

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers**

Melbourne—Tuesday, 3 September 2019

#### **MEMBERS**

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Sarah Connolly

Mr Brad Rowswell

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Theophanous

#### **WITNESSES**

Ms Fiona Purcell, Chief Executive Officer, Outer Eastern LLEN;

Ms Tracey Fenton, Projects Manager, Inner Eastern LLEN;

Mr Boyd Maplestone, Chief Executive Officer, Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley LLEN;

Ms Deirdre Hardy, Executive Officer, Future Connect;

Mr Dallian D’Cruz, Chief Executive Officer, WynBay LLEN; and

Mr Peter Kellock, Coordinator, Research Projects, Inner Northern LLEN

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearings for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. All mobile phones should now be turned to silent. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcasting of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible.

This forum will run as a question-and-answer session. Due to the number of participants and our time limitations, it will not be possible for everyone to answer each question. We will hear two or three responses and then move to the next question. The Committee is keen to make sure that all participants have a chance to have a say. If you wish to respond to a question, please raise your hand and wait until invited to speak. Please state your name each time you speak to assist our Hansard reporters. If there is an important point you do not have the opportunity to make at this forum, you are invited to provide the Committee with your additional comments in writing after the hearing, which we will treat as a supplementary submission.

Thank you for being here. It is very important that you are here today for this very important public hearing. I think we are going to just go straight into questions and not have a presentation as such. I ask the Committee members whether they have any questions at this point in time. I am sure you do.

So LLENs, I know from personally within my own electorate, are very important organisations to assist particularly a cohort that we are very interested in—disadvantaged jobseekers. Can you just outline how you would like to see Government improve its funding of LLENs going forward, in terms of for you to maximise your opportunities to help out that cohort that we are here today for?

**Mr MAPLESTONE:** Picking up on the points before, where there is a place-based response and has been since 2001, coming out of the Kirby review, we have got the opportunity I think to work hand in glove with local schools, with employers and with service providers in regional, rural and metropolitan environments and really assist those most vulnerable in the school setting and also probably at that critical time of transition out of school as well, especially for early school leavers. So I think there is a real opportunity to continue to support the Victorian LLENs, and there is a lot of opportunity, as has been done in the past, to enhance the role of the LLENs at a place-based level. Now, that might not necessarily be in terms of service provision, but that might be in terms of that strategic oversight and supporting and maximising the government investment, both federal and state, at a local level. So I think that there is a real opportunity in relation to that, and we have made submissions to ministers in relation to a youth employment commissioner and in relation to supporting that. That then can role out through a network of place-based responses at a LLEN level as well.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** Can you tell me about what is your experience in penetrating employers—in getting them to take on disadvantaged youth or disadvantaged people in the community?

**Ms HARDY:** I think one of the things that LLENs are very good at is to really work with the breadth of the cohorts that we deal with. So we work predominately with young people, but we do work very much with young people who have disabilities and with young people who are from socio-economic backgrounds that might mean that they need extra assistance. We also work with young people who are either disengaged or at risk of disengaging from schools. So we do work very much with those young jobseekers who are very disadvantaged.

One of the things that we do as LLENs is that we have a contract to provide structured workplace learning opportunities, and that is a very direct option for young people who are studying a VET course to do some work experience that is related to their VET course. If, for example, they are studying automotives, then they work in a mechanics—so that sort of correlation. Through that, we do have opportunities to talk to a lot of employers. So we work in the western suburbs—in Brimbank, in Melton—and one of the things that we find is that our local employers are often very small employers. We do not have huge industry in our area. So we have

a lot of small employers and a lot of single tradies and subcontractors and those sorts of things, and they are very keen to help out the community. When they are willing to take on young people, it is because either they know that young person or they know the school—they have ties to the community. So employers are very keen to work with young people in our areas because of those factors.

