

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

Mr Graeme Forrester, Executive Principal, and

Ms Sara Wrate, Transition and Pathways Advisor, Chaffey Secondary College;

Mr David Browne, Principal, and

Mrs Amanda Boulton, Pathways Coordinator, Red Cliffs Secondary College;

Mr Graeme Cupper, Principal, and

Mr Andrew Willison, Careers Coordinator, Merbein P-10 College; and

Mrs Jackie Horkings, Careers and Pathways Adviser, Irymple Secondary College.

The CHAIR — Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for coming. Welcome to the public hearing of 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, and we will provide a proof version of the transcript so you can correct any typographical errors.

I know you have been told to make a 5-minute statement, but you have to allow us some time to ask questions; that is the purpose of the Committee. So if you want to state your names and then make a 2-minute statement instead of a 5-minute one, we would appreciate that.

Mrs HORKINGS — My name is Jackie Horkings from Irymple Secondary College. We are a Years 7–10 college with about 500 students, low SES. Career advice is delivered at our school. In Years 7, 8 and 9 they generally do a six-week unit and they have either six or seven 48-minute sessions during that time. Year 7s do future work skills needed and things like that, and entrepreneurship. Year 8s do a thing called the real game, where they are given a job and they have to try to budget according to that job—buy a house, pay rent and do things like that. Year 9s generally do a unit on résumés and job application interview skills, but they are having trouble fitting that into the curriculum now with the new curriculum in Year 9. In Year 10 we have three sessions a fortnight of 48 minutes for the whole year, where students do all sorts of transition, work experience, job markets, labour market, OH&S and subject selection.

We do a whole range of career activities with local employers, lots of stuff with the Sunraysia Careers Network and any visiting guests coming through. We usually take on board whatever is offered, being so far away. We have a school partnership with La Trobe University. We receive funding from them, and we have a lot of interaction with them, as well as with Monash University. Mildura Secondary College do a lot of transition with us.

Mr CUPPER — I am Graeme Cupper from Merbein P–10 College. We are a prep through to Year 10 school, which is unique in this area. We have about 209 primary students and 463 secondary students, so 672 in total. We have 90 Koori students enrolled at our school. We have a full range of students, from students requiring a lot of support right through to students who are successful academically, so our job as a government school is to provide pathways and support for all of those students.

We are probably similar to Irymple in terms of our curriculum. There may be some variations that Andrew Willison, our careers adviser, will probably elaborate a bit on at some point, but all of the MIPs, career action plans, counselling and transition are integrated into our school. We have partnership with the Mildura Trade Training Centre consortium through things like days for Year 9 students mainly, Northern Mallee LLEN and La Trobe University. We have a partnership for Years 7 to 9 students, exposing them to tertiary education, and Melbourne University particularly with Indigenous kids, giving them a chance to open their eyes to horizons through their Indigenous excellence program, including a summer school residential program. As Jackie mentioned before we have extensive collaboration with Mildura Secondary College in terms of transition and subject selection.

Our primary children tend to do more informal career planning with awareness. In their reading programs they may read a story about a policeman or a fireman, and they get speakers in and visit the community—aged care, fire stations and those sorts of things—to get a sense of how our community works. That is a factor that we have as a P–10 school to consider as well.

Mr BROWNE — We are a Years 7–12 government school, and currently we have 625 students at our school. We also have an alternative education setting called FLO Connect, which is located in Mildura. We have approximately 50 young people at that campus. Our careers program is very similar to those outlined by the two previous schools. We have similar partnerships with the universities and service providers. One additional partnership that we do have is with John Monash Science School in Melbourne, which provides some unique opportunities for students with an interest in science to extend and expand their knowledge and capabilities and open up possible career paths in that direction.

We have 50 Koori students at our school at this point in time, at the Red Cliffs campus, and approximately 25 at the FLO Connect campus. Being a 7–12 school we have some additional opportunities with our career programs—to extend it over Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 and opportunities for tertiary visits. We alternate each year between the Melbourne unis and the Adelaide unis so students have the opportunity to see the opportunities that

are available to them there, as well as partnerships with La Trobe and Monash universities. Is there anything you want to add at this point, Amanda?

