

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 2008

Members

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

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Witnesses

Mr M. Date, executive officer, Glenelg and Southern Grampians LLEN; and
Ms J. Devereaux, executive officer, Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN.

The CHAIR — Welcome to this regional hearing of the Education and Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria. As you would be aware, we are doing an inquiry with regard to geographic differences as they affect participation in higher education, and we are pleased to come to Hamilton and hear the views of people in the western region of Victoria and receive their contributions. You might be aware that when you are speaking to a parliamentary committee anything you say is covered by parliamentary privilege, so you can feel free to share with us fully. Whether you require the parliamentary privilege or not is another matter. We have not had any occasion where anyone has disclosed anything exciting, but there is always a first. I do not know who is starting, but if you share your input with us, then we will be pleased to ask some questions of you.

Mr DATE — I will start. Jo and I have had limited time to liaise in terms of how we are going to approach this, but maybe a quick snapshot of the local learning employment networks is a good place to start. As you might already be aware, the local learning employment networks are a state government initiative funded through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. They have been in existence I think since roundabout 2001, stemming from the Kirby report with regard to post-compulsory education. They are delineated by local government areas. The area that I represent, the Glenelg area, is the Portland-Heywood type environment, very much in south-west Victoria. Casterton, granted, sits in the Glenelg shire. Southern Grampians sit in the Southern Grampians. Hamilton and Balmoral are the two sites where there are secondary schools. Jo, your LLEN area is?

Ms DEVEREAUX — We have got four shires: Yarriambiack, Horsham Rural City, West Wimmera and Hindmarsh. We have 12 schools and one major centre, being Horsham, so it is a different physical configuration with an hour and a half north to travel and an hour and a half west to travel from Horsham.

Mr DATE — Our LLEN area has nine secondary schools. Four sit in Hamilton proper, two in Portland, one in Heywood, one in Casterton, and one in Balmoral. Again, two centres probably with some sort of satellites, if you like, so transport continually pops up as an issue. The local learning employment networks are community-managed, not-for-profit organisations overseen by voluntary committees of management, so Jo and I work on behalf of our chairs and committees. The LLENs' core role is the creation and development of sustainable relationships and partnerships, and brokering initiatives between local education providers, industry and community. The purpose of these partnerships is to make a contribution towards government policies, particularly the vision for Victoria 2010 in *Growing Victoria Together*, which is that by 2010, 90 per cent of young people in Victoria will successfully complete year 12 or its educational equivalent. One thing to highlight is that the LLENs' role excludes the direct provision of services to young people. The purpose of the exclusion is that we are able to maintain our capacity as brokers and facilitators in a non-aligned capacity. We are not registered training organisations, we are not deliverers of training as such, we are not deliverers of programs like Job Network or TAFE and the like. It makes us quite new unique. Sometimes it feels a bit frustrating, but other times I think it stands us in good stead.

Ms DEVEREAUX — Could I just add there, Michael, we also do government sector and Catholic and independent schools as well. We do not have any independent schools, we have one Catholic school.

Mr DATE — Okay. Again, our area is unique. I think it is important that every area is different. Hamilton, for example, has three non-government schools and only one secondary school. It means that the schools behave in certain ways as well. In Hamilton you could argue that they behave more as private schools. Even the secondary college has the capacity in there to compete, for want of a better term, in a marketplace. And it needs to, to be viable, so it is being competitive. There are possibly other issues that will come up. Whether Jo has got the equivalent figures I am not sure, but I just thought I would give you a quick snapshot of our LLEN, and it might correlate across in terms of — I will just give you a few of the numbers as well. We estimate in the Glenelg-Southern Grampians region there are 2500 young people aged 15 to 19. What I probably left out earlier is that our target group is 15 to 19 year-olds. There are 2500 thousand young people in the Glenelg-Southern Grampians region 15 to 19; 1500 of those young people are at school. In each year about 350 to 370 young people, on average, complete year 12, so across our two regions possibly around the vicinity of 700-ish. We have got approximately 535 VET in school students — vocational education and training students in school; 185 school-based apprentices; 140 VCAL — Victorian certificate of applied learning, students. Again, to maybe put some of this into context in terms of young people, we estimate — this is where it gets a bit more difficult — 100 students in TAFE or adult education environments doing youth-specific training but in a TAFE sector; 170 unemployed 15 to 19-year-olds; and something that we are going to focus on a little bit today, an unknown number of 15-year-olds and under who are not engaged in school — anecdotally, across our region anyway, 80 to

100 young people. We get that anecdotal figure through welfare agencies, often through peers as well. That is to give you a quick snapshot.

This might carry across to be true for Jo's LLEN area as well: on average over the last four years 31 per cent of students enrolled in university places for our region. In terms of looking at the numbers, that is an average of 113 people. The 2006 cohort of year 12 completers surveyed in 2007 was 25 per cent, so 25 per cent of students enrolled in university. That means that 43 per cent of year 12 completers were not engaged in any form of education or training. I think the inquiry is heading in this direction. The other percentage enrolled in TAFE are apprentices and trainees. Again, depending upon the scope of the inquiry and the definition of tertiary education, and higher education as well, from a LLEN perspective we consider those people engaged in education and training. However, there are still issues maybe in terms of if they want to try and move to higher education or to strive for higher qualifications. Sorry, I am still going with my intro; I will wrap it up really quickly. When a young person makes their VTAC application, their offers have increased — this is 2002 data — but overall university enrolments have declined, so what we are seeing is an increase in deferrals to university. By the end of the day, and no doubt at the end of your sittings around the state, you are going to be sick to death of hearing the word 'deferrals'. That is probably what you are going to hear a lot of — increased deferrals. Fortunately from our perspective you are not going to hear much about that today. However, whilst on deferrals, in that 2007 survey, in our region, and Jo's might be slightly different, we are talking 20 per cent of those young people taking up university offers deferred. That is against the state average of 9 per cent, so we are talking over double the state average of deferrals. People later today will talk about the whys and wherefores of those deferrals. Jo, in terms of — —

Ms DEVEREAUX — Yes, ours is 12 per cent.

Mr DATE — We do have some spikes with some of our high-achieving independent schools, and there is correlation in data to suggest that high achievers at year 12 often defer. I think one of our schools that will be presenting and making a submission has in the vicinity of over 30 per cent deferrals, possibly the highest in the state — maybe 39. An interesting stat as well is that certificate IV of TAFE take-up, in our region anyway, is at 7 per cent.

Ms DEVEREAUX — The same.

Mr DATE — That compares to 15 per cent of the state average, so we halve the take-up of higher TAFE qualifications, if you like. What that is suggesting is access to and availability of courses, pretty much. Again, later today I am sure there will be people talking about those sorts of things. However, on an upside, depending again on the scope of the inquiry, apprentices and trainees in our region show over double the state average of take-up, so we are talking about an 18 per cent take-up for the cohort in apprentices and traineeships compared to an 8 per cent take-up statewide. On that basis there are some positives; however, we might need to look in terms of what constitutes an apprenticeship completion. All those sorts of things come into play.

Maybe I will hand over to Jo; I am happy to go backwards and forwards. What we are actually going to focus more on today is that cohort that we mentioned that are actually disengaged from school, that do not have an environment in which they feel comfortable and confident to maintain their education. We talk often of getting into that higher education or tertiary level stepping stone from year 12, but we have got young people who are disengaging at primary school and do not have appropriate environments and circumstances to be able to reengage with education and training. Obviously if they are not engaged at all, they are going to find it very difficult to step up into a higher ed or tertiary level.

Ms DEVEREAUX — Our region is fairly similar. Our university uptake is 30 per cent, so it is a little bit higher than Michael's, but the apprenticeship rates are considerably higher than the state average, almost double, and particularly for early leavers. Just picking up Michael's point, if young people are not highly engaged in school, if that is not the option they want, not the pathway that suits them, our young people who leave school still do go to a pathway, and I think that that is not validated enough. We always say, 'Complete year 12'. We do not say 'Pass year 12', or, 'Use year 12 as a stepping stone to the rest of life'; we say, 'Complete year 12'. I think Michael and I are saying there is something about looking at valuing the equivalent as well and not just focusing on the year 12–university pathway, because for us, 70 per cent of our young people do not do that. Does that mean they are failures and they are not contributing to society? Of course it does not, but it depends how we look at the data and how we couch those terms. The 70 per cent of our young people who do not go to university of course do

not all get an apprenticeship, but a high number of them do, and particularly those early leavers. If they were not engaged in an apprenticeship pathway, they would be unemployed, because they would have a lower skill base. Certainly we think it is significant that our rural LLEN areas have a much higher — not a bit higher, but a lot higher — uptake of apprentices and particularly in that younger age group, 16–17-year-olds. Most of those young people, it would be fair to say, Michael, would never complete year 12 and would never aspire to go on to accessing university. It is just not their cup of tea, if you like. Their aspirations are quite different.

So in terms of skill shortages — which was one of the suggested questions — if more of our young people went to university, of course we would have less apprenticeships in agriculture, plumbing, electricians and auto, and those sorts of fields that in our rural areas are really quite important. There are still skill shortages in those areas despite these young people having quite a clear pathway in. The reverse of that, I guess, is that where we are short is doctor, nurses and paramedical staff, finance advisers and engineers and those types of occupations that of course do require university. For our students to access those courses in university, they not only have to go away, they have to go away to Melbourne or further, so they cannot access those courses in Ballarat, for example, or in Bendigo. It is really difficult to do law in those places. It is difficult to do some levels of finance. For broad-based arts degrees, for example, our young people have to move to Melbourne, which for us is 5 or 6 hours travel to go home for the weekend. Public transport is challenging, to say the least. Those young people probably cannot live at home; they need to move away. In all of the data that is very clear — and I think the On Track surveys, which is the data we are referring to, is all available for you to look at. I think that that is what the data shows; I think we are just really saying what the data shows. But I think also it is fair to say that our young people who do access apprenticeships early or on completion of year 12 have those local connections. Michael, do you find that in your community?

Mr DATE — Yes.

Ms DEVEREAUX — So there are pathways with families, or people who know of families. Predicting what will happen with a lot of people moving into country areas with fixed incomes — lower-fixed incomes, it is fair to say — they do not have those family connections. I am wondering what will happen to those figures in five years time if those family connections are not there. That is probably something we need to think about. The social circumstances and the cultural change for our young people to move significantly from a small town of 600 or 700 people, or a school where you know everyone in the school and everyone in the town, to Melbourne to study law or medicine, for example, can be quite challenging. So there are a whole lot of cultural and social issues for young people to move away. I think we must not ignore that, but it is about cost. It is about the cost, basically, and somewhat probably about aspirations for these families. They often do not have anyone in their family who has been to university. They do not see that as necessarily being the career pathway for them. Could they do it? Would it be all right? That is very hard to measure — that is not in the On Track data really. Aspiration does not quite appear as a line item in the data, but I think that is probably what we know, working on the ground. For kids who do not aspire to go down university pathways, if they do have other local pathways in traineeships or apprenticeships, that is a great option, but we need a balance. I think we do need to recognise that doing an apprenticeship is okay, too. Those young people can have decent life outcomes if they are supported in those ways.

The other thing that we know of — and again there is some data to support it but it is not in On Track — is if young people have a very positive experience in a rural area, no matter where that is, and they go away to university, they do a law degree or become a doctor or a paramedical person, for example, they will often choose to relocate back to a rural area when they finish their course. Michael's students might go off and come back to my area and vice versa, but if young people have a positive rural experience while they are at school, while they are growing up with their families in a rural area, they will often think of that option to choose later. When they are in their 20s and even their 30s when they are raising young families, they will choose to come back to a rural area or provincial Victoria. We need to keep those sorts of things happening so young people know that is an option. For some people who leave I think it is fair to say they will never come back, because their aspirations lie in a different place than rural areas. You cannot practise law or be in the corporate place in this rural setting, so that is not possible. It is about providing the best opportunity for all of our young people. I guess they should not be disadvantaged because they do live in Hopetoun or Coleraine. There still have to be suitable ways to offer them options. So perhaps we need to continue to be innovative about how we deliver school courses, for example, with interactive whiteboards and the internet and so on, but we still need to balance that with that applied learning.

Michael spoke about VCAL in schools— our figures are about the same. There are some other programs. I think we need to continue to look at systems, like better linking together the education system and the health system, and

to look at being innovative and creative, things like Link Up, Connect Ed, which are programs that are for young people enrolled in school but they are delivered out of the school setting. It means that those kids who do not fit into the school setting can still learn in a more innovative way. That is beginning to get acceptance now at systems level. I do not think it is recognised as well as it could be as valid pathways for these young people. We think that is important.

Mr DATE — It is also those programs where students are enrolled at school but being delivered external of school. It is sort of almost not being allowed for in terms of policy. It has not been written into the policy. It is almost like a backdoor type situation. The government are supportive of some of the initiatives. We are talking about things you might have heard of, the community VCAL and the likes, where it is being funded through the student resource package, through the schools funding, but it is not allocated for and there are not specific amounts allocated for. Depending on your negotiation skills, your relationship with the school or the principal, it could vary from anywhere from 50 per cent of the student resource package to almost 100 per cent. That needs to be formalised. I think you will be hearing a bit about that.

Ms DEVEREAUX — For example, we do not have the transition program that was rolled out around the state with the 22 workers. They have gone of course to larger centres. In terms of the youth commitments, particularly in our region — the youth options guarantee — that was a real lack because the LLENs are not service providers, so there is really no-one to pick up these young people and case manage them. We have actually cobbled together some money and employed our own little version of that, if you like. The maximum number of young people in that will be 15 in our part of the region. That is with Stawell and Ararat as well. We have reached that already, and it has been going probably six weeks.

It is clear also with our Connect Ed program, which is just as Michael described — you are enrolled in school and it takes place outside the school. Current enrolments, I think, are 57 in that program. It only started last year in our part of the region. Ballarat's enrolments in Link Up, which is a similar program, is several hundred. I think it is almost up to 300. Clearly those sorts of models do work for these young people. Teachers, once they embrace their program, can see that that is a really valid pathway for these young people. I will just mention a longitudinal study that you may be aware of it — Karen certainly is — that YACVic and most rural LLENs are participating in at the moment to further develop what you are doing really. We started that process, recruiting last year, so the longitudinal study starts this year to actually investigate further some of the reasons why young people are not staying. It is to tease out the cost issues and work out what it is really. Is it the transport? Parents do have to buy their young person a car if they want to come home or if they want to live off campus and travel to university — those sorts of things. Even if they are going to another rural university, they need to be able to travel about and get home and continue to play sport and those types of things.

Some strategies to start addressing that: one, having spoken to most of the school principals and a lot of parents in the region, is the lag time, if you like; if someone defers, a young person needs to get the youth allowance, the independent living allowance. It takes 18 months, so they have to start working the minute they leave school. That does not kick in until they are well at university, so the parents and the young person still have to manage that first semester without that youth allowance. Clearly making that available earlier or, better still, we would ask that rural young people could access that allowance much earlier, when they enrol in university. If they could actually get that support then, that would I think influence a lot of deferrers to look at that option at the moment. If this is the second or third child in the family, the cost of roughly \$60 000 for a basic three-year course, living away, becomes very expensive when you are counting a second and third young person coming through. If you are a farmer, you have already got a large debt. It has not rained for eight years. Again, it is the same thing, although some rural families will see that as a priority of the family and be looking at how they can manage that. So youth allowance early and certainly not having to wait for that period of time. Something on the aspirations — I am not sure how that could be a policy or a strategy but it is certainly worth putting there, Michael, do you think, to — —

Mr DATE — The aspiration side of things probably in terms of data comes out with the VTAC applications. You are seeing very high applications; as we said before, an increased number of applications. That is probably the only one of the measurements we have got in terms of aspirations — what they want to do. But then the reality comes when they actually choose to enrol or, more often than not, defer.

Ms DEVEREAUX — And the HECS debt does not seem to be a major issue for our young people; it is more the living-away component. The kids say, 'Look, we can manage the HECS debt. When we get work, that is okay'. I guess if I use my son as an example — he has just finished an arts degree at Melbourne Uni and got a

graduate position with the ANZ Bank. For him the HECS debt is not such an issue but he was supported by parents to get to that point. The system has changed, as we spoke about before. Is it just about young people going to university? What about the rest? In terms of skill shortages we have to be balanced in rural areas. If everyone went, we would have no workforce in that cohort. We already have small numbers of young people. For us it is 70 young people who go to university out of our entire region.

Mr DATE — One thing that we have not touched on because we are running short of time is that one of the strategies ideally would be to better fund in-school or school-connected, for want of a better term, alternate programs — that is, programs that are for the young people who are challenged when it comes to engaging in the normal school environment. They are the ones who are normally dropping out and they are the ones who we are talking about who are falling under the radar until they hit an age where they might be able to turn up to Centrelink to get an allowance. Often between the ages of 12 and 15 a lot of these young people are disengaged from school. And schools find it challenging to cater for them because obviously they have hundreds of other kids who are engaged and it is these smaller amounts who are disengaged. Welfare sections of the schools are under stress; they are finding it difficult to work the students back into the schools, so we see them disengaging. With the change of the school leaving age to 16 we are seeing that the alternate providers that have often provided for these young people — TAFE and the adult ed sector — are further restricted because the school leaving age is now 16. They have to ask for special circumstances to enrol these students who are 14 and 15. It comes up time and time again.

Hamilton has an alternate setting — for want of a better word — through the adult ed provider. It caters for people sometimes as young as 15; sometimes there are 12-year-olds knocking on the door, and you will hear from them later on today. Portland is in dire need of an alternate setting, an out-of-school environment where these young people can engage. Otherwise we are going to see what is anecdotally suggested — the 40, 50 or 60 young people not engaged until they hit an age where they do appear at Centrelink, and then they are often being told by the schools, ‘We can re-enrol you at year 8’, but their cohort is now at year 10, year 11 or year 12. It is a challenge.

The CHAIR — We might move to a few questions now.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Jo, you spoke before about aspirations. What do we have to do to lift those aspirations for young children?

Ms DEVEREAUX — That is the difficult thing because it is hard to measure that. I guess a more innovative sort of career development in schools would be useful.

Mr DATE — Parents, I think.

Ms DEVEREAUX — Yes and parents. And just something about girls — because more girls go to university than boys, but we have only got 70 going, so that is still not a lot of people, and most of the apprentices are boys. I think in our region it is about encouraging girls to have an opportunity to do perhaps traditional boys’ work but also other work as well — by peppering up the curriculum maybe, making it possible. There are some great things like Steve Waugh’s *Chase Your Dreams*. It probably needs to be more in the curriculum at a very early age — as Michael said, from 12, probably even from primary school, year 5, year 6. We are sort of giving the line, ‘You must complete year 12 or you are a failure’ in lots of ways, because schools are measured by how many kids complete year 12.

Mr DATE — But in terms of aspirations I think parents themselves might have low aspirations for their children or aspirations that do not align with what the government’s targets might be in terms of the increase in that year 12 completion. Educating parents is a key issue. That is coming back to maybe making schools friendlier places for parents to engage with. Many of these parents had negative school experiences themselves, so they do not interact well with schools.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What do you think accounts for the lower ENTER scores for students in country and regional Victoria?

Ms DEVEREAUX — Look, I think if you can pop along to all the extra support in Melbourne, for example — and a lot of our rural kids do — but you have to travel down for the weekend to do your physics update or, you know — it is about access — —

Mr DATE — And it is about the courses that are available for rural kids, because if you do not have the volume you will not run the program. When you have a school like Balmoral that might have 8 or 10 year 12 students, they obviously cannot offer every single program. They are then taking programs that might not attract the high scores as well.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Finally, you said that a large percentage of students defer. Why do they defer?

Mr DATE — You will hear some solid stuff later on today, but some of the reasons they do not take on the studies are that they are not ready — purely because they are not ready. Double the state average, in terms of responses from country kids, said that they are awaiting youth allowance — so it is purely cost driven. It is about financial pressures on families, which was about 30 per cent higher from country kids than the state average response. This is, again, On Track-related data. The costs of travel — there were around 30 per cent higher response rates from country students for that particular question. Too much travel, again, is a major one. Having to leave home was double the state average as a response from country young people.

Ms DEVEREAUX — Triple.

Mr DATE — Depending on the region — triple for Jo's region, double for ours. Another big one again: the course is not offered locally. But you could wrap it all up in 'cost and access'. That would be the primary thing.

The CHAIR — Can I ask on that issue of deferral — which no doubt we will hear more about today, as you say — have you done any follow-up interviews with students who have deferred? What is of interest to me is that deferral might not be a bad thing. It depends on what happens afterwards — whether the students do then take up the university places, or if they do not is it because they have found satisfying work situations to go into? Have either of you done any follow-up work?

Ms DEVEREAUX — There is long-term On Track data about that, and my memory of that is that most deferrers do pick up the offer and do complete. I think they have just tracked the first lot last year. They may not complete the course they start but they do tend to complete a university course.

Mr DATE — We have done no specific work ourselves but in terms of accessing some of the research that is going on — anecdotally, again — through the On-Track data, they do take it up. I think it is in the vicinity of 80 per cent, that take-up of those courses.

Ms DEVEREAUX — The other significant issue I think is that if a young person has completed year 12 and they are work-ready and socially skilled up and so forth, a local employer may employ that young person to do a traineeship in their deferral year, so they do that. They have worked so they can get the independent status. They go off to university, and in a way they have taken the place, if you like, of a local young person who may have taken up that traineeship, completed it and stayed in the region. So some young people are being doubly skilled, if you like, and some are having two opportunities not offered to them for that reason.

Mr ELASMAR — Michael, on that one as well, you said at the beginning 119 people were unemployed. Is that part of this deferral or because they did not get into university or they did not want to leave home?

Mr DATE — In terms of that rate in our area, of around 170 15 to-19-year-olds unemployed, those unemployed are not attending school. They have already disengaged from school and they are currently unemployed. We get that data from Centrelink. They are not even engaged. In terms of when a young person completes school, then the percentage rates you are talking about for our region are about 4 or 5 per cent who are looking for work. They have finished year 12 and their destination is to look for work. So it is quite low — actually it is slightly higher than the state average, but they are relatively low figures.

The CHAIR — Any other questions? Okay. That has probably given us a good setting to start with. Thank you very much, Michael and Jo, for your contribution.

Ms DEVEREAUX — Thank you. There will be papers I am putting in, too.

The CHAIR — Terrific.

Witnesses withdrew.

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Witnesses

Mr B. Baker, convener and member,

Mr T. McMahon, student representative

Ms L. Watt, YouthBiz Western District Health Service, and member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the Education and Training Committee of Parliament. You would be aware that we are looking at rural variations in students going on to take up higher education, so it is good to have the RYAN group come and speak to us here. I do not know whether you were here when I said that in terms of parliamentary inquiries the things that are said in here are covered by parliamentary privilege. I do not know whether that is relevant to you, but it is a chance that you do have. We are certainly pleased to have a fair range of people coming to see us today, and the RYAN is a pretty important part of that group.

