

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Victorian universities' investment in skills

Melbourne—Tuesday, 14 June 2022

MEMBERS

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Theophanous

Mr Nick Wakeling

WITNESSES (*via videoconference*)

Ms Bernadette Gigliotti, Chief Executive Officer, and

Ms Penne Dawe, Acting Chief Executive Officer and Partnerships and Development Manager, Australian Centre for Career Education.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings for 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, and I invite both of you to make a brief opening statement to the Committee, which will be followed by questions—both of you or one of you. Thank you for being with us today.

Ms GIGLIOTTI: Thank you. My name is Bernadette Gigliotti. I am from the Australian Centre for Career Education, and I have my colleague with me today, Penne Dawe, who is the Acting CEO. I would like to start, if that is okay.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the hearing this afternoon. Our association was founded in 1975 by the then Victorian Government Department of Education, and primarily our role was to train teachers in career education and to bring in the work experience legislation. So over the past 47 years we have maintained our core of training career practitioners across the state of Victoria. We are now national, and our association has 1013 members right across the country. We provide training in the VET sector. We are an RTO, and we provide two qualifications: the graduate certificate in career development practice at AQF level 8 and the certificate IV in career development at AQF level 4.

We were really pleased to provide our submission to the parliamentary review, and we are highlighting in our submission the need for greater relationships between universities, industry and the government. And we see a shared responsibility in the three sectors being able to adequately prepare the future workforce for the challenges that are here now but also that are coming in the future. So thank you for that opportunity, and we are happy to answer any questions the Committee might have.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might throw the first question to Chris Couzens.

Ms COUZENS: Thanks, Chair, and thank you both for your time today. It is greatly appreciated. You were talking about the collaboration with universities. What can universities learn from the TAFEs about collaborating effectively with the industry?

Ms GIGLIOTTI: I think that they can learn the importance of actually having all their courses directed to having an applied learning element. I think that is the difference with our TAFEs and where they have been very successful in ensuring that young people are well prepared for the workforce, both in the development of their courses, because they are very focused on work readiness, but they also have designed their courses with this applied learning element. And I think that is where our universities could really learn about the importance of understanding how the AQF works and then designing their courses to have that applied learning element within them. There are many university courses that are already doing this—but not as many as we would like to see, because I think that that is what we are missing. We really still have this great divide between applied learning and theoretical learning, and in a country the size of Australia we could be doing this a lot better.

Ms COUZENS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Juliana, do you want to ask a question?

Ms ADDISON: Thank you so much, Chair. Thank you very much, Bernadette and Penne, for your presentation today. I am very interested in career development at university, and your submission states that it should be embedded in university courses. Could you outline how career education can be embedded in university courses and perhaps provide us with an example?

Ms GIGLIOTTI: Okay. So I think there are lots of ways that we can achieve this, but at the very minimum there should be one qualified career development practitioner with subject matter expertise in every faculty. So we have got lots of examples of this across the country. Some of the better examples of this were coming out of New South Wales. But we are starting to see now a retraction of this type of career service within universities, which is really quite disheartening. Sometimes it is not possible to provide a careers centre for the entire university, simply because of the size of the university, but we should be able to achieve a career development centre per faculty, with one or two experts in each faculty who are responsible for the career development of that group of students. I think that at the very least we should have that. I think we should have a portfolio at the entry of every course, so every student should have an evidence-based portfolio of career development across the life of their course. There are some outstanding examples coming out of the US, and I will cite here the Florida State University model, which has exactly this. Every student has a portfolio that they are responsible for, and right across the development of their course they can identify the key employability skills they have developed in their course, the applied learning experience that they may have participated in and the work expo component of their course. And they then present that to prospective employers, and prospective employers have access to it. So that particular university is world class. It is really providing a sensational microcosm of what career development services should look like in every university.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Kat, did you want to ask a question?

Ms THEOPHANOUS: Thank you, Chair. We know we have skills shortages in some priority areas, but how can universities improve their outreach and their student services to attract students to study in those priority skill areas, and what is the role of the Victorian Government in encouraging enrolments in priority areas?

