

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Victorian universities' investment in skills

Melbourne—Tuesday, 28 June 2022

MEMBERS

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Thephanous

Mr Nick Wakeling

WITNESSES (*via videoconference*)

Ms Mish Eastman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Vocational Education, and Vice-President, RMIT;

Professor Duncan Bentley, Vice-Chancellor and President, and

Mr Liam Sloan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Vocational Education and Training, and Chief Executive, TAFE, Federation University;

Professor Chris Pilgrim, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer, and

Mr Andrew Kong, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Vocational Education and Training, Swinburne University of Technology; and

Professor Adam Shoemaker, Vice-Chancellor and President, and

Ms Dianne Semmens, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Vocational Education, Victoria University.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings of the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into Victorian universities' investment in skills. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things outside this hearing, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible. Could I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking, to minimise interference.

There are no opening statements, but we will ask questions, and then if you can answer them as promptly as possible, that would be great; there are a lot of online. Just put your hand up if you can so that we can see who wants to respond to any of the questions that Committee members have. Thank you all for being here today.

We might go into questions. Chris Couzens, did you want to ask a question?

Ms COUZENS: Yes, thank you, Chair. Thank you all for your time and contribution today. We really appreciate it. My question is: what opportunities are there for improved collaboration between universities and TAFEs to address Victoria's skills needs? And what is the role of the Victorian Government in encouraging collaboration between universities and TAFEs?

The CHAIR: We have many hands up. I did not see who put their hand up first, but I will go with Duncan.

Prof. BENTLEY: I was just waiting for Liam to raise his hand, so I will stop and hand over to him.

Mr SLOAN: Thank you, Duncan. Good morning, everyone. I think there is a pivotal role to be played and I think that if we look at the establishment of the Office of TAFE Coordination and delivery in the Victorian Skills Authority, I think that is taking us some way towards embracing that opportunity for government, TAFEs and universities to have that collaborative approach to further developing industry relationships. I think that there is a real opportunity around the potential to establish centres of skills excellence, so to speak. If we align centres of skills excellence to the Victorian skills plan, there is an opportunity for us to potentially adopt a hub-and-spoke model. For example, if I think about the Asia Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre, which has just been established at Federation University, there is a real opportunity to potentially pull industry together under an area of expertise and look to see what we can do as a state to respond to that. I think that the government also has a role to play in helping universities and the TAFE sector to continue the network approach where at all possible to help address some of these gaps.

There is obviously a requirement to grow in work-integrated learning and student placements under applied learning across TAFEs and universities, and we are wondering whether or not there is an opportunity to incentivise potential workplace providers to engage in offering work placement opportunities. So I think they are potentially two things to give consideration to. There are some other things, but I will give other people an opportunity to potentially jump in.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mish, did you want to answer that question?

Ms EASTMAN: Thank you, Chair. Hopefully you can hear me okay. Thanks, Liam, for those observations. From RMIT's perspective, I think we would strongly advocate that there is a joined-up approach with regard to some of the findings of the Bean-Dawkins review, which explicitly called out recommendations with regard to university and industry collaboration. So rather than needing to start from ground zero, I think there is a good repository of opportunity that is already there and also to bring to life the innovation labs that were talked about in the Macklin review as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Duncan, did you still want to answer a question? No? Adam, you are next.

Prof. SHOEMAKER: Thank you, Chair. Adam Shoemaker from Victoria University. I am just acknowledging country as we begin, too.

I just wanted to suggest that what Mish has said is spot on. Really appreciate that point. I think it is actually the confluence of three things in a triangle. One is the Firth review, the second is the Macklin review and the third is the Bean-Dawkins review, and that space in between is the space we should be in and join that up. I think that is exactly what you are saying. We have already gone on record offering to host, with many others, on our city campus a kind of roundtable with all the relevant skills sectors and everyone on those issues and how to bring them together. We think that would be a really productive next step, and then focus on policy into legislation rather than just talking about the possibilities, because we think Victoria can really lead the way in this respect. That is our view as well: that industry at the core, industry on campus and doing so productively for job creation and education is really the way forward. So, thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Adam. Any further contributions? No? We might go to the next question. Juliana, did you have a question?

Ms ADDISON: Thank you very much, John. It is great to see my friends from Federation Uni on this panel. My question is about addressing skill shortages in rural and regional areas. My question to the group is: how can dual-sector universities and the Victorian Government work together to address skills shortages in rural and regional areas, particularly focusing on allied health, teaching and agriculture?

