

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Lilydale — 17 July 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 A. Cran, director, social and economic development,  
Mr N. White, executive officer, social planning and development, and  
Mr L. Sbalchiero, community development officer, Yarra Ranges Shire Council.

**The CHAIR** — I declare the Education and Training Committee hearing open. We are pleased to be out at Lilydale today, to hear from representatives of this region with regard to this significant issue, and we look forward to your input. I understand that you, Alison, will be leading off. We then will have some questions to ask you after that.

**Ms CRAN** — Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to you today. I am the director of social and economic development with the Shire of Yarra Ranges. Nick is the executive officer of social planning and development, and Lou is located in our community strengthening unit and has had carriage of the shire's learning community strategy over the last five years. We are going to talk to our submission and draw out some of what we see as the pertinent points, and offer you the opportunity to ask lots of questions. Nick is going to provide some more detailed information about his involvement as chair of the Transport Connections program, given that transport is an issue for us, and no doubt for many of the community members you have been speaking to over the last few months.

Yarra Ranges is the sixth largest municipality in Victoria. It has over 146 000 residents. It is very large in terms of its square kilometres — 2500 square kilometres — but has very defined limits of growth, as you would be aware. We have the green wedge here — there are limits to our residential development — but we also have a large number of small, dispersed communities through the different townships throughout the municipality. As you would know from driving up here, it is one of the most beautiful places in Victoria. We have great strength in tourism with something like 3.5 million tourists coming in annually; it is a big area in terms of agricultural production of wine, forestry and horticulture, so some very vibrant industries are here; but there are also some areas of significant disadvantage, which we will talk about.

We are also one of seven municipalities in Victoria which define ourselves as interface municipalities. We form a ring around Melbourne. We have a breakdown of our urban and rural area with a 70-30 split. Much of the urban area, which is only about 30 per cent of the land mass, contains about 70 per cent of the population. The rest of the land mass contains the rest of the population in small dispersed townships. It does create real issues for us in terms of access to services. Like many of the interface councils — and there is a difference there between growth municipalities and non-growth municipalities such as Mornington Peninsula and Nillumbik shires and ourselves — we do not have the issues of growth, but we all share some commonalities in terms of a lack of service infrastructure.

Unlike many of the growth municipalities we will not have the developer contribution and growth that will ultimately give us more infrastructure; so we are facing some real issues in terms of how we can grow some of the support services we need to create vibrant communities.

We have a map in our presentation of the shire, with vibrant colours, which is from the Department of Human Services. It shows the implementation of the SEIFA index, which maps social and economic disadvantage across the municipality. We have pockets of absolutely high social disadvantage which are some of the worse in the state. Our child protection notifications are something like double that of any other eastern region municipality, and we have something like 24 per cent of the eastern region's sexual abuse clients. We have very high levels of reported cases of drug abuse, high levels of particularly cannabis use among young people, very high rates of male youth suicide and youth female depression, and large numbers of people on Newstart allowance, the parenting allowance, and family allowance payments.

These challenges for us in terms of the risk factors facing the community have an absolute impact on take-up of higher education. We have done some work along with the other interface councils in looking at issues facing young people in the interface councils. We have produced a report which has been taken up very seriously by the state government, and certainly Minister Merlino has quoted heavily from the report recently done around young people and how to respond to the needs of young people in the state, identifying the issues that are common across the interface councils. We are experiencing them very acutely, particularly around the issues of limited transport and what that means for accessing education; the critical lack of affordable housing; the high rates of child protection notifications; alcohol and drug use; but also those issues around access to education.

If we look at the characteristics of residents in the Yarra Ranges, the census data shows an absolute disparity between the take-up in terms of TAFE and higher education, particularly in the Upper Yarra Valley as being much lower than that of the Victorian average. For instance, only 1.6 per cent of the community accesses university in the

Upper Yarra compared with 4.1 per cent of the Victorian average. Only 1.6 per cent of the community accesses TAFE courses compared with 2.1 per cent of the state average.

In the Upper Yarra 7.9 per cent of the population holds a bachelor degree or higher degree compared with 17.2 per cent of the Victorian average, so there is a big deficit there in terms of how the community, particularly in the outlying reaches of the municipality, are actually taking up higher education.

The demonstrated value of having closer access to higher education is borne out with the statistics for Healesville in terms of accessing TAFE. In Healesville where there is a TAFE college we have 2.6 per cent accessing TAFE, which is actually higher than the Victorian average of 2.1 per cent. Being close to a TAFE college actually does have a real impact in terms of how TAFE colleges are accessed.

The other issue we have is the limited education options. We have very small and dispersed communities, and particularly the secondary schools are dispersed across the larger townships. We have higher levels of non-completion of secondary college. We have a much lower proportion of schools offering VET courses compared to the rest of the state, and anecdotal evidence from our involvement with school principals — and I know you are talking to some school principals later — tells us that some of the schools seem to see that as a disincentive to attract students. It is seen that the school is less academic if it is offering VCAL or VET, but clearly the other figures showed that that means young people are not completing high school and then probably missing out on the opportunities for that.

In respect of limited access to higher education in the shire, this is the only university. I think the figures show that most of the people who come here come from out of the shire and not from within the shire, but the difficulties of transport access for those living outside the urban areas to get here are significant. There is also a critical lack of accommodation options, which means that for the young people who are travelling or who need to access accommodation to go to university here, their opportunities to find rental accommodation are severely limited. I suppose we cannot stress enough the impact of transport and what that means in terms of high school completion and then access to higher education. If a young person is in Warburton and they are kicked out of the high school in Warburton the next access to a high school is in Lilydale. They have to catch a bus at 7.00 a.m. or earlier, and if they miss that bus they are going to miss the start of school. For a family that may be struggling, or a child who is having difficulty in terms of engagement with school, it takes a big commitment to get on a bus and travel those sorts of times to get to school. That is then compounded if you have to drive for 20 minutes or so from East Warburton to get to Warburton to hop on a bus.

On the other issue in terms of access to post-school pathways, as we have said, access to TAFE is difficult. We have only two TAFE outlets, in Healesville and here. Similar to VCAL and VET, TAFE is often not seen as an attractive pathway. We have noticed the absolute success in looking at some more flexible alternatives in the neighbourhood houses, and we cannot stress enough the value of the neighbourhood houses within this municipality and the sorts of opportunities they have been offering young people who are disengaged from school — and I note you are talking to a number of neighbourhood houses later — has been phenomenal in terms of bringing back disengaged people to learning. There are things like the youth guarantee, the Youth Pathways project, youth placement and employment training programs and youth enterprise.

We have talked about the issue of accessing university. Those issues are even more compounded for indigenous students in this municipality. One of the things we recommended in our submission as a way forward to consider — and we think the work we have been doing in the municipality shows the value — is the whole issue of early education, and we applaud the state government for understanding and recognising the importance of investing in the early years. We believe the foundation that you give a child early in life will have a massive impact in terms of their ability to complete school successfully and move on to higher education.

The other issue is around partnerships with business and the education sector and the community working together to achieve that, and looking at flexible alternatives to engage with people. The opportunity for alternative and flexible education programs, the importance of investing in preventive programs and primary care services, particularly that around youth mental health and the importance of keeping young people engaged and on track in terms of completion of higher education. The last one is the issue of infrastructure and the importance of investing in public transport, which is absolutely central to access to education, training, employment and social connectedness.

Nick, who is our a chair of the Transport Connections program, is going to give a very quick overview of that program and some of the outcomes we have had to date from that.

**Mr WHITE** — The Transport Connections project, if you are unaware, is a state government funded three-year project to better coordinate existing transport services. It is not about providing new services, it is about better timetabling, better intermodal connections between different sorts of transport, so most of the resource is in employing a facilitator to work with the community to identify what are some of the needs. Then the hope is that subsequently if a new bus route is identified that it might then be picked up and funded. There is a small associated, what we are calling, flexible fund which is predominantly for pilot projects. The Minister for Community Development is responsible for the program and the transport department and the Minister for Public Transport for the flexible fund. Yarra Ranges was successful in obtaining one of these programs. It is auspiced in Yarra Ranges by the Eastern Volunteer Resource Centre and has a steering committee made up of a number of players including local government.

I will give a brief overview of some of the initiatives that are relevant to young people, and to their access to education, particularly higher education. There are three areas of focus in Yarra Ranges: the Dandenong ranges, the Upper Yarra area — Warburton, Yarra Junction and surrounds — and also Healesville and surrounds. Most of the activity thus far has been in Healesville. We are at the end of the first year of a three-year process. One of the things which our facilitators have done is to survey students at Healesville Secondary College, but also anecdotally generally these are some of themes that have come through. A lack of transport options, the cost of transport and the time taken to travel is influencing and impacting upon the participation, but also on absenteeism and then, for some, withdrawing from education.

In terms of transport options the young people have said they cannot take their bikes on the buses, which makes it difficult for some because they could cycle to the bus, et cetera. There is some conversation happening around the possibility of making that more accessible. I guess transport costs, and petrol prices going up, but also in the municipality we have the boundary between the metropolitan public transport fare and the rural fare, so if you are travelling beyond Woori Yallock you pay the country fare and then the metropolitan fare which obviously increases the cost. We are dealing with communities and the further out to go the more socioeconomically disadvantaged they are, so these other barriers compound those underlying issues.

Some of the initiatives that have come out of the initial process, particularly around Healesville, are conversations with some of the taxi companies about utilising their larger maxi taxis at set times for meeting the needs of a larger group which can be cheaper for the individual students but is attractive to the taxi companies because these are regular jobs that they can schedule in and work around. A lot of these things are not at peak times when a lot of their other work is happening. There are some ongoing conversations with the taxi companies. I think there is the potential for some good initiatives there.

We are also talking about the possibility of working with train companies to have a last train taxi service where they would have a safe rank at the Lilydale and Belgrave stations and they would arrange to meet the last train. This is not specifically around access to higher education, but it is about young people's access which encourages them to remain, I guess, in the community which obviously has other benefits and is part of their reliance on public transport. There is also an initiative with the two bus companies.

One travels predominantly up the Warburton Highway and the other up the Maroondah Highway, but there is not a lot of crossover between the two and so there is an option for resourcing a pilot to get people from Healesville across to Yarra Junction. The benefits there will be for secondary students predominantly. It will enable a number of secondary students to travel, particularly in the case, as Alison said, where someone is expelled from Upper Yarra Secondary College, because they will then be able to get a bus and go across to Healesville. It will keep them in secondary education, which is obviously important for them going on to any further education.

One anecdote from the experience of some teachers in Healesville is that they see some of these barriers and they do not encourage students — this is what I have heard them say — to go on to TAFE where that means going beyond Healesville. For some of the courses they would need to travel to Croydon, et cetera. The students would need to get a bus from Healesville to Lilydale and a train from Lilydale to Croydon and then there is a significant walk, so the teachers are avoiding even suggesting those. But you will hear from some of the principals later. That is just a brief overview of the program.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks. It might be good if we go to some questions and dialogue now. I am interested to start by finding out whether in this region you have identified skills shortages in areas that relate to particular higher ed areas and what has been the feedback in that area.

**Ms CRAN** — Swinburne university has done a study around skills gaps analysis, which does identify areas of skills gaps. They are presenting to you, I think, later today.

**The CHAIR** — Yes. So we can follow that up.

**Ms CRAN** — I am hoping that they can provide you with the detailed information on that, but that is certainly an issue in terms of livability within the shire. Most people are travelling out of the shire for accessing employment, but we still have gaps in terms of key industry where we are trying to attract people. That really has an impact because people do see this area as a long way away from Melbourne. We really need to be providing that training here to have people working and living within the municipality and that will become more important as petrol costs continue to rise.

**The CHAIR** — Just following on from that point, then, Nick's last comment related to teachers in Healesville perhaps not encouraging students to travel elsewhere to TAFE. I presumed that then the alternative might have been that employment was available nearby, but that does not seem to be the case. So if they are not travelling for TAFE, they are still having to travel to get employment; is that the case?

**Mr WHITE** — Certainly, for those who can find employment. A number obviously do not go on to employment. Some will perhaps go on to TAFE but not study something that is their preference, I guess.

**Ms CRAN** — I think the important thing is that TAFE at both Healesville and here need to be looking at what are the implications of that skills gap analysis and to be redirecting the curriculum to meet some of those, so that we are offering opportunities for gaining those skills that actually meet the skills gaps we have within the municipality.

**The CHAIR** — Do you think you have a higher-than-normal rate of unemployment in this area?

**Ms CRAN** — There are definitely pockets of significant unemployment and what we have found in terms of young people is that — and it follows a traditional pattern, I suppose — where they disengage earlier they are more likely to be employed but within casual or part-time unskilled jobs. So you might get a bit of a spike in terms of youth employment but in fact it is not secure or long-term employment. Certainly particularly in the Upper Yarra and Healesville areas there are high rates of youth unemployment.

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — The other aspect of that is those casual jobs not having a career structure for those young people to really move on into.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Thank you, Alison. I have a couple of questions and I will put them together. The first is: does the shire provide scholarships? The second one is: how do you encourage people who leave the area to come back for jobs when they finish their education?

**Ms CRAN** — We do not provide scholarships. As an interface municipality with more than 12 500 kilometres of road network, the ability to extend funding to something like that is just beyond our reach. But we have participated with the Municipal Association of Victoria, particularly in relation to trying to attract people to work with the shire — we are one of the largest employers in the municipality — around looking at how we can provide access to traineeships and industry experience, to make this an attractive place to come to and work in. We are also just about to launch a brochure around living and working in the shire, to attract people. As an employer we certainly provide a range of traineeships and apprenticeships to offer local people access to training and then employment.

**Mr HALL** — Thanks for coming along and making the submission to us; we appreciate that. I have some basic questions. First of all, how long does it take any of you to get from Lilydale and other parts of the shire into the city?

**Ms CRAN** — With the opening of EastLink, it is a little bit faster than it was. If you are travelling during peak hour in the morning from Lilydale it will probably take you an hour and a bit, but if you are travelling from East Warburton it will take you 2½ hours.

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — Are we talking public transport or vehicles?

**Ms CRAN** — If we are talking public transport, it will increase that.

**Mr HALL** — I am talking about both. The reason I ask the question is that I would like to know whether it is the norm for students from your shire who win a place at Melbourne University or RMIT to commute on a daily basis or do they look for city accommodation?

**Ms CRAN** — They need to look for city accommodation, really. It is difficult to be hopping on the train from Lilydale — and if you are from further out than Lilydale you have only bus connections, unless you can drive to Lilydale, so you are looking at a significant commute.

**Mr HALL** — Given that you have low completion rates at some of the schools, has the shire or an education forum around the area looked at why those completion rates and the application rates are low?

**Ms CRAN** — We have done a lot of work with the development of a learning community strategy, the implementation of which Lou has had carriage of, working with Swinburne, the schools including the principals network, the neighbourhood houses and other education providers and looking at a range of projects around keeping young people particularly in education. Lou can talk about a couple of the projects we have done. One that I think is very important is around career development and getting young people to start thinking about what they want to do long term, so that they start planning. We have also invested heavily in early years. We were a Best Start site, and we have had a lot of initiatives around assisting parents in working with their children around literacy and working with our maternal and child health, supported play groups and preschools — all of that in terms of embedding the issue of education culturally for families.

**Mr HALL** — Do you have any private providers of training located in the shire of Yarra Ranges?

**Ms CRAN** — Not a lot.

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — There is a smattering of private providers, RTOs, that are delivering on various sorts of courses that may be targeted particularly at industries and so forth, so there are some around.

**Mr HALL** — Are there any group training companies?

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — Not a lot, no; I cannot think of any off the top of my head. There are some private providers, but their focus tends to be towards various particular business areas.

**Ms CRAN** — Food safety programs and things like that.

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — What about adult community education providers, ACE groups — not necessarily neighbourhood houses but ACE groups? Are there any of those?

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — Mainly through our neighbourhood house sector, again. We have 12 neighbourhood houses across the shire. Not all of them are ACE providers; about half of those would be ACE providers as well. We have neighbourhood houses such as Morrison House which have budgets of over \$1 million to other neighbourhood houses which might have a budget of under \$20 000, so there is a very wide variety in what they deliver and the sorts of programs that they are able to offer to the communities.

**The CHAIR** — Can I just follow up too? I notice you are particularly concerned that there seems to be a low VET in Schools offering in the secondary schools in the area. Normally I would have thought a local learning and employment network would help in tackling those issues. Do you have a local learning and employment network in the area?

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — There is the Outer East Local Learning and Employment Network that covers this area.

**The CHAIR** — Have they been working on that sort of issue, amongst others?

**Mr SBALCHIERO** — Yes. They are quite active. They cover three municipalities, including Yarra Ranges and the Maroondah and Knox areas as well. They have been quite active in trying to support the uptake of VCAL and looking at pathway options for young people beside the VCE option.

One thing we have been doing recently is supporting a program — I forget the full title but it is basically a program about the manufacturing sector. It is about encouraging young ambassadors or young people to act as spokespeople within their own industry areas in the manufacturing sector. The LLEN has been responsible for bringing that program out here and trying to encourage local businesses to open their doors for young people to see what is happening behind the scenes and look at those areas as career options. The LLEN has been coordinating that. We have been working with the LLEN to try to get industries on board in our own shire, to participate in that. That is an example of how they might work with us.

