

TRANSCRIPT

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 7 May 2018

Members

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Witnesses

Ms Fleur Goulding, Executive Officer, Office of the Chief Executive, and Board Secretary, Holmesglen Institute;

Ms Jane Young, Manager, Employment Initiatives, Box Hill Institute Group;

Ms Vicki Bawden, Cluster Coordinator, Northern Melbourne VET Cluster and South East VET Cluster; and

Mr Phil Loveder (*via teleconference*), Manager, Stakeholder Engagement, National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

The CHAIR — 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 make your statement or contribution, but please state your name before you start for the Hansard record. Can you hear me, Phil?

Mr LOVEDER — Yes, I can hear you.

The CHAIR — We will start with you.

Mr LOVEDER — All right. That is great. Thank you so much. Look, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in today’s discussion. I want to just very briefly ...

The CHAIR — Your name first, please.

Mr LOVEDER — My name is Philip Loveder from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research in Adelaide. I want to very briefly make a few comments around three points. Namely, what do we know about future jobs, what do we know about school students’ understanding of vocational education and training and, finally, what are some interventions for career advice that can make a difference, especially in the schools.

Firstly, vocational education and training provides an important pathway into work. The official NCVER statistics indicate good outcomes in terms of post-training employment. For example, according to the VET student outcomes survey that we run, about 86 per cent of VET graduates in 2017 are in work or further education after completing their training, and of these around 77 per cent are in work. So VET’s connection with work and jobs still remains very strong.

In addition, many of the emerging or predicted jobs in the Australian economy actually require VET-related skills or qualifications. Some research that was commissioned by NCVER and undertaken by Monash University indicates strong openings for jobs in agriculture, for example, including farm managers; in health and social assistance—personal carers and assistants; in some technicians and trade workers; and in hospitality and accommodation workers, out to 2024. So a lot of the jobs that are predicted to dominate will require vocational education and training skills. And yet VET is still often viewed by many as a less attractive educational pathway compared with higher education, and it is still seen as an option for the less academically inclined.

Rather interestingly, the recent Australian jobs outlook publication, which I think came out last week from the Department of Jobs and Small Business—this is a federal department—noted that for Victoria around 68 per cent of Victorian workers hold post-secondary qualifications and that they are more likely to have a bachelor’s degree or higher qualification than the national average, which could suggest that making the case for VET is even a little more challenging in Victoria than for other jurisdictions.

A recent study published by NCVER reports that in terms of the relationship between career advice activities and workforce participation, this seemed to intensify in the latter years of high school, by which point many students have already formed quite strong and sometimes negative views of the VET sector, and they may have minimised their career aspirations in ways that limit them to thinking about and deliberating about university pathways. The research indicates that young people start to formulate their career thinking and their career plans quite early on and that they take advice from a range of influencers, such as parents, peers, teachers, careers advisers and schools, in addition to seeking online career information themselves. So I suppose the take-home message is that the earlier we can start conveying messages about Vocational Education and Training and jobs—in an age-appropriate way, of course—the better. I note too the recent announcements in the Victorian budget around ensuring students receive the right career advice and make sound career choices early on.

Many students are still unclear about vocational education and training—that is especially based on rather outdated and contemporary portrayals of the sector—and are still unclear about the pathways to VET-related occupations, despite career activities in schools, which include VET-focused activities. And this misalignment of educational and occupational aspirations and confusion about VET indicates that many students still lack clear and accurate information about the VET sector to inform their decision-making. This suggests that schools, including careers advisers in schools and/or the VET sector, still have a little bit more to do in ensuring

that students and their parents or carers or influencers have a greater awareness of what pathways are available and where they might lead.

Part of the solution to this is to ensure that the complexity of the VET sector and the benefits and possibilities of the VET sector are somewhat simplified and explained and that those that provide career advice have access to accurate and timely information. This is especially important, I think, for career guidance staff and professionals in schools, who might lack firsthand experience with VET, and it is important to note that VET-related occupations do appeal to certain types of learners and they do this for different motivations, so understanding these aspirations and these motivations of students in schools is very important.