The CHAIR: Duncan.

Prof. BENTLEY: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Juliana, for the question. Just going more broadly first of all, I think the rural and regional areas skills shortages are highlighted by the lack of participation in, particularly, outer regional areas. There is a tendency for the metros to Hoover up the young people, particularly 18- to 25-year-olds, and those who do not go on to education then suffer lifelong in terms of their career. In Horsham the participation rate is 61 per cent compared with the Victorian average of 77 per cent. In Gippsland it is as low as 55 per cent, nearly a 20 per cent gap, which means that we are missing out on a huge group of people who should be engaged. Youth unemployment in Gippsland has improved slightly but remains stubbornly high at 19.3 per cent. Therefore when we are looking at the shortages, how can we overcome that? Going back to Adam's point earlier, I think it is absolutely fundamental that we pursue in the rural and regional areas in particular that triangle of government, industry and the universities all working together and really pushing that idea of cooperative learning, where we have co-curriculum design, co-delivery and making sure that we build in the centres of excellence and the training packages, which the industry in the rural and regional areas needs. One of the key things that we need is, as Liam has said, the aspiration raised from school through TAFE, the pathways into university. How do we go across the AQF level with hybrid qualifications and make sure that you can pathway in?

A couple of things which in the Job-ready Graduates package were a problem were the 50 per cent requirement in terms of pass rates, because we have so many students who are coming from schools where teachers are teaching out of field. They are not properly prepared to move into the university environment, and so we have pathways. Students change their minds, and they are then able to move into the areas that they are interested in.

Just to close off, just in terms of health and education, the pilots the Victorian Government is doing in education—and we cover allied health—have been extraordinarily successful, and we need to grow those. The Job-ready Graduates and COVID have militated against us in terms of greater participation in those programs, but I think that that will turn around next year. The issue we have, though, is basically you have got just in health, for example, nearly \$1 billion worth of funding by universities for placements, and that really is a transfer from one government pot funding universities to another government pot funding health, and it acts as a disincentive. I think if we could collectively address that in a roundtable way, we would come up with some good policies.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might go to Adam next. Adam.

Prof. SHOEMAKER: Thank you, Chair. And also, Juliana, thanks for the question. Look, really quickly, I was vice-chancellor of a regional university in New South Wales for the four years before coming here, and one of the things we found was that having a trisectoral or a multisector campus, which is what Duncan is talking about too, I think, with a school, TAFE and uni all on one site is incredibly powerful. Coffs Harbour is a good example. I know it is in another state, but it is a good example of how it can be done. I was just going to ask if Dianne perhaps, by your leave, Chair, could describe the fact that there is a bunch of tech schools and one

at Wyndham, which is an example of that. The campus at the moment works really well. I do not know if you have a minute just to hear about that, but as a model that could work to really advantage the agenda you are talking about.

Ms SEMMENS: Yes. Thanks for that, Adam. And thanks for the question, Juliana. In terms of focusing on region, obviously the outer west and Wyndham and its surrounds are rapidly expanding, so having Wyndham Tech School—and other universities and TAFEs have something similar across the state—on site does a couple of things. It means that with 9,000 or 10,000 students who are exposed annually to the activities within the tech school there is also the opportunity for them to be exposed to skill shortage careers, whether that be in allied health—you mentioned agriculture—or education, but obviously the focus is on STEM as well. They are not only gaining great practical and industry-based problem-solving skills at the tech schools but they are exposed to the concepts of where they can take their learning in terms of tertiary education, whether that be through TAFE or through university.

More and more we see what Adam and Duncan have been referring to—that whether you call them hybrid qualifications or integrated qualifications, there is an opportunity. It is sort of like if you do not actually see it or get exposed to it, many students in regional areas and their parents just do not know what is possible and what is available. So it is having that visibility of having forums and, if you do not have a tech school, other things that actually take them onto campus where they can hear people talk about the job opportunities. You have got industry people there, so in the triangle that we talked about with industry it is so crucial that they hear the stories of people who have taken multiple different pathways and stepping stones, I guess, to get to where they are. And it is very difficult to recruit. I mean, we can talk about industry using TAFEs and universities as a recruitment field, but it is very difficult to recruit if at the entry point you are not attracting, like with allied health. If you did a poll in the street about allied health, most people would not actually know what an allied health assistant or an allied health practitioner is. So even just the naming and nomenclature around qualifications can be a barrier, particularly in regional areas.

