

# TRANSCRIPT

## ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 7 May 2018

#### Members

Mr Nazih Elasmr — Chair

Ms Dee Ryall — Deputy Chair

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr Peter Crisp

Mrs Christine Fyffe

Ms Jane Garrett

Mr Cesar Melhem

#### Witnesses

Ms Meg Parkinson, President, Victorian Farmers Federation Industrial Association and Chair, Workplace Relations Committee, Victorian Farmers Federation;

Mr Nigel Muller, Executive Manager, Training, Auto Apprenticeships and Skills, Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce; and

Ms Jonty Low (*via teleconference*), Project Manager, Tourism and Hospitality Careers Council, Restaurant & Catering Australia.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to the public hearing of the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee 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. I invite you to state your name and where you come from. I believe you have 5 minutes to make a presentation.

**Ms PARKINSON** — Meg Parkinson, president of the Victorian Farmers Federation Industrial Association. I also Chair the Workplace Relations Committee of the VFF.

**Mr MULLER** — Nigel Muller, from the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce.

**Ms LOW** — Jonty Low, representing Restaurant and Catering Australia.

**The CHAIR** — Who would like to start?

**Ms PARKINSON** — I will. Thank you for inviting me. I think we have all been here before, with this issue on these committees. It is an ongoing problem. Our problem is that it is very difficult to get timely, accurate information to careers teachers. They turn over; sometimes they are doing it in their spare time, so to speak—so a couple of periods a week. It is often very difficult.

There are a few positives, though, and I would like to just mention the positives. We are really assisted in this work by Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia, which is an organisation set up between the federal government and the NFF to promote and assist on this issue. They recently had a conference, and I think the presentations will be on the website fairly soon. They had something like 200 careers teachers or their principals and so on at this, which I thought was excellent. They have now taken over Career Harvest, which is a website that gives real information and links to real information on various careers. Their links and information are first-class and they are up-to-date, which is really important. They also work with the agricultural R and D companies, such as Dairy Australia, MLA and GRDC, and the R and D companies work independently. They put out information and programs. The classic one is Dairy Australia's program called Cows Create Careers, which deals with the dairy industry from the soil up to the cheese in the supermarket.

Also the VFF had a food and fibre project going, which went for a couple of years. It was very positive and it achieved quite a lot in that we got a lot of information and communication between us and the various schools, but it was two-year funding and it takes somewhere between 12 and 18 months for it all to start working, and then it runs out of money. We have had a number of schools to industry people over the years on the same process. They have always been really successful, but once again they have all rolled over because of the lack of funding.

One of the things that the food and fibre project did, which is not always done, is that it gave up-to-date labour market information to the schools, so they knew that in the careers that they were telling their students about there were actually jobs, which is a different approach that had not really been done very much before.

Other states have some very interesting programs. In Queensland they have the Farm Fantastic Expo in the showgrounds every year, which is absolutely unbelievable. It has got every sort of agriculture you can think of. They have kids learning how to shear and they have kids learning how to do bees. It is really aimed at the schools. They have a number of agricultural colleges in Queensland, and they all have input into it and they run their own expos.

I think the real issue is that careers teachers do not know where to get information when new teachers are appointed. So one of the other ideas is to have a central government point for this information. We are not talking about something that requires a lot of work; it is a matter of having links off at that point to all these various things around the country, and around Victoria of course. I do not think it would be a lot of work once it is set up, and it would be a central point that teachers would know to go to, so it may be on their own pages within their own system. That would enable a site that is respected and acknowledged as being the correct thing to go to, which I think is what we are really missing.

**Mr MULLER** — Thank you for the invitation. I want to give some facts about what is actually happening on the ground. I was at a careers expo on the weekend, the Caulfield expo, which would have had 20 000 to

30 000 young people going through. The majority of those individuals had no idea what they wanted to do, and they were predominantly Year 12 students. We had a lot of young people who did not understand apprenticeships or traineeships. We had some come through that did not even know that they could do it during school time and it would work towards their score.

There is a lot of confusion out there, which goes to Meg's point around having careers advisers in schools actually as a profession. Most of the time when we engage with the schools it changes on a monthly basis, depending on what the teacher's load is, and we know this purely because we run a large engagement with schools. We attend probably over 100 expos and career talks annually. We have formed the VETiS forum, where we bring in all the schools that deliver automotive as a subject in their school, for training and so forth.