Finally, in relation to career advice and regional parts of Australia, I note very recently the independent review into regional, rural and remote education by Emeritus Professor John Halsey. This reinforced the importance of a coordinated effort in our regions to improve and maximise transitions through expanded accessibility to information and educational options, especially in VET; to significantly increase the number of people with industry experience working closely with schools and their staff; and to more generally develop and promote regional strategies that involve, for instance, TAFE and other providers and employers.

Those are just a few opening comments that I was keen to make.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Ms BAWDEN — Thank you. My name is Vicki Bawden, and I am the Cluster Coordinator for both the Northern Melbourne and the South East VET Clusters. My role involves close communication with VET coordinators of over 80 schools, both government and non-government. VET coordinators have multiple roles and are important members of the career pathways teams. I understand their roles and the challenges they face intimately. I am a VIT-registered teacher with over 35 years of experience in both rural/remote and Melbourne government schools. I was a careers teacher, pathways manager and leading teacher for several years, and I have implemented VCAL, VET and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships into two schools. I believe I am well qualified to understand the relationship between school career advice and youth employment outcomes.

What is good career advice? It is not a one-off event with a careers counselling course selection interview. It is a process. It is careers curriculum taught by qualified careers teachers to all students, from Years 7 to 12, in schools where careers education is highly valued, well resourced, with adequate time allocated and appropriately staffed. If students are exposed to careers curriculum, then they will be better prepared for the important choices they need to make in a careers interview in Years 9 or 10 at careers course counselling time, when they need to make important choices about whether or not in Year 10 they choose to do a unit one and two VCE subject, VET course or school-based apprenticeship, or whether they will choose to do VCAL or the VCE in Years 11 and 12.

Ultimately the best careers advice comes from doing: from the student's participation in work experience, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, and structured workplace learning within VET courses. The life experiences from these are crucial in teaching them about the world of work and allowing them to trial possible career pathways. Data has proven that students who do VET courses have enhanced employment outcomes.

Unfortunately there has been massive government underfunding in vocational education. An example is the withdrawal of funding which used to be available for VCAL coordination in schools, a role which requires very close support of students. Unlike VCE subjects, which are free for students, VET courses incur extra costs to parents, which can sometimes be a disincentive. School leavers have diverse needs and should be presented with information and access to a broad range of educational and vocational pathways. Staff who provide this need to be appropriately qualified and given time to do this vital task.

Unfortunately, principals in secondary schools do not always value vocational education and are often more concerned with the academic VCE pathway. Increasing financial pressure has led to principals making cuts in the career pathways area, and the following trends have resulted: in many schools careers curriculum is almost non-existent; in many schools the leadership is captive to the achievement of high ATARs; VCAL and VET are not seen as being as important as VCE, and are not resourced adequately; VIT registered staff in the career pathways area are more likely to be part-time in the role, with considerable teaching loads as well; VIT registered staff in the career pathways area are often paid as ES, which is education support staff, on a lower salary; staff in the career pathways areas are increasingly more likely to be ES staff on a lower pay scale, often

part-time with no careers qualifications and little experience or knowledge of the area, and they are not qualified to teach careers curriculum in the classroom.

There has been a huge turnover of staff in the career pathways roles, largely because of the factors previously mentioned. These have unfortunate implications for secondary students. They may only see a careers counsellor once while at school. The quality of careers advice is compromised if it is not timely and available from an experienced and appropriately qualified careers staff member. Students may have had very little opportunity to learn about how they can combine their VCE or VCAL with VET courses of study. Without the experience of careers curriculum in earlier years they may have limited understanding of their aspirations and the broad range of career pathways options available to them. Subsequently, they often make poor and ill-informed career pathways choices, which can lead to poor employment outcomes.

