

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Sunshine — 12 August 2008

Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A. Harkness	

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms L. Steele, north campus principal, and
Mr G. Cameron, managed individual pathways coordinator, Sunshine College; and
Ms M. O'Shea, careers coordinator, Copperfield College.

The CHAIR — I declare today's hearing of the parliamentary Education and Training Committee formally open. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education. I advise all who are to present evidence to us today that the evidence, including submissions, will be subject to parliamentary privilege. This means that essentially legal action cannot be taken in regards to matters that you might share. That has not been particularly relevant as yet, but I do not know whether we will hear something more interesting today.

It is good to be here at Sunshine College senior campus with a group of year 11 students who are going to join us for a while today. We are hoping to hear from some of the students a little later, but at the moment we are going to hear from principals and teachers. We have Lynda Steele and Marg O'Shea with us to share with us their experiences in regard to this issue. Welcome. We are pleased to hear from you, and we will have some questions after you have shared with us your initial experiences and findings in regard to participation in higher education from this area.

Ms STEELE — There are two topics I want to talk about, and they are both in regard to the western metropolitan region of Victoria. You probably know that the western metropolitan region has the second lowest what we call SFO in the state. SFO stands for student family occupation, and it is the measure through which schools are funded. If the family occupation in the region or in the school's intake is very low in terms of their income, then the school gets funded a little bit higher than other schools. Although in the western region and in this area many families place high importance on education, and most of that is due to the education they received at school, we have a lot of parents who have not been educated to a higher education level themselves and through their own experience many of them have somewhat negative views on schooling and view it as a rite of passage until the students are of an earning age or legal leaving-school age.

Some of the parents who are very supportive of school and education are in a situation where they either cannot or do not pay school fees. There is a lot of research into living in generational or situational poverty that gives an explanation for that. Also, in a lower socioeconomic area fundraising opportunities tend to fall flat. People do not have a lot of money or do not choose to donate to areas like schools. The research of Professors Richard Teese and Jack Keating at Melbourne University showed how schools used to be funded in Victoria up until just recently based on students who came from other countries with English as their second language and also SFO. They found that that was not equitable. Their finding was that many ESL — English as a second language — students coming into Victoria had a much higher educational standard, especially students who came from Asian backgrounds. They came from families who highly supported education, had a higher socioeconomic background and tended to settle in the more affluent suburbs of Melbourne. They were least likely to settle in the lower socioeconomic areas, although obviously lots do; you just have to look at areas such as Footscray, Sunshine and so on.

After the Teese and Keating research, the funding to schooling was changed somewhat so that it was based more on students' family occupation, but it was not changed very much. The differential in that funding to schooling from the government was not changed enough to change the whole picture — not just to overcome the financial disadvantage but the social — and to educate the community that schooling and education is the only way out of the cycle of poverty.

Commonwealth initiatives, such as the binge drinking initiative that is going on at the moment, are excellent initiatives to educate the community about things that are beneficial in terms of our students and ongoing students. For example, there is a play coming out called *Spinning Straw*, and schools can apply for funding to take students to the play so that they can get the anti-drinking message, but there are not many opportunities to apply for funding for these things.

If there were more initiatives such as the commonwealth government's binge-drinking initiative and more opportunities to apply for funding to take community members and students to those things, then we would see some of those messages coming through, not only to the community but to our schools as well. I believe that would go a long way towards informing parents about the importance of education, not just as a holding place for students until they reach the age of being legally able to leave school and go out and earn money or collect unemployment benefits. That is the first topic I wanted to talk to today.

The second thing I wanted to talk about is the staffing pool in schools in the western metropolitan region. There are inherent challenges in dealing with the community and students in the western region due to the financial and social issues. We do not have a large pool of teachers from which to select staff. Staff often take leave or leave the school

during the year due to the stress of working with challenging community members and students, or they leave after a short time. They do a year, and then they leave. With their experience they move on to a leafy green suburb somewhere that is a little bit more supported by community members with an obvious interest in education for education's sake.

There are obvious educational challenges faced by students when you have a small pool of staff from which to select and in the inherent challenges of the transience of staff coming and going from schools so that there is no longevity of staff. We know through research that the longevity of staff, including the principals but definitely the teachers, makes a difference to a student's educational outcome, and there is a lot of research to support that. It would be worthwhile looking at something to increase the pool of staff in challenging areas and also to increase staff consistency in challenging areas by offering differential incentives to school staff in challenging schools. There is a model in Western Australia that includes financial incentives to staff to work at schools in challenging situations or geographic locations. But there are also other incentives such as leave incentives that recognise teachers' stress — for example, 10 weeks paid leave after a three-year continuous stint at a school or, if you stay at a school continuously for four years, there is 22 weeks paid leave. We know that teacher stress is the main reason teachers are leaving the teaching profession. That is what I wanted to say. Thank you.

Ms O'SHEA — In relation to the variation in rates of participation in higher education, in my experience part of that is due to a skills issue — literacy particularly and academic skills. There are a significant number of students who when they get to their senior years of schooling do not have the skill levels to achieve the ENTER scores to get into university. It is documented that the literacy level — I did not bother getting any data — is an issue; they do not get the ENTER scores to get in. But in my experience there are also a significant number of students who do not want to go on to higher education. They are seeking a vocational pathway, and they are very happy to move through the VET pathway and into apprenticeships and traineeships. In my experience in the western region that has been the case with a significant number of kids.

Certainly at our school we promote that vocational pathway as an equal pathway, certainly not as a secondary pathway. In relation to that I think that the introduction of VET into schools and now VCAL has been a positive thing for young people, and it has promoted those pathways. In relation to VET, funding and fees that are passed on to students are a serious issue. I am aware of schools, not in the Brimbank cluster but in other areas, which are charging students \$1000 and \$1200 to do their courses, so that is a significant barrier. Also access to VET facilities is still an issue. In this region we do not have enough building facilities. I had students who had done year 11 building last year as a VET program, and when they wanted to go on and continue it in year 12 the option was for them to go to Newport campus, which from Sydenham via public transport is about 2 hours travelling time each way. So that is an issue.

In terms of students with higher education aspirations, the income issues in terms of books and being able to access the internet and things like that are also ongoing issues for students from low-income backgrounds. Gordon, you probably want to comment on that.

Mr CAMERON — It is obviously a very complex issue. A lot of what has been said I agree with. I think that the focus on students achieving university entrance is misguided in some ways and that, as Marg has said, the vocational pathway should be viewed as an equally successful outcome, particularly with the skill shortages that have been identified in apprenticeships. The focus on higher education I think probably partly led to that. An apprenticeship was seen as a second-class option. Things are being done about improving the attractiveness of apprenticeships, in particular I think pay. The number of students dropping out of apprenticeships was enormous because they could see their mates at McDonald's making more than they were making as a first or second-year apprentice. That was something that needed to be addressed. It needs to be promoted as an option which is a viable option for students.

The skills issue is obviously an important one, and we have to address why that is the case. Some students are not going to have the skills to go to higher education, but they are going to have the skills to do an apprenticeship and have an excellent career as an apprentice. They should not be seen, as I said, as having failed because they have done that and not gone to university. So we should not be pressuring students to think that university is the be-all and end-all. I think that one of the main reasons why students are not going to university perhaps at the same rate is largely the social, cultural thing that Lynda mentioned. They are not coming from a background where the family has traditionally gone on to higher education. If students are attending some leafy eastern suburbs school, all the

parents are basically university educated and the kids are, from the time they are born, assuming that they are basically going down that pathway. That is just not the case here. Students are not pushed in that direction.

The VET costs are definitely an issue, and the availability of VET. We operate as a cluster here. There are about 16 schools as a cluster, and we share students. There is a lot of travelling involved for the students, and some of them are not prepared to put in that amount of time travelling. It would be good if we had more facilities where students did not have to travel quite so much. This used to be a technical school, for example, and there was an awful lot of machinery over there that students could work on. That is no longer available, so if you actually want to train students in the sort of workshop environment, then they really have to go to TAFE, which can be a long drive for kids, and the TAFEs charge too much money for most of our kids to afford.

The CHAIR — How far away is the nearest TAFE?

Mr CAMERON — We are lucky because we have got a TAFE up on Ballarat Road in Sunshine, and we are close.

The CHAIR — So it is only about a kilometre away.

Mr CAMERON — Yes, that is right.

Ms O'SHEA — But that only offers electro and auto, and if you wanted to do hospitality, you would have to go — —

Ms STEELE — They do not do auto there any more; auto is in town.

Mr CAMERON — They do plumbing and they do a number of things.

The CHAIR — The building and construction area.

Ms O'SHEA — No, they do not do building and construction. The building and construction is at Newport. From here to Newport, for our students, is even further; it is a bus and two trains.

Mr CAMERON — But we are in a good position.

Ms O'SHEA — You are very central here to everything in the west.

Mr CAMERON — We are lucky here.

Ms O'SHEA — But outside of Sunshine — —

Mr CAMERON — But the cost is obviously also significant. The TAFEs will charge us basically fee-for-service rates, and that is not realistic for a 16-year-old to be paying.

Ms O'SHEA — When we send our kids around on the VET cluster there is no public transport for that, so the kids have to pay. We run a bus. There is no interconnection between the schools in terms of public transport.

Ms STEELE — And considering our region spreads from Werribee up through Maribyrnong and out to Bacchus Marsh, it is quite a large distance for some students.

The CHAIR — I am just trying to get a sense of the geography of Copperfield. You have got Sydenham campus. Where is Kings Park?

Ms O'SHEA — Down the road. It is a 5-minute drive.

The CHAIR — So Deer Park?

Ms O'SHEA — No.

The CHAIR — Still in Sunshine?

Ms O'SHEA — No, it is in Kings Park, the suburb next to Sydenham. There are three; they are sort of in a line: Delahey is in the middle, Sydenham and Kings Park.

Ms STEELE — They are all around Sydenham.

Ms O'SHEA — Yes, but the nearest train station is Watergardens, so that would be a 15-minute, 20-minute walk. It would be a significant walk to get there.

The CHAIR — So your senior students are across each of the three campuses?

Ms O'SHEA — No, our senior students are on Delahey, and our juniors are on Sydenham and Kings Park.

The CHAIR — Last year you had about 200 year 12s?

Ms O'SHEA — I was not there last year.

The CHAIR — But that sounds right?

Ms O'SHEA — Yes.

The CHAIR — How many year 12s would Sunshine have had last year; a bit under 500?

Mr CAMERON — About 120.

The CHAIR — I see. So the figure we have got of 1000 students is across primary and secondary, is it?

Ms STEELE — No, it is across four campuses of a 7–12 school. We have four campuses.

Mr CAMERON — So year 11s and 12s on this campus, and there are three campuses that have 7–10.

The CHAIR — So this campus has how many students?

Ms STEELE — Three hundred approximately.

Ms O'SHEA — Our senior has got 600 year 11s and 12s.

Ms STEELE — We also have at Sunshine an Australian technical college — commonwealth — that has about 130 students in year 11 and 12.

The CHAIR — Of the students that you had last year — we will go to Sunshine and then Copperfield — in year 12, it seems about 26 per cent of your students might have gone on to tertiary and 34 in the case of Copperfield. What sort of tertiary courses might they have taken up?

Mr CAMERON — Business is the most popular. Of course they have various business courses.

The CHAIR — Where would they do that?

Mr CAMERON — Victoria University and RMIT are the two most popular places. So 27 per cent went to university and the majority of the rest went to TAFE. Business is the most popular. For university, engineering is quite popular as well. Arts is way down the list — humanities arts, I mean, university arts. Fine arts is quite popular at TAFE. Design and IT courses — multimedia, IT, graphic design and those sorts of things — are very popular with TAFE, and also business at TAFE. A lot of our students, even at university, are looking at vocational pathways through university, so they are looking to do accounting because they can become an accountant. They are not looking to do a general sort of university education arts-type degree, which I think is fairly common now anyway.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Lynda, you said there are a lot of students here from culturally diverse backgrounds. I assume you have got some refugees as well who attend the school.

Ms STEELE — Yes, we do have a high proportion of refugees.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Tell me, what is the difference in the aspirations of the parents of those students compared to the other parents and the aspirations of the students? Are there any barriers within the school, and is there any racism or clash of cultures which makes it difficult for them to progress?

Ms STEELE — One thing that I am very impressed with in this college — I have been at this college for four and a half years, and I have worked in schools almost all around Australia — is the lack of racism. I was very impressed with the fact that the kids would pick on each other in groups for various types of things, such as being against each other's type of sport or being against each other's type of music, but because we have got such a wide variety of race — we have got, I think, 53 different nationalities in our schools — everybody is different, so there does not seem to be that racism. Just lately there have been a few flare-ups with the new influx of students from Africa, probably just because they are new, but that has settled down again too.

The differences in aspirations of the parents vary widely according to their nationality. We find in general — this is a wide generalisation too — that the parents from an Asian background think that schooling and education is very important and can see that that is the way out of the cycle of poverty. The parents of perhaps the new arrivals, especially the ones from Sudan and so on, can mostly see that education is important, but through the struggles that they are having financially, economically or socially in family terms, they would support the boys more than the girls continuing on in their education, but they may also need their support either at home or in the workplace at the moment. There are differences and variances in the types of background of the parents and their attitudes to schooling.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is the school doing to try to accommodate those differences or to lift the aspirations of both the parents and the students?

Ms STEELE — We try to educate, and that is our main role, so we see that that dovetails very nicely into our role with the community, too, where we are educating the community through talks and through written material that is translated. We have multicultural education aides who talk with us and with the parents, not only in translating but in helping us to understand the cultural background and the reasons behind why the parents think that education is or is not for them. We try to overcome the differences in the backgrounds — for instance, if there are financial issues at home that would stop students from coming to school, with the scant resources that we have, we have to work with them very innovatively to try to redress the balance in some way.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Finally, in terms of careers teachers and in terms of the information that you provide to the parents and the students, do you think that is enough? Do students need more time to work through the courses, understand the subjects and understand what they need to achieve to get into a course? Do you think students are familiar with the scholarships available from the various universities and TAFEs, or does there need to be more done?

Ms STEELE — I would have to tell you that our careers advisers and the people who work to get our kids into places — I am sitting right next to one of them — work very hard and are very skilled in this. I will hand it over to you, Gordon, to talk about the SNAP and the PPP.

Mr CAMERON — Yes. We do spend a lot of time on that. Sometimes you wonder how far you are getting with it, because we are in the process now of interviewing all year 12 students and assisting them with their VTAC applications. All students will have, basically, a second interview now. They had an interview earlier in the year and prepared a list of courses that they thought they would like to get into. They all knew what the ENTER score was, what the extra requirements were for those courses and all that sort of stuff, so they were educated early in the year about all that. We are going through that process again now to try to finalise that. Then later on this term we will, in groups at school, put in those VTAC applications online. We are basically trying to make sure that every student puts in an application. We are not saying, 'Go away and do it at home'.

We are with them every step of the way trying to make sure they get the right courses for them, trying to make their selections realistic, obviously, and making sure that there is a course that they can get into. An awful lot of work goes into that. Even so, there are a number of students at this stage who are still unrealistic in their options. They are still not understanding quite what is required to get an ENTER score of 65 to get into a course. We spend a lot of time attempting to educate students as to what is required, but they are still, even now, thinking that they are going to get this score when they are clearly not; they just do not work hard enough to do that. So there is an attempt to change the culture of the school, I suppose, in students' understanding of how much work is required to get that particular score, because still, despite what we tell them and what we try to do, there is still in some cases a lack of understanding.

Also, in terms of something you mentioned earlier about refugee students and other students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, this year we have started putting in a three-year VCE for some students. At the end of year 10 they will come to this campus, and we can clearly identify some students who simply are not going to be able to complete VCE in two years, so we are counselling those students to do VCE over three years to give themselves an extra year to build their skills, so that by the time they get to the end of year 12 they are going to be better at it than they have been, because in some cases their English simply is not good enough. It has got nothing to do with their level of intelligence or whatever; they just cannot read and write English to a level that is required at VCE.

We also have a program we are running at the moment for a number of students where we have business mentors. It has been organised by the Beacon Foundation in consultation with us, and they are working with our VCAL students and some of our year 10 students through a 10-week program where they are actually working with someone from business. Each student has their own individual mentor, and they are dealing with what is required in the world of work and assisting them to understand the Australian culture and the Australian work environment. We are doing a number of things to try to assist, but we could always use more time.

