

# TRANSCRIPT

## ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 26 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 Shannon Bone, Year 12 student,

Mr Tom Saxton, Year 11 student,

Ms Wren Gillett, Year 11 student, and

Ms Clare Joseph, Year 12 student, Victorian Student Representative Council; and

Ms Marlee van Mourik, TAFE student, Youth Disability Advocacy Service.

**The CHAIR** — 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. We will provide a proof version of the Hansard transcript so that you can correct any typographical errors. Please state your name, the year you are in and the school you attend. We will start with Ms Bone.

**Ms BONE** — I am Shannon Bone. I am in Year 12, and I am from Westall Secondary College.

**Mr SAXTON** — I am Tom Saxton. I am in Year 11, and I go to Notre Dame College in Shepparton.

**The CHAIR** — We heard from Marlee before, so we will go to the next student.

**Ms GILLETT** — I am Wren Gillett. I am in Year 11, and I go to Upwey High School.

**Ms JOSEPH** — I am Clare Joseph. I am in Year 12, and I go to Mac.Robertson Girls High School.

**The CHAIR** — What we will do is ask questions, and then you can participate in the answers if you want to. My question is: what kinds of career development activities does your school offer?

**Ms BONE** — My school does not really offer many career development activities for students to take part in. We have to step out on our own and say, 'Hey, can we participate in events that really help us plan for our future?'. We do not have compulsory or set activities for us to take part in.

**Mr SAXTON** — At our school we have a careers class in Year 10, but we do not really do much in that. It is merely just preparing us for work experience, but it usually does not tend to do that all that well. We also do a lot of writing and reading of what a teacher writes up on a board, but again no-one is really interested in that sort of thing.

**Ms GILLETT** — Just like Tom, my school emphasises career advice more so in Year 10. In Year 10 we are given the last two periods on a Wednesday, which are dedicated to careers and action. And those two periods again are quite focused on work experience, but we are also encouraged to complete our career action plan. Other than that, we occasionally have people come in and talk with us about the workforce and come in and give us demonstrations, but they are not highly productive.

**Ms JOSEPH** — Similar to Tom, in my school we do have a class. In my year it is business studies where we do learn about CV skills and writing a résumé, which is generally for the younger year levels, but other than that there are not a lot of career education skills offered to senior school students.

**Mr CRISP** — We are looking for some examples of successful programs, so do any of you have any examples of successful programs that have been offered by universities, employers or other organisations that have helped your career choices?

**Ms JOSEPH** — I would like to say there have been some online programs through the Morrisby testing that was undertaken in Year 10 that did kind of clarify what my key skills were and did kind of drive me into the direction of my career, but other than that there were not that many.

**Ms GILLETT** — I think probably the most productive element of my school's career advice program would be the private sessions with a career consultant. You talk with them about what you are most skilled at and basically kind of figure out that perhaps if you do want to go to university, there are some courses you could take and you look at your prerequisites, because it is quite important to know your course outline before going into Year 11. So these interviews are quite important, and I think they helped me clarify the direction that I wanted to take respectively.

**Mr CRISP** — Marlee, do you want to add anything?

**Ms van MOURIK** — At my school I did not really find any of the set—what are they called again?—careers expos very helpful, because it was just about jobs like cooking, cleaning, building; not any creative jobs were given. It was just stuff like, 'Oh, you have to be a builder. You have to be a firefighter'. It is not like, 'Oh, you can be an artist. You can spread some joy in this world. You can make a painting, decorate a house or draw

some flowers'. By incorporating creativity into the workforce, you are giving people more opportunities to express themselves and also profit off that expression, because when people feel like they can express themselves with their creativity and also earn a living from it, it will encourage them to pursue it further and also to inspire others to do it. Because when they get inspired from seeing other people running a lucrative business off their art, they will be like, 'Wow! Look at all this person's art. Look at all this money they're making. They're living off it; they have a house and nice food. They can buy more art supplies if they need them or help people'.

**Mrs FYFFE** — That is really well said, Marlee. Thank you.

**Mr SAXTON** — At our school one of the things that has worked extremely well is work experience—for me in particular, because I was fortunate enough to be able to do it through university. Being in Shepparton you do not really get much awareness of what university life is actually about. But that was mainly done through me, not through the school. After that I actually noticed my grades went up, because I had found what I wanted to do. They do not do it at my school, but there is also a local third-party institution called Lighthouse that are around getting actual industry input into the curriculum, and that has helped the schools a lot. They have reported a lot of success from those programs.