So in summary, students must have access to appropriate careers curriculum in Years 7 to 12, taught by qualified VIT-registered teachers. Financial pressure should not inevitably lead to staffing cuts in the career pathways areas in schools. The leadership in secondary schools must be given the resources and the mandated instructions to fund and staff career pathways areas in their schools properly. Staff in career pathways roles must have adequate time allocations and the skills, qualifications and experience to provide timely, comprehensive and appropriate careers advice to students. Vocational education must be given the same priority as VCE. There must be incentives for appropriate careers-qualified teachers to find employment in regional areas. Pre-teaching training in general must include information on VCAL, VET and school-based apprenticeships, and there must be more opportunities to specialise as a careers teacher. Thank you.

Ms YOUNG — My name is Jane Young. I am the Manager of Employment Initiatives at the Box Hill Institute Group. The Box Hill Institute Group delivers over 300 accredited courses and qualifications and trains more than 30 000 students each year, both onsite at our campuses and in a broad range of workplace environments. We are focused on producing graduates who are confidently able to take their place in their chosen field and become valuable contributors to society through sustainable employment in the workforce.

The Box Hill Institute Group has partnerships with over 100 schools in order to provide pathways and industry-relevant training to younger students. Through the schools relationship unit we collaborate with school careers practitioners to provide advice to students about the range of vocational education opportunities available to secondary students, including apprenticeships and traineeships, and pathways to higher education. The outer-eastern region has below-average rates of secondary school completion and engagement in further education and training. Subsequently, this region will in fact suffer from increasing issues relating to employability.

Career guidance is critical for choosing a learning pathway. Without sound career advice, students and their families may give priority to broad generalist degrees over VET, even when they are more suited to a vocational education and training pathway. According to the 2017 graduate outcomes survey, 29 per cent of university graduates did not secure a job straight out of university and over half, which is about 15 per cent, of these graduates still had not secured a job after four years. Changing recruitment practices among large organisations have led to a focus on a broad set of employability skills that young people may have difficulty developing through school. As industries and occupations rapidly change and evolve, students and their families need explicit information about the education and training pathways that maximise post-school options and mobility.

Students who think critically about their career choices well before they leave school are thought to benefit from improved further education and employment outcomes and make better choices than those who do not. It is critical that up-to-date information is provided to school students regarding the full range of learning opportunities available to meet the needs of industry and the local labour market. Careers education needs to be established early in all schools to introduce students to technical and vocational education pathways as an equal option alongside higher education. In addition, many young people may be developing a set of important employability skills through part-time work while at school; however, they may not be aware of the value of these skills to future employers and may not know how to sell their skills set when applying for work.

The Box Hill Institute Group supports the development of career advice in schools with a pathway approach to tertiary education which focuses on current industry needs and the 21st century workforce.

Ms GOULDING — My name is Fleur Goulding. I am the Executive Officer at Holmesglen Institute. Thank you again for your time. I want to take a few moments really just to reiterate a couple of key points as part of

our submission, so I will not take too long and then we can get onto the questions which I think are usually more insightful.

Firstly, I guess Holmesglen comes to this from two perspectives. One, we are a senior secondary provider in our own right; we offer our VCAL programs at our vocational colleges at Moorabbin and Waverley campus. We also are a VET in Schools provider, obviously through our school networks and, similar to the Box Hill group, we also are engaged with career practitioners to inform them about the vocational options.

Like my colleagues, the key message that we really wanted to send to the Committee was around improving the engagement of careers advisers with the vocational network. I mean that as a network; it is not just our career options and our courses, but our educators and our industry partners, because it is about knowing what those emerging skills area are. We work hard to identify those for our graduates, and it would be fantastic if careers advisers could also network into that more solidly.

Like Vicki, I would also like to reinforce our experience that the quality and the range of careers activities in schools vary greatly. It is very much dependent on the school leadership as to how much time and resources are invested in that. Some schools do it exceptionally well, and others are really pushed for resources and so struggle. I would also reiterate the influence of parents and carers on decision-making and how we can go about perhaps changing some of those perceptions that are not terribly accurate today.

