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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Combining study and work

THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 2009

PORT KEMBLA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Thursday, 30 April 2009

Members: Ms Bird, (*Chair*), Dr Jensen (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Clare, Ms Collins, Mrs D'Ath, Mr Irons, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Sidebottom, Dr Southcott and Mr Zappia

Members in attendance: Ms Bird, Mrs D'Ath and Dr Jensen

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The impact of combined study and work on the success of youth transitions and Year 12 attainment, with a focus on:

- providing opportunities to recognise and accredit the employability and career development skills gained through students' part time or casual work;
- identifying more flexible, innovative and/or alternative approaches to attaining a senior secondary certificate which support students to combine work and study;
- support that may be required to assist young people combining work and study to stay engaged in their learning, especially where work and study intersects with income support;
- the potential impact on educational attainment (including the prospects for post-compulsory qualifications and workforce productivity); and
- the effectiveness of school-based training pathways and their impact on successful transitions, including opportunities for improvement (particularly in relation to pathways to employment for disadvantaged young people).

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Committee met at 9.36 am

CHAIR (Ms Bird)—I declare open the eighth public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training as part of its inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions. I take this opportunity to thank you all for your attendance here today. Before we begin, I place on the record the committee's thanks to Mr Mark Webster, Principal of the Illawarra Senior College, for allowing the committee the opportunity to conduct proceedings here at the school. We look forward to holding discussions later with the staff and students from the school.

This inquiry was referred by the Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP. To date 52 submissions have been received from various parts of Australia and from a broad cross-section of interested parties. Copies of these submissions are available on the committee's website.

[9.38 am]

McCAMMON, Mrs Cynthia, Professional Officer, Pastoral Care and Personal Growth, Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales

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GRACE, Mr John, Executive Officer, Regional Development Australia, Illawarra

McLEAN, Mr Gerard, Manager, Workplace Learning Illawarra

CHAIR—I remind participants that, although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be recorded by *Hansard* and will attract parliamentary privilege.

This inquiry has had a number of hearings in schools. I think this is the sixth to date now. We have specifically attempted to get out of the centre of the cities and get into schools and meet with the teachers and students directly. We very much appreciate that you have made an additional effort today to appear before the committee. Normally you would have been able to pop into the city, which might be just as much of a challenge in terms of transport as coming down here. We appreciate your joining us today in Port Kembla.

The inquiry has been gathering evidence of great interest in terms of the way young people are balancing their school and work commitments. The reference was driven by the fact that over the last 15 to 20 years the extent and pattern of young people engaged in part-time work while they are studying have changed significantly. The number of hours they are doing is increasing due to a large extent to the growth of industries outside the old standard Thursday night and Saturday morning pattern. The demand for their labour is across a much wider span of hours. Also the type of hours they are working is changing. We have heard from young people who are working shifts until 12 pm or 1 am in the morning. Indeed, we heard that one young person then fronts up to open again at 6 am.

Whilst these are not the majority of cases, they are a significant minority and a growing number are doing those sorts of very irregular hours. We have heard from young people who are in effect working a full-time load on top of full-time studies—they are working 25 to 30 hours a week as well. We will come to the evidence. The Teachers Federation survey indicated that between 17 and 20 per cent of those in years 11 and 12 who are working are doing over 16 hours a week.

We are very keen to look at ways in which we as a federal government can recognise the reality of that and put in place recommendations for employers, schools and parents on ways in which that can be managed to ensure that young people have a successful transition. One area of concern is clearly young people who drop out. We are keen to hear about the vocational area and some of the workplace learnings that are ways of keeping young people engaged and how we can integrate their part-time work into that.

Young people sit before us and tell us they are managing fine and they have it all under control. Yesterday in Queensland they said that they have talked to friends who are a bit older than them who have said that they wish they had not done so many hours. They did not get the results they wanted. They did not get into the courses they wanted. Looking back they were less than happy that they did manage well. Those are the sorts of things we are struggling with and are interested to hear your experiences of and views on.

We will get those who have put submissions in to give us a bit of an explanation of the major issues and concerns that you had. The first submission we have is from the New South Wales Catholic Education Commission. Would someone like to make an opening statement about the main issues in that submission?

Mr Rodney—The Catholic Education Commission is a representative body but it does not actually control, if you like, policy in relation to school and student delivery. We are a state overarching body. We do have a management role. We work collaboratively with the diocese and systemic systems. There are 11 dioceses in New South Wales and there are a number of order owned or privately owned Catholic schools. We come here in that capacity and that is the capacity under which we put in our submission.

I will go through some of the terms of reference that were in the submission. That might be an appropriate order. We note that one of the MCEETYA initiatives signalled is the destination survey. We certainly support that as an approach to give us a clear indication of what is actually happening with students engaging in school and their management of work plus their other activities outside of school. We do look to other states for some quality there. We notice that Victoria has state funded contract surveys and so does Queensland and they are very broad in their scope. The level of detail and the data that that does provide to policy developers we think is quite significant. We encourage MCEETYA to think along those lines—not just where do children end up but the reasons why they have made those decisions, how school helped them to reach that destination and whether their part-time work fed into that.

We also look to the crowded curriculum in New South Wales in particular. Again we do look across state borders. It seems to us that some of the other states have less crowded curriculums. The breadth of study requirements in New South Wales makes it a very tight structure within the schools. There is not a lot of flexibility for schools to administer learning outside of the set

curriculum. I make that point because it is very difficult then for children to be able to manage their work with what would seem to be the very tight, rigorous curriculum.

If we are talking about the 15 to 19 age group in years 9 to 12, the school certificate curriculum and the higher school certificate curriculum both are very crowded within subject curriculum but also the requirements in the breadth of the curriculum. Having to do 12 units for year 11 and 10 units for year 12 is very arduous. Students are trying to manage that as well as have some commitment to work. We do see that as problematic.

We also acknowledge the work done by Professor Margaret Vickers, and I know you have already spoken to her, that indicates that these days there is not a point in time when students go to a world of work, as it might have been decades ago, but that students are gradually entering the world of work by doing part-time work and school. We acknowledge that as an important part of what we might be able to incorporate into the education experience. It might not be fully reflected in our curricula, where we have mapped employability skills against the curricula rather than possibly explicitly writing them into the curricula.

The New South Wales curriculum has acknowledged the learning that does happen in the workplace for students that are engaging in VET courses as a traineeship or apprenticeship by the introduction of the industry-based learning course, which does award the students some unit credit towards their HSC for engaging with the world of work. That is a very positive first step. There is some further scope to recognise students who are in part-time work, whether it is directly linked to the curriculum or whether it is a part-time job and that is all it is, by awarding some recognition. That could be managed in the learning process and supported by schools if there were space in the curriculum to do that.

We also acknowledge the very sound website myfutures. We understand that myfutures will have the capacity for students to generate personal portfolios of their learning from the world of work. That may not be fully functional as yet; I believe a lot of the work has already been carried out but it is not yet available. That would be a valuable tool for students as they do move from education site to education site, both school and post-school, to be able to carry that information that they collate themselves and also to use it in support of finding work, talking to employers and also within themselves to see how they are progressing.

I will make one other point before concluding—that is, the challenge in New South Wales to deliver part-time apprenticeships and traineeships because of the breadth of the curriculum. It is a very challenging combination of work and school life for a student in New South Wales if they are a part-time apprentice or a trainee. We are very supportive of that; it is a very valuable program—especially after the comment in relation to supporting Margaret Vickers' position about the transition to the world of work. We would like to see that grow. We cannot see easy pathways at the moment for how we manage it with such tight specific requirements for the curriculum

CHAIR—We will get everyone to make a statement, if the committee is fine with that, and come back for questions. Gillian, would you like to address the submission from the commission?

Ms Calvert—Yes, I would. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners on whose land we meet and also to acknowledge Illawarra Senior College. It is a great example of what we are trying to achieve here through this inquiry. I also commend the committee on your successful attempts to get young people's participation to inform your work. It is great to see parliamentary committees showing leadership in this area of kids' participation. I really want to acknowledge your efforts in that area.

I want to start by talking a little bit about our Children at Work research findings. In our experience there is a dearth of research in relation to children's lived experience of work that is informed by children and young people. A lot of the research that is done is not necessarily of the quality that you need on which to make the policy decisions that we are all attempting to make now. One of the recommendations we would be making to the committee is to seriously have a look at what data sets we need to collect, how we need to collect them and that those databases are based on children's lived experience of work.

In fact we have now done two surveys of children's experience of work. They have changed our thinking about children's experience of work, and we have been forced to reconsider a lot of the so-called common truths about work and school and about children's experience of work. In 2003, we did a survey of 11,000 children in years 7 to 10 in New South Wales across the three school systems. We followed that up in 2007 with a survey of 1,600 children aged, again, from years 7 to 10 and we will be releasing that research within the next month or so. I will make a copy available to the committee.

CHAIR—That will be tremendous, thank you.

Ms Calvert—What we have found from both studies—we now have quite large samples of children over time—is that children enjoy working. For children it is a positive experience and one that they want to continue, and they would have concerns if we as adults put things in place that undermined their capacity to work.

The second finding that is relevant here is that children's work did not interfere with their schooling and the children who were working tended to be doing a whole range of other activities in addition to school and work. There appear to be some kids who are able to manage quite complex lives. When we look at our sample we do not find that there is adverse interference between work and school, so the notion that work is bad for kids is a notion that we need to challenge. We are not talking about Dickensian experiences for our children; we are in fact talking about experiences that they enjoy and that are positive for them. I will come back to why I think that is the case later on, when I will talk about one of the areas that I think we need to focus on.

The thing that we did find was that many young people who want to work in fact cannot find work, and that is probably the bigger problem from the young person's perspective. The reasons they gave for this were that they did not know what they wanted to do, they could not find anything that they could do, jobs were not available in their area and, finally, there was a lack of transport, which meant that they could not get to work. Even though they wanted to get work or in fact may have been able to find work or jobs were available, they could not get there because of lack of public transport. Given the benefits that work can bring to children and given that

children enjoy work and see it as a positive thing, then I think it is a concern that the benefits of work are not being realised by all children who want to explore that.

The fourth finding, which we have now found with both surveys, is that transition is not just from part-time work to full-time work but happens much earlier than that. Transition to work really starts in year 7, if not, perhaps, a little bit before, when you start to see children taking on jobs and working within a family setting and then broadening that out to extended family, to neighbours and to the community. The notion that work starts when you get a formal job is in fact not how children experience it. For children, work starts from within the family and then gradually expands out. It is often short term, one-off and highly casualised, which for kids is a positive because that is one of the things that enables them then to fit work in with their school arrangements and their other commitments.

It is important, when we think about the world of work and its interaction with school, that we base that on knowledge which is informed by children's actual experience, is broader than anecdotal information and is based on a representative sample so that we can really develop policies that meet the needs of our children. So what are the ways in which we can maintain this positive experience, pick up on the small number of children who are having negative experiences—because certainly that was the case as well—and try and bring them forward into a much more positive experience of combining school and work? I think there are three ways in which we need to do that. Firstly, we need to look at how we support young people balance work with school. Secondly, we need to look at how we support young people who want to work to find work. The third thing is that we need to start thinking about nationally regulating work in the same way that we are adopting national approaches to curriculum development—and to start to think about those two things in a combined way.

I will briefly go through each of those, starting off with achieving a balance between work and school. The first thing we would suggest probably needs to happen, and I base this on some other work we are doing where we are looking at children's experiences of school and how that contributes to their wellbeing—that will be coming out in the next month, and, again, I am happy to make that available to you—is that school culture needs to change and provide much more flexible approaches to the way in which learning takes place. That will reduce the pressure that students experience and also, hopefully, build better relationships with their teachers, which is one of the fundamental things that enable children to enjoy school. The second thing that we need to do to achieve a balance is include parents in our strategies. Notwithstanding young people's reluctance to involve parents in some things, I think it is essential we involve parents in any strategy that we have. The third key thing is the way in which we regulate work, develop the school curriculum and run our schools. I will come back to the regulation.

The second area is supporting young people to find work. As we said, one of the reasons they gave was that they did not know what they wanted to do or they could not find anything that they could do, so career counselling and much earlier education about work is clearly a really important area that we need to look at. There is no point looking at giving kids information about work in year 10 if in fact, in their view, they are working from year 7. We need to start bringing our curriculum around work back to year 7. Another area is better relationships between schools and employers. I note that there has been a round table established by the Commonwealth government. I would really encourage direct involvement of young people on that round table, perhaps through the youth forum that the Commonwealth government has established. The third

area in supporting young people to find work is clearly improved public transport. Children are unable to drive; they are dependent on parents. If parents are unavailable, then they are dependent on public transport, so the availability of public transport becomes a real issue if we are going to support young people to find work.

The third area that we can look at is national regulation of children's work. We are currently engaged in discussion with a range of workplace relations ministers to argue that we need to have at least a harmonised approach to the way in which we regulate children's work. We have taken the view that where the adult system can adequately cover children we should leave that to happen, but where it cannot then we need to have regulation that is specific to children. One of the reasons that children enjoy work is that they have been able to benefit from adult advocacy to improve working conditions, and that has inevitably benefited children. However, there are some things that are specific about children which we need to address in regulation. The sorts of areas that I would possibly be pointing to are the age at which they work, the hours for which they work, the length of hours for which they work, the time at which they work, probably some occupational health and safety issues and information being made available and the responsibility of employers to make information available to young people. They are the sorts of areas that a regulatory approach should use.