**Mr HALL** — Finally, what are the priority issues that the shire believes need to be addressed? Is it the access via transport issue? Is it the aspirational issue, which I think you have alluded to in some of your comments, which is reflected in a lower level of application to higher ed?

**Ms CRAN** — We would like to see transport given absolute priority; there is no doubt about that. That is an issue that cuts across everything for us. But we also are extremely supportive of flexible, alternative pathways for young people to complete their education. The strength of what we have seen produced within some of the neighbourhood houses in terms of engaging with young people and keeping them in education is absolutely important. We would also, I think, like to see the extension of TAFE in Healesville — the extension of the programs offered out there. We can see from the stats the impact of having a locally based TAFE and what that means in terms of TAFE take-up. And the same at Lilydale — the extension of programs offered here.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for giving us an introduction to the area, and thank you for the submissions that you have made. We will be looking at those in greater detail as we go along. We are going to hear from your Young Leaders program people next.

**Ms CRAN** — I am sure they will do us proud.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you all.

**Witnesses withdrew.**





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#### Witnesses

Ms L. Miller, acting executive officer, youth services, Yarra Ranges Shire Council,  
Mr A. Gray, year 12 student, Billanook Secondary College,  
Mr J. Jonson, VCAL student, Morrison House, and  
Ms K. Billington, year 12 student, Upper Yarra Secondary College, Young Leaders program.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to the hearing of the parliamentary Education and Training Committee. You are aware that we are looking into issues involving young people from regions across the state participating in higher education, so we are pleased to talk to young people as we have our hearings around the state. Thank you very much for coming along today. I do not know, in terms of the way you are presenting to us, whether Loren is going to introduce you or whether you have a plan about introducing yourselves and telling us a little bit about yourselves. We will then certainly have some questions we would like to follow up with.

**Ms MILLER** — I am Loren Miller. I am the community development coordinator of youth services at the shire. These are three of our Young Leaders who are involved this year in our program. I think they can introduce themselves.

**Mr GRAY** — I am Aaron Gray. I go to Billanook College, which is an independent school over in Mooroolbark. I live in Mooroolbark myself, and I am hoping to go to William Angliss in the city next year to do a hospitality and event management course.

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

**Mr GRAY** — I am year 12.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — I am Kat Billington. I live here in Lilydale but also sometimes in Mount Dandenong, which is still in the shire. I am currently studying year 12 at Upper Yarra Secondary College in Yarra Junction. When I leave school I hope to study nursing. I am not entirely sure where — I am still looking into that — but fingers crossed for that.

**Mr JONSON** — I am Jack Jonson. I am 17. I live in Yarra Glen. I am currently doing year 11 VCAL at Morrison House. I am not exactly sure what I am going to do at the end of the year. I want to do something in fashion but I am not exactly sure whereabouts.

**The CHAIR** — Just going back to Aaron — it is good we have got students with different potential directions, all coming from different areas — you said you want to go to William Angliss next year to do hospitality. What has drawn you to determine you are going to do that, and what are the challenges you face in going there?

**Mr GRAY** — I guess the reason I want to go there is I do not want to go to uni and be in a classroom for four years again. I guess also I do not want to be stuck with a HECS fee. I do not really want to have a \$50 000 HECS fee with me for the rest of my life, especially nowadays when you do not know what is going on and how things are going to change. Having that kind of debt behind you is really impacting. By going to a TAFE course I can pay it out straightaway. I can get hands on — I get really into the industry and learn from people who are doing it already. I guess the major problem I see is probably public transport to get to William Angliss. I am looking at a 20-minute bus ride and then a 45-minute train trip, if I am lucky and the train is there. If you get an express, it might speed it up but then at times you can stop at every station and it can take up to an hour to get all the way into the city. If you drive, it can take half an hour with EastLink but then you look at petrol prices and everything like that. That is the major problem I have.

**The CHAIR** — You are saying it is 20 minutes by bus on top of the train, so you are looking at an hour and 20 perhaps

**Mr GRAY** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — But you still plan to live at home?

**Mr GRAY** — Probably to start with but I am probably looking at moving out because of that issue of getting to it. I have a few friends who are moving up there as well, so I am probably looking at accommodation in the city.

**The CHAIR** — But you obviously see it as doable, that you could put up with the expense of travelling to do your first year at least?

**Mr GRAY** — Yes, definitely, because I want to do it, and I am passionate about doing it.

**The CHAIR** — Kat, what did you say you want to do next year?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Paediatric nursing.

**The CHAIR** — Nursing, and paediatrics in particular.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Yes. I am not entirely sure where but it will most likely be somewhere in the city, maybe Deakin or possibly La Trobe. I currently do not live at home, so that is not a problem in moving out. But if there were more options out here, I would love to stay here because I like the surroundings and it is — I will use the word ‘comfortable’, for lack of a better word. It is more friendly here. I would rather not move but it is a guarantee that I will probably have to.

**The CHAIR** — How many other students at your school are looking to go on to further course, whether it be nursing or other courses?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Disappointingly, not that many. They say it will take way too long to get anywhere. Even from Yarra Junction or Warburton, even from Reefton, it would take them over an hour to get into Lilydale and go here to Swinburne. Box Hill would take even longer than an hour, and they are the closest to here. That is something that is deterring them from higher study.

**The CHAIR** — Where is the closest place you could do nursing from where you are at the moment?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — If I went to a TAFE course, possibly Box Hill, but I would rather go to uni, which would be possibly Burwood, which is Deakin, I think. So, like I said, I am still looking into that.

**The CHAIR** — Jack, you have been out of school system for a while, have you, before you have gone on to VCAL.

**Mr JONSON** — Yes, about a year or a year and a half.

**The CHAIR** — What led you to drop out?

**Mr JONSON** — I did not get any subjects I wanted at school. I was at Lilydale high. Then people sort of made me decide to leave. Then I just worked. I did a certificate II in horticulture at Yarra Junction community house and then went on working for the rest of the year.

**The CHAIR** — What sort of job?

**Mr JONSON** — At a nursery in Yarra Glen.

**The CHAIR** — You enjoyed that then?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes. It is not what I want to do forever, though.

**The CHAIR** — So then you found the VCAL course at Morrison, is it?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes, Morrison House.

**The CHAIR** — And that is good?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes, it is good. It is like school but it is not; it is more laid-back, free dress and — —

**The CHAIR** — How many days are you doing there?

**Mr JONSON** — Two to three days a week.

**The CHAIR** — What are you doing the rest of the time?

**Mr JONSON** — I am working two days.

**Mr HALL** — I have a question. Aaron and Kat, you are planning to do higher education next year? Are there any thoughts in your mind about taking a gap year, as do so many young kids nowadays?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Me, definitely; it means that I would have more money for rent, more money to live and for bonds, all that kind of stuff, and other living expenses. It is definitely on the cards.

**Mr HALL** — So the reason you would consider a gap year is purely to qualify for youth allowance?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — I already qualify for youth allowance because I do not live at home.

**Mr HALL** — But, again, a gap year would help you accumulate a bit of money, hopefully?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Yes. I am sure you have heard that youth allowance does not cover every single cost.

**Mr HALL** — Absolutely.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — So that is why I do want to take a gap year, to work and accumulate those funds.

**Mr HALL** — What about you, Aaron?

**Mr GRAY** — I am not 100 per cent sure. I guess at the end of the year I would probably toss up if I am going to take a gap year not. My course would only take two years, and it is not as expensive to do my course, but then again I would love to see the world and have a bit of fun and I guess have some time to myself after year 12. But financially I am probably not in the right position to do that yet, and if I do my course, then I can actually work and travel at the same time, so that might help.

**Mr HALL** — So by going to William Angliss next year you feel that you might be able to pick up work outside of your course to help you with your expenses of living away from home?

**Mr GRAY** — I already work now. I work in a manufacturing factory in the city. I already travel to the city to do work myself, so I already have that financial side to it, but I know a lot of my friends who do not have that are taking a year off so they can build up money to go to uni, because I guess there is so much work to do with uni that you do not have time to work, do uni, then have a life yourself. So a lot of them sacrifice a year to work really hard full time so they have money built up so they can actually have fun while they are at uni and not be as stressed as they are now at school.

**The CHAIR** — So in terms of having that financial support, is that because you have got it or your parents are happy to support you to go — —

**Mr GRAY** — No, I actually work, so that is how I was — —

**The CHAIR** — What sort of work have you been doing?

**Mr GRAY** — I just work with machinery in the city, just making sure the machine runs right and does not blow up and stuff.

**The CHAIR** — So you found it easy enough to get some additional work?

**Mr GRAY** — Yes. I guess I have always had the idea that if you want work, you can find it. I worked for Coles for two years. Everyone is saying it is so hard to get a job, but if you just do it and you go in there and say, 'Look, I need the money', you need someone to help you. If you go in with that kind of idea, they are happy to take you on. But it is hard for some people; it is hard for them to be able to go out there. It is really intimidating, especially when you are 16, going into a manager's office and having four people sit around a table. It is even worse than this, because they are so close to you, you feel intimidated and you feel, 'I'm only 16. I don't know what's going on'. Then they are asking all these personal questions and stuff about what are you going to give to the company, and you think, 'I don't know that'. You just do not know those kinds of things, and it is really intimidating. I guess at some schools you just do not learn that kind of stuff.

**The CHAIR** — At your school have they given you some training in that area?

**Mr GRAY** — This might sound a bit weird, but I cannot use my school as an example of other schools. My school is a Round Square school where the idea is they teach you outside the box. We do not just go to school to learn to write and read; we go to school to be people, to learn life skills, to learn to, I guess, better control what

our lives are going to be. That is what we have built since year 7. You go on camps to learn about who you are, not just who you can be to other people but who you actually are yourself. That has probably changed me the most, just being able to go to that school and learn.

**The CHAIR** — Who runs Billanook?

**Mr GRAY** — It is a Uniting Church school, but it is part of the Round Square organisation, which is 60 schools worldwide which come together and give ideas on how to increase our education through teaching kids life skills and stuff.

**The CHAIR** — Amongst your friends, how many are looking to go on to other forms of higher ed?

**Mr GRAY** — Of students that actually go to Billanook, probably about 80 per cent will be doing it, but the majority of my other friends do not even go to school any more. You know, you get to the point where you become apprenticed for three years and earn probably twice as much as someone that goes to uni for four years, and you think you are already in front by doing an apprenticeship. One of my friends is buying a house next year. I could not buy a house next year, even if I had a great job and was out of school. But since he was 15 he has been doing an apprenticeship, and now he is 19 and he is out and earning a good wage. He can afford to go and buy a house by doing that.

**The CHAIR** — So those who have left have left for employment are happy that they have got an ongoing path in employment?

**Mr GRAY** — Yes, definitely.

**Mr HALL** — Are you planning on an apprenticeship at William Angliss?

**Mr GRAY** — No, I am actually doing a course, because I do not know exactly where I am going to go. I do not really want to work in a kitchen. I guess my other one would probably be the event management side, because I already do a lot of charity work and that is where my event management and hospitality would come into it.

**Mr HALL** — How many kids in your group, Jack, are doing — —

**Mr JONSON** — I think there are 30; that is the two classes.

**Mr HALL** — How long has the community house that you are at been going?

**Mr JONSON** — I think it has been about three years since they have done VCAL.

**Mr HALL** — This is your first year there?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — You said you wanted to perhaps go into fashion, that you are not quite sure, but fashion was an inkling?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes, fashion, but the problem is Box Hill is sort of the closest, and that is not a really good course. So Melbourne School of Fashion, which is in East Melbourne, was my option, but it is a lot of money, so it will not be any time soon.

**Mr HALL** — Is the Melbourne School of Fashion a private provider?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — Where did we see some fashion students the other day when we went on a trip to Brunswick? RMIT has a really good fashion school in the Brunswick area.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of trying to get into East Melbourne, if that is the way you are hoping you can go, you would need to work for a while, you believe, until you can earn enough money to be able to go there?

**Mr JONSON** — Quite a while, yes.

**The CHAIR** — But you see that as a possibility.

**Mr JONSON** — Yes. They have HECS, but I do not really — if it does not work out, then I would have a big massive bill by the end of it, and that is a hassle.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Kat, have any of the universities visited your school?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — I think yesterday RMIT did, and we have a few guest speakers in the next couple of weeks as well coming to speak to us from Deakin, La Trobe and possibly Victoria uni. I would have to check my calendar. I have got them written down, but I know that guest speakers are coming to talk to us.

**Mr ELASMAR** — What about you, Aaron?

**Mr GRAY** — In year 10 we actually had to go out and visit all the universities and TAFEs and stuff and see what it was like to actually go to uni and stuff like that. Then we have career days when people from the army to doing apprenticeships come and just talk to you about what they do and stuff like that.

**Mr ELASMAR** — After leaving the area and going to study in the city, in a couple of years or three years time you will finish. Do you believe there is enough for you to come back here and work in the area?

**Mr GRAY** — Probably not for what I want to do, no it is not doable. I want to do international aid work, so I would not be able to be based here because there are no organisations that deal with that kind of stuff out here. I probably would not be staying in Australia, actually. I probably would not even know too, because it is such a long way away.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Kat, what about you? If you go outside the area and you finish your higher education and you want to come back, do you believe it will be possible for you?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Possibly the same thing as him: what I want to do will probably not be out here. I want to do paediatric nursing, working with children, and I think the closest hospital to here is Maroondah, which is in East Ringwood — correct me if I am wrong — but I would want to work somewhere closer into the city, because I just do, basically.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Would you believe that most young people who are leaving the area are not returning? Are there no opportunities for them to come back, or are there opportunities but in different fields?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Yes. There are too many different things in the city that people would rather do than the things that are offered out here — to my knowledge, anyway. They say that in the city there are more opportunities. There are not many opportunities out here for specifics.

**The CHAIR** — Tell me a bit more about the Young Leaders program that you have come together as part of and how it has worked for you. I do not know how long you have been involved in the program, so I am interested to hear from each of you how it has been working, what it has done for you and so on.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — We have been meeting since about the start of the year — possibly February or March — every two weeks. We are trying to get a project off the ground to help young people in the shire. At the moment we have come across the idea of organising a winter sleep-out. We actually had a meeting last night about it, and we came up with a fair few good ideas to incorporate into this night. The main objective for it is to create awareness amongst young people about young people who are homeless. It is not about raising money; it is just about the awareness of homelessness in the shire. Would you like to say anything more?

**Mr JONSON** — It is good for me because with VCAL you have to do a certain amount of hours in the community as well, so it is helping build up that as well as helping the community and organising stuff.

**The CHAIR** — And you have gained personally out of that as well as meeting your VCAL requirements?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes. It is a social thing as well, so you have got your group of friends, but then you have got different groups as well where you can socialise in a different way.

**Mr HALL** — Can I ask a very broad question of each of the three young people we have got here today?

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Mr HALL** — What inspires each of you to do what you want to do over the next couple of years? Tell me why you have chosen that course. Is it because of someone or a contact with somebody, or is it knowledge of what you want to do later in life?

**Mr GRAY** — I guess for me whenever I do any of my work with Oxfam or anything like that is because I met a lady when I was 15 who had lost her entire family. Some people came to her town in Columbia and killed them all for no particular reason. She came to Australia to tell kids why we should change the world and why we should not just sit back and let it happen, and I guess as I grew that touched me and it made me look outside the box, like at Sudan. We said, 'Never again', but then we have genocides. I think that is why I push myself even through Young Leaders in the local community to help even the people who live next door to me who do not have much, or to help the person in Africa who does not have anything. It is still the same thing, and that is why I push myself to do anything, even my work in a course or anything like that.

**The CHAIR** — So how does William Angliss hospitality link into that?

**Mr GRAY** — Yes, interesting. They are the total opposite of each other, but it is more than a VET management side I am actually going for. I have been running campaigns for Make Poverty History and so on for the last four years now, so it is more that side that I am tapping into, because I am more than happy to go over to Africa for a few years to learn stuff like that, but I do not want to go to uni and learn about the politics, because that is what you guys can do.

**Mr HALL** — What inspires you, Kat?

**Ms BILLINGTON** — A little short story: when I was in year 10 I did child care as work experience for two weeks, and I wanted to leave school and do a child-care course. I think I wanted to do certificate IV or something. My mother said, 'Kathryn, you are way too smart to be a child-care worker', and so I went, 'So what do you want me to do?'. She said, 'Well, Kathryn, you can be a paediatric nurse', and I said, 'What's that?'. She said, 'It's working with children', and I was like, 'Oh, okay'. So I looked into it a little bit, and the more I looked into it the more I thought, 'I love kids, I love working with people and I love helping people, so that is what I want to do'. I am a very people person and I like helping people.

**Mr HALL** — Good on you. Come on, Jack. What has inspired you to get into fashion?

**Mr JONSON** — Sort of just little things. Two years ago I was just wearing tracksuit pants and a shirt, and I met my main group of friends through the shire PATS program. There was this one girl in particular, and she was so out there — blue dreadlocks and so different — I was actually scared of her to start off with. Then I started to get to know her, and after that I just changed and just kept building up, and since then it is what has interested me.

**Mr HALL** — So you have a peer role model — someone in your own age group?

**Mr JONSON** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — Kat has had some inspiration from her parents.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — And Aaron has had inspiration from a chance meeting with somebody.

