

TRANSCRIPT

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Mildura — 22 March 2018

Members

Mr Nazih Elasmr — Chair

Ms Dee Ryall — Deputy Chair

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr Peter Crisp

Mrs Christine Fyffe

Ms Jane Garrett

Mr Cesar Melhem

Witnesses

Mrs Tracy Marr, Assistant Principal, Transition and Pathways,

Ms Linda Snoxall, VET Coordinator,

Ms Bethany Simpson, 2017 Graduate, and

Mr Izaak Luitjes, Year 12, Vice Captain, Mildura Senior College.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearings 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 would like to invite you to make a statement of 5 minutes and then allow us some questions. Please, before we start, can you state your name for the Hansard record.

Mrs MARR — Good afternoon. My name is Tracy Marr, and I am the Assistant Principal at Mildura Senior College for Transition and Pathways. Joining me today is Linda Snoxall, the VET Coordinator at Mildura Senior College; Izaak Luitjes, a current Year 12 VCE student at the college; and Bethany Simpson, who is a former Mildura Senior College student who graduated in 2017.

Mildura Senior College has a student population of approximately 940 students. The college is one of a small number of standalone senior colleges in the state catering exclusively to Year 11 and 12 students undertaking the Victorian Certificate of Education or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. Mildura Senior College provides access to an extensive range of choice in the study areas of VCE, VCAL and vocational education and training, and also supports students to undertake university enhancement studies.

Our school has over 100 equivalent full-time staff, including 65 teachers and 40 educational support staff. The college has a commitment to the managed individual pathways program, providing timetabled classes and teacher advocates for all students. Year 11 and 12 students meet weekly with their pathways class and their pathways teacher, where a number of careers activities, goal setting and reflections on pathway goals are undertaken.

During this time students are also involved in La Trobe University and SuniTAFE visits, industry and workplace visits, and they also hear from a number of guest speakers for tertiary, local employers and industry, who come into the college to promote future pathways opportunities to students. During these sessions students are specifically allocated time to complete a range of career exploration and planning activities, including individual pathway plan discussions and regular support, goal setting and reflection on progress towards their future pathway with experienced pathways teachers, career action plans, skill mapping and interest exploration, VTAC and SATAC applications, scholarship awareness, and applications and résumés.

This unique learning environment is highly valued by the school community as it provides an extensive range of subject choices, supporting students to gain knowledge and skills in a variety of pathways areas whilst developing skills for future success. Mildura Senior College values all pathway options for students and facilitates opportunities for school-based apprenticeships, traineeships, work experience, structured workplace learning and opportunities for students to attend external organisations to access a range of further VET studies.

As a lead school in the trade training centre consortium, the college facilitates access for Year 9 and 10 students from partnering schools who are ready to accelerate their journey to school programs to study a range of VET courses. Over 600 students access programs through the trade training centre consortium. The college is committed to providing suitable senior pathways for all senior students. We work in partnership with our neighbouring Years 7 to 10 colleges, including Chaffey Secondary College, Irymple Secondary College, Merbein P–10 College, Trinity Lutheran College, Mildura Christian College and Henderson College.

Through an extensive transition program approximately 500 new students move into Mildura Senior College each year, and we support 500 students to transition out of the college each year. The college provides a mature learning environment that is built upon partnerships and strong relationships between teachers and students and is underpinned by our values of resilience, respect, responsibility, independence and success.

The college provides pathways to further training and study and directly into the workplace, and it recognises that all teachers play a role in supporting students to develop skills for their future. Specifically this year our VCAL students are undertaking an employability skills passport program to assist students to explicitly understand the skills that they are developing through their general classroom programs.

Our mission is to deliver excellence in education and training opportunities for all of our students and to support students to prepare and plan for life after school. Students are supported by a full-time careers adviser, a workplace transition coordinator and a VET coordinator. In addition to this, students are supported by

individual pathways advisers, an extensive wellbeing team, student coordinators and a team of staff experienced in the successful delivery of senior studies.

Mildura Senior College leads a transitional program commencing in Year 9 for students to prepare for the transition to senior studies at Mildura Senior College from our partnership schools. We are also the lead school in the Mildura Secondary Schools Alliance, focusing on curriculum transition as students move from Years 7 to 12 across our system of schools.