I think why the model that is there that we have seen at Werribee works so well is that we have industry on site at Werribee in addition to the school, the TAFE, the university. We actually have Orygen or Headspace on site there at Werribee operating service provision in mental health. Now, I know that is not allied health, but it is obviously another great area of skill shortage and focus, particularly post COVID. So it is actually about making it real for people and opening up their minds to different pathways and careers other than when they think ‘health’ and they think ‘doctor, nurse’. We are really at the point where we have really got to get beyond that by exposing them to all of the other careers and opportunities that are within their particular fields of interest.

Ms ADDISON: Can I just add: my daughter is in year 8 and she just went to the Ballarat Tech School. She came home with all of these ideas, and it was great.

Ms SEMMENS: Yes, the tech schools are a fabulous initiative from the government, and more power to them about it. People could do with more. The industry engagement in that is sensational, and I think that is what makes it attractive as well to the students.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Dianne. Liam.

Mr SLOAN: Thank you, Chair. I agree with everything that Dianne has just said. Morning, Juliana—great to see you. Just some opportunities maybe to consider are that obviously delivering out to regional areas is often less financially viable for us as an institution. I am just wondering whether or not there is consideration being given to introducing subsidies that maybe support small cohorts, small group sizes, maybe disadvantaged cohorts, in these outer regional areas, because often we go to market to respond to a skills need and, lo and behold, for whatever reason, three or four students apply. Those are three or four potential pipeline candidates for great jobs, but it challenges the financial viability from an institution’s point of view. So considering some form of subsidy would be great.

And then also, secondly, I am wondering whether or not there is an opportunity—although this would create significant challenges—for the government to consider investment in technology. When we talk about connected classrooms, we talk about Federation University students being able to learn in the Wimmera, in Gippsland and in Ballarat, but if we thought beyond that and thought, ‘Well, a connected classroom could be

connecting RMIT, Swinburne and VU', and about whether or not there are opportunities for us to look outside of our own standalone institutions and look at a connected classroom concept, it would mean we actually bring a class of 50 together rather than small groups of four and five. They are just a couple of points I wanted to put across, so thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Liam. Chris Pilgrim.

Prof. PILGRIM: Thank you. Chris Pilgrim from Swinburne, and thank you for the opportunity to contribute. Swinburne is a metropolitan university, so you would probably find it surprising that I am responding to this question, but of our 35,000 students, about 14.4 per cent are actually from rural and regional areas, and over half of those 14.4 per cent are studying initial teacher education courses. So Swinburne is proud that we are able to provide a strong supply of teacher graduates who are more likely to remain in rural and regional areas upon completion of their programs by studying online. We have highly successful initial teacher education online courses available, and we have strong support from the Victorian Institute of Teaching for these programs.

What we have seen is that these programs, because they avail students to study online—the initial teacher education courses—enable them to have their placements in local schools in the regional and rural areas. Those teacher education graduates are more likely to have better skills and knowledge to be able to deal with the particular issues of regional and rural students and, upon graduation, are more likely to remain in the regions and to support teacher education supply shortages that we know are profound. So what we are asking for, I expect, is the continued flexibility in placement delivery arrangements. There have been some recent policy changes that have made it more difficult for those students to obtain placements in their local regional areas. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Chris. Mish.

Ms EASTMAN: Thank you. Not a regional provider—we do have a range of regional students who travel to our metro campus. I think just a couple of principles that I would like to loop in. Victoria has a very unique lived experience and advantage of having dual-sector universities and the ecosystem of a joined-up education experience that is not linear; it is not necessarily VE to HE. It is about multidirectional experiences for students applying in regions with equally as much vigour as they do in metro experience. The other call-out I would make from a policy and system approach is that students and employers are looking more and more for an earn-and-learn solution. So the applicability of those models where we have tested and tried them in a range of sectors, particularly in community services, the disability sector et cetera, is transferable to a regional experience if we think more fulsomely about internships and cadetships in a range of professional and paraprofessional roles.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We might move to the next question. Kat, did you have a question?

Ms THEOPHANOUS: Thank you, Chair. My question relates to the Victorian Government's Clean Economy Workforce Capacity Building Fund, which you might be familiar with. It is creating opportunities for partnerships between the vocational education and training sector and industry. What, in your view, are the benefits and shortcomings of that fund and potentially similar funds? And what improvements are required going forward, in your view?