Mr BAKER — Thanks very much. The South West Regional Youth Affairs Network is a fairly diverse group of people; in fact it is mostly representative of the local government youth offices and the major youth support providers in the region, and it also includes the local police community officers and so on, so it is a fairly broadly based group reporting back through the Department of Planning and Community Development through the youth affairs office. One of our primary functions, obviously, is to try and assist in informing government about what youth requirements and priorities are in the regions as part of the statewide network, and I am sure you have encountered our equivalents in other places. Amongst the things that we are interested in are the transitioning requirements for youth, because one of the problems that regional communities have is the difficulty of losing young people as they move off to education. That looms large on our agenda in a number of ways, and it was therefore appropriate, we felt, that we make some sort of presentation to the inquiry.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Barrie, how are you involved with RYAN?

Mr BAKER — I am not youth, you are saying; is that right? As convener of the group, my heritage and history in fact is as the director of the local TAFE institute. When they were looking for somebody to act as convenor for the group I was approached and was more than happy to respond. I guess that gives me another aspect of background in the area as well, in a sense, and having been involved in TAFE I also see the issues of students as they are coming by. Many of the issues that are relevant to your inquiry, which I guess is focusing mostly, as I understand it, on university-level education, apply also to a regional TAFE, because the same issues apply in terms of students having to relocate, to move away from home, to find their own way and to make themselves economically independent while they are studying, and the same issues in terms of youth allowance apply, for example.

I have a paper here which I will pass to members. Our issues are a combination of things, but they basically resolve themselves into social and economic issues as we approach them, as opposed to educational issues. I am sure we will say very little that is new and that you will not have heard in other places, but we have got Tim here as a student actually doing the job, and Leanne, who is involved with YouthBiz locally and is always in contact with students who have these sorts of issues as well. I have also added on the back of the material I have given you, which we may or may not get to in any sort of detail, a case study of another student who offered his story to us.

Briefly, by way of introduction — and then I will leave it to the others — some of the most critical issues are the economic ones, including the question of youth allowance, and there appear to be a couple of peculiar things about youth allowance. Youth allowance is a federal issue, but obviously in this wonderful word of collaboration you might be able to have some influence on it. There are two key issues with youth allowance. The first is the scale of the resources that need to be put together, which by and large exceed what a normal traineeship would generate by way of income. So if people are taking up a traineeship, they will be only just, if at all, able to raise the amount of income required in a 12-month period. The other strange thing is the fact that you do not become eligible until 18 months after you apply, which means that you are starting your first year, which is often when the greatest expenses come in, without the opportunity to have support, as it is usually halfway through the first year before youth allowance will cut in. That is certainly an issue.

There is also the cost of accommodation. People often think of that in terms of rental accommodation, but there is a heck of a lot more to it than that. When you are setting up house or cohabiting with other people there are all those other issues when you are starting up, which is again that initial cost of the bed, the fridge, the TV set, the power for the jug and all of those sort of things. It is all of those start-up costs which are substantial as well, and they all occur at the same time as you are not getting the youth allowance or equivalent.

Briefly, in terms of the educational issues, there are a few things there. One of the issues I think at the moment for regional people is the limited opportunities that are raised by the breadth of curriculum involved in smaller schools. In the bigger centres — in the Hamilton, Warrnambool and Portland-type centres — the curriculum is quite good, but in the Hawkesdales and Mortlakes of the world, their options are somewhat limited and often relate back to

offering VCAL. One of the educational issues that arises at the moment is that VCAL really is a nice year 12 program but that in terms of university education it does not directly give you entry to anything. That is something that needs to be rethought, I think. I have no easy solution to that.

The CHAIR — Are there not, though, pathways through TAFE that you might be able to then go through?

Mr BAKER — There are pathways through TAFE, and I think they are valuable and probably underexplored. One of the other things that I think needs to be better advertised is in fact the option of alternate pathways. There is not just the option that you leave school and go to university or you leave school and go to TAFE. There are options combining TAFE and university that you can find a pathway through. So VCAL as it stands at the moment is not promoted very well in that direction.

The other question in terms of the educational issues in regional areas which we find around the table at the RYAN is that there is often a lack of aspiration amongst parents. There is not necessarily a lack of aspiration amongst students, but there is not as high a level of higher educated parents in regional areas, and they do not necessarily see it as a presumption that you will go on to do any further study, and so that creates an atmosphere which does not always support people moving into higher education.

The social issues include the isolation from family and friends, which is a big issue when people are contemplating where they should go. Often that does not become real if the students do transfer — they soon find new networks and so on — but when they are contemplating it and asking themselves, ‘Will I or won’t I? It is going to be economically difficult. Mum and Dad are not necessarily pushing me to go. I won’t be able to continue in the footy club. My mates will all be doing something different’, there are those social pressures which work against you as well because of the need to leave the social circle that you are in, which does not apply of course in metropolitan areas.

The things we felt were significant when we had our discussion about it in terms of the future were, firstly, as we said at the bottom of the page, to lobby the federal government for a more logical change to the youth and accommodation allowances. We have a feeling that you could make a good case to say that people who are studying more than 100 kilometres away from home therefore will almost certainly have to relocate. There could be a good case to be made to say that those people should be automatically eligible for youth allowance and for accommodation allowance. That would apply either way, so it could apply for people from the metropolitan area transferring to study at Warrnambool, at the Warrnambool campus of Deakin, if that is the appropriate place for them to study. If students have to relocate or if they are qualified to relocate and their chosen course is that far away, our feeling is that they will not do that wantonly for the sake of the income, because mostly the other factors will count against it. That would be a not unreasonable option to put in place if we are going to address the inequality that currently exists. That is the first thing.

The second question is the question of costs of transport. Again, the regular cost of transport becomes an issue even within a regional area — for example, our TAFE students could not get on the school bus driving by as of right. It was only by chance, if you happened to be able to talk the system into letting TAFE students get onto the school bus which was going past the door and heading in the right direction. Certainly they could not do it as of right if the school bus was full. There was no argument to be put to say the person should get on; it was only if there was a vacancy on the bus that students could get on. Transport arrangements need to be looked at. There are also options needed in student housing. With the affordability of housing becoming worse dramatically as it is, we need to find ways of improving student housing options. The only real options at the moment are relatively formal, university college-type arrangements, and they are also relatively expensive. Perhaps some sort of formalised, subsidised accommodation could be provided as an option.

As to career education programs in schools that focus not just on career outcomes but on pathways, the issue was raised before. There are various ways of getting to the end point you want. Just because you get baulked at the first hurdle does not mean there is not a way of getting there.

Finally, there is the thought that at the moment most higher education institutions have special support officers for international students. International students get all sorts of welfare support and those sorts of things. Perhaps we should be encouraging the institutions to pick up similar support officers for out-of-town students, relocated students, as well.

They are the general issues. Perhaps it is best to now hear a couple of the stories from people who are out there doing it. Tim, would you like to give your version of what it is like being a regional student?

Mr McMAHON — I completed my high school education just last year at Monivae College. I am currently a student at the University of Ballarat. My choice to move to Ballarat and accept my place in my course was not made easily. The move itself was not easy. I had to take into account things that many metro students do not need to. My situation was one of emotional and financial awkwardness because I had to move away from my family and my job to undertake my studies. These two things in particular are common threads which confront rural students every single year. For example, the first house I was accepted for charged too much rent for my budget — a common problem nowadays. I was fortunate enough, however, to find a different house with a lower rent and a far more compassionate landlord. The only reason I have been able to stay in Ballarat to undertake my studies is the good grace, the understanding, the patience and the empathy of my landlord. This is most certainly not the case in all instances.

I chose to not defer my studies because taking a year for the working life can quite often change a person's motivation to go back to education. In addition to the fact that this lifestyle allows people, particularly young people, to get ahead financially, which is a very exciting and attractive bonus, some people — including myself, I believe — would not be able to give it up for the uni life. As a general comment it is my strong belief that the thing that rural students need the most is assistance with their finances. A more unified approach from all levels of government and society needs to be considered. We need to make tertiary education accessible.

Mr BAKER — Leanne, you have a case study there.

Ms WATT — Yes, I have a little story from somebody who did defer; his name is Toby. This is his story:

At the start of the year, I received an offer from the University of Ballarat, in the course bachelor of arts/professional writing and editing. This came as a pleasant surprise, as my VCE marks were not great, and my portfolio ... was sent several weeks after the deadline ... I was also pleased to learn that three of my graduating class at Baimbridge College had been offered places at the same campus, including two of my best friends.

As uplifting as this news was, I chose to defer my studies until 2009, as I did not consider myself equipped to live away from home and I wanted to work full time for a year. I usually work 3 hours a week at my local video shop for \$11.75 an hour, and I felt that I should get a second income — my ability to save money is poor at best.

Unfortunately, after three months and about two dozen job applications, I have only obtained one interview, which was unsuccessful. My current plan, after consulting the relevant UB course coordinator, is to start the course in July. This will require quick preparation, as I have hardly cooked since year 8, and I will need to find a part-time job in Ballarat. Another problem is that the Mount Helen campus is several kilometres from the small part of Ballarat that I have any familiarity with.

Mr BAKER — There is another story attached to the information I have sent around from Daniel, who has moved from Port Fairy to Melbourne. He deferred for 12 months to try to earn his youth allowance, which he has managed to do, but now it does not cut in until the middle of the year. He is sharing a house in Melbourne with three girls. They are paying \$600 a week for the house — so it is \$150 each for the rent before they start — and he is saying it is costing him another \$60 or so a week for living. At the moment, for the first semester at least, he has no other income. He has been trying to find work in Melbourne and has not been successful in doing so. He believes the available work was largely taken up by the locals who already got in there before he made it to Melbourne. While he is certainly looking forward to enjoying his life as a student, he has said that the economics of it are very difficult. He has twin sisters following on behind him who finished school last year, and they are trying to earn their money to get youth allowance for the future. Otherwise his parents will potentially have three students living away from home to help. That economic story is the main one, I guess, that we want to tell you.

The CHAIR — Let us move on to a few questions. I will follow up with Tim to get a sense of the other students he was doing VCE with last year. Have a good number of those gone on to tertiary education?

Mr McMAHON — A substantial number, I understand, have deferred their studies.

The CHAIR — And others went to the University of Ballarat?

Mr McMAHON — Others have; about half a dozen or so have gone to Ballarat and the rest are spread throughout Australia.

The CHAIR — Why did you choose UB?

Mr McMAHON — Because it is closest and my sister lives there already.

The CHAIR — So there is a bit of a pattern, then, from Hamilton that UB is one of the first-choice universities?

Mr McMAHON — Yes.

Mr BAKER — And again the social linkage is the factor. It sometimes even overrides what their preferred course might have been. They have got somewhere to stay.

Mr DIXON — Barrie, this morning we have all heard about students having to travel to the university. Can universities come to the people? I know there is a massive cost to universities to have country campuses and because of that it would be a rare thing, but is half the solution to have more TAFE campuses in regional areas? Is that part of the solution currently with TAFEs?

Mr BAKER — It is a part of the solution, but again we have a campus in Warrnambool, for example, and people living in Warrnambool have exactly the same amenity and advantage as people living in the metro area of Melbourne and going to a Melbourne campus. So in that sense, just being a country person does not of itself create a problem. If on the other hand you live at Casterton and you are travelling to study at Warrnambool because it is the nearest campus, you are no better off than if you were going to Melbourne. So it is that distance from where you are studying. Really the question is: is it possible to study while living at home or is it necessary to move away from home? That is the critical thing, and that is why we say, if we could make an accommodation allowance and a youth allowance available for people who have to relocate, that would be the factor, rather than the fact that they live in the country or something of the kind. Further education, off-campus-type study is useful, but mostly useful for mature-age people. It is a difficult enough transformation to figure out what the heck is going on at uni without having to do it by remote control as well; that is a very difficult option for people straight from school.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are there any subgroups of young students in this region who are less likely to go on to university?

Mr BAKER — I do not know, I have not seen the stats. I do not know what Leanne would say, but I think it would be interesting to pick up some stats to check if the greater the distance from the point of study the more likely it is that you will not do it — bottom line. In fact the non-metropolitan statistics make it look not so bad because of the regional campuses that the universities have, which mean that there are still country people studying close to home in the country. But if you study the proportion of people from Casterton or Heywood and so on who went to uni, I suspect that would be significantly less.

Ms WATT — It would be very hard to determine, but I would also suggest what you brought up before about parental support. If higher education is not something that has been brought down through your family, then it is very unlikely that that you will go.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How do you lift the aspirations of the parents? What do you have to do?

Ms WHITE — A lot of the time it is the money. It is the economic sort of stuff. If it is too much and not affordable, people say ‘We are not going to do that’.

Mr BAKER — People who presume that university education is a sensible thing to do will make the sacrifice to make it happen. Those who say ‘University education — I am not sure’ will not necessarily push the issue. Making it easier so they do better — —

The CHAIR — You touched a little bit on careers advice, and I suppose Tim can offer firsthand feedback. Do you feel that the careers advice you were given at school made you fully aware of the higher education options or the pathway options that you could have taken?

Mr McMAHON — That really depends on what sort of a school you go to. Monivae had outstanding advice and guidance for that sort of thing. I cannot really speak for the other schools.

The CHAIR — Have you got any comments, Leanne, in terms of what you are picking up from people you deal with?

Ms WATT — I think again it depends on the motivation. Tim is probably fairly self-motivated in finding out what is out there. For those students who may be struggling to attend or pass, then just getting through it is probably all they care about at the time. What happens next is that they kind of get to the end of year 12 and it is just a big question mark for some of them.

The CHAIR — Is there a challenge in having programs that personally follow the pathway of each young person? Is there something like that happening? It happens to varied degrees in different situations of course, but I guess it is a matter of ensuring that you get to those students and talk with them. Has that sort of thing happened?

Ms WATT — I think it is sort of on a school-by-school basis at the moment as to how committed they are. With some of the bigger schools, obviously, it is more difficult. We need something like that where every student goes through the process of: ‘Okay, where are you going? Where do you want to go, and how do you need to get there?’. I think some students simply get missed in that whole process.

Mr BAKER — What they call the MIP program, the Managed Individual Pathways program, exists, but I do not know that it is followed all that faithfully in a number of places. If people pick up the stats — —

The CHAIR — Hopefully we will pick up on that informally when we go back to the LLENs and others who were involved in that.

Mr BAKER — It is a difficult process following what happens.

The CHAIR — We will follow up with you at morning teatime to get some feedback on that. I think that would be a good way to go. It is certainly an interesting area. You have again been very helpful in giving us more insights. It is especially good to hear from Tim, but it is good to hear the overall view and to pick up on those case studies. Thank you, Barrie and Leanne.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 2008

Members

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Witnesses

Mr B. Simons, principal, The Hamilton and Alexandra College;

Mr B. Neal, principal, Monivae College;

Mr B. Wilhelm, Good Shepherd College;

Ms T. Burgoyne, principal, and

Ms S. Patterson, coordinator, Portland Secondary College; and

Mr R. Vecchiet, principal, Baimbridge College.

The CHAIR — Thank you for coming along and addressing our regional hearing of the Education and Training Committee. You are all aware that the issue we are looking at is the ability of people from your region to go on to participate in higher education — or at least from your point of view I presume that is the issue — so we are pleased to hear from you today. It is a big group and there are obviously lots of questions we will want to ask you, but we are pleased to get your initial input too.

Mr VECCHIET — I have not got a prepared speech for you but I represent the government school in town. The main disincentive for our students tends to be financial. I have spoken to a number of students recently and referred them to Ms Kaye Scholfield from RMIT — and I believe she is helping your investigation — so that we can actually have some firsthand information from students. The fact that students need to disengage from higher education in the first year after year 12 in order to earn enough money so that they can get the independent Austudy allowance so that they can then go to university is a problem. A number of them simply do not re-engage after they have done that. I have a specific example that I was mentioning a moment ago of a student who got into a physiotherapy course, deferred for a year and now probably will not take up his position because he is concerned about the level of debt he will incur and the fact that he has now been out of the system for a year and he is not comfortable going back. I do not think that is an unusual story. From my perspective certainly that idea that they have to get a job for a year before they can actually engage is an issue. There are also all sorts of peripheral issues to do with isolation and the disengagement away from their community once they move away from here, but certainly the financial one is my big issue.

Mr SIMONS — I might just add to what Rob is saying in terms of the fact that there is a skills shortage in regional areas. I am actually a city boy originally. I moved here nine years ago. We all face challenges not only within schools but also across a broad range of different areas that there is a skills shortage. The fact is that the most likely skilled people to return to work in regional areas are those who were brought up and educated in a regional area in the first place. So I think, just in echoing what Rob has said, to me there are disincentives for regional students to study at tertiary level in the city and most prominently due to the cost.

I actually see the youth allowance — I know it and I heard it being said in the previous submission too — as a paradox. The fact that the more money you earn they will throw more money at you, and yet there are a number of students who just simply know that they cannot even aspire in the first place. We have actually surveyed our school. I made a submission to the then federal education minister, Julie Bishop. She requested case studies so I provided that for her. My school is an independent school, Alexandra college; we have an SES of a hundred. We actually determined that out of our 60 year 12 students, 45 per cent of them who responded indicated that they are either working to help pay for tertiary study and accommodation, working for a year in order to qualify for youth allowance or just simply unable to meet the cost of tertiary study altogether. A range of other statistics really do back that up, but essentially people are seeing not only do they have the debt that will follow for their HECS, which of course is the same for everyone, but specifically a number of them are actually looking to borrow money to get them through in terms of living expenses and they just see that is too great a disincentive. So either they defer indefinitely or in some cases never seek to aspire to get a place in the first place.

I have actually put together a paper for you to consider. Firstly, thank you as well for the opportunity to put forward our views. Specifically what we would be seeking is for the state government to lobby the federal government to change the conditions for youth allowance, and specifically to seek that students from regional areas under certain conditions automatically qualify for youth allowance. I have actually also given — I should have handed this to you as well — a copy of the survey that we provide for our students, which specifically outlines each of the questions and then, as I said, the results are actually in the sheet that you have there.

Mary Bremner, who is the principal of Balmoral Secondary College, was unable to be here today but she made some reasonable points: that there are two key barriers to participation in tertiary and higher education for regional students. One is parental expectations or more accurately the lack thereof. A number of our parents fear the idea of their children living a long way from home, and particularly in Melbourne, and some of their students — and indeed we all face this — have only been to Melbourne once or twice in their lives. Schools do a lot to try to remedy that, but of course education in other regional areas is their best option because it is something that they are more comfortable with. But the courses are not available in a lot of these locations. I am not sure how the government could address this barrier. Some of the universities run some good familiarisation programs for country students so these could perhaps be funded and encouraged. The second and probably fairly obvious issue is the horrendous costs, which is similar to what the rest of us have been talking about. If I may submit that, it is just a sheet that she has passed on.

The CHAIR — As we are going along, one thing that would be of interest to me and probably the other groups is to know how many students perhaps you have in your year 12 year. That might give us a bit of a sense, and what you believe your general percentage of going on to higher education might be. So can I just go back to Robert and then as we come along to Bob we will get that.

Mr VECCHIET — We would have — it varies from year to year of course — on average about 85 or 90 year 12 students.

The CHAIR — And what percentage do you think generally go on?

Mr VECCHIET — The percentage that actually apply to get into courses would be relatively high — around the 80 per cent. The take-up rate, however, would be much lower as is borne out in the On Track data that we have seen this year.

Mr SIMONS — We have 60 students who would be in year 12. All of those would apply for tertiary places, and on average over the past 10 years we have had 98 per cent of them gain tertiary places. The Hamilton and Alexandra College has the highest percentage of students in this state that defer and that is why it was interesting for us to provide a case study.

Mr WILHELM — At Good Shepherd College we only have about 15 students that do year 12. Most of them would apply for tertiary admission, but the actual take-up would be — I am only new in this — about 50 per cent — I think, 40 to 50 per cent.

The CHAIR — So what are the key points that you would like to make.

Mr WILHELM — Again, we have the same issue that is coming up here. The students that are gaining entry into universities are then deferring for at least 12 to 18 months before they take it up. As I said, this is only my second year here, so I am not sure how many are actually deferring completely or not taking it up. I am concerned that our dux of the school and this sort of thing is having to go out to work just to be able to provide the money to go to uni in Melbourne.

The CHAIR — We will come back for questions in a moment and move on to Bernard.

Mr NEAL — I am from Monivae College, a Catholic coeducational secondary day and boarding college. We would have 95 students undertaking year 12 this year, and over the last five or six years we would probably have 90 per cent of our students who have been applying for some kind of further study and about 65 per cent will take up the offers. So we also have a very high deferral rate. I think I would pick up on the two major themes of cost and parental expectations. I think students who go through their secondary school in metropolitan settings have a choice of whether they stay at home or leave home to pursue their further study. Those in regional areas do not have the luxury of that choice and so it is quite obviously an additional impost for the families to cover the cost of the accommodation, the travel et cetera that is required.

In regard to parental expectations, there was an ACER study that was conducted two or three years ago looking at what are the determinants of a positive attitude towards academic education. It would be no surprise that the parental occupation was the major influence that was determined in that regard. Clearly parents with professional occupations certainly had a far greater uptake of an appreciation I guess amongst their children of an academic education. Now in rural areas the ratio of professionals to non-professionals is going to be a good deal smaller, and so I guess there is that embedded disadvantage to start with. I think that probably where we need to work very hard is in some kind of community education program that encourages parents in regional areas to place a higher value on academic education.

Ms BURGOYNE — I have brought my Managed Individual Pathways coordinator, Suzanne Patterson. We have currently got 90 students in year 12, 70 of whom are doing VCE and 20 doing VCAL. Nearly all of our VCE students apply for tertiary places; however, you have heard the story that the number of students who defer is reasonably high. Once again the parent aspiration, I think, is clearly an important thing. We have written a brief paper response which we are happy to give to you, but anecdotally I would hazard a guess that most of the students who defer if they are in the higher range of ENTER scores are more likely to then go on to university. However, it is probably those in the 60 to 70 range who are less likely then to go on to uni after deferring for a year.

We had a little bit of a think about what some positive incentives there may be, apart from youth allowance. I think with perhaps things like the nature of families nowadays, it is more difficult for single-parent families obviously. Clearly things like more orientation programs at tertiary institutions involve the whole family so that the mums and everyone gets an idea of what it looks like and feels like going off to uni. There is a role perhaps for regional offices to coordinate some sort of orientation, not just for kids going to the city to have a bit of a taste of what it is like going off to uni and living in hostels, but maybe for city kids coming out to country areas. If you did that on a school-by-school basis there is a lack of equity there because it is down to the time and capacity of the school to do that, so I think our regional offices of the government department may be a good place where that could happen.

There could be travel concessions for country kids because we can fly from Portland into Essendon but I think it is \$150 to \$200 one way, and it is the same if parents want to go to visit their child in the city, so that probably could be a positive incentive to help families. We definitely need more hostel accommodation in the city for country kids and maybe attached to that are places where the families could come and visit for weekends too. The socioeconomic status of our families means that we have quite a number of families that are perhaps third generation not having had jobs and so once again that parent aspiration and their lack of understanding of what further education can do, not only for their children, but I guess the bigger broader picture of the social capital if there are incentives for kids who are coming out of lower socioeconomic families. We have all read the research that shows if one child in the family has a tertiary education, what that then does in terms of social equity further along the track is that they then have an understanding and their children are probably more likely to engage in further studies. There is a whole raft of different sorts of policies that need to be pulled together to help our families engage and see the possibilities in tertiary education.

