

# 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

Ms Debbie Bell, Careers Counsellor,

Mrs Julia Lewis, College VET Coordinator,

Ms Tayla Pahl, Year 12, and

Mr Nicholas Opie, Year 12, St Joseph's College Mildura; and

Ms Nicole Clisby-Weir, Pathways Coordinator, and

Ms Simone Palamara, Year 10, Trinity Lutheran College Mildura.

**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 know you will give us a couple of minutes about your school and things like that, but please, before we start, can you state your name for the Hansard record, and then allow us some time to ask questions.

**Ms BELL** — Good afternoon. I am Debbie Bell from St Joseph’s College Mildura, and I am a Careers Coordinator.

**Mrs LEWIS** — My name is Julia Lewis. I am the VET Coordinator at St Joseph’s College.

**Mr OPIE** — My name is Nicholas Opie, and I am a Year 12 student at St Joseph’s College.

**Ms PAHL** — I am Tayla Pahl. I am a Year 12 student at St Joseph’s College.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — I am Nicole Clisby-Weir.

**Ms PALAMARA** — I am Simone Palamara, a Year 10 student at Trinity Lutheran College Mildura.

**The CHAIR** — Do you want to talk about your school?

**Ms BELL** — Sure. We are a Catholic secondary college from Year 7 through to 12, and our total student population is 785 across three campuses—a Year 8 campus, a VCAL campus and the remaining year levels. A breakdown is that at Year 7 we have 171 students; Year 8, 142; Year 9, 167; Year 10, 142; Year 11, 86; and Year 12, 77. Amongst those numbers there is a cohort of 33 VCAL students. At the foundation level there are 13; intermediate, eight; and senior VCAL, 12. Our college has 120 enrolments across 19 VET programs ranging from certificate II to III. Our college has two full-time career educators—myself and Julia Lewis—with one full-time administrative assistant/support person who is shared amongst the coordination of the VET programs, careers coordination and VET/VCAL/VCE manager.

The careers team are members of the college curriculum committee and are both professional and affiliate members of the Career Industry Council of Australia. We are heavily involved across all year levels and work closely with domain teachers to enrich subject content relevant to careers. As an example of that, we have introduced STEM Day to our college. For two years we have successfully run that; this will be the third year. We also, as another example, attend RE classes at the lower year levels to discuss things such as strengths and attributes.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — As I said, my name is Nicole and I am the pathways coordinator at Trinity Lutheran College. We are a Prep–Year 10 college with approximately 400 students, with 130 of those students being in Year 7 to 10, and our senior classes—our Year 10 classes—range from 30 to 40 students on average. Because of our small size and our small year level numbers we have had to investigate and implement alternate programs to provide our students with opportunities such as VET and VCE programs and provide pathways to employment. Currently approximately a quarter of our Year 10 cohort are undertaking an additional program on top of their standard Year 10 course. We looked fairly significantly at how we could provide the same opportunities for our small number of students as some of the larger schools. We have rethought our timetable. We now structure our timetable so that students that go out to do VET programs or VCE programs do not find it too difficult to do that. We have put in place that they lose electives within the school to be able to do Certificate II programs and VCE courses at Mildura Senior College, our trade training centres and also SuniTAFE.

What we have implemented this year is a designated session for careers-based education for our Year 9s and Year 10s, because what we were finding is that when we were having to take it out of other classes it was a bit haphazard in the way that we placed it and when we could get time to do that. Both our Year 9 and our Year 10 classes have a designated teacher that runs them through pathway programs, options that are available to them, particularly in the lead-up to subject selection for our Year 10s. The plan is that at the end of the two years of this particular program our Year 10 students will walk out with a portfolio that has in it a number of pathways

for career options that are available for them—so the direct pathway to get in, particularly if they are looking at university, and also alternate pathways if their direct pathway does not work out for them.