**Ms BONE** — The only program that I can think of that my school has encouraged to come in is a program that is offered by Monash University. So it is the Monash mentor program. It is not offered to all students though. There is only a particular amount of students who can take part. But these mentors tutor you as well as help you prepare for what you want to do in the future and the career that you want to see yourself go into. They help you with your career action plan. We were talking about it before we came in. My school does not really focus on career action plans, so it is only through the Monash mentor program that it has actually been spoken about.

**Mrs FYFFE** — Perhaps you could all give your opinion on this: does your school concentrate more on the ATAR scores and going to university or do they give fair balance to the vocational courses, to TAFE and VET?

**Ms JOSEPH** — I would say that of the options you have given my school is more focused on the ATAR score, given my school is a select entry school. However, when we are talking about whether it does go into the options, it does still inform students of vocational training. It still does inform students about VCAL and TAFE.

**Mrs FYFFE** — Is it encouraged?

**Ms JOSEPH** — I would not say encouraged. Thank you for clarifying though.

**Ms GILLETT** — I would say my school is actually quite open-minded. We have a lot of people. I think that of my teachers there are some that would probably emphasise the ATAR more so—the VCE over TAFE courses and VCAL—but personally I think my school is quite open to the idea of TAFE and VCAL, and they promote both equally.

**Ms van MOURIK** — My school was quite ignorant in that fact because they focused on whether you had completed VCE or not, and it was like, 'You have to take this pathway to go here'. I know that from experience, because my former school discouraged me from pursuing scored VCE, and they insisted on me partaking in VCAL, which I found very uninspiring. What they would make us do is essentially work for the school. We were just treated as working horses. We were not actually given a voice about what we thought about the school's education tactics, and we were very much treated like all the kids with disabilities. We were just thrown in the corner and told, 'Good luck with that one, mate'. Do you know what I mean?

**Mr SAXTON** — At my school it is very split. So as soon as you decide to go into VCAL—VCAL is great at our school; it is offered, it is encouraged extremely well and you learn a lot of life skills. If you are doing VCE, you do not really learn any life skills or anything to actually help you when you get out of school.

**Ms BONE** — Just like Clare mentioned before, my school does not really encourage it. We are open to it, but it is not encouraged or promoted much because it is kind of like, with apprenticeships and TAFE, there is kind of this negative outlook that they are for students who do not really have a potential in the future, and they are for students who are undesirable or screw ups. My school is very open to having a VCAL program. It does not encouraging students to take part in it, but they do give them an option to.

**Mr MELHEM** — Tom, on the point you just made on VCAL and life skills, when someone is doing a typical VCE and focusing on ATAR, university admission, et cetera, what would be your view? Should we be looking at maybe adding a component where for part of the program, whether it is VCE or any pathway selected, we have curriculum in relation to life skills, like how to fix something or talking about cooking? Is that something we should look at reforming? Is that something you would like to see?

**Mr SAXTON** — I feel that it should be a compulsory part of the curriculum, life skills, so as you said, cooking and that sort of stuff. Preparing for university is all well and good, but once you actually get into the world, it is not all about university. You are going to need to know how to get a job, how to do your cooking. Even if you go to a butcher, you are going to have no idea what you want to get, sort of thing, or what real things are.

**Ms GILLETT** — On the topic of real-world skills as well, like I was talking about before when you have those alone conversations with a careers consultant often the outcome that you get from those interviews can be very subjective depending on how you view your future. So for me personally I have quite a positive outlook and I am quite driven, and so what I take out of that interview will be very different to someone who does not necessarily know what they want to do and is quite scared about the prospect of their future because often a lot of it is unknown.

So like what Tom said, adding an aspect of real-world skills into the CIA—the careers in action—program could kind of alleviate some of that stress, because you would potentially learn about money management and all those things that are components of real life. So you can alleviate that part of the stress and then actually focus on, ‘Okay, so then how am I going to make the money?’, rather than just looking forward and not knowing anything.

**Mr MELHEM** — Another question. Let us say we have got Years 12, 11 and TAFE. In Year 11, what would you do differently? If you were given the responsibility now to redesign careers advice in your own school, what would you do differently? Focus in on the subject we just talked about a minute ago. I am interested to hear from all of you how you would do things differently. What do you think the school should be doing? What do you think the government should be doing? The government will do two things: one, is developing the curriculum and, secondly, is providing funding, because it all requires money as well. So what do you think we should do if you were in charge? So if you were in charge and you were designing this. Maybe start with Shannon and go that way—through the Chair.