So we have stepped outside the bounds to try to engage as much as we can with the schools, and 99 per cent of them are willing. They are desperate to have professionals come in and talk to them. The biggest problem is that you are trying to address regional and metropolitan, and resources just dry up; we cannot be everywhere at the same time.

To Meg's point as well, I do believe that career advice needs to start as soon as they enter high school and needs to be developed as they progress through high school. Our primary focus is for them to complete. It is to our benefit as an industry that they complete their Year 12 studies, whether that be through VCE or VCAL.

There is not really much more I can add that Meg has not touched on. It is paramount. A careers adviser in a school cannot know all the industries; it is just a bottomless pit of all the intricacies and all the thin markets within every industry. Industry is probably best placed to provide that information, but unless the schools start to cluster and come together, we will not be able to attract and get everyone to attend, that is for sure.

**Ms LOW** — Thank you, and thanks for both of the previous presentations, and for letting me present for the hospitality sector. There is some crossover with the comments that have been previously made. It is really important for the hospitality sector to have the benefits and opportunities of the long-term career path promoted.

At the moment we find there is the perception that jobs in industry are just transitory and short-term. There is not an awareness of the possibilities to pursue a long-term career path, nor is there an awareness of the various jobs within the tourism and hospitality sector. At the moment Victoria's hospitality sector is experiencing chronic skills shortages. The worst areas are cooks, chefs, and cafe and restaurant managers, and that is consistent across the whole of Australia.

So the careers advice in schools is significant to influence students' decisions about their career paths. As was previously mentioned, for us greater industry involvement is essential, as well as more resources to devote to the advice that the school students are receiving, so that they are informed about the benefits of the long-term career possibilities. A closer nexus between high school and industry could be done, for example, through commissioning high-profile hospitality figures to give interactive classroom presentations to school students about the benefits of careers. In our sector I think, given the recent popularity of the TV cooking shows, that interest could be harnessed at the secondary school level to encourage more students to look at the career paths available.

Alongside the industry-led mentoring programs, investment in the VET sector and greater awareness of VET pathways also needs to be promoted, because at the moment there is a real focus on university degrees. The imbalance between the focus on that and not so much on the VET pathways is an issue for us. There is a lot of confusion around the VET sector amongst school students, so this does not help with perceptions around apprenticeships and traineeships.

I think that managing the transition from school into the workforce with industry-led programs in place would certainly help to maximise the completion of courses. At the moment there is a high dropout rate, and there are the perceptions around even starting apprenticeships and traineeships—they are really being felt to be inferior to degrees. If those perceptions persist, then the current skills shortages, which are chronic, will just continue to get worse.

We would like to have students receive the benefits of long-term careers in hospitality, tourism—all and sundry—and to understand the significant opportunities available in the sector, which of course is a growing

sector. The development of skills through school programs and/or the provision of advice by careers advisers within schools is essential for us.

**The CHAIR** — Our questions will be addressed to all of you, and if you are comfortable with the answers, then we will move on. My first question is: how well are school careers advisers meeting the needs of businesses and what aspects of career advice need improvement? Any of you can respond.

**Ms PARKINSON** — Well, they are not.

**Ms LOW** — I agree; they are not.

**The CHAIR** — Any explanation?

**Ms PARKINSON** — There seem to be an awful lot who think we are still back on Old MacDonald's farm, which does not help. They are not aware of modern agriculture; they are not aware of intensive agriculture. They have been watching too many animal liberation videos on YouTube. There is definitely a lack of understanding.

**Mr MULLER** — Yes, I concur. The knowledge is outdated. The perception is a big pushing point—of where they will push individuals into. So you will see it clear-cut: you will be dealing with a school and the careers adviser is engaging with the students and sending them to university and offering trades, so there is a mixture, but that then changes overnight, and you lose all contact with that school and those students are pushed straight to university.

**The CHAIR** — Would you like to add anything, Jonty, or are you happy with that?

**Ms LOW** — Ours are pretty similar. I think it is just having the up-to-date information and a comprehensive amount of information in relation to not just the sector broadly, but the jobs available within the sector, because they are many and varied.

**Mr MELHEM** — Just to follow up, and I will ask individuals in the group to respond: what is the industry doing to sell itself to school leavers? Because I think the point, Ms Parkinson, that you made in relation to the perception of the agriculture industry would be similar for the automotive industry and catering—that perception that the pay is not great, there are precarious hours and job security is not there. There may be some truth in that, but I think for the overwhelming majority that is not correct, because it is a great job opportunity and there is great opportunity for pay and good hours. So what individually as organisations—VFF, VACC and also the catering industry—are you doing to actually sell yourself to the younger generation? Because between the three of you there is a significant market to actually sell yourself to school leavers or schoolkids. Also, what can the government do to help you to sell the message? It is a twofold question.

