

TRANSCRIPT

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Mildura — 22 March 2018

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Mr Peter Crisp

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Ms Jane Garrett

Mr Cesar Melhem

Witness

Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network.

The CHAIR — Good morning. First of all, thank you for coming. Welcome to the public hearing for the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee 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 that you can correct any typographical errors. I would like to invite you to make a statement, allowing some time for asking questions. Please state your name for the Hansard record. Thank you very much.

Mr BROADHEAD — Thank you very much for the opportunity. My name is Ron Broadhead, and I am the Executive Officer of the Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network. My introductory statement is to actually try and set the scene, so there are some documents that I wish to briefly touch on, to try and explain to you and paint a picture around this region because we are thrilled that your Committee has actually come to Mildura to take deputations and to make comment. Thank you for coming here.

The first document you see is our strategic plan for our organisation. It gives you some idea as to what our board and members see as important for the role of Northern Mallee LLEN. The next document is called 'Transitions and Pathways (Secondary): Northern Mallee'. I thought I would paint the picture around the unique situation that happens in our region for young people and their schooling, with a focus on secondary schools. What this diagram endeavours to do is explain to you that we have a range of 7–10 or P–10 schools—government and independent schools—who have students from either primary through to 10 or Year 7 to 10. Then most students would transition into Mildura Senior College, which is a Year 11–12 school. The reason that model was developed a number of years ago was to enable students to access the wide variety of VCE options that no one school—individual smaller school—could offer. That is why that model was established.

Then we have a range of 7–12 schools. We have St Joseph's College, a Catholic school, and Red Cliffs Secondary College. Then in our more outlying regions, Werrimull, Murrayville, Robinvale and Ouyen are typically P–12 schools. That mix of P–12, 7–10 and senior college is a unique structure for this region and I am sure it provides some challenges and some special implications around providing careers advice and pathways. That is why I have put that to you, so that you are aware of what the structures are here. The table there gives you an indication of the number of students at each year level, so a total of about 4500 students from 7 to 12 in our district.

The next document, the A3-sized sheet, is to put you in the picture and the destinations. If we are going to provide careers advice and pathways, where are our students actually going at this point? We have been tracking the On Track data for a number of years and this chart is an analysis of that. You will see across the categories there 'Bachelor degree'. This is Year 12 completers; roughly 500 students complete Year 12 across the secondary schools in our district. You can see that above 'Bachelor degree' there is a trend upwards, that a greater number of young people are choosing to go to university. 'Certificate IV and above' is declining in terms of the proportion of students that complete Year 12. Of those 500, these are the percentages of where they go. 'Certificate I–III' has shown a slight increase. Interestingly, 'Apprenticeship' is a very strong outcome for this region, where almost 10 per cent of students who complete Year 12 go to apprenticeships. The state average is about 5 per cent, so we are about double the percentage of kids from Year 12 going to apprenticeships, which is a positive thing. Traineeships are declining. We understand that part of the reason for that is the funding arrangements to support trainees have changed over the years, so less employers are inclined to take on trainees because of those declining incentives.

We also typically have a high number of young people who defer—that is, they complete their Year 12, take a gap year and then decide what to do. I will come back to that point. 'Employed full time': alarmingly, the percentage of Year 12 students that have completed and going into full-time employment is declining. That is consistent with the youth data since the global financial crisis. Youth unemployment has gone up and this sort of indicates locally that that is a factor. However, part-time employment has trended upwards, and also 'Looking for work' has trended upwards.

So that is a bit of a snapshot of where our Year 12 completers are going. Around 70 per cent of students complete Year 12, 30 per cent do not. The figures for the students who leave early—that is, do not complete Year 12—the sample is very small, so the data is not reliable enough to talk about.