Mrs BOULTON — In terms of our curriculum it is embedded from 7 to 12 within the curriculum, and we do that through using the HUMSS program to cater for the 7 to 9 cohort, and then with the 10s to 12s it tends to be an extension of things that they are doing within the school. Again, we have got opportunity to access programs like VET through the trade training centre and the partnership programs with the universities and that sort of thing, which is a constant part of the program at Red Cliffs for those students in careers.

Mr FORRESTER — My name is Graeme Forrester, Principal at Chaffey Secondary College in town here. Sara Wrate, who you have already spoken to today, is the lead teacher ...

The CHAIR — Yes, we met Sara before.

Mr FORRESTER — Yes, she looks after our careers area. I am only new to the school, so I can give you an overview of the school, and I think if there is anything specific to careers at the moment we will hand over to Sara and she can certainly expand on that. We are a 7 to 10 school with an enrolment of about 440 students this year. We have got a very high SFO in terms of disadvantage in our school. About a quarter of our students are Koori students. We have a Clontarf academy and a Koori girls academy in recognition of that and also to put extra supports into place for our Koori community.

As well as that we have a very diverse mix of students. We have students from Tonga, Samoa, Turkey and Afghanistan, so we have a large cultural mix, probably not unlike most of Australia, really. We deliver a program at 7 to 10, which is a standard program in terms of the Victorian curriculum. We are lucky enough to be able to offer some VET, VCAL and VCE as well. Our students have access not only to programs within our school but they can also access the trade training centre next door at Mildura Senior College, so we have a number of students who will go over there and include that as part of their course at Year 10 and then carrying that on through to Year 11. So there are opportunities there for our kids locally to get involved with some of those things.

We run dedicated MIPs classes. Last year we ran it through 7 to 10. MIPs classes look at goal setting and career action plans. At Year 10 it gets ramped up a little bit more to include job preparation, interview preparation and then also career and study paths as kids go through. Most of our students from Year 10 would transition through to the senior campus, and some would make their way to TAFE.

The CHAIR — My question will be to all of you and you can either share it or one can answer on behalf of you all. What are the most difficult challenges you face when providing career development services to students?

Mrs HORKINGS — I think obviously isolation and distance from Melbourne and the opportunities that students can have down there. I get a weekly publication from a careers site, and it shows all the different things that kids can do. After school there is this you can go to—for students as well as for teachers—for personal development. There are so many different things on that you could go to if you are close by. So that is always one of our greatest problems, I believe.

Mr BROWNE — I think one of the biggest challenges is prioritising time in a crowded curriculum. Obviously careers training and information is vitally important, as is every other subject area. It comes down to a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. That is probably the biggest challenge.

Mr MELHEM — Chair, can I follow up on that issue?

The CHAIR — I am waiting for it.

Mr MELHEM — And the kids are listening in the background. So there are 12 years of education with the hope of leading to a job—putting university on top of that for some kids. What would you drop from the current curriculum—or would you—to give better access to career advice so we can deliver that job? Do you drop anything? What would you do differently, because that to me I think is very essential to make sure that when you finish Year 12 if you do not go to university, you get a job, and even after university you get a job. So what would you change to maximise that output?

Mr BROWNE — The biggest challenge with that is it is a different answer for every student in the fact that in order to be providing as personalised an education program for the best opportunity for each individual student it may be a different answer for each student. If a student had a particular interest, for example, in physiotherapy or sports sciences, you would be wanting to maximise their opportunities in health, PE, physics and possibly chemistry or biology, whereas for another student that time may be better used in another subject area. So it is very, very difficult to make a clear call and say, ‘Okay, we’re going to drop or take time away from subject X in order to be able to fit something else in’. That is the challenge. That is where everything has equal importance. Somewhere a hard decision has to be made.