**Mr GRAY** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Last question: if you wanted our committee to make a change in regard to access to higher education, what do you think should be the no. 1 thing we should try to put in our report?

**Mr GRAY** — I would probably ask the question not just of this committee but also of the broader Parliament why they are not increasing the tertiary education around here but decreasing it. We have Swinburne

now being put to a campus. How can that be put to all of us? We are getting pushed to go to higher education when we are losing the resources around this area and they are not increasing them like they should be.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Simply, I would say, make it easier. I know that the people where I live take ages to get to somewhere they want to go, because there are one or two places that are the closest for them — like I mentioned earlier, Swinburne here in Lilydale and Box Hill are probably the two closest — but they do not offer the courses that they want, so they are having to go to other places. Make it easier for us to be able to find where to go. I think I only found out at the start of this year where I could go for nursing, and that was after at least 12 months of trying to find out. Simply make it easier, please.

**The CHAIR** — So careers advice in your schools sounds a bit limited then.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — They hype it up a little bit, but I say they do not give us enough awareness. They have people from MIPs and K.Y.M. Employment Services who come, but it is a meeting once every three months, which is not enough. I would rather have more contact with someone to be able to help me find somewhere. There is just not enough.

**The CHAIR** — Jack?

**Mr JONSON** — Public transport, because at Box Hill, for instance, it does not take ages to get there, but I was thinking of doing a night course this year and the last bus to Yarra Glen is at 7.45 p.m., and that is just way too early. I have to get Mum to pick me up after work, and she does not really want to do that. So transport is a big thing — frequency of transport.

**The CHAIR** — Is there anything else you want to add?

**Mr GRAY** — No.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for your contribution.

**Ms BILLINGTON** — Thanks for having us.

**The CHAIR** — It has been great to hear from you. Good luck with your futures, and we hope we hear more of you all.

**Witnesses withdrew.**



# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Lilydale — 17 July 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon

Mr N. Elasmarr

Mr P. Hall

Dr A. Harkness

Mr S. Herbert

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Kotsiras

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

Professor K. Lipson, dean, faculty of higher education, and

Ms S. Rice, director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, Swinburne University of Technology.

**The CHAIR** — We are hearing from Swinburne University of Technology now. We are pleased to have you here today. Obviously from the first couple of hearings there are all sorts of issues that have arisen, but we are looking forward to hearing your submission and being able to ask you some questions following that.

**Prof. LIPSON** — I am Kay Lipson. I am the dean of this faculty here, and Sharon Rice is representing the TAFE area. So we are here as two representatives of the dual sector. We will both speak briefly, and then of course you can ask us questions and we will have no idea what the answers are!

Obviously there are three main issues around participation rates that I can identify, which are around student aspirations, financial barriers to relocation of rural students, and financial and other barriers to the provision of higher education in rural or regional areas by providers. I will just talking briefly about each of those. Around the student aspirations area I think the issues are very complex. They have probably been competently addressed by a lot of other submissions, but here in Lilydale it is our experience that it requires a lot more than sticking a university in a region to raise your student aspirations. Working closely with the schools in the region to raise aspirations is extremely labour intensive and I believe inconclusive. It is very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs. It has in fact, I think, been left to universities a little too much to work on raising the aspirations of the students in their catchment areas, and I think we probably need a more statewide approach to doing that because it is not actually our area of expertise. Our area of expertise is doing what we do well: learning and teaching and research.

As far as barriers to the relocation of rural students to the region is concerned, obviously there are huge issues around finances, around living-away-from-home allowances, about non-mean tested living-away-from-home allowances. I actually think if we were going to go that way, it would be good to have living-away-from-home allowances for all students, not just rural students, because I think there is a terrific potential for metropolitan students to relocate to rural universities and give them that sort of dynamism and critical mass that they perhaps lose out on.

HECS-type loans for living away from home would be better than none, but because lower socioeconomic status students seem to be more debt adverse more loans are not always going to be the encouragement that we perhaps might hope they might be. I think it is important that we have ways of giving incentives to universities to develop alternative entry pathways and additional educational and pastoral support for students who do have to move away from home, because that is clearly an issue; even if they can raise the finances they are isolated; they are support mechanisms. It is difficult enough coming to uni even if you live around corner; transition is one of the huge issues that we think about a lot.

As far as barriers to providing higher education in rural and regional areas go, the difficulties are about the range of programs you are able to offer if you take the university into the region. We have a lot of difficulties in attracting appropriately qualified staff, and we have a lack of infrastructure and facilities in small campuses, which rural campuses often tend to be.

I will talk particularly about the specific issues that face an outer urban campus, which is what we are here, and my day-to-day challenges as a dean. The proximity of Lilydale to Melbourne means we are not considered to be regional, and we do not get any additional funding. So we are actually funded in exactly the same way as the Hawthorn campus of this university. But we face a lot of the same issues that a rural or regional much more remote campus would face.

We have been here a little more than 10 years, and it is our belief that we have had little impact on the rate of participation in tertiary education among students in the shire of Yarra Ranges. We only have 40 per cent enrolment of students from this region. We have a significant enrolment of students who come from all over Melbourne. Students, teachers and parents continue to choose and evaluate the quality of an educational provider by the ENTER score of the other students who go there, and do not do it on the basis of the quality of the education that they provide. That is a battle that universities have faced from time immemorial and will continue to face, but you have to go to the university that you can get into. So a lot of very able students drive past us and go to another university that provides the same program, because they got in.

We are limited in the range of programs we can offer. We cannot resource highly expensive and specialised resource programs such as science and engineering. We just could not do it. We cannot offer the same sorts of support services that are available on a larger campus because of the student numbers, so things such as careers,

language support et cetera we could perhaps only offer one or two days a week, as opposed to having a full-time office. Many of our students have travelled very long distances to get here, and when you take account of travel time, time at university, study time, and time spent in part-time employment, you realise our students are very time poor, and the travel time mitigates against their success, I believe. Other students who would study here are discouraged by the time it takes to travel and the high cost of public transport and fuel, which is now quite difficult for students.

Our location also discourages international students for the same reasons. When you are in a financial market where universities only get about half their money from the government and the rest you have to go and find yourself, being able to attract and retain international students has just now become essential for the financial operation. International students are not eligible — you can go back and fix this one up. International students cannot get discounts on public transport. That would be something that we would welcome, should you choose to change that.

When students come on campus from areas outside a 1-hour travel range they do not stay on campus. They come in, they do what they have to do and they get out. That means it is very hard to get them to participate in any extracurricular activity, and that whole concept of university life then becomes quite difficult to establish and maintain. Students are not engaged, so even if people try to run parties or activities after hours, they cannot get students to stay on campus to go to them. That lack of engagement is highly correlated with student attrition and the tendency to just drop out of the program. In this faculty we have a 25 per cent attrition rate compared to about 16 per cent at the other faculties of Swinburne and about 18 per cent Australia-wide. So attrition is a huge problem for us, and a lot of it has to do with students travelling.

I would like to suggest that financially supporting students in any area, metropolitan or rural, to relocate to be close to their universities would be a good thing. It would be tremendous to be able to offer capacity for students of ours who live in Yarraville to live in Lilydale. We are not even getting out into the remote areas now; we are just asking for what makes a viable university experience and what enables you to participate and complete. Swinburne is a dual-sector university, and one of the suggestions we would have for increasing the participation of rural students would be to really promote and streamline the whole pathways model which is very big between TAFE and higher education here. We have seamless transition between TAFE and higher education at Swinburne. We actually have guaranteed entry into this faculty for students coming from Swinburne TAFE.

I think the idea of allowing students to remain at home maybe for one or two years to reduce costs if they have to live away and to give them that support until they get a little bit older and a little bit wiser, and to give them some experience of higher education and then to articulate them in quite a seamless way — in a way that maybe they knew from day 1 that they would be able to come on to, so it is not sort of doing one qualification and then trying to get into the next one but actually knowing from day 1 that they are going to do this here and then that there — could be a way of promoting engagement in higher education and perhaps participation, and this is a model that Swinburne is very keen on promoting and perhaps doing more to more clearly articulate with other TAFE providers. It might be something we should be looking at. I am now going to hand over to Sharon who is going to talk a bit about TAFE.

**Ms RICE** — I am Sharon Rice, and I am director for the Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, which is exactly what we do: engage specific groups. We are like the TAFE gateway for groups, particularly youth, disengaged young people, the mature learners, reskilling unqualified mature learners, VET in Schools — that you have no doubt heard a lot about as you have gone around the state — and traineeships and apprenticeship and workforce skills entry, and indigenous.

I suppose I would like to focus a little bit on the indigenous although if you have any questions regarding the others, I am very happy to answer them. We have been very successful in the TAFE area focusing with indigenous communities. We have done that by linking into the regions and into the rural sectors and forming relationships and partnerships with indigenous organisations. We focus on workforce skills, and that is our focus more than on the softer area of arts and crafts and that sort of thing. We are very much on to skills development.

No doubt you very aware of the poor educational outcomes for indigenous groups, and in particular the young people who might access universities are underskilled. We are finding that if we engage indigenous people through the TAFE system, we can build their skills and develop the knowledge, and currently we are working with Kay and

with the Lilydale campus accrediting an advanced diploma. We have 60 to 80 graduates out of diploma courses now of indigenous people coming through from certificates III and IV and building that skill.

We are now developing the advanced diploma with a recognised pathway into a bachelor of social science with 18 months credit, so that by the time indigenous people complete our advanced diploma they only have to do another 18 months to get a bachelor of social science. We have a mass of people coming through. I just wanted to mention that program. The success in the indigenous area is taking the programs out into the regions and forming partnership arrangements with indigenous organisations and providing it on site. The difficulty we have around that area is funding for residential models, and the state and federal boundaries around funding for TAFE is a real issue for us.

We attract people into our business governance course working with Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the office of the registrar of indigenous corporations, which is the federal body, from Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory et cetera, and we cannot find them which is a real issue for us. Even though we are getting 98 per cent completion and retention through those programs in a residential model, we cannot get funds for our interstate students. I will leave that one there.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. Can I follow up about accommodation: I notice you have accommodation here at Lilydale. Is it fully utilised? Following on from what you are saying about it being great if more students could live on campus, are there plans to increase accommodation on site?

**Prof. LIPSON** — Yes to both of those questions. Yes, it is full but it is only just full now for the first year, and yes, I have already had talks, and it has been signed up to build another 100 beds. It is mostly full of international students.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, so you are getting international — —

**Prof. LIPSON** — Yes. We are about 10 per cent international students. We have got about 200.

**The CHAIR** — The local students are not taking it up?

**Prof. LIPSON** — Some, but not hugely.

**The CHAIR** — They see it as a better option to live at home and travel in?

**Prof. LIPSON** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — Thanks for coming in. Kay, I think you mentioned that only 40 per cent of your students on campus here come from the local area. Is that abnormally different to some of the other places where there is a regional campus, like at Churchill or La Trobe or Bendigo?

**Prof. LIPSON** — I do not know. I am sorry, I cannot really speak about their figures. I would have thought that in putting a campus at Churchill you would expect that students would have to travel quite a lot; a lot of students would travel to that campus because — our biggest competition is the other campus of our university. We are on the same train line. Ten years ago one might have asked, ‘Why put us here, not in Mansfield where we might say we are attracting’ but we are really an outer urban campus, and that has quite distinct challenges, too.

**Mr HALL** — We find that going around the country — and I am from a country electorate — kids say, ‘We have had 18 years living here. We want to taste the bright lights of the big city’.

**Prof. LIPSON** — Absolutely. We have more students from Lilydale Secondary College at Hawthorn than we do here. If you ask them they say, ‘I have been in Lilydale all my life, I am trying to get out’. It is not a huge drawer. The way we have to be competitive is to have programs that bring students from all over the state because we offer that program, and it is a good program. It involves all the travel and location issues that every university faces.

**Mr HALL** — You have a great looking campus here; it looks very attractive. Is there any thought of developing it further by building up the various liaisons that you have with secondary colleges, and even going to the extent of doing something like they have done at Churchill in creating an education precinct? Would you see that as improving opportunities for local kids if that were to occur?

**Prof. LIPSON** — We have done a lot of work with the local schools and tried to bring schools on campus a lot, which we do using our spaces and inviting them. I am not absolutely sure what is in the education precinct at Churchill — —

**Ms RICE** — I know that we engage with over 50 secondary schools through the VET in Schools programs, and I believe there are opportunities to further engage those students through a whole range of activities. We are very much focused on vocational training.

**Mr HALL** — You probably deliver some of those programs to secondary schools.

**Ms RICE** — We do. We auspice secondary schools to deliver a fair bit of that training, and I can see that becoming the new way as secondary schools get more into the certificate IIs and TAFEs get out of those certificate IIs. I think there will be schools as colleagues rather than something separate. I think that is what we are looking at so that we get a whole lot of sharing of teachers and programs and recognise what they do. We are doing more and more of those models.

**Mr HALL** — Do you deliver at the school or here?

**Ms RICE** — No, we do all. A lot of delivery happens at the school with auspiced programs — in some programs 90 per cent is delivered at the school. They might come in in school breaks to do some intensive training, for example, around scaffolding where schools do not have scaffolding so they might have to come on campus to do those particular units in the building area. Others, say in the sport and recreation program that we run at Swan Hill, all of that is delivered fully in that school. There are a whole range of models. We are very flexible. We do not have a one-size-fits-all for a school.

**Mr HALL** — Does your TAFE section contain a greater percentage of local students than the 40 per cent doing higher education?

**Ms RICE** — Yes. There is very much a general trend that local campuses attract local students.

**Prof. LIPSON** — It is quite different in TAFE and higher education.

**Mr HALL** — Yes.

**Ms RICE** — And we work very much to market to the local area and form relationships with our local communities.

**Prof. LIPSON** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — When we heard from the council before they were suggesting that they were disappointed that VET in Schools has a relatively low take-up rate in the secondary schools here. I wonder if you would like to comment on that, and what is the opportunity for — —

**Ms RICE** — I think it is all around the funding issues. We find that students who would benefit most from vocational training in schools pay for it. So in many instances even though the trend is that the funds are transferred into schools and schools should pay, in reality that is very difficult to do because of a whole range of school issues around teachers in front of classes. But if we look at skills shortage areas for example, they are the intense, high infrastructure-type courses, and we are getting kids who might like to do engineering or building and construction paying very high fees to do those courses, and those fees are passed on generally to parents who in this particular area cannot afford to do it so it is not really an equitable arrangement.

The VET in Schools funding is a significant issue that needs to be addressed. The same thing does not happen with school-based apprentices, where schools receive their funding and then TAFE can enrol school-based apprentices against their own funding sources. In the VET in Schools program it is a fee-for-service activity and the schools pay, but it is not working terribly well, particularly in this area where it is a lower socioeconomic area and those costs are passed on to parents who cannot afford it. So the kids are not getting the same opportunity. That is my view.

**Mr HALL** — What about the public transport links to this campus? Do you have a regular bus service from Lilydale station.

**Prof. LIPSON** — From Lilydale station, yes.

**Mr HALL** — So most kids would either pick up public transport or bring a motor vehicle to this campus?

**Prof. LIPSON** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Could I ask a bit more about working with indigenous students? What are the sorts of courses you are running and where are the people?

**Ms RICE** — We run a certificate IV and diploma in youth work, a certificate IV and diploma in community development, a certificate IV and diploma in front line management, and our highly successful certificate IV and diploma in business (governance) and certificate IV and diploma in alcohol and other drugs, training and assessment, and we work with Parks Victoria, coming up with a whole lot of new capacity-building plans so we are looking more at whole communities. For example, we are working with the Yorta Yorta people up in Shepparton, and that is a partnership with DSE, Parks Victoria, where we are starting to train some of their own students. So we work with a lot of indigenous organisations. We do not go and deliver, we always partner with indigenous organisations, and we take it out into the community so we are running training in Mildura, Swan Hill, Shepparton, and we have trained in Warrnambool.

With the business governance we have trained everywhere. We do a three-day introduction and that includes Alice Springs and Western Australia, so we are right out there in the communities. For the certificate IV in business (governance) and diploma, they come from all over the state and we run that in the residential setting in a conference centre in this area.

**The CHAIR** — Is that coming in for a period of a few days?

**Ms RICE** — Yes. We run certificate IV in four, one-week residential blocks. The students must attend every session of those blocks in order to gain the qualifications and then once they have done the certificate IV, they can do another five-week residential block and get their diploma, plus a whole lot of work outside; so it is skilling up and increasing the skills level into the diploma. That particular model — residential, which involves raising the expectations and participation — is getting 96 per cent completion rates and the students love it. Everyone says indigenous students need flexibility. Indigenous students want the bar raised. They want structure, good support systems, high-level materials, excellent teachers and a partnership with the community. You put that in place, and the successes are there.

So our retention rates for indigenous students across the board are the same as for our mainstream centres. In the regional areas we send teachers out and they might do a three-day program, say in Mildura where we are running community development, and our teachers will fly out every fortnight and train for three days and a lot of the students are in workplaces and are currently employed or working as volunteers in the community. They are a higher level of student and we use their workplaces as the training area as well. We go out and get evidence of what they are doing, support them in the workplace, assist them on the job plus run the training and those models really work. They are fantastic. The TAFE receives funding from the state and that is adequate. Where the funding is difficult is around paying for the students' accommodation and travel in the residential model.