Whatever we do with regulation, there need to be two considerations. One is that it has to be simple and easy to understand, because you will then get much better compliance. At the moment, we have very poor compliance in relation to children who are working, so we need to really lift and improve the compliance. Improved, simple regulation will achieve that. We need to keep that in mind. The other thing that we need to keep in mind is this notion of transition from informal family based work to formal employer work. We do not want the regulation to knock out the informal aspects. What I am talking about is regulation primarily of formal work, not the informal pathways. There are critical pathways to children developing work skills. There is a notion that a kid appears with a part-time job for the first time and they are work ready. They are work ready because they have had this informal experience from their families and communities. Finally, a national regulatory scheme must be backed up by an information and advisory service for children, parents and employers. I think that is critical. I think our research goes some way to shedding light on the issues.

I think the continued use of evidence based information on which to guide our policy is essential if we are to continue to provide children and young people with what, for them, by and large, are extremely positive and valued experiences of the transition from school to work.

CHAIR—Thanks. The Teachers Federation submission has provided us with a lot of really interesting data. We did talk to Sally at the big round table in Canberra, but we are a bit keen to follow up in a smaller environment where we can ask more detailed questions. Sally, do you want to give us an overview of what work you have done and what you found from that?

Ms Edsall—In 2007, the work we did arose from concerns that were brought forward from amongst the 65,000 teachers in New South Wales public schools and TAFE colleges to our executive, which is comprised of practising full-time classroom teachers. It is a body that is representative of people actually doing the work. Some of the observations they were making, probably in an anecdotal way, about the conversations they were having with students and what they were seeing of students in secondary schools showed that they were, perhaps, tired and

struggling with meeting assignment and work commitments. When they started talking to their students, what seemed to be going on was that a lot of kids had obligations far beyond any of the obligations that teachers themselves had when they were their age, which is what you were saying. The economy has moved to such a point where work takes place 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A lot of the students were doing that.

We wanted to find out a bit more about it, in a more rigorous way, rather than relying on anecdote. So we commissioned an independent survey in 2007, an interesting time because it was in the atmosphere of the Work Choices campaign and a booming economy—both, of course, have changed now. The research methodology was such that we combined both qualitative and quantitative research. We talked to young people in the Sydney metropolitan, Newcastle and Wollongong areas.

Unfortunately our resources did not stretch beyond those zones at the time, although we subsequently held discussions with a group of young people outside the survey, in Armidale, and got a very good picture of some of the specific concerns regional young people had. Transport, of course, was one of them. Also, when you are studying in a regional area you might have curriculum requirements that oblige you to go beyond the school for fieldwork—there are certain subjects in senior school which have obligatory fieldwork. We found students talking from the heart about how they either were reluctant to participate or had very complex needs around being back in time to meet their shift obligations. They were not able to go away overnight and that kind of thing. So that brought a slightly different perspective than matters in the city centres, Newcastle and Wollongong being included as city areas. We then backed that up with a representative sample through a quantitative research and internet survey. We conducted it in proportion to the number of students enrolled in years 10, 11 and 12 in public high schools.

The federation generally, just to go back a bit, supports the right of students to work. Teachers, as people who are fundamentally concerned about the wellbeing and development of young people and about each young person reaching their potential, recognise that there are many positive aspects to work, as well as challenges. What we want to do is to be able to support young people and their families and employers to be able to strike the right balance and to make decisions around their future, and we want to provide support for teachers in working with young people and for the families of young people. But, more than that, we want to work more closely with employers in encouraging good employment practice and lauding good employers. So our response to the survey has that focus, and I will get on to that in a moment.

I know you have the submission with all the stats and you will probably ask a bit more about that, so I will not go into detail about all that, but we found, very similarly to what Gillian was just saying, that the length of hours and the time of those hours are the critical matters of importance. We found around 16 hours a week to be the critical point at which it becomes too much of a stress and a burden, and where students were reporting that they felt their performance was affected. ‘Performance’—what a horrible word.

CHAIR—Their quality of life.

Ms Edsall—Yes, their quality of life, the quality of their study. Being a teachers union, we obviously also think that education is of critical and fundamental importance and perhaps should be of higher order importance, but that is not to diminish the many positive things that young

people get out of work. Whilst they were the most articulate people about vulnerabilities, some of the experiences they had, which we have documented in our submission verbatim, were reasonably hair-raising.

Young people are so resilient and so able to put things in perspective. I think the community often underestimates students' capacity to analyse their own situations and their resilience. They have great good humour sometimes. They are people who, in that snapshot of time, were able to look at their colleagues a year older than them who were working on awards, their colleagues perhaps a year younger who were working on AWAs at the time and themselves and see what was really going on. Whilst they are able to analyse and see, they need support to be able to deal with the vulnerable points and they need information about OH&S, harassment and things like that. But, all of that being said, the positive aspects of work for young people far outweighed the negatives.

There is an area of this that needs further research given the current climate, and Nicole is probably better placed to talk about this than I am because Nicole works with teachers and students in the Illawarra area, where employment is a critical issue, as you know. But we found social aspects were very important, as was the development of social and communications skills—the buzz that you get from gaining new skills and understandings and the capacity to work with people. There was a young girl in Wollongong who used to be terrified of the surfer boys but, working in the coffee shop, she learnt how to deal with that kind of thing.

Obviously there are the monetary aspects. Life is so much more complex momentarily for kids nowadays. There are all those kinds of things—without the recognition, it has to be said, that should be there within the school system. So, as the kids articulate, there is a disconnect between their lives as students and their lives as workers. The teachers were reporting to us what they were observing and then when we talked to the students, we found that a lot of them had not really had an opportunity to talk to each other about it. So there is a bit of understanding lacking. Careers advisers, I have to say, came out as top of the pops. The kids really liked the opportunities that careers advisers offered to them and felt that that was a really valuable touch point in the school when talking about the world of work. But perhaps we need also to build better understandings elsewhere in school.

I will just skip to what we did as a result of the survey. We put a lot of the union's resources—actually teachers' resources because the teachers were the ones who paid money to make the union work—into developing the website students@work.org.au which we really set up in four domains to provide information and support for students, parents, teachers and employers. We are serious about this issue of trying to connect those four groups of stakeholders in this whole thing. It is not only intended to be static information in the sense that you can go to the website and find information. One of the things in setting it up—and I was responsible mainly for the content—was that there is a lot of information out there, it is just in many places. We know that if people click on a website and they are still on that website within two or three seconds it is almost counted as a modern miracle. If you can hold them long enough to explore deeper than the home page or the first click then you are doing exceptionally well.

We want to build resources that assist teachers to work with young people, so that is a project for us in trying to engage. Amongst 65,000 people you have to find some experts in curriculum development; they have to be there somewhere. Sorry, that is a bit flippant because teachers

obviously are experts in curriculum. We want to provide support for parents. When a young person first comes and says, 'I want to go and get a part-time job.' What sort of things does the parent have to think about to help the student decide whether that is the right thing to do at the moment and how to fit it in? We have built a tool on the website called the Time Tamer which, if you use Microsoft Outlook, is like Outlook on steroids. It is actually much more powerful than Outlook and we own it. It is not only a calendar type arrangement but an interactive calendar. It has the potential to be communicative. The student controls it but the student can allow whoever they like access to the information about their timetable and their days. So they could choose a teacher or mentor, who would also have access to it, or choose Mum and Dad or their employer. They can also choose to have public and private parts of it. Unlike Facebook where all your misdeed are known to the world, if you have a private activity that you do not want Mum or Dad to know about, you can keep that as a private activity. That is the other thing, young people need respect with very complex and private parts of their lives.

We aim to eventually ease communication between students, their teachers, their employers and their families so that they can more readily organise their working lives. Students sometimes complain that employers will make very instantaneous demands for covering a shift. Employers will often say, 'Well, I need them for a shift but they're never available when I want them.' So both sides of that equation want better information and communication with each other. Ultimately a perfect scenario would be, 'I have year 12 exam trials coming up. I won't be able to work during this period of time.' Young people put most of the employers as very accommodating around that time but young people need to learn to communicate their needs effectively and employers need to know that someone else can fill it in. So what about if the student's mate is also on the roster and prepared to cover? They can communicate with their friend within the same organisation and then communicate jointly to the employer in an easy and effective way. That is the kind of interactivity that we are trying to get happening in order to facilitate communication.

This year we are trying to boost the teacher support site to develop curriculum materials and get teachers more actively engaged. We are trying to make links with employers. It would be perfect if we had an employer who was willing to come on board in a trial arrangement of that sort.

We want students to be able to undertake part-time work with the confidence that they are going to be working under properly regulated conditions and they know where they can find information and support if they need it. That is where the federal government can assist, with uniform standards and legislation. We want expanded opportunities for students to combine school and work, and that word 'flexibility' comes in again. But I do not mean flexibility in the way it has been used for the last 20 years—as a euphemism for saving money. Unfortunately, too often that is what has happened. In New South Wales, for example, there is an opportunity to be able to complete the final two years of school over a five-year period. However, if you are not enrolled full time at the school, the school loses staff as a consequence of that through the staffing formula; in fact, it has a feedback loop such that eventually your curriculum opportunities actually become diminished, not expanded. What people want is greater access to vocational ed and training, but if you are involved in a VET course at school and you spend part of your time off your school campus at TAFE, the school loses teaching staff as a consequence. That kind of thing is ludicrous and we have to overcome that.

We want the schools involved with joint programs with TAFE and we also want their other experiences with employment to somehow count back into their schooling experience. We want to work with employers recognising students' academic life is of major importance and the stress that is caused for students. Another issue—and we did not put this in our submission—is public transport, which arose time and time again. It cannot always be overcome, in the sense that a lot of students are working 1 am or 3 am shifts stacking supermarket shelves—public transport is an issue that faces any worker in that circumstance. I will finish there. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Sally. There are some important issues there for us to consider. I will now invite Greg to make some comments. We are interested to know, from the Business Chamber's perspective and from conversations you may have had with local employers, about any insights you might have on the issue are talking about today.

Mr Fisher—Thank you. I have been here in my job for four or five weeks so I thought if I came here in front of this group I had better be good! My qualifications to speak on this issue are that I have two daughters who are looking for work and balancing that, I worked as a teacher myself a few years ago and I am part of the Illawarra Business Chamber's apprentice placement area, so that is more the area of interest. I took the time to read some of the submissions. My understanding of this is that, while perhaps in my time the traditional value chain was that you went to school and then you looked for a job, you are integrating back into the school system that transition ability. My wife is a school teacher and she teaches VET courses, so I understand those issues.

I also did some research on the IRIS statistics about youth unemployment and what it is about that, because I thought there are probably a lot of experts who are coming at it that way but I will come back from this way. I have a couple of notes that I took that will share with you. The IRIS research showed that more and more students are staying at school: it was around 50 per cent 15 or 20 years ago, it is now 64 per cent. That tells me that they are staying in, they are getting the opportunity to have education, but our unemployment in the youth area is still high. So what is it about that, if we are doing all those great things? Then I read some research that it is maybe, coming at it this way, the employees' readiness to accept and understand people and perhaps the support for them in terms of managing the transition. I understand this is probably more the student welfare end, but perhaps you could also look at it as a partnership so that there may be some support for small to mediums to understand what they are taking on and how they do that. Maybe there is an opportunity for the education component of the schools to educate the potential employer through that relationship.

We as an organisation have a policy position, which we wrote to you and Jennie George about, on the incentives to take an apprentice. The amount is the same, I understand, for a trainee or an apprentice. The research I have read says that the contribution a third- or fourth-year apprentice makes to the business is rather valuable. So there is that aspect. In my last role at Illawarra Community Services we had a program that supported children from an Aboriginal background to stay in the system. I was thinking past the value chain where they drop out before they even get a chance to get to there so I would give a little plug for keeping the funding support for that underrepresented component in the workplace. So I looked at it as a value chain. I thought you guys would be all over it in the transition to school. I have come at it this way from getting the employee ready and also looking at the groups that do not even get into that part of the value chain, particularly the disadvantaged groups. That is about it for me.

CHAIR—That is very useful. We appreciate you coming along. One of the great challenges we have had as a committee has been engaging employer organisations. It is particularly important, as I think Sally was saying, that we see these as community partnerships, recognising that we are dealing with young people who are not children and who are not adults. They are in transition as well in terms of their life experience and so on. We appreciate that and hopefully we will have an ongoing conversation as well with the business chambers.

Mr Fisher—Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr Grace—Speaking from an Illawarra regional development perspective, which is what my organisation does, my organisation traditionally focuses on the health and operation of the Illawarra regional economy and the health and operation of the regional labour market. One of the issues that we have been facing in recent years is the contradiction of coexisting high youth unemployment and skill shortages; and an issue which relates to this—which is the social dimensions of youth unemployment and transition to the workforce.

The greatest concern of several concerns that we hold about this is young people's attachment to the workforce. The fact that many young people in this region do not make the transition from education to employment is arguably a bigger problem than some of the other problems we are considering in this area. There have been two reports published in recent years about youth unemployment in this region—one in 2001 and one in 2008. Both of those reports identify the link between social factors and successful transitions from school to work.

In brief, we would suggest that attachment to the workforce through part-time work by secondary students is a valuable step in the transition process. However harmonisation and if possible integration of part-time work with structured vocational programs is highly desirable. Our organisation, through involvement with a range of youth employment initiatives, has also come to the conclusion that employment and job brokerage services for young people are generally inadequate. The focus of current employment services is on the long-term unemployed and the most highly disadvantaged people, which is very valuable; but if we take the view that legitimate paid employment is good for young people then the employment status of a young person should not matter when it comes to decisions that are made about the provision of employment services.

So as well as supporting VET in schools and school based apprenticeships and traineeships we would strongly support the concept of, and have in fact proposed, the establishment of a specialist youth jobs agency—at least in this region—that would provide services to all young people regardless of their employment status in the 15- to 19-year-old age group. So whether a young person is unemployed or whether a young person is in school and seeking some appropriate part-time work that actually does fit with the demands of their studies, we would propose that an agency like that, which is aware of the issues, would be very valuable in this situation—as compared to the current job brokerage services that are available to young people.