Mr MELHEM — So what infrastructure or a suite of things would you put in place to basically accommodate that? Other than an example where you might say, ‘Okay, you want to do physiotherapy’. Let’s pick a popular subject that people were talking about recently—that we have too many lawyers, for example. Too many people are doing law but not many of them are actually becoming lawyers. Do we then say, ‘Okay, that’s what you want to do, but have you thought about X, Y, Z?’ What infrastructure can we put in place to allow the general direction and also the individual? Money is probably one, but in your experience—you are the experts—what would you suggest for us to do differently?

Ms WRATE — It links in with what you are asking. One of the biggest challenges I have seen over the last probably 10 years that I have been in a role of this type is having the skilled staff across the curriculum to deliver careers advice or careers education throughout the curriculum so that careers education can be integrated every subject. By doing that, that then takes the pressure off one person in the school, and that is a big challenge—to take the pressure off the careers adviser, to be that sole person giving the advice, and to spread that across the curriculum where you have different expertise in different areas, whether it be science or humanities, technology going into VET-type pathways, where then if we share that expertise, the hope would be to then have a lot more exposure for students to different pathway options.

Mr CRISP — Work experience—what are the challenges that you face in running work experience programs? And mixed up with that, of course, is how can the Victorian Government improve students’ access to work experience, particularly for regional students?

Mrs BOULTON — Our biggest challenge with work experience is finding enough employers that are willing to host students in the areas that they want to work in. For example, every year we have a lot more students that would like to try health than we have professionals that are willing to take students in those areas. That is across a number of areas that students are interested in locally—we just do not have enough employers to host them.

Mr MELHEM — And that is a growth sector.

Mrs HORKINGS — One of the reasons I believe is that they host a lot of the university students, so the work experience students do not get much of a look-in because they are hosting university students and doctors and nurses who are training. So the smaller fish down the bottom do not get a chance.

Mr BROWNE — Just one other point on that point is the challenges of making work experience a valid and worthwhile experience for the young person as opposed to, I suppose, a watch and learn due to restrictions that are valued restrictions from an occupational health and safety perspective, but sometimes it becomes a case of the young person sitting and watching, and it becomes ...

Mr CRISP — Boring.

Mr BROWNE — Well, yes, a boring experience.

Mrs FYFFE — It is boring for the students but it is also time-consuming for the staff and the business.

Mr BROWNE — Yes. So once again it is finding that balance between a valid, interesting experience and providing a safe workplace for an untrained young person.

Mr CRISP — What has to change?

Ms WRATE — Again I will link it to the point I am making. Here we are very isolated, and again, isolation is a problem with work experience. It limits employers from being inundated with numerous phone calls from

students in a week or a month asking for placements. It is a real challenge to try to support those employers and to support their frustration and to try to put a collaborative approach in place. You have heard from the network perspective this morning how we have attempted to collaborate on a lot of things. Work experience is a challenge, and we have as a network really tried to explore avenues to change in the last few years, to support employers to take up work experience in our area, because we do not want to lose those employers.

There has been a rollout of the structured workplace learning portal over the last few years, where we have attempted at times to come up with something similar to that portal that employers come to, where they put their interests and how many positions they can have in a work experience across the year, that students and schools can log into to look at that interest.

Mrs FYFFE — First of all, thank you all for giving up your time to come here. This Committee is very serious about this inquiry. Members who could not come are also very interested in it. We self-referenced, and we really want to produce a report so whoever is in government can implement some of the recommendations in the future. So if you have anything after today, please feel free to feed it through to our secretariat.

One thing that is coming through from what I am hearing now is that you have got students who, perhaps because of family backgrounds or their own self-esteem, have low career expectations. You have got schools that have an ambition that a large number of students will do very well and will go to university, because naturally that is taken as a reflection of your teaching skills. How can you balance that within this crowded curriculum in bringing students' aspirations up—and their low expectations—and still continue with those that you feel should be going to university? I do not know if there is an answer.

