would see it as their responsibility to just leave school and start work. Now, that would lead them quite likely into a casualised job or a part-time job, and not all of those jobs have promotional opportunities down the track. So we would like to see young carers having the same opportunities as other young people to look at careers with various options.

Mr MELHEM — Have you got any examples of how we can achieve that and what we specifically should be looking at?

Mr ALEKSANDRS — I think it would require a lot of work with employers and business and government to work together and identify suitable roles for young carers that meet their skills and, I guess, their availability to work.

Recently the federal government has focused the Try, Test and Learn Fund programs on young carers, and there was some talk around that in regard to looking at jobs where they were caring professions. More or less, they were suggesting that young carers could be part of and be educated in those professions and qualified. However, what we find is a lot of young carers do not want to be necessarily defined by their caring role.

Mrs FYFFE — Seven days a week could be a bit much.

Mr ALEKSANDRS — That is right, yes, so it can be quite overwhelming. I guess it means a little bit more thinking, not just going to an obvious answer. I mean, we know that those young people are capable of caring roles, they are doing them, but I guess from our perspective it is like let's have a look at the equal opportunity to have the same amount of choice as other young people would be having. Yes, that requires a considerable amount of joint work, I think, from business and education and government.

Mr CRISP — I would like to look at the accessibility of career advice and how schools can make career advice more relevant and accessible to students with disadvantage. What are some examples of successful programs that you are aware of that have worked for those who are disadvantaged?

Mr BAMBLETT — Probably one of the best examples that could be used is the individual learning plans. Individual learning plans in schools are there; they are meant to be embedded for every student. They are not really enacted—our belief is they are actually not to the degree that they should be. That then allows the schooling system, community, parents—everyone involved—to be aware of the student's aspirations and also the student's capabilities. Those education plans we believe are not fully enacted and should be. That is something that could lead to the identification of an individual's desired pathway and also the potential for growth in through those areas, so that is just not happening at present.

Ms KING — If I may add in, I think one of the things we see, if you like, when we look at the variety of careers advice across schools is it is really mixed. I am sure you have heard that, probably through the other people who have presented before you today. One of the common themes that we hear is just how different that is. It mostly a bit of the luck of the draw from school to school, depending on who is available, how contemporary their knowledge is.

It is also about, I think, looking at what does exist. So, for example, I spoke to a group of careers teachers once with the staff at RMIT. They held a careers day and they asked us to come and speak, particularly about jobs of the future, because if you look at the health and social assistance jobs that are growing, there is a huge spike in those areas. Not to put aside some of the issues that will exist in terms of casualisation et cetera in those areas, but there is a huge growth in that workforce, and one of the really interesting things we heard at the end of it was ‘No-one’s told us that before’.

I think you are often finding people who might have close to a full teaching allotment that are also taking on careers advice. They are trying to do the best that they possibly can with the students that they teach, but there is not a lot of time that is carved aside for them in their capacity as a careers teacher. So I was really heartened by the announcement that was made last week in the budget around the investment in careers advice, and for me one of the key things now as we progress forward is: how do we make the most of that investment? So we are seeing significant investment in careers teachers and I think that is a fantastic move, particularly if we put it alongside the Head Start program and the TAFE initiatives, but one of the key parts for me now comes into the implementation stage.

So, for example, if I am a student in Mildura, how do I make the most of the opportunities that exist for me in my home town as well, rather than potentially having to move to Melbourne—those sorts of things as well. One of the challenges we often see with disadvantaged students is because they may not have the money to move—o in effect have to relocate—to go to university, be it in Melbourne or elsewhere, actually what opportunities exist for them to be able to access really good training opportunities and to have work that is local as well. So it is that real connection between education and further training—and whatever way that may look, whether it is pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, traineeship, university qualification—that leads to a job. I think, as I said earlier, one of the challenges is there is a real mixed bag, if you like, in terms of careers teachers. I am not suggesting that careers teachers are not necessarily trying their best but I think often they are overloaded with a very heavy teaching workload et cetera as well, and they perhaps do not have that expertise in terms of where are the current, contemporary jobs and what might be the best flow for each individual student. A lot of the time they just do not have the time.

The CHAIR — Gabriel, would you like to add something before we go on?