**Ms PARKINSON** — Cesar, first of all I think one of the problems is that we are majority small business. Teachers do not seem to understand small business. You get the exception of those who come out of a family that had a small business or whose family itself is in small business, but outside of those they do not seem to understand that we are talking about working for yourself, building up assets into the future, and so there is no understanding of that. I think that is a core problem. I used to be on the Small Business Ministerial Council, and that was a problem right across every part of that council, every section. We had this discussion there, of 'How do you get careers teachers to understand small business?', and there was not really an answer anyone came up with.

On the broader level of your question, the VFF does go to school things, particularly farm safety things for obvious reasons, but to others as well. We have the R and D organisations—research and development organisations—who these days all have to put about 5 per cent of their money into extension, and part of that they do in things like Cows Create Careers. They have got a similar thing in all of them. So they have a significant amount of interaction with schools, out of the R and D companies rather than out of the VFF itself. They are really positive, but once again you tend to talk to the people who know something. I do not know how you get over that other barrier. We have tried really hard.

The food and fibre project that we ran with government money was really successful because the woman who was doing it built up a really good relationship with schools on the outskirts of Melbourne. The ones we targeted predominantly are on that point where you have hobby farms, that type of thing, some commercial

farms and people who know nothing, absolutely nothing, about agriculture. It worked really well. Now they have gone, and we are trying to keep the information flow going, but you have to find someone who has got time in their job to do it, so it is that sort of problem. I do not know if I can do any better than that.

**Mr MULLER** — We are a little bit different. We are a large industry body, and we have a group training operation which funds our school engagement. So we have two full-time staff who engage at the school level and run the school-based program. Our budget is roughly around a quarter of a million a year just to run that and engage with schools. We run, as I said earlier, well over 100 expos. We attend career talks. We promote the industry. The biggest headache we probably have is that it is perception that you are fighting. You are dealing with someone who has had the same idea about sending kids where they think is best for them. And it does not matter how much you go in and promote the specific industry; it will take time to change perceptions. It changes as they change career advisers within those schools. But, you know, it is a drop in the ocean. Schools need to start to cluster. They need to make sure they attend careers days because even industry cannot get around to everywhere. Regionally it is hard, again, with the distance and travel, especially with those young ones. In Caulfield they were bussing them down from the country, and there were thousands of them over the Thursday and Friday. Engage with them? Yes, but as I said, there were five of us that were employers there; the rest were selling courses.

**Mr MELHEM** — Is there a perception that the industry is dirty? I mean, being a mechanic 30 years ago was dirty, but today it is actually all technical. It is not as dirty. Is that something ...

**Mr MULLER** — It is computerised. Yes, we fight it all the time—you know, the grease monkey mentality. But the first thing that a kid does when he wants to work on a car now is grab a computer and plug it in. It is perception and it takes time. We have done a lot of work over the last 10 years in this space, but you seem to have to reset because the teachers change, so you have to reset and start again. It could be 12 months to change their perception.

**The CHAIR** — Jonty, would you like to add?

**Ms LOW** — Similarly perception is a big thing in our industry, and there have been some pretty terrible stories in terms of people working in the food industry, and so that is understandable, but there are also some really good success stories.

I think for us the problem is personality to match the sector, so one of our suggestions is to combine tailored industry-specific careers advice with personality testing of students, because there are a lot who will not be suitable for careers in cooking, chefs, cafes and what have you. I think the other problem we have is that in hospitality people just tend to think about it only as food or a pit stop on the way to something else. It is a side job that you do while you are at uni; nobody sees it as a career. They cannot see the other jobs that are available beyond those low-level ones. You can also work your way up through, for example, to become a hotel manager if you like, but those pathways are not very clear to people. They just think, ‘Oh, I’ll waitress, full stop. I’ll do that for six months’, so there tends to be no view of this as a long-term career.

**Mr CRISP** — I want all of you to explore the skill gaps that employers notice when you are transitioning from school to employment. Jonty, we have received some evidence previously that many employers look for people who have worked in the catering and hospitality industry while at school because they have learned customer relations. What are those gaps and what can we do about them?