Mrs HORKINGS — As teachers I believe in all ways we try to increase students' aspirations as much as possible, and try to get the idea through that 'A student like you can go to university or can get a job in different places'. I think that is almost our everyday tough thing that we try to do. I think connections with places like La Trobe University have been really good for doing that, and showing that this is a place where they can go and you can get a job and 'A student like you does not have to be rich or poor; you can go further and you have got a place locally'. Perhaps more things in occupations generally a little bit later on when they get the chance to do VET subjects, when they get to see other careers, but I think the exploration of what we have in Mildura could be improved—as in the connections with industry around this. There is a lot of talk about going to university; there is probably less talk about getting a job.

Mrs FYFFE — So if a comment was made that roughly 50 per cent go to university and the emphasis within the schools is put on that 50 per cent to the disadvantage of those who do not, you would dispute?

Mrs HORKINGS — I don't know that it is quite like that. You try and get all students to aspire to whatever they want to do, but there is lots of opportunity to do VET subjects and careers, but there is probably not as much link in the curriculum to what is in the local environment, as in we have got a big horticultural influence in Mildura, yet very few students choose agricultural or horticultural studies, for whatever reasons. Whether they have been told, 'I don't want to work on a block anymore', or whatever at home, I am not sure, but they are not choosing those subjects.

Mr CUPPER — I think, as a P-10 school we are pretty mindful that early years are really important. This is a bit of a tangent here, but there are often family dynamics based around poverty and disadvantage. Having a good start to school, having the right attitudes and support from family for aspirations and encouraging students, or young people, to understand the power of education, and ultimately that is a challenge for us, and that often will translate into mental health issues when they move into adolescence or earlier. As well there is a lot of influence arising from personal circumstances that can affect a young person's aspirations for their future. It may not seem a direct connection with careers, but I think it is very important that addressing that and supporting families who struggle a bit will have a down-the-track impact, where they are ready to learn rather than starting from behind. Some preps do start their education a year behind where they should be.

Mr CRISP — I would like to expand that a little, Graeme, into a sensitive area for everyone. In setting those aspirations, being able to give parents and students full and frank advice in a politically correct world, I just think it is getting harder and harder for that to be delivered, yet I think it is also very, very important. Has anybody got some views on how you manage those aspirations?

Mr BROWNE — I will go back to the previous question. There was a meeting held in Mildura last year—and I cannot quite remember when—with the Victorian Skills Commission, and that particular meeting opened up a few eyes right around the room because it demonstrated a lack of awareness from both the industry sector and the education sector as to what one group was saying or doing about the other, and it was mentioned before with regard to the horticultural industry. That was seen by the members of industry who were at that meeting as a real boom growth area in Sunraysia at this point in time, and yet from a schools perspective the information that we were receiving from our parents—many of whom are block operators—was the opposite. So that was a really interesting, eye-opening moment where the information or the need and demand seen through the eyes of key industry leaders was different to the message that we were receiving from our communities in the school. I see a great opportunity for improved communication between those two organisations.

There was definitely the vibe or the feel that there was a much stronger push from schools into tertiary from industry, and schools need to be providing more opportunities or promoting going straight into the workforce, but they were talking about areas that we were not aware there was a demand for. So that level of communication between key industry leaders in Sunraysia and the education sector I saw that there was a real need for from that meeting. Other people at this table were also at that meeting. I do not know if they wish to add something.

Mr MELHEM — Just following on from that, what level of support would you, as principals and support staff, require from the government—for example, we are talking government schools here—to achieve higher quality career advice which is delivering the first choice of a student for a career, or second and third, because normally it will be a choice, one, two, three, and matching that to what is available as well? And you can take that question on notice if you want and then come back with some ideas. What sort of level of support do you think that governments can provide to pull all these things together and make that into a practical reality?

Mr FORRESTER — Can I just pick up on David's theme before, because I was at the skills commission last year as well—in September I think it was. Having gone to that and also having been involved in other programs at previous schools, I do remember when I was involved at Castlemaine we ran the Beacon program, and that was very much about giving kids access to what careers were out there within their local communities. If you are in your local community and you hold onto the people within your local communities, what are the options that are sitting there within that?