In addition to that, all of our Year 10 students do undertake a work experience program. We encourage them to make initial contact with employers. We encourage them to do some investigation into what that employer undertakes as part of their work placement, to write letters of application to the employers and to speak to them on the phone and then also to gather information that we would then put into formal contracts. That occurs at the end of the year so we spend quite a bit of time getting our students ready for that too.

**The CHAIR** — We will provide different questions to the students and to your staff, and assist each other. What are the most difficult challenges you face when providing career development services to students?

**Mrs LEWIS** — Purely access to city-based enrichment opportunities, such as short courses, adult lectures held at universities or industry-driven presentations that we have no hope at all of attending, and that makes it really, really difficult. Probably even more important is the very short time frame that is allotted to these. We might get something in the mail today for a session for next Thursday. There is no way that we can even do it. You put it out there, and if the parents wish to, they can take their student to it, but it becomes really, really difficult. The other really tough one is the work experience limitation in the areas of high demand, particularly in allied health, social work, law, medicine and nursing to a great extent. Because there is so much privacy attached to these industries and a limited number of places that we can actually send our students to, it becomes increasingly difficult. So we look at the city or other options, even Adelaide, Melbourne, Bendigo—wherever we can get it—but obviously we are taking spots from those students in those areas. So it becomes increasingly difficult to do that across the board.

The industry has limitations on taking our students mainly because, particularly in nursing, for example, they take on the higher education students; so those who are doing nursing here in Mildura, for example, at La Trobe and/or at SuniTAFE are taking the spots of our Year 10 work experience students. Obviously that is the way that they have to go, so it becomes increasingly difficult. But I will let Deb speak about our nursing as a career day and mini medicine day to help combat that side of it.

**Ms BELL** — In regard to that, we are all members here of the Sunraysia Careers Network, which Linda Snoxall from the secondary college spoke of earlier. We all work very closely together, and we saw as a collective group that this was an issue and thought about how we could ease that burden on industry also.

The Sunraysia Careers Network worked with industry, with the Mildura Base Hospital, and we collaborated on bringing together nursing as a career day, which is offered to the secondary schools. We all get allocated a certain number of students that we can take. It is a day's program, and the students get rotated through several different departments of the hospital; they listen to people speaking about career pathway options as well as 'A day in the life of' hands-on experience. That is an absolutely wonderful resolution to part of that problem. The likes of 'A day in the life of a social worker' has come about for the exact same reason. That was run for the first time last year as a result of the careers network saying, 'These are opportunities that our students are not getting the work experience in. Can we do something together as a community to address that?'. There are many other areas of 'A day in the life of' which I have mentioned throughout the points and which I am sure I might have the opportunity to discuss when I am asked those questions.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — I think what Julia and Deb have both said is pretty much standard across the board for all of the schools. We just look at alternative ways and work together as a group to be able to provide opportunities that otherwise our students may not be able to tap into.

**Mrs FYFFE** — Perhaps I can ask the students a question, the three of you. Have you had enough career advice at the school? Do you believe that you have had enough to help you work out what it is you want to do?

**Ms PALAMARA** — I have only been at the school for two years, but yes, it has been really good, especially this year. Already in just eight weeks, we have had one session each week on career advice, so we have had a number of sessions. Yesterday we had previous students from Trinity, one in Year 11 and one in Year 12, come and talk to us about their transition, which helped us to get a better understanding of what it is going to be like. Last week we had a career person come and talk to us about opportunities. So, yes, we have had great career advice.

**Ms PAHL** — When I was in Year 8, I decided that I wanted to be a nurse and a midwife, and that is still my career choice. I actually went to Debbie Bell and talked to her about what pathways I can take and which subjects I can choose. She has supported me basically since Year 8 until now. It has been really helpful, pointing me in which direction I needed to go.

**Mr OPIE** — I think quite often career advice has to operate in conjunction with a family support network. I think, for example, that the advice I have been given is satisfactory for the career or the field I want to work in, but at the same time there is limited scope to access, for example, some careers days or even things like that in the industry. I have an interest in working in financial services. I think particularly living in the isolated Mildura region, it is most likely that I will be required to relocate to Melbourne or Sydney in order to pursue that career. So overall in the context of secondary school I think the careers advice has been satisfactory about the way we need to engage with the courses and so on.