Ms STEELE — We also have a partnership with RMIT and VU. Do you want to mention that?

Mr CAMERON — Victoria University runs a program called the Portfolio Partnership program. The students of nominated schools in the western suburbs can apply for university or TAFE places, and they are accepted or rejected based on a portfolio that they develop rather than on the ENTER score. If they want to get into university, they still need an ENTER of 50, but they might be able to get into law — which has an ENTER of 87.95 — with a 50 instead of the 87 because of their portfolio. We spend a lot of time assisting students to develop those portfolios. We also have a similar relationship with RMIT. They have a program called the Schools Network Access program — SNAP. We get to nominate students who we think would be successful at university. It is based mostly on teacher recommendations, but the students do need to do something. As part of their VTAC SEAS process — which is the special equity and access scheme — they can write a statement directed to RMIT about why they want to do that course. We have to support their application with a supporting statement, and then RMIT will either accept them or reject them based entirely on that and will not even look at their ENTER.

It has been a fantastic thing for a number of our students over a number of years that they have gotten into RMIT. They have not had the ENTER that is required for a course, but we have been able to recognise that those students can be successful. I can remember a Bosnian refugee some years ago who wanted to get into a course in professional communication, which had an ENTER of 95. She was not going to get anything like that, but we could see that this student was an incredibly hardworking student and would succeed. She has since completed that course, and she has gone on and is working. It is a fantastic success for her. We work hard on that sort of stuff too.

Ms O'SHEA — In relation to that it is fantastic to have these programs, but there is also a significant extra workload on us because we have so many students we will have to assist to fill out these extra application requirements. Even though they are fantastic and I do welcome them — —

The CHAIR — You want an assistant.

Ms STEELE — There is funding given to schools to staff schools with teachers; the teachers are taken away from teaching because they are heavily involved, and rightly so, in what they are doing.

Ms O'SHEA — I am new to Copperfield this year; previously I worked at a different school in the west. Copperfield has worked solidly for the last three years to build student results, and it has put in and introduced a lot of initiatives. Students now do holiday examinations and things like that. But when you are with students who have not understood how hard they have to work, it is that balance also with retention, because if you are too tough, you have that issue that for a lot of students they are not interested. Also a lot of those special entry programs, or special requirements for universities, actually put students off. Some of the less aspiring students are not interested in doing that extra work to get into a course.

One other issue that I want to raise is that the level of part-time work that some of my students are involved in is huge. I have got some students who are working 20 to 30 hours a week in takeaway food. They are running the McDonald's from 7 o'clock until 2 o'clock two or three nights a week. It is incredibly difficult, when a student has been given the opportunity to earn that money, to say to the student, 'You've got to stop doing that for the next six

months' — or whatever — 'or the next three months so that you can concentrate on your work'. I am sure you have got a significant number of kids like that.

Mr CAMERON — Absolutely.

Ms O'SHEA — Compared to when I was at school, when shopping closed at 9 o'clock on a Friday night and on a Saturday morning, now with this extended 24-hour trading it seems to me that that is being serviced by students. I do not know what the answer to that is, but it is a real issue.

Mr CAMERON — On that point you made about the trade-off between aspirations and running holiday exams and stuff like that, we have pressure to improve our VCE results, and so we try to do things that are going to improve our VCE results, things such as trying to make exams seem more important to students. One thing that we have discussed is making year 11 exams count towards getting a pass in year 11, which is good in terms of trying to improve students' attitude to exams, but there are a number of students whom that will, as you say, completely put off. There are a number of students who we know are not going to be successful at those exams but we still want to encourage to stay at school, so we do not want to be failing students who cannot complete exams. So we are caught in a bind.

Ms O'SHEA — Then you do not increase your VCE averages, so you get in trouble for that.

Mr CAMERON — Yes, we get in trouble from the region for not increasing our VCE scores.

The CHAIR — I am conscious of the time. There are a number of other issues that we could easily have followed up. Hopefully they will still come through as the day goes by. At 10 o'clock we were going to hear from the first group of students, so we might move on to that group. I hope there will be an opportunity to talk move informally with you as we go through the day. Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.

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Witnesses

Ms R. Elliot, year 11 student,
Mr A. Meyers, year 11 student,
Mr D. Nguyen, year 12 student, and
Mr J. Marijona, year 12 student, Sunshine College; and
Mr D. Viviers, year 11 VCAL student, Copperfield College.

The CHAIR — Let us get under way. I think it would be good to hear from you individually to hear your story and your family's background both in terms of where you are from and whether your parents have been to university, their educational backgrounds, and what your aspirations are. That is really what we want to hear. I am happy to start with Rachael at this stage and work on down the table. Then we will swap over as we go along. Rachael, how about telling us a bit about yourself and what you plan to do and so on.

Ms ELLIOT — My name is Rachael. My parents are both Australian. I was born in Sunshine. My educational dream is to finish year 12 with a high ENTER score. I want to do a course at university for journalism. I hope to be a journalist one day.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Another journalist.

Ms ELLIOT — I really want to be a journalist. I would be the first person in my family to go to university, so it would be great to go to university. I have a lot of concerns about university because they are either a fair distance away or, if they are close, they have really high ENTER scores. If I want to be a journalist, the ENTER score is 86 and over. It is difficult to get that. I know RMIT has an ENTER score of 95. The closest one that has journalism courses is in the city, and it is really hard to get 95 as an ENTER score, so it is possible that I will have to rule out RMIT as a university for me. It is a bit hard. I have been working hard to get there.

The CHAIR — But you will still have it on the top of your list in terms of applications?

Ms ELLIOT — Yes.

The CHAIR — And what are the alternative opportunities?

Mr KOTSIRAS — I was also going to ask: are you happy with the way the school is assisting you to try to achieve that score?

Ms ELLIOT — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Could they do more?

Ms ELLIOT — I know there could be a lot more done to help people with the universities and to help people make decisions about them and their ENTER scores and stuff like that.

The CHAIR — The alternatives other than RMIT if you are looking at other options?

Ms ELLIOT — I want to go to La Trobe because I have heard that La Trobe is really good. I had my heart set on La Trobe, but that is an ENTER score of 86, which is also high. I had a MIPS appointment here which recommended that I go to TAFE before I go to university, so I might need to do a TAFE course before I go to university just to help me get into a course at university.

The CHAIR — If you went to La Trobe, for example — is this the Bundoora campus?

Ms ELLIOT — Yes.

The CHAIR — Would you live away from home, or would you commute?

Ms ELLIOT — I would probably live at home still. I would probably have to leave at, like, 6.30 in the morning to get there. It takes two trains and a tram just to get to La Trobe from Sunshine.

Mr ELASMAR — Do you do any part-time work now?

Ms ELLIOT — Yes, I work.

Mr ELASMAR — How do you find this is affecting your study?

Ms ELLIOT — I got a job, and it is basically based on weekends. It is in the city, and so I have to catch a train and leave about an hour before I even start work just to get there. But that is all right; it is not interfering with my studies, because it is on the weekends.

The CHAIR — Let us move on to Daniel.

Mr VIVIERS — My name is Daniel, as you know. I was born in Australia. My dad is half South African — he was born in South Africa — which makes me a quarter. My mum was born in Australia. Neither of my parents went to university, and I really do not plan to either. I undertake VCAL, and I am really interested in getting into some sort of trade, hopefully something in electrics. I am really interested in electronics. I really like them, and I am kind of into mechanical as well. I am undertaking a VET course called electrotechnology, and I am doing a VCE subject — systems engineering — and they are both going really well at the moment. As part of my VCAL course I can do a work placement where I go into a workplace one day a week and see what it is like. Originally I thought I really wanted to do automotive and I wanted to be an automotive electrician, and I was really interested and all that. Now I have been in my workplace for a little while — —

The CHAIR — It has cured you of that one!

Mr VIVIERS — Yes. I had been in my work placement for a little while as an automotive electrician, and I found out that it is actually not what I want to do anymore. I am hoping to get into maybe being an industrial electrician and see where that takes me.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you work?

Mr VIVIERS — No, I do not work. I am trying to get a job, but I do not work yet, other than my work placement.

Mr KOTSIRAS — And your parents are both happy with the decision that you have taken?

Mr VIVIERS — Yes, they are happy. They are fine with it.

The CHAIR — And the VET unit you are doing is where?

Mr VIVIERS — It is based at my school, so I do not have to travel.

The CHAIR — Let us move to Adam now.

Mr MEYERS — My name is Adam Meyers. I am in year 11 here at Sunshine College. Neither of my parents went to university. Actually, being in the second semester of year 11, I have gone the furthest so far, so I am kind of setting a new family record and raising the bar. My father was born here in Australia just like me. My mum was born in Wales. I would like to get into journalism and photography, because that kind of area really interests me. I am aware of the high ENTER scores, recommendations and things like that that I need after year 12, but I am perfectly prepared to go through all that just to get to my goal.

The CHAIR — Is that journalism at university or journalism at TAFE that you are looking at?

Mr MEYERS — I think, because of the high ENTER scores at university, I would have to defer to TAFE first and maybe do a professional writing and editing course at TAFE.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Adam, are you happy with the school, or could they be doing more to assist you?

Mr MEYERS — I am really happy with the school, yes. I think they are doing as well as they can. It is perfect what they are doing here; I am really sure of that. I am being supported to the maximum.

Mr DIXON — Do you have a part-time job?

Mr MEYERS — Yes. I work in a video shop.

Mr DIXON — How many hours, roughly, would you do?

Mr MEYERS — A week, probably 7, and that is mainly on the weekends as well.

Mr ELASMAR — You are aware of scholarships and which university you can go to? Have you visited any universities, or have any universities visited your school?

Mr MEYERS — Yes, I have done research on the internet about scholarships and things. I found a lot of them need a high school scholarship first, but when I came to Sunshine College in year 7, scholarships were not available — they started the next year — so I kind of missed out there. But, yes, I am looking into other scholarships at other universities as well.

The CHAIR — In relation to that bit about the universities that Nazih asked you, have you visited any universities, or have there have been universities that have come to Sunshine to talk to you about opportunities?

Mr MEYERS — No, there has not been anything like that.

The CHAIR — Okay. David.

Mr NGUYEN — My name is David Nguyen. I come from a Vietnamese background. None of my parents went to uni. My parents are solo, and they work full time. I am currently in year 12. I am doing English, physics, chem., maths methods and specialist maths, and I do extra tutoring outside of school, usually from around 4.00 to 7.00 or 4.00 to 6.00 — 2 or 3 hours. In order to get the extra tutoring my parents would have to support me with money. I asked if I could work, but then they were like, ‘We support you the whole way’.

I come from a family of four siblings. Two of my older siblings did not make it to uni, and hopefully I will be the first. My goal is to go to RMIT or Swinburne. I want to do mechatronics or electrical engineering. I am going to an open day this Sunday for Swinburne, and hopefully I will get more information about that. Last Sunday the school organised a bus to go to RMIT, which was really good. I know what I want to do now; I have narrowed down my perspective of what I want to do exactly. I have a lot of support from my peers, my teachers especially, and my parents. My main concerns are transportation to university. RMIT is pretty close for a uni — I would just have to catch a train to the city, and I would just walk across the street to RMIT — whereas with Swinburne I would have to get off the train and then catch a tram to Hawthorn. Another concern is facilities for students at school. I believe that students should have maybe more computers or some sort of technology that would help students with learning. That is about it.

Mr DIXON — David, what are your older siblings doing?

Mr NGUYEN — One is working in a factory, and the other is a mechanic.

The CHAIR — Did they finish year 12, or did they leave before that?

Mr NGUYEN — They actually finished year 12, but they did not get enough ENTER to enter uni.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How are you going so far?

Mr NGUYEN — Currently I am doing okay. I just had a mid-year exam. I got my mid-year score, which was pretty good. There are teachers here who help us predict our ENTER. I got my ENTER, and I have got to work a bit harder to reach my goal.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are there any barriers in the school which stop you from doing better?

Mr NGUYEN — No, pretty much there is nothing. Teachers open classes for us to just go in and do extra classes during lunchtime and recess.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Let us hear from Jorje.

Mr MARIJONA — My name is Jorje. I am currently doing my year 12, and I come from a Salvadorian background. My parents were both born in El Salvador; I was born here in Australia. After I finish year 12, hopefully I want to get into commerce and do commerce. Both of my brothers have gone to TAFE; one is a graphic designer and the other one is a multimedia developer. My father did go to uni in his country — he studied as an accountant — but my mother only finished up to year 9. Coming from a Spanish background, they do encourage me to study and to try my best. They do not pressure me to go into just uni; they just say, ‘As long as you are doing something you like’. But I think one of the toughest dilemmas I am coming towards now is choosing the university I want to go to — for example, La Trobe is a really good university, but due to transport issues, as it is located all the way out in Bundoora, it comes as a second option to me.

The CHAIR — What is your first option, sorry?

Mr MARIJONA — RMIT.

Mr KOTSIRAS — And that is mainly due to transport?

Mr MARIJONA — Mainly due to transport.

Mr KOTSIRAS — If that was not an issue, would you go to Bundoora first?

Mr MARIJONA — Yes.

Mr ELASMAR — Jorje, again the same question: are you aware of scholarships, and have you been visiting universities, or have any other universities come and visited your school?

Mr MARIJONA — I have visited VU and RMIT, yes.

Mr ELASMAR — But have any universities come to the school?

Mr MARIJONA — No.

The CHAIR — The only other question I have got is for David. I did not pick up what age you were when you came here. Were you born in Australia?

Mr NGUYEN — Yes, I was born in Australia.

The CHAIR — So English has not been an issue with any of you; you have grown up with English. I just wanted to see whether you might have had to learn English after you arrived; not the case. We might hear from the Copperfield students next, and there is also another student, I understand, from Sunshine to speak to us. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Sunshine — 12 August 2008

Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A. Harkness	

Chair: Mr G. Howard
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford
Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope
Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms I. Tontoe, year 11 student, Sunshine College; and
Mr T. Lam, year 12 student, and
Ms K. Steckyj, year 12 student, Copperfield College.

The CHAIR — We will start with Isata. Can you tell us a bit about yourself? You have heard the other students. We really want to get a bit of a feel for your family background in terms of education and aspiration and what you are hoping to do and so on.

Ms TONTOE — My name is Isata Tontoe, and I am from West Africa; I was born in Guinea. My mum is from Sierra Leone and my dad was from Liberia. My mum did not get the chance to go to university. She was in grade 9 when she got pregnant with my older sister. My dad was a soldier who fought in the war, and he died when I was about 10 years old. We had to move to Australia to live a better life because I did not have the chance to go to school in Africa. When I moved to Australia I did not know how to speak good English, but I tried to improve my English. I was 14 years old when I came to Australia. Yesterday I was three years in Australia.

I have managed to improve my English and I have managed to participate in lots of events in high school. I have won lots of certificates. I did not expect to win stuff like that. I am trying to improve and do things in the Australian way, and I am actually a citizen now. The only support I have is my mum. I have been living with my mum since my dad died. She is the only one who supports me, and my teachers as well. I would love to go to university. When I was growing up I always wanted to do accounting, but I was not good at maths.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Not many accountants are!

Ms TONTOE — I love drama as well; acting. With my English it is a bit hard. When I went for my MIPS interview I was told that I need 25 per cent for English to get an ENTER score. I was a bit scared about English, then I thought ‘I will do well’. But now, when I grow up I want to be a hospitality manager because I love cooking. I want to be in the hospitality industry and do cooking because I love practical cooking. At the moment I am doing a VET course at school — hospitality. I am doing four other subjects. I am not doing maths; I dropped maths. I am doing English, I am doing industry enterprise and I am doing psychology. It is my first year doing psychology, but it is fun. With my English I am not doing ESL because they could not get me into ESL. Even though I am an ESL student they put me into the highest level and I am doing the best I can, which is kind of amazing. I am an ESL student, but I am in the highest class. As I said, when I finish year 12 I want to do a two-year diploma and hopefully go to university to study more music and drama, because I love acting and acting work.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How did you find the other students? Were they helpful?

Ms TONTOE — They were helpful.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Did they make any obscene remarks when you arrived?

