

TRANSCRIPT

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 19 February 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 Peter Roberts, Director, School Services, and

Ms Aine Maher, Director, Education Services, Independent Schools Victoria.

The CHAIR — I would like to welcome you 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 will not be 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 speak for 5 minutes. That will allow us some time to ask questions. Before you start would you provide your name for the Hansard record.

Mr ROBERTS — Peter Roberts, Director, School Services, at Independent Schools Victoria.

Ms MAHER — Aine Maher, Director, Education Services, at Independent Schools Victoria.

Mr ROBERTS — Thank you for the opportunity for us to present to the Committee today. We just thought we would give a bit of background about the sector and who we are and also about some of the challenges around this particular issue.

Independent Schools Victoria represents 219 member schools, educating approximately 140 000 students. The independent schools sector is very diverse. There are faith-based and non-faith-based schools, single-sex and co-educational schools, primary, secondary and combinations of primary and secondary, such as P–12 schools, specialist schools catering for students with special needs, multi and single campus schools, schools with over 3000 students and schools of 20 students, schools located in most areas of metropolitan and regional and rural Victoria, and schools servicing high, medium and low socio-economic communities. Given all of this, provision of careers advice in independent schools will vary widely.

Ms MAHER — ISV has collected data from schools via stakeholder surveys in relation to the extent and quality of careers advice provided. The data indicates that students, parents and teachers are generally very satisfied with the level of career advice provided through their school, but some trends are evident. Larger schools are more likely to have qualified specialist career practitioners. Metropolitan schools are more likely to have qualified specialist career practitioners, and schools serving higher socio-economic community schools are more likely to have qualified specialist career practitioners.

The challenges faced by specialist career practitioners include role clarity within their schools; in-school support of their area, including physical spaces for meetings and resources and appropriate time allocation to meet student needs at various junctures through the school year; support to retain currency of their area of expertise in a rapidly changing world; and support to collaborate with relevant stakeholders. For schools without qualified specialist career practitioners these challenges are significantly magnified. Parental education is seen to be a priority for careers education in any school setting. We are happy to answer questions based on anything we have said so far.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. Your submission states that some independent schools do not have a qualified career adviser. Should the Victorian Government require schools to hire qualified career advisers, and how would this affect independent schools?

Ms MAHER — It is true that some schools do not have a qualified specialist career practitioner. Typically these are schools that are small, so they may be catering for quite a small cohort of students. I think typically school resourcing being what it is a principal and the school governing body will have to make priorities as to where the money that is available will be spent, and careers education to date has not always been seen as a priority area.

Mr ROBERTS — Requiring independent schools to have career practitioners would be a significant shift in the mandatory employment of any particular type of person within an independent school. So currently broadly the regulations around school registration require all schools, independent schools included, to have appropriately qualified and registered teachers and other specialists as the school sees fit. If the school believes it needs nurses, it will employ nurses. If they need sports coaches, they will employ sports coaches. If they feel the need for career practitioners and are able to resource that within their school, then they will do so. But it would be an interesting proposition to make it mandatory.

Mr MELHEM — I will ask a follow-up to the question from the Chair. I just want to tease out that issue, so I am not criticising. If we are sending our children to school, and the whole of idea of schooling is to prepare these young people to eventually get into the workforce and have the ability to live life and have a job, why

would career counselling, which I think is the most important reason they go to school—learn to read and write, learn a trade or go to university—not be a very important role? Why would independent schools, for example, or Catholic schools or even some principals—some of whom we will talk to later—not see that as a fundamental or a core thing we have to teach at school and provide as a service?

Do you mind talking about the subject and maybe putting a different hat on, not necessarily be the voice of the independent schools? But as a subject itself, do you see that as a core thing we must have at school, because the only reason they go to school is because they want to go and get a job. Otherwise, give up at primary school, be able to read and write and that is it—google everything. I am interested in your opinion on that.

Mr ROBERTS — Certainly the preparation for young people to leave school and be contributors to society is absolutely a fundamental part of any school—independent, Catholic or government—and all principals running those schools would have that view, I am sure. The broad regulatory environment for schools around curriculum provision and the tracking, monitoring and working with students around their progress through all of their schooling is geared towards all of that, creating all that and educating that whole person.

The preparation for young people, particularly getting towards the end of the secondary schooling, in preparing them for life beyond school, is not ignored or dismissed by any school. A school may decide, ‘Do we need to put designated resources towards a careers practitioner to do all that, or are there some other ways we might be able to do that throughout our school?’. It is not necessarily an argument against the provision of career advice to children in schools; it is about how an individual school might best do that. An individual school might say, ‘Absolutely, we’ll have one designated person, the careers practitioner, and everything goes through that person’, or they might say, ‘We’ve actually got 400 students we’re trying to service through that and that is actually a really challenging exercise to do for that individual person. Perhaps we’re better off having a team of people who we provide enough support, skills and training to across the middle and senior years of the secondary schooling to work with children’.