Mr McLean—At Workplace Learning Illawarra in the past 12 months we have worked with about 800 different employers, engaging them in a range of activities with about 5,000 different young people—predominantly through the school system but also out of school in activities that educate them about careers and about the world of work. I guess there are two areas that we see as quite significant in terms of part-time work and how that fits in. The first part of that is: how

do we maximise the benefit of what is already happening in terms of both quality and recognising the skills that are gained through part-time work, and how that is recognised not only by industry but also in the education system.

We have an infrastructure there already that supports the recognition processes. For instance, through the school vocational education and training programs you have systems that recognise the skills that young people are obtaining whilst they are doing VET courses. There is no reason why that type of infrastructure could not be applied to the part-time work arrangements. That would then I guess start to build on the employability skills and identifying the skills and add value to what a young person gains in that part-time employment. One of the things that my organisation recognises is that young people do not necessarily recognise the qualities and value they bring to the workplace. They do not necessarily understand what that value is and use that to their advantage so we need to get around that. There are a number of initiatives that are occurring at the moment that could be easily adopted in that area. I am talking about the job ready certificate and the infrastructure that is there about supporting expanded work placement opportunities for young people in the unpaid workforce side of things. There is no reason that type of infrastructure could not be brought across to support young people there.

The second part of that is: how do we create quality opportunities within the workplace? There are two streams to that. If we are talking about paid employment then we are talking about in New South Wales school based apprenticeships and traineeships. A lot of dollars have been spent on the infrastructure in terms of buildings and resourcing through teachers and through a range of opportunities but it is a very complex arrangement. You have a situation in New South Wales where you have seven parties actually sit down, identify and commit to a school based apprenticeship and traineeship arrangement before the kid can actually start the job. Seven parties have to sit around a table like this and identify what their role is, agree to their role, understand what that role is and then go forward. It is a very complex arrangement. So we need to have in place (1) some activities that streamline that process and sort it out as far as the system is concerned and (2) some sort of mechanism—and I am talking about some sort of brokerage arrangement—that brings all those players together. That just does not exist in the current arrangement as we have it.

The other string to that side of things is how we create part-time work in areas where there are career opportunities. If you look at where part-time work is and where our young people are engaging at the moment it is predominately in retail. An extension of that would be retail in the fast food areas as well. That is a unique and interesting situation. Of itself retail does provide career opportunities, but it overwhelmingly provides an opportunity for a lot of young people to get some valuable employability skills. That can be used, but I think there is probably an opportunity outside the school based apprenticeship and traineeship system, with recognition occurring to create some pathways in those industries that are likely to provide the career opportunities further down the track. Again, that comes back to that brokerage role. I note that in his discussion John talked about that youth employment agency and that is certainly something that we would support as well in those two areas.

CHAIR—This is valuable information for us from each organisation. You have broadly touched on some of the issues that we are challenged with. One is that clearly we recognise there is identified value in young people undertaking part-time work whilst at school. We hear that from the young people and we hear it from parents. Young people will say their parents push

them to get a part-time job. That may be to decrease the nagging factor—there are a whole lot of things driving that—but parents value their teenagers having part-time work. I take Sally's evidence that one of the things young people say is they get a very different message from schools, that it is actually generally seen as a negative, an interference and a problem. Having been a teacher I am a bit defensive when they say that but I think that it is like Sally and Gillian said: when you are taking the evidence from young people you have to hear what they are saying. They say they are getting mixed messages; they are getting a message from parents and employers that work is valuable and they are getting a message from schools that it is not.

There are exceptions to that of course, as always, but generally speaking they will say, 'I don't ask the teacher for an extension because they will tell me "If you can't manage your job, give it up. You should be focused on your studies."' That is the sort of message we are getting back from students across all the school groups we have talked to. That may not be the intention but I think it is important we understand that is the outcome we might all need to look at.

We have talked to lots of employer organisations who are very concerned to be good employers of young people and who talk to us about their policies and the practices they have in place and so forth. Then you talk to young people and it is not happening at the coal face. Whatever the particular name of the store or franchise is that they are working in they say that their supervisor is 12 months older than they are, there is bullying, there is harassment and there are unreasonable expectations of responsibility. That is a real challenge because you are talking of an age group where you are increasing their responsibility, and they like that. They will actually tell you they like getting promoted; that sort of thing you were talking about, Sally. They get a buzz out of all that stuff, but we should remember they are under 18. They are still not always going to manage all that well and manage their own colleagues at work well. I think there are some really serious messages for employers in what young people are saying actually happens in their experience.

The challenge for us in looking at it as a committee is to recognise the really good stuff and, as Gerry said, maximise that for young people. One of the big gaps is that absolute disjoint between their educational experience, the qualifications they achieve and the amount of part-time work they do. I would be interested if people have got observations to make for us—Gerry, you sort of touched on it—on ways in which the government develops the job ready certificate that we are keen to introduce and if we can do that effectively without having a whole lot of small and medium employer organisations in particular say, 'I am employing this person for the flexibility of their labour availability and their cost'—that is fundamentally why they are using them—'I want to look after them but, for heaven's sake, you want to put a whole lot of paperwork on top of me as well.' One of two things will happen: they will not employ these young people, which is not a good outcome, or the quality of the paperwork becomes useless because employers will know that other employers are just ticking boxes and signing it off to get it off their desks.

It might have been John or Greg who made the point that young people say, 'I don't need it because I am working in fast food and I don't want to do that for the rest of my life so it doesn't matter.' They do not understand the skills, knowledge and attitudes they are developing and how to maximise their use of those in future employment opportunities. If anybody has got some direct experience, or idea or contribution about that job ready certificate, the portfolio and ways we might do it, that would be useful.

Ms Calvert—The first thing I would be concerned about is the kids who are unable to get into that employment. You are entrenching disadvantage. From our research, we know the kids who are currently not getting jobs—you are more likely to get a job if you come from an English-speaking background. That may well be to do with the value that non-English-speaking background parents place on education.

CHAIR—There is a component of that which we have picked up.

Ms Calvert—There is that aspect. The second thing is that if you come from areas of high youth unemployment you are less likely to get work. Again, you are compounding disadvantage with further disadvantage, which I think is partly what John was saying. I would be concerned that a Job ready certificate may further advantage those who are already advantaged, and therefore further disadvantage those who are already disadvantaged. However, having said that, some way of recognising the skills that kids get in the work environment is a good idea. There is probably also a role there for non-formal work environment recognition as well, because that is where you learn about turning up on time, being focused and respectful—all of those so-called ‘soft skills’ that are the skills employers want when they employ anybody.

CHAIR—So you are talking about, for example, young people who may have regular babysitting responsibilities within the family and extended community?

Ms Calvert—Yes.

CHAIR—You are using those to document it as well?

Ms Calvert—Yes.

Ms Edsall—I just wanted to expand on that and say that our research excluded young people who worked in family businesses because we had to set the parameters somewhere. I am not sure whether Gillian’s research included that.

Ms Calvert—It does.

Ms Edsall—I am concerned about the effect of that kind of certification, because many of the young people employed in the family corner shop, to take a classic example, are developing precisely the same skills as those who are in a relationship with a major retailer or a fast food store. So that needs to be looked at very carefully too.

Mr McLean—If you look at it from an industry perspective, and if you look at any job description and any particular selection criteria for a job from industry—and it is especially evident at entry-level jobs—you can break it down into two categories. You can break it down into qualifications, described as this certificate, this UAI, these results from school or this level of experience, and it is very easy to identify and define. The other thing that is there—and this is from bitter experience of interviewing heaps of young people for jobs over a long period of time—is the eight employability skills that industry have identified: communication, teamwork, using IT et cetera. Being key things, these are very much the areas that you know young people have the necessary experience and qualities that you need as an employer, but they just cannot get it out. They have never sat down, they have never recognised it, and they have never gone

through the process. There are things in New South Wales, like the employability skills logbook within the Department of Education and Training, that have residence in some schools and that certainly look at how you can identify those things. You have some developments in curriculum that identify those employability skills through the curriculum process, and Paul Rodney was talking about that earlier. There is an opportunity to apply that same sort of assessment in an environment where you can sit down with a young person, talk about the job that they are doing, talk about how they are going, talk about those skills, put them in that context and then document those things that then become valuable.

CHAIR—You are talking less the standard concept of accreditation which is about measurement and ticking off et cetera which does, to some extent, become entrenched in a paper chase?

Mr McLean—My concern with, for argument's sake, a job ready certificate that was delivered through some sort of an RTO process would become that tick and flick. Realistically, what you are talking about is somebody building a portfolio and understanding about skills at a young age—their skills passport, their teamwork skills, their communication skills and identifying examples and recognising—

CHAIR—That would allow integration of not only paid part-time work they may have but also family experience, community experience—young people who train teams of juniors and things like that?

Mr McLean—Yes.

CHAIR—I am conscious that we are really close on time, so I will ask Paul if he would like to say anything.

Mr Rodney—I would like to reiterate what Gillian was saying: we need to ensure that those who are not in work or school are in this mix. I think the job ready certificate may further marginalise that group. But there are some benefits to the job ready certificate. This may sound like a very obvious thing to say but if it is another certificate that we believe may be of benefit to the student—we are not convinced it is; we would rather it pass—and we believe potentially it could be, it must involve the employer. If it is only school managed, I think we provide enough detail in what we currently provide from schools for employers to make judgment. But if it were a student being able to articulate their own skills, that is of immense benefit. I do agree with what Gerry was saying: there is no reason that it could not happen in schools. The skills exist in schools. Teachers do have the skills that they currently use to work with their VET students, but we do not have access to the time and the curriculum does not allow us access to do that. As I was saying before, the curriculum is so very tight that schools cannot take on that challenge. It is not there, it is not explicit; therefore we are tied to that.

Something that has not been mentioned, but which I think marries two important concepts is that schools do work very much in a pastoral paradigm where the kid is king, and that is not their world of work. Their world of work is about product or the bottom line. I think that some marriage and some concept where brokerage, in a local sense—as you were talking about before—is a critical part that actually brings the two together. I do not think that schools are necessarily equipped to do that. The way schools approach the marriage it is all about the child

but, in the world of work, it is not about that. I think there are some challenges there in the job ready certificate to be aware of that because, if it is produced inside a pastoral paradigm for a commercial paradigm, it really might not be a lot of use—

CHAIR—Certainly, that is what employers are saying to us: ‘If you just produce something that is meaningless to us then you are wasting everybody’s time.’

Ms Calvert—Could I just reinforce what Paul was saying about the difference between the school environment and the work environment from a child’s point of view. Children get quite surprised that they can even question their employer, because in the school environment and the family environment they are clear that the adults are there in their best interest and that they are concerned about their wellbeing. When they go into a work environment it is a really different priority. That is partly why we think there needs to be better regulation of the work environment. The work environment is to make a profit, it is a commercial concern. It is not to look after the wellbeing of young people and that transition is not something we overtly talk about and discuss with the kids. We just have this expectation that they will—

CHAIR—That they will manage it.

Ms Calvert—understand it, that they will manage it and they cannot. They do not know that they can ask their employer what time they should start or whatever.

CHAIR—And how much they will get paid.

Ms Calvert—Also, when we ask kids: ‘Who do you turn to if you have a problem at work with your employer?’ they say it is to that same employer who is causing them the problem. Their experience to date is that they turn to the adults who are running things—the school or the parent. So I think the issue you have raised is a challenge.

CHAIR—I am going to give Nicole a chance to make a comment here and then, unfortunately, I will have to wrap it up. This happens to us all the time. Quite clearly, it is the beginning of a conversation, because it brings out a whole lot of other issues.

Ms Calvert—I will try to keep it brief. I will just pick up on what Gillian and also Gerry said in terms of the marginalising, creating disadvantage for people, particularly those living in regional areas of New South Wales—not necessarily major regional centres—who, through no fault of their own, live 30, 40 or 50 kilometres from that major regional centre where employment opportunities are really limited in their town. Their work might be on the family farm or it might be that, through the school, VET and their school based apprenticeships, mum or dad take them into the towns to complete that work. But, again, that impacts on what they can get at school because it impacts on the staffing formula and narrows their curriculum choices at school. Certainly, opportunities for paid part-time work are very limited, so a job ready certificate would potentially disadvantage people in regional New South Wales because they do not have that engagement with work.

CHAIR—Thank you. I am going to go to my colleagues for a question each and then we will wrap it up. My apologies. It has been a great conversation.

Dr JENSEN—There are specifics in your submission that I would like to get into. Obviously, we are going to get generic comments at all of the roundtables that we have. I found some of the data you have in your submission very interesting but, in some ways, it does not paint a full picture. For instance, you have quite a significant difference between males and females in terms of those who work more than 16 hours a week. Obviously, the proportions are different, but what about the percentage of the total number of males in those years who are actually working, and the same for females? On the next page it shows how many hours a week they work. Something I find very troubling is the percentage of kids in year 12 who are in work—I would also like to know whether this is as a result of fewer kids doing work in year 12 than the other years—and the percentage of kids who are doing more than 16 hours a week in a very critical year of school.

CHAIR—Dennis is really interested in the detail of the survey. Do you want to provide some questions in writing following up on the detail of the data? Sally, I am sure you would be happy to drill down and provide that information?

Ms Edsall—Of course; no problem.

Ms Calvert—Can I also suggest that you send them to us, because we can run through our 1,600 kids as well.

Dr JENSEN—That sounds good.

CHAIR—Dennis is more our statistical expert, so we will invite him to put out some detailed questions and provide them to both of you so you can run through your data. It will be very useful to us.