In the business governance ones, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria supports those costs and that is fantastic so they are using that as one of their capacity-building programs, and also through the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations the federal government will pay some travel and accommodation of interstate students from Tasmania or South Australia. We are delivering our first certificate IV in business (governance) in South Australia at the moment with the Department of Premier and Cabinet; so we are getting support there. and we will probably be going into Western Australia very soon.

The issue we want is to bring all of those people into a diploma and our advanced diplomas at this campus in order to take them forward and into that bachelor of social science. They are champing at the bit, truly. We have got 60 people saying, 'When is it happening?' and the aim is that by 2010 we will have 20 people halfway through a Bachelor of Social Science and then I would like to think 15 completions; then people are coming through behind; so it is building the capacity.

With indigenous people it is about skilling them up and giving them the skills at the certificate 111 level, along with encouragement, and then up they come to certificate IV; you build that skill at the diploma level, and it is

starting to put in more theory-based courses, increasing knowledge, looking at how to write for academic purposes, how to do reports, and how to reference documents at that advanced diploma level. So at that advanced diploma level we will be looking at again raising the bar and preparing them for the bachelor of social science that they would have to enter at mid point. So that is happening, and it will happen. I know we will get completions. That will be very exciting because one of the things with indigenous people is that you can probably go and look at the statistics, and they will show some courses which boast, 'Yes, we have got 50 indigenous students', and they give that measure a big tick, but very few complete it, and that is because they do not have the skills.

We are going for completion and building the skills, and that is the pathway model that works with indigenous people; I am sure those models are transferable to other groups that are coming from a low skills base but have the capacity; and the work they are doing in communities is phenomenal. It blows you away when you see what some of these people are capable of; but they are totally unqualified.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. That is very encouraging.

**Mr HALL** — I read in your submission that this campus was established in 1992. Was it established from a greenfield site?

**Prof. LIPSON** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — Nothing else here? One of the things we have heard in this inquiry is that one of the big determinants about whether young people participate in higher education is related to their parents' education. Probably because of the lack of a higher education presence here the culture of university education probably would not be strong in this area?

**Ms RICE** — That is right. I think in the shire of Yarra Ranges, less than 20 per cent of parents have tertiary qualifications and that includes at a TAFE level — in other words, post-school qualifications.

**Prof. LIPSON** — We actually find that there is little parental support for students going to tertiary education. Our recruitment people say that parents are often proactively saying, 'Why would you want to do that? I am all right and I haven't got those qualifications'. So it has been quite difficult to get that culture that tertiary education has a value.

**Mr HALL** — Like a lot of things in life, you are better to educate the parents before you start on the kids.

**Prof. LIPSON** — That is right.

**The CHAIR** — It seems though, from what one of the groups earlier was mentioning, that some of the courses at Swinburne in this region have been cut back? That was the impression I had. Is it the centre for regional development?

**Prof. LIPSON** — Yes. That is not a program, though.

**The CHAIR** — There was mention of a program, though. But you are saying you are not cutting back any of your programs?

**Prof. LIPSON** — No. Increasing the number of programs; we are growing all the time. We have just started a bachelor of communications (public relations and media studies) and that is a lovely program. It is a collaborative effort between us and the faculty of design in Prahran, so we are actually getting some design stuff out here for the first time, which is very exciting for the region.

**The CHAIR** — The commitment for this area is still as strong as it has been. That is good to hear. Does that mean that there is a financial challenge for Swinburne? Obviously there is for all universities but we understand that any of the universities or TAFEs even operating in the regions have greater challenges. I hear you saying that Lilydale does not get regional funding. Does that mean that it requires Swinburne as an overall organisation to subsidise this part of the program?

**Prof. LIPSON** — It depends who you ask. Some of the other faculties might say yes but I do not believe that is true. In fact we are increasingly self-sufficient in this faculty because we are the branch of Swinburne that runs Open Universities Australia. In this faculty our EFT load, if I can talk load, is 1250 students on campus and

we have nearly 1000 online students. We actually are expanding significantly and are extremely viable, because of the ways in which we have chosen to diversify the operation.

**The CHAIR** — That opens up another interesting area. In terms of students being able to access higher education in a manner other than face to face, what is the experience? When we have been out in the regions a lot of people have said that is a second-class education, that, 'If we do not get the face to face, we feel we lose a lot', but I am interested to get your impression of what you might do to ensure it does work effectively.

**Prof. LIPSON** — I think we all agree it works extremely effectively. It is a very effective pedagogy, and we are very cutting edge here on this campus in providing online education and providing students with opportunities to study online. We can do that. It is not the best way for an undergraduate to do their degree, because they miss all the other stuff. I totally agree with that. I would hate to just be an online operation. The students who choose to study online, the OUA students, tend to be a different cohort altogether. They are people who are working, people who have other constraints around their lives. They are in there for the degree. The drop-out rate for online for, say, a school leaver is quite high, because it requires a level of maturity to manage your own learning in ways that you just cannot assume. We discovered that with our own students when we started here. We have got a lot of capacity for flexibility here.

All our lectures are videotaped, all our materials are on the students' websites. They can actually download the lecture and watch it at home, but they do not. Who would? You can watch television if you are at home. They are actually better to be here and engaging with the other students. We are about to spend \$6.5 million on this campus in buildings and facilities to try and give students a lot more reasons to be on campus and to engage. We are actually getting the two most fundamental things a university needs to have to be viable — a bar and a gym. When we have got that right, we reckon the rest is going to be okay.

**The CHAIR** — One of the other questions I asked the council earlier, and they referred on to you, was skill shortages in the area. Sharon, you have mentioned the engineering-type areas. What are the other areas? We were informed by the council that Swinburne has done a study in this skills shortage area.

**Prof. LIPSON** — There was a study done by the Centre for Regional Development, which I think has been appended to its submission. Off the top of my head I could not tell you that information.

**Ms RICE** — From the TAFE end, building and construction. There are a lot of small to medium enterprises out in this area, not a whole lot of large ones. We do not have Ford — —

**Prof. LIPSON** — There is a Siemens.

**Ms RICE** — We have got a Siemens. In the retail area they are the main ones. I think the one that jumps to my mind is in the engineering areas in terms of building and construction, the housing sector. What we do not have is plumbing, although it is now mooted that we are going into that area. We have got into bricklaying in the last few years; that is really increasing.

I know Joan Cashion, who is in the TAFE, has just mooted that we are building two new building barns on the Croydon campus to pick up green plumbing, having a sustainable focus, and we want to have a focus on the green trade. We are starting to put design and sustainability into all our programs within the trade areas. That is where we are going. Plumbing is coming. I think next year we are working with Ringwood, the ATC, in the pre-apprenticeship area and we will get into the apprenticeship area in 2010, but we want the facilities there.

**Mr HALL** — You have building and construction here on site?

**Ms RICE** — At the Croydon campus — a very large facility there. Going into flexible modes too, so that the apprentices can come in and do all the theory-based study self-paced, and we are finding those numbers are increasing because employers can send their apprentices in in the downtime rather than the lock step. That is working very well.

**The CHAIR** — But engineering is not offered at Swinburne. Where would people from this area go to undertake engineering as a degree?

**Prof. LIPSON** — Hawthorn.



**Ms RICE** — That is at the higher ed. end.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. We will be looking over your written submission in greater detail. Thank you for your contribution today. It is great to have visited Swinburne.

**Prof. LIPSON** — You are very welcome. I hope that you enjoy your stay.

**The CHAIR** — We shall.

**Witnesses withdrew.**



# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Lilydale — 17 July 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

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

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

#### Witnesses

Ms H. Hickson, executive officer, and

Ms V. Virgato, career and transition coordinator, Eastern Industry Education Partnership.

**The CHAIR** — The Eastern Industry Education Partnership sounds like a very interesting group. I do not think we have struck anything similar in our travels elsewhere, so we are very interested to hear a bit more about what you do, including the PACTS program, and gain an understanding of how you have come about and so on.

**Ms HICKSON** — I will start off by talking a little bit about our organisation — who we are, what we do — just so you will understand the context in which we make these comments about PACTS. We are a local community partnership which is an initiative of the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It began in 2006 when it was called DEST — the name has changed. We are an incorporated, not-for-profit association. We have been around for around about 10 years. We cover the middle and outer eastern territory of Melbourne, which includes Whitehorse, Manningham, Monash, Knox, Maroondah and the Yarra Ranges. Just listening to what you were saying earlier, is this hearing today predominantly focused on the Yarra Ranges?

**The CHAIR** — Yes; seeking local input but anything that is broader is still useful to us.

**Ms HICKSON** — We actually deal with that really broad middle and eastern part of the eastern suburbs — Yarra Ranges is really just one of our areas.

**The CHAIR** — We are not limited to Yarra Ranges. By coming here we saw this as an area that is in that edge of Melbourne interface area.

**Ms HICKSON** — We have got a few little statistics for you that will just let you know how many of our teachers have taken up PACTS-facilitated training et cetera. We have given you the stats for the whole of our regions. They will give you a better picture.

What do we focus on at EIEP? The main role is facilitating career and transition support for 13 to 19-year-olds. We are not service providers. I know other local community partnerships deliver courses like PACTS, but probably they are really pushing the boundaries of the contract. I am sure it is justified, and I am sure we could do it if we thought it might be useful in the region, but we are not service providers, we are facilitators. What we try to do is get programs and develop those programs in schools and with other stakeholders that deal with young people.

We see ourselves as a conduit for young people and industry, which is one of the main objectives of the Career Advice Australia initiative, which local community partnerships are a part of. We have a number of relationships with stakeholders. In fact, the whole business is focused on the relationships we have with stakeholder groups. Our main stakeholders would be parents, schools, alternative providers, TAFEs, the LLENs, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, community service providers, local government, industry, business and organisations.

We have a number of particular programs we focus on because of the contract that we have with CAA. They include structure workplace learning, ASP, which is the Adopt a School project, which is where industry goes into the schools and sets up some project that gives the young people a fairly realistic — or as realistic as you can get when you are still at school — experience of the workplace in that particular industry. What we do try to do is promote Adopt a School projects in the skills shortage areas or the labour shortage areas in those particular areas. Within the four regions that our organisation covers there are quite distinct and different skills shortage areas, which Vanessa is going to talk about later. Certainly for us, region 75, which is the Yarra Ranges, is quite different to the other three regions. So it is rural; it is quite different to the other three regions, which are much more suburban and much more typical of what you might expect in the eastern suburbs.

One of the things we really focus on is the local environment. We do what is known as an environmental scan on each of our regions. Whenever we are developing our business plans for the year and our strategic planning at the organisation level we are always looking at what the region needs, where are the gaps, where are the shortfalls, what can we do to get in there and do something about that. The basis of all our business throughout the year is pretty much what the environment is telling us about the area.

We support equity groups, but we focus on all 13-to-19-year-olds, whether or not they be members of an identified equity group. But the equity groups we really focus on, particularly in region 75 — we have done a lot of work with indigenous young people in Worawa college, Healesville High School, Lilydale High School and a number of areas in the Yarra Ranges that require support to work with indigenous young people; disabled young people;

CALD people; and refugees. There are more and more refugee young people coming into the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, we have found.

Another key focus of the organisation is promoting up-to-date knowledge and providing advice and support in matters relating to further education pathways and career choices. So our brief is really quite broad. We are up-to-date with the latest research findings, such as information coming out of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, information coming from DEWA, which of course is also reading the same information, and promoting ideas that have come out of the latest research. One of the things we are very aware of is how strong an influence parents actually have on young people.

PACTS of course is something we have really encouraged in our schools. Last year, 2007, we decided that by the end of 2008 we would have 50 per cent of our schools having done some sort of PACT facilitator training. We have 96 schools, so we decided that we would have at least half of them having done some sort of PACTS facilitator training. We have promoted that in our newsletters and on our website and in the way our people on the ground are getting out to the schools and talking to them et cetera. It has been one of the initiatives that we have really pushed. That is just what I am going to talk about, which is just who we are, what we do, and why you might be interested to hear our opinion. I might leave it to you, Vanessa. Do you want me to talk about — —

**Ms VIRGATO** — What we have done. From the brief that we received there were some dot points, so we have gone through and addressed those dot points. It is probably just easiest for me to read that heading and fill in the gaps effectively.

The first issue is around career education and life aspiration of parents and young people in Melbourne's east. Certainly having heard what the previous speakers said, we would be in agreement with that. We work with 96 schools across the eastern region and 24 in the shire of Yarra Ranges. Within the eastern region there is a broad representation of social class and educational levels, and certainly there can be an attitude among some schools and some parents that can act as a blockage to building aspiration in young people. We come across that on quite a regular basis. We are actually facilitating an aspirations forum in August to try and get young people, educators, community partners and industry players together to talk about how we inspire and build aspiration in young people so we can then set about trying to bridge some gaps, I guess.

Some general observations about the eastern region are that it is a reasonably conservative area and schools generally promote courses that lead to high ENTER scores and university entrance. So there does seem to be some blockage around TAFE and VCAL programs. I think a lot of that comes from the schools' perception, but certainly a lot of it comes from the parents as well — that sort of attitude that certainly my child is going to go on and do law, and we would not expect to have a discussion that would involve anything less. There is not a great push in this region for young people to explore alternatives other than mainstream uni. We recognise that success in this region is often measured by entry to the traditional or more elite professions, and, as I said, there are indications that there is resistance from schools and parents to take up VET and VCAL.

On parents' level of knowledge and understanding relating to the potential pathways for their children before and after participating in PACTS, there is not a lot of information that is available to us around this. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that PACTS is usually an enjoyable experience and provides information to parents that they would not have had otherwise. PACTS is an opportunity for parents to explore their own pathways as well as explore a pathway for their child. So there is often feedback from parents that suggests that it was quite a cathartic experience for them to participate for their own reasons, quite aside from assisting their child in career and transition support. Most parental uptake is via the schools, and it is controlled by the schools' willingness or enthusiasm to take up PACTS. So a lot of the promotion that we do is via the schools, and some schools are easier for us to infiltrate — for want of a better word — than others with regard to promoting activities or programs that offer parental engagement. So sometimes there are blockages from those schools to actually get through to those parent bodies, either through the actual parent body itself or through newsletters, et cetera.

**Ms HICKSON** — Just going on to the next dot point on features of effective career education and transition programs, particularly where they involve parents, as I said earlier, we have really encouraged schools to take up PACTS, and we have done this by promoting it on our website and in our newsletters which go out to all the schools. We have offered funding for training of school personnel or parents in PACTS. We have tried to encourage parents within the school community to take up the training as well and not just teachers, because it really is a program for parents to peer to peer with other parents. We have offered the schools a subsidy to buy the

PACTS kit. So we have done everything we possibly can, in a sense, other than deliver the program ourselves, to get schools to embrace it, take it on board and start using it. So far we have had 27 teachers, and that would be one teacher per school, and we have 96 schools. We are in the middle of 2008 — —

**The CHAIR** — Are you talking primary schools, too, as well as secondary?

**Ms HICKSON** — No, we are just talking secondary schools. Just to give you a brief idea, in our total region we have 12 Catholic schools, 45 government schools and 30 independent schools. Just with the 30 independent schools, you know that this is a wealthier area and that the parents' aspirations at least are very high for their children, and that sort of leafy suburb middle-class kind of thing is quite big in this area, but not so much in region 75, which of course is the Yarra Ranges. That is, as I said, slightly different to the other regions.

One of the things that we probably need to say is that we really value parental engagement models. We have read the research, and we understand why it is so important. We have not really had a proper opportunity to test PACTS, so whilst we have promoted PACTS and we have tried to make it accessible to schools and to teachers, we have not really tested how effective it is in getting the outcomes that the research might suggest it might lead to. Part of that is because it has been a short period of time. We have really only been promoting this since 2007. Our biggest problem in promoting PACTS is the schools, which can be a roadblock in many ways. It is unfortunate that the schools are so busy. They do have such a broad agenda. It is quite difficult for them, I guess, to do everything that might be good. Again, getting back to what Vanessa spoke about earlier, sometimes the schools do not consider programs like this to be contributing to the ENTER score that their students are going to get to go to university, and therefore they say, 'We won't encourage this'. It is a low priority in terms of all the other items on the agenda. That is just an attitudinal thing that we notice. There is also a lack of significant feedback or knowledge about school-run PACTS training, because we really have to rely on the schools to give us that information if they have run the training.

To give you a bit of an idea about region 75 — and I will give you this data — in region 75, which is the Yarra Ranges, we only had one teacher take up that training in 2007 and one in 2008, which is not very much. If we have a look at school sectors across the region, we had seven from the Catholic sector last year and five from the Catholic sector this year, and they really do seem to be a sector that takes on these types of initiatives very, very well. We have had a lot from the government sector this year — six — and we had three last year. And the independents probably feel they do this sort of thing really well already, and probably they do it quite well already because of the commitment the parents make financially, et cetera, to sending their child to a private school, and they are probably much more inclined to attend what the school might be offering that could be really an alternative to PACTS without being called that, so there is nowhere near the same uptake. We had three in 2007 and only one in 2008. We have also got special development schools. These are schools that might be looking after hearing-impaired young people or seriously intellectually impaired young people, et cetera. We have got a number of those schools, and we had one teacher from those schools last year and one teacher this year.

