T R A N S C R I P T

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 19 February 2018

Members

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Witnesses

Professor James Bright, Professorial Fellow, Career Education and Development, Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University (*via teleconference*); and

Associate Professor Andrew Harvey, Director, Centre for Higher Education, Equity and Diversity Research, La Trobe University.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearing of the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee's Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing are not afforded such privilege. Hansard is recording today's proceedings. We will provide a proof version of the Hansard transcript so you can correct any typographical errors. You have 5 minutes to make your statements. That will allow us some time so we can ask some questions. Before you start can you state your name for the Hansard record.

Prof. BRIGHT — Thank you. My name is James Edward Harold Bright.

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — Andrew Harvey.

The CHAIR — Professor Bright, it is your call.

Prof. BRIGHT — Okay. So you would like an opening statement?

Mr CRISP — Yes, please.

Prof. BRIGHT — Thank you for inviting me to provide some evidence to the Committee. I greatly appreciate the Committee's interest in this very important area and the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Australian Catholic University in this capacity. You will have had the submission from the Australian Catholic University, and in that we make five recommendations for consideration by the Committee. Clearly this is an area that is very close to my heart and the area of my professional specialisation and activity; it has been for over 20 years in the Australian context, working in Victoria and training careers teachers from all sectors in the Victorian context for many years.

I think there is some great work that is being done in career education in Victoria at the moment and there are some exceptional individuals working within schools providing that career education, and I think it is important that that is stated. However, I think there are always opportunities for improvement, and I think part of the issue as I see it is that there is possibly a lack of consistency in career education delivery. There is I think turnover in staff who are assigned to provide career development services in schools, and the role is not always seen as a particularly prestigious one or a career track for further promotion in such school settings. This may have some implications in terms of the quality of staff who are seeking to work in this role and the influence that they may have more broadly within a school to effect change.

So one of the strategies that we would like you to consider would be bolstering the career educator's role within schools in several ways. One would be to consider establishing a full-time load role in every school. This is an option that has been available to principals in New South Wales schools for many years, and I think it brings with it some benefits, both in terms of the capacity of the role to service the burgeoning numbers of students, but it also provides some stability and continuity potentially within the role as well, which means that you get an investment back on the training dollar rather than continually training people for short-term roles. It also allows the adviser to gain a depth of knowledge about the local scene and to develop effective relationships with local employers as well, all of which is for the benefit of the students.

Further to that I think we really do need to move beyond the current level of qualification for people in this role. This really is a masters level role. People need to have advanced skills and an ability to self-reflect on their skills to undertake appropriate research within their schools and communities to evaluate the effectiveness of what they are doing in destination surveys, where their students are going and what barriers and needs that they have so they can better tailor their services. These require skills which go beyond those currently available to them in graduate certificate-level training, so that would be another recommendation.

I think behind all of this is the need coming out of this inquiry to establish what we would call a taskforce, which would involve a range of different key stakeholders from industry, education, higher education, employers groups, community groups and appropriate subject matter experts, to develop a coherent strategy for what we are trying to achieve with career education. We need to move beyond the idea that simply providing people with information will lead to them making effective decisions. We live in an information-rich age, and students in Victoria are able at the touch of a button to access information that probably a student at a school in Africa could also access via the internet, so the issue is not the provision of information, which perhaps in the past may have been the bottleneck in the process.

One of the biggest issues is that the Victorian economy, like all economies in developed countries, is facing massive change and disruption, and the future of work is going to be about change, dealing with change, being able to spot opportunities and being able to reassemble your transferable skills into a new offering to the labour market or to develop entrepreneurial skills to change the labour market by offering employment through your own work and innovation. Those skills can be taught, but they are not currently part of career education, which has got a focus on matching people to roles.

Simply measuring somebody's interests and saying 'These jobs match your interests' has been shown and has been known for 20 or 30 years to be totally ineffective. It disregards the fact that people change and the labour market is continually changing as well. So learning how to deal with that change and spot opportunities, and to be resilient in the face of that change, I think is a really important and central part of effective career education. We are not simply about transitioning students out of school into their next training opportunity or into employment; we are trying to equip them with the decision-making capacity to make effective decisions about their career throughout their life span, in the same way that we educate people with English or mathematics so they develop foundational skills that they can apply in lots of different ways throughout their lives. It is not simply about the next step, and I think that is a really important fundamental aspect of what schools can be doing. It is a great opportunity for Victorian schools to equip these students to come out as flexible, innovative individuals who are resilient and able to spot opportunities, take advantage of changes and bounce back from inevitable setbacks that are going to happen in their careers. We just do not do enough of that work, and this is an opportunity for us to do it.