The same things apply to our kids about the cost of HECS, the cost of setting up your child in the city and the distance, and of parents understanding and having that connectedness and how they see their children living in the city. A lot of kids, even if they have gained the youth allowance, still have to have part-time work in the city and that is another difficult thing if you have come from a country area then to find part-time work; and the juggling between that and your studies, as we all know, is a very challenging thing and I am not sure how that further impacts on how many of those kids actually complete their courses.

Ms PATTERSON — A lot of our students go to regional campuses obviously because that is where they fit better, but the thing about it is that regional campuses only offer a limited amount of courses. I know Deakin in Warrnambool is improving and offering a lot more but still that limits young people to what they can actually study.

The CHAIR — Let us move on to some questions while we have got you.

Mr DIXON — I am getting some mixed messages about the re-engagement: deferring and then coming back. There does not seem to be any clarity about who they are and exactly how many are coming back, and why. Do you think that is an area that we need more work on; for students who have deferred and then decided not to go on, or do decide to go on, and why. Do we need more information about that, do you think?

Mr SIMONS — The local learning and education network has a fair bit of information along those lines.

Mr DIXON — Yes, we heard from them this morning and got some figures. I can see there are some nods over there as well, so I think it is obviously an area that needs more work.

Mr VECCHIET — I think it is worth finding out more information because there are a couple of things. For example, I know specifics, as I mentioned, of a student who took up physiotherapy who is not going to take up his course. To take up a point that Toni made about those middle-level ENTER scores where those students do not take up courses, I wonder whether there is not a problem. If they are concerned about moving away from their homes to take up tertiary education in the first place, if they do not get into their first choice, the likelihood of them re-engaging in tertiary education is even lower. Maybe the sort of thing that Melbourne University is doing in having a more generalist course rather than specifics may, to some degree, alleviate some of those problems.

Mr DIXON — Can you defer a TAFE course? You have got to take it.

The CHAIR — Following on from that deferral issue then, when we do not have that research it is a bit of a challenge, but case studies can be a source of interest too, and there is an issue to clarify that deferrals can be beneficial in some cases. We have seen some people go on to tertiary and feel a whole lot more ready to take it on

when they have had a bit of a deferral but you would want to think they were doing it for the right reasons, and we did some more work on that. I do not know whether you have got some case study suggestions that either build upon the benefits of deferrals or point out where students may have not taken it up, and not for the right reasons.

Ms PATTERSON — I had a young girl who went and did a gap year overseas. She actually had chosen to do nursing but while she was over there she decided to switch to disability and so she reapplied through VTAC and then came back and followed that line. By having the other experience she has been able to get some more life knowledge to change courses and go along on a different track.

Mr NEAL — Anecdotally we would have numbers that would follow that same pathway. I guess it is an unforeseen added advantage of having taken the year off. I could not give you a percentage on that but anecdotally there would be a few.

The CHAIR — And then it might be an issue too of ensuring that we have some sort of program that picks up people who have deferred in a sort of a managed pathway to ensure that they are counselled at that time and they can link back in or they have to make that decision.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Do schools in the area work together across the sectors to perhaps provide more educational options for students, or do you each work individually, or do you work in some paths together?

Mr SIMONS — In terms of courses for students, generally we are separate.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How about information about the different courses? In the city I know what students can do and what they receive. It is not difficult for them to hop on a bus and go to a university and find the information. What information do the students out here receive?

Ms BURGOYNE — We do a tertiary information tour to the city but we also have — what is the roadshow that comes out?

Mr SIMONS — The tertiary information service, TIS.

Ms BURGOYNE — A tertiary information service, plus we advertise fairly sensibly in our parent newsletters when open days are in the city, but we do take a busload. We actually primarily try to encourage the year 11 students to go along on that because by year 12 you have chosen your subjects and probably what course you may be aspiring to, so we actually try to get as many of our year 11 students on to that tertiary tour.

Mr SIMONS — We would be doing similar things in Hamilton in terms of sending a bus down, but also the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre comes up and does a briefing, which is for the entire community, held in one place.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How do you overcome the third-generation family unemployed?

Ms BURGOYNE — Tell me! They are probably the least engaged group of parents in the school often — not always — but that is probably a fair broad brushstroke of that. As I said, programs where we can get parents — we do not take parents on the tertiary information tours, there is not enough room on the bus. To leave Portland at 4 o'clock in the morning and have your staff get back at 11 o'clock at night and they have got to be back on deck teaching the next day, is a huge thing to manage. We would love to have it so that more parents were able to engage in that. It is a costly exercise; we have got to pay for the bus and things like that.

Mr SIMONS — Toni, you make a good point because not only are these buses where everyone is going down to one area but there are a lot of students who will then seek to look at two or three institutions individually each year. In order to do that they have to head off, spend a full day, and most of that is on a bus, to spend 2 hours at the institution, and a lot of them simply will not do that because the time allocation is not there. They are already having enough interruptions in their school day and they just cannot see that as being viable.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Has any school got a large proportion of students whose parents were born overseas?

Ms BURGOYNE — No, we have not.

Mr SIMONS — I have about 30 international students but they are full-fee paying, they are not living here.

Mr ELASMAR — On the deferring issue, I am looking at the 45 per cent of students who responded. Did we do any calculation after that of how many students will come back after deferral?

Mr SIMONS — No.

Mr ELASMAR — Probably we lose many.

Mr SIMONS — Yes.

The CHAIR — In terms of smaller rural or regional schools, the issue of being able to offer those VCE subjects to ensure that you do not cut any of your students out of those tertiary opportunities that they might have wanted could be a challenge. Although mostly we have got the biggest schools. Bob has got the biggest challenge, and Mary is not here. I do not know whether you others have got a comment?

Mr WILHELM — It is a real challenge for us. We have to obviously run fairly small class sizes to accommodate subjects but where there are only one or two wanting to do a particular subject we normally do distance ed as an option there where they have assigned study time still in the curriculum in the timetable and with the teacher supervising.

The CHAIR — Does it still become an issue with the rest of them?

Mr VECCHIET — It is always an issue. I might jump in and say that you may know about Australian technical colleges, and we have one in this area called the Australian Technical College Wannon. The object of that college has been to try to offer vocational education to all students in the district. That is an attempt, if you like, at rationalising offerings so that the students in the district have access to vocational education. There are specific skills-shortage areas. The ATC, as it currently is, has a campus in Warrnambool and one here in Hamilton. Its future is cloudy at the moment because the funding model has changed.

Mr NEAL — It also means some ad hoc partnerships have been set up. For example, some of our students have undertaken agricultural studies at Good Shepherd, and some of their students have taken multi-media at our place, and the same with Baimbridge.

The CHAIR — Yes, I imagine that option would be there at Hamilton, where you have got the largest centre. I do not know how many other schools you have got in Portland?

Ms BURGOYNE — We have currently got, for example, a VET subject running on our campus and students come from the independent school, Bayview College, and Heywood District Secondary College, another state school. There is a little bit of sharing there with programs but as part of a VCAL stream rather than the VCE stream, which I guess we are predominately talking about here today with the deferrals to university.

Mr SIMONS — We are also considering the option of online courses to different schools in different regional areas around Victoria. We are looking at two different schools where by using cameras, basically like videoconferencing but linking up with interactive whiteboards and the like so that if we are offering, for example, studio art and that school is not, and they are offering psychology and we are not, effectively we can then share those classes. That is something we are exploring at the moment. As our broadband gets better we will be able to do that.

Mr DIXON — The importance of careers counsellors in schools sometimes is a bit of a hit and miss as to who has got the job and how well connected and networked they are. Is that an area that needs more work, and is it hit and miss?

Mr NEAL — I do not think it is hit and miss, but it is certainly a crucial area, there is no escaping that.

Mr WILHELM — It is a real issue in a smaller school where you have got very limited staff.

Mr VECCHIET — Certainly our careers teachers in this region have a network where they meet fairly regularly and try to put together other projects for the whole district like careers expos and suchlike.

Ms BURGOYNE — I have set up Suzanne with MIP and she is there all the time and with the VCAL coordinator. I guess it is a little bit like a hub for the students. Nearby is a student welfare coordinator and that is where outside agency people may drop in. In building a hub where you have got a number of people that kids can link into and get advice from apart from the year level managers, that helps to strengthen the opportunity for them to gain as much careers advice information as we can. We are endeavouring to get more parent engagement in that process, which is back to the aspiration and understanding of parents of what are the possibilities of tertiary education or further training through TAFE for their child. It is not an easy thing to do, but we endeavour to do it.

Mr NEAL — I think part of the effectiveness of the careers network is reflected in the incredible range — diverse range — of destinations for kids from this region. It is just an enormous spread.

Mr KOTSIRAS — If I were to ask you what are two solutions to overcome some of these problems, what would be your answer?

The CHAIR — You have got to be quick now.

Mr SIMONS — If you read on the bottom of that paper from Mary Bremner, it is to look to students who need to relocate from a regional area to automatically qualify for youth allowance — that would be one.

The CHAIR — On that score, too, one of the issues obviously is a socioeconomic one and so there would be some families who clearly either have a professional background or whatever and they build it in and so their children are able to go on, but clearly there is that other cohort of families who for their own financial reasons have difficulty. Is there an opportunity for a scholarship system or something that identifies those, and I do not know whether there are any? I have heard of some cases in regional Victoria where some corporate bodies have offered scholarships. I do not know whether you are aware of them?

Mr SIMONS — Some universities offer a limited number of scholarships, but there are not too many of them.

Ms BURGOYNE — Still, it is an access and equity thing; if you are aware of it, you can apply, or if you have a business that will sponsor students. It would be good to see some stronger scholarship or sponsorship programs that are a little bit like studentships. We currently have to address the teacher shortage. Studentships were a great way of supporting people through. There were hostels for you to stay in while you were doing your teacher training and then there was an obligation to teach in a nominated school that would help to get teachers back out into rural areas. That is one example just in teaching that would help redress some of that. The support is right from when you first get into a university course right out into guaranteeing a couple of years work in a school at the end of it. Unfortunately those studentships do not exist any more.

Mr VECCHIET — Certainly we have access to a limited number of scholarships for exiting students for tertiary education, but it is a limited number and they are for private individuals.

The CHAIR — Yes, that is right.

Mr VECCHIET — And there are a lot of students, however, that do not get that sort of support, so while that is one good way of accessing it, it needs more.

Mr SIMONS — You mentioned two things that we would like: one being the youth allowance and the other one being hostel accommodation for regional students. Can I just give you a figure — for example, for a student to gain institutional accommodation at Melbourne university it is \$16 000 plus and then most of them will only accept students if they are scoring an ENTER of above 95. Most regional students just do not even get a look in. Their only option is to then seek flats, units, the whole bit and they are just not available. As we all know, there is a rental shortage in Melbourne in particular. All of these are disincentives.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How would you lift the ENTER score for students?

Mr SIMONS — How would I lift my students' ENTER score?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes, for students in the region.

Mr SIMONS — Within the region — better teachers. Is that what you are saying?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes, because the figures that we have seen show that students in regional Victoria are less likely to get a very high ENTER score.

Mr SIMONS — I go back one step. I think broadly across the schools we have outstanding teachers — so we are able to attract very good teachers, although there is a shortage of them. In terms of students' ENTER scores and the comparisons with, say, your bigger inner city ones, I am not so sure there is a simple answer to that, because you are not necessarily comparing apples with apples in terms of whether the schools are selective — and some of the schools we may be comparing with are very selective. I think we actually compare quite well with those schools.

Mr NEAL — If I can interrupt there, I think that the advantages that metropolitan teachers have in access to professional development is a significant component. In any given week in Melbourne you can go along to a 2-hour session from 4 o'clock until 6 o'clock, after the kids have left school, but in the rural regions you just do not have that access. You can drive for 4 hours to go to something on in Melbourne from 4 o'clock until 6 o'clock and drive 4 hours back home again.

Mr SIMONS — And it will cost you up to \$1000 to send someone to do that. I know that Rob has got someone here for two days.

Mr VECCHIET — I have waited for two years to get access to someone for my whole staff. Otherwise they would be sitting in the car for 7 hours on a return trip to go and access information.

The CHAIR — The other inquiry that the Education and Training Committee is doing at the moment is on teacher professional learning, so they are clearly issues we will take on board with that too.

Ms BURGOYNE — I just wanted to make one comment in response to your comment. Some of our students who would be equally able to get a high score at VCE choose VCAL. We have very good opportunities for school-based apprenticeships in Portland at the moment, with the industry boom there. It is a real decision. You go to VCE and get to university and there may be some sort of job at the end of it or you go into the applied learning stream, the school-based apprenticeship, and you are very likely to get a job. Looking at the comparative incomes and things, you are clicking straight into a trade or whatever, rather than doing some tertiary course after which you start fairly low and it takes a while to work your way up.

Mr NEAL — I do not have a solution to this, but I think anything that can be done to address parental expectations and the value of further education can only help to serve the cause.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 2008

Members

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

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

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

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms J. Neeson, executive officer,

Ms K. Hamill, youth education program coordinator,

Ms L. Scott, former student,

Ms S. Clark, student,

Ms A. Sharrock, student, and

Mr N. Ainger, student, Southern Grampians Adult Education.

The CHAIR — Now we have the team from Southern Grampians Adult Education, who are going to tell us about their interesting programs. Welcome. It has been good to catch up with some of you in the break and now we are looking forward to your formal presentation. Obviously after that we will have some questions to ask of you. Julie, you are leading off, are you?

Ms NEESON — Yes, I am leading off. I am the executive officer at Southern Grampians Adult Education, where the youth program is one of our many programs. Just as a lead-in, I thought I would start by giving you a bit of history about it. It happened in 2002. We started getting a lot of young people coming in to our programs, primarily our literacy and numeracy programs. I know it was happening not just in Hamilton; it was happening throughout Victoria. It was soon after the Kirby report. It was quite obvious that there was no alternative education for the young people who were dropping out of school, so we developed a program that has a strong life skills, literacy and numeracy training component but also the opportunity to prepare young people for the workforce. We linked it into part-time traineeships/apprenticeships for those young people who actually showed a bit of commitment to the program.

It was very interesting, trying to establish why the young people left school. Obviously when you get a chance to talk to these young people later on, you will hear some more reasons. A lot of them exited from the local secondary college. There is only one in Hamilton. If they were asked to leave, there was not an alternative place to go, so that made it a bit difficult. A lot of them were at that stage, at year 8, year 9 or year 10, where the school curriculum just did not seem to be relevant to where they were going. There was poor communication between the teachers and the students. There tended frequently to be social and family issues. There were low levels of literacy skills within the families, too. There was a lack or loss of motivation. There was a lack of support from school and home to continue at school. We had some who were homeless. There were a lot of the isolation factors, where the kids just did not have anyone to talk to — that type of thing. Some were in trouble with the law. There seemed to be a total reliance on the welfare system. The majority of the young people had very low self-esteem.

The youth education program developed around three days a week. On Mondays they would have a vocational education focus through an accredited program — that is, certificate 1 in vocational preparation. The kids had a lot of opportunity to look at themselves and where they were going. It was a personal development focus, with preparation for getting a résumé together, seeing what jobs were around locally and so forth, and what training opportunities they might need to pursue to go down that pathway.

On Tuesdays they have a full day of literacy, which is tackled in a number of different ways. We try to always come back to more of that life-skill literacy focus. On Wednesday mornings there is a concentration on numeracy, or maths, and once again we have the life-skill focus there. On Wednesday afternoons we have what we call our life-skills sort of area, where the young people do a range of different things. At the moment they are going up to the local gymnasium, having a session of using the program there in the gymnasium. If they want to, they can have a swim or whatever. It is just to sort of look at that exercise regime. At other times they will have guest speakers about nutrition. There might be someone talking to them, suggesting that smoking might not be the best outcome. A lot of them, nevertheless, will go out for their break and still have a smoke, but still they are hearing the normal sorts of things that you will hear in a school situation.

The training the young people undertake is not in a mainstream class situation and the students are certainly not mainstream. For the teachers to teach in this area and the support tutors to do their work they have to have special skills and a good rapport with young people. Every class can be challenging. I think the kids will talk about it with you later. We tend to break them into small groups, because we have an age range from 15 up to 19 in those classes. We do work in conjunction with the local schools. I think we mentioned the local secondary college, which is Baimbridge College; and also there is Casterton Secondary College. Casterton is 60 kilometres to the west from here, and there is a bus that runs across. It is a private bus. We have had arrangements at times where the LLEN has helped to pay the fees for young people to travel on the bus across to our program.

Many of the issues as to why these young people attend SGAE are beyond the charter of adult education, but by respecting these young people and receiving respect in return, their involvement in the youth program can frequently provide that further turning point, where they do decide they want to learn and want to work. The youth program coordinator, Kathryn, works with each young person, monitoring their ongoing participation in the program, as well as assisting and where possible resolving issues related to not only the program but their lives, in the sense that if one of the young people has a particular problem, Kathryn will perhaps refer them to the appropriate agency that can help them. Also, Kathryn prepares a pathways plan, and once they have left SGAE,

Kathryn tends to keep in touch with them through a range of means — often through word of mouth, from other young people and through direct contact. Many young people do come in and visit us several years down the track once they have left the program.

The young people attend the program for periods ranging from six months to two to three years. This was becoming a concern to us, especially as we have had young people at, say, 14 or something coming into the program and we did not want them still there as 17-year-olds. We had been working in conjunction with TAFE for a while to work out some possible pathway that we could link into TAFE. We would often refer them to TAFE, but once they got to TAFE they seemed to get lost. Our program is fairly structured: if they are not there by a certain hour, Kathryn will make a phone call, asking ‘Where are you? Why aren’t you here?’, whereas at TAFE that same sort of follow-up does not happen.

This year we actually have community VCAL going in conjunction with TAFE, where we deliver the literacy and numeracy component at our premises and the young people do the VET component out at TAFE. That way we are still maintaining contact with them two days a week, so we know who is attending, who is not attending, and the same linkage can be out at TAFE: who is showing up to VET classes and who is not. They are doing VCAL at the intermediate level, so they have the opportunity to do office administration, multimedia, agricultural science, horticulture, building, automotive, retail, beauty therapy, and SGAE also an arrangement with William Angliss Institute of TAFE, whereby it subcontracts us to deliver commercial cookery and hospitality. A number of the young people both in the community VCAL and also in the youth program look to do those programs.

The literacy and numeracy and work-skill classes, as I mentioned, in the community VCAL are conducted at SGAE. We actually deliver the commercial cookery and hospitality at the Hamilton Golf Club, so we get a bit of community involvement there. As a result the young people are now working at the golf club in a training kitchen environment on a Friday evening, to give them an opportunity of experiencing the real workforce. It is purely as a training kitchen and they are developing skills. This coming Friday night, for instance, there will be a strong emphasis on meat dishes; they are getting heavily involved in meat at the moment, so they are operating as a carvery. The other VET subjects are done at Hamilton TAFE.

One of the major problems that I find as the executive officer of SGAE is the community perception of the young people. They are certainly not mainstream, but they are special kids with special needs, and, as I mentioned, we try to work to meet their needs and give them opportunities. Many of the young people have responded well, and I think Laura might be an example to have a chat with shortly, but young Nathan, Sarah and Amylee too have some interesting stories to tell. Just before we go on to that, I think Kathryn has just a few statistics on what has happened with the young people in the last three years. When we get them together we are really quite surprised at how effective the outcomes of the program have been.

Ms HAMILL — Certainly if you look over the last three years we have had some 120 students come through the program. Some of those were for a short period of time. We have quite a large mentoring focus in dealing with the youth. If I can focus a little bit on the youth, they really are disengaged from school. Some do not really fit the at-risk description, but some do — certainly the majority do. Some are there because of an unfortunate circumstance in their lives. Some come to us for youth allowance reasons as well, because they are in that age bracket and they need to be engaged in something.

Of those 120-odd students we have had a few re-engage back into mainstream schooling. I suppose that would be our priority: to re-engage them back in. If not, we are then looking to get them into some further education. We are looking at full-time and part-time employment, and that involves traineeships and apprenticeships. In some cases it is just re-engaging them, or engaging them with a service of some sort to help them with other issues. Of those 120, 7 have re-engaged with mainstream schooling. We have got 20-odd back into further education, bearing in mind those young people could have been out of school for up to two years, and sometimes three years, and then they have gone back into further education. We have 21 in full-time employment and 13 in part-time employment. Part-time means not just your 3 or 4 hours; it is over 20 hours a week. So they classify that as quite a full-time job for some of them. Certainly the mentoring does come into it in a big way with us.

Ms NEESON — I do not know if you have heard from any other young people, but Laura has quite an interesting story to tell, which I think you have heard a little bit of before.

Ms SCOTT — I actually really, really enjoyed school. I went to Monivae. But I had a big fight with my mum and moved out of home when I was 16 and moved in with my friend. We started wagging a little bit, and by the end of probably about six months into year 11 I got told I would not be able to pass because I had missed too much school, so I left and went to the youth program. I was there for probably six months. I was just finishing off the rest of that year. Then I tried to get back into schooling and went to try to get into Baimbridge. I had just turned 18, and they would not let me because they had tried it the year before and a lot of students had gone back but they just dropped out or they were not doing very well, so they said they probably would not do it the year I wanted to go there. So I went to TAFE and tried to get into the VCAL course. They said they did not run it in Hamilton; they only ran it down in Warrnambool. I think I went back to SGAE for a little while, and then this year I went up to try to get into VCAL again and the lady there said I was a mature-age student and could just go straight into studying for a diploma of legal and business practice — because I wanted to be a lawyer — and do the VCAL alongside it. That is where I started this year. Hopefully when I am 21 I will transfer into university in Warrnambool, if they let me.

Mr DIXON — They do law at Warrnambool, do they?

Ms SCOTT — At Deakin; they have only just started, I think, last year.

Ms NEESON — Laura is also working part time.

Ms SCOTT — I did six months full time. I did this substitution thing where they paid my work — my wages or something like that — for six months. I did that full time, and now I am just back on part time mainly because I am trying to do my schooling at the same time, too. I will probably move to Warrnambool some time this year.

Ms HAMILL — Laura is attending SGAE for two days a week, back from doing her senior VCAL — it is equivalent to year 12 English and maths, of course — and the rest of her study is done by distance education.

Ms SCOTT — Because they do not have a law course here you have to do it off campus, which is a little bit difficult. I think I would much prefer if I could go in somewhere and actually have a teacher there.

Ms HAMILL — This is as well as your part-time employment. About how many hours a week would you get with your part time?

Ms SCOTT — Averaging probably 15 at the moment, though another girl works about 40. I have done it for two weeks, so normally it is about 15 to 20.

The CHAIR — So with your distance education, is it all in written form, or do you get some face-to-face support.