**Ms VIRGATO** — Under the category of responses to the PACTS program for schools, parents and students, including the findings and any evaluations of the program, our evaluation is that whilst we really encourage parent engagement models, this one has been a little bit difficult to navigate. First and foremost it is about schools promoting this program and it is about their desire to take up the stance of parental engagement, I guess. If that is not high on their agenda, then it is not going to be something that is going to be seen as being beneficial for their students. It can be difficult for parents to access. Again, if they are not informed and if they are not given the opportunities to participate, then accessibility is going to be difficult. While the parental commitment is there, it needs to be high. It needs some parents, once they have been involved in the PACTS model, to actually take leadership and continue so that it is a peer-driven project.

Some of the feedback that we were given was that perhaps we would be better off tapping into some modern technology and offering some of the PACTS information on training online. One of the other things that was commented on was that under the latest design PACTS takes up three sessions. I must say that there is the ability for the program to be tweaked, but as a rule there are three 2-hour sessions. That is pretty lengthy for busy parents to commit to going along to. A better approach might be to make the program more accessible by using those online technologies so that parents can be provided with information prior to actually attending the session whereby they can then have a Q and A session perhaps more so than three sessions of the actual training.

Some of the challenges that we have encountered in supporting the facilitator training have been that the training opportunities have been limited with regard to what the Brotherhood of St Laurence have been able to offer. Clearly this is one part of what the Brotherhood of St Laurence do, and we completely recognise that; however, the sessions have been limited. Geographically it has been challenging for people to attend the sessions, with the last few sessions on offer only being offered in Frankston. At times there has been some poor organisation. One session was cancelled. Teachers went down to Frankston, and got down there to find that the session was cancelled. As you can imagine, it is devastating when they have brought in a CRT to take over their load for the day.

**The CHAIR** — What would teachers do all day down that way?

**Ms VIRGATO** — I cannot imagine; it is close to the beach. They are the challenges that certainly have been fed back to us and that we have encountered whilst utilising PACTS.

**The CHAIR** — All right. So the delivery is by the Brotherhood of St Laurence?

**Ms VIRGATO** — The Brotherhood of St Laurence delivers the training.

**Ms HICKSON** — The facilitator training.

**Ms VIRGATO** — To the facilitators. So that might be either a teacher who represents the school or, in nirvana, a parent who represents the school. They go along, they do the initial facilitator training, and they take it back to the school where they then run this three-session model for parents.

**Mr HALL** — Is it commonly a careers teacher who participates?

**Ms VIRGATO** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — So it is really giving them an enhanced knowledge of current trends in industry and of where skills are required?

**Ms VIRGATO** — Definitely. I guess one of the issues with that, though, is that for careers teachers generally careers is not their only focus. Generally these are teachers who are delivering other curriculum, and careers is just part of what they do. There are a lot of tools out there that careers teachers really want to grab with both hands and utilise; however, they are so time poor that whilst they love the idea of PACTS, to then get back and have to actually facilitate three sessions is a task that has often been a bit too much.

**Mr HALL** — And how is PACTS structured to make it specific to a region? For example, Lilydale secondary college and Frankston secondary college have probably got different focuses locally in terms of skills needs in those areas.

**Ms VIRGATO** — They do. I have actually done the PACTS training, and there was a lot of discussion in the training about whether or not an external facilitator coming in would be a good idea to keep it generic and to keep it on task rather than it becoming a focus on each individual area. There are also people that will suggest that it needs to be focused on individual areas because there are skill shortages in individual areas and labour shortages et cetera. So it basically is dependent upon what angle the facilitator wants to take.

**Mr HALL** — Can I ask a question or are you still — —

**Ms VIRGATO** — I was just going to go on to some skill shortage areas, but please keep asking.

**Mr HALL** — No, do those.

**Ms VIRGATO** — We have broken our skill shortage areas down into four different areas because there are four regions that we work within. One of our areas is Monash, and the three top skill shortages in that area, according to the research that we have done, which has predominantly been through the RICA, the regional industry career adviser, in Monash are business administration, so secretarial, reception-type roles; health and community services, which speaks for itself, and scientific occupations such as lab technicians, et cetera. In Manningham and Whitehorse the three top skill shortage areas in that region are health and community services, manufacturing and construction. In Maroondah and Knox a really big skill shortage is in aged care, more so than other health and community services within that region; hospitality, interestingly enough, with a focus on chefs;

and engineering. The other couple of skill shortage areas that we would probably add to what the previous presenters mentioned for this region is arborists, viticulture and, again, hospitality, with a focus on chefs. Just quickly, as Heather mentioned before, we encourage schools to take up adopt-a-school programs in areas where there are skill shortages in their regions. That has happened in this region and was incredibly successful.

**Ms HICKSON** — The viticulture has been really successful at Billanook College, which I think is in this region or it might be region 74.

**Ms VIRGATO** — Yes, 75.

**Ms HICKSON** — It is 75.

**The CHAIR** — We have heard from a student from Billanook this morning.

**Ms HICKSON** — There have been a number of projects that we have run over the years that have encouraged those sorts of activities.

**The CHAIR** — Can I just check whether your organisation links with the local LLEN groups in the area?

**Ms HICKSON** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Because I would have thought there is a significant crossover in terms of purpose.

**Ms HICKSON** — There is a crossover. There is a little bit of overlap. A lot of our KPIs are similar, but we are quite different. Our brief is really to work across sectors. I know that the LLENs are starting to work more across sectors, but we certainly have a focus across sectors. We also have a different age group. We have 13-to-19-year-olds.

**The CHAIR** — How are you funded?

**Ms HICKSON** — We are funded through DEEWR — originally DEST — and this is the Career Advice Australia initiative that came in at the start of 2006. It has been rolled over into 2009, and then I am sure the new government will come up with their own version of something similar. You probably know this, but they have done quite a bit of research into the CAA initiative recently. They are really just looking at the findings now.

**Mr HALL** — What is the take-up rate of delivery at the school level by the parents? Do you find that a lot of parents are interested to come and learn?

**Ms VIRGATO** — With regard to the facilitator training?

**Mr HALL** — Yes.

**Ms VIRGATO** — We have not had any parents do the facilitator training.

**Mr HALL** — No, once you have got a trainer in place, say, delivering at a school level, what sort of interest is there demonstrated by the parents?

**Ms VIRGATO** — The interest has been high. Once it is to the point where it is being advertised, ‘Come along, this is the three sessions, this is what will be happening’, the interest has been high. The rollout has been successful, and the parents have given really positive feedback.

**Ms HICKSON** — We co-facilitated a PACTS training session at Fairhills Secondary College, and alcohol was involved — so having few drinks for parents, encouraging them to attend and making it a bit of a social event as well. It is interesting, because the previous speaker talked about a university relying on a bar to be very successful, tongue in cheek, but certainly a few drinks is a good way to get some parents to enjoy the experience and network with other parents. Basically that was a very positive experience for that school and for those parents. But really we had trouble even getting figures on how many schools have run PACTS. It was really hard for us without sort of doing a ring around yesterday to get some good information. That is what we are really lacking here — really good information. It might seem that it should be easy for us because we deal with the schools. I suppose it was a Freudian slip when Vanessa said ‘infiltrate the schools’, because that is what it is a little bit like. It is not always easy get into the schools, and it is certainly not easy getting information out of the schools. But the



schools are only one of our stakeholders. I think the LLENs probably have far greater access to the schools because of the infrastructure in Victoria and the Victorian government system that they are a part of. We are not a part of that infrastructure, so we do we rely enormously on building up good relationships with the schools to get information and feedback.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Just a quick question: at 13 years to 19 years, at year 8, is it too early for students to talk about their future and their skills?

**Ms VIRGATO** — Do you know there is lots of recent feedback that suggests the earlier we can get young people thinking about their pathway, the better.

**Mr ELASMAR** — How have parents responded to that? Were they supporting it?

**Ms VIRGATO** — Yes, parents are, and I think we need to accompany that kind of information with some discussions about generation Y and how young people now navigate their path. It is somewhat different, I think, to generations previously. So yes, it is being embraced.

**Mr HALL** — I know you said it was too early to measure the effectiveness of the program, but ultimately you are probably going to have to do that, are you not, to justify ongoing public funding for it? Have you got any ideas how you propose to evaluate it?

**Ms HICKSON** — We would be evaluating by gathering school statistics about participation in it, and I guess schools would be offering that information about the surveys that they have done on the completion of courses et cetera. That would be something that is encouraged in the program — correct — getting the parents to actually fill in the evaluation forms. So we would be hoping to tap into that information.

**Ms VIRGATO** — And answering questions like, ‘How does this change your view; what did you know before; what do you know now?’.

**Ms HICKSON** — It is very hard to come up with some sort of measurable outcome. It is not really something that lends itself well to that, unless we are just guessing, really.

**Mr HALL** — Or unless you look at participation rates or application rates in future years and claim some responsibility for the changes in those.

**Ms HICKSON** — We certainly could, but there are so many initiatives that we run, it would be hard to know. I suppose overall you could see it as one of many initiatives that we have put in place and tried to get the line to move.

**Mr HALL** — Yes. I notice that you are called an industry-education partnership. Where do you get the input from the industry, and how do you do that?

**Ms HICKSON** — How do we do it and where do we get it? We get it from any industry we can, really. Eastern Industry Education Partnership has a very strong connection to hospitality industries, and that is because of its history. The Accor group of hotels, for instance, which operate all across Melbourne — we tend to do their structured work placements for students doing VET courses in hospitality. We tend to manage the placements of those through the organisation, but that is just one area that we have probably just become quite strong in.

We cover all the areas, and the skill shortage areas in particular — engineering, manufacturing, construction, civil engineering. There are so many areas where we really need to be building relationships with industry and with local employers, and we do that by variety of things: business breakfasts, consulting, cold calling — you name it, we use every method we can — networking with Rotarians. The list of stakeholders in that sense is huge, because we do not really want to waste an opportunity to build a relationship that could lead to assisting a young person in a structured workplace position or building up a relationship with a school to run a project, and that can be anything. We have got a database with roundabout 3000 employers on it that we could call on for providing structured work placements for young people doing VET courses.

**Ms VIRGATO** — Can I just add to that that the other really fortunate thing for us is that we work incredibly closely with the RICA that I mentioned earlier, and so we get a lot of referrals from the RICA and from industry that is interested in participating in career and transition programs for young people.

**Mr HALL** — Can you tell us again who RICA is?

**Ms VIRGATO** — The regional industry career adviser. There is a RICA for each region. There are more acronyms in this field than — —

**Ms HICKSON** — The RICA is just another arm of the Career Advice Australia initiative of which local community partnerships are another one. LCPs are much more on the ground dealing with schools and other stakeholders. The role of the RICA is basically to assist the LCPs to get the industries into the school, et cetera, or the industries to the young people. That is one of the initiatives. Another one you might have heard of is Youth Pathways and another one is Connections which is for at-risk young people and disengaged young people. There is also someone called a NIC, which is a national industry consultant. These are experts in a particular industry area such as — —

**Mr HALL** — It is a difficult pathway for us to understand and follow.

**Ms HICKSON** — I know. It is really complex. It is really a PACTS equivalent for what goes on.

**Mr HALL** — Is there coordinating oversight of all of those people who are delivering advice?

**Ms HICKSON** — It is managed from Canberra but there are the state people who we deal with on a day-to-day basis.

**Mr HALL** — Is it well managed?

**Ms HICKSON** — Yes, it is. You are putting us on the spot. This is our funding body; of course it is managed fabulously well.

**Mr HALL** — We will go in camera if you like.

**Ms HICKSON** — As you know, it has gone through a lot of change. I think in the first couple of months of the year the position of the people we know very well was changed, and they are now working with people from a different department. I think it has all settled down now.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for that contribution.

**Ms HICKSON** — You are welcome.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Lilydale — 17 July 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 S. Brennan, chief executive officer, and

Ms S. Costello, VCAL coordinator, Upper Yarra Community House; and

Ms H. Rooks, VCAL coordinator, Morrison House.

**The CHAIR** — This afternoon we are pleased to hear from the Upper Yarra Community House and from Morrison House. This morning we heard from Swinburne University of Technology and from a range of other groups. We have heard reference to some of the things you are doing in terms of working with people, particularly disadvantaged people, in the community here, but we are looking to hear a bit more about what you are doing and then how that might link into our inquiry on people's aspirations and participation in higher education. I do not know who is going to start.

**Ms BRENNAN** — I will start. I am the CEO of the Upper Yarra Community House. I have been there for about 1000 years! I do not know if you are familiar with the adult community education sector but it is a sector that is increasingly becoming involved in education and training for young people particularly through the delivery of VCAL, which is the Victorian certificate of applied learning. It is a sector where organisations are individually managed and operate independently of each other, but their focus is local education and training delivery, so they focus on the needs.

Morrison House and Upper Yarra Community House are part of 450 registered training organisations around Victoria, so we have the capacity to deliver accredited courses. Traditionally it has been education for disadvantaged learners who are adults that have been our target group. I think that ability to be responsive has enabled those organisations to play a critical role now in the education and training of young people, particularly young people at risk, and that is what our two organisations do.

Last year Upper Yarra Community House had in excess of 80 enrolments — actually I think it was over 90 enrolments — of young people, all of whom had the experiences of failure at school, and who were quite definite about the fact that they did not want to return to school. However, some did. Those young people enrolled in a range of programs that were designed specifically to ensure they were supported through their educational pathway.

There are particularly two programs that I might give you as examples. One would be the Oonah Pathways program, which is a schools-based program for young indigenous students in Healesville. That came about as a result of a partnership with the Aboriginal educational consultative group in Healesville, and that program was designed specifically to have significant input by the indigenous community there in the management of the education of their young people. That is a small program. It has 14 enrolments this year. It stayed small. But that is a program where the community has significant input into how they want education and training to look for their young people.

**The CHAIR** — And they are actually studying at your community house?

**Ms BRENNAN** — They are studying at the Oonah Indigenous Learning Centre in Healesville, but it is an Upper Yarra Community House program.

Another example of that is that over the years we noticed that a lot of our young women were becoming mothers at an early age and in becoming mothers the next step for them seemed to be to abandon the pursuit of anything really except motherhood, which is a wonderful thing, but certainly education and the aspirations for employment were not there. So we began a program for young women who come now to school. The program is six years old now. We have a particular space designed for them where they bring their children. It is our experience that these young women traditionally do not like to put their children in child care in order to pursue education and training. We have 12 young women this year and they all come to class and bring their babies with them and we have a space specifically for them.

They are examples of how the ACE sector is working more with school-based education, with a view to young people successfully achieving. Our intention is that they successfully achieve their year 12 or equivalent and then go on. In terms of the Upper Yarra region — and I think you have heard statistics this morning from the Shire of Yarra Ranges representatives — when you are dealing with a community where three-quarters of the adult community has not only not had post-secondary education but did not complete secondary school, it is a huge problem, and our challenge is to engender some aspiration for learning among or within a community that has struggled with those aspirations in the past.

We have found that through our delivery of programs for young people the parents become engaged as well and parents very often re-engage in learning and might enrol in accredited training as a result of that. Higher education is something that is so off the radar for our young people that it is our next big challenge.

In terms of our delivery for young people our challenge has been to get them to complete schooling, to complete year 12 or its equivalent, and then during that time introduce to them the concept that higher education is something that is actually there for all young people but it is so off the radar for our group that that is a challenge.

**Ms COSTELLO** — Yes, certainly their perception is that, even though they live in Warburton or Yarra Junction — 40 or 50 minutes away — it is beyond them. Because of their family structure and the family aspirations, for them to come here is a significant barrier.

One of the things we are intending to do to address that is that in about a week's time we are starting up a partnership with Swinburne and we will run some of our classes here at the TAFE to show our students that it is not much different. We will run normal lessons as we would do in Warburton but also get them involved to see that the environment is a really positive one, that it is the next step if they want to do certificate III in their various career aspirations and slowly work into an environment for the following year. For them it is a significant barrier. They just do not see this as a TAFE or university or something else that they are likely to achieve.

**Ms BRENNAN** — And in the past they have seen year 12 in the same way. So it is a journey; it is about changing. I suppose it is about trying to shift the educational culture in the area where we are. Certainly geography plays a huge part in how people view things. For instance, if they do not have a car, a young plumbing apprentice, say — who might be living in Powelltown, Reefton or even Yarra Junction, which is on the main thoroughfare — has to travel to Wantirna on public transport in order to go to trade school. So trade school is a particular issue for young apprentices. If we have the levels of school leaving that we do — they are high and our organisation tries to pick up on that and we have very good partnerships with local schools and we talk together a lot and often we pick up kids who come out of Upper Yarra Secondary College certainly — a successful outcome for one of those young people might be an apprenticeship. But then it is the start of a whole raft of new issues for them. Trade school is a significant problem and so indeed is actually getting to work. Hanging on to your apprenticeship is a big issue. If you have to be in Lilydale by 6.00 a.m. to meet your employer, then you rely on somebody to drive you. There is no bus at that time. There is simply no transport. You have young people who might have jumped a lot of hurdles and have got themselves a job and then a whole range of new difficulties arise.