Ms TONTOE — No. Actually I have my speech, but it is kind of really long. When I heard them speaking they only said little things, the main stuff, so I just said that I will leave my speech there because it is all my story from when I was born and when I came to Australia. I just basically said that I will leave that and say the main things I want to say. They were pretty helpful. They helped me to remember stuff that I forgot.

Mr ELASMAR — You are doing very well. Do you work part-time?

Ms TONTOE — No, I do not work because my mum always told me that I should focus on one thing and I should not do work and school. I have just started a good education in Australia, so I should just focus on what I want to do.

Mr ELASMAR — So your mother will support you to go to university?

Ms TONTOE — Yes, and my teachers as well.

The CHAIR — Terrific. Your English is remarkably good. Well done. What was your first language?

Ms TONTOE — My first language is Kisi. I cannot speak my own language. After three years in Australia I am used to the way they do things, even though I have not been here for a long time. I have done a lot of things out of school like presentations and giving speeches, so I am not nervous at the moment. I am used to it, so I can speak in front of millions of people. I choose to speak good English.

Mr KOTSIRAS — You should become a politician.

Ms TONTOE — Yes, that would be good. I love an argument. I can argue the whole day; I love arguing.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Isata, you have done very well.

Mr LAM — My name is Thuong Lam. I am a year 12 student at Copperfield College. I was born in Hong Kong and raised by my mum. My dad died when I was four years old, and because of that I had to move to Australia. We were sponsored by — I am not sure, but it was an organisation that consisted of nuns, a Christian group. It gave us an opportunity to go to Australia.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What do you hope to do when you finish school?

Mr LAM — In the future I want to go to Monash University, probably the Clayton campus, and do a bachelor of arts and major in criminology. Otherwise I could do Japanese studies and maybe go into a Japanese business or something like that.

Mr DIXON — What languages do you speak?

Mr LAM — At home we mainly speak English. We do talk a bit of Vietnamese but not that much, because I have spent most of my life here in Australia and English is a bit easier.

The CHAIR — Do you have older siblings?

Mr LAM — No, I am on my own — with my mum, obviously.

The CHAIR — Just you and your mum?

Mr LAM — Yes.

The CHAIR — In terms of financial support to get to university, how do you see that working out?

Mr LAM — Do you mean HECS?

The CHAIR — How do you see your finances? You are relying on HECS, but in terms of other costs; are you doing a job?

Mr LAM — I don't have a job. However, I am planning to go back to Hong Kong. Because of my dad's death I am receiving some sort of compensation. When I turn 18 I am entitled to get that, and I could probably use it for my university fees.

Mr ELASMAR — When you are with your friends, what do the majority think? Do they want to go to university, or do they not want to go to university?

Mr LAM — Most of my friends want to go to university.

Mr ELASMAR — They want to go to university?

Mr LAM — Yes.

Mr ELASMAR — Do they have background support from their parents?

Mr LAM — Yes, some support from their parents.

Mr ELASMAR — And you are aware of all the options you have?

Mr LAM — Yes, I am. My second option is to go to Melbourne University and to do the bachelor of arts. I like Monash University better because of the beautiful buildings and area. That is where I would prefer to go..

The CHAIR — How have you learnt about your options — the internet, at school, support through your careers teachers or what?

Mr LAM — I have been provided with information by the careers office, and they gave me information about some open days. They recommended that I go to three different universities. I went there, and it was very

informative. At first I did not know what I wanted to do for my future, but then once I went to these open days, it gave me a clear picture for my future.

The CHAIR — That is good. Kate?

Ms STECKYJ — Hi. My name is Kate, and I was born in Australia. I live with my mother, who is very supportive of my education, but my father left school at year 9 and pursued factory work. He does not see education as a priority. I want to study a bachelor of social science, maybe specialising in criminal justice. I have received a lot of good information about careers from my careers teachers and also other teachers at school. They hold information sessions, and Marg O'Shea, my careers teacher, is opening the computer lab and showing students step by step with their VTAC applications.

Mr DIXON — Kate, have you got brothers and sisters?

Ms STECKYJ — I have a brother who left school.

Mr DIXON — He is older than you?

Ms STECKYJ — Yes.

Mr DIXON — And what is he doing?

Ms STECKYJ — He is doing a traineeship in America for hotel management.

Mr ELASMAR — Do you work? Do you do any part-time work?

Ms STECKYJ — Yes, I have a part-time job.

Mr DIXON — How many hours would you spend on that?

Ms STECKYJ — Probably about 10 to 20 a week.

Mr DIXON — More than weekends, or just weekends?

Ms STECKYJ — Yes, weekends and Friday nights.

The CHAIR — Have you visited a university campus?

Ms STECKYJ — Yes, I went to two open days, and there was a lot of information there, but I am still thinking about my options.

The CHAIR — What is going to help you make up your mind, do you think? What are you still looking for before you can make up your mind?

Ms STECKYJ — I guess I just want to have a job where I am passionate about it and go to work happy every day. I think criminal justice is probably something I am passionate about, so I will probably end up doing that as a career.

The CHAIR — Isata, have you been to an open day at a university?

Ms TONTOE — I did, but it was in Tassie — Tasmania — because I lived there for two years.

The CHAIR — I see, so it was some time ago.

Ms TONTOE — I went to the Launceston university, I think it was, yes.

The CHAIR — Very good. I was just wondering — given that we are making recommendations as a committee about ways in which students might be more assisted in making up their mind about what they want to do and if they want to go on to university or higher education — what are the sorts of things that you would like us to suggest to help make it easier. Any ideas, Isata?

Ms TONTOE — For me, more support for people who come from other countries into the school, and more ESL teachers to help them and assist them in English, because English is a hard thing. For me, it would be very hard if you cannot speak English and want to go into uni, because I have experienced that. Yes, that would be one good thing.

The CHAIR — Although you have had a fair bit of support in that area, I presume.

Ms TONTOE — Yes, I have. I did.

The CHAIR — But recognising there are a number of other people.

Ms TONTOE — Yes. There are other people coming.

Mr ELASMAR — How did you get the information about that support? Who helped you when you got here?

Ms TONTOE — With what I have just said, are you asking?

The CHAIR — In terms of her English, do you mean?

Mr ELASMAR — Yes.

Ms TONTOE — In terms of the English, basically it was this school and high school. Yes, they helped me.

The CHAIR — Any suggestions for us?

Mr LAM — Probably open days. More people should be informed about these open days that are available. They should open doors for them, because some students may be confused about whether they want to go to a higher level and university or not. That is all I can say.

The CHAIR — Is there an opportunity, too, for either the universities or people who have been to university and then gone on and are working in different areas, to come into the school more to let you see how people have gone through their career paths, as it were?

Mr LAM — Yes, of course.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do you think that universities should also visit the schools? Rather than you going to the open day, should the universities physically come out to the schools and talk to the students?

Mr LAM — Yes, provided that they talk about the basic university structure, what is going to be covered and such things like that. But I still recommend that they should go to the actual university, because they will see what kind of learning environment they might experience.

Ms STECKYJ — I think the transport is a big issue for people going to university. I believe that there should be more public transport that goes directly to the uni instead of having to catch two or three trains and buses. And also to subsidise the fares, because they are very expensive at the moment. People who have to use it regularly should have it cheaper.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your contribution. We are going to have a break for some morning tea, and you are welcome to stay and have a chat to us. We would like to have a bit more of an informal chat with you before we continue on. It has been terrific to hear from you as students through the morning. Good luck with your futures.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Sunshine — 12 August 2008

Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A. Harkness	

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Dr M. Davies, co-director,

Mr A. Edwards, manager, Access and Success project, and

Dr E. Curtin, liaison officer, Making VU project, Victoria University.

The CHAIR — We will now hear from the Victoria University Access and Success team. Thank you for coming along. You are aware that we are looking at those issues that might act as barriers for students going on to higher education, and we are very interested to gain your input. If you would share with us your insights for a start, we will have some questions, no doubt, to follow up with.

Dr DAVIES — My name is Merryn Davies. I am the co-director of Access and Success. My colleague, Tony Edwards, is a project manager within the team. Emma Curtin is our liaison officer with a large project within Victoria University called the Making VU project, which is where the Access and Success project nests. The Access and Success project, I think you have seen in an earlier submission, is a Victoria University initiative that is designed to address issues of student aspiration and achievement in the west. The first thing that we have to say is that this is a university initiative and there are limits obviously to what one institution can do. Victoria University is very much informed by a very local focus in its orientation to its region. It is aware of the nature of the educational issues confronting young people in its region and is very concerned to be addressing some of those in the way it is undertaking its work on the basis of its teaching and its learning but also its engagement issues and engagement policies with its own region.

The Access and Success project is a small one. It is a research project but it is also a development one in the sense that we actually undertake a number of programs in schools. The most useful thing I could do would be to tell you a little about the sorts of things that we are doing in schools. At the last count we had about 70 schools involved in the sorts of programs that this little team is running. We break the projects out into four distinct groups. One we call the Learning Enrichment projects, the second group is Youth Access, the third is what we call the Schools Plus initiative. Then we have another project where we are looking at teacher development, so we are looking both at pre-service teachers and professional development for teachers.

If we are looking at the Learning Enrichment projects, we are focusing on students in secondary schools at around the years 7 to 10 level. The rationale behind that is that although we are very much looking at connections between the university and particularly young people coming to university, we are very much aware of research that basically points us to achievement as being an absolute precondition for being able to access university, too. Instead of hooking into schools at the year 11 and 12 level we are looking at what is going on with the students further down in the school.

These are projects where we are working with the schools in partnership. Some of the essential things about this project are that these are partnerships that are school based. They are research projects, and we are using the teachers within the schools, our pre-service teachers within the schools, and university staff to work around particular issues that have been nominated by the schools as affecting aspiration and achievement, so they are very locally based. There are a number of levels that these work on, but these are long-term projects. We are in for the long haul, and so are the schools. There is a three to five-year project, and we are charting the development of our initiatives over time with this. In that sense it is different from perhaps some university engagement or university outreach projects that are much more short term and much more like the rollout of a particular program.

In the paper that I have given you I have noted what particular themes some of these individual projects might be, but I will run through one or two of them. Out at Galvin Park, for example, they are focusing the project around the use of the flexible learning environments. At Laverton P-12 college we are looking at integrated curriculum. At Thomas Carr College it is numeracy and leadership. The Keilor cluster is a really interesting one because that is made up of a number of schools, including Copperfield College whose students have just spoken to you. The Keilor cluster is interesting because initially we were looking at a focus on, say, literacy.

We went to the schools and we talked about what issues they wanted to investigate and research. The schools themselves had identified an issue that in their view was enormously important in depressing some of the achievement and aspirations of students across that particular cluster, and this one was to do with student engagement. This was the one they wanted their teachers and us, in cooperation, to research and come up with ideas they could address as a group of schools, and this is now emerging as being quite an interesting project. Not only do we now have the secondary schools in this particular group but primary schools are coming in too on the basis that there is a real understanding that within this local region there will be a group of students — say, around about five per cent — who tend to shuffle between schools because they are being exited from schools. What the cluster wants to do is to build a unified approach and a way of supporting those students in much more positive ways. That has important implications, not only for those students but also for the other students who are in the

classrooms that those students are in because when those students are being better supported and better worked within the environment it is a lot better for everyone else too.

The CHAIR — Can you perhaps tease that one out a little bit more? Exactly what are some examples of actions that the schools are taking as a result of the students becoming more engaged?

Dr DAVIES — At this point, Geoff, what is happening is that the schools themselves are communicating more. This means that those students are not just shuffled from one to another, like passing the buck. It basically means they are taking responsibility for those students and investing much more in the future of those students. This is a change in attitude. With that change is a change in the mindset of the teachers in the school too. This is the way of the teachers themselves generating that cultural change, and I think that is a really important thing.

The other important aspect of that is that the school is very much involved in the research side of it. This is something where the teachers themselves feel they have a big investment now in the knowledge that is coming out of that also. That is an example of the Learning Enrichment projects. Youth Access is one that I might pass to you, Tony, very briefly.

Mr EDWARDS — Can I start by saying that there seem to be three groups of students that we focus on. There are those who have high aspirations but at the moment are lacking in their capacity to match those aspirations, those who have a high capacity but low aspirations, and then there is that rather strange group called the disengaged.

Roxburgh College is the focus of a collaborative project based on that middle group who have a relatively high capacity but are lacking in aspiration and may in fact disengage and no longer be in the school in the next year or two. We are working collaboratively with the school and listening to the challenges they are facing at the moment, and this all stemmed from the careers teacher receiving a phone call from a young man who was at RMIT. He had got into RMIT on a fairly decent score of about 79. He was standing outside RMIT almost in tears saying, 'I cannot cope with all of this'. He was clearly dropped into the deep end in terms of social and cultural capital, even though he may have had the educational capital.

We discussed a range of challenges that were facing Roxburgh College and came up with the idea that we would bring together around 20 students who were nominated by their teachers as lacking in aspiration but quite capable. Those 20 students were a little under 10 per cent of the year 9 cohort, so they were mainly in year 9 and a couple of the students were in year 10. We talked about and looked at their aspirations, did an initial survey and chatted about why they would be in that project.

The first significant action has been to take them to two campuses of Victoria University where they heard from four different course coordinators in different areas. At the St Albans campus they heard from multimedia, both from a staff member and a student undertaking the course, and they looked at the work they were doing there. They then heard from the course coordinator in paramedics, who is based at St Albans as well. We put them back on the bus and took them to Footscray Park, where they heard about career pathways and courses to do with human movement, physical education et cetera. We finished off the day by visiting electrical engineering, which takes a problem-based learning approach with our undergraduates.

The end result of this will be that our pre-service teachers will work between now and the end of the academic year to guide the students and to refine some of their questions about their future based on this initial experience. Then over the next two or three years, between now and when they are in year 12 hopefully, we will set out to find what questions they have about their future, in particular with tertiary education, and then our pre-service teachers and others will work to find ways that they can find solutions to those questions and continue to refine their questions about their particular career pathways. It is relatively early days, but it has been a fairly significant start with Roxburgh College.

Dr DAVIES — We are looking at these projects, in a way, as models or as pilots of what sorts of interventions or what sorts of projects the university can realistically be doing, because we can be doing these sorts of things. We have pre-service teachers who are out working in these partnership schools, and these can be really useful in terms of their own curriculum and their own learning, and at the same time they can help them become much more committed to the work that we are hoping they will continue to be doing in the western region anyway. Part of the mission of the school of education, for example, is to be preparing teachers to be working in this region. The more that our students can be understanding the settings in these schools and the more that they can actually

feel themselves to be working professionally alongside the teachers in these schools, the better it is for our program and the better it is for the schools and the educational future in the region also.

That is where projects like these are running. They are small scale, but they are also pilots for what works, and this is where the research component comes in. We are researching and evaluating these pilots as we go with the assistance of the people in the schools, and this will build up our understanding and body of knowledge of what sorts of things are going to be helpful and what sorts of things realistically a university might be doing within its region.

Our Schools Plus Provision projects are a little different again, because while we have focused in the earlier ones, as I was explaining, on learning enrichment, Schools Plus actually takes you right across the board. We have some projects here that are even at the early childhood level, where we have a big rollout of projects called Kinder Kinda. Has anyone spoken to you about Kinder Kinda yet?

The CHAIR — No.

Dr DAVIES — Okay. Kinder Kinda has been a really effective initiative that was begun two years ago. It was noticed first that not all of the children of preschool age were attending kinder, particularly in regions like Melton and so on. It was also noticed that many of the parents were, let me say, not very comfortable about the idea of their children attending preschool. Lots of these were, say, very young parents, they might have come from other countries or other cultures, and they were not quite clear about what that environment was about. So the Kinder Kinda experiment did start small. It involved the university using its early childhood pre-service teachers and other members of the university staff actually to come in and deliver many preschool programs for the children but also for the parents too.

While the children were having their program, the parents were also learning about early childhood and early childhood development. It was a way of comfortably bringing the parents into an environment where they felt much more au fait with what the expectations were of the whole preschool idea and also where they were comfortably able to ask questions about what would be happening in the next phase with school et cetera. The parents were also able to be working towards accreditation in a certificate in early childhood development. This was undertaken in a public library environment.