Mr MELHEM — So it is that sort of thing.

Mr ROBERTS — Yes.

Ms MAHER — Perhaps I might add to that and say that I think typically it is agreed that that advice into next stage of life for young people whenever they are leaving school is not solely the responsibility of the school; it is a broader and shared responsibility that includes parents and parents’ knowledge and parents’ wishes and it includes the broader community in which the school is located. I think many schools do have quite successful partnerships with local industry and with local third-level institutions who will support the careers education advice for students moving into post-school options, but it is more challenging in some settings than it is in others.

Ms RYALL — My question relates to schools that do it well and schools that perhaps do not do it well, so across the spectrum of independent schools. What are the things that you see from the schools that do it well and perhaps some of the learnings from the schools that do not?

Ms MAHER — I think it would not be honest of us to say that we have an estimate or a knowledge of schools that do it well versus schools that do not do it well. As a membership-based organisation our job is really to support schools in whatever requests they have of us.

If we could make a more generic response to it, schools that do it well will tend to have a careers education program that starts much earlier than when students get into their senior secondary years, so they are looking at that notion of work education being something that is embedded from much earlier in the student’s experience of learning. That can even start young. Some schools will talk about, for example, working with children in prep classrooms and talking to them, not necessarily about, ‘What are you going to do when you leave’, but about the idea that, ‘There are different work environments and different skills and different attributes that might cause you to lean in one area rather than another area or that might open doors for you’.

It seems that partnerships outside of the school, so having really good and thriving partnerships with people and often drawing from the parental body, I think, who are working currently in a variety of different work situations and having them come and run careers evenings or careers show and tells and those kinds of things, tend to be features of schools that are very proud of their careers education programs. A number of schools have

partnerships with universities, with local TAFEs and with various different third-level institutions so that students are familiar with and aware of what programs are available to them and what their choices are in a post-school setting.

I think one of the things that came out strongly for us when we spoke with schools was that idea that parental education is an important outcome and that schools that are proud of their programs will make sure that there is every opportunity for parents of those students to be able to be learning about the changing world of work and indeed the changing world of post-compulsory education and helping people to look more broadly at what the options might be than perhaps parents might typically hold for themselves.

Ms RYALL — Also, given you mentioned earlier the possibility of having teams as opposed to one individual, what qualifications therefore would you expect of those who were actually delivering this?

Ms MAHER — I am thinking. I am putting my own hat on and I am thinking that as a chemistry teacher in my day I would have absolutely seen that it was part of my responsibility with my senior students in chemistry and indeed with my science students to constantly be thinking about what a career in science might look like, for example. I do not know, Peter, I am not sure whether you would also have thought that as a science teacher too—whether we were constantly putting those kinds of options ahead of people.

Ms RYALL — Others we have spoken to have talked about the necessity for a minimum graduate certificate, moving into a graduate diploma and potentially masters, given that it is a specialist field.

Ms MAHER — If there is a person who is designated with responsibility for careers advice, I think that having the appropriate qualifications to be staying ahead of the game is pretty important.

Mr ROBERTS — I think that is a fair comment. Going back to some of the challenges for schools around the resourcing aspect of it, to refer to the qualifications you have just mentioned, are there many people out there who have got those qualifications already, are they willing to work in schools and are schools able to fully utilise what such a qualified person would bring? Often schools have tended to either put someone in the role of careers adviser—it is careers practitioner now, but perhaps an older term is careers adviser—or perhaps with a team of teachers in the senior years talk about how we can do all this, which is presumably partly why this inquiry is being held, because it can be a little ad hoc. It can depend upon perhaps the goodwill of individual classroom teachers who maybe specialise in their chemistry, physics, history or whatever it might be. Maybe we can do something with those teachers around, ‘Okay, you need to learn a little bit about what is happening out there for young people these days, what links with industry are there, what expectations are there from industry, from tertiary institutions et cetera’—knowing the multiple pathways for students there are now once they leave school.

Through all of that you can see the challenges for schools around resourcing that adequately, and I do not just mean giving time or dollars to it but actually finding the right people with the appropriate level of skills and expertise they need; it is a very hard thing.

Mr CRISP — For regional students, how can the Victorian Government better support careers advisers in regional schools and provide up-to-date information to their students?