**Mrs FYFFE** — But the industrial experience is not there?

**Mr OPIE** — I think there is not enough industrial experience; or even for this industry, I think it needs a broader scope. There is not enough, particularly in secondary school, for financial services. There is not a lot of scope to have industry days, work experience, or whatever it might be. Often that happens with university, so in the context of that industry, I think the career advice at St Joseph's College has been satisfactory in saying, 'This is the university degree you would necessarily need to do. This is the pathway you will need in order to get into that industry'. I think that has been satisfactory.

**Mrs FYFFE** — What are your observations of other students who perhaps are not sure about what pathway they want to take? I mean, everybody varies and is at different stages.

**Mr OPIE** — Yes, certainly.

**Mrs FYFFE** — Do you think there is enough advice available in the school for them?

**Mr OPIE** — I think so.

**Mrs FYFFE** — You would have friends who would be stuck about what they are going to do.

**Mr OPIE** — As far as I am aware, I think a lot of it is that you do have to be somewhat self-motivated to explore your options. I think often when people say they do not know what they want to do it is because they have not fully explored the scope of what options and opportunities are out there. I think the careers department does need to have the scope to say, 'These are some options', but at the same time a lot of students need to take the initiative to say, 'I kind of have some idea', or even if they do not have any idea, to at least go out and explore options.

**Mrs FYFFE** — What are your friends saying currently? What are your friends feeling—the ones who may not be as focused as you are? Do you think they feel they have had enough advice?

**Ms PAHL** — Yes, because from Year 10 we have had a class called healthy futures and we had a lot of support in getting, like, a first aid certificate so we can use that in some industries, and also careers advice sessions. That has gone from Years 10 to 12, and recently we had another one where Mrs Bell just talked through what we could do. If some people did not know particularly what they wanted to do, then she would say, 'What subjects interest you?', and then she would pick out a few different types of careers that would suit them and what would interest them for the rest of their lives basically.

**Mrs FYFFE** — Do you think the same? Have your friends had enough career advice, do you think, who may not be as focused?

**Ms PALAMARA** — Yes, I feel they have enough careers advice. Yesterday we were planning out our careers and what we wanted to do, and everyone was on task, knowing what career they wanted to choose. So it is all great, that we have a mindset of what we want to do.

**Mrs FYFFE** — I am a bit envious. I have a son who was 20 before he could focus.

**Mr CRISP** — I think we know that in this area TAFEs and universities present the courses that they are interested in, but on getting industry to present and involvement with the wider industry offerings that are there, what more do you think can be done to offer as wide an industry view on careers as possible?

**Ms BELL** — I have made a couple of dot points under that particular question, Peter. In regard to the STEM day, which I spoke about—which St Joseph’s College ran successfully for the second year last year, so we are going into our third year—the reason that has been successful in bringing industry from Melbourne in particular niche areas, with robotics and so forth, was because I had a healthy budget to be able to do so in that one year and the strong link that we have with the network and the local La Trobe University. I think it is important to utilise the people around us and within the community to help us achieve that, including the Northern Mallee LLEN. They have also been of assistance there.

But other ways that we have spoken about in which industry would assist include being maybe a little bit more open to and a bit more flexible about what work experience looks like. I do not think there are a lot of industry members who would think it could be a day. It would be absolutely wonderful if they could offer a day. It does not necessarily have to be a week. It does not necessarily have to look as though it is the hands-on experience of that work experience, especially in particular areas like horticulture or agriculture, where machinery is used, where those particular industry bodies might say, ‘Oh no, there’s no use coming to us because you can just observe. It’ll be boring for you’.