We think also that a Victorian Career Development Institute would be a very worthy idea to provide ongoing targeted professional development for career educators regionally and in metropolitan areas, as well as conducting targeted research on the Victorian career development experience, labour market statistics, destination surveys and so forth, and I really do think that could become a focal point for a lot of high-quality training and also research, which would inform the Victorian Government and help them in their decision-making to implement effective policy in this area.

In relation to regional students, we feel that they are at something of a disadvantage in terms of their exposure to various career opportunities and maybe the culture of going on to higher or further education. I think we need increased funding at those schools to assist specifically in targeted initiatives around career education, including travel, to allow those students an opportunity to get a breadth of experience that their metropolitan counterparts perhaps take for granted or at least have more readily available to them. So in a nutshell, those are some of what we believe are the most important areas for consideration for the Committee. Thank you for listening to me.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Professor Harvey, would you like to make a statement before we start questions, and it will make it easier to put questions to both of you?

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — I think the lesson from most of the submissions to this inquiry has been that being a careers adviser is not a particularly prestigious career. From what I have read of the submissions they seem fairly consistent around the fact that careers advisers are effective, they are important, their provision should be mandated, they should be better qualified, they should receive better professional development and their work needs to start well before Years 11 and 12. All of that seems pretty clear from the research and I think there are a lot of issues around how you implement those policies, but I do not really want to add particularly to that, because I think the case has been well made elsewhere.

Our own research highlights the extent to which those issues are exacerbated in regional and low-SES schools. For example, the students in our surveys who were not intending to study at tertiary level or who were unsure of tertiary education, they are the most likely students to rely on parents, teachers and careers advisers, particularly teachers. So what our research suggests is that students see their discipline teachers as careers advisers, but the discipline teachers often do not see themselves as careers advisers. So getting around this idea that the careers advisers can solve these issues I think is important, and clearly there are a lot of changes that need to be made to the careers advisers themselves and to that profession, but the issue is a lot broader than that, I think.

Our research with Year 11 students found that they do not know much about tertiary admission centres, special education access schemes, directed admissions, subject weightings, ATARs or principal recommendation schemes. Almost none of these things do they know well and low-SES and regional students know less, and this is particularly problematic because the students who are most likely to need or who are most in need of the special education access scheme compensation, for instance, are in many cases the least likely to apply for it. So

that is an obvious informational issue, and there are other broader issues around what we call the soft bigotry of low expectations. So we do a lot of work with care leavers, for example—people in kinship care, foster care, residential care—and they are surrounded by low expectations, and that feeds into careers as well as tertiary education. So there are some deeper needs around that as well.

So I guess beyond our submission—which I think is long but hopefully fairly clear in terms of the research around regional and low-SES students—some other ideas that perhaps the Committee could look at would be a revised version of a program called LEAP. So LEAP was called Learn, Experience, Access Professions, and that was HEPPP-funded, so that was commonwealth funded, and it was a collaboration among the Victorian universities to work in outreach and get students into career sites, such as hospitals directly or employment sites directly, rather than simply familiarising themselves with a university. So it was very careers focused. That program ran out of money subsequently, but there would be an opportunity for a state government such as Victoria to implement something similar that was school-focused and school-funded, rather than university-funded, but that brought in employer groups as well, where the government might try to untangle a bit this relationship between schools and universities that is so university-centric and broaden it more towards a careers focus. So I think if employers were brought into a program that worked with tertiary education institutes as well as schools there might be an opportunity to diversify some of the outreach that is happening.

Another important element I think is resources for teachers directly around stereotype threat, low expectations—some of the issues we see all the time. So for instance we know that from a very early age girls do not think they are good at maths or science. This is pure stereotype threat and it has to be addressed, and in many cases it is not being addressed by teachers. So we have a federally funded project with the University of Newcastle looking at developing resources for teachers in low-SES schools to address those issues. Those kinds of issues I think are important, and the Victorian Government could support development of some of those resources as well.

Direct resources for parents and students I think are also important, so again what the research says is that students rely on not just careers advisers but also their teachers, also their parents, also their peers, and in many cases, of course, parents are not the people who turn up to parent teacher nights—the parents of students who most need it. Whether that was something similar to the MyUniversity site, whether there was a sort of careers website that looked at that, I am sure there are a number of sites already that tackle this, but it is clearly an issue and the information is not getting through to regional and low-SES students and their parents, not only about university but more broadly about careers.