The CHAIR: Have we got any hands up? Who wants to answer that one?

Ms THEOPHANOUS: Liam has his hand up, Chair.

The CHAIR: Liam, there we go.

Mr SLOAN: I am happy to give an attempt. I suppose, from my point of view, I want to reflect on the work that we have done around establishing the Asia Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre. I am not using this as a plug for Federation University, but essentially I just want to talk about the concept and the way that we built this. This took about 12 to 18 months worth of hard graft around constant industry engagement, so meeting with all of the industry partners across the renewable energy training sector. This took, as I have said, 12 to 18 months worth of work that was sometimes difficult to substantiate, although you are being driven to deliver targets all through those 12 to 18 months. I think the government has a role perhaps in enabling some of

those conversations to happen to get industry on board, because the rewards that we reaped from that were that we got \$1.8 million worth of industry funding to build a training tower.

The university obviously contributed in kind to that through all of our time, but it is amazing, the industry engagement and the skin in the game that can be gained through a collaborative approach. And what is not going to work is all of the institutions doing this independently—everyone tapping an organisation industry on the back and saying, ‘Can we have some time with you? How can we make this work for this region?’. So I think it needs to be an all-of-government approach, as is the way that it is starting to take shape, and it is being able to pool these industry partners so that they can see the benefit of their potential investment so that we are not relying solely on government investment and it is looking at industry investing.

Lastly, I just want to mention the opportunity that I think we need to push around potentially degree apprenticeships within this area, because there is a big, real opportunity for us to collaboratively develop a degree apprenticeship program rather than independently doing this. And it is not only degrees, I accept that; there are going to be skills needs across the whole of the AQF. So I think that collaboration led by government is going to be key. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Liam. Dianne.

Ms SEMMENS: Thanks. It is a really important question, Kat. And, Liam, you have taken a couple of things I was going to say, which I will not repeat, which are just about the necessity to have higher level apprenticeship programs and that it is silly for us all to be developing our own ones. So I think the way that the clean energy is funded, I would not like to comment on what is working and what is not because it is quite embryonic at this stage, so it is a little bit hard to make that evaluation. But I will probably call out a couple of things in relation to it.

Yes, Liam, spot on about the time and the investment taken in terms of getting the industry on board. I think the part that is a risk for us and for the Victorian Government is in the trainer capability space in clean energies, whether that be at university or at TAFE. I mean, there is obviously a lot of research and information and so on, but it is about currency—having that industry currency—and it is changing and evolving so rapidly. So I think something that probably the Victorian Skills Authority in its work of trying to coordinate things needs to consider is whether the training capabilities of staff are sufficient to meet industry needs, because we can stir interest among students and interest among industry. We all have goodwill to do it. Do we have the workforce that is capable of doing it? That is an area that really needs probably some development.

The other thing I think is, I suppose, the elephant in the room for the VET-immersed people here: the training packages that we work with are five, 10 years behind. Even though they are supposedly industry informed, the clean energies and the skills and the knowledge, no matter which AQF level we are looking at, at the VET level anyway, are really outdated and we are constrained in that we need to deliver within these training packages that are not fit for purpose. I mean, it is a clear message from our industry partners every time we raise this that we are bound to accreditation and to training packages that are not up to date, and some of them do not even reference fundamental clean energy terminology or skills knowledge and underpinning foundations.

So I suppose I just wanted to highlight two risks: that, however we proceed with the clean energies initiatives, it needs to be in a collaborative way, as Liam said—and that is being coordinated anyway through the VSA et cetera—but also that we need to look at the workforce and we need to look at the actual product and what we are constrained with if we persist with offering accreditation just through training packages at VET level.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Dianne. Now, I understand that RMIT did apply to this fund, so we will go to Mish for this one.

Ms EASTMAN: Thank you, Chair. We applied. I think my understanding is we are still waiting to hear back at the moment, but from an opportunity point of view, if we lift up, I think there are two things. One is how the Victorian skills plan aligns with this domain is really crucial, and then to double down a little bit on some of the threads that Dianne planted there, for Victoria to think more expansively than training packages as the solution to this workforce opportunity. So we have an emergent commitment as a state to a clean economy workforce. We have a lag indicator if we are looking to national training packages to resolve that, but we do as a state have great experience and depth with bringing to life a curriculum that is applied in nature and solves

these challenges for the state. So that is the piece where I think Victoria and government in Victoria can potentially be more active in that space.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. I might ask a question about upskilling and reskilling. Micro-credentialing—I know a lot of people have different views on this, but what is the role of micro-credential courses in developing the workforce skills that Victoria needs and what is the role of universities in promoting the uptake of micro-credentials? Also how could universities contribute to increased clarity about the definition and role of micro-credentials? Adam, you have got your hand up.