**Mr D'CRUZ:** I would like to add to what Deirdre and my colleagues said. Of course employers are not a homogenous group—you have small, large and very large employers—and we find that the smaller employers are very receptive and work well with us when it comes to programs like structured workplace learning. I had the opportunity, along with Sarah and a couple of others—you might recall—where we launched a business network. We launched it in August of 2017—I had the Treasurer there as our patron and special guest—and we brought together 43 of our largest corporations, especially in civil construction, in engineering, in a lot of the STEM-related pathways et cetera.

The purpose of this network, which was called the Business Industry Group, was to further all of our work in the LLENs. But also in light of the very large infrastructure spend in the pipeline and all the various large infrastructure projects, we thought the time was ideal for these companies to start thinking a little bit more long term and be proactive when it comes to addressing disadvantage and unemployment. We did not get anywhere. It has been an abject failure. In my view, there is no interest within our large corporations to do some of the long-term, difficult work. What happened was I followed it up by meeting a lot of them, and I was educated on some of the structural issues that they face. I still remember my meeting at John Holland, and I was shown a spreadsheet of 4,000 subcontractors. They said, 'That's John Holland'. So when we are looking for partnerships, where do you start?

A lot of our civil construction and engineering companies find it very hard to engage with this sort of long-term planning and procurement to address disadvantage in communities. That is not to say that they are not doing anything. A lot of them do a lot as part of their social procurement obligations in their tenders. But in speaking to a lot of them personally I find that the capacity to do a lot of this is not there within our corporations, our large companies. So I have been scratching my head for the last two years trying to work and come up with a fix around this.

There was one gentleman, who I will not name, who was one of the largest contractors for BHP Billiton, and he explained to me that he thinks Papua New Guinea is more serious about this than we are, and I nearly fell off my chair. I said, 'What do you mean?', and he gave me the reasons. It is a very complex interplay. That is not to say businesses are not doing anything, but a heck of a lot could be done by some of our large infrastructure companies. A lot of it is what I call crisis by management. So they pick up a tender, and the tender says '10% community benefit—you have got to procure X number of Indigenous staff or trainees and X number of female staff and trainees'. Then the bells go off, and some of our partners get a call saying, 'Quick, quick, quick—we need to find 200 people. Can you send them over?'. There is no 5, 10 or 15-year plan in these companies as to how they are going to address skill shortage.

What was funny was that we had some of these CEOs and directors at our launch two years ago and followed up thereafter, and I keep getting calls from some of their training managers, saying, 'Quick, quick, quick—I've got to find 200 young Indigenous people for this project. Can you send them over by Monday?'. I mean, what sort of a system is this?

This is my personal experience. We have put in hundreds of hours. Sarah, you were at that launch, referring to some of those businesses that were there.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** I was one of the businesses, yes.

**Mr D'CRUZ:** You were one of the businesses there at that time. So, yes, it is that group that I was referring to.

**Ms CONNOLLY:** Then can I ask you this: what do you think the Victorian Government could do to ensure that the big end of town is pulling its weight when it comes to social procurement?

**Mr D'CRUZ:** A fantastic question, and a very simple answer. I asked this of each one of our leading CEOs of our large construction companies that attended, and some of them, who I will not name, said, 'Carrot and

stick. Make it explicitly clear to us what you expect'. Now, I tried to write this into the Treasurer's speech, because I was asked—naturally, as friends; I am just being honest—'What would you like the Treasurer to say?', because he was our special guest. So I worked with his office, saying, 'Could you please ensure that there is direct reference to this?'. And some of the advisers felt that it might be a bit inappropriate or it might be crossing the boundary. So make it very explicit: the Government is going to spend 17 billion or 40 billion on these projects. This is what is expected of you, and we are going to hold you accountable.

Of course there are a lot of ways they get around this. For example, the word 'local' means 'anyone in Australia or New Zealand' in a lot of the contracts. If you are Lendlease, at any given time you have 200 projects on your books somewhere in Australia and New Zealand and you can move people around the country and easily tick that off and meet all these requirements. It does not mean 200 people are coming from Melton or Wyndham on a project. So that is very important.