Well, we would love to work with those industry people to say, ‘Can we help you come up with a plan of a day or two half-days where a student could actually rotate between different positions within the organisation’, and have the ability to interview these people to find out, ‘What university did you go to? What do you like about the job? What would you recommend I do? Is there an opportunity for internships past Year 12?’ That is something that we were discussing just in recent times.

**Mr MELHEM** — Following on from that, basically you are looking at perhaps a structured program where today in some schools students go in and shuffle papers, do some filing and maybe not do meaningful tasks. That could be boring.

**Ms BELL** — No, that is not at all what I am suggesting.

**Mr MELHEM** — So it is not work experience; exactly. So you are looking at, and I am interested in what you are suggesting, structured tasks and an outcome. Is that something you have had any success with yet in putting that together? Is that something we should consider, are you saying to us?

**Ms BELL** — I think the way government could assist with that is maybe offering industries financial assistance if they are going to take a student on for a day with some sort of subsidy and they are recognised as a partner—like we have the tick of approval with the Heart Foundation—some sort of recognition to show within their business that they are on board and engaged with secondary colleges to help with career education. If there is funding available to assist them to do that, that is great, because a lot of the time they will say, ‘It’s too much for us to take time out of our day to babysit’, but babysitting is not what I am suggesting at all.

**Mr MELHEM** — No.

**Ms BELL** — It is working with them to come up with a formal process, which I know that Bendigo Bank does beautifully. They have a wonderful, wonderful work experience program. So I think just actually taking the time to sit with us to say what will work for them and what will work for us—collaboration.

**Mr MELHEM** — Can I just now move on to the career expos. You mentioned them earlier. Would you be preferring something like various schools—public schools, private schools, Catholic schools—state government and industry do a regional career expo, maybe subsidised by all these institutions I have talked about, including universities? Is that something that could be beneficial?

**Ms BELL** — It would be wonderful. It would be, and it has happened in the past. SuniTAFE have done the Grow Your Career day. We have had similar discussions with the LLEN. We would like to bring those people together. It would be good if we could have the funding to bring people from the cities to come, not just focus on our local training providers.

**Mr MELHEM** — That is what I am talking about.

**Ms BELL** — Absolutely; that would be fantastic.

**Mr MELHEM** — So basically city, local, industry, universities, TAFE and even your sister colleges in Melbourne et cetera.

**Mrs LEWIS** — I think that is what we are trying to do with ACT now. We are all part of the group that is putting that together. That is focusing more on the trades areas. That is a really good thing, but if we could have something that is a bit broader and can look at different perspectives, I think that would be really good.

**Mr MELHEM** — Just a quick one with a quick answer. Some submissions recommended the Victorian Government make career advice compulsory for the school curriculum. What is your view on that recommendation?

**Mrs LEWIS** — Absolutely.

**Ms BELL** — Yes, we strongly agree. Any person delivering a career education program we think should have the minimum qualification of a cert IV in career education and, in an ideal world, a cert IV in training and assessment to be able to interpret training packages and to support the staff that are under you as if you are in a management position to be able to deliver those VET programs with the knowledge and skills that are required. We also think that postgraduate studies should align with the professional standards according to the Career Industry Council of Australia for those in supervisory and management roles—100 per cent—and we are actually in discussions right now with the LLEN and SuniTAFE in regard to putting something in place in postgraduate studies and getting some funding, because as a region we think it would be wonderful to have as part of our strategic plan for the Sunraysia Careers Network to be able to say that a certain amount of careers educators are postgraduate qualified.

**Mr MELHEM** — Last question: how can school career advisers better involve parents in their child's career development? Does anyone want to give a quick answer?

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — I think firstly we need to get their interest in it and get parents to understand that things have changed very significantly.

**Mr MELHEM** — Subpoena them to attend ...

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — And that is the problem: getting them to actually physically attend something.

**Mr MELHEM** — a teacher-parent interview.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — Yes.

**Mr MELHEM** — And if they do not turn up, what do you do with them?

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — That is the problem I think we are having across all schools at the moment. We are getting less and less parents coming in to the schools for simple things like parent-teacher interviews, so getting them to come in for information evenings and sessions on career pathways, and what have you, is a major issue for us.