From our perspective, both as careers advisers within our own vocational college but also working with other careers practitioners, it very much is about the time and resources that are put into this. Again I would echo Vicki's comments around starting early in an integrated way thinking about careers and the role of VET within a career pathway. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. Our questions will be directed to all of you. Feel comfortable for anyone to answer. On mandating career advice, some submissions have recommended that the Victorian Government make career advice a compulsory part of the school curriculum. What are your views on this recommendation? How could it work practically?

Ms BAWDEN — Absolutely essential. As I said, by the time a student has to make those important decisions about courses, about subjects—and they have to start making those decisions by Year 9, because really a VET subject is best begun at Year 10; it is a two-year subject, and if they can start at Years 10 and 11 it can save a lot of students from leaving school and it can save the disengagement which often happens at that Year 10 level. With a student having a course counselling interview at Year 9, how on earth do they make their minds up if they have not learned about the world of work? They should have had careers education from Years 7, 8 and 9, where they are immersed into a whole lot of activities—role plays, simulation games, excursions, incursions, opportunities to learn, having guest speakers—to learn about all the options out there and how pathways work. So yes, I think that would be absolutely essential to mandate, because there is a crowded curriculum in schools. They do not have time for things like music and drama. They have trouble even fitting in sport, but careers education is fundamental.

The CHAIR — Phil, do you have any comments?

Mr LOVEDER — Look, yes, I would agree with that sentiment. I think there is a penalty for young people making poor career choices quite often. For instance, if a young person has access to funding through a government-sponsored program or similar, they might have one chance, really, to make the right decision et cetera. If they make the wrong decision it can actually mean undertaking training that either does not suit them particularly or does not actually result in a good job outcome or one that does not play to their strengths. So I think having the right sort of information early on in the piece that assists people to understand what a particular industry or particular job means, what sort of career options and pathways are available to them, is absolutely essential to make sure—because even at a young age they are actually investing in their own skills. Any support and assistance they can get through the schools—whether or not that is mandated is clearly a decision for the Victorian Government and the sector, but I certainly think that it is an essential part of any young person's school education experience.

Ms GOULDING — I would also like to comment that I think this is absolutely essential as part of the ongoing curriculum, but it is about breadth. It is going beyond 'What VCE subjects do I need to select to get into this course?'. I think that students today do come with experiences. A lot of them are carers to parents or

other individuals in their family; they work in family businesses; they do a lot of work before they are actually employed, even on a part-time basis; and I think that building career vocabulary and choice and identity is really important in a careers education program that stretches even into upper primary and right the way through.

Ms BAWDEN — And remember a lot of parents may be unemployed, and the student is growing up in a family environment where no-one is working. Those students in particular need to have access to careers curriculum. They do not have role models around them.

Ms YOUNG — I do think it is important, and I would certainly agree with what other people have said, but I also think it is important that we go beyond just the secondary school and go further down to primary school to start this kind of education, particularly for the reasons just iterated in regard to parents not being in the workforce.

Mr CRISP — I would like to build on those thoughts around taster programs in immersions to work out where they fit with that, but also whether you have any examples back the other way where VET providers outreach to schools as well, as we try and get penetration into this area to give people the information they need and the choices they need.

Ms BAWDEN — Can I clarify: there are two models we are talking about here. The Northern Melbourne VET Cluster—one of the clusters that I manage—has a home host model, which means that our students access VET in other schools, our host schools. So, out of 45 schools in the cluster, 15 are hosts. During the week we have about 1500 students travelling all over in various ways to reach their host school to do their VET course. Some students in their home schools may be going to TAFEs but the vast majority are going to other schools in the home host model. And so when we have VET tasters, and we have a whole program of those which begin about the end of this term going into early term 3...