And I want to give an example as well as to how these tenders are actually weighted. There has to be an alignment that goes on here. There was a project, which I cannot name, obviously, for confidential reasons. There were three consortiums that bid. There were two consortiums that put lot of work in with the LLENs into sort of coming up with the community response plans to meet some of these targets in our region. There was another consortium where the chief financier that was based in New South Wales had a different model and felt this was just a waste of time doing all of this. They had their own in-house approach to this. And to the surprise of all of us—to the consortiums and ourselves—that particular consortium got up for a particular project. Now, it must have been on all the other criteria that they scored well, but it seems that the people who make final decisions on these projects sometimes do not give it enough weight even though it is there in the tender; I have seen it. In fact the project that I am referring to was the only project that I came across in my 20 years in this field of work where the LLEN was explicitly named. You never see that in a contract. It is usually work with the community, work with community organisations, the social procurement—all these sorts of things. But this particular contract, which I will not name, had—and I was very surprised—the LLEN explicitly mentioned. That is why we put a lot of work into that with the two other consortiums, and the consortiums that never even rang us or consulted us got up. So that is just one case study.

Sarah, to come back to your point, Treasury has to make it absolutely clear what is expected of them and enforce it rather than nice language that is very diplomatic—if you wish, you may. This is what is expected from you, and we are going to come back and check that you have actually done that.

**Ms FENTON:** Can I just add to that?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, sure.

**Ms FENTON:** Obviously the LLENs work with young people, and they are part of the social procurement parts of the tender. To access that for a young person is extremely challenging because they do not know how and there is no how-to guide out there. How do I get onto the new rail links? There is nothing out there for young people to try and find. There is not an easy option—quick, go here. It does not work like that. We are talking about young people who may not have had any work experience whatsoever.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just ask in relation to On Track Connect, obviously it is to engage those students that are leaving school and then track six months after they have left school how they are going. Can you expand on that?

**Mr MAPLESTONE:** I think I am going to take the lead on this for my colleagues. We have a situation where the On Track and On Track Connect program has been running for about 15 years. The situation in terms of gaining employment has changed from probably a generation ago and the generation before that in terms of the requirements around education, especially for entry-level jobs and the skill requirements being much more work ready. Employees expect that. There is much more flexibility with work and casual work so there is not that kind of security in terms of that workforce that is out there. One of the things that we have looked at is that students are most vulnerable around that October–March period. The On Track Connect program happens for us at that July to August period, so really the horse has already bolted. So we have literally been getting virtually the same results for 15 years. We know the issue and we know where we should be working. We had a review last year where we put that forward, and there is virtually no change in terms of what we are doing

with On Track Connect. It has been the view of the LLEN network that the modest investment that we have, just over \$5,000 per LLEN to deal with the three-month case management, is modest at best, and it is really missing the critical time of vulnerability for young people. So that is really the problem. The solution that we suggest is actually shifting—

**The CHAIR:** So can I just ask why it went on for so long? Did we just pick up on it, because you are saying that it has been ongoing for 15 years? What has taken so long?

**Mr MAPLESTONE:** We write a review back every year. Thirty-one LLENs write a review back saying how we can improve it every year. There have been several reviews over several years. There was a full review last year, and there has still been no change.

We have been saying that we were set up to support at that critical time of transition and prepare young people to get to that transition time and that then the horse has already bolted and we are helping around the edges. We are very frustrated by that, and we feel that we, through that place-based role, can be supporting them around that October to March–April time. That is that critical time when young people are vulnerable. Now, whether they have completed Year 12 or not, whether they are an early school leaver or not, we can work hand in glove with the schools and support them—which we already are, but it enhances that role—and by doing that we can then support them on that transition. So when a young person drops out and does not get into a course—let us say at TAFE in January, and the teacher is on leave, the best and most dedicated teachers will not be there to be able to support them—there could be a transition support worker that is supporting them through that particular time. And then if you overlay that with all the complexities of social issues as well, you have got a real opportunity to have a prevention model here where you are supporting young people at that critical time of transition.

We know that parents are involved in this process as well. They are not always sure what to do, and they are well-meaning, but that young person can be engaged directly to be supported through that transition time.