Mrs D'ATH—The three key areas I see are ensuring that, as a consequence of young people working, it does not impact on their quality of education. We do want to keep them at school, we do want them to finish their education, so we think work is fantastic in keeping them engaged and learning life skills but not to the detriment of their studies, only to come to the end where they say, 'Gee, I wish I hadn't done that, because I did not get the marks I wanted.' It is trying to find that balance and considering whether we should be regulating the number of hours worked to ensure that that balance is there and whether you can realistically do that. Obviously, work will be done while kids are at school, so how can we ensure that employers are getting what they want out of that process? As I say, there is no point in creating a job ready certificate or anything else if that is not what employers are seeking. When we have youth unemployment the questions have to be asked. Firstly, 'Why, from the young person's perspective, are they not getting jobs?' And, secondly, 'Why are businesses not picking up those young people and what can we do to improve that?'

Importantly, one of the committee's terms of reference is: should we acknowledge skills learnt outside of school in the obtaining of any formal school qualification? Should we give credit for skills being learnt outside and, if so, to what extent? We heard in Queensland yesterday that you can do all these things and get one credit for it, but it is barely being taken up because of the paperwork and everything involved in it, similar to what Gerry has said. I do not want you all to comment on that. But just on that last point, should we acknowledge the skills learnt and give credit for that? I am not just talking about paid work, I am talking particularly about volunteer

work with not-for-profit organisations, for example, and how we may incorporate that into the formal education qualification.

Ms Calvert—It is interesting that we think about work cutting across schooling. For many kids, work keeps them in school and we need to turn that thinking around and start seeing work and those outside experiences as contributing to school and the attainment of some sort of certificate at the end of it. I would suggest that we challenge our thinking on that. It then flows from that that, yes, you would want that external non-school learning to be incorporated into some sort of acknowledgement of skill attainment. Other people have much better ideas about the detail of that, but I certainly think we should.

Ms Edsall—In terms of the impact on schooling, one thing we had to work out when we set up the Time Tamer were the parameters to develop the program. The idea is to encourage kids to put into it their shifts and hours worked. We thought at one stage we would have little pop-ups that said, ‘Now you have done more than 12 hours a week, stop!’ We have decided, being more interested in the educative approach rather than wrist slapping—

CHAIR—‘You’ve done three assignments this week, stop!’

Ms Edsall—We try to encourage students to reflect. A lot of the conversation is about students’ self-identification. We have little pop-ups. The thing will track the number of hours you have done over any given period—a fortnight, a month, a school term, a year—and provide guidance and encouragement and say, ‘Research shows that, after 16 hours and 3 am shifts, you might like to reflect on your results at school. Maybe you need to talk to mum and dad and your teachers about your latest report and things like that.’ I do not think you can regulate and legislate that deeply about students’ lives. I think there are areas where you can go where you set parameters but, within that process, I would also encourage students to become critical and self-reflective about their engagement.

CHAIR—I will invite people to consider, if there are other things that have occurred to you and you want to contribute, providing follow-up submissions to us now that you have an idea of what we are thinking, where we are going and perhaps, Sally, you could provide something more directly on the Time Tamer initiative, which I have had a bit of a look at. Gillian, I would be interested in some follow-up from the commission on your view about regulation after age 16. We are conscious that every state we have gone to has been up to age 16. Some of the issues that are coming out is that it often leaves the 16- to 18-year-olds at a critical period, being the ones who do a lot of extra hours and so forth. So perhaps you could consider that.

Ms Calvert—We have already said regulation should be up to age 18, under Fair Work. That is the black hole, if you like, of regulation, so we go up to age 18.

Mr Fisher—What would be the ideal final result out of all of this?

CHAIR—What we are looking to do—and this is why I am inviting people to go back and consider again—are some recommendations around the skills and learning side of it. How can schools better integrate with what they do, how can they better support students, how can we perhaps put together a certificate or a portfolio or whatever that goes through the process Gerry was talking about, getting young people to understand what they have achieved?

The other side of it is around the experience—that is, how do we ensure that young people are being good workers as well as good learners? How do we make that a meaningful experience for them and get partnerships in communities between employers, parents, schools and the young people in making that an important part. Things have developed ad hoc over 20 years, so what ways can we stop, go back and say, ‘Where is it at for young people and how can we enhance the experience?’

Mr Fisher—For you, if that all happened, what would it look like?

CHAIR—That is going to be at least another six months down the track of our inquiry.

Mr Fisher—So a kid is at school, he or she enjoys the school, the employer goes, ‘Go you good thing,’ and they get this portfolio that says wow.

CHAIR—And, beyond that, we need to recognise that is a really valuable transition and life experience and make sure all young people get access to it. That is a part of what we are looking at.

Mr Fisher—I asked that question because I understood and listened to the problem. I always like to think we have really got good at the paradigm, the pastoral versus the commercial, so I was turning my mind to ways of getting that to that ideal final result, which is some sort of merge, isn’t it?

CHAIR—It is a conversation that we have not had, which is what the Australian National Schools Network and Margaret Vickers’ work made us think about. This is a valuable asset. In the OECD we stand out in terms of the percentage of young people that we employ in the workplace while they are studying. As we have said before—and the Mexican border is probably not a good example in the current environment!—we do not have cheap entry labour that goes into that sort of work, so we look to our young people to do it. They are valuable, so let’s make sure we are doing it well for them.

Mrs D’ATH—The school based apprenticeship and traineeship system has gone part way in making sure that we keep young people engaged in education while making them more work ready and employable. We are giving employers what they want when kids are coming out of school, but we have not gone anywhere when it comes to all the skills that those kids are learning outside of a school based arrangement.

Mr Fisher—Like my daughter umpires netball on a Saturday—

Mrs D’ATH—Yes, so how can we make sure those skills are also recognised so that they are employable and so we do not lose those kids? We should not just assume it is the disengaged and those who say, ‘I don’t want to go on to university,’ or, ‘I don’t want to go on to further education,’ whom some other work experience will keep engaged. It is also those high achievers who take on everything, who think, ‘I can do 16 hours work because I’m a straight A student and I can do this and I can do that.’ They are the last to speak up because everyone is patting them on the back and going, ‘You’re doing such a great job.’ When they hit the wall and start suffering from stress or anxiety—and we see youth suicide—they are the last to turn around to mum and dad or the school and say, ‘I can’t cope with this,’ because all they hear is how good they are.

CHAIR—And for employers that is important to understand. For example, glandular fever is a common teenage illness amongst those that are overloading themselves. The evidence shows not only is it year 12 but the more responsible a student is the more hours they are probably doing and thinking that they are managing. So there are some issues there that as a community we have a combined interest in. We want them to become adults and transition but we should understand they are transitioning and sometimes stop.

Dr JENSEN—One final thing that we need to be very careful with here is not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We need to be cognisant of the fact that fundamentally schools are about education. If we go too much into this whole aspect of choice what we are going to end up with is where school just happens to be one of the choices that is in the mix, rather than school being the central thing. We want to make these other things more convenient for the students but we should not throw ‘I have the choice to do this or go to school on Monday morning’ into the mix. We need to make it clear to young people that the primary priority still is education.

CHAIR—On that note we might wrap up. We certainly look forward to some follow-up from organisations, and thank you all for your attendance. If you have been asked to provide additional material please send it to the secretariat. Once again, your evidence has been invaluable. We are very determined to get this right, to not destroy what is worth while and to also take stock and enhance the experience. Anything else you would like to contribute to us you are very welcome to send through. Thank you for your participation today.

Proceedings suspended from 11.00 am to 11.20 am

CHEADLE, Mr Robert Alexander, Deputy Principal, Illawarra Senior College

FOGARTY, Mr Dennis, Head Teacher of English, Illawarra Senior College

HOUSE, Mrs Patricia, Class Teacher and Year 11 Coordinator, Illawarra Senior College

LEAR, Ms Lynne, District Guidance Officer, Illawarra Senior College

WEBSTER, Mr Mark Anthony, Principal, Illawarra Senior College

CHAIR—I now welcome representatives of the Illawarra Senior College to today's hearing. I will just indicate to you that the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath. However, the hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and therefore has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. Do any of you have any comments on the capacity in which you appear today?

Ms Lear—I am the District Guidance Officer for southern Wollongong and I am based here as the school counsellor.

CHAIR—I am not sure if you were able to hear much of the previous session. We are particularly interested in the issue of how students are managing in terms of balancing their study commitment and their work commitments. We have found it most useful to talk directly to those who are at the coalface—or the chalkface in this case—about that, because we are hearing from students that there are lots of demands placed on them. They greatly value work—it is important in their lives and they see it as a positive—but there are clearly points at which, either in terms of the number of hours or the time when they are doing the hours, it tips over into a real problem and a negative. It is clear to us that when you talk to the young people themselves or the teachers, who are dealing with it on a day-to-day basis, you get a much clearer picture of what is really going on. We are interested to hear from you about your observations about what those challenges are for your students, what some barriers might be that we should look at and what some of the positives might be that we should not lose sight of or lose in the processes of what we are doing.

Mr Webster—We have a lot of those issues here, and not only with work. Because of the nature of this school, I guess it depends how you define work.

CHAIR—Mark, I am sorry—do you want to give my colleagues who are from other states—

Mr Webster—A quick run-down?

CHAIR—a bit of an overview of what the school's purpose is?

Mr Webster—Yes, it is probably worth doing that. The school is quite unique, certainly in New South Wales and possibly in Australia, in terms of its make-up and the way we operate. We are a senior college, which means we operate years 10, 11 and 12. About 30 per cent of our students are of mature age, which is very unusual. We have about 180 part-time students, which

is a different issue for students as well. We have a large number of parents here, particularly mothers with children at home, some of them as full-time students doing their Higher School Certificate and some as part-time students. About 50 to 60 per cent of our intake are what we call 're-entry' students. These are people who have left education previously and have come back after sometimes a very long break—sometimes 20 or 30 years—away from education to either career change or to finish an education that they did not have the opportunity to finish before. We offer a year 10 program to both normal age and mature age students. We were the first school in the state to deliver an alternative year 10 certificate. We do not do the School Certificate that every other school in New South Wales does; we follow the TAFE certificate program because it is a one-year program.

Most of the young students in that program are what we call 'last chance' students. They are people who have left or have been asked to leave or have been bullied out of or for family reasons have left school without completing a Higher School Certificate. The large majority of them have had unsuccessful experiences in their previous school. So the school has structured itself to cope with that sort of clientele. We are providing a service, I guess, that is not available in any other school—certainly down here—and we operate very differently with that.

Some of the things that we have done—and this will probably put some of the other things we are going to say in context—include that we operate on a four-day week. We were the first school in New South Wales to do that. We are in our fifth year of that. We run extended hours from Monday to Thursday and the school is closed on Friday. That has given a lot of those students with other commitments a free weekday. Parents in particular can get involved in their students' schooling. They can visit their students' assemblies—most of them are on Fridays—and those sorts of things. The four-day week makes a lot of our students who are working part time very competitive in the part-time market because they are available all day on Fridays, and most of the part-time work is on Thursday night, Fridays and Saturdays. Travel is a big issue for us out here because we are not a local school; we attract students from right across the Illawarra. Many of our students travel for up to an hour and a half in a day each way to get here, even though it might be only a 15-minute trip in the car. Part of the reason for moving to the four-day week option was to reduce the travel time.

That is a quick context, if you like, of the students. It is a very interesting group. Our current age range is from 15 to 79. Our oldest student doing HSC exams this year is 75. The classes generally are mixed right through. Certainly in years 11 and 12 there is no distinction in age. In year 10 we keep our normal cohort, the 15- and 16-year-olds, together, and we have two other classes for people who have been away from school for some time and have come back. You will see one of those this afternoon in our classroom visit. That is the school context, if you like.

CHAIR—Great. Thanks, Mark. Dennis, do you have any comments on the capacity in which you appear before the committee?

Mr Fogarty—I am the head teacher of English here at the college.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dennis. Patricia, do you want to give us some feedback on the year 11 students that you are dealing with and some of the issues that may come to you about balancing those competing demands?

Mrs House—Yes. Of the year 11 cohort that come through to us, generally most of them are brand-new students and we have never met them before. We have a few that have completed their year 10 component last year, so we are familiar with them, but generally speaking the students that we have at the beginning of year 11 are an unknown quantity, so for term 1 we spend a lot of time getting to know their individual needs. As Mark said, most of their experiences in the past have been negative, so they are not quite willing to come forward with their problems, so, as a year coordinator in term 1, I spend a great deal of time chasing around after students.

For attendance problems or issues like that, we have developed a database here at the school which we call MIA. That is for students causing concern and for early intervention. The staff can enter the data and I can access that and then phone the students. That is our way of being able to contact the students quickly. Once we have established that there is a problem, we go about setting in place some strategies to enable them to cope. Sometimes that means that they have enrolled in a full-time program and because of their external issues or concerns or work commitments we then advise them how to go into a part-time study pattern. The way we have structured our line choices means that they can reduce to doing three straight days rather than having to come to the college for an hour or two.

Other issues we find are that, for example, for students who have children and have to be home at three o'clock to pick up their children themselves, we can negotiate with the classroom teacher for them to be able to be absent from that class but also catch up on the work and present competencies for the VET subject or class activities. They can present those at a later time.

For those types of issues that present themselves, I think the first problem that we would always have is communication, encouraging the students to be able to come and speak to us. That is in term 1. In terms 2 and 3, generally, once the students settle down and they realise that we are approachable and that we can negotiate things, we hold morning teas once a week and we have an afternoon tea for the mature age students. All staff are welcome, and that is where, in an informal capacity, the students can sit down and discuss some of the concerns that they have or the barriers that they find they are experiencing to being successful in this study.

CHAIR—Patricia, one of the things that has been raised with us about part-time enrolments—and I am conscious that in Queensland you can take nine years to complete your QCE, and I think South Australia has a similar model and there is some capacity in New South Wales to do that—is that a lot of the students who are on income support, such as youth allowance, who often have youth allowance and are doing a part-time job because youth allowance is insufficient for their financial needs, indicate to us that there is a problem if they enrol part time in that they are then no longer eligible.