**Mr MELHEM** — We are running out of time, but I would be interested if you are able to go away and think about what worked, what did not work and what suggestions you have, because I think that is something we have not really focused much on, because parents are part of the program. They are part of the responsibility to get your education, at least for the first 12 years. So I would be interested if you have got some ideas about what worked, what did not work and what you suggest. If you could send that to the secretariat, that would be great.

**Mr CRISP** — Julia, I have one for you. It is difficult, and I am going to have to be brief. Several submissions claim that schools place too much emphasis on ATAR scores and university entry. How correct is this assessment, and to what extent do the expectations of parents and the community influence career advice? And should the Victorian Government be doing more to encourage students to consider their pathways?

**Mrs LEWIS** — Obviously as a VET coordinator I have a very vested interest in vocational pathways, but apart from that I strongly believe that in all the years I have been doing career and vocational education—

17 years I have been doing it—I have never really placed a great emphasis on ATAR. Obviously it is a means to an end. Parents have vested views on that—‘My child must go to university; therefore they must have an ATAR and it must be a good ATAR to get them where they need to go’. But what our role is is to get them to view the broader field and look at what vocational pathways there are there for students. So a prime example, and even though Tayla is not one, is nursing. SuniTAFE offer allied health. There is a VET in Schools program—or the new acronym. That is a fantastic pathway for our students to follow into nursing, and it is a direct pathway into the diploma of nursing at SuniTAFE.

Getting parents to look at the value of those vocational programs is a work in progress. It is slowly changing, and I have noticed that particularly over the last maybe two or three years where parents are realising that the ATAR is not the be-all and end-all. With the universities now looking at different selection modes and not necessarily using the ATAR, that is opening up a whole range of different pathways to get where you need to go. Personally I think that is really good. I think parents are looking at that maybe a bit more broadly. Maybe their eyes are open a bit more and they are not just tunnel visioned on getting a 99.95 ATAR, which is impossible. With that, I hope I have answered your question, Peter.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — Can I add to that, Peter. What we are seeing in Year 7 to 10 schools is basically we have got three streams of students now that leave Year 10 and go into senior secondary. We have got a group of students who have already worked out that they definitely want to go to uni or they want to keep that option open. They are the ones that are working for the ATAR.

We have got another group of students that know they want to get a VCE certificate but are pretty sure they do not want to go to uni—they want to go out and find full-time employment, but they do not want to do a VCAL program, because they still want the ability to choose their subjects. That group of students I think is a growing group of students that we are probably not catering for as well as we could and as we hopefully will in the future. And then we have got a group of students who know definitely that they want to go into some type of trade. They are the students that go into the VCAL program. It is that middle group of students that can be the issue because, with the push for an ATAR score, it means that automatically that group of students, if they do not want to get an ATAR score, they do not want to do the exam, and the exam at the end is what the big push can be seen to be for.

**Mr CRISP** — You used the term ‘stream’.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — I do not mean streaming in that way; I just mean that with the way students are nowadays, there are not two clear paths they need to take anymore; there is a multitude of parts. They do not necessarily know what they want to do, but they know they definitely do not want to go to university.

**Mr CRISP** — But you are providing them with guidance and options.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — That is right, yes. And knowing that, you have got a group of students that may not be doing things like handing work in on time, but they are handing work in because all they are looking at is, ‘I want a satisfactory outcome for this; I don’t necessarily want a particular grade mark or ATAR subject score for it’. I think that is the group of students that are kind of in the middle that are ...

**Mr MELHEM** — They have not made their mind up on what they are going to be.

**Ms CLISBY-WEIR** — That is right, yes. So you want to keep their options open, but they know that they do not want to do VCAL, just because that then says they have got three or four subjects they have to do; it means they have not got those options.

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

**Witnesses withdrew.**