I want to point out one thing, though. You will see under 'Bachelor degree' that because we have such a high level of deferral we know from previous studies done by the LLEN network and the University of Melbourne

that about seven out of 10 students who defer go to university in the year following. You will see in the last column there is an adjusted column. So if you add together those who go to university straight after Year 12 plus the ones that go after taking a year off, our actual percentage of students from that cohort going to university is about 47 per cent. So we are only about 12 percentage points behind the state on that scale.

The question I wish to raise for you is: is there a correct percentage and what should be the percentage? Should we have more and more young people going to university? As you will hear later, there are some wonderful vocational opportunities locally, so do career education and advisors understand that, and provide the right advice to parents and students?

The last document in my introduction is data extracted from the Victorian Skills Commissioner report, which is the Mallee regional skills demand profile. It is an indication of the types of industries and where the projected growth of jobs will be in the future. So that is right on our doorstep.

The CHAIR — Good. Thank you. How does the Northern Mallee LLEN work with schools and careers advisers to optimise education and transition outcomes for students?

Mr BROADHEAD — The first thing I can say is that the previous two people who were here are part of the Sunraysia Careers Network. We are part of that network and work closely with careers teachers, VET coordinators, and transition and pathway coordinators. We work regularly with them by providing this sort of information and by looking at developing strategic partnerships to address gaps that the Northern Mallee LLEN identifies. We encourage them to be part of partnerships to take actions to address issues relating to education and training.

I guess one of the overall statements, and you have heard this a lot but I will repeat it, is that I use the word ‘figuratively’ rather than an accurate description. Schools are drowning in the responsibilities placed on them. Parents, society, employers—everybody expects schools to do 1000 per cent more. The ‘crowded curriculum’ are words that are used, and we think that is happening. Not only do they have to deliver the Victorian education curriculum but we have school camps, we have arts camps, we have trips overseas to visit other schools, we have Safe Schools policies, programs against bullying, respectful relationships programs, teaching kids to swim, teaching kids to drive—schools are expected to do lots, lots more.

The reason I make that point is that when we are trying to develop partnerships with schools you are competing against all of these other things that schools are being required, demanded or requested to do, so to get their attention and their commitment to spend time on a partnership is very competitive, if I can put it that way. I do not think that anybody has a solution to that; it is just what society is. But I think there are some strategic ways that that can be addressed. Those would be the points that I would make on that question.

The CHAIR — And regional challenges—as a regional LLEN what are some of the challenges you face, and what support or tools would help you to provide better services to the community?

Mr BROADHEAD — Apart from those challenges that I just outlined I think our next opportunity rather than challenge is our partnership with the Victorian Skills Commissioner’s office and the information and opportunities that exist for young people right in their own region, and how we communicate, work with and build partnerships between employers, schools, students and parents to recognise this opportunity and to perhaps even change some of the structures and ways that schools do things, so that these opportunities are realised. That is probably our largest opportunity and challenge at the moment.

Mr CRISP — In changing those structures, I am interested in that 47 per cent going to uni, because I think our secondary schools are viewed very much as production warehouses for the university system. In working out how we change I would like you to expand and comment as to whether that 47 per cent going to uni or higher is appropriate for this region with its future?

Mr BROADHEAD — That is a good question. It is not for me to judge whether it is appropriate. What we are looking at is parents of young people—and mind you, a young person does not wake up at Year 9 and automatically decide ‘There’s my career’. We recognise that young people start to formulate ideas at upper primary school, through secondary school and, lo and behold, there are probably 28-year-olds still at university who do not know what they want to do. It is a gradual process of maturation and development, so we need to

have a system that caters for people, as they go through that process, to be able to access information and advice to make decisions.

So in answer to your question I think we would believe that the balance between the information and community understanding, support and aspirations is highly geared towards every student going to university. We do not think that is healthy. Given that the Victorian Skills Commission is pointing a light towards the vocational opportunities for very good quality technical well-paid jobs, then how do we strike a balance? The challenge is how we get that information to parents, students and schools such that they can make an informed decision about the pathway they want to pursue, and I think the marketplace may play a role in correcting that. In some graduate markets there is oversupply of graduates already, and so our students are aware if they undertake a degree in that area with a HECS debt and no job at the end of it what the outcome of that is for the student compared to a vocational pathway through to employment and a future and maybe going to university later on in life. It does not mean ‘Don’t go to university’; it just means, ‘What’s the appropriate time?’.