Prof. SHOEMAKER: Chair, thank you. Look, it is a massive question, but I will try to give you a very direct answer. I think the term is problematic because some of these things are not small or infinitesimal. ‘Micro’ is a bit of an issue. I think what it is actually talking about is just-in-time credentials just in place and jobs where you live. That it is really what we are talking about. The problem is we do need to coin a better phrase, because out there in punter land not everyone gets what ‘micro-credential’ is, means or does.

I will give you an example that is concrete, if I could. When we are talking about the health crisis at the moment in Australia and we are talking about things like ambulance and paramedicine, every state is having ramping issues like that. So we have decided as a place to have a paramedicine centre of excellence at the Sunshine campus in cooperation with Ambulance Victoria, literally situating their training headquarters for the region on the campus, as well as an actual, real-life ambulance station, as well as what we teach in the TAFE in terms of non-emergency patient transport and so on. Now, these are all skills. Some of them take six months, some 12 and some—in the case of a paramedicine degree—a number of years. But there are also upgrades which you could have to any of the above, which could be what you described—you know, like a micro-credential, as things change.

But to me the problem is how we come up with a nationally consistent form of words to describe it which does not sound like sort of a little bit cheap and nasty. In other words it has got to be done at the highest quality, highest level, highest standard and just in time. I believe Victoria could lead the way in such things as a national centre of excellence in medtech, healthtech, paramedicine. Each of us could be one of the places which did such a thing, and it is not just a Victorian thing. It could be for Australia as a whole. But I believe we do need to do some more work, hence the idea of a roundtable might be useful to really coin a better phrase.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Liam.

Mr SLOAN: Thank you, Chair. My comment really is—I agree around the nomenclature and suchlike. I wonder whether or not there is a real opportunity for us to—we constantly hear from industry that they are struggling with pipeline talent, and of course we know that if we get micro-credentialing right, then there is an opportunity to upskill the existing workforce, which then immediately addresses some of the challenges that they might be facing around the talent gap. So I wonder whether or not there is an opportunity for the government to incentivise organisations to upskill existing workforce through the adoption of micro-credentials, nano-credentials, whatever we call them—stackable credentials. That might be an opportunity that buys us time to develop pipeline talent but at the same time gives us an opportunity to upskill existing talent.

Then also I am just wondering whether or not there is an opportunity, although there will be complications and challenges, to create—and I know all of my colleagues in the room, because we have a strong relationship, do this already—or to have a cross-institutional platform that supports the delivery of credentials rather than the constant replication and duplication of effort. I know it comes with challenges and complications, but we should not throw it out without giving consideration to it. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Andrew, I will go to you next.

Mr KONG: Thanks, Chair. I think that as we go forth it is more than apparent that people will need to continually upgrade their skills. Just to prosecute that, there are many degree-qualified and vocationally qualified people who are ineligible for funding, so therefore it is really necessary to ensure that we do fund those particular people to upgrade their skills. I would also reinforce Liam’s point, and that is that where industry tell us that they want micro-credentials or credentials or non-accredited training in order to upskill their workforce, it is often the case that those particular programs will be developed but then it is hard to get industry to release their people to actually participate. So again, it is important to incentivise industry to do so. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Andrew. Duncan.

Prof. BENTLEY: Just a brief addition, Chair, to what Liam has said: one of the issues that we face is that when talking to the SMEs who represent somewhere between 87 and 93 per cent of our regional economies, one of the biggest issues is that they google what micro-credentials their staff could study and they have not a clue how to manage the quality or what it is that is actually going to be in there which is going to be a provision that they need. I suppose Victoria has recent experience in the vocational education market to know that we need to very carefully curate the framework within which we operate. Hence some of the recommendations which Liam referred to in terms of the platform which came out of the Bean-Dawkins review and other, I suppose, market-curating approaches, which Victoria has done very well in the last few years, would be important.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Duncan. Mish.