We lead a number of transition events to assist students to prepare for selecting the correct program in line with their future pathways plan. The activities students are involved in through the transition program include visits to Mildura Senior College in Years 9 and 10; principal class team visits to schools to speak to students in Year 10 about future pathways course opportunities, considerations in pathways planning and preparation for senior studies; open day, head start and orientation programs; and individual course counselling on a number of occasions with experienced members of the transition team, which also involves the students' parents. Students are supported with careers advice as they transition into, through and out of the college each year. Students have the opportunity to participate in an individual career planning interview, which parents are also invited to attend. This opportunity is available to Years 10, 11 and 12 students and is scheduled for all of our students when they are in Year 12.

Mildura Senior College hosts the annual tertiary information session for both parents and students and operates tertiary institution visits to a select number of Victorian and South Australian universities. The college also has a partnership locally with La Trobe University through the La Trobe school partnership program to assist both staff and students to increase their awareness of local further tertiary education opportunities for students.

Mildura Senior College promotes VET as a pathway to further education, training and employment by linking with industry in a number of fields to regularly engage local employers and link students to furthering their career in the area of VET study. Partnerships are continuing to be developed in this area, specifically through school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, transitioning directly into apprenticeships with local employers and facilitating networks between local employers and current VET teachers to provide employment opportunities for our students.

Mildura Senior College has a number of Koori students, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Clontarf Academy for Indigenous boys is one example of a program at Mildura Senior College targeted at reducing educational disadvantage for students, alongside other programs such as the Koori Girls Academy; VCAL Engage, which is a flexible learning option; VCAL Foundation, which is support for children with disabilities; and specialised English as an additional language support programs. All of these programs facilitate additional opportunities for employment and provide students with support to prepare for and access further education, training and the workforce.

It is a challenge to stay aware of emerging industries and pathways offered as options for students. We try to overcome this challenge by developing and valuing partnerships with our local SuniTAFE and local employers, supporting our staff to engage in professional learning and welcoming opportunities from external organisations to connect with our college.

Mildura Senior College focuses on developing students' academic, social and emotional wellbeing while supporting students to develop skills for future employment opportunities in a range of different fields. We believe that we all have a role to play in adequately preparing our young people for the future, and we acknowledge that the future is ever changing and evolving. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. As a regional college, what are the most difficult challenges you face when providing career development services to students?

Mrs MARR — There are a number of challenges for us at our school. We find it challenging to keep up-to-date with the available opportunities in the industry for students in our local area. It is something that we are continuing to try to develop, partnerships with industry, but it is a challenge for us. We would ideally be more informed about employment pathway opportunities in our local area for our students. Resources are a challenge for us: we have a large number of students and we have got three full-time support staff in that area, so that is a challenge for us. We do recognise that for students in Years 11 and 12 it is vital for them to have career support throughout that time because they leave us and they need support to go into further education or

into the workforce. So we do resource that as we can as a school, but obviously we could do a lot more if we had more resources in that area.

The ever-changing development of industry and technology is hard for us to keep up with as a school. As I mentioned, we have strong partnerships, with La Trobe University coming in and being able to offer us a lot of things through the school partnerships program, and they access our students regularly. Something coordinated with industry would be useful to us as a school, to be able to access a number of students so they are aware of the opportunities that are available to them.

Career advice is a challenge for us in terms of keeping up-to-date due to our area being on the border of multiple states. A lot of our students do go across to South Australia or they go to Melbourne, so we really need to keep up-to-date with lots of different areas, and that is a challenge with the resources that we have as well.

Mr CRISP — With the student plans that you do, how well defined are your students' career plans when they enrol at your college? Could the career advice given to Years 7 to 10 students be improved and if so, how? You can go first, but if the others have got a view, please go after Tracy.

Mrs MARR — We work strongly with our partnership schools to do it. We have a strong transition program where we are talking to Years 9 and 10 students and supporting them from that end. Ideally we find at our school that yes, a number of students do change their subjects when they arrive at our school. They also would benefit from as much career planning as possible. When they are transitioning into our school at Year 11, they really need to choose a pathway at that time. We obviously support the students to keep their options open for them, but a number of our young people do not know what they want to do at that point in time, and that makes it challenging.

All of our partnership schools, including us, are on a system called Career Tools, where the students actually work online on their career interests and pathways, and that then feeds into us. So that has been fantastic, and all of our partnership schools are using that now.