The last point I make there would be that the economic opportunity for this region that has been identified through the growth, Mr Melhem, clearly identified that food and fibre is a key industry right across Australia and very much the backbone of this community, and if we do not capture that opportunity and convert it into jobs and employment and grow the industries in this region, then the whole of our region has lost out on an opportunity. Our young people can play a very important role in that, so we feel it is very important to get that message through to them and then let them make the choice.

Mr MELHEM — Can you take us through the role—you touched earlier on your role, or the LLEN role—and then can you expand a bit about what reforms can be done to get a better result, working between your organisation, schools, community and industries? Can you take us through that bridge and what reforms you would like to see that the Victorian Government can do to achieve the aim we are all actually looking for? I know it is a long question.

Mr BROADHEAD — In large part we have already commenced that work with the skills commission and the schools, having a couple of meetings with them, but it is very early days. One of the things we would like to establish and are working towards is inviting schools to be part of a roundtable, and that roundtable would involve all principals of schools, the key VET providers, La Trobe University and industry, to look at the picture that we have painted, because schools, being self-managed, only look at themselves; they are not necessarily looking at the big picture or the medium picture.

We are trying to create that helicopter view around what is happening. So if we can get everybody on board to look, share that view and see where the opportunities are, then you can strike partnerships between industry and schools around what are the ways industry can support schools and parents. It is easy to sit back and say we should do A, B, C and D, but I think part of the process is really bringing the players together, because if there is a will and a commitment by industry and schools to work together ...

Mr MELHEM — How can you make that happen? What is the trick? Or have you got one?

Mr BROADHEAD — Part of it is to—if I might smilingly say—support Northern Mallee to bring the partnerships together, which we are working hard on, and we understand we have your support. But it is like many things in a rural community such as ours: if the key players can see the reason and the rationale and the purpose, and it is a win-win, then I think you get commitment.

Mr MELHEM — Funding? Could the funding play a role?

Mr BROADHEAD — You cannot do this without resources.

Mr MELHEM — You can actually say, ‘It’s part of your funding arrangement. That’s one of your key performance indicators. And by the way, we might dip in something to make that happen’. Because the example you have just given, which is probably not uncommon, is that for school principals their main aim is to look after how their particular school performs and outcomes, so they are focused too much on ATAR, in my view, which I think is nonsense. How we can maintain that I think is important, because I want to get the best outcome possible. But then how do you apply that in a reasonable sense, a state sense, to these goals and how do we make sure these things happen?

Mr BROADHEAD — I understand your question. There is a role for government, and you are providing advice and recommendations. How can you set the framework and the resources to be available to communities such as ours to actively work together to produce outcomes, which they are measured by?

Mr MELHEM — You can take that on notice if you want.

Mr BROADHEAD — So that is a partnership between government and community to do that.

Mr MELHEM — If you specifically want to tell us some practical way of doing it, if you want to provide that to the secretariat, it would be great.

Mr BROADHEAD — I guess it is early days in terms of what we are trying to do to develop that understanding and partnership, but I am confident that we can do that and I am more than happy to provide further advice about the strategies we are using and what works and what does not work.

Mr MELHEM — Last question from me: what are some examples of successful programs that have improved career outcomes for your students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Mr BROADHEAD — An example I like to give is our organisation—I will table this document called *Journey to Work*—worked with Chaffey Secondary College to identify an issue around transition and pathways, work experience, and they identified a group of 15 CALD, culturally and linguistically diverse, students. Mainly they were of Middle Eastern background and also South Pacific Islanders who struggled to get work experience. So we applied to the Victorian Multicultural Commission for a small amount of money to develop this program, and essentially what it was was a three-day industry visit. We took these students plus three teachers to a wide range of industries. They are all listed in that document; I will not name them. Then at the end the students formulated a report, which they presented back to the school, to their parents, to their peers and to us.