We have looked at a couple of options for us to try to support young people through this education pathway. One of our biggest hurdles I think is the fact that we cannot or do not deliver VCE, and VCE is seen very much as the avenue for higher education. However, what we have often come across in our cohort of students are young people who would be more than capable of achieving VCE. Because the wheels fall off when they are 13 or 14, they re-engage with us and they come back. If they choose to, they can go right through to year 12, but VCAL is not seen as a pathway to higher education. It is certainly seen as a pathway to technical education or VET, but not higher ed. That is something that I think is certainly a real gap in what we can offer in our region.

**The CHAIR** — Do some of them go back to secondary schools to do VCE?

**Ms BRENNAN** — Some do. It is a very small percentage, I would say, Sue; wouldn't you?

**Ms COSTELLO** — Yes. About 5 or 10 per cent of our student body would go back to do their VCE, but often they struggle because of the system and the pressures and the stresses that are associated with doing VCE.

**The CHAIR** — So in a different setting you think they could do VCE?

**Ms COSTELLO** — Yes.

**Ms BRENNAN** — Yes, absolutely. With that in mind, we have pursued the option of registering as an independent school — we have gone down that road. This is all tied in as well with being able to provide adequate resources for our students. The adult community education sector is not famous for its wealth. It is not easy to get the resources that we need. The funding models that support our programs cannot compete with the funding that schools might get or that TAFE colleges will get.

Our funding models — I am going to take this opportunity to say it and you can shout me down if you like, if it is not the forum — for those students also are dependent on the interpretation of what is year 12 and what is a year 12 equivalent. In our view and experience there is some discrepancy across government departments on what year 12 or year 12 equivalent actually means. The reason I raise that is that if a student is regarded as having their year 12 or their year 12 equivalent then the major funding, which is through Youth Guarantee, is cut off for that student. At

the moment our experience is that it is impossible for us to fund a student under the current funding models through to the completion of senior VCAL, which is regarded by the VCAA as year 12 equivalent. That is just something to bear in mind. Last year the Upper Yarra community had 10 graduates of senior VCAL, all of whom were young students who were seriously disadvantaged. Some had been with us since they were 13 or 14. One, who had been coming from Silvan, travelling 3 hours each way to get to us every day, came out with his year 12, his senior VCAL, at the end of the year, but he was an unfunded place. So funding models are very important if you are considering retention, basically.

**Ms COSTELLO** — Yes. In terms of meeting the government's year 12 retention rates in particular.

**Mr HALL** — On the funding model you spoke about, one of the community VCAL groups that we spoke to in Rosebud informed us that to get funding students had to enrol at a registered secondary school and then the funding was passed either in total or in proportion to the community provider. Is that the same with the 80 or 90 kids you have?

**Ms BRENNAN** — No. There is a memorandum of understanding that was drawn up between the education department and the ACE sector to facilitate the provision of education to kids who are of compulsory school age. At that stage it was under-15s; now it is for under-16s. In order that the appropriate duty of care be met for a compulsory school-aged student in an alternative setting, this memorandum of understanding process had to be gone through. In the past we have had arrangements like that for students of post-compulsory age. The current funding model under Youth Guarantee means that we no longer require that. By and large the funding that was available was about half or maybe a bit more than half the funding that we can get under Youth Guarantee.

Then you move into a whole range of other issues with Youth Guarantee. They are around year 12 equivalent and the interpretation of that. The current interpretation for the provision of Youth Guarantee is that intermediate VCAL is the year 12 equivalent. That is a significant thing if you are looking at encouraging students who are disadvantaged and disengaged and organisations that are working with these young students to bring them back. Now it is virtually impossible to take them right the way through, without funding it yourself.

**The CHAIR** — We have not heard from Helene and Morrison yet. I am just aware that our time is a bit limited and I do not know whether you have anything to add about your experience at Morrison House.

**Ms ROOKS** — I have actually just joined Morrison House as VCAL coordinator, so I am not that familiar with all the ins and outs of the Morrison VCAL program yet. We are running it for the second year now, so we are quite young. We have about 32 students enrolled and attending.

**The CHAIR** — One of whom we met this morning — Jack.

**Ms ROOKS** — You met Jack, yes. Jack is one of my students who has expressed his interest in furthering his education in the city, which will come into the whole getting students from the Yarra Valley to move down to even Lilydale. There is a big blockage for them, aside from the transport issues. Morrison House itself is located closer, it is just up the road here, so in terms of transport for students who are around here, we saw students from Ringwood, Monbulk, Upper Yarra, Healesville — so they come from a wide area to Morrison House. The ones who are further up the line find it harder to attend school because they need to take a bus into Lilydale first and then a bus out again. So transport is an issue in the current setting in general. But then to move and to get out of your comfort zone and go even further, like go to the city — for Jack, living in Yarra Glen he already finds it hard to go to Mount Evelyn in terms of security; he feels really secure in Yarra Glen.

The key term for what I see in VCAL is flexibility. It has to be a flexible program in terms of delivery. Part of the VCAL program is the vocational education and training course. We strike up partnerships with a lot of providers in the area. We have some students who do their VCAL at Upper Yarra and come to us for their VET course, because we all deliver different VET courses. In that way we work together in providing the VET options for regional students as well.

**The CHAIR** — One of the things I want to follow up with before the principals, the next group, come in is that I would have questioned whether the education offered in the state schools is not letting some of these students down. Essentially it should be the role of the schools to try to work with all of the students who are part of their cohort to see them through education, and we all understand why students might become at risk and why they

might drop out, but I wonder whether there has been work done by the schools to try to pick them up before they come to your organisations.

**Ms BRENNAN** — I think the schools work very hard with students. That is our experience. Certainly all the schools with whom we have partnerships — and there are probably 10; we have formal partnerships with them — work extremely hard to incorporate these particular young students or to keep them in school. A one-size-fits-all does not work; it really does not work. I think alternative models of education for young people have to be recognised as viable learning environments for particular students. Certainly that is our experience. We have regular discussions with the region. Jim Watterson, who is the regional director, has been out to visit us. The conversations are new, but it would be our preference to have a strong relationship, a strong partnership, with the region then to go down the path of registering as an independent school. In that sense we believe it is much better if we can work together and keep the kids within the system. Whereas our kids thrive in our educational settings, they know they are not like other schools' kids. That marginalising is something that they are very well aware of and we try to break that down, but it is there nonetheless and it is a very real factor: 'I have got my year 12 but I got it at the community house'.

**Mr ELASMAR** — On this one you have the support from the local schools, obviously.

**Ms BRENNAN** — Yes.

**Ms COSTELLO** — Definitely.

**Mr ELASMAR** — What sort of support do you get from the local schools?

**Ms BRENNAN** — It is the support, I guess, that you get with any good partnership. The schools are aware and we are aware of the difference in the work that we do. The schools are very interested in what happens to the students. There is a lot of regular communication. In terms of financial support, or whatever, there is not any for the students who are enrolled directly with us, and that is fair enough. Why would there be? But we talk about the possibility of sharing some resources.

**The CHAIR** — I suppose the key part of it is that if they see a student drop out of their school, they ensure that they refer them on to you?

**Ms COSTELLO** — Yes.

**Ms BRENNAN** — Yes, absolutely.

**The CHAIR** — And alert you to that possibility?

**Ms BRENNAN** — Most definitely.

**Ms COSTELLO** — Yes, and it always happens generally prior to them dropping out. When they are really at high risk the schools identify — —

**Ms BRENNAN** — Contact us.

**Ms COSTELLO** — And contact us and talk about the welfare of that student and how best the school and ourselves can support them. Sometimes it might be only for a short period and then we re-engage them back into the school. I have done that quite a number of times with a number of students. But often they still struggle. So it is a very strong partnership, in terms of the student and that student's welfare. The students we generally get are independent at very young ages already. At the moment I have one student who has been homeless for about six months. For him the main thing is that he comes every day, has food and has a chat. Once he has overcome his barrier then he can be educated, because at the moment, until he gets his housing, he really cannot be educated to the same extent that all the other students in the class can be. It is about supporting him, having a place to go, and slowly re-engaging him back into education. Sometimes with schools, if a student is homeless, their level of support and ability to do that is a bit more — —

**Ms BRENNAN** — It is diminished.

**Ms COSTELLO** — It is intense; it is really intense case management of a student.

**Mr HALL** — Are you required to have registered teachers run these programs?

**Ms BRENNAN** — To deliver VCAL the qualification is a certificate IV in training and assessment. There is no requirement that we have qualified teachers.

**Mr HALL** — Some of the other programs I notice in your submission, the pre-apprenticeship stuff, do you deliver that too?

**Ms BRENNAN** — The pre-apprenticeship is through our status as a registered training organisation. We run pre-apprenticeship training in automotive, not hospitality at the moment. It varies according to the — —

**Mr HALL** — You have got a growing market, too, looking at the enrolments you have had over a few years, and I guess coming up here to deliver some programs on campus here will be a good thing.

**Ms COSTELLO** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — In terms of your physical needs to deliver those programs, is that an issue for you?

**Ms BRENNAN** — Absolutely, space is always an issue, and finding a suitable — —

When I am talking about a space I suppose I am not talking about a room; I am talking about a learning environment that allows a student to feel that there is a degree of respect and that it is conducive to their needs and that there is an outside and an inside. They are the sorts of considerations that, yes, we struggle with all the time. We are fortunate in that we currently inhabit the old St Joe's school in Warburton, so we are actually in what was built as a school building and which is now managed by a community committee of management. But that is good; that means we have got adequate — they can go outside and cool off and we have got space inside.

**The CHAIR** — That is rented, I presume?

**Ms BRENNAN** — Yes, it is a rented facility. Of course access to capital funds for organisations like ours to build classrooms, to build science wings, art rooms — —

**Ms COSTELLO** — IT.

**Ms BRENNAN** — IT, yes, we do not have access to anything like that. You could pop that down, if you wanted to!

**The CHAIR** — I have, I think, six neighbourhood houses in my electorate, and others of us do too, so we are aware of the challenges the neighbourhood house system faces.

**Ms BRENNAN** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — If there are no other questions, thank you very much for your presentation. It has been very helpful.

**Ms COSTELLO** — Thank you.

**Ms BRENNAN** — It was a pleasure.

**Witnesses withdrew.**



# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Lilydale — 17 July 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

Mr L. Bishop, principal, and  
Ms J. Walker, assistant principal, Lilydale High School; and  
Dr M. McNamara, principal, Croydon Secondary College; and  
Mr G. Bailey, acting principal, Lilydale Heights Secondary College; and  
Mr S. Reid, principal, Mooroolbark College; and  
Mr M. Hill, principal, Upper Yarra Secondary College; and  
Mrs A. Tacey, MIPS, careers and VET coordinator, Healesville High School.

**The CHAIR** — We are very pleased to meet with a range of principals and assistant principals.

**Mrs TACEY** — And careers teachers.

**The CHAIR** — And careers teachers — thanks, Anne — from some of the schools in this region. Earlier on today we met with a range of groups ranging from local government and Swinburne University of Technology to some young people from the area, and we gained a range of input from them in regard to aspirations and participation in higher education. But we are certainly pleased wherever we go to speak to representatives from the secondary schools, so we are pleased that you have come along to share with us some of your understandings and provide us with advice as to things we should put in our recommendations to support opportunities for greater participation in this region. I do not know how we are going to start. Perhaps we should work through the schools and allow you, in your school groups, to make an initial presentation to us and then enter into further dialogue. Does that seem a reasonable way to go?

**Mr HILL** — You may very well get repetition of responses.

**Mr BISHOP** — You might do, yes.

**The CHAIR** — We may, but then obviously you do not need to add to the points; you can simply say that you support some of those points and then we can come back to them. We will start with Lilydale.

**Mr BISHOP** — Okay. Except for Anne, who is from Healesville, we had a brief conversation over at the school before we came, and we talked a little bit about the questions that the inquiry was interested in. In trying to make a general statement about participation rates in higher education in this area we would say that of the students who start in year 7 we would probably have around about, say, 40 to 50 per cent left by the time they finish year 12, and probably about 50 to 60 per cent of those would go on to higher education. Some of the issues that we thought were affecting those choices in this part of the world were to do with just the geographical location of where we are, travel issues, cost issues and the socioeconomic background of our cohort of students out here. The proportion of parents in our schools who are tertiary educated themselves, particularly in our school and in at least one of the other schools that I know quite well, is not high, and therefore that level of aspiration to go on to university and tertiary study is not high amongst our students either.

What else were we going to say about that? A lot of our students and parents see the cost of higher education over the short term as being probably not a good investment of their time. Many of our families are small business people, tradespeople or small property holders, and kids can make a pretty good living and get a pretty good start in their chosen career that way, so they see that as a legitimate alternative to higher education. Is that a fair summary of the sorts of things we were saying? Other people might like to add to that.

**Dr McNAMARA** — There are things like how many models there are for people going on to university. Also the idea of HECS, I think, is really pretty important, because I reckon that people's really deep understanding of the kind of longer term benefits of that is not really that great. People see an up-front payment that they have got to make in the beginning, and if you have got a cultural expectation or some models in your family or among people you know of that working or that not being an issue, you can see a cost benefit. In my family HECS is simply not an issue for two reasons: one is that we can manage to support our kids so that they do not have to do massive amounts of part-time work, and the other is that it has never even been a question. But in some of our families there is a question about whether or not you are going to take on a HECS debt, and it is not obvious that there is a really massive long-term kind of cost benefit because they have not had models of people with the experience of achieving that particular cost benefit. So, seriously, that sort of thinking is beyond school kids, and teaching them and having them learn about those things from a family's point of view would be pretty handy.

**Mr REID** — Our students are now becoming more savvy in terms of understanding where they are going to go and in enrolling in a university degree course. Quite a few of our students will get their VCE and make applications to enrol, but they will not take them up because they do not quite know at this stage whether that is what they want to do. If they do not know exactly what they are going to do, the cost of the HECS debt is very prohibitive if they then start changing their courses. When we went through university we did not have HECS fees, and we had the opportunity at some stage to make a choice about whether we were going down the right course or whether we should move into another one without carrying a debt, and the same thing happens in our own schools.

If students are going down the VCE path, they do have an option in year 11 at some stage, if they choose to or are able to, to move into, say, a VCAL course. Once you move out beyond college and high school, if you choose to go down the VCE line, there is going to be a cost associated with whatever decision you make, and if you make the incorrect decision it can be very costly to you. They are fully aware of this, and so they then start thinking, 'It's better for me to perhaps go out into the workforce and get an idea of what I want to do with my life before I start making big decisions about going into university and so forth'. They will then start thinking, 'What are my options?', and they are fully aware of what their options are — probably far more than we are aware — in terms of taking pathways through to training or just going into TAFE or going into the workforce and other areas.

They are very aware of that. The cost factor other than HECS, being where we are situated, is that you have got to take into account the travel component. Where we are here, if you got a place at Melbourne uni, you could easily be up for a round trip today of 2½ hours for one lecture. If you weigh in the price of fuel and so forth, that is a fairly costly lecture, as well as the cost of the unit and so forth. These are now becoming prohibitive things that the students are now starting to weigh up, on top of the fact that because of where we are they are not necessarily exposed to their options at uni as well. These are other things that we need to take into account with our students.

**Mr HALL** — It was suggested this morning by some students that they would prefer to live in the city — to move away from home to live — rather than do that commuting each day.

**Mr REID** — My word.

**Mr BISHOP** — That is definitely the case, yes.

**Mr REID** — But then again, recently it came out in the paper that you have got the new poverty, because kids going to uni are trying to get Austudy, but it is not enough to cover rent and so forth, and there is now an increasing rate of homelessness amongst students going to uni because they cannot afford the rent and so forth. So it is a Yin and Yang thing. Yes, they would prefer to do that and that would be an obvious thing. I grew up in the country, and I had to board when I went to university, but that was a very different environment then. Fortunately my parents had enough money for that to occur, but that is not the case for everybody.

**Mr BISHOP** — We are starting to see an increasing number of kids who will take the gap year between year 12 and university so that they can earn enough money to qualify for youth allowance as well, and during that year often their priorities and their take on things change. I think that cost and location in terms of being close to Melbourne and those sorts of things do come into play here.

**Mr HILL** — It is interesting the way we are seated. Anne and ourselves come from two schools which are still 30 minutes further up the road. When you talk about geography there is an extra 30 minutes even before we get to a rail head along the way. So it is interesting how we have just happened to sit down here. What I would like to put to the inquiry, and it has been mentioned before by Leon and the group, is that they have not got role models in respect of higher education in their family and friends, and their career and vocational horizons are the ones that they see. Again, talking geography, they see what their family are doing in their occupations, they see what their friends are doing, what is happening down at the local football club, so we see a repetition of those vocations. There is nothing wrong with that, but when we are asking why particular students who are capable and have an inkling do not go to higher education, they have not got the particular role model and are not readily exposed to or experience higher education. It is something down the road, something they do not know about, and they only get hearsay of what it is about, particularly in the middle years, in years 8, 9 and 10, where some of those formative ideas are coming about.