Mr LUITJES — For students in the Years 7 to 10 bracket it is often seen as something that is a long way into the future, so they are not necessarily able to come up with a set plan or idea of what they want to do when they leave school. I think that the current system does work quite well, because they are talking about it and exploring systems, and it is not until Year 10 that they really create more of a plan of where they want to go, which fits in very well with going on to senior college.

Mr MELHEM — So basically you would not want to change much with the current system—talk about it between Years 7 and 10 and try to have a firm idea in Year 10 about what you want to do. Is that what you are saying?

Mr LUITJES — Essentially, yes. Keep it as a topic that is talked about in the earlier years when people are not necessarily so sure, and even when they are not so sure in Year 10—just still having more of a plan, more of a structure around where they want to go.

Mr MELHEM — So how has that worked for you? You are in Year 12 so you are one of the 500 who will be leaving. So how has that worked for you, and what would you change?

Mr LUITJES — What would I change? For me it has not been something that I would say needs changing, because I had an idea of what I wanted to do as a career in Year 7 and that changed as I got to Year 10. Then having the careers interview here sort of solidified that. There was not any point in the system where I felt like, 'This needs a change'. It was fairly coherent I think for me.

Mr MELHEM — So I will keep to my line of questioning there. Did you think you found the right support throughout that journey? Did you know the right person to talk to? Did the school have enough resources to basically accommodate your needs? Please be free about it; there is no sort of ...

Mr LUITJES — For me I feel that it was completely adequate for what I needed.

Mrs FYFFE — If I could follow—Bethany, as a former student did you find the career advice you got at school helpful and sufficient?

Ms SIMPSON — Specifically in Years 11 or 12, or in Years 7 to 10?

Mrs FYFFE — Well, all of it actually, if you would not mind, please.

Ms SIMPSON — I think as we are growing up we are always, ‘What do you want to do when you finish school?’, and while we are in school we have got these preconceived ideas of what careers are going to be. I was very lucky; I always knew I wanted to go into business, so I always knew what I wanted to do, but now with my job I work in all different industries as I monitor apprentices and trainees. What I thought engineering was, say, through school is completely different to when I visit the engineers on site: I am blown away by what they actually do.

Mrs FYFFE — Like scientists, aren’t they?

Ms SIMPSON — Yes, exactly! But it is amazing because we come through school and we have to imagine what these careers are going to be like, and we never get to be able to fully understand it until we are in the job or, studying. Even when you are studying at university, you still do not really know, I suppose, exactly what the job is going to entail. So I suppose it is a tricky situation to get kids on the right path. Yes, I think in Years 7 to 10 just giving kids ideas about career paths and getting them to think about it works pretty well.

Mrs FYFFE — What about Years 11 and 12? Were you pushed to go for a high ATAR to go to university or were you encouraged to also look at VCAL and VET?

Ms SIMPSON — I think we were encouraged to find our interests and then seek advice. That was one of the biggest things I found at senior college and one of the greatest assets. A lot of the teachers have industry experience, so I utilised my teachers a whole lot—asking them what their experiences were like when they were working in the industry. Then you have got Lavina, who is the full-time careers counsellor, who was open pretty much at any time to ask about how to get there. So there were always people who were available to ask in those situations, which was very handy.

Mr MELHEM — Does she always have a line of people waiting to see her? For the people we heard earlier it was common to have a line of people waiting to see the careers advice teacher. Do you experience that problem or do you have easy access?

Ms SIMPSON — Personally, no. When I was there it was always, ‘I’m going to come back in 5 or 10 minutes’, or, ‘I’m just finishing now. I’ll be able to squeeze you in in between’. So I found Lavina to be pretty flexible. Yes, of course there are going to be days when she is packed out, but I found her pretty accessible.

Mr CRISP — I am going to expand a little on engagement with the industry. How easy is it for your school to arrange with local industry to expose students to career options, and how do you think school and industry collaboration could be improved?

Mrs MARR — That is definitely an area which we are trying to engage in and work on as much as possible at the moment. As I mentioned before, it is difficult because it is not currently a coordinated approach. Our universities come to us with scholarships and with opportunities, and they have got lots of different things that they would like to do with our students for the year. We plan that all out, and it fits into our programs very easily. That is challenging then for industry because there is not that coordinated approach for us as a school. We are currently looking to get our VCAL students as much as possible to visit industry sites. Ideally that is what that looks like for us, but it is hard to coordinate it from our point of view with the resources that we have. Do you want to jump in?