The outcome of that was the students were blown away by the opportunities in their own district. They had no knowledge of what is happening in horticulture, agriculture, transport, logistics, solar energy, manufacturing and automotives. If there is a statement that sums up where students are at: they do not know what they do not know. If that is a theme, I think we could get through to people. The more we get young people out looking and seeing and understanding what is happening, then that is part of the broader picture of careers development. That is an example of a type of program that can be mounted quite readily. It impacted significantly on those 15 young people—and the teachers, mind you, they were blown away. They were very surprised at the sorts of opportunities existing in their own community. I think that is an example of the sorts of things that can be done.

Mrs FYFFE — If I can just build on that. With students who for various reasons have not attended school very much, who have been anti-school, what past or even current programs have you come across that have actually worked to help to bring them up to the state that you were just talking about? It is not the linguistic background in many situations; often it is an inability. So what has been working?

Mr BROADHEAD — I can point to two major partnerships we have been part of. One is called flexible learning options, which has been in existence in this region since 2012. In that partnership Northern Mallee LLEN, together with schools and support agencies—drug and alcohol, mental health and all these agencies—came up with flexible learning options in schools, which is a program that five schools offer for students who are just about to walk out of the door, ready to disengage. That program is a combination of some mainstream subjects plus flexible learning options. It might be project work in the community, it might be options around what their interests are. The results of that, which we track because we are very interested in outcomes, is that on average 75 per cent of the students who are in the FLO in Schools program are still engaged in education in the year following. Mind you, these are kids who are ready to walk out of the school door.

Mrs FYFFE — Yes, I understand.

Mr BROADHEAD — It is that successful. On the other hand there is FLO Connect, which is aimed at students who have already dropped out of school—12 to 18 year olds. That program commenced in 2014, and that is achieving something like 80 per cent of the young people. So there would be over 260 who have gone through that program, and 80 per cent are still in education and training one year following. That program is around bringing them back in in an alternative education setting run by Red Cliffs Secondary College and Mildura Rural City Council. It is a different style of schooling. It is to build their confidence and self-esteem

and address their social and emotional wellbeing issues, to then get back into school, into TAFE and into employment. Probably the biggest success there was a young lass who went from FLO Connect into the La Trobe Uni Tertiary Enabling program and is now studying to be a primary teacher at La Trobe University. So they are some examples of programs.

Another funded program that Northern Mallee LLEN has a contract with the Department of Education and Training for is Navigator. There are six pilot sites across Victoria, and we are one. It is to work with schools to identify young people with less than 30 per cent attendance, to provide them with wraparound support, develop an education plan and support them to get back into school. It is early days yet, but we are having some success in getting those young people back into school.

Mrs FYFFE — That is good to hear.

Mr CRISP — Ron, we heard earlier that there is a shortage of teachers for VET and VCAL. In an earlier response you talked about the gap between what the real economy has in opportunities and what is perceived within our schools. I am concerned that we are short of VET and VCAL teachers and what impact that might be having on students' view of the world.

Mr BROADHEAD — It is a problem. Is it a significant problem that cannot be overcome? No. I think it can be overcome, because we talk about partnerships. If a secondary schools cannot source a VET teacher, perhaps there should be partnerships with the local TAFE that have qualified people. There may be industrial issues around one teaching the other, so overcoming those sorts of things is important.

I think more importantly the key question is identifying what are the VET courses that should be run in our district in line with these opportunities so we get better alignment between what schools can offer and enabling young students and parents to realise these opportunities. Having done that, what are the clear pathways through secondary school to TAFEs and to other RTOs leading to employment? That is the key question around aligning all those, and that is where a roundtable of employers, schools and VET providers can start to look at the more strategic bigger pictures issues of how we do this. I think that would be my response to the VET teacher issue.