Ms SCOTT — I have had no face to face yet. I have been sent a letter with two phone numbers on it to call if you get stuck. You get this big, thick book that you read, you do the work and you have to send it away. It is little bit difficult. I find it a bit hard to push myself all the time. Going to VCAL is fine — getting up and doing all the work there — but when you have to do it yourself — —

Ms NEESON — The interesting thing with Laura is that when she first came to us three years ago, effectively at that stage she wanted to be a lawyer. She has still got that goal, which is incredible, too, because she has had quite a journey in those three years.

The CHAIR — All right. If we can just get a bit of a sense from Nathan, Sarah and Amylee of how they have come to be in the program and what they want to go on to; tell us, Nathan?

Mr AINGER — I left school last year because I was finding that they were not basing it towards abilities. There were subjects like history and stuff like that. I thought that they need to focus it more on things you are going to use in life, like a job or something like that. I want to be a fitter and turner, so more hands on like the techs school used to do. That is why I came to SGAE, because they focus more on that. Mondays is stuff that you are going to use in the job, like OHS and stuff like that, and Tuesdays is literacy and Wednesdays is maths. The focus on English is the stuff related to getting a job.

The CHAIR — So what do you hope to do next year?

Mr AINGER — I will probably do the VCAL course.

The CHAIR — Is there an opportunity to go into fitting and turning here that you can link into?

Mr AINGER — Walkers.

The CHAIR — Good luck with it. Sarah, what is your story?

Ms CLARK — I left school in year 8, because I could not handle all the work and I need more one-on-one help. I was not at school for 2½ years or so, but I went to a few different schools for a few weeks.

The CHAIR — Are you from Hamilton?

Ms CLARK — No, I am from Geelong. My mum moved up into Penshurst, and I got into some trouble with the law. I moved up here with my mum. We were looking for schools, and my JPET worker helped me get into SGAE.

The CHAIR — What are you hoping to go on and do in the next few years, then?

Ms CLARK — I am doing the hospitality course at the moment. I am doing a certificate II and hopefully a certificate III next semester, and then do commercial cookery next year.

The CHAIR — Amylee?

Ms SHARROCK — Yes. I used to go to Baimbridge, and then I left because there were a lot of issues at home and at school. It was getting a bit annoying. Then it was Mr Speed who offered me to go to SGAE, so I went there and did the youth program for half of last year, and this year I am doing the commercial cookery and the youth program.

The CHAIR — Do you want to go into hospitality?

Ms SHARROCK — Yes. Being a chef is pretty cool.

Ms NEESON — Both these girls are 15, just in terms of where the school-leaving age is. Sarah has been helping us out — I mentioned — at the training kitchen on a Friday night, at the golf club. Sarah has been working with me or one of the other staff members — we help with the kids — and has been taking the orders. She is a vibrant, bubbly personality and a great kid. She is going really well at that. Amy is in the kitchen on a Friday night. They rotate through different roles in the kitchen. How have you found that?

Ms SHARROCK — Yes, good.

Ms NEESON — The chef yells at you a bit at times.

Mr DIXON — You have been watching too much TV!

Ms HAMILL — Amy is involved in a five-day-a-week program, which allows her to attend the youth education program for three days, and the other two days, which are 9 to 5, studying commercial cookery, so it is a way of getting back into that five-day mentality.

The CHAIR — Terrific.

Mr DIXON — Kathryn, Julie was saying that you manage the pathways, and you try to keep track of what is going on. We have a similar program down where I live on the Mornington Peninsula. They have got a very high success rate in terms of students staying engaged and either finding a job or doing some training. Have you got any longitudinal results of how the students are going once they leave?

Ms HAMILL — Yes, we do tracking. Certainly we have the MIP program running, and we track the students. I am not sure how often they do it in schools, but ours could be every two or three months if I am not in visual contact, or maybe just having a meeting with students via telephone. That can go on. I have been here for 4½ years, and I still have contact with students from that first year.

Mr DIXON — How are they going?

Ms HAMILL — Great.

Mr DIXON — All on a pathway of some sort?

Ms HAMILL — We have one here locally that is working full time, and he was with us about three years ago now. He took on a part-time job for 20 hours a week and still kept doing his youth ed work so he could get his full certificate, which he did. He then went on to full-time work, and he is still engaged in that job today. I am not saying all of them are — a lot are. You can look at Laura, who was engaged in education but was still floating and not finding anything really secure, so she came back. We do have a lot come back. A lot come back just to say hello and let us know where they are — popping in. It is good that we have been able to assist Laura with that next step into her VCAL.

Mr DIXON — Laura, how did you find out about SGAE?

Ms SCOTT — I think it was probably just one of my friends from school. I do not really remember. I did that JPET program, too, so it could have been through that, but I think one of my friends started at the same time — the friend that I moved in with. Because we both did not go to school enough, she also dropped out, so I think we probably both found it together. Her mum kind of pushed us — like, ‘You have to go do something’ — so I am pretty sure I probably found out through JPET.

Mr DIXON — The program is fairly well known around the area, I would imagine.

Ms HAMILL — Absolutely, and that contact is really on a mentoring role, too, where we have mentors working with the students. Certainly we have linkages in community areas with businesses, with the TAFE, with employment agencies, and certainly with local services. We are working with them all the time. We do tasters out at TAFE as well.

Mr ELASMAR — Julie, listening to the different stories, what can be done to help the young people to continue their education through university or TAFE?

Ms NEESON — Nathan probably liked more of a tech-school approach to learning while he was at school. One of the difficult things in Hamilton very much is, because there is only one government school — there are three other private schools, but they are not affordable for everyone — there is not the alternative.

The CHAIR — Did the ATC start a campus here?

Ms NEESON — It is not up and running yet, and that is limited to the number of areas that it is going to be dealing with. I think there are only four.

Ms HAMILL — Certainly the youth education program caters for students from 16 to 19 years. When we were referring to the 15-year-olds before, we have to have our memorandum of understanding between the school and ourselves, so we are able to have younger students.

Ms NEESON — We have got five this year who are under 16 in our program.

Ms HAMILL — There is not normally an easy transition from school to us. They actually become disengaged from the school through exit purposes or family reasons, homelessness, a lot of other things before they come back to us. Some are sent from a service, some just walk in off the street, some because their parents have had enough of having them at home for so long.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Does SGAE provide other services to students once they leave to go to TAFE or university and then might have some problems? Do you provide anything else to them?

Ms HAMILL — Not as a comeback. The only thing we offer is for them to go on to some VCAL program. This allows us stay engaged with them rather than having them for 6 to 12 months and letting them go with nowhere to go. Because we are an adult education facility, we do not really have anything further, as in a higher education facility, so we have to source that elsewhere. Also, a lot of our students do not tend to move away from the area.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I want to ask the students how they get to SGAE — public transport?

Ms CLARK — Bus for me, school bus.

Ms NEESON — As long as there are places on the normal school buses, they are allowed to travel on the school buses. Sarah is out at Penshurst so she can come in on the bus. Otherwise if they are in town they can still link up with school buses or they can walk, whatever the situation is.

Ms HAMILL — The majority of our students would walk, which makes it difficult in the really cold or wet times. Some do not have a bike to get there or transport, the younger ones, for the parents to drop them there, so getting there is a difficult situation for some. Most of them walk everywhere.

Ms SCOTT — And actually going if you do not have your parents there to push you. You would just rather sit at home and do nothing, so to actually get out of bed and go is an effort for some people.

The CHAIR — Funding has obviously been a perennial issue in trying to support young people in those alternative programs. How has your funding worked out?

Ms NEESON — For the program I have funding coming from four different sources. It is very much a juggle through the whole year with where the budget is at and where it is not at. Under 16s — getting MOUs and schools to agree to handle across a percentage of funds has been an ongoing issue this year. The Youth Guarantee funding that supposedly exists — we were given some 18 months ago, and we are not going to spend it because we have been told that we might have to hand it back. No-one has told us the criteria or guidelines, and we have been advised just to keep it on hold. Other than that, some of our young people are through YPP funding. Then we have another arrangement with Baimbridge College for students who are enrolled on census date. They are enrolled at Baimbridge. We get a percentage of their funding, but they attend with us full time. We have really had to source funding by using almost under-the-table methods.

The CHAIR — A lot of it is arrangements through the schools and you getting a percentage of the school's funding via MOUs?

Ms NEESON — Yes.

Mr DIXON — That MOU arrangement is because of the age.

Ms NEESON — For the under-16s it is the MOU, but there is also an MOU we have now established for 16 to 19 year olds, and that is really a way to release money to us.

Ms HAMILL — Only prior to census day, which allows us to take more students. Otherwise we would not receive enough funding to cope.

Ms NEESON — At the moment in a direct sense we would only be able to put on 11 students for the whole year or 22 for half semesters if we did not look for alternative ways to source funding.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Julie, if I was Santa Claus how much money would you need in recurrent funding per year to run a program?

Ms NEESON — It is a bottomless pit, isn't it? The unknown is that when we start at the beginning of the year we do not know how many young people are coming in any way at all because they just drift in in phases. We will have the young people who perhaps even inquire in December the previous year, and some will come in at the very end of January and the first week in February. They drift in slowly during the first term. In the second term we normally have a drift in. We have not noticed that in a big way this year, we have had about four or five come in. The second semester is normally when indication has been given to young people that they are not going to pass that year, and that is when we seem to get another wave. Even in term 4 they have driven teachers mad.

Ms HAMILL — We have had 28 students so far.

Ms NEESON — Twenty-eight students so far this year, yes. We seem to average around about the low 40s over the year. The dollar rate varies for each of the funding sources and the length of time the student attends.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So you do not want any money?

Mr DIXON — He has not got any to give. Humour him!

Ms HAMILL — Hypothetically.

Ms NEESON — The hard thing is because our youth program is run in an adult education centre we have got a mixture of programs going on at the same time. We might have an elderly group of adults who have come in to learn how to use computers and a group of young people going out at break time, and the elderly people could be knocked flying down the stairs if they are not careful. It is a real juggle, because we do not have the proper resources as such, but we make do. I mentioned earlier the respect angle, and these kids are great now. They acknowledge you on the street, they smile, they make eye contact and all of that, which I think in lots of cases is a huge outcome. That is very important, and mixing with adults is something that helps them in lots of ways.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your contribution today. For young people sometimes it is a bit hard to speak to people who are supposed to be scary, so it is terrific that you have come along and spoken to us and shared with us.

Mr DIXON — We are scary, so thank you!

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 2008

Members

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

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

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

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Ms L. Toddun, facilitator, Local Community Partnerships;

Ms Z. Dyke, student, and

Ms E. Nagorcka, student, Hamilton campus, RMIT University; and

Ms E. Shepherd, project officer, Greater Green Triangle Area consultative committee.

The CHAIR — We have some young people coming forward to speak to us to share their stories. While they are doing that I can acknowledge David Koch, who has just arrived. He is an upper house state member for this region and a Hamilton resident. I should also mention that Hugh Delahunty, the lower house MP for Lowan, passed on his apologies today. Thank you very much for coming along. You are just listed as young people in our notes, as opposed to the older people we have been hearing from. It is great to have you here. You have all got different stories to share with us. I do not know whether there is a particular order in which you are speaking to us, but, as you know, we are looking to try and understand what are the issues that are preventing younger people from this region from going on to take up higher education. We are certainly looking forward to the input from each of you to help us come up with some recommendations as to how to address that issue.

Ms TODDUN — We originally thought it would be a lot more formal presenting today, and we have very little experience in public speaking. I said that I would read the stories from all the girls, and then we can field some questions and have a chat afterwards. First, I will start with Edwina. Edwina was born and raised in Hamilton. When she finished year 12 she did not have a high enough ENTER score to get into nursing in Melbourne. Not wanting to be left behind in Hamilton, she decided to do a short course in beauty in Melbourne. The idea was to work until classed as a mature-age student and then apply for nursing in Melbourne. Three years after finishing year 12 she was still working in Melbourne and had almost forgotten about the plan to go back to do nursing. It took a bad boss to remind her what she really wanted to do. She then had to look into how to get back into study. Pretty fast it became very clear that she would not be able to support herself in Melbourne if she were to study, and it did not feel right asking her parents for assistance. It became clear that the only way she would be able to study was to move in with her parents, where they could support her with what they already had. That meant moving back to Hamilton. By age 21, not seeing her friends every day did not really seem that big of a problem.

When she moved back to Hamilton, the immediate problem she noticed was transport. After relying on public transport for three years — she had never owned a car — there were no trains, trams or NightRiders in Hamilton. You really do need a car; otherwise, having a job, going to university and having a life prove very difficult. Buying a car meant paying for registration, insurance, petrol and maintenance, which costs a lot more than a monthly student concession metro ticket.

The next problem was finding a job. While Centrelink does provide some assistance, you still need to have a job. While living in Melbourne, she had a full-time job and on top of that another part-time job — about another 16 hours a week. Finding a job in the country that will work around study commitments also proved to be difficult. She guesses she is really lucky to have such giving parents who are able to provide for her and do not see having her and her 22-year-old brother still living at home as a problem. She has no doubt in her mind that without them she would not be studying.

Then we have Zoe at the end. Zoe completed year 12 at Baimbridge College in 2000 and went on to complete a traineeship at Robson's Pharmacy where she still works today. After five years in pharmacy working her way up to become the pharmacy manager and a qualified dispensary assistant, she also completed many other courses along the way, including a diploma of business management and a diploma of human resource management. She could not climb the ladder in this job any further and decided it was time for a new challenge. Zoe enrolled as a mature-age student at RMIT University in Hamilton to commence a bachelor of nursing degree in 2006. It was not something that specifically interested her at first, but it was the only tertiary course offered in Hamilton, so it had to be that. By this time she had established a long-term relationship in Hamilton with her partner, who was involved in his family farm, and she also purchased a home in Hamilton. She was heavily involved in the local hockey association as a player and coach and had many friends in the area. It was also important to be near her family, especially as she assists her parents with the care of her intellectually disabled sister. With all this in mind, it really was not an option to move away to study.

At first university life was exciting and it was great to be back learning again, but the financial pressure was and still is immense. As Zoe had been living with her partner for five years, their income was judged to be combined, and this prevented Zoe from receiving any financial support from the government. Therefore she had to continue to work as many shifts as possible at the pharmacy throughout her studies to pay for her mortgage, schoolbooks, bills, groceries, petrol et cetera, and the list goes on. The pressure placed on students to work puts strain on their study, as it takes up a lot of their time. Luckily Zoe's family and partner have been a huge support to her throughout the past three years, as it would be impossible to continue study without their financial support.

The pressure is increased when students are required to partake in clinical placements, which are a valuable part of learning within the course. Students are required to take time off from their jobs to travel away from home, which means they have no income and the added expenses of travel, food and accommodation whilst they are away. Another financial pressure that is beginning to concern Zoe and her fellow students is the repayment of the HECS debt that may be required within the next few years.

You hear all the time in the media that there is a shortage of nurses and that Australia wants more nurses; however, it is out of reach of many to become a nurse due to the high costs involved with completing a university degree. If the RMIT campus was not in Hamilton, Zoe would never have pursued a career in nursing or even considered further studies. It is a fantastic thing to have here in Hamilton, and it provides the perfect opportunity for people like Zoe to further their careers if they can afford to do so.

And then we have Emma. Emma is 21 years old and wants to study to become a midwife. She applied for uni at the end of year 12 and was accepted in Ballarat. She could not afford to pay all the expenses related to moving away on her own, so she deferred for a year so she could work until she was classed as financially independent. The following year she applied to live on residence. She found out a few weeks before O week that she did not get a place, so she had nowhere to live and did not know anyone in Ballarat to live with. She also found out she would not receive any financial assistance because she had not been out of school for long enough and that she would have to wait another four months before she was eligible. In the meantime she was meant to move away to a new town where she had no job and nowhere to live. Considering this was only a few weeks before uni was set to start, she felt this was unachievable, but she tried to attend uni for the first few weeks, making the 2-hour drive back and forth from Hamilton to Ballarat a few times a week and staying in temporary accommodation. After a few weeks of this Emma decided to quit uni, as there was no way she could continue the way things were.

Last year Emma applied for uni in Hamilton and was accepted. She is living with her boyfriend, and she was declined any form of financial assistance because she is classed as being in a de facto relationship. Emma is 21 and her boyfriend is 24. Together they have a mortgage, car repayments and general expenses. There is no way her boyfriend could financially support her. They have separate incomes and separate bank accounts, yet she is not able to get any assistance because the government thinks her 24-year-old boyfriend should be supporting her. Because of this, Emma had to decline her university application and will be applying to study via correspondence through a South Australian university, which she will have to complete while working full time. It will take her eight years to finish her midwifery degree. And then there is me.

The CHAIR — You left yourself to last.

Ms TODDUN — In 2003 I was faced with the decision all year-12 leavers are forced to make — what to do with my life beyond school. Having only moved to Hamilton from South Africa two years prior, I was not too happy about the fact that I may have to leave my network of friends that I had only just developed. Due to the fact that I did not want to move far away, my university options were very limited. The closest thing, RMIT in Hamilton, was renowned for nursing, but unfortunately that was not the profession I saw myself in.

Next there was Warrnambool, an hour away, which is where I ended up studying commerce. I was lucky in terms of financial support, as my father looked after my accommodation and the then HECS fees. Not being able to defer the course I was doing to work towards the youth allowance threshold, I had to work two part-time jobs in between full-time study to buy fuel and food as well as a minimum of 250 kilometres, sometimes up to 500 kilometres, each week to get myself back home. I finally got through it and was faced with the next challenge, finding a job in which I was able to use the qualification I obtained. The options in a small country town are not as vast as metro areas. Luckily, five months later I found a challenging position which I thoroughly enjoy. I was able to settle down and buy a house with my long-term partner. My dream is to now complete a diploma of education to qualify as a primary school teacher. This unfortunately is near impossible with a mortgage and the need to give up full-time wages. It is simply not an option.

That is our story. There were a few notes that I made while sitting through this morning's submissions. In terms of scholarships, there really is not much on offer. I looked into scholarships, wanting to do primary teaching, and there was one that I found offered to one student from regional areas, but that was only for undergraduate degrees not postgraduate degrees, so that was out of the question.

In terms of a deferral year being a good or bad option for students, in some respects people see it as a year off to refresh and renew themselves for the study ahead. That can be good if you get a good job and prepare yourself for university, but a lot of the time people lose sight of what it is they are having the year off for and they get stuck there and they do not get back to university. After the first year of study the chances of you returning again reduce more and more and more each year you have to go back. A lot of people go for their first year, and if they get back for the second year, they have trouble getting back for the third year and sometimes it gets worse and worse as they go. I found a lot of people while I was at university who were just there because it was the next thing to do. They were too scared to go out and get jobs. University was just somewhere they went to, but they were not actually there for study, which was frustrating because there were a lot more people who might be deserving of those positions who wanted to study that missed out because they had better ENTER scores or whatever.

In Hamilton we have great facilities at RMIT. I do not see why study via correspondence or videoconferencing or internet or any of those new technologies could not be an option for people who want to do courses that may not be as close as here or Warrnambool even.

The CHAIR — We have RMIT university addressing us after lunch. Any other questions you would like us to ask, provide them to us. We will certainly be interested in following up those sorts of issues.

Ms TODDUN — Study via correspondence is hard for a lot of people, and they say it is out of the question because they do not have the motivation and all that kind of thing, but when you look at the extra motivation needed to study via correspondence, it could not be a lot more than that needed to travel all that way and have all the extra commitments you need when you leave town. I do not see there is much difference.

In terms of careers advice for school students, I think it is a lot better and bigger than it used to be. I currently work for Careers Advice Australia, so I probably have a vested interest in letting you know that it is going well. The careers teacher network in Hamilton is quite strong. They meet regularly and we organise things like careers expos and guest speakers and try-a-career days and all that kind of thing. That is working well. I think there are lots of things out there, which makes it hard, but we try our best to educate students as to what is there.

MIP is also another issue in schools. Government schools get funding for it, so they tend to deal with it a lot better than any private schools. They do not have the money there to map and interview students individually and deal with their concerns separately. They bunch them all together and give them careers advice. Sometimes it could be done a bit better. We are looking into programs such as coaching young people for success and the likes — those sorts of programs we can offer to schools which they might be interested in taking up. They are a lot less expensive than outsourcing Westvic in Hamilton. Baimbridge College outsources the MIP program to Westvic. They do interviews and follow up the students that way, which is costly. They are just a few points that I scribbled down through the morning.

The CHAIR — We have got some questions for you.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Were you happy with the school that you went to in terms of the information that it provided you for courses or pathways?

Ms SHEPHERD — I personally was not in my school. I went to Monivae College in Hamilton. It was pretty much the whole year your ENTER score was going to determine what you were going to do with the rest of your life. It was not, ‘If you don’t get your ENTER score, you can do this, this and this’. It was just, ‘You have got to get your ENTER score and you have to go to uni and you have to do this’. That was about it. I think we had a careers teacher, but really I do not even know for the whole year whether we had one sit-down thing with even her or the whole group. I know we had assemblies where they discussed what we would do, how we would apply for uni, how we would do everything like that, but I do not think there was anything else like, ‘If do not apply for uni, you can do this’, or how you can access uni or anything like that. It was clear-cut — that is what you are going to do. I do not know if it was just because that was a private school and that is what they expected of you or not.

The CHAIR — How have you got that kind of advice since you left school?

Ms SHEPHERD — Through my own doing — the internet and just looking it up myself. I finished and went into full-time work, so I have been out on my own for a while. Other than that, it was not even accessible when I was at school.

Ms NAGORCKA — I am much the same as Emma. I went to Hamilton and Alexandra. There they sort of focused on perhaps the ones that were going to get the higher ENTER score and said, 'This is fantastic. This is what you will do'. Anyone who was considered to be a bit of a write-off, then it was sort of just like, 'Here are your job options. Perhaps you could go to TAFE', but that was it. It was, 'Here is the TAFE thing. Off you go'. So yes, I guess they focused a lot more on the brighter students.

Ms DYKE — It was a long time ago. I do not remember being told anything about going to university or anything like that. It is a shame because when I was in year 12, RMIT just opened that next year. I do not know why we were not told that it was opening and that you could stay here and do this.

Mr ELASMAR — During this public hearing we hear many different stories, but in your contribution you mentioned that students had to defer because of financial issues. They might come back in one year or they might not come back. Are there high percentages coming back or not coming back? Do you know from talking to others?

Ms TODDUN — I do not know the figures, but a lot of friends at school deferred to make the money. It is all about the youth allowance and all that kind of thing. The ones who do go back often change their courses three times when they are at uni because it is not what they expected or things are different at university.

Mr ELASMAR — How hard is it to find a job — a part-time job or other jobs?

Ms SHEPHERD — If you are in the country, it is very hard.

Ms TODDUN — A job to you use your degree, you mean?

Mr ELASMAR — Yes.

Ms TODDUN — In Hamilton your options are limited because there are not obviously the things that are available in Melbourne or the big corporations and all that kind of thing that have graduate programs and take on people who have left university, straight out of university. In Hamilton they often look for experience, which is hard to get when you cannot start somewhere. I found that a lot. I applied for a few jobs.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How easy is it to find part-time jobs while you are studying?

Ms TODDUN — Easy enough.

