

# TRANSCRIPT

## ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 19 February 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

#### Witness

Ms Melyssa Fuqua.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to the public hearing for 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.

I allow you 5 minutes to give us a briefing, and then allow us some time to ask questions. Please provide your name before you start for the Hansard record.

**Ms FUQUA** — My name is Melyssa Fuqua, and I am here today as a former careers educator in a rural school in Victoria and also a PhD candidate who is exploring what rural careers educators are doing in their work, what they think their work is and what they would like to see happening for their students and for their communities.

The really big takeaway is that we really—I use ‘we’ because I still consider myself a careers educator from a rural school—just want some more support. That takes the form of money in some cases because everything is a bit more expensive in a rural area, and honestly most of that cost goes into transportation. We want to be recognised as professionals in what we do. For example, I was just listening to the previous person talking about people being unqualified. Half of my participants are not qualified careers educators. Two of my participants—from my PhD—are not teachers; they are education support staff. These are members of the community who are looking usually for part-time work, and the school hires them.

I myself was not a careers educator—any kind of qualified careers educator—when I got the role. My principal said they put me there because I was very good at paperwork, and as it turned out that is what I did most of the time. The accent is American, so to try to give advice for rural Victorian students was a bit challenging when I was not quite sure of the local industries and economy and all that. So there was a very steep learning curve, and that prompted my research as to how we can help each other out.

There needs to be that greater recognition of careers education from the community, from parents, from students and from the school itself. There is not really a curriculum or space in the curriculum to deliver proper careers education, which then makes any kind of interviews for subject selection or tertiary study really difficult when there has not been any groundwork laid. Some of the schools that I talked to for my study do not even offer careers classes. One of those schools has a qualified careers practitioner in that school, but they do not have time for that subject. It is important to remember that in rural schools in particular teachers wear many different hats, so they might not just be the careers teacher—they might be the senior school coordinator, they might be looking after the VET program, they might be looking after the athletics program. With fewer staff, we have to do more jobs.

One of the things that we really want to remind people of, especially from a rural perspective, is: please talk to us about what we need. Often there are pilot programs or someone thinks they are going to help out the students in a rural area and they develop this program that is not actually accessible to us or practical to us—either to our students or to the educators themselves.

To come into the city to do a professional learning opportunity for myself, for example, it was a 5-hour drive one way, so that was going to be an overnight at least. So there is time away from my family and time away from my classes, which costs me money and costs my school money to replace me. It becomes a really big burden, and that seems to be a reason why a lot of these career educators that I spoke to were not interested in becoming qualified. It is not that they do not want to help their students; it is that there is just not physically time to do all the things they need to do.

The work experience programs are really important, and we have difficulties in rural areas getting students to different types of workplaces. You could imagine that in a small town there are only so many different types of careers that students are exposed to. Those businesses tend to be really supportive of students and take students for work experience, but if there is only one mechanic in town, for example, they cannot take the three or four students who might want to do that. Some schools have Melbourne work experience camps where we come down for a week and the students learn how to live in the city and do public transport and are exposed to different types of jobs. But those are incredibly expensive, and that is the main reason why a number of schools are dropping these really valuable programs. This is something my participants felt very strongly about: the need to perhaps have some subsidies or some sort of assistance to make sure these camps in particular continue.

We would also like some more support for these regional career expos or events that happen. There are a number of career expos that happen in Melbourne across the year. Again, if it is a 5-hour drive in, it is an overnight if you are going to take students, and it costs I think about \$1500 to rent a bus to put students on. That is quite a significant.

**Mr MELHEM** — Is that the Year 12 expos you are talking about?

**Ms FUQUA** — Yes. There is one in western Victoria. It is not just tertiary. It has all the tertiary providers who are willing to come that far and a number of industries, both local and national industries, to get students a range of careers. They have seminars and that sort of thing. My participants and the students that I have had really value that opportunity to get to see a variety of experiences, but I know that it gets really hard to fund such an event and to have people to organise it throughout the year. It is no small undertaking. I think the one in western Victoria has about 2000 students that go to it every year and a budget of about \$100 000 or so that they need to run through each year.

We really need—especially with opportunities like that—some more connections to industry. Rural industries are telling us they need more people and they need more skilled workers in the future, but there are not great lines of communication between various industries and schools. It can be quite difficult. Really a lot of this comes down to access. There are websites and whatnot, but it is hard for students to get access to the websites for career tests and learning about careers when they do not have internet at home or they have unreliable internet access. If there is not a career subject for them to explore those options in, when are they supposed to do that? That is the most flexible, practical way to get them that information. There is so much to say. I think I will leave it there for now.

**The CHAIR** — Melyssa, thanks for that. Can you explain to us how the Victorian Government can improve access to professional development and career advisers in regional areas?