Mrs House—Yes, that is a big problem.

CHAIR—Have you heard that?

Mrs House—It is a huge problem. We do find that we sometimes lose students because they cannot afford financially to be a part-time student. The requirements for Centrelink of being a full-time student mean that they have to either do full time or leave. I find that extremely frustrating, because you have students who are trying to improve their academic levels, their

education, and to become more employable, and, because a lot of our students have come from either homeless situations or shared accommodation, they need the money, so we lose a lot of potentially good students because of the financial barriers. Sometimes, too, because our students have come from such hardship in their background, they are not on a level playing field. The idea of them doing full-time study is impossible for them to get their head around. They might need twice as much time and effort to put into part-time study than you might have for a student who is living in ideal situations and who can cope. Some of these people have a lot of emotional problems that they need to deal with. But definitely the financial situation is a big factor for their barriers.

CHAIR—Lynne, do you want to make some observations here?

Ms Lear—I have only been working at the college now for 18 months. I have spent most of my career in mainstream schooling. There is a mammoth difference in the approach that the whole school has to all of the students here. It is a four-day week for the school. They are a non-confrontational staff, which is really obvious when you have moved from another mainstream school into here. You cannot understand that until you have actually been here. There is not yelling or standing up kids against a wall, pointing their finger at them; they actually sit down and give students here the chance to talk through issues and a chance to calm down, a chance to resolve the situation. That is the biggest difference noticeable when I have been at the school.

The students who tend to self-refer to me at the moment are women who are trying very hard to come back. They have been out of school. They range in age. We have parents here who are 16, through to older parents, but I am seeing the younger adult and the older teenage students who are finding it difficult to come back to school. They are attempting full time. They are managing on the Centrelink benefits, with a struggle, because a lot of them tend to return to their parents or something like that to get some kind of support, if they have parents there. They are finding it very difficult to juggle looking after children and attending the college. The fact that if you are in year 10 you can get back to the school to pick up a child on time makes a massive difference for them. Having the Friday off gives them a chance to go off and do the school canteen and things if they are able to, but also we have had a number who have gone searching for long day care on that particular day. It gives them an opportunity to go and do the searching around and find a suitable place.

The whole way the college runs really suits that particular person and gives them the opportunity to succeed. We do lose a number because it is difficult to do, but we keep a lot of really capable young women who have not had the opportunity before, giving them the opportunity to succeed, and we have some very clever young women here.

CHAIR—One of the things we have heard evidence about is the capacity for there to be an accredited subject that recognises paid and even unpaid work that has been done and the skills and knowledge that are developed through that. I was told it was a subject available in New South Wales?

Ms Lear—I am looking a bit blank.

CHAIR—You are all looking at me blankly. The Catholic Education Commission in the previous session indicated to us there is a certificate in work readiness or that is available to run.

I am interested to know whether that is something the school has looked at and what the experience is.

Mr Webster—Why students come here is to get a higher school certificate in years 11 and 12, and that is not part of the higher school certificate. There is a range of those sorts of things available through the TAFE system in particular. We run a strong vocational education and training program here as well; we run six of the framework courses here. The only thing that would equate to that in the higher school certificate is what is called two-unit industry based learning, but that is more with work skills, where they can get two units accredited to them for their time in the workforce over and above their VET subjects. For example, if they are doing hospitality and they are in a part-time traineeship or part-time apprenticeship, they can get an additional two units credit for the work skills that they develop. That is the only application in a higher school certificate system.

CHAIR—It is of interest to us. In Queensland we met a lot of students who were doing a subject—society and community or something it was called—that allowed them to do part-time work, volunteering, a range of activities that count as a credit. Their indication was that it allows them to manage achieving the certificate better because it gives some recognition for the other things that they are already doing or are interested in doing in their lives. Is that a model that you think the students that you are dealing with may be interested in?

Mr Webster—Very much so. We have been looking into that over the last six months in particular, at an alternative curriculum. We value the higher school certificate very highly in New South Wales, as you are probably aware, but initially it was geared as an academic pathway. A lot of our students returning now are not necessarily looking for an academic outcome, and the structure of the higher school certificate does not always allow a full range of options for those people. I know the Victorian system has the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, which we have had a very close look at, and we are currently working with the Board of Studies New South Wales to look at an alternative curriculum. We are hopeful that something might be trialled here next year along those lines.

CHAIR—It is interesting that you mentioned the Victorian program. When we were in Melbourne we went to Holmesglen, which is a high school that sits in a TAFE college. The TAFE set it up because it had so many students coming at the end of year 10 saying, ‘I don’t want to go back to school, what’ve you got for me?’ They indicated to us that what has been most interesting is that a lot of students are going there to enrol in bookkeeping or assistant in nursing, and they do have a view that eventually they will go to university and get qualifications, but it is not something that they see they will be able to achieve in the immediate term and they like that transition model. They also like the fact they get credit points, so they have a lower HECS debts when they go to university—they are pretty canny. What would your view be of that sort of curriculum availability?

Mr Webster—That is one of the options we would like to see maybe come up in this alternative curriculum. The issue we have with a lot of our students that makes it very hard for them to complete is meeting the sometimes rigorous requirements of some of the higher school certificates subjects. Due to a whole range of reasons, it is really difficult for some of our students. One in particular who I can think of is on a school based part-time traineeship. He keeps getting asked to work extra hours and the money is very attractive. He sees it as a career

option for him, but it encroaches on his time. He is missing whole days, and then the teachers are on his back because he is not handing in work and the vicious cycle starts.

CHAIR—How old is that student, Mark?

Mr Webster—He is 17 or 18. We also have the same issue with some of our young parents who are returning. Some of them have two or three kids and they are trying to do full-time school. Of course, kids get sick: they get chickenpox, they cannot go to day care, the mother has to stay home to look after the kid, and those sorts of things encroach. One of our mothers went back to part-time study at the end of last term. Even though it was her wish to do full time, she just was not able to cope with the time frame. So those are the sorts of things that impact on our students here. Very often it is their outside commitments that impact on their abilities to meet their requirements in school.

CHAIR—And that is not helped by the rigour and rigidity of—

Mr Webster—Depending on what subjects they choose, yes. But to get a higher school certificate you have to do at least three board developed courses, and they are designed to be fairly rigorous in the application of meeting course requirements.

CHAIR—Dennis, do you want to add some observations about the issue based on your experience with the students here?

Mr Fogarty—One of the problems we have here is that a lot of our students have not been successful in their previous school experiences and so they are coming here as a second chance or even a last chance to try to finish some sort of formal educational outcome. And so a significant majority of our students are not academically oriented; they do not have university as a pathway that they are heading for. All they want is a credential that they did not think they would ever have a chance of getting. Our year 10 students are often blown away by the fact that they actually finished year 10. For them it is a major achievement. For their parents it is a major achievement that somebody who they thought had no chance of completing school finally finishes.

The problem they have when they transition to year 11 is that they go from a TAFE course, which is not exam base—it is competency based, you can do it all within the condition of the classroom, no homework, you can do it all within the classroom time—to suddenly being faced with external examinations, formal assessment, volumes of work which require significant time outside of school to do. A lot of these kids cannot do this because, as Mark pointed out, a lot of them have part-time jobs. We have 16- and 17-year-olds kids who are living independently, they are living in group housing, so they do not have parents, they do not have the 2½ siblings at home; they are struggling to do it day by day.

They also come from a background where they have limited educational opportunities. They finish year 10 here, but it is a TAFE module, and then go into year 11 with the board of studies—and Mark talked about the rigour. I am head teacher of English, and the standard English course, which is the only option available for them to do, is pitched at the middle ability range of students, and most of our year 10s going into year 11 are very much in the bottom deciles of the ability range and they cannot cope. They do not manage and there is not a lot we can do.

English, for instance, is the only mandatory subject that they have to do. It is way too hard and they struggle. As a consequence, we lose most of our year 10 kids before the end of year 12 because they just cannot manage the quantum jump in difficulty between the TAFE course that we offer in year 10 and the board of studies course that we offer in year 11 and 12. That is why Mark said we have been looking at an alternative curriculum, something that will be a more natural progression from year 10 into the next set. So a stage 6 course, which is not the board's course but a TAFE module that is more appropriate for the vast majority of students that we are getting, particularly from year 10.

Mr Webster—Just as a follow-up to that, as part of that alternative curriculum we are looking for a vocationally based course so that students are learning work skills, working with people skills and those sorts of things so that when they leave school, not only do they have a credential and can say they have completed 12 years of schooling, but they also have portable skills that are going to suit them for employment in later life, and that is the area we are looking at.

CHAIR—I encourage you to visit Holmesglen and have a look at what they are doing there. It is exactly the same sort of group you are talking about and the re-entry of more mature age people actually looking at paraprofessionals. They were not feeling that they were then pushed into a trades based job—for a mum returning to the workforce that is not what they are looking for—so the bookkeeping strands, the assistance in nursing and those things. It is very encouraging what you are doing. I understand how inflexible systems can be as well. I did say to the principal, 'Who pays for your high school?' He said to me: 'This is the big issue. It is on a state-owned facility, but we would have to register as an independent school to access recurrent funding.' So I do appreciate how challenging it is, what you are trying to achieve. Rob, did you want to add anything before we wrap up?

Mr Cheadle—I very much support what the four staff members have said. My interest mainly lies in offering the alternative curriculum for a whole range of people. As Dennis and Mark have said, we get a lot of re-entry people into the college and we need to target curriculum that suits their needs. We do a literacy-numeracy task that can give us some idea of where they fit with their skills, and we should be able to tailor programs in any school or any college around Australia that will fit in with those needs—and that is what Mark has been a leader in: working to find some form of model. He has looked at the Victorian model, his own ideas and our ideas. The challenge is always going to be that there will never be one model. We need to be flexible with part-time students, mature-age students and all those things as much as we can, generation wide. You probably have an understanding of all the characteristics of mature-age students. They do not think about the future; they live day to day mostly. In saying that, they are not going to think, 'Maybe I want to build up my credentials and in four or five years time I will know what I want to do. Maybe I will want to go to uni.'

CHAIR—Indeed, the universities tell us that the mature-age entry is increasing for that very reason—people do not make a decision about uni at 17 or 18 years old; they go off and do other things and decide to go back to study. So that is a good message for them.

Mr Cheadle—Jobs opportunities are different to what they were 20 or 30 years ago, with the apprenticeship centres and so on. Things like that are just so different, and we need to find ways to fit in with the changes not only in the workplace but in the social fabric in society, how it is

developing and the needs of independent young people looking to stay at school or to re-enter school. The college does a really good job here.

Dr JENSEN—One of the things you were drilling down into was the issue of choices. This is something that is being highlighted to me more and more. I am a little concerned that we are heading towards a stage where school is simply one of the choices. I know that your situation is different to a lot of schools, but people are choosing to, say, spend Monday working or whatever instead of going to school. What sorts of processes do you think we should look at putting in place to formalise school a little more while still offering students the choice that they will need?

Mr Webster—It is hard to tie down—one size does not fit all. We have tried to base ourselves on flexibility. We have already structured the school week over four days. However, we do make individual concessions to students who have other commitments. They might even be doing a TAFE course, which means they have to leave early because we run later into the day than other schools—so they may have to miss a lesson or two once a week or once a fortnight. We try and be flexible with those things. If there are other things going on for students, such as they need to be away for a week due to family issues—someone had Family Court issues—and those sorts of things where they just cannot attend school for lengths of time, we try to be flexible with that as long as they are genuine in their efforts. We are not an open school where people can come and go as they please anytime they like, but we work with people and their individual needs to try and get them through. That is what we are about; that is how we have set ourselves up. We have deliberately set ourselves up to be different to normal schools because the normal school situation has not worked for a lot of these people.

Mr Fogarty—We do not have normal students—we do not have students that fit the norm.

Ms Lear—One of the things that I think works really well here is the fact that you have the support time of two hours a week, which is structured time where people can get support from teachers on work that they need to catch up. That helps hugely for people who are worried about missing work because they are doing these alternative activities. And it is not a punishment to do these extra hours; it is just part of the way you are going to succeed in your HSC or your school certificate. Having the teacher there helping makes a mammoth difference—it really does.

Mrs House—I would like to say something about the education system that we have. When I was at school everyone left in year 10 and you would have half-a-dozen staying on to do year 12. In those days you could walk out and get a job; it was relatively easy to find employment with a year 10 or even a year 9 certificate. Now we have massive unemployment so you have to be a lot more competitive, so we are having a lot more students staying on at school—those students who are not normally in the academic mode. But we have still based our education system on a model that I think is outdated. We need to look at the education system we have got and tailor it more to the society that we have. My husband has been in the same job for 30 years. Now students come out of school and they will be in five or 10 different careers by the time they retire. We are constantly looking at updating, retraining and providing more education as the generations are getting older, but it is still based on an education system that catered to a society that was very much different from what we have today.

CHAIR—Part of the challenge for the committee that Dennis is touching on is that for a significant percentage of students that model does still work—so we do not want to lose that.

But do we make the whole system change to accommodate the 20 to 30 per cent who are having difficulty or are we better setting up systems like this school? These are some of the challenges that we are trying to work with. We will have to sort through it.

Mr Fogarty—To have some of the conventional structures in place while still having flexibility around the edges.

Mr Webster—I was just going to make the comment that we do have regular HSC students here who are gaining UAIs in the 80s and 90s and going on to university. We are trying to cater for them as well as the different ends of the spectrum—we have young mothers, part-time people, people with jobs and non-academic people coming back to school. Flexibility is what we hang our hats on here, I guess, to try to deal with that full range.

CHAIR—But to expect every high school to do that, would be a bit hard.