Research and evaluation are important. I think it was mentioned in the previous session which schools do better and why. Do we know much about the careers advice in Lighthouse schools? Have we talked enough to students? Have we talked enough to parents and careers advisers? There is probably an agenda there around research and evaluation that could be conducted.

Linking the Victorian Student Number to the CHESSN higher education number and the vocational number is critical for student outcomes. We have been pushing this at the higher education level with the commonwealth government, but again there is an opportunity for a state government alone to pair with the commonwealth to make sure that we know what the pathways of students are, not only through secondary school within Victoria but beyond that.

Perhaps the final point: we had another program recently called Uni Bridges, which was about thematic curriculum. This was based on the work of Professor Richard Teese, who essentially went around Victorian schools and said, 'Well, the reason students aren't achieving highly is because they're bored, so how do we deal with boredom?'. The model was a thematic curriculum based on a high-challenge, high-achievement model. We had a theme of preventing and curing disease, and we ran that across 12 schools in Bendigo and Melbourne. We worked with the schools and we reformed the curriculum so students were able to study that theme of disease through English, through maths and preferably through the sciences as well.

There is an opportunity for similar kind of work to that through the Tech Schools that have now been created and also through the humanities areas as well to try to redesign curriculum, not only so careers are embedded in the curriculum, which is important and needs to happen, but also so that the curriculum is made more real for a lot of students who do not see the diversity of careers on offer or the benefit of some of those careers. There are some ideas, and of course I am happy to talk more about our own research.

The CHAIR — I am going to ask a question, and Professor Bright you are welcome as well to respond to the question. I know I cannot see you face-to-face, but I hope you are listening to me.

Prof. BRIGHT — Yes, I am.

The CHAIR — Good. How can the Victorian Government encourage principals and teachers to place greater value on careers advice activities within the curriculum? Would you like to start, Professor Harvey?

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — No, I think I will handball that one, actually. I think Jim will know more about that.

Prof. BRIGHT — Principals are assailed by everybody in their schools saying that their own area is of absolutely critical importance, and very often what happens is what is immediately expedient rather than what is longer term strategic. I think that incentivising principals by, for instance, the mechanism of having a full-time role as a careers adviser and also, as the previous speaker said, embedding careers in the curriculum would be very strong signals that this stuff is absolutely central to their mission. I think that having this stuff within the frameworks as an expectation as part of the principal's KPIs to report on would be one way of doing that.

We could present the evidence for the effectiveness, and I think that is important. Again it also links into the quality of the people doing that work. Currently I think at times people in the careers advising position, not in every situation but sometimes, are put in that position to take them away from frontline teaching for a variety of different motivations. That can create reputational issues with the role as well. I think if this is seen as a prestigious role with a career track and a role into ultimately executive management within the schools, senior promotional roles, you are going to have a lot more competition. You are going to attract the best and brightest into that role. I think there is a range of different strategies that could be taken, including sort of carrot and stick and persuasion, with principals to do this.

The CHAIR — How can school careers advisers better align students' career decisions with actual job availability or workforce projections?

Prof. BRIGHT — That comes down to a couple of things. Again it comes down to capacity—giving them actually enough time to be able to do the research and maintain employer contacts, and also understanding labour market statistics and what is likely to be happening looking at projections. Most careers advisers in schools are not in a full-time load. Sometimes they are as little as 20 per cent in very large schools, and a day a week trying to cater for 1000-plus students is just absolutely unrealistic in relation to actually providing a service to those students individually or in groups and keeping on top of labour market projections, let alone doing things such as liaising with employers and getting involved in employment and community groups. Employers are crying out for this and wanting that kind of relevance, but that takes time and that requires somebody who is in the position on a continuous basis full-time, in my view, to be able to develop those kinds of effective relationships and get a sense of what is happening in the Victorian economy and where the jobs are.

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — I would agree with both of those points. I think professionalising careers advisers is critical. It will not be taken seriously until it is professionalised, and there are a number of ways that Professor Bright outlined that that can happen. I think in terms of the experience of students in the workplace, as I said previously, getting employer groups on board is critical, and that does need to happen beyond a school level. As was just outlined, schools are not going to have the resources individually to meet with a range of employers, but that is the sort of thing that could be brokered through a project, similar to the LEAP project I described, where you might perhaps get peak employer bodies, for instance, to commit some level of resources for work-integrated learning placement experience that could be coordinated across the sector or at least across the government school sector.