Ms MAHER — There is no doubt about it, careers advisers and the whole area of careers advice in a number of the regional areas has been challenging, and I think we spoke particularly with some who work in regional areas where what have been the typical employers in the region are no longer employing in the same numbers and where the parental expectation has been that their children will have gone to work in that particular industry and those options are no longer there. They certainly have identified that as challenging. It is just about access to what other options are available as much as what are perhaps some of the other stakeholders that they can work collaboratively with. They certainly feel that there is an opportunity to receive much more current information about what is happening in particular areas with employment, but what that might look like or what it is specifically they are looking for, they were not as clear on. They would just like more.

Mr ROBERTS — Just to add to that, it is like many of the challenges that are faced in rural communities that may not exist to the same extent in metropolitan Melbourne. I have had several principals of regional schools over the years that say to us not so much career advice but the broader thing of students who have completed their Year 12. They have certainly got the appropriate score or whatever to get into a tertiary

institution but that would mean they would have to pack up and move to Melbourne or some other capital city. There is the cost of that at a personal level so they say, 'I'll take a year off. I'll save some money and then I'll go to Melbourne next year', and then they never do because they are enjoying their lifestyle in the country with their mates and all the rest of it. The principals have said to us there is then that lost opportunity in that community, where the person who might have gone off to Melbourne to become the lawyer or the accountant, the doctor, the specialist, the scientist or whatever ...

Ms MAHER — Careers practitioner.

Mr ROBERTS — and return to that regional area down the track at some stage is the opportunity that has been lost. The challenge for all schools in regional centres across all industries and in education as well is finding high-quality teachers to come and work in country schools, and so to add the layer of high-quality and qualified careers practitioners to work in country schools is even more difficult, given that it is often difficult for metropolitan-based schools to find highly qualified, well-credentialed careers practitioners. So there are all those usual layers that occur for schools in regional areas.

Ms MAHER — The level of difficulty is higher.

Mr MELHEM — How would you overcome that problem of attracting the right people to give careers advice? Do you see a role for the government to play? Do you see another role, for example, in mandating that careers advice is part of the curriculum? It is sort of a bit of regional and metro—how do you improve that?

Ms MAHER — I may not have my facts completely right, but I think there was some support through a national partnership some years ago that allowed teachers within a school to be able to take on I think it was the grad cert programs, so the teachers who were already working within the school and who expressed some interest in the careers area were able to go and have some support in doing their further studies. That program certainly was received very favourably by the independent schools that used it, and it allowed them to take a teacher who was already working within the school and who knew the school and its community and its context and for them to be able to get that additional qualification to be able to provide that kind of specialist advice. That certainly was very favourably received at the time and is one option that perhaps is available.

Mr MELHEM — Are there any examples that you can give us from your member schools, independent schools, of what is the best benchmark? Do you do any benchmarking about careers advice and do you look around at what is happening around the state, the country, the world about how you benchmark your careers advice which you provide in the city at the moment? If you don't have any, you don't.

Mr ROBERTS — We probably do not overall, other than, as mentioned in our submission, the specific questions that are asked in the stakeholder surveys that we administer through our schools, which are pretty good benchmarks. The survey tools themselves have been operating for over 10 years and are incredibly robust and so on, so when they are asked specific questions asking sorts of things like, 'As a student I got good careers advice at this school?', 'As a parent do you think this school provides good careers advice to your children?' and so on, they are good measures around what the perception is. In terms of what specific schools do, as Aine mentioned earlier, this is the challenge for us. We are not inside schools and so it is hard for us to know exactly what might be going on. In conversations with schools and in talking about this review, and as Aine mentioned earlier, it is where schools have got a whole-school approach to this thing from the very early years through to where you run a work experience program in Year 10—and it is a real work experience program; we do not just ask the kids to go and find a placement, go out for a week, have a good time and it has no bearing on anything which you might be interested in.

The best work experience programs we see are when the teachers and the careers advisers, if they exist in the school, and they most likely do because otherwise the program would not work as well as it does, are working with the students well in advance about, 'You need to work hard and we'll help you to find a placement, even if it's just for a week but in an industry that you are thinking about pursuing down the track'. It then gets buy-in from the students, it gets buy-in from the families, the employers like it because they have now got a young student who is here for a week who genuinely wants to find out about this particular field of work. As opposed to having a week out, they are experiencing something, then the challenge coming back into school is 'What do we do with what the students have learned and experienced during that week out of the school?'. How do we build on that in terms of the careers advice, in terms of they are now in Year 10 and we are starting to choose subjects for Year 11 and Year 12 so your pathway might have changed a bit now? You thought you wanted to

work in this area. You have gone and spent a week there and you think, ‘Actually I don’t want to do that at all. I’d rather do this other thing over here that I’d been thinking about’. It is with that sort of holistic approach where we see things work best.