Mr Cheadle—I think it is a philosophical difference. As Trish said, things have changed. If this works for a student along a particular path, that is fine. If there is the academic strain—as Mark said, we have had students with up to 96 for UAI—that is fine as well. If that is the way we are developing then education needs to fit. Sure, those parameters have to be set so people do not think, ‘Oh, Monday, I’m just going to get up.’ But there are; there are going to be those people who are going to fit into that model. In education we need to move with that and move away from saying, ‘This is the way was.’ This is the way it is now and this is the way it is heading. Unfortunately, that is the way it is. We need to be flexible in thinking how school structures are set up. You have already said that the college has very much moved with that. It is always a work in progress. We are always developing things. This is what Mark has been working on. A lot of teachers have been here for a number of years but are still looking for alternative changes to suit the students that are coming through the door every year.

CHAIR—Of course, what is not acceptable is that they are not doing anything and they are not engaged.

Mr Cheadle—Absolutely.

Mrs D’ATH—Patricia, you mention the database and trying to intervene quite early with the students if there are any issues. For those students who are still in a family unit, whether it is with a parent or guardian, how much contact and involvement do you have with the parents and guardians to sort through these issues with the students?

Mrs House—Quite a lot. We have created the position of head teacher welfare. We all can do it, but sometimes I might refer to Lynne or I might refer to the head teacher welfare. We make a policy of making sure that we have regular contact with the guardians or the parents that are involved with our under 18 students if we feel that the student is slipping just a little bit. Sometimes it might only take a week for a student to go from being a committed student to leaving the college because their resilience is not right there. Unfortunately, they are the ones that we do miss out on. But for the other ones we do have quite a lot of contact with the parents. The experience of the parents and the guardians with the education system has been quite a lot and usually on a negative basis. They are used to being called up to the school on a regular basis, unfortunately.

Ms Lear—It is also a very quick system. As I said, I have transferred and it is a lot quicker. I notice that the staff here get in touch with the parents a lot quicker—within a week, maybe even on a particular day. But you do not wait for the annual report to come out; you do not wait for whatever. It is actually on the phone talking to parents or guardians. It is phenomenally quick.

Mrs House—It can be within an hour. The staff can enter their information on MIA and I check that regularly—probably three or four times a day. If there seems to be one that is across the board I will get in contact with the staff straightaway and ring the parent by that night. It is an extremely successful process. I ask the staff to have their comments in by the Wednesday and then Rob and I will sit down for an hour or two and discuss the major problems that we are having with some of the students and what strategies are going to be the best to put in place. But we do that via the phone and we will ring the parents. It is a very quick.

Mrs D'ATH—How much involvement does the school have with the business community, on the same issues—where students are having problems?

CHAIR—Direct employers of students—not the general business community.

Mr Webster—Not a lot on a formal basis. As I said, a large number of our students undertake VET programs so they have work placements in a range of places. We have those sorts of contacts with our VET teachers going out and meeting the workplace managers and observing the students in those situations. Our careers adviser has a lot of contact with local business. She has a long history in the area and has built up a very strong network across the business community. That is more related to employability positions coming up and those sorts of things happening.

Ms Lear—We sometimes have that sort of thing. If there is an issue affecting the school or whatever, Nola, who is the careers person, has been able to get involved with the employer to talk about the issues. So it is the whole cohort involved with this particular person. It is not common but it does happen.

Mrs House—Sometimes there is a confidentiality issue. We cannot discuss student issues with an employer. If they are under 18 we have to deal with the parent; if they are over 18 we need to deal directly with them.

Mr Webster—The careers adviser is the one who actually makes contact—particularly with our part-time apprentices and trainees—if work is encroaching on school, and negotiates times at work. We try to work around Friday off, in particular. We are trying to encourage employers to make use of our students on those days when it is not going to impact on their schooling. It is the careers adviser who manages that for us.

CHAIR—We get so engaged with these conversations that we run over time all the time. Thank you all for your attendance here to day. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence that Hansard has taken to which you can make corrections of grammar and fact. Dennis will appreciate the limitations of that if anyone needs advice on what that might be or might not be. Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to us today. It has been very useful because, clearly, there are some issues around mainstream young people's experience of work and school, and there are some issues around those who are disengaged and how we manage that

as well. So your evidence has been really useful in that broader context, as well as your hospitality. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 11.59 am to 1.34 pm

Adam, Illawarra Senior College

Alex, Illawarra Senior College

Allison G, Illawarra Senior College

Allison P, Illawarra Senior College

Alysha, Illawarra Sports High School

Ammy, Woonona High School

Andrew, Warrawong High School

Belinda

Ben, St Joseph's Catholic High School

Bianca, St Joseph's Catholic High School

Brittany, St Mary Star of the Sea College

Cailin

Caterina, Smith's Hill High School

Cheryl, Albion Park High School

Cristian, Edmund Rice College

Elissa, Woonona High School

Emma

Erin, St Joseph's Catholic High School

Helen, Warrawong High School

Isabella, St Mary Star of the Sea College

Ivana, Edmund Rice College

Jaison, Edmund Rice College

James C, Edmund Rice College

James L, Smith's Hill High School

Janaya, St Mary Star of the Sea College

Jessica, Illawarra Senior College

Justine

Karen, Woonona High School

Katherine, St Mary Star of the Sea College

Kayla

Kira

Kye, Illawarra Senior College

Lauren B, Illawarra Senior College

Lauren P, Woonona High School

Lauren R

Madeleine, Illawarra Senior College

Mah, St Joseph's Catholic High School

Michelle, Illawarra Senior College

Peter, Illawarra Sports High School

Reece, Edmund Rice College

Renee, Illawarra Sports High School

Riste, Edmund Rice College

Sam

Samantha

Stacey, Illawarra Senior College

Stephanie, Smith's Hill High School

Steve, St Joseph's Catholic High School

Tahleea, Woonona High School

Thomas, Illawarra Sports High School

Trisha, Illawarra Senior College

CHAIR—I welcome all of you to the hearing today. The committee is conducting an inquiry into how students combine school with part-time work. We are interested to hear about your experiences or those of your friends or family and any views you might have about how to improve the situation for students. We have been receiving feedback on these issues from many students across the country and many of you will have filled in the committee's online student survey. If you have not, I encourage you to have a look at it and fill it in. We have also visited schools across the country like today. Many students are telling us that they are coping fine, that they are working while they study and it is a manageable amount, that the teachers understand their needs and work with them to balance it and that the employers are good. But there are a significant number telling us that there are things that are making it tough, things like working late hours on weeknights or on the weekend, not feeling comfortable telling an employer that you cannot do a shift or you need time off for exams and so forth. Those are the sorts of issues the committee is interested in exploring with you today.

The federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, has asked us to look into this and our job is to make recommendations back to her about ways we could improve the situation for students with the intention of keeping both a good educational outcome for you and also good work and employment outcomes. The committee does not require you to give evidence under oath but this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and therefore has the same standing as evidence given in the respective houses of the parliament.

We will start by giving the committee members a chance to let you know who they are, so that you know who it is that you are talking to. This is a committee of the House of Representatives so we are all lower house members of parliament. My name Sharon Bird and I am the member for Cunningham. Some of you I will know from visits to your schools but my area is just north of here and of Wollongong, and of course we are in Jennie George's electorate and some you are from Jennie's school. Most of you will know the two of us. I will ask my colleagues to introduce themselves so you know who the other members are.

Dr JENSEN—I am Dennis Jensen and I am the member for Tangney, which is in sunny Western Australia. It is one of the areas of Perth.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dennis.

Mrs D'ATH—My name is Yvette D'Ath and I am the federal member for Petrie. Petrie is outer metropolitan northern Brisbane.

CHAIR—Thank you. So you have three states represented here. The full committee has nine members and we meet in subcommittee like this to get out and about in the country and talk to you. First, it would be really useful for us if you could give us an indication, just by putting your hand up, of how many of you here have a part-time job at the moment? By the show of hands that would be easily half or maybe 60 per cent of those present.

Dr JENSEN—The majority of them.

CHAIR—Great, thank you. Those of you who have a job, can you put your hand up if it is in retail, the shops? Again by show of hands that would be 11 or 12 of you. Can you put your hand up if your job is in the fast food industry or hospitality? By the show of hands some you have multiple jobs, obviously, doing both. Great, that gives us a good idea of the sort of representative group we have. I appreciate that.

Dr JENSEN—Can we get the hours as well?

CHAIR—Yes. Can you put your hand up if you would work fewer than 10 hours a week on average? So probably by show of hands half of those that have jobs. Can you put your hand up if you are doing more than 15 hours a week? Eight, by show of hands. Now you might be able to tell from that where our area of interest is. We have been getting evidence that a part-time job is a really positive thing and really useful, but over a certain number of hours or when you are required to work very difficult hours, it creates real pressures and stress. That is what we are interested in hearing about. I will ask if anyone wants to contribute of what you think the benefits of your part-time job are. What it is that you really value about it or what your family values about the work? It is a big call. Somebody has to be the first cab off the rank. Just remember to give us your name and your school.

Thomas—Money and meeting new people. It comes like a second family so it is a support environment.

CHAIR—Thomas, what sector is your job in?

Thomas—I am in retail.

CHAIR—Okay and how many hours were you doing a week?

Thomas—Eighteen.

CHAIR—What year are you in now?

Thomas—Year 12.

CHAIR—How do you find balancing that? Do you find it is generally okay or generally it is a struggle?

Thomas—I used to work hours during the week but then I just threw all the 18 hours onto the weekend so I have the whole week to do my work.

CHAIR—How do you do 18 hours in two days?

Thomas—Nine till six and nine till six.

CHAIR—Are you exhausted on Monday?

Thomas—I sleep in some days when I have free periods.

Dr JENSEN—How many subjects are you doing?

Thomas—I do 13 units.

CHAIR—That is more than the compulsory requirement.

Thomas—I do a VET course, which is about two hours a week that is a part of work because I am doing retail, and then I do 11 units at school.

Dr JENSEN—Are you finding that your working hours are impacting on your schoolwork?

Thomas—Yes, they do. It takes time away from being able to do schoolwork—and sleep, obviously.

CHAIR—Does it worry you? Are you worried that you will get to the end of it and think ‘I haven’t got the results I wanted’?

Thomas—Not really, no. I know I will get there anyway.

CHAIR—You are determined.

Thomas—Yes, I am.

Andrew—I study at Warrawong high. I work at McDonalds. I work for the money as well. It doesn’t benefit some people, but it does benefit me. I also find that work is like a second family, as Thomas said before. It is also a place of escape for me. Sometimes I have trouble with my family—I am not going to hide it—so I would rather work than do school or be at home. They are my reasons.

CHAIR—How many hours would you be doing?

Andrew—I do fewer than 10 hours. I am willing to do more but, as I am under my family’s influence, I do fewer than 10 hours.

CHAIR—Are you using your money for anything in particular? Are you saving, or using it for living expenses or what?

Andrew—I use it for food, clothes and everyday stuff like my iPod.

CHAIR—Does it clash with your schoolwork? Do you find that number of hours manageable, or do you think you could do more?

Andrew—I find it pretty hard even if I do fewer than 10 hours. I hear people say they do more than 10 hours and they are managing it, but I cannot even do that. So I am already finding it difficult.

Mrs D'ATH—You mentioned that you are finding it difficult just with the hours you are working and your studies. Is there anything that you believe the committee should be looking at that can make it easier for students who do want to do part-time work?

Andrew—Could you ask that question again?

Mrs D'ATH—Is there something we can consider to make it easier for you to balance your commitments at school with your work commitments?

Andrew—If you had schools where you go to workplaces during school hours and they offered subjects in the area or the industry students are working in, then we could get a chance to do schoolwork at the same time as experience work and so we would know the feeling. If we go to university, TAFE or do an apprenticeship in the future and they offered training in school, it would give us experience—not just work experience, but a first-hand idea of what it is like and if we are interested in that area. It would be good if you guys had 'officeships' like traineeships or government jobs.

CHAIR—As a part of your studies?

Andrew—Yes, as part of our studies. It would be awesome.

Jessica—I go to the senior college here. I used to work but I had to quit at the beginning of the year because I just found it very hard and stressful. I tried to balance my work with my schoolwork but I am a big stress-head. You have to find a boss who will understand, I guess, and help you. If you do need the time off it is rare that you will find an understanding boss who will let you have that time. I do not think I could work. I want to get really good marks. Like Thomas, I am doing 13 units and I have a big workload. I was working in the afternoons.

CHAIR—What were you doing?

Jessica—I was working for a beautician. I was waxing, doing hair and cleaning—just crap jobs. I was training but I was getting paid at the same time. I was working in the afternoons. I would finish school and, because I catch the bus, I would get home at about 4.30 and start at five, and then I would have no time. I would keep the shop open, because that was my time to work. She would give me the key. I would earn my money and then I would go home.

CHAIR—How old were you then?

Jessica—I am 16 now. It was at the beginning of this year.

Dr JENSEN—How many hours were you doing?

Jessica—In the afternoon, about five to nine, if I wanted to. Because I had the key to the shop—

Dr JENSEN—Per week, I guess?

Jessica—Per week—any time I wanted to. She told me to give her my hours at school and said that if I wanted to get my own clients I could book them in to fit my schedule, but that still did not work for me because still want time to study and stuff like that. I do not get the time if I am working. If I am at work and not studying, I am stressing about my schoolwork. It does not work for me.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Cristian—I am from Edmund Rice College. I find a part-time job very beneficial because it shows me, and I am sure a lot of other people, the value of the dollar. It makes us appreciate not so much how much our parents spend on us but what they do to spend money on us.

CHAIR—How many hours are you working?