Prof. BRIGHT — Yes.

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — I do not think there is any other way that it is going to happen. Schools will never have the resources to be able to connect directly with employers, and if you leave it to students to create their own employment opportunities, then that ends up stratifying inequity for various reasons.

Prof. BRIGHT — I think this is also an opportunity for the proposed Victorian Career Development Institute that they could develop effective relationships on behalf of school communities in different areas and

across Victoria as a whole with employers, bring those in so you provide high-quality professional development information for careers educators on an ongoing basis. So you can have a level of coordination there, and that group also may be able to coordinate things at the local level as well, because one of the issues sometimes is employers will say, 'We don't hear from schools', and the next minute they say, 'We're just being pestered by every school in the area for work experience, or what have you, and we need some coordination, because it's taking up too much of our time trying to deal with individual inquiries'. So some coordination of that relationship, which could be done through something like a VCDI both at state level but also in regional and local areas at a community level I think would be one way forward. That would also serve a purpose of educating the careers advisers and keeping them current.

Mr CRISP — Professors, some submissions have recommended that the Victorian Government make careers advice compulsory as part of the school curriculum. What are your views on those recommendations and why?

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — As I say, I think this has been well covered. I think careers advice needs to be compulsory. It is really what that looks like. I guess, as I said, going back to our research, the careers adviser is a critical person in the school, and it is usually only one person in a very large school. But if the focus is solely on that, it will not translate into great outcomes. The question is how you really educate all teachers to do some elements of career advice. Obviously you are not going to expect discipline teachers to be as across the level of detail as a careers adviser, but there needs to be some broader process where careers advice becomes professionalised and is taken seriously. Really, the obvious way of doing that is to put it in the curriculum, albeit the crowded curriculum where everybody wants something added.

Prof. BRIGHT — Yes. I absolutely concur that having it in the curriculum is critical. This means educating people to appreciate that career development advice is not simply about whether you are going to become a blacksmith or a rocket scientist when you leave school. On that kind of idea of trying to work out what your future is, none of us know what the future holds, but teaching kids how to be prepared for whatever is thrown at them and whatever opportunities come their way is absolutely critical.

Consequently this is about lifelong development, that we are trying to do, as we do in many other subjects at school. In that sense it is very similar, so I think we need to move away from this idea that it is simply about transitioning the students out of the school system but rather equipping them with the capacity to make these decisions repeatedly throughout life, because they are going to have to. The idea that they are simply going to leave, complete a trade, complete a degree and then work in the same occupation for the rest of their lives is pretty much outmoded now. The evidence is pretty conclusive that the labour force does not work anything like that anymore — if it ever did, incidentally.

I take the point also that, although you need the professional focus of the careers adviser, I think, in a full-time role, there does need to be appropriate education and support for teachers across the curriculum with materials. I remember seeing the New South Wales Department of Education produced a whole series of booklets for teachers showing how they could incorporate career development and career education components within existing curriculum topics—they were lesson plans effectively—which allowed teachers to imbue a career development element within their existing stuff while meeting the requirements of the curriculum more generally. Whether it is English or whether it is PDHPE or whatever it happens to be, there is an opportunity, and I think some guidance for teachers generally to be able to do that, which is authoritative and evidence-based will help increase professionalism and also will help roll out the career education mandate throughout the schools.

Mr CRISP — If it is made compulsory, then we have got to be able to measure it to see if it is a success. What measures would you suggest to assess the effectiveness of a careers program or careers advice?

Prof. BRIGHT — I think there is a range of things that you can measure. You can measure objective things, such as destinations, and capture those. You can measure the number of students who subsequently drop out or change from whatever they have selected. Those figures are notoriously difficult to shift. There seems to be a natural attrition level in things like apprenticeships, traineeships and also in university enrolments of about 30 per cent changing course for a range of different reasons, but you could measure those sorts of things objectively. You could also measure—if you wanted to, I suppose—people's labour market knowledge. You could actually test students directly pre and post if you wanted to, coming into a career education program and at the end. Do they know where the jobs are? Do they know what it is to be a carpenter or a rocket scientist or

whatever it happens to be? You could actually test vocational knowledge quite directly. That is another thing you could do.

You could also measure their confidence in their ability to be able to make career decisions and their confidence and their ability to know where to go to get the information required to make a decision and so forth. You could measure what we call self-efficacy, their belief that they are competent and they can make these sorts of decisions. There is lots of good evidence to suggest that career counselling and career education programs can boost students' career self-efficacy quite considerably. I think that is important thing. It gets away from that sense of, 'I'm not very competent. I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go. I don't know where to seek help'.