Ms SNOXALL — As the VET coordinator, all our VET teachers as part of their compliance process link in with the industry in regard to what they are teaching. We have had forums where we have had local industry coming into our VET classes for us to get a better understanding of their needs and how we can work with them better, but we also get a lot of local industry coming in and speaking at our VET classes.

We do quite a bit of PD through our careers network up here. We are quite active. We do industry tours where we go and visit different industries, which is great because that gives us a person that we can connect with if we need to touch base with them and get information from them. Our VET teachers have participated in industry

work placements as well to make sure that their currency is kept up-to-date. Our engineering teacher, for example, went and did two placements at the end of last year.

We also liaise with all the apprenticeship centres and group training organisations locally, and then our transition-to-work coordinator deals with all of our local employers for work experience and structural workplace learning as well. Again with our VET programs, a lot of those do actually have work placement requirements, so you get to develop really good relationships with local employers, who will regularly take students in that capacity.

Mrs FYFFE — Can I follow up on that? If I could just follow up on the VET teachers, we just mentioned how engineering is not engineering on a machine now. You have got science, where computer technology is very involved, and it is very hard. Is there a difficulty in getting VET teachers who have the skills, who have the knowledge, of today's industry to pass on to students?

Ms SNOXALL — It can be. Certainly we had our integrated technology teacher leave us at the end of last year to go back into the primary school system, which was great for him but not so good for us. We advertised multiple times and we could not find a teacher, so we have ended up employing someone from TAFE to come in and actually teach that program now. It is difficult because they do have specialised skills, and there are requirements now for VET teachers. Apart from having the qualification in the industry that they are teaching, you have to maintain their currency as well. So, yes, there is quite a lot of burden. Being in a remote area, we cannot always attract those teachers, so we are lucky to have the ones that we do.

Mr CRISP — My question will be for Izaak and Bethany. Which career advice activities did you find the most useful, and which were the least useful?

Ms SIMPSON — In my opinion, I always loved it when we had representatives from industry come in and speak to us, so in subjects like accounting and legal studies quite often, perhaps once or twice a term. They were different people that were actually working in a field. So we had a chance to ask them questions—what it was like—and, yes, probably the most useful thing to me was finding out about the job and asking someone that is in it. So that was one of the best things that I got out of it.

Mr LUITJES — Just due to the subjects that I am studying I do not have the same opportunities to look at the people within the industry because a lot of the subjects that I am doing are more in the maths/science-related fields. I do not know what the program is within the school, but we have not had people come in who are chemists or physicists, just because there are not that many in the district. But as for the most valuable activity, I would say it would be the interview with our careers advice team. So with Lavina, who actually then just sort of exposes us. Especially people who are not sure about what they want to do, it exposes them to the courses available and scholarships as well, and all sorts of things.

The least useful for me? The current career action plan set up for me was not entirely useful, and I think a lot of students had difficulty relating to it because it is set up in a system of surveys and you have your résumé but a lot of students there already were working part-time or casual jobs and thinking, 'Well, why do I need to do this now?'

Mrs FYFFE — What career are you planning or hoping for, Izaak?

Mr LUITJES — Specifically, career wise I do not know what I want to do. I know what I want to study at university and beyond there. I always want to do something that interests me, so having a definite plan is not something for me that I would consider doing so much because it is not going to work out really. Having a fixed idea in mind is not what I want to do.

Mrs FYFFE — You mentioned science and physics and that was sort of what was interesting. We had a submission earlier from—I have forgotten the name of the water ...

Mr CRISP — Peter Ebner, Lower Murray Water.

Mrs FYFFE — Yes. And just the amount of science involved in that world was staggering and then the farms, the growing of the almonds and the cotton. It is just a huge, huge world of job opportunities with them. We are needing science and physics degrees.

Mr CRISP — Two, with perhaps Bethany and Izaak's experience. How does the need to relocate for work or further education impact on the career choices you made, or are there any examples of people you were near to where that impacted on their career choices?

Ms SIMPSON — I think for especially us in Mildura and people in regional areas, when we finish school if we have got a career that does require going to university and La Trobe cannot offer it, it is just not a matter of—if we were living in the city, it would just be, you know, you would go to university and still stay at home, whereas we are faced with having to move away entirely. We have got to find accommodation, and it is not just the cost of the university; it is the cost of living and the strain that that puts on families as well. So we are faced with the whole additional challenges that go along with university. Yes. Izaak looks like he wants to ...