Ms EASTMAN: Thanks very much. I guess not wanting to double down on what has been said before, our call-out from RMIT's perspective is (a) around commonality of size, magnitude, impact and how we can reach some coherence around that so that micro-credentials are not seen as an old-fashioned tick-and-flick, undervalued kind of experience. The second is the risk that we only have a perversity of conversation on upskilling that is only grounded in micro-credentials as the be-all and end-all. I think we need to be very cautious in our language, our policy settings and our drivers to maximise students having a stackable experience that leads to qualifications over their lifetime, which indeed leads to lifetime earning capacity for them, their family and the community that they are grounded within. So we need to be alert always to undercutting that by default, and because the labour market at the moment has low unemployment and high employment, there is a current and emergent risk that individuals are being grabbed to work and given some micro-credentials or short skills to solve that problem from an employer's perspective. But we need to be cautious not to lose the lifetime or the longer term impact for individuals if they do not obtain formal qualifications throughout their journey.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. We will go to the next question. Chris Couzens.

Ms COUZENS: Thank you, Chair. How can universities and the Victorian Government work together to encourage enrolments in priority skill areas, but also how can universities improve student services and engage with secondary schools to attract students to study in those priority skill areas?

The CHAIR: Lots of hands up. Okay. I will go to Adam.

Prof. SHOEMAKER: Sorry, Mish. You might have just been ahead of me. I apologise. Chris, I think it is a fantastic question, and it goes to this whole issue of the A to Z of education. 'A' begins in very early childhood, and you know that there is a lot of work being done there, and I think that is crucial, but also 'Z' is wherever and whenever; it does not stop, so it is throughout the lifespan. But on the specific question of the reaching up from school and the reaching in from TAFE and university and the space in between, I think that is the crucial space. If you think about the olden days, some people who were lucky enough in high school got to do university-level subjects and count them towards their VCE. Now with the new VCE you can do very similar things, in fact just as valuable things, with that level of qualification during senior levels of high school. That is great, but picking the areas is crucial, and I think what we find often is that the advice that is given does not necessarily cohere with what industry are saying they need and want. So I would advocate really strongly that you have industry participation at that level—years 11 and 12—guiding us in the areas that should be offered and what we can support, and guiding the support, for example, for scholarships and/or bursaries for students to make the transition. I think without that industry voice, the target is not in mind, and I believe that is, speaking personally, what we are talking about.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mish, did you want to respond?

Ms EASTMAN: Yes. A couple of observations: one, I think students are guided by their trusted family and friends and community that they are grounded within, and that has been an experience across dual-sector universities for a long time. So changing the dialogue about the status of educational outcomes is crucial, and if we just rinse, repeat the same model of career planning that we have always had, we will end up with the same outcomes. So I think we need to be much more divergent in building in the value of multiple educational

outcomes and qualification outcomes for Victorians and rebalancing, recalibrating how important skill outcomes are for individuals and for communities.

The other two elements I would build in are, I think, a coherence around a learner profile that can be utilised for admission to education that is alternate to the ATAR scheme—I think that is really crucial and something where perhaps the state and the commonwealth can do some work together—and really broadening out that sense that access to education is not and should not be dependent on ATAR alone. But until we systematise and demonstrate and continue to broaden what a more inclusive tertiary, in its fullest sense, admission scheme looks like then I think that is work that can be done.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Duncan?

Prof. BENTLEY: Just a very quick addition to what others have said is that one of the difficulties, particularly in rural and regional areas, is to engage with the students and the teachers in the schools such that they realise that aspiration early on. It sounds very easy to say, ‘Well, let’s take industry and the university into schools’. Schools have a very tight timetable, particularly in their year 11 and 12 years, and to be able to build that partnership, I think, is much more challenging than it will read our submission here and our answers here. I think that is where Victoria—again because of the innovative approach of the Department of Education and Training to how we can develop our schools to make our teaching more attractive but also how we can ensure that our students have a much better view of how to realise their aspiration, and with the dual-sector environment how they can do that in a measured, stepped pathway, as Mish has described—has got a real national competitive advantage.

The CHAIR: Okay. We might go to the next question—we are running out of time—if that is all right. Kat, do you have a question?

Ms THEOPHANOUS: Thank you, Chair. I know we have covered a bit of this already in the answers that have been provided, but I wanted to just drill down into work-integrated learning. We know that it is important. We know that it helps with placements and internships and preparing students for the workforce. We are really looking for tangible sorts of things here. What more can the Victorian Government do to support universities to embed work-integrated learning into university courses, and what can other universities learn from the dual-sector universities and TAFEs about embedding work-integrated learning into the university sector and courses?