Mr ALEKSANDRS — Yes, I would just like to add too that there are some programs available for students at risk of disengaging with school. However, we would like to ensure that those programs include significant care responsibilities in the eligibility criteria so that some of those issues that are arising for young carers can be addressed in the delivery of those programs. So just sort of tweaking the supports and the programs to take into account the various types of relationship stress that can occur in care relationships.

Mrs FYFFE — I think you raise a very good point, because for students in Mildura who are also carers, moving to Melbourne is not an option.

Mr ALEKSANDRS — No, that is right.

Mrs FYFFE — So they have got to be looked at in a different way. But my question is about mentoring. I am a great supporter of mentoring in many aspects of anyone’s life, not just being disadvantaged. Do you have any examples of any successful mentoring programs that have actually improved career outcomes?

Ms KING — Actually a really good example would be in Mildura.

Mrs FYFFE — Mildura is rating high today.

Ms KING — And there are some others as well, but I am thinking and I do not know the name off the top of my head. You know where the local businesses et cetera have joined together in Mildura because there was an issue with young people dropping out of school early and a lot of it was to do with the cost of education. So the local community got together, to the best of my knowledge similar to the Western Chances model, to say, ‘Actually how do we keep young people engaged in education and how might we help them achieve career outcomes that otherwise through financial reasons may not be available to them’, and my understanding is it also involved a mentoring component. So in terms of involving local businesses ...

Mr CRISP — For the record, it is Chances for Children.

Ms KING — You have got it. Thank you very much. The name had escaped my mind. There is Western Chances that would be another example. So there are a number of programs that exist and from what I understand, I think actually the program in Mildura may have been one of the first of its type that then, if you like, lent its intellectual property to others, but asked them to perhaps use a slightly different name because they were mindful about their program but wanted to share that knowledge with others. There are others as well and I know there are often conversations with people around how do they link young people up and how can we do better in terms of linking up with business and other areas as well. My understanding is the Head Start program that has just been announced last week is around how do we work more closely with business and others as well.

That does not go specifically to your point around mentoring, but I do recall there is a program that Judith Graley is overseeing at the moment that is very much focused on mentoring. For example, looking at Monash University, they have a program where there are specific people assigned to students to help them through their university, but it is very much around mentoring. I think through the funding that has been made available it includes Monash University, and I think the Smith Family and others. I would need to be able to get you more information on that, but I have been involved in some conversations on that front.

Mr BAMBLETT — Several programs in the Aboriginal or Koori space and that is the Koorie Academy of Excellence in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. It has been operating now for a number of years and is highly successful and proven to be successful. We are reviewing the program at present to look at growing that outside of the metropolitan area. You have got four regions obviously within the Department of Education, so we are looking to place one at each of the regions. When I say we, that is in partnership with our organisation and the Department of Education. It is called the Koorie Academy of Excellence and it is built around the notion of leadership, academic development and cultural maintenance. There is a very heavy mentoring component right throughout the program and that is rolling out successfully at present. Actually, we just conducted a camp, just recently during the school holidays. The program will be conducted outside of school hours. Students sign up for that. It is weekends, school holidays and lunchtimes, so it is not interrupting the school-based activity of the student. It is highly successful. It has proven to be a success.

In the TAFE and adult education space we have introduced a program called the Wurreker Strategy that is actually looking at place-based activity for people. Say you lived in Mildura, what are the industry components in that area that could best suit your study journeys? We run that program right throughout the state. We have eight Wurreker brokers employed—not enough, I have got to put that forward—that we want to actually grow, and to look at how we can actually link. So if you live in Mildura, for example, or Bairnsdale or Morwell, what is the local industry that will maintain your existence within that community. Instead of us educating people to a certain level and then breaking up communities, because if they want to advance their careers they have to come to Melbourne. We do not want that; we want to maintain that focus in the local community. The idea is to look at the career opportunities. So we have those round tables where community members will meet with local industry groups, local council and others to look at business opportunities and future growth in those areas.