We have mentioned the costs, and the aspirations now are a lot more immediate. They cannot see the benefit that yes, we might be up for a HECS fee of whatever it is and we might be able to pay that back. They want the immediacy now. They might be in a situation where their family desperately needs that next income and there is a chance of saying, 'Do I go to university or a TAFE course, or do I pick up that apprenticeship or do I start helping the guy down the road build water tanks so I can get some money and some independence right here, right now, and I can also help out my family by providing some finance and money that is immediate'.

I also think there needs to be consideration that people who have to travel have to give up being part of their community. The students mentioned this morning moving into the city, but they actually have to break with their own community, and that is quite difficult, because they have sporting and cultural ties not only to their family but to their friends, and to travel an hour or 2 hours a day or to move is an extraordinarily big ask. The other thing is

will they be able to fit in there — that big fear? What is it like there? They might not know anyone who has actually been to a university and finished a course or gone right through a TAFE course, so it is a big fear factor, and they might decide, 'I'll go with what I know. I know the guy down at the football club, the coach's friend. He is a plumber. He has offered me an apprenticeship'. There is nothing wrong with that, but then the question we are left with is: are they making informed decisions about their futures?

**Mrs TACEY** — I think I would like to add the fact that it is scary out there for those kids. The kids at Healesville — it is a country town in effect — for them, going to Chirnside Park is going to the big city. Like most schools, we have a year 9 city experience where we take the kids into the city, and the kids will stick to you like glue. You walk down the street, and they are around you like a little flock of sheep, because it is scary out there. There are a proportion that have got a lot more street savvy, but they are small numbers compared to the others.

The other thing I would like to say is that most of our kids by the time they are in year 10 have part-time employment. Some of them in year 11 are working two part-time jobs, and they are doing it because they are supporting their families and their own independence at that stage. They are not in a position to suddenly say, 'I am going to have a HECS debt of \$5000 for the next four years, five years or whatever it might be. Some of them are very realistic in what they are doing. They are looking for cheaper pathways. They want to go on to education, and they will try and use the articulation process through TAFE to do a cert III, to do a cert IV and then articulate into the degree process if they can work that way through. But even so, it takes a commitment for them to do that.

In terms of location we have one particular student who was our Kwong Lee Dow young scholar for this year, but she did not qualify for the relocation expense because Healesville is not far enough. Even though there was money available for her to relocate, she did not qualify, so she has had to relocate, but she had supportive parents who were able to find the money to move her into the city. So it is all relative.

**Mr REID** — Can I add support to that? I come from a different environment. I have only just moved to Victoria from Western Australia, so geographical isolation to me has a completely different meaning, having worked in the Kimberleys all the way down to Esperance and so forth. A lot of the geographic isolation is dependent on distance from a central point, yet what we are dealing with out our way is not necessarily distance from a central point; it is the time taken to get to a central point, and that needs to be taken into account, and not necessarily the distance from A to B. Perhaps that is something the inquiry could take on board when we start working out support for travel allowances and other bits and pieces.

If I take the case of where I have lived, if you travel for 2 hours you can travel up to 220 kilometres. It can take you 2 hours sometimes to get to the centre in Melbourne from out here, depending on the time of the day and whether you get a car park. That is reality. That is not something that we are just making up. So we need to take into account when we start making provisions for support for students who are in the outer parts of the metropolitan area that we start thinking about time taken to actually get to some place.

**The CHAIR** — So does the placement of universities or higher education opportunities like this one at Lilydale and others in the suburbs as we move in provide opportunity, and is it something that we should be pushing in our report, that more tertiary institutions should look at having regional campuses?

**Dr McNAMARA** — We talked about when we walked in here that we cannot see any students. It is a university without students. It might be the semester break, but I still reckon that if we were at Monash or at Melbourne now we would actually see some students here. Part of the problem of campus life compared to when I was at uni is that there is such financial pressures that people have to spend time either in lectures or doing their particular work or at work. I did not work when I was at uni. I had a mighty time. So for me the really defining thing in my life about being at university was the campus life. At an institution like this one I cannot see it. Even when we come here during the semester time, the richness of the experience here is different from universities which are closer to the centre. For me that has got to do with the fact that somehow or other students, whether they are full time on the books at the university, are in fact part time in their heads and they are doing part-time work at other times. That is a big difference from campus life in times when there were things like studentships, which is what I had.

**Mr HILL** — But in response, I think the decentralisation of higher education is one of the recommendations that should come through from this inquiry, so it does start to address the travel and the time taken backwards and forwards for students who are geographically isolated.

**Mr BISHOP** — Kids will travel to a regional college or a regional university if there is a course there that they perceive to be of high value. Some of our kids last year have gone on — this is testing me out — to Albury to study physiotherapy and stuff like that because they have not had the marks to get into a Melbourne university to do that. Some of these regional colleges — this one in particular, from our school's perspective I do not think the kids perceive it as offering high-value courses for them; they see it as a second option. Those who want university would much rather go to Melbourne University or Monash University than come here. They do not perceive this to be — —

**Dr McNAMARA** — But certainly people will travel. I was telling an anecdote about one of our girls last week who had had a pretty tough life — and who still has a tough life — who is travelling from Croydon to Sunbury to go to university. She is at Victoria University at Sunbury.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Is that by transport?

**Dr McNAMARA** — She travels 5 hours a day on public transport because she wants it that much, which is sort of what Leon was saying. It is a pity that what she is killing herself for is not here.

**Mr BISHOP** — But you are talking about a different group of kids, really; you are talking about those who want to go on to tertiary education. I am not sure what the scope of your inquiry is. I think you are wanting to increase participation, are you not?

**The CHAIR** — It is a question that we have not exactly answered. There is the issue that sometimes schools are accused of pushing too many students towards tertiary rather than TAFE or a range of other options that might be legitimate or might represent skill needs in the community. But I suppose our issue is ensuring that students who have an aptitude and capability to go on to university should not be deprived for reasons or by barriers that should not be put in place.

**Dr McNAMARA** — What are you defining as 'aptitude'?

**The CHAIR** — We are not really. We are simply looking at: what are the barriers that are out there that might be stopping people who could otherwise go on to tertiary education.

**Dr McNAMARA** — That sort of answers my question. Is it out there, or is it within the school education sector? Are you thinking about stuff which is beyond schools? We have not talked at all about things which are within the department of education within our sector. We can, but at the moment we have talked about cultural expectations, familial aspirations, economic things and issues of distance. They are not things which I personally can control. But I reckon there is a component of this which is about the structural organisations of school education and efficiencies that can be created within it. If that is not your scope, I will not open my mouth about it?

**The CHAIR** — It is; they are also issues and I was going to raise some of those issues with you. So I am interested to continue on. What are some of the things that you might do within a school that might change — —

**Dr McNAMARA** — There are things within the school and there are things between schools, which are important. The kids in my area have nine secondary schools and three private schools to choose from. It is in a shrinking demographic, and in that situation there are some schools which win and some schools which lose. Because, whether we like it or not, schools compete with each other for enrolments. I think that produces some really serious misuse of resources. There are things that we do in the budget of my school, which has a population of 500 — Leon has got just over 2000?

**Mr BISHOP** — No, 1700.

**Dr McNAMARA** — Seventeen hundred, so we are talking about significantly different-sized schools. There are things that I do with the budget that we control, which is all about maintaining the breadth of the curriculum at the senior school, because if we do not have it, because there is not the range of pathways there, kids will leave our school to go to Lilydale, compounding the problem of a small school cohort size. So we will dedicate resources inefficiently. If you sit in my chair, that is so obvious. There are effectively probably too many schools in our area, and yet moving the government forward to confront that as a reality and to support initiatives to do things more intelligently between schools so there could be a decent allocation of resources — we are working on that, and by jeppers it has taken its time.

**The CHAIR** — So you are talking about specialisations perhaps taking place within some schools?

**Dr McNAMARA** — Some rationalisation, some effective uses of resources so that there is not unintelligent use of dollars in the school education sector, and building much more genuine, really deeply profound cooperation between schools. I think there is another way of thinking 'school education'. At the moment we have in our heads 'secondary college, secondary college, secondary college', but we never have groups of schools which actually work to support each other. We are in the Yarra Valley eLearning Community and we are a long way forward in supporting each other compared to where we were three or four years ago, when it was just open competition. But it seems to me that that is one small step compared to genuine cooperation that can happen between regions. When that happens there will be a much better and a much more intelligent use of resources in the school sector so that we actually devote resources where they need to be and can produce more kids having the option of considering whether to go to university.

You prompted us with the thing about aptitude to begin with. What I want in our school is to equip families with children who are students who go to our school with a range of choices: if they want to go to university, sweet; if they want to do something else, that is absolutely fine. But at the moment I reckon that the way the schools in our area are structured there are in-built inefficiencies which prohibit some people fully realising their potential.

**The CHAIR** — Can I go to the other side of what you are talking about, too? Are there ways of challenging the aspirations within your communities and what have you done?

**Mr BISHOP** — It is a vexed question, is it not?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Mr BISHOP** — I am always torn between wanting to challenge people's aspirations about going on to tertiary education and having higher aspirations for their family, but on the other hand you have got to pay them a certain amount of respect for their own sorts of attitudes and their own culture around them. You can make big mistakes in secondary schools out this side of town by pushing that high aspiration message all the time, because implicit in that message is, 'You're doing something wrong here'. In our school particularly we try to get people back; we have a pretty high modelling program where we have high-profile ex-students come back; we have a number of functions where we do that sort of thing. We do all the work through the careers department and all of that. But it is a bit hard to take it much further than that without telling your grandmother how to suck eggs, really. I am not speaking for everyone else now; I am speaking for myself.

**Mr BAILEY** — We were talking before about the fact that it seems to be a middle-class aspiration to say, 'You must go to university'.

**Mr BISHOP** — Absolutely, yes.

**Mr BAILEY** — And it seems that the committee is saying, or that the government says to us, 'You must get kids to go to university to qualify that you are a good school. At our particular school we would rather you build larger TAFE colleges out this way, because most of our students who do apply for tertiary like to go and see some sort of practical course which is within their range of monetary gain and they can see the end of the course getting them somewhere. With a lot of our students we spend a lot of time taking them to universities and promoting universities and trying to do the right thing by the government parameters, but our students do not choose that in the long run. We do spend a lot of time, but most of them just do not want to because of the geographical or because of their upbringing, or whatever. They need the more practical options. TAFE is a great practical — —

**The CHAIR** — In fact what I mean in terms of challenge aspirations is not pushing them all in one direction but opening up to that broad range of directions so they have the full opportunity of choice.

**Mr BAILEY** — No, but our school is often judged in reports on how many students we send to Melbourne uni.

**The CHAIR** — That is right.

**Mr BAILEY** — We have got a thing with Melbourne uni and we do not send so many students there because they have a lower ENTER score.

**Dr McNAMARA** — Underrepresented.

**Mr BAILEY** — Do you know what I mean? So all the judgemental things that are done by the education department are done on the basis of how many students go to university. You are seen as a great school if they go to university. I was saying to somebody just before that we took a vote of confidence in our teachers; we see it as great if they go on their own pathway, which might be an apprenticeship.

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Mr BAILEY** — But that is judged as somebody having not completed year 12 by the education department. We have not completed what we have been paid to do if they go off and get a great job earning \$200 000 a year as a plumber. We have not done the right thing by the education department because we have not got them to tertiary education.

**Mr BISHOP** — The simple fact is that a tertiary degree is no longer a guarantee of employment or of a high income level. We have lots of people working in our tech department and those who pass through the school all the time who have a tertiary degree in all sorts of computer applications and who are earning \$30 000 a year. It is hard to sell that to kids if that is the fact.

**Mr HALL** — Can I ask a question about VET in schools? There were comments by some people who submitted to us this morning that schools in this region are running fewer VET programs in schools than other regions; is that so?

**Mrs TACEY** — Can I answer that as the VET coordinator? We are actually part of a very large cluster called the Yarra Valley VET cluster. We have, I think, 10 schools with another 20 schools that send students to our campuses where we run our courses. Lilydale Heights runs — —

**Mr BAILEY** — Four or five different courses. This year I think 75 or 82 students come to our college to join in our VET program on a Wednesday afternoon.

**Mrs TACEY** — Mooroolbark has courses where students go for furnishing — and what is the other one at Mooroolbark, I cannot remember — and Lilydale high has. We have kids who come up to the living and learning centre in Healesville; they do clothing and design and hairdressing. We send kids to Swinburne to do building and to do hospitality. We send kids to Pembroke, where they do auto. We have introduced a new course for next year, which is desktop publishing. We have something like 18 different courses that we run as part of the VET cluster, and something like over 700 kids get involved in courses through VET in schools. This cluster has been running for what, 10 years, I think?

**Mr HILL** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — And is cooperative too, by the sounds of it, from what Michael was talking about.

**Dr McNAMARA** — Yes.

**Mr BAILEY** — I have written down here ‘VET is a cooperation between schools’ from what Michael was saying. It is probably one of the best examples I have seen in a long time in education of schools working together for the good of the student and not for the good of the school.

**Dr McNAMARA** — Yes.

**Mr BAILEY** — The VET cluster is something that could be modelled a lot more around Victoria.

**Mr BISHOP** — It is actually one of the only things we do that is not competitive.

**Dr McNAMARA** — Yes, but it is so good, is it not? Croydon is in Maroondah LGA so we are not part of these things, but there is exactly the same thing among the Maroondah schools in the Eastland cluster.

**Mrs TACEY** — And between clusters, too. We have students who go to Maroondah and from Maroondah who come to us. It is very time consuming and dynamic and hair pulling at various times of the year when you try to balance where the kids are going. But it comes down to the same thing: the kids have to travel. The

VET cluster looked at costing a bus to run from Healesville to Lilydale and back again once a week, and it was prohibitive. We could not put it on; it would have been far too expensive for the kids to run and the schools could not support it.

**Mr HALL** — Are you adequately funded by the government to run those VET programs?

**Mr BISHOP** — No.

**Dr McNAMARA** — Good question.

**Mr BISHOP** — If you are going to ask school principals that question, no.

**Mr HALL** — How much does it cost parents to enrol their kids in some of your VET programs?

**Mr BISHOP** — You would know the answer to that.

**Mrs TACEY** — It depends on the courses.

**Mr BISHOP** — Yes, it does.

**Mrs TACEY** — And where the provider is. For example, concept clothing and design is a \$900-odd course. The amount that comes in from the government to help pay for it is about \$300. So students are willingly paying, in instalments to the schools, the difference.

**Dr McNAMARA** — Or not so willingly sometimes.

**Mrs TACEY** — Sometimes not willingly, yes; we have to drag it out of them. Other things — if they wanted to do commercial cooking last year, for example, we had to use Swinburne completely. That was \$1600 for the students to do; there was a \$400 allowance that the government provided.

**Mr BISHOP** — Kids are paying somewhere between \$100 and \$1000, are they not, really, for a VET course?

**Mrs TACEY** — Yes, depending on whether it is totally within the school, in which case everything is met by the school funding, in whatever that line thing is that you guys sort out, or if it is outside with another provider; and it varies.

**Mr HALL** — Are there students who do not participate in a VET program simply because of the cost?

**Mr BISHOP** — Yes.

**Mrs TACEY** — Yes, and then travel as well, because they have to travel independently.

**Mr BISHOP** — I would say that travel is probably more prohibitive for them than cost.

**Mrs TACEY** — You always have to make sure they understand they are going to have to travel.

**Mr BISHOP** — There is more of a need, we feel, from our school's perspective, for more vocationally oriented VET courses in our area. But the ones that we need to offer require specialist facilities as well, like building and construction, automotive, things like that. The facilities are just not there.

**Mr HILL** — And getting the staff.

**Mrs TACEY** — And staffing.

**Mr BISHOP** — Yes, staff is also a huge issue.

**Mr HALL** — You mentioned before that it would be nice if we had a couple more TAFE colleges to deliver vocational education in the area beyond secondary school. Is it the case that you feel there is insufficient infrastructure to deliver vocational education beyond year 12?

**Mr BISHOP** — I think we do.



**Ms WALKER** — Yes.

**Mr BISHOP** — And post-compulsory, in those last two or three years of schooling as well.

**Mr HALL** — Are there any group training companies?

**Mr BISHOP** — Yes, there is one in the area.

**Mr HALL** — Or other private providers around this area?

**Mrs TACEY** — There are quite a few in the area. Their involvement in schools vary, depending on whether programs within schools can run. School-based apprenticeships, which I presume you are talking about, and traineeships require the program of the school to be revolving around a day at work, a day at TAFE and only three days at school, usually, and that would require a specialist program within a school, under a VCAL model possibly. We cannot do that at our school. You do it at Mooroolbark and Lilydale Heights — you have got a VCAL program like that?

**Mr BAILEY** — Yes, we have got VCAL.

**Mrs TACEY** — And I think Upper Yarra does a similar one.

**Mr BISHOP** — I think it is fair to say that over the past 10 to 15 years in the valley many of the schools sitting at this table have tried school-to-work transition vocational programs with their pre-compulsory school-age kids as well. I think they have pretty much all foundered over time for all sorts of different reasons. Schools have perceived a need to do something with those kids who are not taking the traditional pathway through school, but there has just not been the resources there to do it.

**The CHAIR** — Can I ask: you are part of an e-learning network. Does that mean you offer distance education for your students via that network?