Mr LUITJES — I think the problems with distance are as big as the student makes them for themselves. I think people with that kind of barrier—for me I do not see it as an issue, but that is for me personally. I understand that there are students who find it incredibly difficult.

Mr CRISP — Thank you.

Mr MELHEM — I think you all answered the questions and you have been talking about how you have got a good program in place now. You have got, I think, successful former students and it looks like there will be successful current students, but is there anything that you would change in the current system you have in place and the current career advice you are providing? In asking that question, what level of support would you require from governments to make that change — what would you change and what would it take to do it? Or are we just happy?

Mrs MARR — I think there is ideally, obviously we have brought along students today that have strong parental support potentially—they knew what they wanted to do. We have got 940 students. That is not the case for all of our students.

Mr MELHEM — Okay, that is what I want to explore—the other part. This is what I mean about being successful, because obviously you have got really good support at home as well. We have only got a few minutes, but do you mind expanding on that bit?

Mrs MARR — We have a number of students that do not know what they want to do. They are in Year 12. We are doing as much as we can with them now, but next year they are going somewhere. We have got a high number of students that really do not know what they want to do and they also do not have as much support as some of our other students, and that is challenging for students. So we employ Nick, our transition to work coordinator, to actually take students down, to transport them to places, to help them to fill in forms—things that they cannot do on their own. There are a lot of students for whom that is the case, and they need that kind of support, for which ideally we would have more resources for our students.

Mr MELHEM — So it is resources and funding to assist toward that?

Mrs MARR — Yes.

Mr MELHEM — Would you mind taking that question maybe on notice and be specific. If we use your school as a case study for that cohort, what you think you would need in resources to make life easier. We have heard about distance. We have heard about people not able to go, let us say, to Melbourne to explore some options because there is financial disadvantage et cetera. They are not able to do it, so whether or not some sort of assistance can be provided similar to the assistance provided for camps, for example. So if you have got some ideas specifically as a case study, I would be keen to hear it. If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

Mrs MARR — Yes, I can do that.

Mr MELHEM — If you could provide that to the secretariat, that would be good. And you have got success, so how can we make the other cohort be a success as well?

Ms SNOXALL — I was just going to say, as I said before, we have a strong careers network up here, but one of the challenges that we do have being in a remote location is that we get limited buy-in from universities or other training providers. So in Melbourne, if we were part of the careers network down there, they all attend

their meetings and that sort of thing, whereas we have got our local ones but we do not get a lot of information from the likes of Melbourne University, Swinburne, RMIT, those sorts of ones sort of feeding into us. Again I guess if we were located in Melbourne, you can go and attend expos and the different universities and training providers have open days. There are lots of different things we could also be taking students to, and I guess that is a challenge for us—that is, to take students down there is a very expensive exercise. We do have tertiary trips to both Melbourne and Adelaide, as Tracy mentioned before, but that again is not always open to us.

Mr MELHEM — Actually, with the open days, you have just reminded me, you have just triggered something in my mind. That is what helped my son in making a decision because he went to three open days at three different universities, choosing a university and choosing what he wants to do. I agree with you 100 per cent there, which is a real disadvantage for you here because the closest university would be, what, Bendigo?

Ms SNOXALL — Yes, it would be, and we do have quite a few students that do go to Bendigo, but like I said we have students that go to a whole range of different places, which is why we do the tertiary trips, but then you are limited with the amount of students you can take down there. And our VET programs are certainly—and when I talk about our VET programs we offer 16 onsite but we also have students that go to SuniTAFE and down to the Riverside trade training centre as well. Then we have about 15 students doing school-based apprenticeships too, so they are getting a lot of access to industry, and we do a lot of programs with SuniTAFE and La Trobe locally so the students get to experience what those campuses are like, but again I guess we are limited, and it would be great if we could get industry more on board.

So there are a couple of other things that we have been trying. We did this two years ago and we are going to run it again this year, we have called it ACT now—so apprenticeships, careers and trades—so we will be showcasing what we offer at the trade training centres but also having apprenticeship centres come in and talk about school-based apprenticeships and then hopefully get in local industry to run activities and both SuniTAFE and La Trobe, but as you can imagine for the employer who is out there busily working it is probably going to cost him \$1000 or \$2000 in money to have a day off to come and present at that. So it can often be quite difficult to encourage them to participate in things like that as well.

The CHAIR — If there are no further questions, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you for your contributions.

Mrs MARR — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.