The initial pilot went well, and it has been rolled out and rolled out in other settings across the western region, supported by pre-service teachers and early childhood educators in a whole range of different settings. This is one that the Access and Success project brokered and trialled and then passed over, because it became large and we are a small group. We passed it over back to the university to then deliver. It is a model that has been very attractive, very resource effective, obviously, and I suppose you would have to say respectful of the needs of the people they are working with.

That is early childhood. Although our focus tends to be linking people to aspiration for university and although it might not look as though these connections are obvious, all of the research tends to be showing now that all of the disposition to schooling and the favourable exposure to education has to be happening at this level too. That might be one example. Another strong one where the rollout has just continued rolling out has been the Bulldogs Friendly Schools program, which is a program where we are partnering with the Bulldogs football team to deliver programs with footballers and pre-service teachers into many, many schools. This is an example where the university hooks into the energy that is generated by the footballer visits et cetera and the Bulldogs hook into the curriculum expertise and the expertise of our pre-service teachers in basically making beautiful little pairs that are able to go into the schools. We have a pre-service teacher and a footballer, and it tends to be a much happier combination than either one or the other. The kids love the footballers, but the footballers feel much more comfortable and confident in the school setting when they know that they are delivering something that is worthwhile, because they actually have a curriculum behind it which the pre-service teachers and our project worker have developed for them to deliver.

The CHAIR — These are the actual footballers who are going into the schools?

Dr DAVIES — They going into the schools, yes.

The CHAIR — So what are they doing other than doing their footy clinics?

Dr DAVIES — They are doing the usual footy clinics, but the footy clinics are based around a curriculum that is delivered in the school around healthy living, healthy eating, values in sport et cetera. Most of us might have been familiar with the old model of footballers going into the school where they just do the clinic and nothing else. They turn up, and then they go and that is it, and everyone thinks back to that day when the footballer came.

The CHAIR — And they got their autograph.

Dr DAVIES — And they got the autograph, and maybe on the back of the jumper. But this is a program that is focused around those visits, so it is much more coherent. It picks up on some of that energy and some of that glam et cetera, but it does have a much more sustained and engaged effect because it runs over time, over a number of weeks and so on. It is one where it has been mutually beneficial. Again, it is one of those pilots that we are evaluating and researching to see what the success factors in models like this have been and how the different resources of the different groups can work to build into positive and engaging environments for the children involved. From this project, which was a primary school one, we are now developing a secondary one to do with drug and alcohol education. That is now in development and is going to be an interesting one also. A number of other projects on page 8 might involve some non-school settings as well. In all of these we are trialling different sorts of partnerships and looking at different ways of working with different groups of young people.

The last arm of our research is the Teacher Leadership one. Again, we started off with research that showed a number of disturbing things about schools in the west in terms of, say, teacher burnout, teacher attrition and the need for, I suppose you would say, an understanding of the context that the teachers in the region are working in. This particular project looks at the needs of teachers in terms of teacher leadership. It is looking for sustainability of that teacher workforce. We are trying to keep the teachers in the region and not have them head off to the eastern suburbs the moment they decently can et cetera. We can do this in many ways: by validating the work they are doing, by bringing them into, say, some of the research culture of the projects we are working on and by building leadership capacity from a much earlier point. We are looking at teachers who are just, perhaps, a few years out and looking to hooking them into leadership programs that way. We are also looking at doing this in ways that are an understanding of the teachers' context as we possibly can by trialling things like on-site delivery — actually delivering, say, masters unit programs in particular schools so that we go to the teachers rather than the teachers coming to us. Again, these are trials. We are looking at pilots. We are looking at innovative ways of working with and building the educational capital in the region.

Mr DIXON — You are out there in a lot of schools. One of the objects of the whole exercise is improving educational capital in the area and just improving education. The university is exposed to students and to teachers, but especially to students and even to their parents, as a worthwhile path, whereas it is not the major path, obviously, in this area. Do you think that might be one of the by-products of all that you are doing?

Dr DAVIES — The underlying rationale of it is very much to make the university taken for granted, not something that is either unheard of or out there and alien. To have visibility and a presence in the schools in a day-to-day way is a really important part of the work that we are doing now. This has been happening for many years with the Project Partnership Program that is being run by the school of education. But now projects like these where the presence is much more sustained and expected and where you are moving towards bringing in other people from the university, apart from the school of education, are starting to make other aspects of university life more open and understandable too. We are looking at bringing in people from different faculties — from, say, engineering faculties, that sort of thing. That sort of role model and example is terribly important. It is also really important when the students in schools see people just like them who are university students coming out and talking to them — just like Tony was saying, when he worked out at St Albans and the students were able to come and talk to your students.

Mr EDWARDS — Bayside Secondary College was a good example of that as well. We run an alternative access program for some of our partnership schools. In addition to their ENTER score they construct a portfolio along guidelines set by the university, and that access applies to every VTAC course both in TAFE and higher education. We used a number of our youth studies students as well as our education students to go to Bayside and act as mentors to help to complete this task. A lot of students are still daunted by the fact that they are given a form, and to help them get over that threshold these mentors were operating at the school, but as they worked they were exchanging amazing amounts of information about their commonality — that they came from a similar geographic area and their parents were from a non-English-speaking background — and they related to each other things like, 'I am in the second year of my course, and I found it hard, but these are the successes I have experienced'. That

exchange in itself was gold, because they were handing over a whole lot of knowledge that you can only get from people who are experiencing it first-hand.

Mr DIXON — Were any of the footballers studying at VU, or am I asking too much?

Dr DAVIES — No, you are not asking too much. Some of the footballers quite like working with school students, and we do have a very strong physical education program at VU, so I think we will be getting footballers.

Mr EDWARDS — The Western Bulldogs spend quite a bit of time in the human movement area in terms of the diagnostic aspects of it. With the construction that is going on at the moment at Whitten Oval, I think human movement will be utilising some labs down there as well, so there is a fair bit of reciprocity.

The CHAIR — You said that when you went to Copperfield College literacy was an issue that you had identified, and that is something that I think we have picked up on a bit today, too. There is a challenge for a number of students who might be able to speak clearly enough but their written and comprehension skills still need a lot of work to ensure they can get up to the mark. Have you done any work in that area to work with schools to lift those capabilities?

Mr EDWARDS — Box Forest Secondary College, once again, is fairly small and shallow at the moment, but pre-service teachers are working with the literacy coordinator to develop a program I call ‘metacognition mentors’ where they get trained in this area. They roam around the classroom, almost as tutors, to help students use the skills they have been given. Whenever a problem comes along they are there as tutors to help unpack and say, ‘What about utilising this tool? What about doing that?’. It is very early days, but 2008 is the first entry into the school. In 2009 we hope to grow it from the small successes we have had so far. That is an example of that.

The CHAIR — Can you say that again? The tutors are university students or other community — —

Mr EDWARDS — In the classroom there would be a teacher and two of our pre-service teachers. While the teacher is delivering the bulk of it and as students come across, let us say, challenges in the literacy side of things, our pre-service teachers would be reminding them about some of the literacy skills they have been given as a way of addressing challenges so that they are challenges, not barriers, and allowing them to use those tools to decode and unpack some of those challenges.

Dr DAVIES — All of our projects are based on using Victoria University students in schools. At the moment most of those students are pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers are in the schools every week, and they are working on those projects on Tuesdays during the week and also in their block rounds. Again we are looking at these as models for further work with, say, Learning in the Workplace students. Emma might like to add something on Learning in the Workplace.

Dr CURTIN — I was going to add a couple of things. As Merryn said, I am the liaison for a broader project called the Making VU program, of which the Access and Success project is a part. I wanted to add to what you said, Martin, about the kind of by-product of Victoria University. Part of another project commitment stream is about customised learning. That is about making sure that if we are attracting students to Victoria University, we do not just leave them to their own devices; we build in support capacity within the university to make sure we are working within the diverse communities in the west and providing ongoing support, particularly support for students that may come in through the Portfolio Partnerships Program.

As Merryn just indicated, another stream is about Learning in the Workplace, and we have a commitment to have a 25 per cent Learning in the Workplace capacity within our courses. Access and Success connects in with that, because this fantastic model they are building is a collaborative partnership that we are hoping will be a really good model for other schools across the university to apply that. So there are a lot of linkages across all of the projects we are working in. The commitment, as we call it, that I am a project officer in is specifically about community connections and opportunities in the west. It taps into the sporting area and, as Tony indicated, we are working very closely with the Western Bulldogs in creating partnership opportunities and getting people more included in physical activity in the west, which again touches on the engagement within education. I could go on and on, but I will not.

The CHAIR — That gives us a better understanding of some of the things you do, and it is certainly good to get that feedback and understanding of some of the good opportunities that VU are able to provide and the benefits that have flowed on as a result of that.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How difficult was it to form a partnership with the schools? What are the barriers that universities might have?

Dr DAVIES — That is a fabulous question. It is a very good question because it is the nub of this work anyway and, in our view, probably the most important theme coming out of what we are doing is the significance of developing partnerships that are going to be very strong and very enduring. In terms of how difficult it is, partnerships take a long time to develop if they are going to develop well, and this is one of the things we are really wanting to convey to our colleagues. Schools need to be treated with great care and respect. You do not come into a school saying, 'We are from the university and we know what is right; we know what is good for you'. It is a matter of constructing relationships that are going to be durable over time. That can mean quite a lot of initial sorting out of territories and boundaries and an understanding of what people want, like the example I gave where we came in and said we thought literacy was the way to go but the schools had a different idea. Once we worked towards accommodating that and working together the partnership was much stronger, because we were listening and able to then support the school in where it wanted to go. It is very important, and if it is acknowledged and honoured, I think it means that we are certainly preparing pre-service teachers in ways that are good, credible ways, because they understand from the start what a school setting means and what the issues confronting schools are.

Mr EDWARDS — I might just say in addition to that that as a starting point we have access to the On Track data, and some of those trends tend to flag certain schools that are perhaps in more need than others and identify those aspirational groups et cetera. Often we have been asked, 'How do you pick the school, because there are so many in need out there?'. Often it is the ones that really want to work with us anyway. They are looking for as many solutions and as many resources as possible, so often they step forward as much as we step towards them. But that On Track data really does inform where we go and what schools we approach.

The CHAIR — So no schools have said, 'No go; we don't want any more of that sort of stuff from you'?

Mr EDWARDS — No, because I think that in the very first 50 or 60 minutes that we have a meeting with them we just listen rather than talk, and I think that is important. We need to look at their strategic plan and appreciate that, and we need to look at their annual implementation data and strategies and try to see how we can weave in with that rather than tack onto it. When they hear us listening — a strange way to say it — they start to appreciate the methodology we are putting into this.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I know it is early yet, but are there any success stories with your Access and Success project? Do you know how it is going?

Mr EDWARDS — I will just give you one hint that is not really strong and tangible, but at the Roxburgh Park excursion to St Albans, within 5 minutes of walking out of multimedia one young man said to the careers teacher, 'I think I won't do boilermaking. I might go into multimedia'. They are the sorts of things we are getting at the moment rather than the quantitative sort of data, but they are the things we are looking for. I know that is not overly tangible, but for me that is in the right direction.

Dr DAVIES — I think also if you are looking at things like, say, consolidation of networks and the building of connections between the university and schools so that teachers feel much more comfortable in saying to a student, 'Why don't you just get on the phone and call up so-and-so if you are interested in this particular course?', or whatever, there is much more of an exchange and an understanding of who they are and who we are. Those sorts of connections are very important. We are also looking at basically building many more connections with teachers in terms of higher education degrees and that sort of thing. It is becoming really obvious that to build up the educational capital in the region you need to have teachers who continue to learn, who continue to study and who are interested in researching these themes as action research and so on. That sort of support is also really important too. A number of the teachers in our projects are coming on board as far as doing their masters and these sorts of things. That is important too.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much Merryn, Tony and Emma.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Sunshine — 12 August 2008

Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A. Harkness	

Chair: Mr G. Howard
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford
Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope
Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms J. Halat, acting manager,
Ms M. Weiss, student counsellor,
Ms E. Kianidis, student counsellor, counselling service, Parent Information Program, and
Ms G. Norwood, administrative officer, office of the deputy vice-chancellor, research and region, Victoria University.

The CHAIR — We will move on to the Victoria University Parent Information program group. Thank you very much for coming to speak with us today. It has been good to hear from the Sunshine College's principal, teachers and students as well as from students from Copperfield College and some of the Victoria University people. It is certainly pleasing to hear from the Parent Information program people. I do not know who is going to tell us a bit more about this program and the work you are doing and give us the insights that we would like to hear about.

Ms HALAT — I will hand out copies of a PowerPoint presentation if you want.

The CHAIR — Okay. Thanks, Marie.

Ms WEISS — Perhaps we can all introduce ourselves, and I will start. My name is Marie Weiss. I am a counsellor at the university.

Ms KIANIDIS — I am Liz Kianidis. I am also a counsellor, and I coordinate the working committee and have been doing so for a few years.

Ms NORWOOD — I am Glenda Norwood. I work in the office of the deputy vice-chancellor but was originally a manager in a faculty, and that is how I became involved, and I have stayed involved with the program as the MC.

Ms HALAT — I am Jenny Halat from counselling services also.

Ms WEISS — I will start off by giving you an overview and a background to the program. I, along with a group of other counsellors, staff from faculties, particularly Glenda, and also students, have been involved in running the Parent Information Program since 2003 at Victoria University. That was a pilot program, and it was pretty clear from the success of that program, in the way that it actually attracted so many parents but also in the things that parents said, that they were so grateful and enthusiastic about what we were doing and that we were doing something that was useful and of interest to parents.

It was first established in recognition of the importance of family support to tertiary students, especially where the student is the first in the family to attend university and/or has other disadvantages or obstacles to deal with, such as students who are moving from rural and remote areas to Melbourne away from their families, or students who have language difficulties or disabilities, for example.

As you would be aware, studying at university level poses challenges to all students, particularly in the crucial early stages of their transition, and for those who are the first in their family to attend the challenges can be more numerous and more daunting, so I am just going to outline some of them, and there are many more. Students who are the first in the family often are very unprepared for the greater level of responsibility that they have to take for their own learning at tertiary level. They do not understand or have a background in the conventions or the tradition of academic study, so they do not quite know what to expect. They do not understand the jargon or how to use administrative procedures. They feel lost, confused or different. Their families are not able to offer them assistance with their study tasks. They are often unaware of the existence of support services or that help is available or how to access it. The family may not understand or even value tertiary study, and they may even encourage the student to leave university and go and work if they are having difficulties. They may not understand the costs involved in study and may not value the necessary investment, especially if money is tight and the benefits seem too far into the future.

A family may make excessive demands on their child to work or fulfil family responsibilities, leaving inadequate time to study or, on the other hand, may place excessive or unrealistic demands on the child to study due to misunderstandings regarding the time necessary, the difficulty of tertiary study and the importance of extracurricular activities. All of this can lead a student to feel lacking in confidence and feeling anxious, and it can lead to depression, feelings of shame and a difficulty in actually approaching people for help. All of these pressures add to the risks of the young person leaving university without completing their course or, at the least, not fulfilling their potential.

Our experience and action research also suggested that many parents wanted to know more about how to support their children at university and really appreciated that opportunity which was traditionally far more available to them in primary and secondary school, but they just did not know how. So in effect the children's transition from

secondary school to university is also a transition for parents, who go from having a high degree of responsibility and opportunity for involvement in their children's education to seemingly none or very little and not quite knowing how. So the Parent Information Program provides parents of first-year students with information about Victoria University and the university experience in general, and information about how parents can assist to enable them to better support their sons and daughters.

A typical program occurs on the Sunday prior to the university's orientation week for new students. It includes an information session, lunch, afternoon tea and an accompanying booklet — more recently in DVD format — on information available to parents, covering topics like understanding the transition from school to university, the differences between school and university, time management, student support services, student finances, the importance of social networks and recreational activities, how parents can assist, and administrative and practical information such as common terminology and jargon. It also includes the university calendar and information on public transport, parking et cetera — the sorts of practical things that students need to know.