**Ms PARKINSON** — Well, I think the skill gaps are in, obviously, technology. These days if you are a grain farmer and you sit in the air-conditioned cab with your tablet and wait until you get to the end of the row, and you turn it around and back off you go. Well, it is a bit more complicated than that, but people do not think of it like that. They do not think of the fact that you have got a drone hovering over your header or hovering over the scarifier seeing what is happening or, even more to the point, hovering over the chemicals to make sure that there is a very little amount of chemicals used exactly where it should be, and the drone is checking that this is happening. They do not look at it like that. They think someone is walking around with a backpack, so that is a serious problem.

I am in the egg industry, and in our industry everything is technology. It is pretty much: the egg goes from the chook into the carton without the use of human hands. People do not think of it like that either. I think the skills that people need now are at two levels. One at the farmer/manager level. They need to know how to use the

technology. They need to know how to do human resources, because that is becoming very important these days. At the low level—at the farmhand level—they need to understand animal welfare, biosecurity, animal health and food safety. So we want an entry-level skill set of those levels for people before they start work, and as well as those we add in OH&S, chemical handling and communication—all of those. And at the other level, we want the certificate V-type subjects, with a few of the other lower level where necessary. They are all missing. None of those are easily available. The egg industry has now got a diploma level, certificate V, course which we have set up, but it does not have a lot of uptake because the people who grew up on the farm already know it and it is difficult to get other people to come in. So that is difficult. At the certificate II and certificate III levels that they have introduced, there is great uptake.

**Mr MULLER** — I think still it is your basic employability skills—communication, presentation. For most of our small businesses their biggest turn-off out of the apprenticeship system now is that kids sort of turn up there willy-nilly. They do not seem to have an employable attitude. Those individuals that have had part-time jobs throughout their school life are chalk and cheese to the ones who do not. They get snapped up pretty quickly. If they have mechanical aptitude we grab them and hang on to them and we spend a lot on them. But nine times out of 10 they come out with just the basics, like being able to do their own résumé. It does not have to be fancy, but it just needs to have the basics in there: their school reports; you are looking to make sure that they are interested; have they done any research? Most of that just seems to fall on deaf ears. They come in with a mishmash.

And our industry is struggling with a skills shortage, so we are taking whatever we can get and turning over any rock. Whereas being a large employer ourselves with 550 apprentices, we look through that, but for small employers, they do not. They just see that and they go, ‘He doesn’t care’, and they will filter through 50 until they find one. Parents help the individual with just basic communication and presentation and that they will have to turn up every day. Some of the basic concepts they do not seem to understand. Doing a trade does not mean you can leave school, because the first thing we do is put you back in school to do your trade schooling. So they do not have any concept of where they are going and where there have been.

**The CHAIR** — Jonty, would you like to add anything?

**Ms LOW** — Yes, I agree with all of that. We have very similar issues. I think ours, in our industry, are also not appealing sometimes because they are not necessarily friendly to be social if you are working at night. But we have big issues. We get a lot of people signing up to apprenticeships and traineeships, but their completion of apprenticeships is not high for the same similar sorts of reasons as you just discussed in that there is no real appetite to develop skills themselves. It is almost like they are just doing it because, and then they decide they do not like it and they either drop out or they continue with it and complete it. But there is a lack of direction that seems to be quite present, and I again think it is the nature of the food industry—cooks and chefs. Once they realise that they are on their feet all day and the conditions are not terrible but it is work—hard work—I think it is a struggle to see that through to completion. And for those who do complete and are employed, retention of those people is also difficult because there are so many shortages that they can go here, there and everywhere. For so small business owners who train people up and get them to a certain level to lose an employee in that way is also a big problem.

**Mr CRISP** — Thank you. Jonty, you raised something in your introduction that I would like to quickly explore with the others: personality testing. You are obviously in favour of it, but going around, do you have any thoughts, or what work has been done, on that to see whether that helps?

**Ms PARKINSON** — Well, I do not know what work has been done on it, Peter, but it sounds like a great idea. Certainly we have the same problem with, not only kids, but older people in their 30s and 40s not necessarily coming to work every day. And certainly with drugs. You know, people have taken ice. You can buy ice anywhere in the state at the moment, including small towns. I have a rule in our place that anybody who kicks a chook is out the door. And they mostly do it because they are high. So I think that testing is a great idea, but I would be interested to know more about it.