**Ms FUQUA** — I think it is a two-pronged thing. Money is quite important for that in terms of resourcing. Like I said, all teachers do work and professional learning outside of their time. We recognise that as part of the job, but when it involves overnight and significant travel, that is a lot more of an imposition and it is a cost to the school. If I leave for a two-day event or a one-day event, it is two days out of school. That is two days that my school will need to cover my teaching load with a CRT. One of my participants, all she does is career stuff and all the data management, so when she goes away it is not as much of a burden on school. But if teachers with a full-time teaching load go away, then that creates more problems as well.

Perhaps we could encourage more flexible delivery methods and more digital methods. Do we need to drive 5 hours into the city to watch someone deliver a PowerPoint when we could watch it through a videoconference link? That sort of thing. Having the infrastructure even for that and a schools system would be really helpful and encouraging the providers of these professional learning opportunities to make that an option—to Skype in.

**Ms RYALL** — I have just a quick question. How many participants are there in your research?

**Ms FUQUA** — There are six participants in my research. We have been collecting their stories about their work and what they do, what they would like to do and particularly what challenges they are finding of being in a rural setting as a careers educator.

**Ms RYALL** — When you referred to ‘half are not qualified’—so three out of six?

**Ms FUQUA** — Yes.

**Mr CRISP** — Rural career adviser networks is a support network that is out there for careers advisers. How do rural career adviser networks operate in your view and what can be done to support those adviser networks?

**Ms FUQUA** — I think they are very, very important, particularly from my own perspective as an unqualified careers adviser. That is where I got my practical information from—the ‘what is the bare minimum of what I need to do to make sure the students get what they need and to meet the Department’s requirements for the MIPs interviews’ and that sort of thing. Even getting to those is a time commitment. I was an hour from mine, so that is a 2-hour round trip to get to a meeting that might be an hour long. When that is during the school day, that is most of the school day that you have spent travelling, and there were people in that network

that go for longer. Again if we could have some more infrastructure about being able to videoconference into that, that would be really helpful, but that costs a bit of money to do that sort of thing as well.

Because it happens in the regional town, at their school, I think we are lucky that we do not have to rent a space because the school donates us a room once a month to meet in, but I do not think that is always the case in other networks. It would be nice to encourage more industries to attend things like that. At the network, we have Fed Uni and ACU representatives. We have people who are invited. The LLEN comes along as well, and every so often we get special guests to come and speak to us for specialised information, but it is very hard to get experts in fields to come out to us because of, again, the travel and the costs.

**Mr MELHEM** — Just a quick question. We talked about resources. As an idea, would you then mandate, for example, a particular region? Use Shepparton as an example, a big city. To mandate that you have got to have qualified career advisers in that particular town. That is one; that is an individual school. Or would you go as far as maybe having private schools—Catholic schools, for example—and public schools share resources to make sure that the people providing this service in that particular area are there? Is that something that ought to be looked at or considered? What you think about that?

**Ms FUQUA** — We have a Catholic school in our town, but we do not have any private schools. If we are going to share resources, because occasionally we are required to share a specialist like a speech pathologist or an EAL person, they have to travel between three or four schools which might be up to 2 hours apart. That is not really a very productive use of the specialists' time either, when they are spending most of their time in the car. I do not think an outside expert in rural communities is necessarily very helpful. I think it should be mandated that they are qualified, but it cannot just be a line item that says, 'From now on, you must be qualified. Go do the certificate IV or go do X number of hours of professional learning without that support'. So without some sort of support to the school to give that person some time release to do this additional study and get caught up and get qualified, or subsidising the programs as well, if you are going to undertake the cert IV or I think there are some postgrad degrees as well, you have to pay for that out of your pocket and give up your free time to do this. It is not that people are unwilling or they do not want to know more to help their students, it is just such a big hurdle.

**Mr MELHEM** — But that is what I am asking. In your opinion and from your expertise, how can we make that happen and what does it require? You touched on a few points. Funding, making sure that it becomes mandatory, for example, that the resources are there and how it is done. I would not mind if you want, because of the time, to take that question on notice. In practical terms, what would you suggest that the state government should do in that field, and the private providers as well, because it is a responsibility across the board.

**Mr CRISP** — Connections with industry: you touched briefly on having them in your career networks and similarly industry's involvement with career advice and work placements; you talked about the one mechanic in the town. Do you want to elaborate a little more on how we can overcome some of those difficulties in connecting with industries between the careers professionals and industry?

**Ms FUQUA** — That is something we are all trying to work on. We are trying to reinvent the wheel, it is almost like, from each school. We know we want to reach out to industries, but it is a long-term incentive for the industry. They have to be forward thinking to realise it is useful to talk to us and to engage with us. Perhaps if there are some incentives or some sort of push from the government that they should be involving or they have to run programs that involve students, that would be really useful. I think the grain industries group a couple of years ago invited all the careers educators for a day of professional learning and they took us around their facilities. Then there was a follow-up a month later where we took our Years 7 and 8 students to the same facilities. But we learned so much as local careers people about what was going on. It is really important, that local context and understanding.

**The CHAIR** — As there are no further questions, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you for your time and contribution.

**Witness withdrew.**