The other program we have is in the higher education space and in TAFE and adult education, called Toorong Marnong. That is a partnership or an accord between VAEAI and the Vice-Chancellors Committee of Victoria, and we are looking to negotiate places for our community members within that university space. In the past, the majority of our students that went into the higher education space came via mature-age entry via the TAFE pathway. We are now getting students to the point where I think last year or the year before we had 573 of our young people complete Year 12. That is a huge increase, considering that in 1985 we had two—two Year 12 students in the whole state of Victoria. So we are looking to enter into an agreement with the Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and that is flourishing. That is happening. We are continuing with that program and looking to gain entry into the university setting.

With those 573 students that had completed Year 12 in that year, there were 200 that we figured should have been in that cohort that were not there. No-one knows where they went to. There is no data that shows their journey. Why didn't they finish Year 12? So, if we are going back and looking into that, it is about that data and the identification of the journey, where those people have gone to, and looking at how we can arrest that.

The other one then is about making sure. Through that Toorong Marnong program, at the end of the year, we have a hotline where the student, on receipt of their ATAR score, can be in contact with a member of the Committee, which is generally made up of a person from each of the universities, and they can talk about their

options post their ATAR score. One of the things that we did recognise as far as those 573 students that had completed Year 12, was that the majority of those ATAR scores were low. That had a hell of a lot to do, I have got to say, with postcode. So it does come back to that notion of disadvantage and we need to look at how and investigate why those scores are low. If you lived in the eastern suburbs, for example, your ATAR score was 73 and above. If you lived out in Reservoir, then your ATAR score, I think, was about 46 or 36, average. So there is a big discrepancy and so we need to look at that as well.

Mrs FYFFE — It is actually good to have heard of all of those programs, and some of those low ATAR scores may have gone back to non-school attendance in the early years and so forth. Who knows? There are a lot those things.

Mr MELHEM — Just following on from that, how can career advisers be made aware of the scholarships, support programs and other opportunities that exist in disadvantaged areas? Is there a way to encourage career advisers to take advantage of these programs? You talk about Western Chances, you talk about other areas.

Ms KING — Yes. I think for me too it is looking at how schools work. We have done some work with the Department of Education and Training around this, but I would be really keen to ramp it up—how schools work with their local community sector organisations and local businesses to create more opportunities for career development as well, and I would like to mention the local learning and employment networks there too because they are really critical and provide a really critical service.

Even when it comes to career development opportunities, whether that be industry tours, visiting worksites, the Trade Taster programs, mentoring students. We would describe it as a kind of speed dating program where potentially they can meet local businesses—those sorts of things as well. I think what I am really excited by is the opportunity that exists within the sector, because I feel there is a lot that has not been done, if you like. The career teacher is often not seen in as prominent a way as it could be in a school. Where we do see really good career teachers, they are really proactive in terms of looking at how they give students tasters to options that might be out there, which for many students the reality is they will not even know about. So we are really keen to see more on that front.

Mr MELHEM — What measures could be implemented to ensure consistency between schools? That is another problem. Some schools may be doing really well and some schools may not. In light of the recent announcement with the budget and the interaction with the employers and industry and so forth, what would you like to see put in place so we can enforce the consistency between various schools, using the best model, and then how can we roll that out?

Ms KING — I think to some degree we see it working well with principals and others—looking at the principal networks that exist and looking at the network that could exist for career advisers. I do think there is a part there that is about careers advisers also being well linked into other opportunities, so that does include businesses. Lionel also gave the example of being linked into the Vice-Chancellors' networks and those sorts of opportunities, whether it is local universities and local TAFE and other training providers, to genuinely know what opportunities are out there.

I give this example, simply because VCOSS is involved in the space. We often see students encouraged to take particular career options where there perhaps is not a huge amount of growth attached to them. They might undertake courses where there is actually not a lot growth. When you look at the ABS data about where the growth is going to be, that is why I point to health care and social assistance. It is huge, and the reality is those jobs generally are not going to be automated. They require people. So there is a disconnect at the moment about where the jobs are and where the jobs of the future are. I think there is some further training et cetera that is required around that and some further professional development for careers teachers as well.

I think there is some more work that needs to be done in terms of actually raising the bar and keeping it high for everyone, which goes to your point. I would be keen to work with the government of the day around how we do that and think about it collectively, but I do think a key part of that is about stronger relationships with community groups, businesses and training providers, and the full gamut is really important in that.