The CHAIR: Liam.

Mr SLOAN: Thank you, Chair. I think we should celebrate the success that happened over COVID with regard to the Victorian Government putting forward our way additional funding that enabled us to respond to a huge demand in administration—in administering work-integrated learning or work placement activities post COVID. It was great to receive that form of financial incentive or support to enable that to happen. I know that there is going to be a need for a growth in work placement providers as we move further down the line around cooperative universities and working world ready graduates, so I am wondering whether or not there is an opportunity—and I know I keep saying ‘incentivise’—to incentivise potential work placement providers in whatever way it can be to grow that list of people who are available. But also dual-sector universities and our standalone TAFEs are all vying often for the same work experience opportunity, and we have got three or four institutions tapping a health service on the back saying, ‘Can you provide work placement opportunities for our students?’. I know there is work underway to try and get there, but I think in trying to develop a network approach to work-integrated learning and how we tackle that, there is a real opportunity for us to do that. Also, just lastly, I am wondering whether there is an opportunity of a grant towards maybe commencement costs if an employer recruits a graduate who went to them on work placement. That might encourage further engagement with industry, with universities and also provide that pipeline of talent. They are maybe a couple of things I just wanted to raise. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Very good. Thank you. Mish.

Ms EASTMAN: Thank you for the question, Kat. I think RMIT and certainly all of us as dual-sector universities have a long legacy with regard to our establishment coming from applied solutions for the communities that we reach, so I think there are some elements and a key contribution the actual sectors can make. Part of our bench strength is understanding the multifaceted approach to workforces that employers are

looking for. Currently there are systems and a process that make it a competition-based approach with regard to placements rather than looking at preferred partners and integrated solutions with regard to work-integrated experiences. I would call out that I think how we match applied research, workforce development and new and emerging graduate requirements all within an ecosystem of an employer or of an industry grouping is really crucial for us to shift from transactional as part of this solution to a much more evolved approach to how we do that.

The other piece, which I did flag before, is I think some of our examples really looking at how the Victorian Government has supported—and we are very pleased and thankful for this—the focus on learning integrated with work. In particular we have got examples of working through the Workforce Innovation and Development Institute at RMIT—us as the provider and working with employers across community services, disability services and aged care. The ingredients of that have been investment in on-the-job mentorship and support as well as educational-led development of skills, knowledge and application and linking that together in a much more cohesive way than just an input-only kind of fit. So they are some of my observations with regard to work-integrated learning and experiences.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We have gone over time. I notice that Chris and Adam have their hands up. If they are really quick, we can get through it. That would be great. Chris, do you want to go first?

Prof. PILGRIM: Thank you, Chair. Just a very quick observation: I think there is an opportunity around participation of international students in work-integrated learning, and I am aware of a Victorian Government roundtable that was held a couple of weeks ago with respect to that. I just encourage the Victorian Government in, and really commend the Victorian Government for, that initiative. There is some work to be done, particularly around removing any of those real or perceived barriers that industry have with respect to engaging with international students in work-integrated learning, and that is a key to the success of the international students in being able to engage with the workforce, because they bring huge skill capacity but there is a step that is needed that work-integrated learning can actually solve. So thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Adam.

Prof. SHOEMAKER: Thank you, Chair, I will be really quick, given time, but thank you so much for the discussion. Three quick points to recap: I think we mentioned before the importance of having insertion, or what we call a flipped campus, with industry on campuses. Everyone does it, even if it is a demonstration restaurant on a campus, which is another example of it in terms of skills. But tech schools, more of them, on university and TAFE campuses, fantastic idea; I have really written that one down and underlined it. Clinics, be they tax clinics—you know, the ATO—or other forms of clinics that the public can use not only open the door to skills for those teaching but the benefit to the community is profound. So clinics is the second thing. The third thing is platforms. We have been talking about lack of competition. If you have a platform, it is non-competitive. Within that platform people do slightly different versions of clinics or of tech schools, but the platform is the key. So to me: tech schools, clinics, platforms—that is how I would summarise it. Chair, I hope that is helpful.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Adam. Thank you for your participation, all of you. It has been very valuable to us. If your feet that you wanted to say anything further but you could not raise it here because we were out of time, please write to us with any further information that you might want to provide. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.