So we think that by shifting the time frame from October to March we work hand in glove with the schools around that October, November, December period, and then we help them. We take them over the divide, let us say, and we hand them on to that next education training provider. We help them and support them with that particular service or agency on that wraparound approach. We make sure the referral sticks; we have got time to do that. I believe the outcome would be that we would be able to identify young people with more complex needs earlier in the school setting. They are already there and being identified by schools, and we would have the opportunity to support them at their most vulnerable time. We would also be able to increase the amount of young people that we are actually engaging with, because we engage with a relatively small number. So, for example, this year was probably the smallest we ever had. They are broken into two groups: Year 12 completers and early school leavers. This year we had 32 Year 12 completers and, I think, about six early school leavers. Now, we know—and that is just one; you times that by 31 on average—that that is not the number of young people that are unemployed or the young people that are dropping out of courses early in that vulnerable transition time as well. We know just from speaking to the schools that there are a lot more than that, so we are not really tackling the heart of the issue. We are not looking to hold onto those young people; we are looking to be that supporter that takes them over the divide.

I honestly believe that there is a greater chance of decreasing the uptake of critical services down the track because there is an increased likelihood that young people will complete Year 12 or equivalent, which is quite challenging at the moment—we are seeing declining rates with Year 12 or equivalent—because they are able to pathway into that appropriate course, and over time we would see a decrease in youth unemployment because they are being supported at that critical time.

**Ms HARDY:** I think the additional thing that we would see is that at the moment we have very low numbers of young people who actually opt in to be part of On Track. I think around 40% of young people tick the box that says they are happy to be contacted. If there was a value for them in being contacted, because they would be getting that support, then hopefully that would mean that more young people would opt in to On Track, which would actually give us much more substantial data, and that would give us more accuracy around trends and what is happening.

**Ms PURCELL:** I guess related to that is young people, before they leave school, understanding where to go to get some help, because we hear so many teachers do not even understand where to send them, never mind parents or anyone else. And there are so many organisations out there—where would you start? They do not even know what each one is offering them to some extent.

**Mr BLACKWOOD:** That is what I was going to ask: with that connection between the careers advisers and schools and you, but also the connection between local employers, do you think there has been enough done in that space? Could we help foster that and improve that connection, which would then help with your role as well? Those students that do not opt in for you at least are getting some sort of advice from careers advisers that might be of some help.

**Ms HARDY:** I think there has been a lot of investment obviously in the development of careers teachers, but there is certainly more that is needed. We know that when a young person makes a decision around what they want to do when they leave school, the young person is at the centre of that decision. But then the parents are part of that decision, family networks are part of that decision; there are a whole lot of other people that are part of that. What we find is if those parents grew up in a time where they would have expected to have started a job and proceeded through that career and gone on a fairly straight line with a career pathway, that is not what we can expect for young people now and it is not what we are seeing. So parents really need to understand that success may look a little bit different for their young people than they may have predicted for themselves, but they also need that support to be able to then support the young person. I think it is a systemic thing.

I think most of the LLENs are connected with a careers teachers network—we certainly convene a careers teachers network in our area—and what we are hearing from them is that they are incredibly committed to what they do but they are under-resourced. What we are also hearing is that they do not necessarily have the capacity to be experts across all of the industries that are on offer in our area. That is where the LLENs play that role because we do have those connections outside of the school. We are not focused on getting the kids through their individual counselling sessions. We do have a lot of those connections to industry and to employers, and we try and feed that back into the careers network so that they become more informed, but it is a really big ask. So we cannot just be relying on the careers teachers to be able to have the capacity and the knowledge to cover off everything. We really have to be looking at what is the system and how does that system support the young people.