Ms GIGLIOTTI: Look, I think that we are missing here a piece around scholarships and funded programs. I think that is what will make it attractive. The cost of a degree is becoming extremely out of reach for a lot of young people and even the families that might be supporting them, so I think the government has a role to play in supporting universities with scholarship programs. I think the universities themselves should be offering fully funded scholarship programs in our skill shortage areas. We are seeing good examples of this, for example, at Swinburne University—and I think I quoted that in my submission—where we actually have IBM offering a fully funded scholarship for students. They have no problems filling that course or attracting students into those particular computer courses. I think that we have still got a way to go there, but a scholarship program that is fully funded in those priority areas with applied learning as a component of that scholarship program and then of course some form of funded internship, whether that be from second year onwards—I think those particular strategies will go a long way to ensuring that skills shortages are actually managed effectively and that we have got this pipeline of workers coming through the university sector. Penne, is there anything you would like to add?

Ms DAWE: I was only going to add that I think that that is correct, and then perhaps a bit more onus on the industry to participate, because I think this is one place where we do see some let-down where industry is looking for people who are very job ready when in fact young people are coming out needing to have that support and experience in the workplace as well. So it is those connections between university and industry.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Gary, did you have a question?

Mr BLACKWOOD: Yes. Thanks, John. Thanks, Bernadette and Penne. Just on that theme of university and industry and collaboration, your submission calls for more partnership between universities and industry and also states that governments need to implement policies and frameworks to make industry more responsible—and that is just what you have said of course. But how can we improve that? How can collaboration between universities and industry be improved? And also what can the Victorian Government do to help in that process to improve that collaboration?

Ms GIGLIOTTI: Well, I think the Victorian Government are going a fair way already in terms of when they provide industry with a contract to deliver on particular work—Major Road Projects Victoria is a good example of this—where a percentage of the entry-level positions need to be made available to young people or need to be made available to specific cohorts within communities. So I think that that strategy is effective. What we are not seeing necessarily from industry is the willingness to train. We provided you with an example of what we saw just recently where we went out to members where there were active positions, 20 active

vacancies, in a Big Build project. We advertised to our schools. We advertised to students and their parents, and we had very good responses. So from those 20 positions available only three were offered, and when it came down to it, it was because they selected the students that actually demonstrated work readiness immediately. So they did not see the need to have to train those young people themselves. In other words, the other 17 that we were concerned about that were not offered anything—there was no support there to say ‘Okay, well, you were rejected because we need you to go and complete this course’ or ‘We’re prepared to partially fund the course’; that was not happening. So I think that industry really needs to consider the importance of investing in young people who might complete a VCE or complete the new vocational major but also support them to keep studying while they are providing them with a livable wage. I think that is important. There needs to be that collaboration there.

Mr BLACKWOOD: Thank you, Bernadette.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Bernadette, and thank you, Penne. I might just finish off with one question if that is all right. I saw this on social media somewhere, and it was very pertinent in terms of the frame of mind people are in. It said something like: what if the cure for cancer was in the mind of a child that could not afford education? That is a very powerful sentence. So with inflation rates going up, interest rates going up, cost of living going up, all of these things point to, obviously, over the next few years there being a bigger proportion of disadvantaged people in our communities, and accessing education is probably the key. How can state and federal governments do the best that they can to make sure that nobody misses out, especially if they have got a cure for cancer, because they cannot access education?

Ms GIGLIOTTI: That is a really great idea that you have got there. I guess I am going to start by saying: we got it right in the past. We did offer studentship programs to the highly disadvantaged. That is how I was educated. My father was not able to afford to send his children to university, but we had at the time a very good government which saw the importance of ensuring that all young people had access to education. Education is a right, it is not a privilege, in this country; that is my opinion and it is my view. And I think that we can go a long way to alleviating issues in regard to workforce development if we ensure that all young people have access to education at the highest level that they can achieve and ensure that those pathways are well funded via scholarship programs. I believe that we still have an opportunity to fund programs fully to allow young people to access those programs so that they have got the very best potential coming out of courses and into workplaces. Now, they may not find the cure for cancer in the first year of their employment, but they may find it within five or six years and then turn around and do as I did—thank the government for investing in potential.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Any further questions from members? No? Well, thank you very much, Bernadette and Penne, for being part of this process. We appreciate and value your submission that you have made to this very important Inquiry.

Ms GIGLIOTTI: Thank you very much.

Ms DAWE: Thank you. We appreciate it. Thank you.

Ms GIGLIOTTI: Bye.

Committee adjourned.