A feature of the program is providing parents with the opportunity to meet informally with staff and ask questions over afternoon tea or lunch, and campus tours have also been organised when that has been possible. It requires a lot of staff resources to do that, so we have not always been able to do it, but when we have it has had a really great impact, because when parents can actually see a lecture theatre it can be a lot more effective in conveying some of the key differences between school and university than simply talking about it. Simply seeing the place that their child will be going to alleviates their anxieties and helps parents understand something of the kind of environment that their child will be navigating.

Another important part of the program has been the participation of staff who work directly with students on a regular basis, either in the support services such as counselling or, very importantly, those working in the university faculties where students and at times parents often come as a first port of call for information or help. One of the things that we have noted — and I remember parents coming up to me and saying this quite often — is that they feel it is such a relief to actually know that there are people at the university who are looking out for their sons and daughters and are interested in their welfare.

One of the big emphases of the program has been to have as much person-to-person contact with the parents as possible. That has been a really important part of it. At the completion of the program parents have been asked to complete an evaluation and provide feedback to us about it. Jenny will talk a bit more about that and an evaluation of the latest program that we have run.

Ms HALAT — I have a copy here of the 2008 evaluation. I will take you through its overview. The results in that year are fairly consistent with the results for the last five years that we have been running it, so it gives you an idea of how it has been going over the time.

Our 2008 PIP, which happened in February this year, was really our biggest PIP so far. It included 150 families, which ends up being about 470 people attending on the day. It filled the largest space we have — an auditorium — and in some ways that is the maximum we can do if we are delivering PIP in that auditorium type of format. Eighty per cent of the group in the evaluation told us that they were first in the family to study at university, so clearly the majority of that group were from that background. They also told us that they were mainly from the western suburbs, as well as from outer western regions and rural Victoria. About 70 per cent in total identified themselves as being from those areas of Victoria.

In terms of their non-English speaking background we perhaps did not ask the right question. We asked them what was the main language spoken at home, and 80 per cent said that they spoke English at home. So in the future we may change that question.

Getting back to our evaluation, that is the group that we have been typically having at our Parent Information Program. I guess the question is: what was their level of knowledge prior to attending PIP? We have a glimpse into what that was, because we asked them the question, 'What did you hope to learn from the session, from your time at PIP?'. They gave us a lot of feedback, and we have grouped this into four or five areas. They said they wanted information about transition to university. I have some direct quotes from parents, such as 'Any information that will help with our daughter's enrolment and progress into VU'. Others included 'More information about how to make my child's transition to uni life smoother — the transition of high school to uni — and also details of VU' and 'Learn a little more about adjusting to uni life'. They also wanted to know more about specifically the parents'

role in that transition process. We had comments such as ‘Gain knowledge about the university environment and what I can do as a parent to help my son’, ‘How to help our son adjust to uni’, ‘How to help my daughter’, ‘How things work at uni’ and ‘How to support my son deal with the new environment’.

They were also interested in — and this is in no particular order — information on the structure of VU, basically the structure of universities, information about how VU operates, a general overview of uni teaching methods compared to secondary school, and student responsibilities. Other comments included ‘Structure of the university processes and procedures undertaken at university’ and ‘An insight into uni about campuses and facilities’.

They were also interested in study and expectations of students in university. We had comments such as ‘Uni sounds like hard work; what is it going to be like for her to succeed?’. We also had comments about wanting information on available support structures, and there were comments such as ‘General ideas about what to expect of uni and what is available’ and ‘More about university and what it offers my student, and supports’.

We had a sort of glimpse from those comments that they were seeking out quite a lot of information about the transition process and supports that the university can offer and really about understanding what the university is like in many ways compared to the schooling that they had previously come to know.

How effective was PIP in, I suppose, assisting the parents who attended? We had 84 per cent say that they felt the program answered their questions that they had come to the program with, which I think is a really good thing. All of the respondents said that they found the program either useful or very useful. All of them also said that they would recommend the program to other parents. That was the feedback we had.

We thought, as a group, ‘Where do we go from here?’. We may talk about that a bit further when we have the open discussion here. We thought of three areas. One of the things that we were really struck by was the enthusiasm that the participants had in attending the program. We felt that the program was, in many ways, the tip of the iceberg in meeting the need. The conclusions that we have come to in how to assist families from these backgrounds are to in some ways expand PIP or maybe look at alternative formats of delivering PIP; to have some more emphasis on community outreach, so that might be by accessing more families and targeting peer groups, migrant groups and geographical groups in the community; and also to develop partnerships between schools and communities. There were also some thoughts on whether to extend it into our other sectors, such as the TAFE and vocational education areas. That is the result of the evaluation. This is the kit that we gave out to parents. We have only one copy, you can take that.

Mr DIXON — In general, what are probably the most common misconceptions that parents who you work with have about university?

Ms NORWOOD — They still think it is school. The questions we get are basically, ‘When do we get a book list and the things that they would have at school?’. They have not gone into the transition yet themselves; they are still overawed by the fact that this is their first time at university and what happens here. The transition is a big thing, I think, from the questions we have.

Ms WEISS — Also the level of responsibility; parents often ring universities. They ring and they want to know if their child is there.

Ms NORWOOD — That often happens in the faculties.

Ms WEISS — They want to know a lot of things, they want to ask about things, and of course there is that whole issue about privacy and understanding that difference.

Mr DIXON — They are playing with their friends nicely.

Ms NORWOOD — No, but, ‘Can you get a message to such and such?’. The other thing is, too, that parents are now giving such a bigger commitment in financially supporting the students, because a lot of the students are still at home. I am a third-time parent of a VCE student.

The CHAIR — So you are going to keep working for a little while yet?

Ms NORWOOD — Just a tad, yes, and just knowing how we are going to have to support him, it is a big thing. Parents want to know what the value is. It is a mystical thing to a lot of these parents. They do not know. Because of the ethnic backgrounds we are dealing with, it is very different.

Ms KIANIDIS — They do not understand the structure of the day, like, how many hours will they be on campus, those sorts of really basic, everyday matters.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The fact that you exist means that the schools are failing in year 12; should there be a pre-PIP?

Ms NORWOOD — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — You are one university. Students who go to Monash, Melbourne or Swinburne might not have PIP to assist them. Perhaps they should take one step back and perhaps something should be done at year 12 to educate the parents?

Ms WEISS — Yes, I think so, about the transition that they are going to be going through too.

Ms KIANIDIS — That was one of the things we were talking about in terms of the outreach, we do not have the resources clearly, but to work with parents of VCE students and let them know about what the next step is.

Ms NORWOOD — They go to open days. Students often go by themselves; they go with their cohort; they do not take their parents. Some parents insist on going, and others do not. It is such a new world for them when they get there. They do not have to sit in the class, they do not have to do any of the things they had to do at school and go to classes.

The CHAIR — Can I ask how did the parents know about this program? I presume you leaflet schools and so on?

Ms WEISS — No, it is sent out.

Ms KIANIDIS — There is a central mailing list that goes out from the university with the offers to all first-year students.

Ms WEISS — With the enrolments.

Ms KIANIDIS — With all the offers, so there are 5000 or so each year that we send out with those. We also hand them out in the faculties.

Ms NORWOOD — When we have an enrolment session, you target the parent who comes in with the child.

The CHAIR — So it is only for the parents of students who are actually enrolled as opposed to prospective parents?

Ms WEISS — It is.

Ms KIANIDIS — Only once they have had an offer.

Ms NORWOOD — We have had people from other universities — their children have been offered at other universities but their friends, who have come into VU, have asked to come. It is appropriate in a way, but it does not work quite like that.

Ms WEISS — It has kind of got two benefits, because it has got the general orientation, but there are also parents who might have gone to Monash or something themselves but do not know anything about Victoria University, do not know anything about the west — they might be coming from Narre Warren — so they really want to know what this university looks like. There is also that wanting to know what this place is like, where they are going to catch the train and that kind of thing.

Ms KIANIDIS — One of the things I really love hearing about is the student's experience. Part of the program involves ex-students or current students speaking to the group, giving their insights and experiences.

The CHAIR — Do you have other parents speaking too?

Ms NORWOOD — Normally it is me.

The CHAIR — A sample parent.

Ms NORWOOD — A sample parent; I feel like that sometimes. I have been at the university for a long time and I have seen a lot of parents. They come to my counter and say, 'Joey can't come to exams today'. I say, 'That's fine, just fill in the form and you will be fine'. They cannot quite comprehend that that is all they need to do. Or take them to doctor and get a doctor's certificate.

But actually the students are the seller. A couple of times we have had students who have had very difficult transitions into university. They have moved from Glen Waverley to Werribee. They have had a really tough six months, but they got through it with the support systems that were available to them. I suppose they were savvy enough to know where to look and they got through it.

Ms WEISS — It is really important for parents to note that if a student fails a subject it is not the end of their course; and there are all sorts of avenues they can take. That can be greatly relieving and helpful in the whole process.

The CHAIR — Very good. Thank you for that.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Sunshine — 12 August 2008

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Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford
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Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Mr B. Perry, student,
Ms S. Powell, student,
Ms A. Colahan, student,
Ms J. Molley, student, and
Ms L. Davis student, Victoria University; and
Mr I. Lewis, student, RMIT.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I declare open today's hearing of the Education and Training Committee. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education. I wish to advise that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege. In other words you can say what you want and no-one will be able to sue you, so you can be honest.

We will start with Ben and work down to Laura. If you would just tell us your name, which university you go to, what course you are doing, tell us about the issues you wish to raise about the problems you faced in your first or second year in going from secondary school into university, and why you chose your university.

Mr PERRY — My name is Ben Perry. I study at Victoria University at Footscray Park. I study exercise science. It is a bachelor degree. The main issues I had when moving from high school to university perhaps were that while there was orientation in place, it did not seem very thorough. I only had a beach day, I think it was, and after that there did not seem to be much. That was probably the main problem I had with the transition. There is also the financial aspect as well.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Did you work part time?

Mr PERRY — Yes, about half way through the year, but relying on Centrelink by itself is a very hard thing to do, especially as at the time I had to catch public transport from Frankston to Footscray which ruled out a lot of time for work, and there was a lot of boredom.

The CHAIR — Stacey?

Ms POWELL — I am Stacey Powell, and I am studying for a bachelor of communications, public relations; I am currently in my second year of it. Previously I was doing interior design, but I am not doing that anymore because there was not enough time in the day to be able to do it. I deferred in 2006 and went into mid-year entry at a different university. Because I am from the country I had to stay with my grandmother, because I did not know about the whole accommodation thing and getting in mid year. At the start of 2007 I moved to the VU student village. That is pretty much it. Yes, the same; it is really hard to live on Centrelink alone without the support of your parents or having a part-time job.

Ms COLAHAN — My name is Amanda Colahan, and I am studying at Victoria University at Footscray Park. I am doing a bachelor of business, hotel, restaurant and catering management. The biggest issues faced when coming from high school are, as has been said before, financial and accommodation issues. I was not aware of where you could live and how to access information on living arrangements. It was a big thing to overcome, and also moving and being financially able to move out of home.

Mr LEWIS — My name is Isaac Lewis, and I go to RMIT. I do electronics at TAFE there; I am a second year. Before that I was enrolled in electronics at the uni there, but I did not pass that; it was sort of too hard. It was too many hours, and the work was too intense. What I find hard is the money as well. Sometimes you have no money, and so sometimes you cannot really go to uni because you cannot buy a Met ticket. That is about all.

Ms MOLLOY — I am Jo Molloy; I go to Victoria University at Footscray Park. I am doing a bachelor of arts; I am majoring in psychology and literature, and history is my minor. I used to live in Shepparton, which is about 300 kilometres away. I actually lived 50 kilometres out of Shepparton, so Melbourne is very different for me. I had to defer to earn money — I think it was \$18 500 — to get the Centrelink, which I needed because I could not afford accommodation or to go to uni. Otherwise — like everyone else has said — it is really big. Most people cannot go to uni if they cannot afford it. Another thing that I found difficult was with the campus that I live at. If I did not get into that accommodation I would not have been able to go to uni. A lot of people I know have not been able to go to uni because they have not had accommodation to live in, and they cannot exactly travel 300 kilometres every day just to go to uni. That is about it for me.

Ms DAVIS — I am Laura Davis; I go to Victoria University at Footscray Park. I am doing a bachelor of business, accounting. I come from a little town near Warragul called Poowong. We do not really have any university facilities near us other than over an hour away. So I think that as well as financial problems and everything like that, it is hard to go and stay at home, so without getting into village residence I would not have been able to go. I worked a year before I came to uni just to get the money behind me and to earn enough for Centrelink. I think that mainly a lot of people from my area may defer and then never go back because they are

doing the whole working and earning money and everything and do not really feel like they want to go back to being poor, in a way.

The CHAIR — Sorry, did you say you deferred, Laura?

Ms DAVIS — Yes, for a year after school.

Mr DIXON — Stacey and Isaac, you both changed courses.

Ms POWELL — Yes.

Mr DIXON — Was part of the reason perhaps that you did not know enough about the course that you originally selected? Is that why you changed? If you had known what you know now, would you still have gone into that course, if you know what I mean? Did you have enough information when you were actually choosing your original course?

Mr LEWIS — Not really. The VTAC books only had a quarter of a page about a subject, so not really much.

Mr DIXON — So if you were able to access more information, like from somebody who had done the course before, that might have helped you more with your decision?

Mr LEWIS — Yes, and it was my first year away from home, so it was a bit harder as well.

Mr DIXON — That was part of it as well. What about you, Stacey?

Ms POWELL — I would probably still do it all the same. I changed courses more because I decided I did not want that to be my career; I wanted it to be my hobby. It was ruining design for me. I was not enjoying just sitting down and drawing anymore, whereas now I am doing a more arts-based course I am back into just drawing to relax and stuff.

The CHAIR — I want to ask Joanne and Laura, as students who deferred to get the youth allowance — or did anybody else defer to get the youth allowance?

Ms POWELL — Yes, I did that.

The CHAIR — You did too, Stacey; I knew you said you deferred, but I did not know that that was part of the reason. I know you said, Laura, that some of your friends who deferred did not then go on to uni, but for yourself was it a good or a bad thing, that deferral? I am interested to get a sense of whether you thought deferring was a good thing or a bad thing for your own personal development or opportunity.

Ms DAVIS — I thought it was a really good thing. I do not think I would have been able to move out of home, leave my mum, leave the house and leave the town I grew up in — it was kind of like a safety net — without growing up a bit more, going to work every day, getting a bit more money and having that year to grow up and get the youth allowance.

Ms MOLLOY — I was lucky enough that my high school offered a traineeship, which it later just turned into a job, working with the students at the school, tutoring year 7s up to year 12s. I am going to uni to become a teacher. That was amazing for me; it made me realise that I really do want to teach. But the wage was really poor, so I had to get two other jobs on top of that. So I was working three jobs, which was really tiring, but I really wanted to go to uni. It made me realise that I will definitely fulfil my dream of becoming a teacher if I am willing to work three jobs.

The CHAIR — So the deferral was good for you?

Ms MOLLOY — Yes, really good. I do not think I would have been ready to move to Melbourne without doing that.

The CHAIR — What was your experience, then?

Ms POWELL — I still had to leave the town I was from to find a job. I come from Benalla, which is very, very small, and you have to know people to be able to get a job, or your parents have to work in a shop or something like that. Both my parents are teachers, so I cannot exactly just rock up and be a teacher. That was really hard, so I still had to move to Melbourne at the beginning of my deferring year just to be able to find a job.

The CHAIR — Was it a good transitional experience or a bad experience, and do you think that if you had just gone straight on to uni it would have been better for you?

Ms POWELL — I think it would have been better if I had gone straight on to uni, but I could not do that, just because the student accommodation was not there, and I did not want to be a student and not be with other students. Does that make sense?

The CHAIR — Yes. Okay; that is what I wanted to get a sense of.

Mr DIXON — A couple of you said you stay at the village.

Mr PERRY — We all do.

Mr DIXON — You all do. If you do not mind me asking, what is the cost of that, what do you get for it and where is it?

Mr PERRY — It is one of the better ones around Victoria, I would say. It costs about \$115 a week.

Ms POWELL — It is \$496 a month.

Mr DIXON — What do you get for that?

Mr PERRY — We get availability of the kitchens, we get our own rooms. We have to share a unit, but not a room per se. I think the RMIT village has like a dodgy curtain to separate rooms. We have laundry services — we have to pay for them — an after-hours assistant and a security guard. It is not too bad. A few of us are on like a resident adviser team so we get a bit cheaper rent.