**Mr MULLER** — We mechanically aptitude test all of our applicants, and we encourage the industry to do that. Most of the complaints and abuse I get from parents is, ‘Why didn’t you employ Sally or Jimmy?’. They have got great employability skills, but they do not have any mechanical aptitude, so they will struggle by the time they get to the third or fourth stage. So there is no use for me or us as an industry employing and training someone who will not stay after their apprenticeship because it is not something they are able to make a

rewarding life out of. They do not know the difference between a career and a job to start with. The biggest headache is that I get more than 1700 applications a year and I can put them all into a job—there is a shortage and demand—but there is no use in me training for the sake of training. We need to make sure that we can pick those that are best suited, because they will stay within the industries and they will earn the best that they can.

**Mr CRISP** — Would you like to see that aptitude testing occurring in schools?

**Mr MULLER** — It should be starting at Year 7, yes.

**Ms LOW** — Yes.

**Mr MULLER** — And they should be funnelled, but not into one industry. An aptitude test will never give you one industry, but it will give you the best indication of where you will excel and where your core skills are. And that will change until their Year 12. As they build and explore different subjects, their skill sets will change and evolve. They should then be saying, ‘Well, when you go to the careers’ day today, make sure you are looking, because these are the three strongest industries that you will perform the best in and that you will make the best living out of, and you will have a rewarding life’. At the moment they are just jumping from job to job, hence the apprenticeship model is suffering—it is because they just see it as a job and not a career. They do not see that an apprenticeship is a start to a career—and a very rewarding career, especially with our skills shortages, because wages are pushed through the roof. Small business suffers because big business has the money to poach off the smaller ones. Unfortunately, that is business. But I think that some form of direction needs to be done at a very young age, yes.

**Mr MELHEM** — Just on that, I am struggling to accept that theory. I mean, at Year 12 kids are still struggling as to what career they want to take. Even if they get into university, they can change their mind. You are telling me that we should be able to determine it at Year 7. I mean I understand a bit of coaching and mentoring and working through it, but making a determination at Year 7 that you are not going to be a good mechanic—that is what I am hearing you say.

**Mr MULLER** — No. So what you are saying ...

**Mr MELHEM** — You are not saying that?

**Mr MULLER** — No, no. What you are doing is from Year 7 to Year 12 you are narrowing the best outcome for those. So a Year 7 student is going to have basic skills; they may be outgoing, so they may want to work outside. There is a lot of what they think they want to do and what their core testing shows. That is different in Year 12. Too many times we see Year 12 students who do not know what to do, but it is too late—if you have not got a good idea of what you want to do now, you are in trouble.

**Mr MELHEM** — So we are not talking about your typical aptitude test when you are applying for a job? You are talking about a mentoring program to basically try to coach young students to plan ahead between Years 7 and 12.

**Mr MULLER** — Yes, and using their personal skills ...

**Mr MELHEM** — Is that a better term to use?

**Mr MULLER** — Yes, I would say it starts there, and the program would change over their schooling career. Because it will change depending on what subjects they take a liking to and excel in. Most do not choose maths if they do not excel in maths. They do not do maths methods if they do not excel it. If they excel in it, then that changes these course outcomes.

**Ms LOW** — And in our sector I would say that, personality-wise, you would identify people who can communicate with people and therefore they would be appropriate for a front of house kind of role. And then those who do not work well with people—as in interact well with, say, a customer—but could work well as a team behind the scenes may well be suited to a role behind the scenes, in a kitchen for example.

**Mrs FYFFE** — Thank you for your presentations, and I appreciate your understanding of the difficulties that are there both for schools and for young people. My own background is in small business, in tourism, hospitality and agriculture, and in my area there is a desperate shortage of people with skills or people who will

go in. The businesses are poaching people from each other all the time. Of course the resentment in the community is that we are bringing in people from overseas to fill jobs that they feel Australians should fill. Do you think we have gone too far—and this is very subjective—that we have gone completely away from streaming in schools to broad education and telling everyone, ‘You can be anything you want to be’ without putting the reality to them?

I say this from the point of view of having several children: one who did an apprenticeship and has a very successful business now, and one who went into merchant banking, and just different levels. Do you think we have gone too far with, ‘You’re wonderful and you can be anything’, so that they are not looking at these jobs? Any of you?

**Mr MULLER** — We have lost a whole generation like that. We have taught them that they can do anything they want to and be whatever they want to be. Frankly, they can, but the problem is that they will only be good at half of it. We have a whole bunch that have gone through. They come in and they want to start at the top and work to the bottom. But yes, we have. We had that thinking in the late 90s, when the kids would grow up and be told, ‘You can do anything you want to’. That is probably the worst thing we could have done to them, purely because they now feel resentment because they tried to do that—to become a doctor or a motor mechanic, and they are not suited to the trades or to medicine. So then they just withdraw and will just bum around and low self-esteem is created. So yes, I think we have.