**Dr McNAMARA** — We did last year.

**Mr BISHOP** — We did last year.

**Dr McNAMARA** — We offered specialist maths at Croydon and people accessed it remotely using tablet computers.

**The CHAIR** — But you have not continued it this year?

**Dr McNAMARA** — There are a number of reasons. The teacher who took it retired and at the next cohort at Croydon there was insufficient interest to run a specialist maths class. It would have had to change site and kind of almost be reinvented. The absolute urgency about doing it did not present itself in 2008.

**Mr BISHOP** — I think it is fair to say we do not have the technical expertise and the staff support for programs like that to make it happen, do we really?

**Mrs TACEY** — Specialist maths is less of a problem, too, because prerequisite wise, in terms of university courses, there are not that many that require it any more. If you are not really good at maths and you were doing it for a course, the need for it is gone.

**Dr McNAMARA** — It is not kind of the mainstream. It was a really, really interesting experiment and it did involve a lot of work. In terms of 2007 I reckon it was successful, especially as a pilot. It did involve a degree of maintenance, but in terms of was it at the centre of our thinking, it was not.

**The CHAIR** — So the fact that you are part of, did you say, an e-learning network — —

**Mr BISHOP** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — What does that — —

**Mr BISHOP** — It was originally a Leading Schools Fund project back about five years ago. The idea of the Yarra Valley eLearning Community was to provide as much computer access across the schools in individual schools over that time. There were two initial rounds of funding, one from the education department and one from the then Department of Infrastructure, that have kept this network going. One provided teaching and learning coaches in the schools to try to increase the level of ICT use in the schools; and from the Department of Infrastructure that funding provided laptop computers, upgrades to servers and faster access to the internet. There was talk of the establishment of a wide area network between the seven schools, but since the idea of the ultranet has been floated, the ultranet is going to take care of that for us, is it not? Basically it was a group of schools who were working together on the integration of ICT in schools.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for your contribution. We have run out of time. You have given us a good range of thoughts that we value. Unless there is something you wanted to put to us as you are leaving — —

**Dr McNAMARA** — Just one. I would like to ask you people a question: in your heads in terms of government education — and you can think of the building stock that there is around government schools — what do you think it says in a symbolic way about the value of education that is given in terms of our community? Where is it in the hierarchy symbolically, especially in the way our buildings look?

**The CHAIR** — I suppose we all have different communities. There are some schools in my Ballarat East area — Daylesford, Kyneton and down through Ballarat — I know there is fair variation. Some of the schools are looking great, and some of them are in need of further work. Are you getting at the school maintenance sorts of issues?

**Dr McNAMARA** — Not so much school maintenance. I think symbolically what we are saying in terms of the cultural expectations of people in our community is that when people have some degree of question mark over the value of higher education in a way for me that is a kind of representation of an issue about our nation, about Australia and about how we position education in the way that we think of things. For me in government school education the fact that some schools — and there is variety; I think that is absolutely right — can be run down is a difficulty. In my own school we have had a choice. We knew that there were some things that we could paint; paint is a beautiful thing, I reckon! We chose to make a decision that we would paint the inside because we thought our responsibility was to our own people, but that meant that we did not paint the outside. I feel sad that my community has to make that decision. It is a not a real big amount, but nevertheless it is the case just in relation to the coat of paint. With simple things like the appearance of significant institutions within our community, I am amazed that people could not ascribe that a greater level of significance. Because when those things are there and visible and prominent in the community, that the school is sort of the centre of the community, then people think education has got plenty of value.

**The CHAIR** — I understand what you are saying. Yes, there are certainly issues that governments continue to grapple with in terms of our government putting more and more money into upgrading schools, but that is right; there is still a job to do.

**Mr HALL** — I taught in a few crappy schools too, Michael. Your work environment does impact on student outcome, I think.

**Dr McNAMARA** — We do tours. One guy was a teacher, and he said, ‘My older boy goes to a private school. I am interested in doing a tour of your school’. He said, ‘I love your school. It is great. It is so fantastic on the inside, but I did not know it from the outside’.

**The CHAIR** — All right. We had better keep going.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Lilydale — 17 July 2008

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#### Witness

Mr M. Horn, senior manager, research and policy, Brotherhood of St Laurence.

**The CHAIR** — Michael, thanks for coming along. While we have been out in the Yarra Valley today, the nature of your contribution is going to be more broad ranging, I understand, in terms of the research you have done on students continuing on in their education and the opportunities in higher education. I will let you get under way, and then we will have some questions for you perhaps after you have made your initial contribution.

**Mr HORN** — Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the inquiry today. Just by way of introduction, I am senior manager at the research and policy centre at the Brotherhood of St Laurence. I am sure I do not need to go into detail about the brotherhood's work. The research and policy centre focuses on developing new initiatives and undertaking research to strengthen advocacy for policy reform, in particular in the areas of early years, and the transition from school to work has been the focus of my attention since I joined the Brotherhood. The essence of what we will be talking about today is around that issue. We provide a range of services and programs that we have either developed ourselves or contracted to state and commonwealth governments over the past few years. The Parents as Career Transition Support program is something that you are quite interested in, so I can talk about that a little bit.

**The CHAIR** — We heard a little bit about that earlier on, of course.

**Mr HORN** — We also provide a range of transition and youth pathways programs. There is JPET for homeless or at-risk-of-homelessness young adults and vocational training. We are a registered training organisation and we provide homework, tutoring and learning support program assistance in the inner part of Melbourne. So we cover a wide range of programs, but they are very much focused on disadvantage and on preventing, I guess, the exacerbation or the continuation of disadvantage for families and children in various regions of Melbourne and Victoria. We have not undertaken direct research, and we do not provide services in the higher education or tertiary university sector. So I guess the presentation will try to draw out the findings from our research and our knowledge base that might inform you in terms of policy developments. It is a more preventive approach to ensuring maximisation of participation in tertiary education as an option for young people in disadvantaged circumstances.

The focus of our work over the past few years in life transitions has been on three key areas, including support and assistance to secondary school students at risk of early school leaving or those without pathways to post-compulsory learning or work. We have had a significant stream of work around parental support to strengthen the contribution and commitment to student retention and educational achievement. We have also provided a range of assistance around better integrated support for young people who have multiple or highly complex needs — so homelessness, health issues, parental violence backgrounds, those sorts of things.

I just thought it would be worth drawing out from our research some of the principal issues as we see the situation around education and skills building of young people generally today. Clearly a well-educated and skilled population benefits the whole society, not just through a more productive workforce but also through increased social participation, better health and improved social cohesion across the community. That is a really strong principal point that we need to not forget. An ever-increasing proportion of new jobs require tertiary qualifications, placing a higher priority on educational completion and progression to university through the life course. A broad range of reasons and factors that go beyond educational ability contribute to reduced rates of access among young people from disadvantaged circumstances to post-compulsory education and training generally.

The social circumstances, and more particularly social disadvantage, exert a vital influence on educational participation, commitment to learning, and attainment across the developmental years. Factors include poor parental health or disabilities, material deprivation and financial hardship, indigenous or refugee backgrounds, homelessness and transience, and family violence. In addition school-age children face other barriers to attainment that include learning difficulties and behavioural problems, which may be compounded by the lack of support and skills within the school to ameliorate the effects of this disadvantage such that they maximise their potential to progress to higher education.

Financial hardship and inadequacy of financial support through the developmental years constrains full attendance of children in education. Exclusion from school activities can exacerbate disengagement from learning. This has longer term consequences for post-compulsory education outcomes. Financial hardship is not restricted to education costs such as participation in excursions, sports events, outings, specialist equipment et cetera, but includes transport to and from learning facilities and the provision of food and meals during the school day. The barrier around transport can be clearly far more significant in regional and remote areas with the increased travelling distances.

Students and parents may lack knowledge and understanding of the range of options and choices after leaving school. Uncertainty about the potential benefits of university education, peer group pressure, and alternative choices or incentives such as preferences for paid work contribute to decisions not to seek or take up higher education courses. Families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or socially isolated families are more likely to lack full knowledge to make informed decisions with their children.

Those are some of the principal issues. I just thought I would also mention some of the performance data. Drawing on the previous presenter's issue around the quality of school facilities, it is worth reflecting on the performance and investment, if you like, generally in education in Australia over the past decade or so. If you compare with OECD best practice, Australia has a relatively high proportion of low-skilled workers, with over one-third of the working age population not having achieved formal school qualifications — year 12 or equivalent. This situation is improved for the younger age cohort — 25 to 34 years — but there is still a 21 per cent non-attainment rate of year 12. We lag significantly behind in educational attainment, and participation in higher education is clearly associated with year 12 completion rates, as is evident from longitudinal survey data. Australia ranks 11th in the proportion of 25 to 34-year-olds who have attained tertiary education. The proportion there is 38 per cent. We lag well behind the leading countries of Canada, Japan and Korea. We also lag behind in terms of investment in education and skills building generally. This covers investment in basic education infrastructure as well as active labour market programs. Compared to OECD best practice, we do lag significantly in investment in people and communities.

In our submission to the recent blueprint for school reform we estimated that about 15 per cent of children and young people in Victoria are at risk of not fully participating in education due to the array of barriers that I mentioned earlier. Whilst retention rates have been improving, one in four young males in government schools do not complete year 12. The retention rate in non-metropolitan regions — at 69 per cent — is significantly lower than in metropolitan regions, at 86 per cent. One-quarter of early school leavers in Victoria and New South Wales live in just 5 per cent of postcodes. Other data indicate that we could do much better at retention and attainment in formal learning, including absenteeism rates that average 18 to 20 days in years 8 to 10, suspension and expulsion rates, and cost-induced absenteeism remains a significant barrier for some low-income families. Schools in low socioeconomic status areas have higher levels of unexplained absenteeism. In summary, our argument is that if we want to increase take-up of places in higher education, a more targeted policy approach is required to improve the commitment to learning and hence completion rates to year 12 of students in disadvantaged circumstances, for the reasons we have outlined. This requires further resourcing and new approaches to engage this cohort of marginally attached young people.

I will now point out some of the specific findings from recent research that we have been involved in that are relevant to your terms of reference. The Brotherhood's Life Chances longitudinal study has been going since 1990. It is a study of children born in 1990, and it has recently completed its eighth stage primary data collection with the families. The 125 young people who were consulted last year have now reached the age of 16, so they are in year 10 or year 11. All but five are still in school. They cover a range from low-income families in inner Fitzroy to families from a broader socioeconomic status. So it is fairly representative sample of children accessing maternal and child health back in 1990.

In the most recent study we looked at the intentions of those 16-year-olds when they leave school. Ninety-two per cent reported that they intended to complete to year 12, which is a pretty high rate. The strongest family factor associated with this intention was the parental education level. So the higher the level of parental education the more likely the student to aspire to the completion of year 12. University was the most commonly reported post-school plan — about 70 per cent — and this is a pretty high aspiration rate compared to the broader population data. Low socioeconomic status students had significantly lower levels of tertiary planning in mind — 54 per cent compared with 87 per cent for the other socioeconomic groups.

In terms of career planning, the Life Chances study indicated that those students in low-income families who were more likely to attend government schools had received career information in group sessions, and it was of a fairly limited nature. High-income young people — year 10 and some year 11 students — reported a high level of support on career options from their parents; 47 per cent compared to 32 per cent from low-income status families. The evidence is supported by other research — for example, Professor Golding at the University of Ballarat, in his 2007 study also found a significant lack of knowledge and understanding of career options, of funding assistance and possible income support availability amongst year 10 students and parents. The study also looked at the costs of higher education. Only a small percentage of those students and parents consulted in the survey reported that the

costs of university might be a problem — 13 per cent. Recent research by Cardak and Ryan in 2006 at the Australian National University suggests that the direct costs of university do not act as a deterrent for young people; however, low socioeconomic status does influence educational attainment and thus entrance into university in a competitive environment.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence last year conducted a survey of low-income families across Victoria. It was a relatively small sample — 58 low-income families with 129 kids, and most of those families were on income support benefits. That study found that 39 per cent of those students had been absented from school and had not participated in school activities last academic year for reasons of financial hardship. So school activities are clearly impacted, and attainment and progression are clearly impacted by financial hardship.

**The CHAIR** — Just on that last point, Michael, you are saying that the families' financial hardship was preventing the students from going to school?

**Mr HORN** — The cost of transport was one issue mentioned as a reason for not getting to school; the lack of food to take a meal for lunchtime was also cited as a reason for absenting their children from school; and the cost of equipment to attend particular activities and the costs of attending excursions that are not covered by school provision. So there was a range of those issues which meant that those families had made a decision. That was what they were reporting to us, and that is consistent with the other evidence.

**The CHAIR** — But whether that is an excuse they are offering is the question, because in lots of those cases they still have to have lunch, whether they have it at school or not, and there are a range of other things involved there. Do you think those families might in some cases be giving that as a reason but there are other underlying reasons perhaps why their children are not going to school?

**Mr HORN** — It is probably a mixed case. If you talk to primary school teachers there are certainly kids who go to school who do not have meals provided for them and therefore the teacher has to provide something for them.

**The CHAIR** — That is right. I would have thought a lot of schools would assist if they were aware.

**Mr HORN** — But there are also definitely cases, anecdotally we know, where parents are a little bit concerned about sending their kids to school if they do not have a meal for lunch. They may have previous histories or a connection with child protection, and they are a little bit concerned about being reported or it being noted in some way that they are not attending to their children's needs. There are a range of explanations of why that occurs, but certainly the underlying issue is financial hardship; a lack of income. In terms of the PACTS trial I will not go into the detail. I assume you have heard about the pilot and the development of that approach?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Mr HORN** — The Brotherhood has been continuing to roll that out through the Train the Trainer approach. Over 200 facilitators have been trained now, both interstate and in Victoria, to deliver the PACTS program, and our evaluation conducted in 2005 certainly found significant improvements in the knowledge and understanding of those parents to be better able to engage and support their children and be more informed about post-school decisions and pathways for those children.

**The CHAIR** — Does that program need to be expanded?

**Mr HORN** — We are actively expanding it through that training model. There is a lot of support from a range of different areas to develop it and further expand it, but it certainly needs more resourcing. I guess overall we have identified a stream of activity that says that parents are a critical first point of connection and decision making all the way through the educational learning pathway for their children. We operate the HIPPY program for early years — children aged 3 to 4 — which assists parents to be better informed and be able to give better support to their children's early years development. And then PACTS is an extension at the other end — the post-compulsory end — of education. We feel that is a critical stream of activity in terms of assisting children to make an informed choice about their options.

Just to summarise, in terms of policy suggestions we would argue for a broader social inclusion lens to be applied to education policy reform to ensure equitable access and participation to learning for all children and young people

whatever their background or circumstances. At a national level advocacy to the commonwealth government is required to increase the core funding of higher education with a priority placed on ensuring better coverage and accessibility of courses in regional institutions to reduce the necessity for students to leave home, where possible.

Barriers to access and participation in learning beyond educational facility boundaries must be addressed, including financial hardship and the lack of public transport. This requires policy reforms to increase financial assistance — for example, EMA scholarships, income support supplements to families in hardship and to ensure cost-induced absenteeism is minimised, and a specific policy to make public transport free to students in full-time education is also required. Breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage requires a commitment to provide consistent and continuing parental support from the early years to completion of year 12 or its equivalent. This includes models such as PACTS to better equip parents to support young people's post-compulsory learning and transition options. Availability of personal support, mentoring and professional welfare must be strengthened to effectively address social issues or problems that may limit full participation in learning at all levels.

Better understanding and support from teachers, lecturers and tutors for those students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds needs to be strengthened through in-service training and professional development modules. The resourcing of learning support programs, including community-based learning support for school students at risk of falling behind, is required to increase their retention and completion rates, and the development of more flexible learning approaches including methods, curriculum and assessment processes that take into account the circumstances of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is also required. Those are our key suggestions that we would like the inquiry to consider.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Michael. Are there any questions?

**Mr HALL** — First of all, thank you for your presentation. You mentioned that you have some youth transition officers — 325 school-based officers. Are they placed in schools around Melbourne; or where are they placed?

**Mr HORN** — The focus of the Youth Transitions and the Youth Pathways model is in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula area.

**Mr HALL** — Okay.

**Mr HORN** — It is a key geographic area that we work in, that we assess as having a significant level of disadvantage for young people. We operate those programs in those areas.

**Mr HALL** — Do they take the place of careers advisers in schools?

**Mr HORN** — No, they supplement them. There are two approaches. One is to have an in-school project officer who links in with teachers and with other support staff to provide practical advice, advocacy and assistance to students who are at risk of dropping out of school or of not fully participating in decision making, if you like, about their future options. The other approach is to have an off-site, out-of-school support model, and we have been trying to develop, I guess, a one-stop-shop, a future adviser's approach, which might bring together some of those fairly fragmented approaches that are already in place that focus not just on tertiary careers as one direction, but also vocational directions and apprenticeships and so forth. At the moment there has been a fairly fragmented approach to advice and support to young people at risk of leaving school, or those who have already left school and who we are trying to re-engage in positive activities. I think there is a need for a consolidation of some of those with a more generalist approach which has a flexibility of working in school but also out of school with those who have already left the school environment.

**The CHAIR** — I think you have covered all of the issues that I had noted and which I might have wanted to ask questions on.

**Mr HORN** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Michael. That ends today's hearings, and so I formally close the day's hearing.

**Committee adjourned.**