Ms SHEPHERD — Easy if you want to work in hospitality. If not, no.

Ms TODDUN — I worked at Subway and I did waitressing and bar work and all that sort of thing. If you want to do anything other than that, there is probably not much to offer that fits in with your study — that is the major thing. Hospitality is after normal hours, so you can do that after your study, but there is not a lot that you can do that is not during those times.

Mr KOTSIRAS — And transport?

Ms TODDUN — When I finished school I had three months of getting to Warrnambool and back with no licence because I was only 17. That was made easier because my parents had the time to drive me down, but there were a lot of students who did not have that and had to catch buses down and back to Warrnambool, which is hard when you have a whole lot of books and bags and clothes and things, catching a bus all the time. But there is transport to get there and back. Often you have to wait for it. It is not there when you need it — at the right times and that sort of thing.

Mr DIXON — Just a general question of all you girls here. Are most of your friends still here in town and in the area?

Ms SHEPHERD — No, I am the only one.

Mr DIXON — Really? Yes.

Ms TODDUN — A lot of my friends are in Melbourne, and in Ballarat too. Very few of my schoolfriends are still at home.

Ms NAGORCKA — Yes, I am the same. Everyone has gone. It is just me.

Ms DYKE — I have got a few people around that I went to school with. They sort of go away but then they always sort of seem to come back.

Mr DIXON — If you hang around, they might all come back.

Ms SHEPHERD — And all my friends who have gone, all their parents are financially supporting them in Melbourne. So they are paying for everything for them.

Mr DIXON — Okay.

Ms SHEPHERD — It was not an option whether they were going to go to uni or not. They were just going.

The CHAIR — Emma, where do you see your opportunities in the future? You have sort of said you are locked out of the opportunity you want to take up in tertiary.

Ms SHEPHERD — I want to study midwifery, so I am going to apply for part-time study.

The CHAIR — And where can you do midwifery?

Ms SHEPHERD — It is through a uni in South Australia.

The CHAIR — All right.

Ms TODDUN — By correspondence.

Ms SHEPHERD — Yes. By correspondence, sorry. Because I am already working two jobs at the moment and that is without studying, so to add studying part time is going to be hard enough without trying to study four subjects. To do midwifery it is normally a standard four-year course, so it will be eight years part time, and that is if I can still — I mean eight years from now I might want kids, so I might have to drop back to one subject or no subjects for a year or two. Even now I would be 28, almost 30, when I finish.

The CHAIR — And so how do you cover the cost for that?

Ms SHEPHERD — I will have to keep working, probably two jobs on top of study. Yes. And then there is HECS. I have not looked into HECS — whether I would have to start paying that back while I am also earning an income or it is until I have finished uni. I find it hard that we do not get any financial assistance because I live with my boyfriend. I think they need to look at a new way to judge that.

The CHAIR — Yes. You should have kept quiet about that, shouldn't you?

Ms SHEPHERD — It is hard when you have to — —

The CHAIR — It is an issue about people's honesty as opposed to people who take all the — —

Ms SHEPHERD — It is not even that. At the moment we own a house together and we are on a mortgage together, so you cannot hide that.

The CHAIR — No.

Ms SHEPHERD — Even if you tried. And my friend works for Centrelink, so — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — You should not hide that.

The CHAIR — No, of course you shouldn't, but it is interesting.

Mr KOTSIRAS — It is if you change your relationship.

Ms SHEPHERD — Also, I do not know why they do it, but they say you have to have been out of school for I think 18 months or something before you can even get any of that. So if you go and start uni, even if you defer for a year, you are still not eligible.

Ms TODDUN — Everyone talks about the HECS, but that is if you get a commonwealth supported place. When I was looking at doing primary teaching — they have, I don't know, thousands of people apply and they only offer 200 commonwealth-supported places, which quarters the bill that you will have. I think it was \$14 000 to do the course full fee-paying or \$4800 or something if you have a commonwealth-supported place. So if you are lucky enough to get one of those, it makes it easier, but it is still not easy.

Ms SHEPHERD — Another thing was that I found when I did not get my place on residence in Ballarat but went to O week in the first few weeks, a lot of Ballarat people got residence. So someone who lives in Hamilton does not get that, but the people who are living with their parents are given residence.

Mr DIXON — It is a long way from the centre of the city.

Ms SHEPHERD — It made no sense. When I rang and applied they said, 'You are mature age, as in you are not a school leaver straight away and you have been working full time and you have applied early, so we will give you a place and we will try and send it out early'. I was waiting for the letter. It just did not come. Then I rang them and they said, 'No, you didn't get it'. Meanwhile I was meant to start uni in two weeks and had nowhere to live and all my family are in Hamilton. I have no family outside Hamilton, so there was no-one I could live with, and all my friends moved to Melbourne, so I could not live with any of them. In two weeks you are expected — and when you do not have a job in Ballarat, you cannot financially look after yourself anyway.

The CHAIR — Okay. All right. Can I ask Leigh, I have not heard of Careers Advice Australia, whom you work for, but it is a bit relevant to the inquiry. So what is Careers Advice Australia?

Ms TODDUN — It is federally funded through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. At the moment we are in limbo as to whether we will get the funding again with the new government, but I think it looks as if we will have it until the end of 2009 at least. Basically our target audience is 13 to 19-year-olds. We assist with their career and transition decisions and offer things in three different areas. There is Adopt a School where we encourage relationships between business and schools to work on projects that provide experience for students in real workplace jobs. Then there is career and transition support where we do things like careers expos and things like that — all the education side of it. And then there is a program called parents as career transition support where we provide workshops for parents and educate them on things like VTAC applications and how the ENTER score and all that sort of thing works. Then there is the last one, which is structured workplace learning, where we help schools place students that are doing VET subjects. They have to do one day a week of work and we encourage businesses to be involved in school-based programs and have students in their workplace to have the hands-on learning experience.

The CHAIR — And how far afield do your responsibilities lie?

Ms TODDUN — I am in Hamilton, Casterton and Balmoral. There are a few tiers to Careers Advice Australia. At the top there are 12 national industry career specialists who feed information through to regional industry careers advisers, and then there are LCP (local community partnership) facilitators of which I am one. There are 213 of us across the country in different service regions.

The CHAIR — It sounds like a program that should continue in one form or another.

Ms TODDUN — Hopefully.

The CHAIR — Any other questions? Thank you very much. It is terrific to have you along.

Ms TODDUN — Thanks for the opportunity.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 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 M. Bell, treasurer, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, and health programs manager, Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation, and

Mr D. Rose, chair, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, and representative, Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation.

The CHAIR — You have come from Heywood, I understand; is that right for both of you?

Mr ROSE — That is right, yes.

The CHAIR — We have had an interesting morning already hearing from a range of groups about issues relating to the take-up of tertiary education by young people in this area, and we are interested to gain your perspective on the issue. Thank you very much for coming along. If you speak for 15 minutes or so, then we will probably have some questions to follow up with.

Mr ROSE — Do you want to start with Winda Mara in general?

Mr BELL — Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation has been established in Heywood and surrounds since 1991. It is an organisation developed by the local indigenous community. We really needed a social support agency way back then. Lake Condah mission had a tourist venture happening out there at the time, and around 1990 we had about 40 or 50 indigenous people living there in the tourist complex. That was their home; that is where they were actually living. So in Victoria back in 1990 we had indigenous people living in poverty out at Lake Condah mission in a hostel-residential type facility. Education was high on the agenda for us back then. We were not getting any kids through VCE and stuff like that, so that was another major issue. Obviously health was another of the key three or four, and employment was another one of the key issues for indigenous people back in 1990.

Winda Mara's first four years of existence was voluntary. There were a lot of voluntary services, and committed people committed a lot of time and effort. We were lucky that ATSIC was born. In about 1991 I think the first ATSIC elections took place, and Winda Mara grew from the ATSIC process. We were able to get a representative on the board of ATSIC for the regional council and that put us right in favour with knowledge of resources and how to build our community. That is what really got us going. We were able to start a housing program. I think today Winda Mara owns 25 community houses. We bought the lot of the old state government houses, which were commission homes — strong, well-built homes. The ventilation did not quite suit the need, but we had a budget of X amount of dollars. We did not buy one house; we had a need to house the guys who were living out there. Today we house quite a few people, and we have still got a major waiting list for housing, because a lot of community people want to move in with us. We developed a housing policy. Even over that period it is still growing.

Employment has been a big issue. We have touched on the tourism side. Right now we have a community tourist company called Budj-Bim tours, and we have got a couple of people who do get regular work, but a lot of other people, a lot of single parents, will pick up a day here or something like that. It helps out, and it helps the company out because we are able to provide training. 'Respect our culture' was a major initiative across the continent. The major indigenous tourism unit has developed a bit of a program about respecting our culture, and a lot of the people who do that learn about how to present and talk about local culture in the local area. It is about being accredited, and that is where the company is going.

Land management is big in employment for Koori people in our region. With the Gunditjmarra-Gunditjmirring native title body receiving native title last year, the lands that the Gunditjmarra own or have control over are substantial, 3000 to 5000 acres at a guess, which means that we are pretty asset rich at the moment to do some good ventures. These properties need maintaining. They provide great opportunity to learn good skills. The land management team owns a couple of little Kubota tractors with a front-end loader on one of them, and with a slashing program we are able to get some good skills, moving away from the old shovel. You still need to have the shovel and pick stuff happening, but we have been able to train a few boys up. We are sort of taking the initiative and training the guys up, but accessing this, due to OHS issues, is a problem. Some indigenous people have high contact with the criminal justice system and a lot of that is the acquired brain injury. The repeat offender is one of the main reasons why the contact is high. If we were able to reduce some of the repeat offenders who have got acquired brain injuries or are just slow and who really need a bit of one-on-one tutoring to give them skills in using a Kubota tractor, they could actually cut the grass around the Lake Condah mission as a communal project.

Some of these guys have had only 20 hours of community work and there is a real struggle because managing that community work is really, really difficult as you really need a one-to-one person keeping an eye on some of these guys. Some of them have never ever worked. I know that about four or five of them have never ever worked and do not know how to use basic tools. We buried an aunty there before Christmas. We usually backfill the grave ourselves; it was hard work watching about four of these boys use a shovel. It is something we take for granted. That is the skill level that we are dealing with. We all know that when we are dealing with that it is time

consuming. We have to get it done somehow. We have got a group of four or five blokes at Portland alone; Hamilton would have a couple more. There would be possibly a dozen or so of those blokes around who are really at the bottom end of the skilled team. We are trying to come up with solutions to try to address some of those needs. We do a lot with health, but obviously here we are talking about training. We have done substantial work on training with the mob over the last few years. Is that enough lead-in for you, Daryl?

Mr ROSE — Yes. Probably just picking up on that point, part of our biggest issue with the whole training stuff is that small towns have small numbers, and small numbers mean that we are not a priority. We go off to Department of Justice meetings and they talk about us not being a priority area, because we are not. Yet the needs of one of our people are just as important as those of a person in Mildura. I think they focus on the Milduras and Sheppartons and whatever of the world, and North Fitzroy and Broadmeadows and down at Lake Tyers or something, but they forget about the kids out in our regions. Sometimes it is a bit of a battle to actually come up with the goods.

I will run you through a bit of history. We have had our LAECG, the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, since about 1976. We have been very active. Aunty Laura has been vice-president of VAEAI, the peak indigenous body on education. I have been involved with them for the same amount of time. We have had a very intense thing. We have had a very intense push towards education in our community. From the years 1995 to 2005 we had 25 kids in Heywood who did VCE. We had only 14 kids in the same period who did not do the VCE. We were running at a pretty good percentage. We lost probably five of those in the first year. They were kids who had not been brought up on homework centres that the commonwealth had at the time. Lo and behold the commonwealth, in its wisdom, changed everything and sends funds to those northern fellows who are in real need, who never want to speak English but who they are going to try to teach to speak English anyway. We actually got our homework centre gutted from \$54 000 back to \$28 000 this year — back from somewhere around \$100 000 a couple of years ago. Now instead of us being able to run a separate secondary homework centre, like we did when we had those great numbers, tonight we will have a meeting to say, 'Kids, what can we do?', because they are not coming to the homework centre anymore because we have to run it straight after school. We do not have enough money to run the programs at night. They are the programs and the small numbers that we face, and all these great people are making decisions — forgetting about us in little rural towns like Heywood; we cannot even get a tutor in Heywood. There are only about two teachers in Heywood who actually live in Heywood. All of them leave town, so if you want any extra help or want to do anything else you have to leave town — just to get extra help. All of those different types of things happen. Three of the students out of the 25 tried to go to tertiary education, and only one of them is still at it; the other two dropped out. They have to go to Ballarat, Geelong, Warrnambool — they have to leave town to do any education. If you want to do a TAFE course in Heywood, the town itself, you virtually have to leave town. TAFE is not making it any easier on us, because the whole system of OTTE seems a little bit funny, the way they want to fund our programs and stuff like that, because they cannot even give us a straight answer on the funding mechanism. A guy from OTTE at the statewide committee the other week was not able to tell us whether, when you put up a plan through the Wurreker program, which I do not know if any of you are aware of — —

Wurreker is the Aboriginal vocational and educational plan. It was IITV (interactive instructional television) and all that sort of stuff. That gets put in. We sit there and develop this great plan and we put it in. We are involved in that part of the process, and then it goes to OTTE, and then OTTE goes out and negotiates with a TAFE college. They do not talk to us and the community, they do not speak to even their TAFE workers, and a decision is made between the hierarchy and OTTE on how many student contact hours they can have that year. All they asked for, or all they were given this year — we do not know, because no-one can tell us the answer — was 5000 student contact hours over at South West TAFE this year.

We wanted to run a small course in Heywood, on photography, arts and crafts and all these other little things, to engage our community so we might help the tourism stuff we have got going, and all of a sudden we were asked for a minimum of \$100 fee to come and do the courses. All of a sudden everyone who was thinking, 'It would be a good idea to do some of these programs had to please find \$100. If it had have been a profile course, a profile program rather than 5000 student contact hours, we would have walked in there for nothing. But because someone decided that there was no further need for training in Heywood, Portland and Hamilton, there were not enough hours in the area and therefore we have to find money if we want to do any course. There can be some people doing some courses under the profile who are not having to put out any money, yet if we want to do anything else that engages our community right now we have to start putting our hands in our pockets. Winda Mara has had to do it to a number of its staff. If we want to train anybody we cannot get enough hours and we have to have enough

numbers to do a course. Often you get people who want to come out and do something with us. They say, 'You need 15 people'. In Heywood we have four people who need training in the hospitality area, so what do we do about them? That is where we are getting killed on all these programs. People would have to leave town to go off and do a course. Therefore they do not go off and get training and therefore we miss out.

If they are trying to move away from home — you have probably heard any other non-indigenous person talk about how hard and how costly it is to try to move to Melbourne and all those types of things. I am moving my daughter this week. We did 3000 kilometres going back and forward to Geelong just to get an application in to rent a house. You have to view the house before you can put in an application — a marvellous system. She did 3000 kilometres just travelling down and back. She was lucky that she had us to back her up. It was lucky that she was not going down there to do a course and looking for accommodation with a family and all those types of things. Those types of things, when you have to do that much travel just to get there and you then need to find a couple of thousand dollars minimum for your rent and other things like that, make it near impossible for any of our mature people to go and get any further education. Because as soon as they have got some children — they have got a house and all those things — it just makes it too expensive to get up and do that move.

There is no support for Aboriginal students anymore in lots of ways — like there was 20 years ago. Twenty years ago I ran a student hostel in Mildura through Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. They decided they were not needed anymore. At Winda Mara we have talked for umpteen years about buying a house in Melbourne so our community could have a house in Melbourne so that if we needed to send our kids down they would know they have got a house to live in for a while, to get established. We have been talking about those types of things that we need for our communities, because we just cannot afford it. We have got a cousin down there, Aunty Cookie. Every one of our kids who have gone down there have stayed with her for a week or a month or two months or three months until they could settle. She is in a little three-bedroom place with her two kids. She is squashing them up and putting her family at risk by engaging and taking the rest of the kids in and trying to give them help. She puts herself at risk by taking the kids in. There are ones getting double dosed in the house, where there is not any more room to call your own. All those types of activities will not lead to us going for education. We just cannot afford to get up to move. I think you will find that across the board; you will find that with any person trying to leave Hamilton or these regions, unless they have got a good lot of money behind them. That is part of the problem.

Mr BELL — Winda Mara provides specialised stuff to this community. It helps indigenous people to get through and get into study. It is all documented. The family violence area is a major issue. We have got kids not being able to go to school because of family violence issues, and we have got to be able to address that. We had the situation at Portland at the start of 2006 where nearly all of the Koori kids failed school that year. This is only two years ago.

Mr ROSE — Nine out of 15 it was.

Mr BELL — Nine out of 15 failed school that year. Diverse reasons contributed. We are the group that is trying to come up with strategies to keep these kids engaged. It is not only the kids, it is the whole family you are trying to deal with. We try to offer some sort of connection for kids to the education system. Parents need to be connected to training and other things as well.

At the moment we are helping the family violence committee. The regional family violence strategy for Barwon South West has funded a sewing program at one of Winda Mara's sheds in Portland. I was there on Thursday last week, and there were about seven people there. You service them for the other areas — the violence and things like that. The people in that one little area were really happy to come into a Koori building, a Koori resource. Getting funding from the family violence section to pay for a tutor who is connected to the community as well, that is what we are getting at. All of a sudden they have got a little bag contract. They are making these little Koori bags, and there are a few other little initiatives like that. That is something similar to what we have done in the past in the old Lake Condah days pre-80s. In the mid-80s we did a small training thing which was building cray pots. Our stuff is around communal training where people like going. They want to go and do a few things and get a few resources.

We had the closing down of the community development employment program, the federally funded CDEP program, but it shut down. We need to have that flexibility. Winda Mara is strong enough now to be able to bring in some training. A lot of our people are on social support programs, so they are getting paid fortnightly, banging it out like that. When they were working with us on CDEP, we were able to pay them weekly, so it felt like they were going to work. We have lost that ability a bit. We have got a couple of other little programs on the go now, but it is

about sustaining those programs. We would like to see a profit at the end of the day, but it is around trying to get people connected back into the community. Then, once they gain a few good skills, they usually do move on and take up further employment.

We run community development programs. Things like Budj-Bim tours are a community project, but it is also about running a profit-type of business that we have got to run it as. That is the field we are sort of getting into. We are negotiating about a major capital purchase down there. Hopefully it will create a bit more for us — we are going to need another four or five people to help us run this new enterprise, and it is all connected to tourism a bit. We have got the partnership with LLEN and all that stuff now, and it is really strong. It is about keeping that continual growth going. Looking ahead, we need help to put some of these other initiatives down on paper so that we can get a good run. Some of these initiatives — you are talking about guys who have got complex needs; they are really slow. We are starting at rock bottom. No-one is middle of the road here; you are talking about people who have missed the school system. Only two years ago there were nine out of 15 and most of the nine were under year 8. I am not quite sure but I know a few of that group are still having contact with the system. The reality of them getting to year 10 is going to be hard. They need alternative schooling, and that is what we have to come up with. We cannot resource that. You cannot say it is a family violence initiative; it is about employment.

Mr ROSE — A lot of people talk about these great programs and courses they run, but the only good ones that work are ones that are run in partnership with the Aboriginal community where extra money is put into them. If they go on student contact hours it will never work. None of them have been on just pure student contact hours without any partnership. If you are in Melbourne and big towns like that you can say, ‘We want to run a course in such and such’, and you get 15 or 20 applicants; then you can do it. But if you want to do these things out here they have to be done in partnership.

We go to lots of different places and hear them talking about all of these things and as soon as you hear about the good ones you find that there is another partner involved in the education system. Usually the organisation has been funded to provide a service because they are the things that the education department does. TAFE, the student contact hours are 5000 this year, which is magnificent — for one course. But that is only to help pay for all the things. If it is a course where you are in class all day hardly doing anything and just using a pen and paper, that is all right, but if they want to do the industry skills course, which a couple of the boys did last year, which are really high-cost programs, we cannot do it with eight people; they will never fund it. They never talk to us about those things. They say, ‘We cannot afford it’. Everyone says, ‘We cannot afford it’. The problem is that the government is funding mickey mouse courses out in our region, things that are designed for us to become perpetual training people and not things that are going to get us off and into real employment.

It is ironic that last Monday we had the community cabinet here. I remember going to community cabinet in Warrnambool about six years ago and walking in and seeing Lynne Kosky. I was working for TAFE at the time and I was also chair of the education committee and we were starting up Budj-Bim tours. They had one of their employment programs running and they were cutting them back to 16 weeks instead of the 20 weeks they used to fund. They were going to cut them back. We were just at the end of this cycle; everyone was doing it. We went there and pleaded that we needed 20 weeks. The 20 weeks would mean that we could fully train our people and give them the two days a week work experience time on the job. Without that full course, that full program, we would have had a half-baked program, a half-baked course. We would have had four or five guys in the end who may have only been half trained, and that would have been a tragedy.

We are in the same boat right now. Michael has brought another boy over from Western Australia, over from Albany, with this timber industry stuff going on. There are huge opportunities in this area for the timber industry, but we still only have small numbers of people. If we do not engage and involve properly in that process we will not do it. The issues around trying to work with non-indigenous organisations are that a lot of them have got their own sets of rules and ways they want to run, and they will make very little allowances for the Koori things that are needed to do it. They are things to help support the families, help them to get transport there or to just have a feed when they are there. Some of our guys will go off to work or go off to courses without any food in their stomach, so how long are they going to study for? Not very long. If you are in a house that is overcrowded and none of those people have had breakfast, when you leave they are not going to say, ‘You make sure you have got your lunch, mate’. Some people do not even go to the course and do not go to school. That is why you have a lot of people dropping out — you cannot go off without food.

Those types of issues need to be addressed in any programs we do in the future that relate to our communities. If they are not funded at the level they need to be funded at and they just rely on having a formula and not reality to make it work, we will never get anywhere. All of our kids will have to continually keep moving away from our communities. We are trying to develop programs. We have just been funded for three years for a land management program. We have four more people starting, but we cannot put them in the same training course we gave the other guys because there is only four of them. We cannot put certificate II or III in conservation and land management into them because we have not got the time and the support to give to them. The college says it has not got the time and the support to give to them, but if we want these guys to succeed someone has to find the money for them somewhere. Someone has to find the process from somewhere to change it and make it worthwhile for our children, because if all these other things that are needed — health, housing, education and things to make sure they are intact — are not addressed in anything we do, we actually miss out.

The CHAIR — Have you had some success with some of the programs? Can you give us an idea of which direction, then?

Mr ROSE — Budj-Bim tours is probably a good example. We started off with about 12 people doing that. We have had some of our guys move on now, because they were only young guys who moved into other areas. My daughter was one of those applicants at that time, and she is a qualified chef because of it.

The CHAIR — So you were able to do training programs through the company?