Cristian—Not long—probably just under 10 hours on average a week, but it varies. It just depends. I work at McDonald's as well. On school weeks you can put in unavailabilities. I have no shifts past 8.30 so that I have a chance to get home and complete all my homework and assignments.

Dr JENSEN—How you finding that with McDonald's? We have had very mixed reports where, in some cases, basically you are told what shifts you do, you are told that if you cannot fill a shift you have to find your replacement and you are told that you have to lock up or open up, regardless of what you put on your list. You are saying that you have a good experience with your McDonald's, where they—

Cristian—I have heard that. I am pretty lucky because at my McDonald's, when I started the job, I just put down a couple of days for soccer training and days for study, and they have not given me any shifts past—

Dr JENSEN—So there is no pressure at all to do—

Cristian—No. They are quite understanding.

Dr JENSEN—That is excellent.

CHAIR—Has anyone else got some experiences to share with us about the benefits and the reason why you think it is important to have part-time work or why you have decided it is just not manageable?

Madeleine—I go to the senior college. I have not worked for a couple of months. I have been studying and doing the rest of that. I am starting to do Mary Kay Cosmetics. I think that is great for me because you book your own hours and do the parties on the weekends or whenever the clients want to, but there is no pressure. There are no set shifts and it is not like having the pressure of workload either. It is more about sitting around a table and having a chat with girls about makeup. It is not having to open or close a shop and sweep floors. You earn money at the same time and you meet people. You can travel and there are lots of opportunities.

CHAIR—What sort of job did you have before that—the one you said you gave up?

Madeleine—I was working in a fish and chip shop. It was great. It was stressful because it was hard to get time off and my boss was not understanding at all.

CHAIR—Sometimes what we hear is that the smaller businesses, unlike the big ones that have a lot of staff—so if you are not available you can swap—have more pressure because they do not have so much of that.

Madeleine—That's right. I was the person she was relying on. So if I wasn't there, she would have to work. It was just me and this other lady. She has a family of four and they are all little kids as well. So it was hard to manage, and she was not understanding in that respect.

CHAIR—Okay, thank you for that. Are there other experiences that people would like to share with us?

James C—I work in a restaurant washing dishes. It is stressful because you are always working at nights.

CHAIR—What sort of hours do you work?

James C—From five until whenever we finish.

CHAIR—Can you give some idea of what that ranges from?

James C—Half past 11, half past 12, half past one—whatever happens.

CHAIR—How do you feel the next day at school?

James C—Crap, to be honest. It makes it hard to get school work done because you are mostly sleeping all morning.

CHAIR—So what is driving you? Obviously you have decided you need the work, but what is making you do it?

James C—Just the money. It is good to have some money in your pocket so that when you go somewhere you have money.

CHAIR—Do you have to do those night shifts consecutively? Do they regularly ask you to do a couple of nights in a row?

James C—You never know when they are going to call you. They could call me now and I would have to go to work this afternoon.

CHAIR—So you do not have rosters in advance?

James C—It is usually just Friday and Saturday but, like I have said, they could call me any day.

CHAIR—And what if you say, ‘No, I have an assignment I have to do.’

James C—I feel kind of bad because if you have the job you have responsibilities.

CHAIR—So you are not likely to say no very often?

James C—No.

CHAIR—What do your parents say? Do they sometimes say to you, ‘Hang on, don’t be mad’?

James C—Yes, they say I can’t work every now and then. But it is money, so—

CHAIR—Do you talk to your school about that? Has it created problems where you have not had things done on time or whatever?

James C—No, it is all right. You have to push yourself. You can get it done but you are mostly tired all the time.

CHAIR—So you get your work done but you pay a price by being really tired and run down sometimes?

James C—Yes.

Dr JENSEN—Apart from the fact that you are tired, do you think that it is actually adversely affecting your academic performance in terms of your marks?

James C—That depends on the subject I am doing.

Dr JENSEN—So the answer is sort of a yes?

James C—Yes and no, I guess.

Mrs D’ATH—I have a general question for everyone. For those of you who work more than 15 hours, do you discuss your hours with your parents as to whether you are managing? Do your parents encourage you to work those hours? Do they show concern—that they think you are taking on too much work while you are trying to study? Does anyone have any examples of that?

Thomas—I started work when I was in about year 9. Through all that time I was a casual. Then, when I hit year 11—when I did the traineeship with BigW—they put me on a contract. My parents were actually really supportive of that because I knew exactly when I was going to work. After that, I took on more hours but that was during the week. And because I was on a contract I was able to change it—I knew exactly when I was going to work. So then they were actually really flexible. They are really flexible towards students because three-quarters of their staff are either uni or high school students. So then they just let me put it all on the weekend, so that was good for me.

My parents were really supportive of me getting a job in the first place because they really thought it was a good idea for me to go and learn how much they actually spend on me. But before I got the contract I was doing a lot of night-fill work and my parents would often have to come and pick me up at 10 or 12 o'clock at night as that is when the shifts end for night fill. Once I got onto the day shifts they were really happy for me because then they did not have to wake up at nine o'clock and come and pick me up, or drive out late at night. So it was really good. So my parents have had mixed feelings about the whole time, but now they are really supportive of it.

CHAIR—Does anybody else have some views on the messages you get from your parents about whether you should be working? Or whether you are doing enough hours?

Jaison—Last year I used to do 20 hours plus.

CHAIR—Was that year 11?

Jaison—Yes, year 11. I used to do overnights from 8 pm to 4 am sometimes, and also I work at a computer store. I have two jobs. This year I have cut it down to just over 10 hours because of studies and stuff like that. It was my and my parents' decision as well.

CHAIR—What started that conversation with your parents?

Jaison—It was just getting too much. On weekends I used to work 8 pm to 4 am and on Sunday I would be sleeping all day. Then maybe I would be working Sunday night as well and on Monday I would be stuffed.

CHAIR—Were you reluctant to say no to the shifts, or at that point were you just thinking, 'Great, some extra money'? What was driving that?

Jaison—I said no straightaway sometimes. I had just had enough. But now it is cut down.

CHAIR—And was that okay to say no? You did not feel any backlash?

Jaison—It was fine, because at my McDonald's I had about 150 people on staff and it is easy to find others to work.

CHAIR—The other thing we hear a lot in the fast food industry, which people seem to think is pretty normal but we have been a bit shocked by it, is that if you cannot do a shift you are told you have to find your own replacement.

Jaison—Yes.

CHAIR—A lot of you are nodding to say that is quite normal. You are saying that that is the situation?

Jaison—Yes, that is pretty much true, unless you call in sick. If you are sick, they have to find someone for you.

CHAIR—So when the roster comes out and there are times that are not suitable for you, in that circumstance do you negotiate with your work colleagues and swap them around?

Jaison—Yes.

CHAIR—Because the other side of it that we are hearing—and I would like your comments on this—is that there are some people who find it really hard to say no to their friends and mates as well. They start out just doing 10 to 12 hours a week so they can manage their schoolwork but then they pick up a couple of shifts because colleagues cannot do them and suddenly, before they know it, they are up to 20 hours that week.

Jaison—Yes, that is true.

CHAIR—You have had that experience?

Jaison—Yes, I have had that experience. I had a three-hour shift one week and then it turned into 16.

CHAIR—How do you manage your time? With the best planning in the world, if you have assignments and things due and suddenly three hours goes on to 16 hours in one week, what is the reality of managing your schoolwork?

Jaison—It is not easy. It is a bit better this year because I am not playing a sport this year. I do not have training, so it is a bit easier, but it is still hard with all the assignments, homework and stuff like that.

CHAIR—I have a few questions about the messages you are getting from parents and different situations where they might have intervened. Does anybody have any other examples of that?

Alysha—I could not believe that my mum actually did this to me, but she knows that I am the type of person who cannot say no, especially to my managers. So at the beginning of year 12 she called up my manager and asked him to cut me down to one shift a week, and for a long time I thought that I was really bad at work. Then when she saw me going through all that she told me what she did and that it was because of my studies. But I have coped a lot better with only one shift a week and my manager knows that in the holidays I am able to do more. So then he confronts me about it, asks if I want to do more, and if I have time in the holidays I take two or three shifts. We have a bit of a rule at my work—I work at KFC at the Werriwa food court. He only gives two shifts to students at school, so it is pretty good at my work.

CHAIR—So you think now that Mum's call, as embarrassed as you were by it, was probably the right one?

Alysha—Yes. It was a good thing. I am glad that she did it. I have been able to have more time to do schoolwork, and also my manager stopped calling me in all the time, because I was the one who always said yes.

Dr JENSEN—You have just earned a few brownie points with your mum.

Alysha—Yes.

CHAIR—That is good. That is the sort of information that we are keen to hear. While you are on your feet I will get you to have a go at this one too, because the other thing that young people say is: 'I'm managing. I'm fine. I've got it all under control.' Then they have an accident or they come down sick with something like glandular fever, which is a stress related illness, or they finish their HSC and say: 'Wow, I didn't get the results I wanted. I haven't got into the course I wanted. Maybe I wasn't managing so well.' So what do you think are the things that you should look out for that tell you that you have reached a point where you are not managing? What do you think your mum saw that said to her, 'This is too many hours'?

Alysha—I am a stresshead as well. I would take on these hours and happily say yes but I would be stressing and whingeing to my mum by saying, 'Oh, I've got to work tomorrow. I don't want to.' I got very sick last year. I am even sick now. She said, 'You're getting sick. It is not worth it. Your health's more important.'

CHAIR—So the stress reactions plus being sick all the time and not being able to get over things?

Alysha—Yes.

CHAIR—Okay, that is great. Has somebody else got some idea on things you might have seen? It might be somebody else—a friend or someone at school—with a signal to say, 'Hang on a sec. This is too much and you're not managing.' What sorts of things would you be watching for?

Katherine—I am from St Mary Star of the Sea College. I found that when I had my job it was great to have a job because I wanted that independence and I wanted to earn some money for me instead of living off my parents all the time. It is a part of a step of growing and finding what you want to do in life. I found after a while, through my marks throughout my courses, I was not putting the amount of work I wanted to put into my subjects. That was letting me down in my marks from my exams and assignments. I would like to do really well in school so I thought I would have to think about this as to whether I was doing too much throughout the week.

CHAIR—How many hours were you doing?

Katherine—Probably close to 10. I do a lot of extracurricular activities outside so I have to balance those as well. I was finding that trying to study and fit homework in with the amount of hours I was doing in extracurricular activities was becoming a bit too much. I talked to my manager and I told her that I had to pull back a bit on my work. She was fine with that, luckily, and she was very understanding.

CHAIR—That was the signal for you? So you saw your marks starting to drop down?

Katherine—Yes.

CHAIR—I think that is a really good common one that we have heard before. Luckily, you noticed it before you finished your HSC rather than waiting. Has anybody seen other signals and

other things that have happened in terms of the point at which it is all perhaps too much work? Do you know somebody who has finished the HSC and has reflected back to you what they thought might have been too many hours or anything like that? As there are no other examples, I am going to ask you to think about what you think a good number of hours is. If we were to make a recommendation to the minister to say this is the recommended number of hours that a year 11 or a year 12 student can work on top of studying full-time, what would that number be? Does somebody want to make an offering of what they think?

Thomas—I am at Illawarra Sports High. Yes, 12 to 14.

CHAIR—Put your hand up if you reckon 12 to 14 is pretty well a good number. Okay, so we have got about 10 votes for 12 to 14. Who thinks it should be higher than 14? So nobody is going for higher than 14. Who thinks it should be lower than 14? A majority think it should be lower. Put your hands down. Do you think it should be lower than eight, which is two four-hour shifts a week? So we seem to agree that between eight and 14 would be good number of hours. It does rely a bit on the person too, doesn't it? It is like what you were saying. Some people are stressheads. Some people manage well. Some people get really stressed and anxious. The other thing is the type of work. Another thing we are interested in hearing from you about is this. Clearly, most of you work in jobs that you do not intend to be your career. You are mainly doing them to earn money but you are also learning in those jobs things that are valuable for any job. I am keen to hear from you whether you think it would be worth while if we were to recommend something that allows your skills to be recognised in a certificate or a portfolio or a reference or something from your work that identifies the things that you have learnt and the skills and knowledge that you have gained in that part-time job. Who thinks that would be worthwhile thing to have at the end of it? So the majority of you would value that. Can anybody who has done a traineeship give us an idea of how that went? Thomas, did you say yours was a retail traineeship? If so we might start with you. To anyone who has actually done a traineeship as part of their work, which is now quite common: how did you find doing it in a qualification framework?

Thomas—I have not received a certificate yet but I have had constant training through Big W. When I have done that I will have it, a certificate II in retail services, and it will qualify me to do a lot of retail stuff as well. It comes from Wide Bay TAFE, which is a Queensland based TAFE.

Dr JENSEN—Renee, are you doing this as well?

Renee—Yes.

Dr JENSEN—Maybe you could give us some of your feedback on it as well.

Renee—Yes. I am at Illawarra Sports High. It has been good for me, except for this. I mainly do three-hour shifts. I get home from school then realise I have to go to work so I get ready and then go to work and come home. I have found that by the time I have done that by the end of the night I am tired and I do not really want to do any schoolwork, so I get lazy in that way and as well my marks are starting to show that. I see that as a sign for me to stop.

CHAIR—Another thing is that a lot of people do traineeships in retail and hospitality as part of their work. Have any of you explored actually having that as part of a subject or a recognised

unit? I think that at year 11 you can do a recognised work based one. Can you put your hand up if you actually have that at school? I see there is a sample up the back where that has actually been part of it.

Jaison—I am from Edmund Rice College. I do hospitality at school. Obviously, that is a school based course. I will get a certificate II after I finish my HSC.

CHAIR—Is there a work experience part of what you are doing?

Jaison—Yes. We do 35 hours, I think, of work experience in year 11.