**Ms BONE** — I think definitely having a full-time and maybe even more than one careers adviser. At my school we have quite a large Year 12 cohort. We make up the majority of the school and it is really hard to get a one-on-one meeting with my careers counsellor because there are just so many students who have no idea what they are going to do next year and who need to speak to her. I still have not had a chance to actually have a conversation with her and we are almost through term one, so I think definitely having even more than one full-time careers counsellor would definitely help and definitely implementing life skills or something to do with life skills from as early on as Year 7, because it is so important to develop those skills throughout your life no matter how old you are.

**Mr SAXTON** — If I was given the responsibility of designing a careers curriculum, the first thing I would do would be to start it at primary schools. That is not just meaning teaching a primary school kid how to be professional and get an interview—that is probably not necessary—but more giving them awareness of different industries, getting them out into the world and actually experiencing stuff like that.

Then I think I would like to see industry collaboration with the curriculum. So that means getting the local community involved and getting them out and helping people, and teaching the students stuff they might actually want to learn in the industry about what they would be doing—what they would be required to do if they did decide to have that career. And then also, in terms of funding, I think giving both regional and rural people opportunities to go to the city but also metro people opportunities to go to regional centres, especially because in the metro area, in the big city, they do not really have agricultural industry, which might be something metro kids might be interested in and they just will not be given that opportunity.

**The CHAIR** — Marlee, would you like to say something?

**Ms van MOURIK** — I think there needs to be more emphasis on providing more funding for people like myself with additional needs to do what they love in life, whatever they want to do in life, because at my school there was absolutely no effort put into providing proper funding and a proper program for kids with additional needs. It was just hit or miss. You either do VCAL or you are out, and because of this—I think that in the schools the teachers need to be more caring and considerate of their students and not be so harsh, dry and cold—it was awful. It was essentially like being in the army. You were just somebody there trying to do the program and you had people yelling at you all the time and saying, ‘March into line!’, you know, with no expression, no creativity, no free speech. It was just, ‘You are here to fill out the forms, fill out the paperwork. You are not actually here to be yourself’. I remember coming home every afternoon with aches and pains all over my body and just feeling like ending at all because it was just too much. I felt like I was of no worth to anyone because they were just so dry and the program was just so bare bones, with no outcome from it.

So I have had to look elsewhere because I have to wait until the end of April to go to my course at Melbourne Polytechnic. It will be a great start in my life, because I really want to learn to draw faces and the expressions on human-like figures to accentuate the importance of mental health care in our school system, because I feel like there is no actual care for the emotional wellbeing of the students. They just churn them out and say, ‘Oh, look at you. You’re just a number. Just jump on the barcode with everyone else’, you know? There is not actually any individual care for each of the students. It is just like, ‘You either accept our emotional abuse or you are out’. It is just terrible in every sense of the word.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Ms GILLET** — Like I said before, I think the idea of careers counselling can often be seen as quite a scary prospect, so I think like what Tom said we should be educated about career choices from earlier than perhaps Year 10, which is what my school has basically done. We were introduced to the program called careers in action in Year 10 and from that moment onwards it was like okay, suddenly careers are a major focus, when there should have been—or at least we should have been shown—choices from earlier on than Year 10. So along with that I think there should also be an equal emphasis.

I feel as though at my school careers in action is kind of not seen as a very important subject; it is just something that is held at the end of the day and there is not much importance tied to it. I think it should be classified as important, and along with that I also think what perhaps could be introduced is the idea of connecting real-world skills along with a careers in action program. So potentially not just career focused but also maybe future focused, so we learn the skills needed for life outside of work and also the skills needed for work as well.

**Ms JOSEPH** — I agree and support all the points that everyone else has raised. I think two other points that I would like to add are: one, to get parents involved. I think there is a major gap with parents. They have a lot of knowledge that they can share with their kids. A lot of the time parents are asking their children, ‘What do you want to do when you leave school?’, and often this is a pressure on the kids—like, ‘Mum, Dad, please stop nagging me. I don’t know what I want to do’. I say we get the parents involved in the careers counselling sessions that students have with their careers counsellors. Shannon and I were actually talking about this point. I say if we get the parents involved, we are not only connecting parents with the students; we are also connecting parents with the schools.

Also, with implementing life skills into the curriculum, what I find from going to a selective school is that a lot of the students at my school are career driven. Hence in developing a curriculum we need consistency. We need a consistent curriculum if we are going to implement one. We need one consistent curriculum across Victoria. Basically we have all these life skills that we need to survive life. The thing is, there is a checklist of all the skills that we need—we have this massive gap titled ‘career education’ and then we have life itself. We need this career education gap to be filled, but what we need actually is for someone to help us get there. We need someone to guide us. We cannot just have someone telling us, ‘You need to be able to cook, you need to clean, you need to know how to do this’. We cannot just have someone telling us, ‘You need to be able to know how to write a CV’—show us, tell us, help us understand what we are doing wrong. Do not just, like, mark us, ‘You’re doing this wrong, you’re doing this wrong’—help us understand what we are doing wrong.