**Ms PARKINSON** — I agree too. I think the real problem is that the attitude is more than ‘You can do anything’; it is ‘You can decide what you’re going to do and everyone else will fall in with it and help you along, and you won’t have to actually do much’. That is the problem to me. You get it all the time, and it is really sad. You have only got to open Facebook and have a look at it to see the things that are being said of people in the 18 to 20 years age group. It is mind-boggling, but most of them grow out of it—that is the positive side—because they see the real world and they learn from it. It is only the arrogant ones who do not learn from it. So the majority I think get out of it, but they give us some problems along the way.

I think the good kids are the ones who simply learn. As Nigel said, they do part-time work when they are at school. They have learned to take some responsibility and then they keep doing it for the rest of their lives. I think it does sort itself out.

**Ms LOW** — I agree with all of those things. Again, it just comes down to perception. Certainly in tourism and hospitality it just tends to be looked down upon and only as a stopgap, which is weird. I did waitressing all the way through school, and the perception of it then was different to the way it is now for kids the same age as when I was doing it. It is almost horrific to think, ‘I’m a waitress’, whereas in my era we never had that as a problem. But there is this sense that they are too good to do particular jobs, or that those particular jobs will reflect in this particular way about them. So, yes, it is a hard thing to challenge if one wants to be an accountant or a lawyer and not a chef or a hotel worker.

**Mrs FYFFE** — I think you are raising some very good points there, Jonty, because people do not look at hospitality and tourism as business management skills. Running a large hotel where you could have 600 employees, or more depending on the size, you really need those accounting skills and so forth to go into it. But the people skills that are learnt in hospitality I think are essential for any job. I know that in my job now as a politician people skills are very helpful in dealing with people.

When I have talked to young people in my area about hospitality and tourism and about hotel management—managing large tourism venues—they do not seem to see it, and their parents do not seem to see it. We are talking about careers advisers and young people, but we have also got the issue of parents who do not see what a fantastic future you can have. You can travel the world if you are successful in hospitality.

**Ms LOW** — Yes.

**Mr CRISP** — I would like to look into the value of work experience and how work experience operates. What are employers’ views of work experience? What are the barriers to it? What can be done to improve work experience, if you think it has value?

**Ms PARKINSON** — Yes, definitely. It definitely has value.



**Mr MULLER** — We are big advocates for work experience. Year 10 is normally when they start to dabble in doing a couple of weeks in a couple of different industries. What we are not a big advocate of is the structured learning model that was run previously. That has had some changes to it. Kids were dumped in workplaces all year for \$5 a day. If they are going to engage in an industry, they need to be remunerated correctly, because all it does is leave a bad taste in their mouth. But work experience is the first step in them engaging in a work-like environment.

**Mrs FYFFE** — Do you find that you can give real work experience, though, with all the restrictions placed around ...

**Mr MULLER** — In the current skills shortage, yes. The days of the apprentice having to wash cars and sweep floors are well and truly long gone. They are under immense pressure to hit the ground running. They are servicing cars within a couple of months, with supervision next to them, but they are to be productive at a very early age. Whereas before, apprentices were support staff; now they are frontline staff, and that is a big headache for us because it creates other problems. But work experience is paramount to engagement, especially to make sure the individual actually knows what they are getting themselves into. They might love cars but hate working in a workshop.

**Ms PARKINSON** — Agriculture has long had work experience in one form or another—as young as possible—but the job varies. Certainly if people are keen to farm, then yes, you definitely want them to actually experience it. It is broader than just farming of course. Getting kids to do things like work experience in a vet's practice is often very good if they want to be on a farm. The work experience does not have to be as narrow as it has been. I think you can actually make it a lot broader, and once again getting them into a diesel mechanic's shop is probably a really good thing if they are going to be a grain farmer. So work experience can be a lot broader than you always think.

**Ms LOW** — Yes, I agree. I think work experience is wonderful. In our sector I would say a hotel environment would be ideal because you can go from the laundry to the kitchen to the front desk. You can get exposure to all sorts of jobs in the one building with the one work experience. So yes, we are very keen on work experience.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. I do not think there are any further questions, so on behalf of the Committee I would like to thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**