Mr MELHEM — I will just finish off; it is about the State Government budgeting for one career consultant per school, and hopefully the private sector will pick that up as well—the Catholic sector et cetera. Would you like to see schools not see career consultants as a cost? Normally when they go and cut costs that is the first

thing they look at. Basically what you are saying is we should look at it in another way—they are as important as, and probably more important than, some of the teaching positions. Would that be a fair statement?

Ms KING — Oh, yes, absolutely.

Mr BAMBLETT — Of course—a very fair statement.

Ms KING — It is a strong investment in our young people.

Mr CRISP — Collaboration with industry has been touched on, but I would like you to focus on that if you could. How easy is it to engage with industry to expose students with disadvantage to career opportunities, and how can industry involvement with career advice for students experiencing disadvantage be encouraged?

Ms KING — I was fortunate enough to go on a delegation to northern Europe early this year with Minister Tierney, and it included Tim Piper from the industry group, Mark Stone from the chamber of commerce and industry as well as trade unions and others. One of the things that really struck us was when we were looking at what they call their dual pathway. I have some reservations about the dual pathway in that they streamed kids very young, so they had fundamentally 25 per cent of children going on a university path, 75 per cent of others going to a different path. One of the things that struck me—and it did not matter who we spoke to, they really liked it, whether it was industry or unions—was a very strong connection that the education system had with the business community, and the role that the business community played in looking at the equivalent of the Headstart programs that have been announced in the most recent budget. So I think there is very strong opportunity that we have not fully explored in Victoria and probably within Australia around the kinds of relationships we can have with the business community, so that we are genuinely linking people up to where there are jobs but also looking at where the business needs of the future are.

It particularly struck me with one workplace I was standing in where they ran their own training program that was accredited. They had really looked at what was their workforce of the future in 10 years' time, and they trained according to that. It was really interesting. These economies for a variety of reasons had low levels of unemployment but were looking at programs that actually had the broader community thinking these were very strong training and employment models, and whether we spoke to a business or whether we spoke to a union, for example, they all said, 'This is really good and it's a strong outcome'. So that is probably one of the things that has stayed with me, to say, what is it that we can be doing better that we are not, and clearly having stronger conversations with business, with unions and with the community sector I think is really key to that. That would be based on my experience of what I saw there.

The CHAIR — I know we are running out of time, but would you like to add anything Gabriel?

Mr ALEKSANDRS — Yes, I think it is important too to acknowledge that while business and education can play its part, there is a certain amount of service mapping that needs to be done by vulnerable young people when they are looking for work. So young carers would be looking at health and mental health services, they would be looking for respite. They might be dealing with child protection and that sort of thing, so I guess our focus too is supporting the activities of whatever is going on to create that job pathway with the assistance of types of case management. There were some federal services that were in place for young carers which are now very uncertain due to the integrated carer support services model that is being proposed by the federal government. So we find it hard to envision how all this would fall into place without some complementary case management services.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Lionel, any final comments?

Mr BAMBLETT — With business it goes back to more the Wurreker strategy. The reason we actually entered into that strategy was that we had become aware that in Victoria, when we first introduced that program—and I think that was in 1996—what we found was that per head of population Victoria had the largest involvement by Koori people in relation to the TAFE sector. But if you had a look at what training was being offered, in Morwell, for example, their main focus was around early childhood delivery and early childhood development, but by the end of two years there would be one position available in the town. So basically you are training for training's sake; you are not training to meet the needs of that local community, and the labour market and industry are part of that.

At that time the power industry was in full swing, but the majority of training was around early childhood. I mean it is a nonsense, and that is the idea of making sure that business came to the table, community came to the table, the providers came to the table and they could talk about the identification of need in that local community. That is what we need to do, but I will go back to what we need to look at here in an educational context, and it is about the whole system working together.

From the early years, the latest figures you will see is we have nearly closed the gap in early years in the state of Victoria—in Year 12 but also in the schooling sector, but that involves the whole system. That involves the Department itself, that involves schools, the regional office, the whole system working together, and it cannot be fragmented as it has been in the past. The notion of autonomous processes is a nonsense.

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

Witnesses withdrew.