Mr CRISP — At what level are those tasters offered, what year level?

Ms BAWDEN — Any level. Well, probably they are more aimed at Years 9 or 10 because, as I said, we prefer our students to start a VET course at Year 10 preferably. So they are aimed at that level and they are promoted actively. We have a flyer with multiple copies that are available for students and their parents to take home to market them, and we strongly encourage the students go, and they are very effective in our marketing.

The CHAIR — Any other comments?

Ms GOULDING — I just had one quick one. I think the value of tasters is in exposing students to specialisations within fields as much as fields themselves. A lot of senior secondary, Years 9 and 10 students, are perhaps unaware that a plumber is not just a plumber, that there are an enormous amount of specialisations within the field from high-end HVAC mechanical systems to general plumbing. I think it is not until you get a taste of that that you come in with this general sort of perception that has been formed mainly through parents, but also your own exposure. So I think tasters are certainly important, and we engage with about 34 000 students across a whole range of almost outreach kind of programs into schools, including our VET in Schools programs.

The CHAIR — Phil, would you like to add anything?

Mr LOVEDER — Just one point. Certainly the evidence is a bit anecdotal, but some of the research from here and overseas suggests that exposure to work, industries and jobs through things such as pre-apprenticeships has been shown to be a valuable way of getting young people to clarify whether a particular industry or particular job or particular course might be for them. But again, quite often that is at a point where they are getting close to making a decision. I think taking the courses and opportunities to understand what is involved in these sorts of jobs as early on as possible is very, very important.

Mrs FYFFE — To Jane, but comments from the others, if possible: how do you think the new Tech Schools are assisting students with their post-school choices? I believe Box Hill is more advanced with this.

Ms YOUNG — Yes, Box Hill does have a Tech School in the Yarra Ranges area. I think the Tech School gives people a taster in a different sort of way. It is a taster in a more confined environment but it is also really focusing in on some of those employability skills and understanding how they fit, with tasting of different types

of courses they can do. So it is very focused on some of the new and emerging skills which I think is so critically important when we are looking at people's work options.

Mrs FYFFE — So they are narrow, the subjects that they are doing?

Ms YOUNG — No, I would not say that they are narrow, but they cover some of the major areas that are new and emerging areas in the skills base, so we have got robotics, sustainability and renewables. It is actually introducing people to some of the changing needs of the workforce in a school environment, I suppose, but a much more hands-on environment. So it is a combination of a taster and information at the same time.

The CHAIR — Any other comments?

Mr MELHEM — I think, Fleur, you gave an example about Holmesglen and how you have got your own school interaction. Can you give us the VET providers good model for outreach to schools that could be adopted more broadly across Victoria? I know that you have got a particular model. I think other TAFEs might not have connection to their schools. I think, Vicki, you talked about the cluster, so if we are able to say, 'That's a good model, that's something that we can actually roll out to other schools' and what we need to actually roll it out, what sort of support, what the governments can do to make all these things happen.

Ms GOULDING — I will talk a bit about the vocational college because it is a bit of a forerunner to some of what we now see in Tech Schools and some of those other areas. The vocational college started over 10 years ago and it was really an intervention to engage what were increasing numbers of students who were at risk of completely disengaging from school.

We knew that it played an important role in providing some of the taster-type programs, but they are actually accredited units from a certificate II level qualification. Pleasingly, over that 10-year journey what we have seen, and I think this is based on a lot of the work in the VET in schools space, is that now students are making a choice to come to the vocational college because they wish to accelerate their career pathway. They have done some VET in Schools subjects perhaps, they have done some tasters, and they are now actually choosing to come to the vocational college because they want to accelerate, and not into the traditional trades which was where it started predominantly, but into design, into the community services, into the health sector, into allied health services and areas like that. It uses VCAL as its curriculum framework, but the industry-specific skills are always delivered at a certificate II level, which then provides some career acceleration. Again, I think the work with schools, with the cluster groups and with employers within the region has enabled the vocational college to now service two campuses. It was I guess a forerunner to some of the Tech Schools. That is one example that we specifically mention in our submission.