**Mr D'CRUZ:** I would like to add to what my colleagues said. I think this group in our region which we call disadvantaged or at risk just like businesses are not a homogeneous group. So there are different subgroups that we call disadvantaged and at risk and different groups have different challenges. A lot of them have common challenges but there are nonetheless distinct challenges. If I could break it down to some of the more prominent groups of disadvantaged young people—for example, you have those that face disadvantage and challenges making a successful transition because of a lack of educational attainments, specifically literacy and numeracy. That is obviously one group. There is another very significant group that suffer from various mental health issues and various other challenges, and of course we need a different response to that group. This is very interesting in the case of Wyndham and, I might suggest, Melton, but Deirdre would be in a better position to answer that. We are an interface region and we have large groups of young people who defer taking up placements at university or TAFE. The LLENs commissioned a deferment report many years ago, and what we found in that report was the challenges that our young people face in those interface councils, like Wyndham and Melton, are not dissimilar to those in regional Victoria—cost being one. So that requires a different response.

But underlining all of this, if you ask most of our disadvantaged young people who leave school early or do not continue their education what is that they want and what is it that they need, the first thing that they tell you is a job, because they might be the only breadwinner in the family. So they need employment in order to generate income to look after their families. They need a job. Now we face a big structural problem here because, as Boyd mentioned earlier, a lot of the entry-level positions for these young people have disappeared in our local economy. But the other challenge—and this is something the Committee would need to look at—is I think we have a serious problem with, how can I put it, underemployment of young people leading to disadvantage. Part-time employment, gig economy employment, casualisation of the workforce means we have young people working one or two days a week. Now, I came to Australia in 1990, and at that time I heard the word

‘flexibility’ in the workforce, which meant casualisation of the workforce. Working in this space now for 20 years, we are now seeing the repercussions of that. Our young people are paying the price for this mass casualisation and part-time work, and in this I am referring to young people that want full-time employment who cannot get it so they have two or three jobs around the place, jobs that pay very poorly.

So I think from a policy perspective state governments and commonwealth governments should really start looking at closing or setting caps for casual employment rates. I know there are some businesses in my region that are running 70, 80, 90% casuals. That is crazy. Casuals should not make up more than 30% or 40%. That gives enough flexibility for the business. Once you are getting to 60 or 70%, that is exploitation. Once you are on 30 or 40%, that is reasonable flexibility for the business to be competitive. That is something you really need to look at because that has really undermined what we are trying to do, because what these young people and all of our disadvantaged people need is secure, meaningful, fulfilling, sustainable employment, not two days or one day a week flipping a burger here or there. That requires us going back and looking at our labour laws, industrial relations laws—everything that we have done in Australia over the last 20 years. I have seen because I am now paying the price at the other end of this. So please look at this seriously.

**Ms ADDISON:** Can I draw that out? I am so glad we have got such a broad representation of different Melbourne communities here today because, as you said, different areas have different challenges. But which young people are most at risk of this underemployment? Are there some patterns we can see across Melbourne or are there certain—

**Ms FENTON:** The patterns vary depending on where you live. In regional Victoria there would be a whole range of young people who are underemployed. They may be working for the family farm and stuff like that but they are not employed per se, so they are underemployed. In inner urban and in the suburbs you will find underemployed across the board.

One of the things we put forward in our submission was the fact that young people who have any employment are now automatically unable to access any other supports because they have a job. So we would want a recommendation from the Committee to expand opportunities for young people to access support services to get further work even if they have got a certain amount of employment. That is one of the issues—you know, as soon as you say, ‘I’ve got a job, 1 hour a week’, well, you are no longer eligible for a whole range of things. Young people who come from generational unemployment, we have pockets of that around the state. They are very much either not employed or underemployed because they do not have anyone to learn about full-time work from.

We also have been talking about volunteerism. There is a whole range of organisations that will take you on as a volunteer. That is great and I think it is an awesome way to learn skills—it is not about not having volunteers; they are the backbone in some ways of our community sector especially—but there should be caps on that. You cannot be volunteering for 12 months at 15 hours a week. That is not acceptable. You need to be having paid employment in that space.

**Mr MAPLESTONE:** Picking up on your point, Juliana and also Gary, I think one of the themes that runs through in the school setting and then into the underemployment question and around industry engagement for disengaging or disadvantaged young people is social capital. I think that is the role the LLEN can play in terms of knowledge and skills, networks and connections. We have run some pilot programs around targeting particular identified groups such as newly arrived young people, also young people with a disability in a mainstream school setting—those young people that are not in a special school setting but might have a learning disability, they might have ASD, autism, they might be on the autism spectrum—they might have a number of things that are going on and they are perfectly capable of working and contributing to community and society fulfilment but they need some additional support. So we have done some programs where we have tailored some work over one day a week over six weeks to get them ready and then do some work experience.