I do not know how aware the students are of the diverse range of offerings that they have here. So when we were with Beacon we did a thing called speed dating. It was not actually speed dating. It was where we brought in members of the community, so we had 200 business partners and brought them into the room, and then we allowed the kids to go around and talk to them about, 'What job do you do?', 'What offering do you do?'. That awareness is actually really important. If you want to raise the aspirations, you have to get your community in behind you as well at the same time, and then you have got to not only raise the aspirations of the kids that way but you have also got to involve the parents as part of that process and educate them along that same way. If you are getting the push from both ends, then kids are naturally going to want to lift their aspirations in terms of what they want to get to in the end.

Part of the battle is kids who actually work out 'What do I want to do when I leave school?'. It is not as easy as you have got three choices; sometimes they do not make their mind up until they get to the end of Year 12 or even after, when they leave, as to what they want to do, and they are not likely to have the same job for the rest of their life. That is no longer the case, as it was when I went to school, when I picked the job up—I was going to be a teacher and I was not going to change. That is not the case with the current generation.

Ms WRATE — Going on from that, I think building the knowledge of teachers as well—going back to that career pathway before—and being able to link their curriculum to how that works in with particular industries or particular career pathways, so that students are starting to link that maths or science looks at engineering and starting to link, 'Why am I doing this subject in school?', and then building their aspiration that way because they are seeing what career pathways are available in that area. For that we need skilled teachers in the areas to really understand what their subject is leading to.

Mr FORRESTER — I guess also, sitting on that at the same time, does it mean because you want to be a tradesman that you have got low aspirations? I do not believe so; I believe that there is a range of areas. You do not have to be going to university to have high aspirations; you can have high aspirations and do any career that you want to do.

Mr CRISP — I am going to go back to how we can better collaborate with those industries. The skills commission has done a really good report. Where do you take that from here?

Mrs BOULTON — One of the points that has come up previously in conversation is the relationships that we have built with universities and how strong those relationships are in terms of them coming into the schools and talking about what university options are available. That is great, and I think from a Red Cliffs perspective it has raised the number of students that are studying locally, so that has been a good result for us. Having exposure is a good thing as well, but we do not see that from industry, and building that relationship is the tricky bit because businesses are busy. They generally do not want to come into schools and run programs and that sort of thing, but that has worked from a schools perspective because the universities come in and say, ‘We want to run this program’. The school says, ‘Yes, come in. We want to raise our aspirations for students’.

Having that sort of a system with industry where they come in and are willing to run programs with our students would help to direct them into those areas where we do need people to take an interest in agricultural science, logistics and transport—those types of programs. So how we collaborate with industry better, what Sara was saying about teachers being more thoroughly trained in this area, having the teachers connect in with those industries where the jobs are and that being part of their PD, could be part of that.

Mrs FYFFE — So how can government, in a practical way, assist in the professional development of career advisers? You have both raised it; it has been raised before. If you were able to say, ‘I want government to do this to assist’, what would it be that you would want us to do?

Mrs BOULTON — I do not think it is one person being responsible for it. It needs to be across the whole school. I am the sole person at my school that looks after this area—a bit unusual, because I am actually education support; I do not have a teaching load. Most of the other schools sitting here have teachers that take up careers as part of their role. That releases me to do lots of things, but even still, I am only just touching the surface of what needs to be done because I am one person trying to get across 650 students. It is impossible.

Mr MELHEM — Just on the same subject, some submissions recommended that the Victorian Government make career advice compulsory in school curriculums. Have you got any view on that, and on this particular recommendation have you got any views on whether we should adopt the new approach and make it part of the curriculum? Sara, jump in; you have been here twice.

Ms WRATE — We have already stated from the beginning, across the four schools that are represented here, that we do have career advice as part of our curriculum already. So I do not think that making it compulsory is the issue; it is: how do we better skill up the staff and spread the load to increase the quality that is being given?

Mr MELHEM — So how would you do it? Do you make it part of—I mean, it is twofold: one is for the new teachers coming on stream who are actually in the process of becoming teachers. That is one. What changes would you then recommend for us to do in relation to that cohort? The second one is—probably not in the right order—the existing teachers. What help can be provided to encourage or get these teachers to actually develop their skills, because it is the issues of money and time and distance; they are the three things? What can we do to enhance that? I take your point that it is already there, but how can we maximise and implement it?