Mr ROSE — It was one of the government programs that was run. That gave the support so that there was enough income coming in, so it did not have to worry about where the next feed was coming from almost. All those types of things were looked after. It was also run in Heywood. If we want to do that again, the problem is that we will not find 12 people again, because those days — —

To run a generic course for Aboriginal people in country Victoria now, in small communities, if you went and got 12 people who have got the same employment and outcome in mind, there might be 2, 3 or 4, but we have not got 15 or 20. That is where part of our issues lie, because if we have not got that many people, then they have to go mainstream and, unfortunately, mainstream around here just does not cater properly. There are lots of issues.

Mr BELL — Especially with the land and infrastructure we have got today, we do offer really good programs to get the community back into training. The possibility of long-term employment is a reality now. With the native title decision coming down we have got access to heaps of land. There are partnerships with Parks and DSE and all those types of places. They are all coming online. We have had those there. They did not just start last year when it came down; these partnerships have been around for a long, long time. The few boys we have had through the firefighting season have produced some really good workers for us, and that is because of the partnerships. Coordinating those partnerships comes at a cost to us — they really affect how much time and preparation we get to put into some of those things — so planning is a big issue for us. In 1997, I think it was, there was a 30 per cent cut in ATSIIC spending. What that meant to Victoria is that 80 to 90 per cent of the co-ops in Victoria had administration dollars taken away. That was about 50 per cent of Winda Mara's budget, if not a bit more, and that was your planning money, your discussion, and it created a lot of an issue. Winda Mara has survived that. It is 10 years since that has happened. It has grown in professionalism, the management structure and training — all that type of thing — and has really come to the fore.

The challenges come from within as well. The Gunditjmarra process has come on board. That is a native title process. Winda Mara is around social support. We were able to combine a fair bit of that stuff over the last three to five years. A lot of energy went into helping the process get through. That body is going to take over those initiatives now, and the resources Winda Mara will get from that will have an effect at the end of the day. We are continually asked about education and training and employment. It is still a major factor of ours. It is something that we have got to invest in right now from our LACG. We are investing about 5 hours a week to help five young people doing VCAL this year. We really wanted to make sure that these guys get through their VCAL and make sure that their days are lined up, because three of them are doing it with Winda Mara, through the land management administration and Budj-Bim tours. A couple of the others have picked up a day at one of the pubs doing a bit of catering, and one of the boys picked up a bit of bricklaying. We are still making sure that we have got a coordinator checking up on these young guys and making sure that they are connected, making sure that they have got their boots on — the right boots! — and making sure that they are going to work in the appropriate attire. We are

actually funding some of this attire, but that is out of some of our other resources. We have got to come up with a really good strategy.

Mr ROSE — Just on that, our kids do not see that if they want to do any further education, they have to leave town. That is why all our kids run to VCAL now. We are going to have them keep on running to VCAL and not VCE. We have had good numbers go through VCE in the past, but we have had no job outcomes for them because we were not developing very many jobs at the time, and we had very few of them going on to further education because it is just too hard to move on. Part of the issue is because there is no support from the co-op to go to any further education stuff. If that is not fixed up they are going to still look at where their strength is and where they feel safe, and that is going to be at home. Therefore, the more we do by providing a service that actually meets their needs, they are only going to look at it very narrowly, staying home, staying around the place, and not look at broadening themselves.

As I said, we have shown that we have had kids who are quite capable of doing VCE and all those things, but what is happening to our kids? Instead of them looking at that as an option, they are all going to look at VCAL. I should not diminish VCAL as an option, but that is going to be their reality. It is going to be interesting to see what happens now that these kids are coming through VCAL and whether they get picked up by non-indigenous employers in the future, or whether all they end up coming to is us. Nearly every child we have had has worked for Winda Mara at some stage once they leave school. In the end we are also encouraging them; having CDP in the old days, we actually said, 'Keep moving', because we did not want to become idle. We try those things, but we actually create a monster for ourselves in a sense, because no-one else is providing the services that our kids need and should expect. If all they are going to be doing is saying, 'Please go off to La Trobe uni and train up down there and become an archaeologist, mate', it would be great. Some of our kids probably think that would be a great idea, but what does it cost? That is the thing.

Part of the issue, and I think one of the biggest issues we suffer from in our Koori community, is that if you look at any of the country kids, they have to go home. They need to get home more regularly than non-Aboriginal people. Therefore the chances of getting a part-time job are very limited. Why? It is because, 'Hang on, I cannot work Saturdays or Friday nights because I am going to be going home every month or so. I want to go home and visit my family and stuff, and there are community activities and all these other things I want to get involved in that make me feel who I am'. The way they have been killing us with Abstudy and those lovely things, we are not supporting our students in the proper way. We are not having the guys look up because of that, because as soon as they move away they go, 'How do I get home on this?'. How do you actively get home when you need to get home and on weekends and stuff unless you have got mum and dad supporting you to the hilt? I know that, because it has happened to me for the last two years with my baby; I know how much money she has cost us, but that was because we made a decision we did not want her to work. We wanted her to enjoy her time, to enjoy life and enjoy these things and come home whenever she liked. She did all those things, but how many other kids will not do it because they have not got the family support and structures. That is the sort of issue that we — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is your annual budget?

Mr ROSE — Winda Mara?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes.

Mr BELL — We roll over about a couple of million, but that is all different types of programs. When you come down to education, we do education out of those programs. A classic of Daryl's is: you are robbing Peter to pay Paul to get a result on there.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What would you say are the three top barriers that stop indigenous students from getting into TAFE or university?

Mr ROSE — It is having to move — so all the things of having to move, basically. Even for a simple thing like going to Portland, that is 25 kilometres down the road, yet it might as well be a light year away, because there is no public transport, so you cannot get public transport to and from to go down and do a TAFE course. We had one girl doing a course at Newcastle — through the uni up there — in child care. She wanted to do the basic child-care stuff we had at TAFE in Portland. She cannot do it. Why? Because it was on this many days, there was no transport, she did not have a licence — because she did not have those, she could not do it. Yet last year she was paid to fly to Sydney, bused out to Newcastle, accommodated and fed for the two weeks she was up there with the

blocks — all these things — and looked after properly. Then she came back, she had a tutor and all these other things to support her, and she was doing great in the course. Yet she could not travel 25 kilometres down the road to do a simpler course that would have given her just a basic certificate. She could not do that because she would not be supported at that level.

There is plenty of support for people in Koori programs, to do some of these block programs. It is reasonable support. Some of the support back home needs to be helped a bit with just things like tutors. I was just talking to Denise, who was looking for a tutor the other day. I do not know whether she will find someone; she is doing law. She is left to try to find the person; it is not the system that is trying to help her. All the things have come from having to move. That is part of it. That means moving away from family, moving away from the people you feel strong with. That whole range of things just multiplies because of that one little decision. It has to do with hope.

In Hamilton and Portland, where Winda Mara services also, you can go up the road and do a couple of RMIT uni things. You can do nursing and a couple of other things — whatever else — up the road there. You have limited scope and opportunity for doing those programs. We are limited on how many, on what things. If you want to go to TAFE and you try to do a hospitality course out there, you will get this ‘Oh’. You can do only certain things. You cannot become a cook out there. Again, if you go to Portland, the scope is limited. If we want to develop things for our community, for the small scales that we work on, we need to be funded to get to those levels. That is what I think will be — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — How many students would you work with during the year?

Mr ROSE — Right now we have no-one in our community studying. The chance of them doing anything this year is going to be very limited, because they are going to have to find money. If they want to do a course at TAFE they have to find \$100. We are talking about some of these lads who have some really basic needs. They will do some mainstream programs. That is all there is. There will be no Koori-specific courses run because there are not enough student contact hours in TAFE — or in OTTE — for the south-west. That is part of the problem, that we are also forced to use the South West TAFE because they are the only ones who have the Koori liaison officers. They get funded to have an Aboriginal liaison officer there, yet our community organisations are all forced to use South West TAFE as our provider. I actually used to work for them, so I was part of the job doing that.

Part of the problem was that I would walk into our organisation at Heywood sometimes and see William Angliss sitting up there, delivering a short course for our community. They were a big organisation and they wanted to win some brownie points, so they came out and delivered a service into our area. RMIT has done a similar thing in the past. They came down and used our TAFE building in Portland to run the drug and alcohol diploma course last year and they ran it for four people, so we can get people. Some organisations probably have a big enough pool of money in their global budget to sit there and say, ‘Yes, we can deliver these things to some Koori people. We can miss out here, because we have won a few things here’. Our providers in our region out here probably are not big enough and do not have that scope to actually carry a number of courses. They probably already run some at huge deficits. Therefore an extra one for Kooris becomes a bit too hard. So there are those sorts of things.

The CHAIR — Thank you. You have given us a bit of an insight into some of the challenges. There are obviously a number of other issues that we will be interested to follow up in terms of Koori issues both here and further around the state as part of this inquiry. Thanks very much for coming along.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 2008

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Mr N. Elasmarr

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Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witness

Dr L. Wheeler, head, Learning Community Partnerships, RMIT University.

The CHAIR — We will now hear from RMIT University. Dr Leone Wheeler will make the presentation for the university. Obviously we will have a number of questions to follow up with you after that, Leone. Thank you for coming along. It has certainly been an interesting day, coming out into regional Victoria and hearing from the users of education services in a range of ways and people associated with them. It is good to have a provider speaking to us now, so thank you.

Dr WHEELER — Thank you for the opportunity of presenting. May I apologise on behalf of Professor Tony Dalton. I am Tony's representative.

What I thought I would do is go through the questions you have outlined in your letter and respond to them. RMIT University is a dual-sector university, with 65 000 students globally and 950 higher education and TAFE programs, ranging from apprenticeship training through to doctoral research. We are a global university of technology with its heart in the city of Melbourne, creating and disseminating knowledge to meet the needs of industry and community. We are not really a university that is based in the regions, apart from having a learning centre here in Hamilton, where we have what we call a regional research and learning site, and that is what I am here to talk about. I will just go through the various questions that you have outlined.

The role, structure and operations of RMIT University in Hamilton: we are operated as a team, led by Professor Tony Dalton, who is the pro vice-chancellor, design and social context, and he is the vice-chancellor's representative in Hamilton. I am the head of learning community partnerships, and I am responsible for managing the Hamilton Centre. We broker research and learning opportunities in the region. The other members of our management team are Professor John Fien, who is the director of research and Dr Martin Mulligan, Globalism Institute. We are backed up by 11 staff at the Hamilton Centre. We have regional development research; we have a bachelor of nursing program, with two academics; we have a number of staff engaged in what we call community engagement work and partnership work. These staff broker a number of partnerships which will and does lead to important research programs for us. Our vision for the future for Hamilton is another question you have asked us. We see that we are a regional research and learning centre, and we want to maintain sustainability and operate in a cost-effective manner, and our vice-chancellor has invited other universities and providers to use our site also as a local regional base. We do have other providers who use our base from time to time. It is an excellent facility, and we operate excellent videoconferencing facilities which we hire out.

In terms of how we tailor our courses to meet the needs of the local community, I think the exemplar program is the bachelor of nursing. We also offer other online degree courses through our partnership with Open Universities Australia, and we offer a number of postgraduate courses — in particular the graduate diploma in mental health and the graduate certificate in gerontology. In addition we offer a short-course program. I have the latest e-news and RMIT Hamilton update which show the range of programs that we offer, which I will leave with you as exemplars.

As far as statistics go, I would like to hand out the statistics for the bachelor of nursing over the past three years as well. In terms of higher education, the bachelor of nursing is the only commonwealth HECS program that we run that we count from a data point of view. The other flexible and online programs, through Open University Australia, are counted through that organisation's programs, but we do actually count numbers, and we have in addition PhD and masters students. If you look at the statistics that I am handing out to you, you will notice that we allocate 30 places in the bachelor of nursing to Hamilton, and we have had steady numbers, although we had quite a large dip last year. In regard to that dip, we were not able to fill the regional places last year, but what we did was reallocate those places to Bundoora. While we did recover this year, the total load is trending downwards for the bachelor of nursing.

However I want to tell the story behind the statistics now, because it is quite a bright story in terms of what we do for the region. You might have heard from some of our students as well. In the folder I have got a student scenario of Kathy — not her real name, but just a typical instance of what it means to have a higher education presence in a town like Hamilton, where there are people who are mature-aged. Of our 59 students enrolled we have 52 currently attending. Of them 66 per cent are mature-aged. There would be about half a dozen with a story similar to Kathy's — a mature age woman living in a regional town, who was not sure how she should could get back into higher education. The South West TAFE offered a return to study program to build up her confidence, and she was able to do a certificate III in aged care, and then from that she applied to do the bachelor of nursing program. She graduated from the bachelor of nursing last year. There are numerous stories like that, where we are making a difference in the lives of people in the region.

There are numerous Kathy stories. We often in our booklets also present some wonderful stories about our nursing students and how we are building capacity, how they have opportunities — for example, through being linked to a global university, to visit our Vietnam campus. Our academic staff visited our Vietnam campus this year and made links. So there are opportunities for our local graduates too, as part of being a global university.

We have graduated 120 nursing students altogether so far since we started. The statistics also show that the ENTER scores for these students are quite low — 50.65, which is lower than the Bundoora starting students. If this continues, it would be an issue for us, but we will continue the program in a cost-effective way and we will actually make differences in the lives of these students. Some more statistics from the students: the students really like the flexible approach, the videoconferencing that we do, but we also have local staff. The fact that we do not provide all the facilities that a campus has is more than offset, judging from the comments of the students, by the support they have from the local staff. I have got numerous comments from local staff that show that.

Other characteristics about the 52 students that we have currently on site: most of them originate from around the region, with the majority coming from Hamilton and Portland. One particular statistic of interest is that 10 of our students actually come from Melbourne. We also have one from Frankston. Our catchment area ranges from Port Fairy, Swan Hill, Echuca. We have just done a survey and 33 per cent of those surveyed do have some form of scholarship, ranging from a couple of RMIT equity scholarships, quite a substantial scholarship from the Royal College of Nursing, and aged-care scholarships. Other students would not be able to come here without the support of parents or their spouses.

The issues are: child care — it is much better here than it used to be, with the establishment of the ABC Learning Centre, and many students have commented on that, but the majority of those who have children still rely on family for support. Another key issue that they raise is the cost of petrol and the travelling time to classes. That is a major issue. . The benefit of RMIT is that we have a presence in the region. We have key local staff who are able to negotiate with various organisations, ranging from the catchment management authority through to the Western District Health Service. Our local staff have brokered a range of projects, including the youth leadership project; the 10MMM project, which is building youth research capacity; in ICT, health and wellbeing . Those research projects that we are running do build capacity in young people in the region. I have staff here who could give more information on that if you are interested. Those projects are detailed in our brochures.

Research has been an important focus for our site. We are a globally networked research organisation and our research programs are linked to the Global Cities Research Institute. Our local global research program in Hamilton is focused on outcomes of collaboration between researchers at the RMIT University's globalism institute and people living in the region. Research areas focus on food production, climate change, local global ideologies and sustainability. In your pack I have also put information about an exemplar research project, the Helen and Geoff Handbury Fellowship program. That program has also provided opportunities for local community members to become researchers through fellowships, with projects in a range of areas. We also have a regional development research program which we are very proud of. Many research programs have started as incubators out at our site, and I could name the Sustainable Farm Families as one classic example, which started within our site within regional development and has gone on to receive further funding to establish a research centre.

In relation to the terms of this inquiry, we recognise that higher education is important and that the uneven geographical impact of the youth allowance disbursement affects young people in rural areas. We also know that people from rural families start off with lower than average incomes compared with people in the city when it comes to supporting young people, so that is an issue. The cost of leaving home to attend university in the city is an important deterrent for young people. Dr Collits has done quite a lot of work in this area, and there are other statistics here which I am sure that you have been hearing about all day. I will leave it at that at the moment just by way of introduction and see what you are particularly interested in following up on.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Leone.

Mr DIXON — What brought RMIT to Hamilton in the first place?

Dr WHEELER — We have had a presence here since the early 1990s through international students visiting the region. There is a classic story, called the RICE story, about a farming region, Woodhouse Nareeb. That built a partnership — one of the original founders is in the audience behind us — which was built on social capital and networks and capacity building. At the time the vice-chancellor had a strategic direction of dissolving

boundaries and a focus on regional partnerships, and that led to a partnership with the Southern Grampians shire which was very important and which led to the Regional Development Infrastructure Fund going forward for that. We still have a strong partnership with the shire. In fact the one thing I forgot to mention was that as well as the structure we have a community advisory board with members of the shire, health representatives, members of the business community and community members on that, and their role is to advise us.

Mr ELASMAR — You said the majority of your students are from Hamilton. What about the others from outside; where do they live? Do they need a place?

Dr WHEELER — Housing would be an issue. I have some statistics: two come from Casterton, one from Byaduk, and one from Digby, Dimboola, Dunkeld, Echuca, a farm, Frankston, Grassmere, Horsham, Mortlake, Port Fairy, Rainbow and Swan Hill. These are the range of places they come from. Those people who come from far away — from Melbourne, Frankston, Swan Hill — would have to rent in Hamilton; so they do rent. Others live with their parents or spouses if they are locals. The Portland people mostly drive, so some of them are driving an hour a day to get to lectures.

The CHAIR — Is that rental accommodation easy enough to get in Hamilton?

Dr WHEELER — It is not too bad at the moment, but it goes up and down depending on the economy here. With Timbercorp coming in and harvesting the timber, we are going to hear about a substantial increase in industry in the coming years, and that will put a squeeze back on rental accommodation. I believe that as soon as that comes on, housing will be tighter again.

The CHAIR — On that score, RMIT has not looked at the possibility of providing any student housing?

Dr WHEELER — RMIT has not looked at providing accommodation, no.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What initiatives has RMIT put in place to try to encourage more local students to come to your course?

Dr WHEELER — To come to our nursing program?

Mr KOTSIRAS — And then to retain them?

Dr WHEELER — And to retain them? All right. To come to the nursing program; that is a responsibility of my team. We have a marketing strategy. We go out to the local careers days, the one at Horsham and the one at Portland; we go and visit schools; we actually have a stand at Sheepvention; and our nursing lecturer has an open day at the centre. We actually ramped up the marketing last year, and I think that was reflected in the increased numbers as well. We are also putting out these good news stories about the fact that education does change lives, so we actually put out stories from time to time about our students. There is nothing like a good story to say something about how you can improve your income and improve your life.

Mr KOTSIRAS — According to these statistics in 2007 you had 52 students enrolling in nursing; is that correct?

Dr WHEELER — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — And completion in 2007 was 20?

Dr WHEELER — Yes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — So there were 32 who, for some reason, did not complete the course. Are there any indications of the reasons for that?

Dr WHEELER — That 52 would be including first, second and third year.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Okay. All right.

The CHAIR — So it is 9.4 new students, is it?

Dr WHEELER — It is 9.4 new students, yes. Generally we have pretty good completions. If I cannot answer any questions, I can take them on notice to go back to my nursing coordinator.

Mr KOTSIRAS — If some did drop out, I would not mind knowing why they dropped out: was it housing, was it transport, or what were the reasons that they dropped out?

Dr WHEELER — Yes. I will get back to you on that with the specific reasons.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Also we have listened to others who have said that regional students are more likely to remain in regional Victoria. Do you have any indications whether your students stay in Hamilton once they complete a course or whether they go to Melbourne?

Dr WHEELER — I cannot give you statistics on that, but we do have quite a few in the hospital. Anecdotally I would say that quite a few stay, because a couple of our staff have just recently given birth and they have said, ‘We had some of our past nursing students’, so I know that they are employed in our local hospitals. So it is a good story. I understand from our nursing coordinator they are employed all around the region, but I will try and get you further key statistics on that as well.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Finally there will be a number of students who will not have the finances to start university or nursing. Do you do anything to assist those students?

Dr WHEELER — We have an RMIT equity scholarship, so — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — How many?

Dr WHEELER — We have about three at this stage, but a third of our students, in surveying them, are on some form of scholarship. If you look at that e-news, we always tell them when a scholarship is available and encourage them to apply. We have got about a third of our students on some form of scholarship, whether it is an aged care scholarship, an RMIT equity scholarship or one from the Royal College of Nursing. They are quite substantial, but we could always do more. In fact our vice-chancellor says that we allocate 20 per cent of places to equity students, and rural, isolated and regional would come under that. So whenever our scholarships office has scholarships available we have a local e-news, and we make sure that students know about the scholarships. Scholarships are an area where more can be done. Because of the income situation et cetera, I think scholarships for regional students are very important.

The CHAIR — So if our committee was wanting to get more details of the range of scholarships that are available, how do we get those details?

Dr WHEELER — I will provide them with my notes.

The CHAIR — Fantastic; that sounds great. There is obviously a challenge for any tertiary institution in establishing a campus in regional Victoria. For example, looking at your numbers, they have been up and down, which must be financially a challenge for the institution, but what are the other challenges that you face in coming to the regions first off — in establishing in Hamilton from your point of view?

Dr WHEELER — I think the major challenge is that we have major campuses within an hour’s drive. Deakin University and also we have the University of Ballarat about an hour and a half away or 2 hours away, with presence in Horsham and Ballarat, so for us that is a challenge. We are not able to put any more commonwealth-supported places into Hamilton for that reason, because we are operating in a thin market. Those are challenges for us.

The CHAIR — With placements have you had any problem?

Dr WHEELER — We have tried to get places in education. For example, we have twice tried for a graduate diploma in teaching secondary. We have advertised that heavily here, not that that was commonwealth-supported places, but it was fee-paying places, and both times we have advertised we have not been able to get a viable number.

The CHAIR — For which courses are you saying?

Dr WHEELER — The graduate diploma in teaching secondary. There was an identified need about five years ago that there is an ageing teaching workforce and we must do something about that. That has been identified locally. But for us to put a bachelor of education here is just financially not viable, so we believed that the way we could do that was to run a graduate diploma. We have advertised but not filled the places. However, we do run short-course programs for teachers to try and skill them. You will notice in our e-news that Professor Di Siemon is running a workshop on middle maths to train teachers and improve their teaching ability in middle maths and that kind of thing. We take that obligation very seriously.

We run a number of workshops for teachers in the region; just-in-time training it would probably be called. But we are happy for any other university to come in and work with us. Our vice-chancellor has written a letter to the other universities saying that we have this wonderful learning site here in Hamilton and we are happy to collaborate with anyone. We are also connected to the small regional campuses throughout Australia and understand that sustainability of these small campuses is an issue for a number of them, but we think we provide a valuable asset to the town through our research, through community engagement, through the number of partnerships that we provide. Just looking at how those partnerships have led to real research projects and the teaching that we have done, the human capital skills that we have developed through our nursing program have made a significant difference, I think, in the town.

The CHAIR — In terms of the financial scene, is it the case that Hamilton would still be subsidised overall as part of the organisation or is it financially — —

Dr WHEELER — It is not financially sustainable. Hamilton is subsidised overall by the organisation, and we are happy to sustain that provision and we want to grow research. We think research will be very important in this region. We cannot see how we can grow commonwealth-supported places with a thin market and the presence of the other universities within an hour to an hour and a half's drive.

Mr DIXON — You said the vice-chancellor has written to other universities. Is that just a recent thing?

Dr WHEELER — Last year, yes.

Mr DIXON — Has there been much response at all?