Now, the feedback that we have received from a lot of teachers and welfare coordinators is, ‘If you had told me X student had gone out and contributed really well in the workplace at the start, I would never have believed you’. So that then allows us to take that young person, identify that young person and take them to the next level with structured workplace learning, and then we can take them to the next level and talk about their pathway into part-time work and then hopefully full-time work. So we are taking them on that journey, but we

have got to start with that social capital and that understanding. So those particular vulnerable cohorts need that tailored support early on. I think we are just playing around the edges at the moment. We are very small, but I think that maybe answers the question a little bit around the school setting that then transfers to the post-school setting as well.

**Ms ADDISON:** We do not expect people to suddenly learn how to read. We scaffold them to teach them to read, so why aren't we scaffolding them to teach them to work?

**Mr MAPLESTONE:** Absolutely, and some young people need a little bit more additional support in tailored ways at particular times.

**Mr KELLOCK:** Just building on that, I think a critical thing is around how employment services are tailored around transaction. That pathway is built around relationships, so you have got transactional versus relational. Critically, the capacity to actually build a relationship—it builds to the thing about On Track Connect as well. You have a transactional approach. It is like, here is an intervention from someone you have never met and you do not know. A phone call comes in and you try and sort of establish a process. It is the same with jobactive. It is true of so much that happens in the employment transition process, whereas what you are really looking for—whether it is mentoring, whether it is sort of a staged pathway from work experience through structured workplace learning into part-time employment or into full-time employment—is sort of a relationship guiding process to carry the person forward. That is what is critically missing, and that is what is so poorly designed around the Commonwealth's job services system. It is a transactional approach. It will never be effective. It will be place-in, place-out.

**The CHAIR:** So the digital barrier, is that really a problem out there in amongst the youth? I just think I have not seen one youth that has not got a mobile phone. Just in relation to online recruitment, if you do not have proper internet services at home, it may prevent you from accessing some of these very important services. So is there something the State Government or Federal Government, any tier of government, can do in relation to giving access to those disadvantaged job seekers in terms of online internet connection?

**Ms FENTON:** That is probably my area because I work with young people in the employment space. Everyone thinks that young people have access to digital capabilities. They do not because they cannot afford the internet—a great number of them. They all have mobile phones but their access to anything digital comes from free wi-fi from being at McDonald's, at the library, wherever they are, for data download and to apply for jobs. It is really a challenge. I also think that when we are looking at developing employability skills and applying for jobs—I mean this in the nicest possible way, looking around the room—we are all older and we are used to applying through a letter or through a phone call and we do not look at making sure that we have got keywords that are going to be picked up because no human is looking at you at the other end.

**Ms ADDISON:** AI.

**Ms FENTON:** It is just AI going, 'They have used that word, that word, that word' and they make it to the next stage. Now they have used those six words they have made it to the next stage. Teaching young people to do that is quite a challenge, and it is not very commonly done. I also think what we need to look at is most employment opportunities still come through people that you know. Even if we talk about large recruiting and online recruiting, it is still—

**The CHAIR:** Social network.

**Ms FENTON:** Social networking is massive, and young people are not sure about how to maintain that and develop those skills and sell themselves to employers by saying, 'I'm looking for a job'. It is a real challenge.

**Ms HARDY:** I was also just wanting to add to what Tracey was saying because what we actually see is that young people who do not have those networks often come from families that do not have those networks. So the families might not have anyone in their immediate family that works. The families might not have been born in Australia and may not speak good English, or they are young people with disabilities that have parents with disabilities. What we are actually seeing is that those differences are being compounded, so young people who would have started off disadvantaged continue to be because they have not got that support system or that network that could help them into employment.