Mr WILLISON — I agree with the money and time thing. I am very envious of Amanda and the fact that she does not have a teaching load. I have a full teaching load as well as my career stuff and looking after the work experience program and also the VETiS, VET in schools program, for all our students. My time allowance over the fortnight, because we have a fortnightly timetable, is about 5 hours. So when I try and implement all that sort of stuff and career action plans and spend time with the kids trying to find work experience placements et cetera, the time thing is very, very draining. As I say, if my time allowance was much greater, then obviously I would be able to deal with the kids a lot more and hopefully open their eyes to a lot more careers. I believe I am a very strong supporter of the VET program as well, but it is based mainly upon student interest as well, which is sometimes difficult. So more time and more money would make my job a lot easier to try to get that across.

I am very fortunate. We have got our careers stuff all embedded through our humanities department as well, and the teachers that are teaching that at the moment are also home group teachers for those year levels and also for those forms, which is great, plus they are very experienced teachers. So they have got lots and lots of experience

that they draw on, and they have been doing this for a very long time. So the money and time thing, which I am sure Graeme would agree with, would help somebody in my role spend more time with the kids and give them better access to careers and better advice as well.

Mrs FYFFE — So for 5 hours you have got all those children, and then you have got the parents.

Mr WILLISON — Yes. It is difficult, and it is for probably all the careers advisers here. They are probably robbed of their planning and correction time and half the school time as well to try to keep up at the really busy times of the year like around work experience or at the start of the year when you are doing all your VET enrolments and stuff like that, I am robbing the time from everywhere else to get all those things sorted, but it just is what it is.

Mrs HORKINGS — A lot of the VET options that students have, have a cost that goes with them. Some families struggle to pay any sort of school fees, and with some of the VET options there is \$500 for beauty services or \$200 for automotive, which is also a restriction. A lot of kids drop out early on because they cannot pay the materials cost. Perhaps some sort of funding arrangement like you do with camps and that sort of thing might be a way of students from low-income families accessing some of those VET subjects. Some are very expensive, but they may like to do them.

Mr CRISP — Can I build on that for a moment around outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, which I think is where you started to go? Have you got any examples of successful programs that have overcome those issues for some students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Mr FORRESTER — Yes, I have. If we look at CSEF funding, that certainly helps a lot of our students—so the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which helps students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and find it difficult to go to camps and on excursions. The government gives a subsidy, and we use that to actually subsidise a lot of those camps and excursions that kids would not normally do.

So if along the same lines careers could operate in the same way, or if there were some way of being able to work that, then that would certainly help in low socioeconomic areas as well.

Mr BROWNE — Just to add to Graeme's point there, probably the most successful aspect of the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund model is the fact that the money is allocated to the child but the money actually goes to the school, and so therefore that money gets used for the purpose that it was intended by the government.

Mrs BOULTON — Can I just extend that idea? We were talking about the isolation and that we cannot access programs that are running in Melbourne and Adelaide, where students can actually go and have a look at industry, university options and that type of thing. If there were money available for students to go and do that, that would be another option to try to increase the exposure of students to what is available and to increase those aspirations.

The CHAIR — At the beginning Mrs Fyffe said how interested we are on this committee, and we would like to thank you for coming and making your contribution. If you can think of anything you would like to raise now, we still have a bit of time. You can say whatever you like for a minute—that we have not discovered with our questions.

Mr CUPPER — Just one fact that I noticed this morning in a bit of research on the VCAA site is that it takes an average of 4.7 years for a young person aged 15 to 24 to find a job, and they will have 17 jobs on average over five industries throughout their lifetime. So we are trying to prepare young people for a very different future to the one we know, or that I certainly have had, and I think that adds to the complexity and the challenge that you probably face as a committee, and we certainly face as educators.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the Committee I would like to thank you for your time today.

Witnesses withdrew.