Dr WHEELER — I understand that there have been a couple of universities that have responded, yes. I am not sure whether that is going to go, though.

Mr DIXON — But it could be a good model in that you have got the infrastructure there and it cuts — —

Dr WHEELER — I believe this learning precinct model is the model to go for, and at one stage we started having discussions with South West TAFE about co-locating, because there are models in other areas around Victoria like that. That was not going to be financially viable for South West TAFE, but we do work in partnership whenever we can with South West TAFE. But this learning precinct idea, a collaboration among the universities, I know there are issues around it. I have seen the West Australian models at Geraldton and Albany where a couple of universities partner and one provides teaching and one nursing, which are the most common bachelor programs in regional areas.

There are issues to go through, but we have written to other universities saying we have the infrastructure, we have really good videoconferencing facilities, computer facilities, we have upgraded the site, we have administrative and IT support locally, so we have the infrastructure there. We will see where that leads, but I think it is a good model actually. We do do things to try to help students get into university. Actually one of the things that Professor Gardiner puts in her letter is that regional students need help with their portfolio preparation for various design courses. We are planning on running those workshops in the region to help students prepare their portfolios. So we can do a lot of capacity building at a local level. It does not look good in the numbers, but our presence is really important for building capacity and for leading to further projects.

I notice, Mr Elasmr, that you are from the Northern Metropolitan Region. You would know the Hume Global Learning Village model. That is a range of universities and other training organisations working together to grow capacity in a lifelong learning model, and I am already on the research sub-committee for the Village. I think that kind of working together to build capacity in regions, the community engagement model with universities, that

partnership model, is the way of the future personally. That is from a personal point of view, having a passion for building lifelong learning in regions.

The other thing is that in being networked to these small regional campuses there are other things that they do. For example, the University of Western Australia and the University of Tasmania run university preparation programs, where you bring students in and you actually talk about higher education, what it is and what is available in your region. I am hoping to get funding to run one here, if you can recommend where I go to get the funding. But I think those types of programs are the things we can do to make a difference. We may not be able to run a whole course, but we can do a lot to make a difference to people.

The CHAIR — You have sort of touched upon my only other question, which is in terms of the potential for expansion of courses that could be offered at Hamilton. Teaching is the main one you have looked at. Clearly we will learn more as we go through this in terms of the issues to do with commonwealth funding of places and so on, but that does not appear to be an opportunity. So smaller courses, is that what you are saying seems to be the way forward?

Dr WHEELER — Where we are going is that, yes, we will run short courses and whatever to meet community demand, knowing that we have a local TAFE here as well, and we want to collaborate with it. For example, we are about to start real estate agency rep and certificate 4 in real estate. This came about because we have a very large school of property construction and project management, and it happens to have a lot of trainees in the region anyway. There was a demand by the real estate agents for a local course, so we are actually going to start running that next week. That is in response to local demand. But we are also aware that when we go into short fee-for-service courses like that we do not want to appear to be taking away from South West TAFE, so we will do it in collaboration, and when there is an industry need we will do it when industry approaches us. Our statistics over the year have shown that we have offered the odd graduate certificate in business or front-line management or something when an industry comes to us and it is cost effective for us to do that.

I also allocate in my budget money for key academics to come up to the region to speak on issues, and we do it also through partnerships. For example, a couple of weeks ago we had Professor Stephen Bird, who came up through the Go for Your Life program. He talked about active ageing. We had 70 people attend that workshop. They got a lot out of it. In fact the feedback has been very positive about all of the issues to do with healthy lifestyles and active ageing. Having the quality of academics like Professor Di Siemon, who is world renowned in mathematics education, come to the region and speak and take workshops for teachers is something that a global university can contribute to the region. We have an international speaker, Dr David McNulty, coming to talk about lifelong learning in the UK and the lifelong policies shortly; and also Dr Paul Collits has a whole range of regional development people coming to the region, hoping to do some sort of student placements through our planning degree. So there are small ways that we can build capacity. We may not be able to do a whole degree, but we can do elements.

Also in the teaching area we place some of our bachelor of education students in Hamilton. Last year we got scholarships from the Victorian teachers credit association, and we placed four students in local schools. We will try to do more of that this year. Some of the students are very reluctant to come to the country, but when they do they come back with really wonderful stories about the experience and how friendly people were. So in fact getting them into the country is the key challenge for us. We will work with the head of our school of education, Professor Annette Gough, to get more of these sorts of placements. We are working with the local secondary college as well. So we edge away at things. That is what we do.

The CHAIR — I have one last question that it has occurred to me is probably important. You mentioned that the Southern Grampians shire had a relationship with RMIT that got you here. I am interested to know what the nature of the shire's commitment was to try to attract you here.

Dr WHEELER — We had also the Helen and Geoff Handbury trust actually put a substantial amount of money in and, in combination with the shire actually went into partnership with us to lobby government to get the funding, because the shire wanted a university presence in Hamilton. That relationship is very strong. So it is an important relationship.

The CHAIR — Good. Thank you, Leone. It has been very useful.

Witness withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 2008

Members

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Witnesses

Ms J. Kean, executive manager, organisational development, and

Ms J. Roache, research and planning officer, quality and innovation branch, South West Institute of TAFE.

The CHAIR — I welcome Julie Kean and Jacinta Roache. We have just heard from RMIT University. It is entirely appropriate that we also hear from the TAFE provider in the area.

Ms KEAN — I should think so. We would be offended if you did not!

The CHAIR — And you would have a right to be. We are very interested to hear your response and your advice to us in regard to the issues that are relevant to this inquiry on participation in higher education.

Ms KEAN — Good. Thanks for the invitation. First of all, may I apologise on behalf of our CEO, Joe Piper, who was due to be here. He has been called to a meeting with the minister this afternoon and tomorrow morning — something to do with funding, I think.

The CHAIR — It is a good idea that he has gone there.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Good luck to him.

Ms KEAN — My name is Julie Kean, I am executive manager, organisational development, with the institute, which means that I head up one of the three major portfolios within the institute. I have with me Jacinta Roache, who is with our quality and innovation branch. Jacinta is a research and planning officer, so she has put together a lot of the data that is in our paper. I will start off and call Jacinta in as we need. Do not worry, I am not proposing to read through the paper; it is for you to take away. But you will notice that at the end there is a series of recommendations, so what I would like to do is just talk to those recommendations. But I will do it by moving through the paper, because the recommendations are also contained in the paper.

First of all I will give a 2-minute snapshot about the institute. We are the major provider of VET in south-west Victoria. We account for about 60 per cent of the total delivery in this region. The rest of the delivery is shared between a couple of other providers who operate in this region and any particular private providers. I have to stop and think how many campuses we have because we have just increased them by two. We have a campus here at Hamilton and one at Portland. Our major campus of course is Warrnambool, and we have just opened a new campus on the outskirts of Warrnambool, in fact on the Deakin University site. If you are heading back that way, through Warrnambool, it would be good to just drive in and take a quick look at it. Of course two years ago we took on the Glenormiston campus, just outside Terang. So we have the complexities of operating from a number of different locations.

There is a bit of data in there that describes to you some key things about the institute. Perhaps if I refer you to the sixth paragraph. There are some distinctive things about South West TAFE in terms of our student cohort. A much higher proportion of our students are trained in traineeships and apprenticeships than the state average. In fact about a third of our total delivery relates to traineeships and apprenticeships, and that compares with under 20 per cent across the state of Victoria. That makes us a little bit unique and also creates some problems for us because of course traineeships generally speaking are certificate levels 2 and 3. It means that we have a higher proportion of our total delivery at the lower end of the AQF, the Australian Qualifications Framework. I am sure you are aware that the COAG agenda is to push VET provision up into the higher end. That creates a bit of a dilemma for us as a training provider, because clearly we are meeting an industry need by providing all the traineeships and apprenticeships, but clearly there is a need at the other end as well. There is a dilemma there that we are in the process of resolving.

There are a couple of other statistics down there that I draw your attention to. A lower proportion of our students go on to higher education. That is what this inquiry is about, looking at those pathways. It is not hugely lower, but a significantly lower proportion of our students move on to university level. That of course is consistent with the fact that a higher proportion of our delivery is at the lower end, so more of our students go on to higher level TAFE qualifications rather than university. If you turn over to page 2, there is a heading there, 'TAFE and the regional community'. I want to make a bit of an issue of this because it is about your inquiry, this one referred to here — I am sure you have all read it from cover to cover — about retaining young people in regional and rural communities. One of the key propositions of that inquiry is the role that education providers play in keeping young people in their regional communities. I want to make a particular point that we see ourselves as being absolutely fundamental to the regional infrastructure in terms of developing social and economic capital. If I can ask you to take anything away from what we are talking about today, it is that very thought: that we have a rather unique role — and so do Deakin University and RMIT have that unique role — of contributing to that social infrastructure.

That brings me to the first recommendation:

That state and federal governments develop funding and governance models which recognise the critical role that regional institutes and universities play in the development of social capital in —

our communities. I guess that it is a little bit of a plea. I hesitate to say this, but I am going to say it anyway: I believe that we deserve to be quarantined from some of the changes in the system as a result of that. It is a big statement, but I will stick with it and I will refer back to that later on.

In section 3 we have identified a number of barriers that we believe exist in the region in relation to participation in higher education and in TAFE in particular. You will see that little list there. We are talking about travel, resourcing of flexible delivery, ICT infrastructure, fee regimes, VET in Schools funding arrangements, the availability of preparatory and access programs, pathways to higher ed, and funding models for TAFE. All of them are huge issues in their own right, but I am going to skip through them at the speed of light.

First of all, travel. I am not going to dwell on this one, because I am sure you have heard it from every other person that you have listened to today and on other days. In fact it is reflected in a lot of submissions to this inquiry. I just want to reinforce that it is an issue for us and in particular for younger students. These are our trainees and apprentices who either are not old enough to get a licence or cannot afford to have a car, and in particular VET in Schools students. We have two recommendations there in relation to travel. They are for a subsidised bus link between our various campuses and for additional bus links, particularly for VET in Schools students. Those recommendations come from the fact that our funding levels from government do not run to supporting bus routes.

Section 3.2 is headed 'Resourcing of flexible delivery'. Again, I am sure you have heard a lot about this. There was quite a bit in this earlier report about how flexible delivery can be used to reach geographically isolated people. That is great in theory, but if we are going to do it we require resources. Again, our funding models do not stretch to developing the sort of quality learning resources, be they online or print based, that would enable us to convert all our programs into some sort of flexible delivery mode. We do it for niche programs and in specialist areas, but we do not have the capacity to do it across the board. Recommendations 4 and 5 are both about resourcing of flexible delivery:

That TAFE funding models allow for the development of flexible learning options for students who are not able to access on-campus teaching.

That the development of print-based resources be supported through the open training network ...

That is particularly in relation to what we have notionally known as the traditional off-campus student — that is, somebody who gets their learning resources through the mail and sends assignments back through the mail. We still have a large number of students who study in that way. We are unusual as a regional institute in maintaining our off-campus programs and each year we deliver about 40 000 or 50 000 student contact hours in that way, but they need resourcing.

Section 3.3 relates to ICT infrastructure. Basically what we are saying there is that we need broadband to a metropolitan standard and we need it fast. We are absolutely limited in what we can do because of the technical infrastructure environment within which we operate. There are a few key points there about costs, accessibility and so on. Our sixth recommendation is:

That cost-effective broadband be available across regional and rural Victoria equivalent to ADSL2 currently available in metropolitan centres.

Section 3.4 relates to up-front fees. The point that we make here is that university students have options; TAFE students do not. That makes the TAFE sector quite distinctive, I guess, in terms of fees. If you want to enrol at university, you can turn up tomorrow, enrol and pay nothing. If you want to go TAFE and you turn up tomorrow, you could have to pay up to \$1500 out of your bank account in order to enrol in a full-time program. If you are in New South Wales, you might have to pay up to \$3000 or \$4000, so I am not complaining about the level of fees that have been set in Victoria, but we have to recognise that that is a barrier for some students. There is a proposal from the federal government on the table to introduce FEE-HELP for TAFE students undertaking higher level courses, but it does not address students undertaking lower level courses, so it locks those, typically younger, students out. FEE-HELP of course has a 20 per cent administration charge attached to it, which HECS-HELP for universities does not. We see that as being a bit discriminatory.

Our seventh recommendation is:

That a simplified version of FEE-HELP be developed for TAFE students to remove the burden of increasing levels of up-front fees ...

VET in Schools funding arrangements is another vexed area. We have over 700 students in this region that we deliver VET in Schools programs to. Sometimes they come to us to do their training, sometimes we go to them and sometimes we auspice the school, so the school actually does the training and we provide the qualification. It is a very significant contributor to education levels in this region. Students will typically come out of a VET in Schools program with either a certificate II or a certificate III, more typically a certificate II level qualification.

We believe it is a major contributor in keeping students at schools longer. But we have the same issues. We have the issues of fees and transport, so actually getting students around the region to a TAFE campus to be able to complete their studies. The parents typically will be up for around about \$800 to undertake a VET in Schools program. There are a couple of barriers there, which leads into our eighth recommendation that VETiS funding be provided directly to the RTO — that is, us — rather than being part of schools funding. At the moment it is buried in the funding that goes to the schools and it does not see the light of day once the training effort shifts from the school to the training provider.

Preparatory and access programs: we think that these are a critical pathway for people in our region. It is a way of pulling people into the concept of lifelong learning, so it is about starting people off on that path. Our programs typically work with the most disadvantaged groups — that is, early school leavers, disengaged young people, mature-age people with low literacy and numeracy levels, people with disabilities and CALD or NESB residents. They are never going to get on the pathway into lifelong learning or higher education if we are not able to offer these programs within the region, which brings me down to recommendation 9: that funding for preparatory and access programs be expanded. All the signals at the moment in relation to these programs are not good. The signals are that there is going to be a contraction of these types of programs. We think they are important and that the funding level should be increased to reflect the importance of the programs, reflect the need for small classes, and reflect the level of professional development that teachers require to work with these groups.

The next barrier that we identified was pathways into higher education. Leone mentioned before that we work well with RMIT. We do. Our major partnership in this region is with Deakin University, which is the major provider of higher ed. We have a strategic alliance with Deakin, and through that alliance we have developed a number of pathways where Deakin now has an interactive website. Our students can log on, say 'I am a South West TAFE student. I have done such and such a program. How much credit can I get?'. Let us say nursing: they may have done Div 2 nursing with South West TAFE, they are thinking, 'I quite like that, I would like to go on and complete a degree program'. They can log on to the Deakin website and be told how much credit transfer they will get within that program. It is great. It is terrific. It does not go far enough.

We need a lot more pathways put in place, particularly in trades areas, which have largely been ignored. Believe it or not, there are tradespeople who are interested in going on to higher, university-type education. And the other issue here of course is universities are self-accrediting, so once you have done it with one university, that does not mean you have done it with them all. You have to renegotiate the arrangements every single time, which from our point of view is very tedious. Our 10th recommendation is that Australian universities develop common criteria and expectations for credit arrangements for students moving from the TAFE sector. It would go an enormous way to facilitating that transfer of students from one sector to the other, and creating a seamless education system.

Finally, and possibly the most important one, the funding models for TAFE. I am happy to say that the current government has reinstated the regional differential for TAFE institutes, so we do actually get an extra 36 cents per student contact hour or 3.8 per cent in funding to accommodate all of our additional costs — and I will not go through what the additional costs are because I am sure you can imagine them. But it is not enough. It does not go anywhere near far enough. We reckon that 10 per cent would be closer to the mark to really deal with that issue of the regional differential.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How much are you getting now for a contact hour in total?

Ms KEAN — The common rate across the system is \$9.46 and we get an extra 36 cents. Our funding currency is student contact hour. Are you familiar with that?

Mr DIXON — Yes.

Ms KEAN — And our institute delivers around about 2 million student contact hours of government contract training per year.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How does it compare with New South Wales contact hours?

Ms KEAN — The funding rate?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Yes.

Ms KEAN — Their total is about \$13 a student contact hour. We are the cleanest, meanest system in Australia by a very, very, very long way. That is a separate issue. That is the subject of another inquiry.

And then the final point that I would like to make there is in relation to contestability. We are hearing an enormous amount at both federal and state level about moving the VET sector into a contestable environment, and it is not that we are against that per se, but I think the government needs to think very, very, very carefully about the implications of that for regional and rural infrastructure, because I think it has some profound and possibly unintended outcomes as a consequence. So our recommendations 11 and 12 are that the regional differential funding for non-metropolitan institutes be reviewed, and finally that contestability not be used at the basis for determining funding of public TAFE institutes in regional areas.

By way of summary, I guess we would like to say that we have read — not all but a lot of — the other submissions that are available on the inquiry website and are in complete sympathy with most. In fact I do not think I have read anything to date that I have actually disagreed with. In particular South West LLEN I think has some fairly similar recommendations to those that we have put together, so I think you are going to find those issues that we have put up as barriers to pathways are going to be a common theme coming out from most of the people that you listen to. That is my guess. Thank you, and I invite some questions or comments.

The CHAIR — Very good.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Can I ask, how much information or what type of information do you provide to students in the secondary school sector for pathways in TAFE?

Ms KEAN — For pathways from TAFE to higher education or pathways within TAFE?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Within TAFE.

Ms KEAN — Within TAFE; I would say a fair bit but possibly not enough.

The CHAIR — How is that provided?

Ms KEAN — It would typically be provided through both schools careers advisers and our own careers advisers. We have a marketing team which includes careers advisers. At this time of the year they are spending most of their time in schools, travelling around secondary schools in the region, attending careers days and talking to groups of school students. It is certainly there, but we could probably put more effort into that side of things.

Mr KOTSIRAS — What is stopping you from creating more pathways with the universities?

Ms KEAN — The fact that it has to be done individually, with every single university. There is no commonality, so we have developed a number of pathways with the universities. It is an incredibly lengthy, tedious business — and that is not a criticism of the universities. That is the way they operate. We put up a proposal. It has to go to their board of studies. It can take 6 to 12 months to get a pathway sorted out for any particular program.

Mr DIXON — Over the last few years has the perception of TAFE and VET studies changed, or is it still university or bust and everything else is a consolation prize? Is that perception changing at all in the community?

Ms KEAN — It is changing a lot, particularly because of the large number of students that we have in traineeships and apprenticeships. Last year we had 12 000 people — individuals — who passed through our doors. Now that is in a region of about 120 000, which is our catchment area, so that is 1 in every 10 people engaged directly with the institute in some way. It is a fairly high proportion, especially when you take out all the people

who are under 18 who were too young to do so, and the people who were over 65 who are not too old to do so but have fewer options.

Mr DIXON — Interesting.

Ms KEAN — It is a very high proportion of our south-west community that does engage with the institute. Sorry, that did not answer your question, did it?

Mr DIXON — You are saying that obviously the community engaged with the institute. Do you think that is an increasing trend?

Ms KEAN — Yes, very much so. Our reach now extends eastwards because of the Glenormiston campus. Typically in the past our reach tended to be more westwards, between here and the border and northwards, but now that we have coverage through Glenormiston to Terang, our study area extends all the way through to Colac and across to the South Australian border and up as far as the Grampians at the northern end. It is a fairly broad catchment. But I would not want you to think that we only deliver within that region because — and I have made a reference in the paper — we deliver quite a number of programs outside this region. In fact — this is not apropos of anything to do with pathways — we have one of the longest-standing international partnerships in the whole of Australia, with a university in Xuzhou in China.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Julie. Jacinta, you were the quiet partner. Is there anything you would like to say?

Ms ROACHE — No, I will just sit quietly, that is fine.

The CHAIR — That has been very helpful.

Ms KEAN — Thank you. We have put together one folder of information.

Mr DIXON — Caitlin would want to read that.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 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. H. Sobey,
Mr M. Wagg,
Ms D. Howcroft, and
Ms L. McCormack.

The CHAIR — Now we are going to hear from some parents who have been organised to come to put their perspective to us. Welcome to our parliamentary committee, which is looking into issues of people from this region being able to go on to higher education. It is great to now have some parents; we have heard from students, providers and other people who have had general interest in education issues from the region. I do not know who will speak to us first, but if you could introduce yourselves and offer your insights, we will probably have some questions to follow on from that.

Ms HOWCROFT — I am Deb Howcroft. I am a parent of two university students. To add to that, both of those students did a gap year before they went to university.

Ms SOBEY — I am Helen Sobey. I have two children; one has finished university down in Melbourne and the other one is currently at university in Ballarat. I am also the year 12 coordinator and see lots of the parents on student issues in relation to the year 12s at Baimbridge College.

Mr WAGG — I am Mike Wagg. I have one daughter who is a first-year student at university. She took a year off last year in order to earn some money.

Ms McCORMACK — My name is Lena McCormack. I have a son who took a year off and who is in his first year at university, and a daughter who is just about to complete year 12 and who wants to go straight on to university.

The CHAIR — Terrific.

Ms HOWCROFT — And I will add I have one more to come, so seeing the spreadsheet is terrifying. The Southern Grampians Youth Network has, I believe, put together the submission, which I think you have in front of you.

The CHAIR — Yes.

Ms HOWCROFT — They canvassed the opinions of parents in order to do that. They then asked us as parents to speak to that and to receive questions. I thought I would perhaps try to talk to the submission that has been provided. They found that the issues that were raised were consistent and the parents were strong-minded about the concerns that their kids were facing when they were aspiring to a university education and a professional career. The most consistent and most critical issue is the cost. Obviously, when we are living away from where they can attend tertiary institutions, the expense of living away from home is the primary cost. Having a child studying elsewhere means the maintenance of two or more households. In our case it is the household at home, and then we have two who are studying at different universities in different cities. The parents who were spoken to estimated that the cost ranged from \$15 000 to \$30 000 for each child. At this point I might draw attention to a spreadsheet that has been submitted by Steve Martinich who has horrified us all by kindly putting together the costs of supporting his two boys in Melbourne.

The parents commented that while the kids are studying in the city they have to constantly juggle part-time jobs. That is because of the cost, obviously, of the accommodation and books and trying to have a social life and all the other associated costs of being away from home. The point to this is that they have no choice; they cannot stay at home. For instance, my eldest daughter does physio; it is a fairly full workload with physio. That is at La Trobe. She lives in Carlton and she maintains a job as a netball umpire somewhere and also one as a trainer for a footy club on Saturdays. This affects their attitude, their study, their health and their social life. I have certainly found that they do not really have too many opportunities to visit back home regularly. Even if they have the spare time, often they are very tired.

They do not have the benefits of full-time work — for instance, no sick pay or choice of shifts. I think three of us have demonstrated that the qualification for youth allowance becomes an important focus — probably more important than it deserves to be. That is because the young people must earn \$18 000 in, I believe, 18 months from the last day of school in order to qualify for the youth allowance. That means students frequently forego study to work up to three jobs to earn the precondition funds once schooling is completed and prior to university. That can mean that there is no down time between year 12 study and university to relax and recharge. Some might choose to do a traineeship for the gap year, but that probably does not pay enough to qualify for the \$18 000. It is not here in the submission, but my children did the gap year working at a school in England. They also did part-time work before they left and worked when they came back in order to qualify with the \$18 000. When they do that sort of

gap year, which gives them an enormous amount of freedom at the age of 18 and 19, there is a certain difficulty in resettling back into a study routine — for one more than the other.