You asked me should it be mandated. We are always concerned about mandating things because mandating does not necessarily get buy-in. Schools might tick something off—‘We have to do this and we go and employ a careers person or give someone the title of a careers person’, but it does not necessarily change it. I think it is about raising the profile of careers practitioners, explaining to schools and the world that these people, if they are appropriately qualified, have a level of expertise and understand the changing nature of the working world and so on, are viewed within the school as playing a really important role, which is what you asked very early on, in that school of guiding not just the students but, as Aine said, their parents as well and some of the staff within the schools around the whole preparing children for life beyond school.

Mr MELHEM — So instead of mandating it, basically you have to employ X number of advisers per student. Would you go as far as saying the curriculum needs to be delivered but how you deliver it and what method you use is up to you? I think you gave an example earlier about how you could employ one person full time to do it or you could train half a dozen—I am just making the numbers up—to basically have some sort of understanding of how to deliver it. That is the method you would use to deliver the service. Would you consider mandating that the concept, the curriculum where it is part and parcel of educating kids and also—I will finish off on this—what sort of involvement parents should have in that exercise, even the careers advice as well, whether you mandate it or whether you do not mandate it?

Ms MAHER — There is, through the Australian curriculum as you would know, currently an option to do a work studies program, which I think can be delivered through Year 9 and Year 10. Our sense, although we have not specifically asked the question of all of our schools, is that fewer schools have exercised that option of taking on the work studies program, mostly I think because they have looked at the content of the program and they have satisfied themselves that the outcomes are being met already through other aspects of their program.

Parents have a huge role to play in this. There is no doubt about that. It is whether the parental knowledge is sufficient to be able to give their sons and daughters the right kind of advice into the future, because most of us live life, don’t we, through the benefit of hindsight where the stuff that we know is the experience that we have gained over the course of our lives. I think that the schools that are really trying to be serious about this work closely with the parents to make sure that parents have the benefit of education about work futures as much as students do, because ultimately they are going to be very involved in the decisions of their sons and daughters.

Mr ROBERTS — I think part of the challenge with parents is helping parents to fully understand the landscape, particularly when their children are moving up through the senior years of education. So schools have an important role to play in helping parents with the language and helping parents understand the structures of these things.

At a personal level, both Aine and I have in recent years had children go through. We have both held senior roles in schools in the senior years, so we know what it is like to be delivering that information to parents, and in recent years we have received that information as parents. You think, ‘Yeah, this is really tricky’. If people were not quite sure what this was all about, it is full of acronyms, it is full of weird language and so on. There are so many pathways now, as I mentioned earlier on, for young people beyond school, into study, into work, into apprenticeships or into whatever it might be. It is a really complicated landscape.

Mr MELHEM — I am interested if you can expand the lower socio-economic areas in school areas. In these areas parents need help because most of these parents will be busy going to work. Some of them will be in two jobs and doing manual work. It is important to them, but getting around to addressing that, do you see a role for school and government in assisting these parents? To an extent that would apply in regional areas as well.

Mr ROBERTS — Yes. I know there are plenty of resources and that the Department has some really good material available. I just think it is about continually reviewing the material that is available that schools can distribute to parents. Schools are best placed to understand how their particular local community works and if there are any language difficulties in that community and so on. Schools are best placed around that, but schools are always crying out for some really good material, really good resources, that we can share with our school community, with our parents, to help them understand what it is about. At the school level we are well equipped to then be able to answer the questions that those parents might have.

Mr CRISP — We have tied it all together. The only little bit, if we had a moment to further expand, is about when we talked about work experience and talked about guiding the students and getting the ducks lined up there. How do we better collaborate with industry to get them to actually be willing partners in this process to provide a good experience?

Mr ROBERTS — That is a really good question and one that is very hard to answer. On work experience specifically and more broadly links with industry, where schools do it best is, not surprisingly, down to some relationships that they are able to build and being able to get the industry representatives to realise that the future is these kids in school and that they have a level of responsibility. Yes, you are running your own business, and yes, you are trying to make money and produce whatever you are producing, but you also need to understand there are people who are coming through who are your future employees and so on. There is not a simple answer to that. It will depend on goodwill, it will depend on relationships, and it may well depend on there being families in the school that are in those particular industries and are willing to help out.

The flip side is that if I am running my own business, the last thing I want is some 15-year-old kid hanging around for a week looking for something to do. That is the view that would be expressed by many employers. The additional responsibilities around child safety, child protection and that area have made that whole area just difficult for people to work in.

The CHAIR — Thank you. If there is nothing further, on behalf of the Committee I would like to thank you for your time and your contribution. Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.