Some of the other outreach work, though, is going to be very similar to what Box Hill and any other TAFE provider does in terms of engaging with careers practitioners, getting them onto campus, running visits, running presentations and running tours; and also obviously in our VET in Schools networks, where we deliver, unlike a host home model.

Ms YOUNG — Can I just add that I think the things we are doing in terms of taster programs, in terms of the Tech School and with the STEM areas, they are all really important and very valuable. However, the bit that perhaps does not happen enough is to give people the reality check of what is actually happening in the workforce, and I think that we really have not homed in on making sure that we get that information to people—because I think that is the information that needs to start in the senior schools.

Mr MELHEM — How would you do that?

Ms YOUNG — I think there is an enormous amount of information available as it is to the skills and jobs centres and they have access to that information and it is very readily available to other people as well. I think it is important that we look at the areas of demand, particularly on a state basis rather than a federal and a more national basis. People who are getting that information need really solid information about what does this job lead to and what sort of career options are there within that role, but also what are the wages involved in that. People do not talk about money. It is interesting, because a lot of students make assumptions about whether or not a VET course will allow them to earn an income that they aspire to.

Mr MELHEM — Should we then do an audit on schools, whether they are actually doing that stuff, accessing that material? It seems there is a lot of stuff out there, but whether it is happening or not, should it be part of KPIs, should it be the Department auditing, should it be part of the funding model? Is that something ...

Ms BAWDEN — I think all of those are possibilities, but as you were talking I was saying, ‘Of course’. We know there is fabulous information out there, but how do the students in the schools access that? They need to access it through careers curriculum, through their careers advisers, who have the time to spend with them. And they need to be in classrooms. As I said, unfortunately, those teams of careers pathways personnel in schools are more likely to be ES staff, who are not allowed to be in a classroom with a group students. They are often shoved into that spot with that role because they have got a little bit of time left over from their other admin duties. They are not trained in careers. They are doing their best and they are working very hard, but they do not have the skills, the experience or the qualifications.

Students need time in class to discuss these and to be presented with this information in an interesting way, activities-based, within the classroom from an early age, with qualified, experienced teachers.

Ms YOUNG — Can I just add an extra bit there? Although it is really important to have it at the schools—and I totally agree with you—for the students, I do think that we need to think through about educating parents. They are key influencers of students and they get very little information about what are the careers of the future and where people should be looking in terms of work prospects.

Ms BAWDEN—Actually the kids can educate their parents if we get to the kids first.

The CHAIR—Phil, any comment?

Mr LOVEDER—I agree with all of the points made. I must say in particular that I think exposing young people and their parents to what it is actually like, what the experience is like, to be participating in VET and at a college is probably essential. The higher education sector, the university sector, has been so successful. We have seen a drift away from VET towards higher ed and part of that is because they market themselves very well. In South Australia—and I am sure there are similar things happening in other states—the universities banded together and they have got a couple of programs like the Journey to Higher Education and Children’s University where young people, quite young children, their parents, what have you, are all involved. They come on campus, they participate in a whole range of different activities, they get a little parchment at the end. That sort of exposure is absolute gold and I think they are some of the points that were made by some of my colleagues around that exposure, that what it is really like is an absolutely essential way to change the kind of attitude that people have often had about VET of the past rather than that of the now.

Mrs FYFFE — Have any of you and the opportunity to look at how any other countries have been able to direct students onto VET pathways? Any of you.

Ms BAWDEN — Very briefly, and I have not gone into it in great depth, but I am informed that the German and the Swiss model is worth looking at very closely for Australia. Employers are more closely involved in students in the senior secondary years and apparently a lot of students are already doing a lot of work experience and their employers are very, very closely monitoring students and they have already been employed before they leave school. So they are more oriented towards vocational education models.