Ms COLAHAN — It includes your bills as well, like your water bill and your electricity.

Ms POWELL — All you pay for is phone line and internet, and the most we share with is one or two other people to a bathroom.

Mr DIXON — And you obviously supply your own food and drink?

Ms POWELL — Yes. But the bed, desk, lamp and all the things you need are provided.

Mr DIXON — Where is the village actually located?

Ms POWELL — The corner of Williamson and Hampstead roads, just up near Highpoint shopping centre, just off Maribymong Road.

Mr DIXON — So it is close to public transport, is it?

Mr PERRY — Yes; it is near to most public transport.

Mr DIXON — A station, or just buses?

Ms POWELL — There are two trams and a bus, and it is about a 5-minute drive away from Footscray Park, which is the main campus.

Mr DIXON — Could you survive there without a car?

Ms POWELL — Quite easily.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How well did your high school prepare you for university, first of all in terms of the course you decided to go and undertake, the career advice and the transformation from being a high school student to a uni student?

Mr PERRY — I did a course which is perhaps a bit niche, so the career counsellor did not quite know the possible value of it — a bachelor of human movement, exercise science — so the career counsellor really had no idea where it led to. She basically read the VTAC description to me; that is all she could do. In my position it worked out okay, but it would have been a bit better, because I did not know what career prospects there were from it, nor did many people that I asked. My brother went to university and he did not know, so I did not have much chance either way. It worked out okay in the end.

Ms POWELL — I was under the impression that my course was going to just be like studio arts and visual communication and design at high school but a little bit harder. I got there and realised it was pretty much architecture and nothing at all what I was expecting.

Ms COLAHAN — We had a careers counsellor. She helped and was inspiring, but she did not know a lot about the courses. In year 12 most of our teachers' main focus was on our completing exams, and for what you did after you walked out of your last exams there was not much about preparing for it or being aware of anything like that.

Mr LEWIS — I did not get told much. I just got told that year 12 is going to be a bit harder than uni. It did not end up that way. They did not teach me much about what uni was going to be like.

Ms MOLLOY — My school was really good. We had a meeting once a week about all the VTAC stuff and careers. Even if we did not want to go to uni, we could choose other paths. We had two career counsellors. I was really lucky, because I wanted to become a teacher and I could go and ask a teacher how to become one. They told me all the things I could do — I could do an education course, I could do a bachelor of arts and then do a dip. ed. after it. My school was fantastic in that aspect.

Ms DAVIS — I would say my school was fairly good. We would have the meetings. They probably were not as often, but they were more about how to put your preferences for VTAC or something like that, but they were not really talking about what kind of course you wanted to do, and they did not offer a lot of information about that. We only had one careers counsellor for years 10, 11 and 12. It was hard for her to spread all her time amongst us all.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Joanne, how many other brothers and sisters have you got?

Ms MOLLOY — I have got two sisters.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Younger or older? At university?

Ms MOLLOY — They are both older. One went to university, and she is a teacher now — it must be genetic — and another one is working in retail.

The CHAIR — I was going to follow on from that sort of question to ask whether your parents were very influential in encouraging you to go on to university or whether they were pretty laissez faire and happy for you to make your own decisions. I am interested to get a bit of feedback in terms of the role your parents played.

Mr PERRY — Yes, a very strong impact. My dad was a tradesman and grew up in Frankston, so it was not exactly the most nurturing atmosphere for university, but my mum had a masters degree. I think my uncle had something to do with university as well — I cannot remember what — and my brother has just done his PhD, so they have definitely been some influence for me to go to university by far.

The CHAIR — In a direct way or an indirect way? From what you are saying it sounds like it is more indirect.

Mr PERRY — When your dad is a plumber you kind of see all the worst parts of a job. You see him come home all bloodied up and scratched, and you think, 'I do not want to do that'. You do get subtly pushed by your parents.

The CHAIR — So he did not say, 'Go to uni if you do not want to be a plumber'?

Mr PERRY — My dad was very laissez faire. He did not really care either way; he would just comment on what I wanted to do. It was my mum being around, and she was doing her masters while I was in years 7 and 8, so it subtly influences you, I think.

Ms POWELL — It is just natural for us to go to uni; everyone from my grandmother down has been to university. Pretty much everyone down from my grandmother has been a teacher. It is either teaching or commerce that we go and do, and I was the first one ever to want to do a design course. My parents were eager, and they knew it was what I wanted to do and they helped as much as they could, but they did not know what exactly it was. It would have been a lot easier if I had just got into a teaching course. The PR course I am in now makes it a lot easier, because it is more arts based, which is what teaching is a lot of, so it is all essay writing rather than having to build a vertical section of a building.

Ms COLAHAN — My parents have given me and both my sisters a fund to go to university, so not going to university was never a consideration. They did not force us or push us into any particular course or pathway. It just seemed like the natural thing to do — from high school you go on to university — and I guess that not going was never considered.

The CHAIR — So you could not have accessed the fund if you did not go to uni?

Ms COLAHAN — No, you could still have the money, but it was primarily for university.

Mr LEWIS — My parents encouraged me to go to uni. They took me to all the open days at Melton, Bendigo and Ballarat. They support me at the moment; they give me money every fortnight, and if I have any problems, they always listen.

Ms MOLLOY — I was really lucky. My parents are fantastic. They are both teachers. They never forced me to go to uni, but they wanted to make sure I was happy and I would have a stable career after it, and they supported me. Even if I did not go to uni, they would have supported me and made sure that I was okay. I have seen them teach, and my sister is a teacher as well, so it must be genetic or something. It is just something I have always wanted to do, but I do not think they would have minded at all if I did not do it.

Ms DAVIS — My parents were really supportive of whatever I wanted to do. In my year I had off work here I started an apprenticeship that I did not particularly like. I was a chef. It was not something I was really into, but they supported me through that. But once I said I wanted to go to uni and do accounting — my mum is an accountant — I could see they were a bit happier and a bit more stable. All mum's family — all my cousins — have gone to uni. We have got doctors and teachers, but I am only the second out of 11 grandchildren to have gone to uni on my dad's side, and I am the youngest. They are very contrasting families.

The CHAIR — Joanne has drawn me to a question that follows on from a program we heard about recently. Victoria University has teaching students going into some of the schools doing some programs with the schools, so I am interested to see whether you have been doing any teaching experience and what is the nature of it?

Ms MOLLOY — My school, Wanganui Park Secondary College in Shepparton, offers four or five traineeships which just turn into jobs, because the wage was really bad. They offered a tutoring traineeship, an IT traineeship, a sport traineeship and a science traineeship, and I was lucky enough to get the tutoring traineeship, which was amazing. All the schools in the Goulburn Valley offer those traineeships.

The CHAIR — So what did you do once you got that traineeship?

Ms MOLLOY — I worked 8.00 till 4.30, and I got to help mostly year 7s and 8s and 9s and then year 12s around exam time. I got to help the year 7s with their transition from primary school into high school. I was given all the students who would probably flit under the radar of the classroom, and all their schoolwork. They were sent to me once a week on a timetable, and I would help them with their work, make sure they were all okay and tell the teachers what was going on. A lot of them had learning disabilities. The teachers just thought they were being naughty and undisciplined. They did not realise they had learning disabilities, which we later found out.

The CHAIR — With your present university course in teaching have you done some teaching rounds already?

Ms MOLLOY — No. I chose to go through teaching by doing a bachelor of arts, which is three years, and then I do a diploma of education after it.

The CHAIR — So you are not doing your teaching until the end.

Ms MOLLOY — And then you do the rounds in that year.

The CHAIR — I understand now.

Mr ELASMAR — My final question is: what sort of outcomes would you like to see from the committee?

The CHAIR — What are the sorts of things you would like to see us put in our report recommending governments to do?

Mr PERRY — I think change the Centrelink system. It seems weird, but I was fortunate to get it because my parents were low income. I have plenty of friends whose parents are middle income. Their parents would not send them any money, but they get no Centrelink at all. They get absolutely nothing because their parents earn too much. There has to be a better way than making people defer for a year. There must be a better way than that, because it just seems unfair that if your parents are poor you get money, while if you are that two grand over the threshold, then you get nothing at all. There is not even a sliding scale; it goes from something to nothing at all. That would be my biggest recommendation.

Ms POWELL — I agree with Ben because even though both my parents are teachers — so we have got a stable income, and it is well above the Centrelink threshold — it was not possible for them to send me into student accommodation as well as uni. I was going to have to stay with family because that is a much cheaper option and it was one that they could come comfortably afford.

Ms COLAHAN — I think maybe making accommodation more available to students coming straight out of year 12 and maybe having more accommodation — not only having it advertised more but having more of it — because I know getting into the village where we live is really competitive.

Ms POWELL — More affordable.

Mr LEWIS — Making Centrelink easier to get would be good. I used to have Centrelink in my first two years, but my parents earned too much last year so I am off Centrelink now.

Ms MOLLOY — Yes, definitely; everyone has covered it. The biggest two things determining whether you are going to go to university are accommodation and your financial situation. If you have got nowhere to stay or you have not got money, you are not going to go to uni; that is the bottom line pretty much.

Ms DAVIS — I agree with everyone here, but also maybe even getting schools to talk more about the university and more about looking into your courses a lot more and getting a lot more information out there about the university and the courses to the year 12s.

The CHAIR — Okay; very good. Thank you. We are about to stop for lunch, so please stay for lunch and we can have a bit more of an informal chat.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Sunshine — 12 August 2008

Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmar	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A. Harkness	

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Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms S. Quek, manager, policy and research, and

Ms N. Garcia, case management coordinator, Centre for Multicultural Youth; and

Ms N. Nyuon, bachelor of arts student, Victoria University.

The CHAIR — We will resume now formally with the Centre for Multicultural Youth. Welcome. Thank you for coming along today to Sunshine College. We have had an interesting morning hearing from students, teachers and principals, and hearing from Victoria University staff and students and also about their Parent Information Program. While we are out here we are certainly very interested to follow up with issues that you might be able to share in, being aware that there are 54-odd nationalities represented just in this school and a great many issues that are obviously relevant to our inquiry. You are starting, are you, Soo-Lin?

Ms QUEK — I will lead the charge, thank you. Thank you, for a start, for inviting us to make a presentation. I am Soo-Lin Quek. I am the manager of research and policy at CMY.

Ms GARCIA — I am Noemi Garcia. I am the case management coordinator for the youth support team. We provide direct service to young people, 12 to 21, with a range of issues.

Ms QUEK — And you have been introduced to Nyadol, who is a young person who has come to talk about her experience in navigating the pathways through education, because I think we can talk about the issues and it can sound quite dry. When you hear a story of what actually happens and what it means for a person working their way through it, it makes more sense. I will do a quick overall summary, and then I will hand over to Nyadol to talk about her experience in finding her way through the education training pathways.

As you know, the Centre for Multicultural Youth is a statewide organisation and we advocate for the needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. We have a combination of both policy development and direct service delivery that informs all our work around advocacy and policy development. What I have just handed to Caitlin, and hopefully she has handed around by now, is a written submission we have put together, which goes into a bit more detail on what I am talking about today. So I will just give you a quick sketch. The demographics I will not go through; that is in the background paper itself.

One of the things we have been asked to do today is to talk about the range of programs that we deliver in relation to the education and training of newly arrived migrants and young refugees. I will not go through it in detail again as it is listed in the written submission to you. Very briefly there is NAYSS, which is the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service, and the Reconnect Program. They are both excellent programs in supporting young people through education. The out-of-school hours learning program, a new-ish program area that we have just been recently funded for, is UCan2, and we run a wide range of leadership and mentoring programs. As I think someone alluded to before, there is a whole range of factors impacting on the participation rates for newly arrived young people, especially for newly arrived migrant and refugee young people, but what I thought we would highlight today are the three key ones.

One is the refugee experience, and I am sure a number of you are well aware of what that means in terms of someone going through that experience. When they come into Australia often there has been little or no formal education or very disrupted schooling, so to slot someone into a school and say, 'This is the linear progression: you go to high school and you go to tertiary education from then on', is quite an unrealistic expectation. There is a whole range of factors impacting on whether newly arrived refugee young people continue to participate in the education system or not, but one of the three key ones we wanted to highlight today is the whole refugee experience and how young people engage or do not engage with the education system because of their refugee experience. Very often they have little or no formal education or have had an incredibly disrupted education, which does not provide them with a foundation for engaging in a formal education setting or just being slotted straight into school. Often young people are slotted in according to their age rather than to where their education levels have been.

The experience of torture and/or trauma — and I am sure you have heard a lot about that previously — affects their ability to absorb or to focus on learning. Let us not forget that resettlement is an enormous task, not just for the young person but also for the families. But often young people are the ones who quickly acculturate to the local community and often are the ones who are the providers of support or information to the rest of the family members.

A brief snapshot follows of some of the three key strategies. Again, it is the old hoary chestnut: data collection. We do not have desegregated data tracking young people through the education system. How many refugee young people do we actually have in schools; how many in tertiary education; how many are in TAFE or at universities in the different programs? We have data that captures X number of humanitarian entrants arriving into Victoria, but

we do not have that desegregated data on young people. I think we need that data in order to make good policy platforms or good program development.

The other key strategy, which again I am sure you have come across before, relates to educational institutions and educational services that provide educational services and, a lot of the time, try to provide other support. What we have found is that in order to support those educational institutions and to keep young people in schools and following a pathway, you need a host of other complementary community-based support services — for example, the NAYSS program, which is one of the programs that Noemi coordinates — to keep and maintain the young persons' aspirations for their educational outcome. We have tertiary institutions that provide some support and we have schools trying to provide support to young people in schools, but that needs to be complemented by other types of support services that can support the young people in their resettlement tasks.

The other big one for us is the need for more targeted flexible pathways to higher education. For instance, schools need to be more flexible in offering VCE over three years instead of the normal two or so years. One of the things that we offer is the AMEP — Adult Migrant English Program — for newly arrived persons. A suggestion is that that needs to be made more flexible for that age group — and you are talking about the 15 to 25-year-olds. Sometimes someone will go to an English course but then, because of family circumstances or their personal circumstances, they may need to go out and work for six months or a year just to get a bit of money. What we are saying is that there needs to be a youth-specific voucher system or a bank of hours that can be drawn upon as required by the young person rather than saying, 'You have 510 hours. You do it in one stretch.' That needs to be made more flexible so they can dip in and out as needed because of other pressures that they have in their lives.

As I said earlier, Nyadol will talk about her experience and what it all means in real life. The written submission is there, and it will give you some of the details of what I have talked about. What I will do now is hand over to Nyadol, who will talk about her experience in trying to manage her way through the different pathways.

Ms NYUON — Thank you. I arrived in Australia in 2005 from a refugee camp where I lived for 13 years. I was born into a refugee camp and I grew up in one, which is really the normal experience of a lot of Sudanese young people who are coming here and wanting to access higher education or who just wish to pursue a better life for themselves. For me, I came with a family of seven. My mum was the only mother, so that put a lot of pressure on the money that we had from the social security network, which meant it was too stretched for the whole family to depend on. When I went to school, I went to year 11, second semester. I could not afford books, and I could not have internet access, and there is no way I could also ask my mum to provide that because there was not enough financial support from anywhere else. The money also that we had from, say, Centrelink we also needed to divide that money with the family left back home in Africa because most of the time they depend on the family that is here to support them. That meant that a lot of basic needs that I needed to support my learning were lacking, and the fact that I went to a school and coming from a refugee background, it is really hard to adapt to the whole environment. There are computers, there are books and there are libraries. It is well-equipped. However, because of your background, you are not able to use all those facilities. I came when I was considered illiterate so I could not use the computer, and it disadvantaged me a lot in my class because other students could go ahead and do the assignments and do their research and I did not have that skill to do it.