**Mr D'CRUZ:** If I could add to what you have already said but just on the flip side, what we have discovered in Wyndham and Hobsons Bay is equally we need to support our businesses as well in being able to offer opportunities for disadvantaged or vulnerable or at-risk jobseekers. What we are finding is that a lot of the businesses are not equipped, like I said earlier, and so I think more support services for our local businesses to navigate the system and to get them to understand. Part of the process is we are working with our businesses to amend their recruitment policies and their HR procedures to accommodate this. We have a partnership with the City of Wyndham, and what we discovered in that partnership is that the City of Wyndham needed to look at—which it is doing very, very well, I should say—some of its own internal structures in order to be able to do this.

If you are looking at the large health services that are big employers in our region, like local government departments, I think they require assistance, because if you look at the last 10, 20 years, a lot of our focus has been on supporting the disadvantaged jobseeker through various services. What we have not done equally well is to look at the other side, which is: how can businesses be supported to accommodate? A lot of the business cultures, a lot of the recruitment systems, processes and the methodologies they use to recruit and hire need to be updated, so we are working with our businesses on that front. Some of the businesses we consider to be champions, especially the City of Wyndham and St Vincent's Private Hospital and so forth, they acknowledge that to do a lot of this they need to drive cultural change within their organisations. We have had, as Boyd said, fantastic young people that we have managed to place with these businesses that lasted there for a week. So businesses need support as well.

**The CHAIR:** I am just mindful of the time. We have got a couple of minutes left. Any further questions?

**Ms THEOPHANOUS:** Yes, I might ask a question. I am interested to tease out—we have talked about the casualisation of the workforce and the gig economy and all of that—what strategies the LLENs have to address the mismatch between what the labour market is offering and what young people are skilled for but also what their interests are? Because it seem like some of those gig economy jobs are taken up out of, 'That's the only choice that I have left as a jobseeker'. How do you navigate that space with young people?

**Ms HARDY:** One of the things that we find is that there is a huge disconnect. If we look at employment in the western suburbs, particularly in the outer west, we see that retail and hospitality are the biggest employers, but they are the biggest employers in terms of jobs, and mostly they are casual jobs. When we look at full-time, sustainable employment, really our biggest employer in the region is logistics. But we found that our VET clusters—so the groups of schools that come together to offer VET—did offer a certificate in logistics and none of the students took it up. I mean, you are absolutely right: there is a clear disconnect between where the job opportunities are and what the young people are interested in. One of the things that we did in terms of a project that we did around it was to bring together a group of young people and we took them to different logistics employers in the area and said to them, 'How would you go about attracting young people into logistics? If you were in charge, how would you go about doing it?'. And it was fascinating because the things that we would have thought and that the logistics industry were promoting were things like, 'You get paid really well, and you can travel all around the world'. Neither one of those was of any interest to the young people, and these were young people who were mostly from families—

**Ms ADDISON:** Really? I am feeling very old right now.

**Ms HARDY:** But they were from families where at least one parent was born overseas, which is very typical of our region. They did not want to be away from their families; they wanted to stay with their families.

To be frank, if you say to a young person that you can earn \$50,000 a year, or \$250,000 a year, both amounts seem like a hell of a lot, so it is not really meaningful for them. But what they did like was when they went into employers and it felt like family to them. That was the sort of thing they were looking at, and that was the sort of thing they were looking for. And they also liked when they went somewhere and they saw diversity in the workforce. They liked when there were programs for women. They liked when there were people from different nationalities who were there. So in terms of your question about how do we address that, it is a really difficult thing for us to address and we can only address it by actually asking, you know, young people and employers, 'What do we need to do to address this?'.  
  
**The CHAIR:** Good. Any further?

**Mr MAPLESTONE:** And I think that that probably is a great example of something of the role of the LLEN. I guess that we, at the moment, play around the edges in relation to that. We have lots of specific projects and works that we do. We feel that, with a place-based response, that we could, probably with some enhanced investment, really bring together industry and schools and young people and identify those critical of need at a lot earlier age. So that is something that I think the Committee could consider, and we have put proposals forward in relation to how that could be supported going forward. Thank you for your time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for attending.

**Witnesses withdrew.**