Mrs FYFFE — The whole curriculum is, is it?

Ms BAWDEN — Apparently. I do not know about it in detail.

Mrs FYFFE — Does anyone else know anything?

Mr LOVEDER — In terms of the German and Swiss systems, I mean of course they have got the dual system where effectively you choose one of two pathways, either the kind of academic pathway or the vocational pathway.

Mrs FYFFE — So they are doing streaming?

Mr LOVEDER — Yes, streaming. The benefits the Germans have, of course, is that they have achieved a greater level of parity of esteem between the sectors than probably most other countries. It is interesting. I

happened to be in Germany last year and I heard a professional engineer who had just finished his PhD say he was now doing some additional postgraduate university study, but he referred to it as his fourth apprenticeship. They really do not distinguish like we do here. Somehow with industry and with all the other social partners they have achieved a level of parity that is seen between vocational education and higher education that we do not see in a lot of other countries, that is for sure. And certainly I agree with those comments, that there is a strong level of industry support. From very early on in the piece, there is involvement by local industry and quite often it is working toward a particular job with a particular employer. It is quite different to Australia.

Ms GOULDING — Could I also add that I think you are absolutely right, Peter, but I think that one of the key differences from the Germanic systems to ours is the involvement of employers and the way that, for example, it is highly competitive to get into BMW in Germany—highly. It is seen as probably one of the best choices you can make. But it is about the connection between employers and providers which is quite different to what you will see here, along with the parity-of-esteem issues.

Mr MELHEM — I think we touched on the qualities the career advisers need. One is the classification and specialisation. I just wanted to go to the teachers. Should the teachers have specific training to be incorporated as part of their normal training and also should that be part of all the secondary teachers' professional development requirements?

Ms BAWDEN — I believe when they are in training a significant component of their training should be involved with vocational education: what is VCAL, what is VET, what are school-based apprenticeships? That area is not covered in most teacher training courses, or if so in a very small way.

Mr MELHEM — And as part of their ongoing review. We heard earlier about doing some testing on young kids, about mechanical aptitude — I am paraphrasing here — and to start that early in Year 7 to basically coach students between 7 and 12 about what career they need and there was a bit of talk about doing some aptitude test. What is your thought on that?

Ms BAWDEN — I do not like that idea much. It depends on what you mean by testing.

Ms GOULDING — They already exist, and quite a few schools will use a variety of models to assist students, but they typically do them in Year 10. I would actually counter that Australia does not have a great evidence base when it comes to careers advice in schools, including the assessment tools that might be used.

Ms BAWDEN — I think there is a difference between testing and self-assessment.

Mr MELHEM — I am paraphrasing.

Ms BAWDEN — I have taught careers for years in schools from early to late years in secondary schools. So, self-assessment is a huge component because the student is encouraged to look within themselves and look at their own life experiences and try and identify their own skills and abilities and their strengths and their weaknesses. And then we encourage them to look at, 'What kind of life do you want to have in the future? Imagine that life. Now, what kind of job or what kind of career will give you the kind of life you would like to have?'. And then now a step back further, 'What kind of training or education will give you that career or that job in the future?'. All of that is real analysis and self-assessment and that is what career education is all about.

Mr MELHEM — I think the talk earlier was about doing that sort of assessment, about the aptitude test. For example, if I want to be an engineer but I am not good with science and maths for example. And then this kind of assessment would say, 'Just give it up, man. You need to look at something else'. That type of discussion, is it something that should be encouraged, discouraged or ...

Ms BAWDEN — I would discourage that. Personally, I think that if you label kids too early it is not fair on the kids. Some kids bloom a bit later. Kids surprise you. That is why I do not like streaming as such, either, because it categorises kids and kids take on those categories if you label them too early. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, unfortunately. It is not fair on the kids.

Ms GOULDING — I think there is a very real difference between maths as a school subject and applying maths and maths concepts in a work context. And I think that really it is more about encouraging a plan A, B, C and D, about how you might get to where you want to go on a career trajectory than it is about a choice.