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — Yes, I agree.

Mr CRISP — I might move in a different direction and look at students from low-SES backgrounds. You both talked about people being locked into careers or locked into a more tunnel vision about what their opportunities are. How would school careers advisers help students from the lower socio-economic backgrounds raise their career aspirations and achieve those goals?

Prof. BRIGHT — One program that I developed and ran in south-western Sydney in a series of low-SES schools were community helpers as career advisers, and we trained up members of the community—not parents necessarily, because a lot of these students do not necessarily have parents intact or functioning at the level to be able to provide this kind of help. We trained these people up over several weeks in an evening at a local RSL club to have a basic career conversation with a student, and the deal was if they attended this training, they had to take on a case load of students from these local schools, and we had a large night where all of these trained people had students sign up and these students for the first time in their lives had a 30-minute conversation with an adult about their future and about careers and this transformed their self-confidence in terms of career decision-making. There were a whole bunch of spin-off things that happened. For instance, one school organised driving courses for a lot of students, when it was clear they needed this in terms of future employment and training prospects, which had not been appreciated.

One of the issues there is that very often those students are simply not getting an opportunity to actually sit down and discuss or imagine a future with somebody who has got some skill, some level of skill, in doing this. At the time I developed this thing, I thought what happens in primary school if kids have problems with reading? Well, you bring in community members, parents, to act as readers and listeners to help in the process, so in other words you enlist people who have got skills to be able to do that, and it means these kids do not fall through the cracks quite as much. So that is one small project that was successful that could be run again. It is not simply about throwing information at these kids. It is actually about encouraging their imagination and encouraging their confidence into thinking about what they have to offer and to be encouraged to think that they do have things to offer, and to broaden their horizons.

Now, a one-off is not ideal, but it was a start. So something along those kinds of lines would be something that could be done. Another one would be to increase the number of experiences and contacts with employers outside of their immediate area. They may not have a culture of a lot of employers or employment or know very much about what it entails—so site visits, contact with employers. All of these sorts of things could be done, and that is just a couple of examples.

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — I would echo that to say that aspirations are usually mediated by achievement, so we do not talk much anymore about raising aspirations at my university because it is more about raising achievement. A lot of students start with very high aspirations and then have them moderated by lower achievement, and the expectations issue I mentioned earlier is rife, so for instance at the moment my university is going out into some flexible learning schools, which are primarily offering only VCAL curriculum—'only VCAL'—as opposed to VCE, from a university's point of view, but we are doing that because we have this commitment to not only students in care but other students, who are disadvantaged or under-represented, to try to normalise higher education, normalise decent careers and just try to remove this stigma and this low expectation that surrounds a lot of the students in those schools.

So it is absolutely critical that the education is—and I think we have both been making this point—not really about specific careers and matching and these kinds of issues or even about information around VTACs and the VCCFs process and ATARs. There is a lot of work that has to happen particularly with low SES around

expectations and plasticity of intelligence—the fact that people can learn, people can get smarter. A lot of people do not actually believe that. A lot of low-SES students and regional students think the main reason they do not go to university, whoever they are, is that university is not for people like them. That is the same for Indigenous students, regional boys, it does not matter. So we need to normalise not only university but careers for all of those diverse students and to keep promulgating the idea that intelligence is not fixed and that everyone is capable of a range of careers, and, as Jim said, also through exposure to the professions and to the universities, so there is a big piece of work there but it needs to be focused as well.

Prof. BRIGHT — Yes, I was going to add that. I agree, and I think it is about that notion that they can be further exposed and have contact, whether it is familiarisation with going into a college of further education or into a university or meeting employers and actually knowing, 'Yes, I can do this. I can have a conversation with an employer. I can find my way around a university campus, and I can begin to feel at home'. Those very basic kinds of things are career education, and it is about building up that confidence and that mastery, and I think that is a very important aspect of this. I would say career education is not about simply trying to think of an occupation, because things change too much for that. That is a very outdated kind of view of what it is all about, and if that is all it was, then go and take a random test online, but unfortunately that is how a lot of career education is now being delivered because people think that is what it is, and it does not work.

Mr CRISP — Thank you both, particularly Andrew. My next question was going to be on regional students, but you have covered it in your answer about low SES, so thank you very much.

The CHAIR — How useful is current student destination data and how can it be improved?