I guess the most important thing for me as a young person settling into Australia is that even though a lot of young people like me aspire to get into degrees like law or medicine, there are just so many other factors that make you not able to access them. It could be financial, or it could be cultural or social reasons. Australia is a wonderful place to be in. The government tries to provide the best opportunities for refugees from a migrant background, and I do understand that to a certain limit they will not provide every single need that everyone else needs. However, for most young people coping with the stress of just settling into a new environment in the first place and I think maintaining your parents' ambitions and yours too, it becomes really difficult to be able to settle into the learning environment. Then if you sort of put in things like post-trauma and coming from a war-torn country and things like that, the idea of then settling into a class is something that is hard to comprehend. It is supposed to look easier when you come here because what else could you ask for when you come to a developing country, but it is very confronting I think for most young people, and that is why a lot of young people tend to drop out, because the requirements that are needed in the education system in Victoria are so high that they do not meet the requirements of the background that you come from.

Actually today I was in a lecture when you arrived, and they were talking about the right to education and they were mentioning the basic requirements for what is considered as education, and I realised that out of those seven

requirements none of the education I had actually qualifies for even one of those criteria, which means the education background that I came with was equal to nothing coming to Australia, and to be put into a year 11 class and expected to pass and go to a university level, it is very complicated and it is very hard to achieve. And even if you do that, even though you fail, you do not know a lot of information such as going to the internet and searching for other opportunities, maybe going to TAFE or going to other shortcuts to get into universities. I only understood the fact that you go to high school, you go to university; if you fail high school, there are no other options. That is what I knew, and that is what I know a lot of young people know. They do not understand that there are other opportunities. There is not that education in the community to make them realise there are so many opportunities to actually get to where you want to get.

For me, I think if there were places like even a community centre where I can go and access the internet or maybe a computer or anything or books after school, that could have helped maybe in my education, in my pursuit for a better education, but because I could not have that and my mum could not afford a computer or pay for the internet bill, it meant that I was very disadvantaged when I went home. And my mum also is not educated in the western manner, so it meant I came home with assignments that no-one could help me with, so I was stuck not having access to a computer and the structures that I needed to succeed in school, and I did not also have the support from my mum to be able to assist me with my assignments. So getting stuck in that environment is making a lot of young people from my community back out because it is just too stressful to be able to maintain being in school and also settling into the environment of Australia, culturally and in other ways. That is my story.

Ms QUEK — How did you get to where you are now??

Ms NYUON — I managed to pass.

The CHAIR — That was the next question.

Ms QUEK — Who helped you, if anyone?

Ms NYUON — I managed to pass my year 12, but not as well as I wanted to, but I got to the course that was my second course actually, because I wanted to get into law but I could not get into law. I did not manage to get a 90 point something, but I still think I am doing this course as a stepping stone to go into law. I guess I have understood that, as I am doing my second course, this is another way of actually getting to this course.

The CHAIR — So what course are you doing?

Ms NYUON — I am doing a bachelor of arts degree.

The CHAIR — At where?

Ms NYUON — Victoria University.

The CHAIR — So in terms of assisting you through to get your VCE, you have talked about all of the challenges that you had to overcome which somehow or other you did, so some people did provide you with assistance and you did find internet opportunities?

Ms NYUON — No, actually I do not even have internet access until now, even though I am at university, which is sad. Sometimes I think your own individual character influences how you deal with some of the experiences you get through, but generally I know why I had difficulties trying to get into university, not so much because of only the internet issue but because I was also settling into a new culture. I went to classes where teachers tried their best to understand my problem, but because they have not been in that environment they knew I had a problem but they did not even know how to help me because they have never gone through it. I will not blame the teachers because they did try their best. However, sometimes they lacked the skills because of not being in that environment, and I guess I understood it from that point of view, which put pressure on me to work extra hard, more than most of my classmates do, to even gain a leverage with them — not even to be ahead of them but even to get a leverage with them. That is how I got out of it. My mum was still very supportive. She said, ‘Go to school, go to school, go to school’. However, when I came home she could not help with assignments, but the pressure kept me going, I think.

Ms GARCIA — I think also one of the key issues that Nyadol has raised in sharing her experience is for us through the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service that when a school identifies early that the young person is in

need of that extra support, what we have found to be key is to get the youth worker or support involved early, so that a support plan can be worked on and checked in, so that the young person who may be at risk of falling through the gaps is followed through and supported. Schools, as you would be aware, are under a lot of pressure and are very underresourced in many cases, so we find that we work really closely with our local schools in that early intervention model, which is a key for us, and what we find really helpful is when we have schools that are flexible in saying, ‘Okay, rather than doing VCE over two years, three years will possibly suit you better’, and having that flexibility rather than saying, ‘This is too hard. Why don’t you just try another school?’. So that early intervention and that dialogue with the school and the young person and families is really important, and we find that that works really well, and also we have those relationships with some of our local TAFEs.

Ms NYUON — The hardest thing is also like in role models that are in areas that you can aspire to, because I think it limits your perception of your own capability of getting to a certain place. The fact that a lot of us are just new arrivals who have been here for five years or seven years maximum makes it really hard for you to aspire beyond what you have seen someone else from your community achieve. With most young people that is the hardest thing, because you do not see a lot of Sudanese doctors or a lot of Sudanese lawyers, so to a certain limit it is restricting the imagination of how far you can reach. I think maybe it is more of a community thing to get community leaders with support from maybe the government to participate in their own community development, so that you are getting people from the community coming into schools, and even if it is talking or working with the schools to get young people to where they want to be, but at least people from their own community to give them that sort of encouragement that they have got there despite their experiences, so these young people too can get where they have got.

Mr DIXON — You have younger brothers and sisters?

Ms NYUON — Yes.

Mr DIXON — And how are they coping compared to you? What is the difference?

Ms NYUON — They are speaking English quite well, which is a good thing. However, my little brothers and sisters grew up in Ethiopia and the national language there is Amharic, so all the studies they undertook were in Amharic. When they came to Australia it was a big transition because education is in English, and it is really hard to write in English. One of my two brothers is extremely smart, and he is doing really well, but one of them is really struggling because he came when he was a bit older, so it is really hard for him to transition fluidly into the Australian school structure, which is also a whole new thing to get used to. We come from an oral culture. We do not write a lot. It is more spoken. I guess the whole structure of how you have to write is a whole new concept and makes it even harder to succeed.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Can I ask if you experienced any racism?

Ms NYUON — Yes, I did, and sadly some of it was actually from some of my teachers. Racism is a very relative thing sometimes. I could say I experienced racism when a teacher acted in the way he did. A professor from Sydney actually went on channel 7 and said that black people are dumb, especially the Sudanese people, and that their IQ level is about 70 per cent. I went to school the next day and I had a teacher who actually commented on that. I guess it really affected me. I also had scenarios when a teacher told a friend, ‘If I were you, I probably would not do the biology exam because I know you will fail anyway.’ There is what you can perceive as racism if you are a person on the receiving end, but maybe the other person does not think of it as racism. But I did experience that, even from some students themselves. However, and not to excuse anyone, I took that as part of a settlement process. Someone thinks I have invaded their space — ‘Someone just came from Africa and now they are sitting in my classroom and doing this and that’. It is a process for them as much as it is a process for me to accept the whole thing. I am not making any excuses for them. I was upset, but I think I sort of understand our fear of the unknown sometimes.

Ms GARCIA — Yes. I think that sadly there has been a lot of stereotyping, particularly in the media, that has impacted on a lot of the young people we work with. I think the challenge is for all of us to try and work against some of that.

Ms QUEK — Absolutely.

The CHAIR — Okay. I am still trying to understand the programs that you offer. Did Nyadol link in with some of your programs at some stage through her education, like tutoring programs or anything like that? Was that available to Nyadol?

Ms GARCIA — No, not through — —

Ms NYUON — No, I actually did not access any of the programs offered by CMY because I did not know they were there. I knew there were teaching programs available if I wanted to access them, but I had just come to Australia and I just wanted to try school straightaway. I did not know a lot about how to find out information on where to go and where not to go, which is another big struggle. There are a lot of resources available sometimes that the community will not even know about it until it is too late.

The CHAIR — Okay, so that is part of the issue with your programs. Do you think that it has got better and that you are able to identify the refugee families who need your services? How do you link in, and how do you stop refugee families from missing out?

Ms GARCIA — Sure. Through the Reconnect and NAYSS programs we are based in a number of local government areas. What we do is identify our key stakeholders so that we have a fluid referral path so that young people and families are identified early. We work really closely with our local schools. We link in with community. We also provide recreation-based activities where we put our information out there that we are available and that support is available if necessary. So we work really closely with our key stakeholders — that would be our local schools and language schools — in targeting the newly arrived communities specifically.

Ms QUEK — Like Noemi was saying, it is important to do a really thorough assessment of what is happening for that family and what is happening for that young person and staying with it as they develop and resettle into the community, because needs change over time. At different stages of a young person's development there are different needs. For instance, there is a case study that we have outlined in our paper: fictitious 'Sam', who is actually not so fictitious, had massive family conflict when she went to school and ultimately had to leave her family. The NAYSS program worked with the family and worked with Sam to try and mediate a way through the conflict and at the same time try to keep her in school. That is an example of how the school can provide X, Y and Z. We need these complementary services to ensure that the young person does not slip through the net somewhere along the line.

Ms GARCIA — And we, where possible, provide long-term and flexible support, so that could mean that sometimes we are involved with the young person and the family for over a year or two years. We are not precious in exiting that client if the supports have not all been met. We are really there long term, and we also work with other support services that can be linked in as well.

Ms QUEK — I would like to make quite a critical point for us as one of the service providers in this area, and that is that a lot of service providers are saying to us and to government that the pathways for education training make up a really complicated map comprised of which pathways are the most suitable ones, what are the pathways and a mixture of state and federally funded programs. For Noemi, who has worked as a direct case service provider as recently as a year ago or so, even at the local level it is really difficult to try and find out what the pathways in existence are and what would best suit a young person's particular circumstances. I think there are a lot of pathways out there, and the difficulty is in trying to find out where they are and what is the most suitable one, because it is not always in the most easily accessible place that we can all go to and say, 'Right, that is numbers 1, 3 and 5; that is what we need'.

Ms GARCIA — In order to support young people effectively, if the worker is struggling in navigating those systems, it is incredibly hard for our support workers to assist a young person in navigating a system that is continuously changing. There does not seem to be a clear understanding or mapping of where to start when we are talking about young people who do not necessarily follow that straight line straight from secondary college to university. They are having to take other pathways, so I think some support is needed around that. Even for families, it is incredibly hard for families to try to support their children and young people if they do not understand those systems. From my experience as a worker, I have always really struggled in trying to keep up and to support a young person in trying to see where we can go. A young person who does not have those supports is one who is falling through the gaps.

Ms NYUON — Also, a lot of young people come in without parents, especially from Sudan — sometimes they are termed ‘lost boys’ and ‘lost girls’ — and there are still a huge number of young people coming in without their parents, and I think that makes it extra hard for those people, especially in accessing schools. So far it is still a significant number that comes under that category.

Mr HERBERT — I am mindful of the point that you were making just before. There seems to me to be a whole heap of programs out there, and one of the things that always amazes me is that there are a thousand programs, and trying to work out how effective they are is always a difficult thing.

Ms GARCIA — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — I know that organisations always apply for funding for programs.

Ms GARCIA — Absolutely.

Mr HERBERT — That is the nature of your business, really. You say here that the UCan2 and the NAYSS program are effective or good examples. Are there KPIs, key performance indicators, for those? Is there any assessment of how effective different programs are or how they could be better? Is that occurring?

Ms QUEK — There is evaluation across the board because, as you know, being a funded organisation we have reporting accountabilities to the various departments that fund the programs. There are quantitative outputs that we have to keep track of as well as qualitative data. But what would be good for us as one of many organisations is to be able to see a comparative analysis across the board so we know that the Ecumenical Migration Centre may provide leadership programs as well as we do. Let us try and see how we link it together, how we compare across the board and where we need to pull our socks up or go, ‘Yes, we’re doing all right’.

Mr HERBERT — When you say they are good examples, it is basically anecdotal from you or from your own personal experience rather than an outcomes kind of analysis; is that right?

Ms GARCIA — In terms of the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service, for us we work on a support and case plan, so if the young person is working towards being enrolled in education, for us it would be working with that young person until they are enrolled and, down the track, following to see if they continue to be enrolled. So that would be considered a good outcome — for example, the case study of Sam. If you have a look at that, it has been since the beginning of the year that Sam has been able to stay within that school. That would be considered a good outcome for that person.

Mr HERBERT — And you document that?

Ms GARCIA — Yes, absolutely.

Ms QUEK — Absolutely. I suppose with the NAYSS, for instance, we have FaCSIA.

Ms GARCIA — Yes, we have got data.

Ms QUEK — We would look across all the NAYSS-funded organisations and do that evaluation across the board, so we are one of many organisations funded by FaCSIA.

Mr HERBERT — The other question I have, through you, Chair, is in terms of parents. I was reading through your submission, and it seems self-evident that newly arrived refugees and kids in schools would have trouble, but it also strikes me that parents would have trouble helping their students at school obviously because of language difficulties and different things. Are there programs about that help parents help children with their homework and that sort of thing right through school?

Ms GARCIA — Look, definitely from our model wherever possible we will try to work as closely with the family as possible, giving them information and what have you. I have to say that schools over the years have made a really strong effort in trying to include newly arrived families in that information provision. I think some great attempts have been made, and there are some good models out there of schools that are really trying hard to engage those newly arrived families, particularly where there are high numbers of newly arrived. I do not think it is perfect yet, like anything is, but there are certainly attempts to do that. But, sure, it would be an area that I think would need to improve as well, as families are trying to balance a whole gamut of other things.

Mr HERBERT — What would be a good school?

Ms GARCIA — I worked for a number of years in Hume, which is that Broadmeadows region, and Broadmeadows Secondary College, both their English language school and the secondary college, definitely made many attempts to always have information sessions for parents, to involve parents where possible, to have interpreters and community leaders involved and to send out information to families. So definitely that was high on their agenda. I found working with Broadmeadows secondary a pleasure.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time and input. That has been great.

Ms QUEK — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Sunshine — 12 August 2008

Members

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Witnesses

Ms H Worlidge, executive director, Western Chances;

Mr Z. Abatayo, scholarship recipient and student, Melbourne University; and

Mr M. Tran,

Ms P. Le, and

Ms K. Alim, scholarship recipients and year 11 students, Sunshine College.

The CHAIR — Welcome to you all. You might be aware that when we were in Robinvale we learnt about Chances for Children up there. We were introduced to the concept and understood that there had been another program established down in this area, so we are very interested to hear a bit more about it. I do not know who is introducing things, whether it is Helen or Zion, but you are going to tell us about the program and then we are going to hear from some people who are recipients of some of the funding.

Ms WORLADGE — Yes. As you know, Western Chances was started from Mildura's Chances for Children by Terry Bracks in 2004 to help talented young people in the west who, through lack of resources and through no fault of their own, find that it is very difficult to find their way through the schooling system and on to tertiary education. Western Chances' ethos and reason for being is that there are many young people in the west, like these young people here, who without Western Chances might not find their path to higher education. Western Chances focuses on creating opportunities, supporting scholarship recipients for the long term and building the social capacity of the community in which they live. We also facilitate career and educational opportunities by creating ongoing economic, social, cultural and educational opportunities in the community in which they live.

Western Chances works with public schools and community groups across the municipalities of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham. We run with a lean team of five part-time staff who are supported by several volunteers. We receive no government funding, with all our funds raised via business foundations and individual donors. Western Chances scholarships are provided to the school or community service to be spent on computer and internet access, specialist educational software, travel cards, language lessons, specialist tutoring, art, dance, music and acting lessons and school excursions. Those are just a few. The important thing about Western Chances is that these young scholarship recipients tailor their scholarship to suit themselves, so every scholarship is individual. We have given out over 1018 of them. We have also put over \$1 million directly into programs in the west.

Turning to the background and pathways of scholarship recipients, there are a couple of case studies. One is about Violet, who is an 18-year-old from the western suburbs who never dreamed that one day she would live in Australia. She emigrated from Vietnam in 1995 without any knowledge of English, and the challenges were vast. Primary school was the first step to learning a new language. Through the support of teachers and friends she was fluent by the time she entered high school. Violet's abilities and determination throughout high school years have already given her the opportunity to be a part of the accelerated learning program and the Access Melbourne program run by the University of Melbourne. In year 11 we donated a computer to Violet — of course, that is not her name. When I went to the school the teachers complained because she had been handing in so much work — the computer made her access to the work easier — but they were just joking. Violet is now a third-year student at Melbourne University studying commerce.