Mr CRISP — Can I ask you to put one more statistic on the record for us? I know you have done work on how we marry the Victorian Skills Commission future labour demand with the number of school leavers we have. Even in a perfect world are there enough school leavers to fill those positions? Are we short or are we oversupplied?

Mr BROADHEAD — In relation to the first part of your question I suggest that work is now underway. How do we marry that? It is not something that is imposed from outside. We have got to get all the players together to work to do that. We can control that as a community. The supply of young people, as you saw from our figures, if nearly 50 per cent go off to university, that leaves 50 per cent remaining to do apprenticeships, traineeships and training. That will not be the total supply of labour to the market, but it is a good start.

I think the message that has come through the meetings with employers is that the opportunity exists to grow your own talent. You would have heard the results of the survey, but employers are saying, 'If we're going to get the skills we need in the future, then we must work with schools', so there is an imperative to do that. I think the ducks are lining up in that case.

If I could make one last point, there is a sheet called 'Resources' available to schools to support careers education activities, and it is the last document in your pack. Our analysis of the immediate resources available to schools right now is that there is a careers curriculum framework that has been around for some time and that identifies what schools should be doing in terms of developing young people through Years 7 to 12. That is the careers curriculum framework.

We have careers advisers, pathway transitions coordinators, VET coordinators and year-level coordinators all providing advice to students. In fact every teacher is a careers teacher. Managed individual ...

Mr MELHEM — Hang on—are they, or are they supposed to be?

Mr BROADHEAD — In a general sense—in a broad sense—every teacher actually can have a role. It is not in their position description.

Mrs FYFFE — But isn't that difficult when you have a number of teachers—and this is not a criticism of teachers—that have gone from school to university to school and may not be aware of what is out there?

Mr BROADHEAD — Correct. I know that is a generalisation—there are different examples where there are some teachers who do get into industry—but as a whole that would be a major thrust.

Then we have workplace learning opportunities and work experience. We have talked about work experience. That is really work observation for Year 10 students because, as was alluded to by previous presenters, the regulatory requirements mean that during work experience you cannot touch or do a lot because of the risk. Therefore when we get to structured work placement it is a significant opportunity.

We have got roughly 1000 students doing a VET course. That means they are eligible to do structured work placement, but it is not compulsory. So about a third of the students in our district that do VET actually do a placement. Why can't we make that 50 per cent, 60 per cent or 70 per cent? Because employers are saying, 'If a student comes to me with a certificate and they haven't done a work placement, they're not worth anything'. So clearly structured work placement is a major component. School-based apprenticeships and traineeships are currently available.

Quickly touching on the rest, EPiCC is a resource for parents—a website. Parents as Career Transition Support is a mechanism where schools can run workshops for parents around equipping them with the skills to work with their sons and daughters about planning their future career. You will see the other items there. I will not read them out. The point I wish to make is that all these are available now. The question is: to what extent are they implemented and how effective are they?

If I was, euphemistically, the CEO of a school rather than the principal, I would adopt the approach—given I had time, and I just described that I do not have time, but I now do as CEO—of asking: what mechanisms do I have to evaluate the effectiveness of the career curriculum framework in my school, how often do I assess the effectiveness and impact of my careers pathway adviser and transition people, and is my managing individual pathways program working and successful? I can ask all these questions around all these resources.

I think one of the issues that I would like to leave with you is—at the risk of creating more work for school principals, but it is really important—these are the existing resources, so how effective are they and what impact do they have before you even add to the resources that you might be considering? That would be a suggestion of mine.

Mr MELHEM — So it should be part of their KPIs.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the Committee I thank you for your submission and your time.

Mr BROADHEAD — Thank you very much for the opportunity to meet with you, and good luck with your deliberations.

Witness withdrew.