The youth allowance is up to \$231 a week and that is not sufficient to support young people living away from home to study. They still need to work that part-time job or obtain a subsidy from their parents, and they can only earn up to \$6000 a year before their youth allowance is cut. I did not know this, but apparently it has not been indexed in 15 years. Certainly the cost of living has risen in 15 years.

When we talked about it, there is certainly a ripple-out effect of that in the community. Parents continue to work to make up that shortfall. I read in Steve's submission that two professional salaries and a line of credit are required to meet their son's accommodation and living expenses. Seeing he has put it out there, I will put it out there as well. That is what our family is doing as well — two professional salaries and a line of credit to allow our children to go to university. It says here that the choice of off-farm work for farming parents is limited and that young people from farms are aware of the situation and take it upon themselves not to ask for extra help. I would go further and say that the choice of work for parents in a country town is limited, full stop — I do not think that is necessarily related to just farming parents — certainly in terms of earning capacity to perhaps try to improve the situation.

Another one of our conversations was about the amount of money that is being diverted away from your local community in order to pay the \$15 000 to \$30 000 for your children to live away from home. An estimation has been done that the cost of \$20 000 means a loss of income or investment to the community of approximately \$3 million annually. I do not know whether Kaye did it this way, but I think that would be \$3 million annually per child away at university.

There are emotional impacts as well. When kids leave home to access higher education, they also leave the emotional support of family and friends. For many it is the first time they have left home. The transitions required for young people often exceed simply changing schools. They need to negotiate a new physical environment to study in, work in and live in without the aid of their support networks. Security and safety was mentioned by some parents. There is a sense of vulnerability that impacts on young people's attitudes and capacity for resilience. I think that impacts on them as well.

I will just move to the next page, I think. Weekend travel arrangements make it difficult for children to maintain contact with friends and home. Certainly that is an extra cost that we have invested in the children. We have bought both of them vehicles, which they have needed, but the cost of petrol has now impacted on their capacity to come home. Travelling back to Hamilton from Melbourne via public transport, there are only two services on a Sunday and both depart within 20 minutes of each other late on a Sunday afternoon. The cost is about \$38 concession to do that. The cost of petrol Lena thinks is more. It cost me over \$100 last week to do a round-trip.

One of my beefs — and I am not sure how this inquiry would work on this — is university timetabling, which I think causes increased frustration. My eldest daughter in her first year had a compulsory tutorial at 9.00 a.m. on a Monday and nothing else until Tuesday. There were many country kids doing that particular course. Therefore they are unable to perhaps go home. It is not worth it to go home for two days, but they may have gone home for three days. If they were able to keep a job back in Hamilton on that Monday, they may have had the capacity to earn work. When they go to a new city and try to get work, obviously they are not as attractive to an employer if they cannot put in a full day. My second daughter, who is Geelong, has one 1-hour lecture on Monday, one 1-hour lecture on Tuesday. That drives them into the hospitality industry to work, because they can only get evening work. That makes them tired, and it just puts pressures on them. The universities could look at their timetabling; I think that that could resolve some of these issues. That was my beef.

There is a lack of tertiary education locally. Young people have to seek courses elsewhere. While some thrive and do well, others find it difficult to cope with the experiences of studying away. When family aspirations are not encouraging of a tertiary education, some people commented that young rural people were less likely to be in a position to take up further education in their chosen area. The continuation of that was if these young people lived in Melbourne, or if education was closer, their further education options were still possible. To access these opportunities from a rural area is difficult without the support from parents. At RMIT here I know if you are doing nursing there is a flexible opportunity. They actually do timetables so that, I believe, each year has two days consecutively, so it can be done. It is a little bit different with resourcing here.

Suggestions that were made in the submissions from parents were that universities consider the needs for rural students when timetabling. That is not necessarily just for rural students. If you are a city student and you want a job, one hour a day would impact on you as well. Other suggestions were: include in discussions around tertiary affordability the cost of rural students living away from home — discussions are too often focused on HECS repayment; more flexible transport costs; alterations to qualifications for living away from home youth allowances; taxation arrangements which assist genuine education support costs to parents of rural students studying away from home; and to consider and provide more rural and regional study options to rural and city students. I am sure someone else has got something to say.

The CHAIR — Have any of you got anything to add to that just at the moment?

Mr WAGG — One of the things that possibly did not come up there was availability of accommodation, which has been a big issue for us. Our daughter was offered a place at Melbourne Uni this year. We tried to get her into a college. They had three applicants for every position that was available. Then you look at the housing options. To try to rent a house in Melbourne is very difficult, and it is hard for a country kid to work out how to negotiate that. She did get into a college at Sydney University, so she is now 1000 kilometres away from home instead of 300 kilometres away from home, simply because the accommodation issues just made it too hard to find somewhere suitable in Melbourne.

Ms McCORMACK — It is the same with my son. He is over at Burwood. They do not have a lot of on-campus accommodation there. We did not get in, so we have got a short term. He is living in a smaller version of an international house. He is the only first-year student there. All the other students are a totally different nationality to him. He is homesick. He is struggling to live with a whole different group. He is not socialising at all. He is going into Melbourne University to play football, where he is quite a good footballer, and he is travelling by public transport from Burwood into Melbourne University. He is wanting to come home, whereas we are trying to encourage him to stick it out a bit. But again, once the rental company see a student, they do not necessarily want to rent you the flat or the house either.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Can I ask, if finances were not an issue, would your kids prefer to go to university in Melbourne or would they be happy to stay in regional Victoria? Would you be happy for them to stay here, or would you like them to experience life in the city, if money was not the issue?

Ms HOWCROFT — Personally, my children are off. They wanted to have the city experience. Anna is in Geelong and she is happy with Geelong. There are a lot of other rural kids at Deakin as well so that suits her. And I want them to have the city experience.

Mr WAGG — My daughter was keen to go to a city, but I know there are a lot of kids from Hamilton who go to places like Ballarat and Warrnambool. Particularly Ballarat they see as being nearly Melbourne but not as frightening, and they are still within striking distance of home.

The CHAIR — You said you have got a daughter at Ballarat, Helen.

Ms SOBEY — My son is at Ballarat. My daughter went to Melbourne. He does like it because there are a lot of rural students. I have so many students that I work with at school. They are technically terrified to go to Melbourne. They hear so many things on the news. They are physically not brave enough, having very limited access. Families do not get to go for a couple of days. It costs \$1000 probably to take a family to Melbourne to stay in accommodation if you do not have relatives, to go down to watch football or whatever. In talking to my year 12s, I say, 'How many of you have put in to go to university?'. They say, 'Oh, no, I do not think we could do that. It is too scary down there'.

To have regional opportunities is, I think, so much better. That is why those who are game enough to go, they would go as far as Geelong. But we have a lot of students who are just not strong enough to think that they could manage. They do not understand the transport system, they do not understand public service, they have not had to hop on a bus. They have not had to do those sorts of things all alone. I must admit that this total lack of emotional support structures is one of the key things. I was going to say that that is my little hobby horse. My daughter went to Melbourne and she went into residence. I think that is one reasonable steppingstone but it is excessively expensive. We could not get Austudy. My two children, unlike the others, did not do a gap year. They went straight to university, so that was extremely expensive. I felt that it was the only way that a country student could make

some like-minded friends and have a bit of a support structure. I would know that someone would be checking on them.

When she went into a house even two years after, she suffered in the end quite severe depression. But you are not going home. All of the things say look at the signs for your teenagers as to what is going to happen. Are they getting up in the morning? No, she was not, but she was in a house full of people who were all at university and a couple were in medicine so they were doing odd hours. Nobody knew; I did not know. She was not game enough. We said, 'We believe in you; you are strong. You will do a good job; you are doing really well' — this was in her third year. She was missing lectures, she was getting behind, she was not getting up. No-one was doing anything. No-one was there. She was not going home to a family; she was going home to an empty house and had to prepare some food and was trying to keep up a job. It was really messy.

The other thing is when she did tell us, we could not actually go and knock on the door at the university and say, 'Someone help her', or, 'Where do I go?', because we were 300 kilometres away. As I said, I am a teacher and I would have had to take sick leave to go down to follow that up. It was only through a lot of phone calls that we found that the union had advocates. Had anyone been there to help or she had been coming home to a household, or if we had lived in the city it might have been different. She failed a year — it just compounded the whole thing. This is why a lot of students do not stay if they actually go and do it. They do say that country students have a lot of resilience and they are not the ones, perhaps, who pull out easily, but it is certainly a reason why they think, 'This is too hard; there is no emotional support; I change schools, I change friends, I change the expectations of the style of instruction I am getting; I have no family; I have left my boyfriend'. Everything — including sporting teams — is gone. That is a huge impact on these kids saying, 'Can I put my foot in the water to say I would like to go to tertiary?'. It is this seriously big scary thing.

Melbourne University is aware of it, and does try to do some transition programs with senior students, but they are very limited. Some sort of support is needed so that students can get a bit more familiar. We have one-day open days and a bus might go down, but it is so fazing, even to go to enrol the students. Here are some people from 300 kilometres who cannot find a park and do not know this; they are sent from one building to the next and all of a sudden they say, 'Come back on Wednesday for enrolment day', and you say, 'Excuse me'. There are lots of things. People just do not think about how far it is, how lonely it is for students. It does put them off. I look at the students I teach and see how many say they want to go to university.

Mr KOTSIRAS — One of the main reasons why some students in regional Victoria do not go on to TAFE or university is the aspirations of these students. What can be done to firstly improve the aspiration of parents and therefore the students? You are the parents. We are hearing that the aspirations of parents are not very high.

Ms HOWCROFT — I grew up in Melbourne, my family are in Melbourne so my kids have greater opportunities to mix with Melbourne families, but I still found that their experiences — you talk about aspirations — of what they could be when they grow up were so limited; they really did not have the comprehension of what careers they might have and what they might lead to. I do not know how to resolve that. As Ms Sobey said, you do a bus trip down to the university, but it just does not —

Ms McCORMACK — You asked: if there were opportunities in regional areas, would they stay? With the degree I have it is only possible to get that at one university in Victoria. Sometimes you do not have a choice of where you go. My son has a few mates at Melbourne — he is studying health science — so we looked at that; we looked at RMIT, but of course all of their health science is out at Bundoora. You are still almost as far out as if you were at Burwood. So it is not only that, it is where the courses are, too.

Mr WAGG — I would like to support Deb's observation. I think the careers guidance that students get is not really all that good. The work experience programs they go on are guaranteed to put them off whatever the job was they went and spent a week doing. It is a very difficult thing to do to engage a kid in the workplace at short notice. The concept or the realisation of what might be available to them is very low, consequently a lot of them have no idea what it is they want to do when they leave school.

Ms SOBEY — To that aim I think the idea of this new model that the University of Melbourne is bringing in has got some merit. It is a bit of selling it to the parents, saying 'If they are going to be away, they must know what they are heading to be'. But that may address the potential of not wasting the university's time by counting

towards some qualification, and yet they will have a lot more opportunity if that is expanded or given — for rural students I think that is perhaps a little bit on the right track.

The CHAIR — Yes, those sorts of courses, as Melbourne is looking at doing, can be offered in the regions. Then you can use the regions as a transitional base, I suppose, to make a start to your tertiary degree?

Ms SOBEY — That is right. It is not a waste of time.

The CHAIR — And then a specialist might take you — —

Ms McCORMACK — All of us who are sitting here mostly have double incomes. We have fairly good incomes, and we are struggling, so what about the average family where dad is a mechanic and mum works at Safeway? What is happening to their kids? They cannot support them in Melbourne. They cannot do what we are doing.

Mr DIXON — You have all obviously got children at university. Do your children aspire to come back to this area or regional Victoria to work, or are their options open at this stage?

Ms McCORMACK — My daughter wants to be nurse. She wants to do a double degree in nursing and midwifery, so she goes off to do that because she wants to do neonatal intensive care work. My son is doing sports coaching and all that sort of stuff after doing a traineeship at the gym. It could bring them back here or take them anywhere.

The CHAIR — Lena, you said your daughter is looking to do nursing. Why did she not consider RMIT nursing here?

Ms McCORMACK — She is just doing year 12. Because of the nursing she wants to get into, I do not think they do — where is Kaye; do they do nursing midwifery here? Is that offered in the double degree? No, they do not offer it in a double degree. To be a neonatal intensive care nurse she has to have that midwifery training.

Mr DIXON — Do your other children want to come back, or don't you know?

Ms SOBEY — Mine is back working at the moment. She finished university and did some travelling. She is interested in the diplomatic area so she is working back here. We have looked at whether she will go back to Melbourne but she has decided on lots of things like the safety aspect of being in Melbourne as a single, the money. She is looking to not head back to Melbourne immediately. My son has always been committed to enjoying a country lifestyle so I think he will end up back in a rural area as well.

Mr WAGG — I think it is a bit early to say, but one of the great things about it is that by the time they finish at university they will understand how you can live in a rural and regional area or how you can live in a city. Looking at from the other perspective there are a lot of people who live in Melbourne who could have much better lives if they came out here but they just would not know how to go about it.

Mr DIXON — That is a fair point.

Mr WAGG — At least our kids will be equipped to do both.

The CHAIR — I have no further questions.

Mr WAGG — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Hamilton — 28 April 2008

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Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witness

Ms K. Frankland, drug and alcohol and indigenous family violence worker, Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service, and Koori liaison officer, South West Institute of TAFE.

The CHAIR — The committee welcomes Kellie Frankland from the Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly Citizens Association. Could you please state your name and the name of the organisation you represent?

Ms FRANKLAND — My name is Kellie Frankland, and I work at the Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service in Portland. I am an alcohol and drug worker and an indigenous support worker. I am also the TAFE Koori liaison officer for South West TAFE. DWEC has been incorporated since 1994. It was initially set up for the elders of the Portland region, but over the years we now deal with all age groups — from zero to when they pass away. The reason we have changed into a health service and incorporated more age groups is the demand from the community that we become more involved in their child's progression from the time they are born to primary school. We do not actually have an indigenous youth worker in Portland. We have a regional one who is based in Heywood. Part of my job is that I have become the youth worker. I am not actually there to do that, but there is no-one else in Portland to do that, so I am it. One of my big things is having a youth worker based at DWEC permanently, full time, so that we can help get these kids engaged in school.

There are a lot of programs that help the at-risk kids. If kids are mucking up at school, then — bang! — they come and do this, but we always forget about the kids who are doing well. I think we need to start focusing on those guys as well. Because they are the ones who are dealing really well, we do not want them to muck up just to be able to get a trip to the paintballing or whatever. I have been doing schooling since 1995. I have done my year 12, my cert IV alcohol and drug work, and I have done my diploma in alcohol and drug work, and all of these things have managed me to be able to keep this position that I have got and to be able to be a positive role model for the kids who are in school. We have a hard time with them.

They get on the bus and get off the bus and go home. They do not even get to the classroom — and they are 12-year-olds! They have drug problems, they drink and they are from single-parent families. There is no-one in their families who are positive role models — who get up, go to work or anything like that. They do not get involved in sport, so we are finding it hard, because we do not actually get the money. We do not have a paid youth worker to actually do it, so I have to sort of jig it into the four days that I work. But we do positive things within the community. In 2006 for NAIDOC Week the mothers in our under-5s playgroup did their certificate in Photoshop and actually made their own books, which were displayed at the library. You can borrow them from the library, and we have got a copy of them at school, so that was at least seven mums who got their first-ever certificate for anything, ever.

For NAIDOC last year, we saw eight youth members from Portland receive four units of their certificate IV in hospitality through the TAFE in Portland. They became our waiters and bartenders for that whole week, so we had a flag-raising ceremony luncheon, so they were it. That whole week was hands on in there, non-stop — pumping info into them. From that, TAFE utilised two of the youth for any of their services. If they need waiters for a meeting, or whatever, they will actually employ two of those youth members.

We have run a sewing group at the moment. It is called Sew Simply. It has been running now for 28 weeks. The outcomes of that have been phenomenal. They actually do not drink on Sunday. They go to bed early, they get up and they are waiting out the front of their houses and ringing you if you are not there at 9.30. The age group of those participants ranges from 12 to 45. We have three students from Portland secondary who are being suspended all the time and are on part programs. Part of their program is that they come to the sewing group on Monday, and we give a report to the school on how they go — their manners, their behaviour, if they are actually doing what they are told and completing the tasks. We are just about to start our second program of that. There is one guy who does it. He actually goes to the shed now and is sewing five days a week, even if there is no-one there, because he just absolutely loves it that much. He has ended up getting 8 hours work a week. He actually has a shower now — he never used to shower. He is getting manicures, which he has never, ever done before. We are starting a mentoring program for the at-risk kids so they will have a separate day to the normal sewing group, and he is one of our head mentors for that program. Because we are not going to teach them to have good hygiene or anything like that, they are going to learn that from the way we dress and the way we speak, so his self-esteem has shot through the roof, and so have the rest of the participants in that program.

We have run a four-week TAFE course — just basic literacy, numeracy, art and computers. There were people who were illiterate right through to people who are still at school, and we are doing well. One guy in particular was illiterate — he could say his ABCs, but he could not write a big, long sentence — and he would be there, waiting at TAFE for me to get there with everybody else. He was in trouble with the criminal justice system. He has been in

jail. The four weeks was the only four weeks, and the first-ever certificate anyone in his whole family had ever got, he got, and he sat there staring at it for an hour. He could not believe it.

One of our big problems is actually getting them to go to primary school — some of them. They get up, they have not got food to be able to go to primary school, so they do not go to school that day. My thing would be looking at each individual holistically — so the whole family — and getting the supports in to be able to support the families to support the kid and to increase their rate of actually going to school so they can then go to university or to TAFE. It is very hard. They are not engaged whatsoever. If they do go to school, there is one part program. Nearly every single student in year 7 last year got suspended within the first three weeks of going to school. We have brought in racism policy now. We only had the bullying one, but we have actually got a racism one now at the secondary school. That is about it that I can think of.

The CHAIR — Kellie, did you grow up in Portland?

Ms FRANKLAND — No, I grew up in Warrnambool, then I moved to Sydney, then I moved to Melbourne, then I moved back to Warrnambool and I have only been in Portland 2½ years.

The CHAIR — The fact that you have managed to get on and get yourself through your secondary education and done the certificate courses, does that mean you had a family that was more together?

Ms FRANKLAND — No. I left school when I was in year 9 and I got asked not to come back. It was a boarding school. Then I went down the wrong track in life. I got into a lot of trouble with the police, and then I came back to Warrnambool and I thought, 'No, I am moving to Portland'. I moved to Portland and I thought, 'I am all my kids have got. My kids have got no dad. I am it. If I want them to make anything good in their life happen, it is up to me to do that', so I went back to school, and school, school, school and got a job and I bought a house and I got my car. I am it at the end of the day. Yes, I have got my mum and my dad and everyone, but I am 24/7 with my kids. So I know that I have got to make their growing up as normal as it can be and be a good role model and everything. That is why I do what I do, and that is one of my biggest things. If I can find one kid and keep them in school and get them happy to go to school to be able to become something that they want to be, then my whole life experience plus my education experience is best suited, I suppose.

Mr KOTSIRAS — How many young people did you help last year?

Ms FRANKLAND — Last year?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are we talking about 10 or are we talking hundreds?

Ms FRANKLAND — We are talking probably around 50.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Fifty; and you get no assistance?

Ms FRANKLAND — No, I do it in my own — it is not a part of my role to do that. I just do it because there is no-one else to do it, and if I do not do it, then who is going to do it?

Mr DIXON — You work with senior Aboriginal people as well.

Ms FRANKLAND — Yes.

Mr DIXON — These days, in the way the community lives now, have they got any influence over the younger children to inspire them at all?

Ms FRANKLAND — They do to an extent, but a lot of the kids do not have the respect that they should have.

Mr DIXON — For those elders?

Ms FRANKLAND — For those elders. You are meant to have respect for your aunts, your uncles. These kids just don't; they have none. I earn mine, and they know when I think it is funny, and they know when I am being serious that it is time to stop, basically. But we have got elders. They cannot go to our sewing group, but

they go along for the day just to have a look at what is going on and get them out of the house and stuff, and the young ones do behave better on those days. But you cannot ask them to go every single week, sort of thing.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Has your organisation got any involvement with the local TAFE or universities?

Ms FRANKLAND — Yes, I am the South West TAFE Koori liaison worker.

The CHAIR — How did you get that job as well? You seem to have about half a dozen.

Mr KOTSIRAS — .Do they assist in any way?

Ms FRANKLAND — Yes, we do. I speak a lot to the community about what needs they want — basically, programs they would like to be run through TAFE. A lot of things they ask for we do not do out of Portland, like hospitality. If we want to run a hospitality course, we go to Warrnambool. For NAIDOC last year I begged TAFE in Warrnambool to send two of their teachers for a week, and they did, because there was no cooking; it was just safe food handling, RSA, things like that.

The CHAIR — We had the Winda Mara people this morning, and I know there are the — —

Ms FRANKLAND — Gunditjmarra.

The CHAIR — The Gunditjmarra people also in the Portland area. Do you not work together? There are not some links with your group and those groups?

Ms FRANKLAND — There is. We have got the Gunditjmarra Aboriginal co-op, which is in Warrnambool, then you have got DWEC in Portland and then you have got Winda Mara in Heywood. They both have regional workers, so they will have a worker that comes. They have a regional youth worker. But when you look at it down at the nitty-gritty, you have got all the youth in Heywood, and you have got one youth worker there — two youth workers there, and you have got all the youth in Portland. How can you seriously think that these two workers can deal with all of those youths? We are talking a hundred kids, and you only ever hear when they do not go to school or they got suspended from school. There is no incentive, of, ‘You’re doing really well. That’s so good to see. Come on, let’s go paintballing’. It is a case of, ‘You’re doing the wrong thing; we had better get some help in there’, and then people jump on it. They have transition day where they go one day from primary to secondary to suss out the school, but there is no — being able to deal with kids going from grade 6 to year 7, where there is a lot more older influences in doing the wrong thing. How can you get them to — they have just got to follow the bad influences.

The CHAIR — Thank you. It sounds like you are doing a remarkable job.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Well done, Kellie.

The CHAIR — For our inquiry we will look at Koori aspiration and Koori education to some extent, but obviously the issues you raise go further, and it will be interesting to see the comments from the new Prime Minister and how the programs that he has outlined will roll out through this area.

Ms FRANKLAND — Yes, because it would be great to see if we can get the support that is needed.

The CHAIR — This been indicated, yes.

Ms FRANKLAND — When you look at us as a region we actually are in three different places. We are a long distance away from each other, and our kids are different from Warrnambool and different from Heywood kids.

The CHAIR — Thank you. That completes today’s hearing. Thank you very much, Michael, for your significant input and yours too, Leigh. It has certainly been a terrific day, and we have heard from a great range of people with a lot of input that we all need to think and work through as we progress this inquiry. It has certainly been most useful, and we appreciate all of the assistance and all of the input we have had.

Committee adjourned.