Another young lady, Siu, was 16 but isolated and stressed about her long-term prospects. She had been out of school for two years, leaving school in year 8 to care for her sick mother. A youth worker from Young Carers referred her to the SpiritWest program. Over the course of 2007 Siu completed a certificate II in general education for adults and also enrolled in the Victorian certificate of applied learning, completing a vocational certificate in retail operations. Siu received an offer from RMIT University to enrol in its VCE program. However, full-time study became an issue for Siu, whose family's sole income was the part-time work of her father. A nomination for a Western Chances scholarship solved the financial dilemma when Siu was awarded \$1000 towards school texts to undertake further studies. That was last year. She is still at RMIT and still studying, so that is a great story.

Since we started we have given out 1018 scholarships in total, with 690 new scholarships and 328 renewal scholarships. The percentage of renewing scholarships is 47.5 per cent. The municipalities in which we have given scholarships — and I am skipping through here — include Brimbank, 366; Hobsons Bay, 71; Moonee Valley, 52; Maribyrnong, 112; Melton 67; and Wyndham, 45. In the back you will see a graph relating to municipalities. There are also graphs about our new scholarships and renewal scholarships.

We run other programs with Orchestra Victoria in the mOVE! program. When we first started in 2005 we had 28 participants, and last year we had 92. I do not know how many of you know about mOVE!, but it is a program run by Orchestra Victoria where they send 12 to 14 musicians and a real live conductor out mostly to regional Victoria — and to Sunshine College here, actually. The kids mentor with the musicians for two days and then they put on a concert, and it is absolutely fantastic.

In all from 2005 we have taken 71 participants into the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, and those young people have made a digital story about themselves. If I showed you any one at any place I am sure you would find tears coming from your eyes because they are usually stories about themselves and stories that have impacted very seriously on their lives; they are very brave people.

Another organisation that supports us is Free Debate. I think one of the issues in the western suburbs, and an issue for many young people in the west is that their English skills are not always at the level of some kids who live in the eastern suburbs. Debating is one way of raising that skill level. Free Debate is an organisation that goes into schools, particularly disadvantaged schools in the west, and teaches teachers how to debate and teaches students how to debate. That automatically lifts the literacy level, and I think Zion will attest to that. There is a little story about Free Debate there for you.

Another program is the Siemens science program. We take year 9 students — 130 year 9 students for the past two years — to Victoria University, and we put on a three-day spectacular organised by Victoria University and funded by Siemens to promote science, and they love it.

Another one is the Crusaders-Merv Hughes program, where young kids from the west are invited to go to cricket practice with the Crusaders and Merv Hughes. Test cricketers come to teach these kids how to play cricket. I think it started two years ago, and out of that we ended up with two kids from the west out of the whole of Victoria being taken on a tour of New Zealand, and last year we had another two. Given the opportunity, these young people can do anything. We often have kids going to the Lord Somers program, and Western Chances funds them. There is the Rotary Youth program, and once again Zion can attest to that. We send kids to the RYLA camps and to the National Youth Science Forum.

With our alumni programs we run a young leaders summit, which is, of course, funded by Leader newspapers. The latest program we have started is a Links program. We ask businesses to fund young people who are leaving year 12; to take them into their businesses for real work for real pay. Zion has been on one of those programs at City West Water. They found he was so valuable that they did not want him to go back to university. However, we now have a part-time Links manager to manage that process. What we are looking for — we have got about 10 businesses hooked at the moment, and we hope for 20 by the end of the year — is that if you are an aspiring accountant and you leave year 12 and you are going to university, we hope that a business will take you in, pay you a fair wage for a fair day's work, and you will do that during your uni vacations for the three or four years that you are at uni, and then at the end of that you will get a job, hopefully with them. That is one of the advantages that kids in the more affluent societies have; they have opportunities and they have networks.

What are the factors impacting on educational participation in Melbourne's western region? Schools have work experience programs, and strategies are given to students on how they should go about applying for a job. That does not seem to be reinforced into their thinking, because of the community environment they find themselves in. Parents' educational levels and job skills are low, and they never had to present for jobs. Often they are therefore unable to instil in their children the importance of making a good impression on other people. Young people do not have role figures to model themselves on. Parents either have unrealistic expectations of their children because they have no idea what is required to achieve these expectations, or often they do not have any expectations of their children, not because they dislike their children but more because of their own lack of knowledge and their low expectations of themselves.

Because many families in the west are struggling to survive on basic wages or in many cases government support pensions, young people — with parent encouragement — look at short-term economic gain by leaving school early if they find a job which is usually low paid and often dead-end. With scholarships we talk about a hand up, not a handout. We work on the children's self-image and their self-esteem — that they can achieve what anyone else can achieve — and we are just there to give them the opportunity.

Often young people are criticised for not knowing how to write an impressive CV. These skills are being taught in schools from around year 9. However, how can they write up an impressive CV when their experiences in community activities and affairs are non-existent? Their parents and extended families have never been involved in things like that, so why should they be any different?

Often they will go through school and never have had part-time employment, and sometimes their academic achievement is poor for the various reasons that I have spoken about, so what can they write about to make their

CV impressive? Even if these young people are talented academically, they are not getting the chance to expand and demonstrate these talents. This young man sitting here with me will attest that he could not get a job at McDonald's, and now he is at Melbourne University doing commerce and engineering.

In terms of recommended strategies or initiatives to raise higher education aspirations, participation and success for people in the west, our belief is that the only way to raise higher aspirations, participation and success is through a combined community approach. Schools are doing the best they can through careers programs that they provide for their students and building partnerships with local industry and businesses through their membership of the local learning employment networks. Unfortunately these curriculum programs and partnerships, although important and valuable, are only token solutions to deep-seated community problems. Therefore a broad community approach is required and must be seriously tackled by all sections of the community, including all sections of business and local and state governments.

Organisations like Western Chances, through their newly formed Links program, must be seriously supported by all levels of government and strongly promoted in all sections of business. The Links program is designed to create employment and opportunities for talented young people in the western suburbs by matching their career aspirations and talents with appropriate paid employment experiences through vocation employment and work placement programs which complement their studies. This not only gives these young people an insight into the world of work, but it also provides the young people with some financial independence.

The success of this and other similar community programs to assist and encourage young people in the west to broaden their educational employment opportunities is dependent on wide support from employers in the west and some form of incentive from the government to encourage employers to participate in these programs.

This is the crucial bit, I think: the success rate for Western Chances scholarship recipients entering tertiary is 95 per cent. The overall rate for western region is 36.1 per cent, and there are some statistics here to support that.

Can I leave you with this thought: I believe that Western Chances has established that there is a huge need to boost the confidence and aspirations of the young people in the west. Western Chances is in danger of not being able to continue its successful work with young people in the west due to financial constraints. If government money is put into supporting the west, then some of that money needs to come to Western Chances. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Helen, you have a group of young people here who have been recipients of your support. I guess it might be appropriate for us to hear from them in terms of how Western Chances has assisted.

Ms WORLADGE — Yes. We talked a little bit about it yesterday, but they are going to tell you their story.

Ms ALIM — My name is Kausar. I am in year 11, and I am the oldest child of four. I have three younger sisters. I migrated from Kenya, which is in Africa, two years back, and I live with both my parents and sisters. At the moment I am studying art, visual communication and design, photography, maths methods and English. I chose these subjects as I wish to successfully complete a double degree in architecture and interior design.

A couple of months ago my parents and I went in search of a house, and in the process we visited quite a few very beautiful display homes. I immediately had ideas flowing through my head. I was already making changes to the house, such as, 'If I was an architect, I would do this and do that', so that was what inspired me to choose this path. It also made me realise my creative side and what I can contribute to this particular industry.

As a western suburbs resident I feel that we have fewer opportunities because we lack resources. I know a few students who want to become architects, and they own software programs such as 3DS Max, MAYA, and LightWave, and these programs help them with their assignments and stuff. So they do better than the other kids who do not have these programs. I think that schools ought to be able to provide these sorts of facilities. I am not trying to say that the school does not do anything, it is just that it has limited facilities. For example, at this school they get money, but it has to be shared within four campuses.

Another major disadvantage is financial support. I strongly agree with this because I have two part-time jobs. I really have to save a lot so that I can pay for my university fees and other related expenses like books and transport. It is very hard to save because I get very tempted to spend it somewhere else. I always have to sacrifice something for the other. So as a proud recipient of a Western Chances scholarship, this brings me a step closer to my goal. It

has given me a lot of encouragement and support. It shows that there are opportunities outside. It has encouraged me to work harder towards my goal, and I am really honoured to be receiving this scholarship, and I would like to thank Western Chances and my teachers for their endless support.

The CHAIR — What year level are you in at the moment?

Ms ALIM — Year 11.

Ms LE — Hi. My name is Phuong, and I am currently in year 11 as well. I do subjects more on the science side like chemistry and two maths. I am in a family of four — the oldest of two children. My aspiration is to do something more in the medicine side, like becoming a pharmacist. I think the only thing that is keeping me away from my goal is money, because I really do not want my parents to spend so much just on me to go to university. I know they have other things to worry about as well.

I think that is the main way in which kids from the west are disadvantaged, because we do not have a lot of money to provide kids with what they need, like more books for the libraries and more text books for the school to be more updated. The students need a push, and that is what Western Chances is giving us — more money and more hope that we can do better in the future.

With the money that Western Chances has given me I could use it on textbooks and tuition, and I would not need help from my parents, because they have taken care of me for the past 17 years of my life and I want to give something back to them. That is what I have to say. So thank you.

Mr TRAN — Hi. My name is Michael Tran, and I am currently a year 11 student at this school. I am doing physics, chemistry, maths methods and advanced general maths as well as English. I live in a family of five, and I am the oldest of three children.

I want to pursue a career in civil engineering, and for that I have to go to university. Of course I will require money, which is what Phuong mentioned is the main barrier for kids wanting to reach their goals. Also there are other things that hinder students from the western suburbs reaching their goals, such as language barriers, resources, libraries, technology — things which students from the eastern suburbs have. Also, finding time to study is difficult around here because a lot of families do not have the money and privilege that other families do. Some students have to give up the time studying to go find part-time work so that they can help support their family along with their parents. My opportunities have opened up through Western Chances supporting me financially with my tuition costs and my books and so on. This incentive will help me further excel.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Michael. And Zion, what is your story?.

Mr ABATAYO — First, I am so honoured to be amongst the giants before me today. It is my first time to be in a parliamentary inquiry. So here goes: imagine yourselves in a room full of people, four people per square metre — so, so tight. I just went out of the door, turned at the right corner and then saw myself out — whew! That person happens to study at Melbourne University — commerce/engineering, second year.

My story was that I grew up in the Philippines and arrived here three years ago as a migrant. Fortunately, I became a citizen last year. Struggling with English, and in order to get that, I really had to study further, engage in a lot of debates. I like arguing with people, so that can help with a mix of ideas as well. A major barrier is, first of all, culturally, in a very poor country education is a key because it lifts you up from poverty — it is really a fact. As the inquiry is all about geography, it is not only physically but also beliefs-wise as well. As one of my panellists here said, it is like striving to be educationally competent enough.

Then, going back to the other room, I went out of there and that was where I was, the university door. On the left could be classified as the TAFE door. The funny thing is, last Monday when I was riding the train, I was reading the *mX* newspaper and one of the articles said that generation Y is lost. ‘Why is that?’, I thought to myself, ‘Why?’, and different ideas came in. Because 5 million people — and I am quoting Julia Gillard here — who are of working age are not having qualifications more than their studies. So 5 million of them are not having post-study qualifications, and 120 000 people after 2015 are not going to have studied higher than certificate III or something. That is quite staggering, isn’t it? Generation Y is lost or lingering on the abyss of some sort. You could not count them in the unemployment rates anyway, because maybe they are discouraged workers or discouraged learners. It is quite different.

I thought to myself, 'What would I say about this before these people?'. Going back into that very tight room, what do you think is the problem? It could be the supply, it could be the demand — because I have learnt something in my economics. So you look at some ways. The good thing about here — all of us laugh — we are not constrained. Being a politician and being in high ranks, you are there to be rational, to be bound, to be constrained by what is the reality, while for us, we are quite fortunate — and you are also quite fortunate — because for us, all we have to do is wish a wish list. Nothing is bound.

When I wish, I have to wish harder and higher. Within my wish list could be four or five things. To memorise I said, 'tai chi', so c-h-i. 'C' would be the number of campuses. In the Philippines I also had a qualification in medicine but did not have the chance to finish it. I was saying, 'What would be a good state school in Melbourne?', or, 'Is there a state school in Melbourne?' — it could be very tough here. The only thing that I knew was that I really had very limited expertise in that. I do not have any expertise as well in ethnodemographics. So where is a state school in Melbourne? So I said, 'It could be in Monash or in Melbourne', so it was getting that control in year 12.

Fortunately, my ENTER score nudged a little bit to get into the Melbourne school and then Western Chances and Melbourne University gave me a bit of a financial incentive to be up there at that institution. Going as far as Clayton did not really impress me because I really live in the west. It is very far. Just wishing for another state school that is very top-notch as well would be good as well — if it is possible, more campuses and more good universities.

My 'h' one would be a HECS base for the TAFE. That would be good because it is quite unfair that people could have double degrees in university, while people do not have any at TAFE. Universities and TAFE are quite different as well. They do not have any deferred payment anyway.

When Brumby was giving a keynote speech at Melbourne University last time, that was the day he announced he was going to be the Premier as well last year, so I remember that fairly well. He really symbolised a new hope. According to the news he said he was going to propose to the government to back him on the TAFE deferred payment, for a HECS-like base for TAFE. That would be another one.

For the 'i' would be the internet for regional Victoria. That would be good because I also stayed in regional Victoria when I first came here to Australia. I remember telling my grandpa and grandma, saying 'What would I do on this farm?'. 'Just look at the cows,' they said. I thought to myself, 'What would I do? Do I have to go back to year 12 to qualify for a course?'. The advice on the internet said that I had to go back to year 11. I went back to year 11. I am now 21 years old, second year of university — very old.

The internet could also boost the Open Universities, where they have online degrees. That could also increase the supply for degrees.

Mr ELASMAR — Zion, you have a very interesting story, but can I ask you a question? How did you find out about Western Chances? Sorry to interrupt you, but it is because time is running.

Mr ABATAYO — I found out about Western Chances from my social development officer. She was also my psychology mentor, although I did not take psychology classes; I just fancied psychology anyway. She said, 'There is a scholarship that is going to help you very much, not only financially but leadership-wise, mentoring programs, job prospects'. She was really underselling her story there. 'Not only that,' she said, 'you will have very good networks. Not only are you going to have all of those things, but you have the wealth and privilege to meet very talented kids as well.'

The CHAIR — Are there other questions?

Mr KOTSIRAS — I have one. Helen, how do you tell school students that you exist?

Ms WORLADGE — We have a DVD. In my previous life I was a principal, so when I retired and took on this job I was reasonably well known in the west. I went to regional meetings and we sent out flyers, so we have had a very good uptake of Western Chances. Also we met with the regional directors and Western Chances was able to have access to the schools. The program has had such an impact on so many young people that people start seeing the value of increasing and developing talent in schools, and everybody has a talent, so if you think Western Chances is elitist, think again. If I can give you an example, one young man we met in 2004 was working 21 hours

a week; he was from a fairly dysfunctional family and dancing 21 hours a week. In 2005 when Dad had left, he said to me, 'Helen, I cannot work and dance and study, and all I want to do is dance'. He said, 'My grades are dropping because I can't put my time into study'. So I said, 'Okay, Western Chances will take you through your dance program'. He rang me two weeks ago like a cat with a hot tail. He had just been chosen to go on a cruise ship. Now you might not think that is the greatest thing in the world, but he is going to Sydney for two months of dance training and he is being paid \$600 a month, and then he is going on a cruise ship and he will be paid US\$2000 a month. He will be on that for approximately two years to get his real training grounding and then he will be back and dancing in some of our major shows, so the talent is where the kids want to take it.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for sharing that information with us and good luck to all of you in your futures too.

Ms WORLADGE — We hope the government comes on board too.

Committee adjourned.