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — I think just quickly to reiterate—and I am not actually as familiar with the My School website as probably Jim and others are, but as I said—linking the Victorian Student Number to the higher education and the VET numbers is critical. It is not that hard. It has been done in New Zealand and elsewhere, and that would solve a very important and big piece of the puzzle in terms of outcomes from schools.

I am also interested in some of the middle schools. So, for instance, in Bendigo and Mildura and Wodonga I think there is a system where there is usually a middle school and then there is a senior secondary school. So I guess the question I have always had is: what are the outcomes and the accountabilities for the middle school as well as the senior school? So there are very clear sorts of outcomes for the senior school around average ATARs and some of that destination data, but I am not sure how the middle schools are evaluated or accountable under the system. So that is just more a systemic issue, but at the moment we basically cannot track students through the education system unless they are in a school in Victoria.

The CHAIR — My hopefully last question is about non-university pathways. Several submissions claim that schools place too much emphasis on ATARs and university entry. How valid are these claims and can the Victorian Government encourage the community to view vocational education and training as a valuable pathway for students? I am talking about ATARs.

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — Everybody knows that ATAR is a problem in terms of an excessive focus on it, and we are seeing all sorts of perverse outcomes now around unscored VCEs, people being moved into different certificates on occasions and a whole range of issues around the obsession with ATAR, and of course it leads to students being pressured and feeling as if that number is more important than it is. That is clear; getting around it is another issue.

One of the pieces of research that we have done is around alternative pathways to university, so portfolio pathways or interviews or looking at voluntary work of students and contextual admissions, which sounds good, but a lot of those pathways are actually more stratified than ATAR. So interviews, for instance, tend to lead to even more stratified outcomes than just the ATAR, so it is difficult to do contextual admissions right and it also gets very complex. So in Victoria a lot of schools will have access to eight principal recommendation schemes from eight universities, all of which require a separate form to be filled out, all of which require a careers adviser or a teacher to be part of that. So we have got a bit of a mess at the moment.

New South Wales has coordinated that process through UAC. We could do a similar thing through VTAC, where we actually coordinate the principal recommendation schemes, and vocational education obviously has suffered in recent years from a range of issues, including funding. It is critical. I think part of getting past the

bifurcation is again just being more sophisticated around careers advice—that we are not talking about whether you go to TAFE or university for the next three years; we are talking about broader careers issues. The real problem is neither VET nor higher ed; it is the NEET category—those students who disengage, who say that tertiary education is not for people like them, who think that they are going to go into a job straight after school and who often do not. So I am not as worried about the distinction between VET and higher ed as I am about the students who just are disengaged from such an early age, particularly people like regional boys who just hate learning from an early age. They see university as a continuation of school—really boring.

Prof. BRIGHT — I think, and I am on record as saying it in the *Age* and elsewhere, that the ATAR creates huge distortions in the system. It is seductive because it is a single number. It provides some schools with an opportunity to market and to boast, and parents undoubtedly shop around that. It has insidious effects on career education, with students being advised to take subjects which are going to maximise their ATAR rather than subjects in which they genuinely have some interest.

It also distorts the perception of subjects at university with people mistakenly thinking that, for instance—I do not know—medicine, physiotherapy, psychology and law are the most intellectually demanding subjects at university, whereas engineering is a lot easier simply based on the ATAR scores. People believe this stuff, and that has all kinds of implications in terms of what people enrol in, and they often do not see beyond that. You hear people worrying about wasting an ATAR by doing something as 'lowly as teaching' when they could be doing psychology or something else. It creates a whole bunch of completely erroneous problems for students and for teachers and also for schools, and it has impacts on subject selection.

The other point I want to make about the vocational side of this, and it is a problem that I have seen in the New South Wales system as well, is that the administrative demands of vocational education when it is being delivered through school are so immense that it completely swamps any attempts at career education because there is always some pressing issue to deal with a work placement or some other aspect of the administration of that, which soaks up an awful lot of teachers' time so that they cannot do any proactive career education work, and that gets left to the side or it is done in a fairly superficial way. That is a real threat.

So I think it is absolutely essential that we do not see vocational education as some kind of second-rate or second-class option, and I think the ATAR unfortunately creates a view like that. But I think also it is absolutely essential that we ring fence career counselling and career education from the threat of simply administering vocational education.

The CHAIR — Thank you. We have no further questions. On behalf of the Committee I would like to thank you both for your time and your contribution.

Prof. BRIGHT — Thank you, Chair.

Assoc. Prof. HARVEY — Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Committee adjourned.