I am going to a selective entry school. I am in Year 12 and there are still parts of the world that I am unprepared for, and it scares the hell out of me. Sitting here as a Year 12 student, the fact that there is such a big gap shows that there is this massive gap and there needs to be something done about it. I do not know what else to add here, but if that is not showing something ...

**Mr MELHEM** — Clare, just to follow-up on the comment you made about when your homework is being corrected—you just get a cross or whatever and there is no explanation about what went wrong and how you can address it. I hear that a lot. Is that because teachers do not understand or accept that it is part of learning that if you do not know, you do not know and that is why you make mistakes? Is this something we need to change, this approach? I hear that from a lot of students, even my own children: ‘No-one explained to me’. Is that a common theme, your sort of experience?

**Ms JOSEPH** — It depends on the outcome of learning. Is the outcome of learning to get good test results or is the point to learn something?

**Ms van MOURIK** — I think the outcome of good learning is to feel that your teachers are proud of you and not constantly judging you. It also needs to be based on a personal level, like, ‘Hey, this student is actually enjoying their work because they are getting all this encouragement, the work is not extremely hard, they are able to comprehend and they are getting help’, which has not happened at my school at all. It needs to be more of an emphasised subject—teacher on student work. They need to focus on the individual student rather than a big cluster of students—just one, not multiple—because then care goes out the window and they do not think about them as people, they just think about them as numbers on a barcode.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. Just to follow-up on the parents involved, and this question is to the others as well, how much influence do your parents have on your career choices and should career advisers inform the parents in your career planning?

**Ms GILLETT** — My parents personally—they do not necessarily tell me what to do. I think I kind of initiate my career focuses, but I think it is quite relative. Perhaps in the schools where ATARs are more so emphasised—this is just a very broad comment—the parents of the students might also have a very different outlook on perhaps what the student should be doing or what subjects they should be doing in order to get the particular ATAR needed to go into a particular vocation. Actually with that being said, it is not necessarily just, you know, private schools or selective entry schools; I think even in public schools it is quite relative to who your parents are and perhaps what they see your future entailing.

**Mr SAXTON** — Personally, my parents have a large influence on my career decisions, but there is also the other point of being in Shepparton, which is a low socio-economic area. There is the sad fact that some people simply do not have parents, so they will not be able to have people who can influence them in that way. There are also people whose parents simply do not have the skills, have not actually had that experience in their own life and have not been able to pass anything on.

**Ms BONE** — My dad is a single parent and he dropped out in Year 10, so he does not have any influence over my future career. I actually find that that is a big downer, because he knows me better than anyone knows me and I am really conflicted with what I want to do in the future. The times when I have gone to him and I am like, ‘So what do you reckon I should do next year? Where do you see me as your daughter going and being successful?’, his reply has always just been, ‘Do what makes you happy’, and I do not know what makes me happy. So I think it also really ties in with getting parents involved in what Clare brought up before, careers counsellor sessions.

**Ms JOSEPH** — Just on the point that Tom raised in terms of some parents not having the skills, my mum is actually very involved in terms of finding me a career, but I myself am not so much finding myself a career because I am not too sure of what that career is. The thing is that my mum and dad both have jobs; it is just my mum has this overall fear of me not having a good job. She wants me to be able to live by myself and support myself, so it is just that I need to have a good job so that I am able to support myself. When we involve parents, we just need to clarify with them what career counselling is. That is what I would like to raise.

**Ms GILLETT** — Yes, because we also do not want it to be conflicting.

**Ms JOSEPH** — Yes.

**Ms GILLETT** — We do not want this to be something that actually allows the parents to actually take charge of their child’s future, because in some cases that is not necessarily the best thing. It is not necessarily a good thing.

**Ms JOSEPH** — Yes. Sorry, if I can just add, as a kid that goes to a selective entry school, a lot of the parents want their kids to be doctors and in high, up-there professions, and a lot of the students do not want to do that. We do not want a kind of conflict based in the counselling rooms.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. I do not believe we have any further questions, so on behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you for coming and for your time. Thank you very much for your contributions as well.

**Ms van MOURIK** — Thank you for having us.

**Witnesses withdrew.**