Ms BAWDEN — And if a kid is motivated, if they want to do a career that needs maths well, dammit all, they will get good at maths—because they want that. It is all about the motivation. Before we run out of time, there were two other small issues I wanted to talk about.

The CHAIR — Phil, have you got any other comments before I ask Vicki?

Mr LOVEDER — Look, just briefly, I agree with all of that sort of stuff. I just think that too often—my wife is a deputy principal in a school here in South Australia and even in their school they have a VET coordinator and it is amazing that it is not until teachers have sometimes made an assessment of whether or not the person is actually going to be able to do an academic stream or not that suddenly they are kind of pushed to the VET coordinator to try and consider VET outcomes and pathways. In reality it has kind of got to be a coordinated effort where career professionals are having discussions with teachers and the teachers actually are working to try to achieve a good outcome for their students rather than sort of waiting until it is almost too late and saying, ‘Well, look, your maths is poor. You are not likely to make it to university as an engineer. Go and talk to the VET coordinator’. That is the only other point that I would make.

Ms BAWDEN — I did ask that you be provided with some extra paperwork this morning. We had a meeting last week with the principals of the northern Melbourne VET cluster. It is an annual meeting, and the timing was amazing because the previous day the government had made that announcement that there would be free TAFE places for some cert II and cert III VET courses. Yes, that sounds wonderful but there are dire ramifications for VET in Schools if VET in Schools is not also made free, because—now I will not read through—as you can see from the email, one of the principals is from one of our biggest host schools, the Northern College of the Arts & Technology, NCAT. They are a vocational college from Years 10 to 12. They have about 400 cluster students from our 45 schools in the cluster doing VET sometime during the week and there is a cost to the schools and a cost to the parents of those VET courses.

Now if the same courses are going to be free at TAFE, why would parents want to send their kids to another host school where they have to pay the materials fee and why would schools want to allow their kids to go to another host school to do VET where the school has to pick up the bulk of the cost—the tuition cost—for that VET course? I mean they are under such financial pressures they will not be encouraging that and they will want all the kids to go to TAFE. So we are really, really concerned about that decision, and this email, if you have a look at it carefully, is trying to explain clearly they must consider making VET free at schools as well, and the motion that came from the meeting after extensive discussion is on the separate page there. I will read the second sentence:

This policy initiative has significant potential to render such programs—
that is, VET programs in schools and trade training centres—

unviable unless the government also funds these programs in schools on the same basis.

This email was sent to Leela Darvall in VCAA—I think that is her role—and verbally she has assured the principal of this school that they are taking that on board and they will clarify what the announcement was going to be, but we have not heard anything since then.

Mr MELHEM — Is that in relation to the amounts charged to the school, the \$1600 or \$1800, or the charges to the individual students, which is \$250 or \$300, or both?

Ms BAWDEN — A VET course—there is a total cost and in government schools only the materials component can be given to parents, but the schools have to pick up the rest of the cost, the tuition, and that comes out of their SRP, so the VET budget in a school is considerable, considerable. It is a lot of money. And the trade training centres—we have five of them in our cluster—will be empty if we do not get the same free VET courses in our schools.

Mr MELHEM — I am sure the Minister’s Office or the Minister will be dealing with that as we speak.

Ms BAWDEN — I am hoping so, because we are very, very concerned, and there is the other small issue about—have you got time for the training of future VET teachers? That is the other issue I wanted to bring to your attention.

The CHAIR — I am sorry, I cannot allow this to go any further because we are running out of time, but thanks for that and it has been tabled.

Ms BAWDEN — It has been tabled, so you will read it.

The CHAIR — Yes, sure. Thank you very much. Phil, if you can hear me, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you all for your time and contributions. Thank you very much.

Ms BAWDEN — Thank you very much.

Mr LOVEDER — It is my pleasure.

Witnesses withdrew.