CHAIR—Can the paid part-time work that you are doing count as part of the work experience for your VET course?

Jaison—I am not actually really sure.

CHAIR—That is one of the other things that we are interested in. A lot of VET courses, which are quite popular now, have a work experience part to them. A lot of students have been asking us, ‘Why do I have to go off and get another job and another form of work experience somewhere else when I have already got a job in which I am learning some of the basic skills anyway?’ Do you reckon it would be worth while to look at integrating it?

Jaison—It could be. What you learn at school as to hospitality is more at an industry level, so it is more about meals and stuff like that. Things at McDonald’s are about making burgers—

CHAIR—So they are not meals you are telling me?

Jason—Don’t go there!

CHAIR—We will go to Yvette for a question while Dennis turns his phone off.

Mrs D’ATH—Would those of you who have had trouble getting an assignment done or preparing for an exam because of the shifts you have been working put your hand up. Okay, so all of you should be able to put your hand up and answer my next question. I am interested in hearing from you whether you have spoken with your school, whether it be through a teacher or a guidance officer or somebody else, when you have struggled to get an assignment done to negotiate with your teacher about that assignment. If not, why haven’t you approached your school when you have been having trouble getting an assignment done? I am interested to know, if you have not spoken to your school when you have been having difficulties managing your schoolwork and your shift work, why you have not approached your school. If you have approached your school, I am interested in your experience.

Lauren B—I am from the Illawarra Senior College. I am a mature-age student. I have had a great experience. I am 32. I have two children. I want to point out that all the staff and people at the senior college are fantastic and supportive. I can approach them about anything like that. The thing that I would like to point out is that I have a full-time job. I have two kids. I cannot cut back my hours. It makes that really difficult.

CHAIR—Sorry, Lauren, but when you say a ‘full-time job’ what sort of hours are involved in that?

Lauren B—I am a mum; that is my full-time job.

CHAIR—I am sorry; I am with you. So there is no flexibility there because the kids will not give you time off.

Lauren B—No. There is no, ‘Mum, here’s two hours so you can go and do your assignment.’ But I find being here at the Illawarra Senior College, with the way they work the system here, Pathways, very good and very helpful. I just wanted to add that, because there are more people here than younger kids. I can appreciate what they are going through too, but there are also a lot of mature-age students out there who find it hard as well, who have a totally different environment and still have exactly the same dilemma. They are still trying to work it all out.

CHAIR—Thank you, Lauren.

Allison G—I am also from the Illawarra Senior College and I am also a single mummy. When I attended my last school I was also working on a casual basis. Every day they would ring up, asking whether I could do hours and, wanting money, I would never say no. When I would have trouble with my schoolwork I would go and see my teachers. They told me that I would have to make a choice either to work or to go to school. I sat down with my mum and we decided on work. Now that I am nearly 30 I have decided to come back to school and try to get my education now. Every time I do have a problem with an assignment I automatically go straight to my teachers. They have no problems. We sit down and we talk about it and work out a compromise; I find them very helpful.

CHAIR—When you were at the point where you had to decide between work and school, do you think if there had been more flexible and supportive arrangements in place you would have persevered with the schooling?

Allison G—I was a pretty good student, being nearly A grade. Ringing me up every day at eight o’clock in the morning, saying, ‘We need you. Come in, come in.’ If I said no it was, ‘Oh, well, I guess I won’t call you next time.’

CHAIR—What sort of work were you doing?

Allison G—It was at K-Mart.

CHAIR—We hear this a lot from people who are valuable employees. The better you are, the more responsible you are, the more presentable you are or the harder a worker you are the more pressure there is on you to do additional hours. So you are reflecting that that was a reality for you.

Allison G—Yes. I had to make the choice: it was either work or school.

Mrs D'ATH—Allison, you had to make a choice. What can we as a committee do to avoid students having to make that choice, to be able to balance their work and still be able to get their education?

Allison G—I think that, in traditional schools, teachers need to understand that circumstances in every house are not the same and that some children need to go out and work and earn money to help the family. Maybe a bit more flexibility—perhaps a set number of hours that we are allowed to work and more money available for Austudy and things like that so that we do not have to go out and get a job and can concentrate on our studies. Perhaps a contract can be made between schools and the employers that these are the conditions that they have to stick by.

CHAIR—So you are saying that employers should also talk to schools and come to an agreement about how that can be managed?

Allison G—I think that if you are at school you should be doing only a certain number of hours and certain shifts. I do not believe in always working night-time and every weekend. You still need to socialise with your friends. That is a part of growing up and social development. If you are working and going to school you are missing out on something else, so something always has to lapse.

CHAIR—Thank you for that, Allison. Is there anybody else who would like to make some comments on that issue? Allison has raised something that is a big issue. Students have been very good to be very honest with us and we appreciate it, and I am sure your schools do too. But we keep getting conflicting messages: 'We don't go to the schools, we don't raise it with the teachers because we know that we will be told, "You're in year 11 or year 12. This is serious. If you're not managing, give up the job."' 'The reality is that you do not want to make that choice. You do not want to give up the job and give up the money. So I am keen to hear whether any of you can give us an idea about how we can do that better.

I will give you an example that students in Adelaide raised with us. They said: 'When we start in year 11 we're told that we should set aside about 15 hours a week for additional homework, beyond school hours. But instead of giving us homework by the week so that we can actually manage 15 hours, they give it to us in period six, due the next day, and, then, you've got a shift. When the school says 15 hours a week, why don't they set the homework by the week?' So we are looking for really practical ideas, things where you might have thought, 'If they did this, it would make it more manageable and easier for me.' There are also things that they might do to help you to recognise when you are doing too many hours or when it is perhaps starting to bring your marks down, as someone said earlier, and it is a problem. Does anyone have any ideas on that?

Bianca—I am from St Joseph's. I work and it is hard. I have a bio teacher who loves homework a whole heap. Sometimes I will have a shift from 4.30 in the afternoon until nine o'clock at night—I work in hospitality—and she might say, 'You have to finish all these questions by tomorrow.' And I say, 'Miss, I have to work tonight. Can I have an extra day or something.' She just pretty much says, 'No, tough luck.' Then you have to get up at, like, five in the morning and finish your homework, or you have to stay in and do it at lunch, which is pretty bad. Maybe they should give you a slip or something so that if you do have circumstances that

you cannot get around you can hand it in, and you could be allowed only so many so that it is still fair.

CHAIR—So you are saying that negotiations should be a bit more open and to recognise that?

Bianca—Yes. I understand that you cannot just say, ‘I work, so I don’t have to do my homework.’ But maybe being given a certain number of times in a week that you might not have to pass it in on the day, or could do it on another day.

CHAIR—Yes. So you are saying that it very much depends on the teacher, too?

Bianca—Yes. There are some teachers who are really understanding and who will say, ‘Hand it in the next day,’ or, ‘Do only some questions.’ And there are other teachers who just make you do it and do not really care.

CHAIR—Okay. That is exactly the sort of feedback that we are hearing from lot of places. Does anybody else want to make comment on that?

Alysha—My biology teacher is pretty good with homework. At the beginning of Monday he kind of overwhelms us. He brings out about 10 sheets and puts them all up. But the good thing is that he always makes them due on the next Tuesday. So he gives us the weekend to socialise and he understands that we have work, but he also understands the importance of year 11 and year 12. We know that our homework is due every Tuesday, and he always says that if it is not done by Tuesday then he will provide time for you at recess and lunch. So it is like detention, but you have the whole week to get through the work. I think it is a good system.

CHAIR—So it is reasonable. You are given the week so that you can work out when you are going to do it, and if you have not got it done by then it is your problem?

Alysha—Yes.

CHAIR—And then you get detention to sit in and do it. Does anybody have any other experiences about managing work?

Katherine—I am from St Mary’s Star of the Sea College. I find that for some periods I do not have any homework at all, and then a week later I will get a whole load of homework that is due by the next week and it has to be done around the same time. I am thinking that maybe some communication between the teachers as to when they are going to give students homework and to figure out the basis on which they are going to give their homework.

CHAIR—There are a lot of heads nodding as you are saying that.

Katherine—I think everyone is finding it really hard to manage with a whole load of homework at one time. If it were spread out a bit it might help.

CHAIR—So you think coordination is an issue across teachers as to the allocation of homework?

Katherine—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you. I think schools do that pretty extensively with assignment work, don't they? You get all that well in advance.

Katherine—Yes.

CHAIR—But you are saying that the homework that comes on top of that is not coordinated.

Katherine—Yes. The extra homework that is given out on top of assignments and tests.

CHAIR—Is there someone else who has anything to add?

Ben—I am from St Joseph's. I do not know about other schools and their assignments; they tend to give us two weeks notice for all our assignments but they come in blocks. So you will get four assignments at once, and it is it within the space of a couple of days, and then you have to try to get them all done within that time. That makes it a bit harder because on some weeks you will be fine with work, and the next week you will not have any time to do work.

CHAIR—Where do you work?

Ben—I work at Jamberoo Action Park.

CHAIR—How many hours?

Ben—About 10 to 20 hours.

CHAIR—A week?

Ben—That is during school times. During holidays it is a lot more.

CHAIR—Are they open to you indicating: 'A month is coming up where every assignment is due and I need to cut back?'

Ben—Yes, we put in our availability two weeks early but that is when we get all our assignments. If we have already put in our availability—we put it in for weekends or whatever—and then we get all our assignments, we have to try to cancel. Again, you have to try to find someone else to take your shift.

CHAIR—On the issue of getting assignments in big blocks, has anybody else had a bad experience in trying to organise time off or other arrangements when that happens?

Thomas—It is not so much that you do not get the time off work. With my work, if you want to get time off you are required to give almost two weeks notice. The problem is that, with assessment tasks, most schools generally give you just two weeks notice, so on the day you get the assignment you have to do the same thing at work. What they do with assignments is that they have a book and teachers are supposed to write in it the day they have an assessment task,

but sometimes some teachers neglect to read that book. I remember that, before my half-yearly exams, I had two assessment tasks in the week before the exams and then I had those same subjects assessed in that half-yearly exam as well, so I had exams for about three weeks.

CHAIR—I think we are getting a pretty strong message from everybody that at the school level we could get better at coordinating things.

Belinda—I do physics through correspondence and, being the only one who is doing it, if I have assignments due on the same day from different subjects, my teachers usually just ask, ‘Does anyone else have an assignment? Oh, it’s only you, so bad luck.’ I find that really hard.

CHAIR—In terms of dealing with the individual issue of your study pattern, it is a case of thinking that you are one person so your problem is not a big problem. Is that the message?

Belinda—Yes. It is really hard, because doing it by correspondence is harder than I thought and then to do an assignment on the same day is really hard.

Mrs D’ATH—Are you doing that externally because it is not offered in the school?

Belinda—Yes, there were not enough students to run a class.

Mrs D’ATH—But the school does not recognise that you have to do those studies?

Belinda—They give it to me and say, ‘Try to organise it through Sydney Distance Education High School,’ but, because I get my assignments at short notice from my normal school, they cannot do much about it.

Dr JENSEN—Physics is tough enough as it is, anyway.

Jessica—With regard to what you were saying before about the 15 hours of study and homework a week, in my personal experience I think teachers need some sort of teenage psychology counselling and they need to care more. They also need more communication between staff, between themselves, because we are given all this homework at the same time and most of the teachers do not know that we have other, bigger, more important assignments or something like that. If they are communicating they can work out a roster as to when to give us homework in order to make it a little easier for us.

CHAIR—Absolutely. As the Illawarra Senior College people know, having previously been a teacher, I have to say that this has been an eye-opener for me. A lot of the schools we have been to and a lot of the schools we have been talking to have been quite shocked by how many of their students are working and how many hours they do et cetera and are very open to these messages, which is why what you are telling us is important. The schools do understand that, no matter which generation, each generation has some challenges that are the same and some challenges that are really different. We need to understand that, so we appreciate what you are saying.

Dr JENSEN—How many people here think that the hours they are working are too much and that they are not really coping with them? Is there anyone?

CHAIR—How many think it is possible that there are too much—

Dr JENSEN—There is one hand there.

CHAIR—Maybe two.

Dr JENSEN—Have you tried cutting down on those hours? Is it the business that is saying, ‘Tough luck; this is what you are going to have to do?’ Do they pressure you for more shifts? What is the situation?

James C—Pretty much, yes. They are saying, ‘We need you to work. It’s a business and you’ve got a job to do.’ It does not help that we are pretty much understaffed at the moment where I work. So you’ve got to put in, suck it up and work.

CHAIR—Have they suggested to you that you might have a friend who was looking for work who they could talk to?

James C—The job I do is not really everyone’s dream—washing dishes.

CHAIR—I tell you what: most of the casual jobs you guys are doing are not everyone’s dream!

James C—So you cannot say to people: ‘Come and wash dishes; it’s a great job.’

Dr JENSEN—A career choice!

James C—But what are you going to do? You need money. You just have to try to find a line where you say, ‘I’ve got to do schoolwork; no thanks.’

Dr JENSEN—If you got to the point where it really was a crunch and it really was pushing you, which one would have to go?

James C—To be honest, I could not answer that right now because it is a tough decision: you need money but at the same time you have school. So I would probably have to cross that bridge when I got to it. At the moment it is not bad but it is tough.

Madeleine—I would just like to say that work is a choice. No-one is forced to work so if you put your name down for a shift and then whinge about it you should just suck it up. You have said that you wanted to work; no-one forces you to work. I understand that people have circumstances where they need to have money for their families and blah, blah, blah, but we are not in Africa: we don’t need to provide solely for our families. We’re at school and only at a young age. Yes, we are at a mature-age college and there are some people who have to work full time but the majority of us are 17 or 18. We do not need to provide for our whole families. We are at a time when we are at school. The main focus is school so I do not understand why people are trying to have such a big workload when we are at school.

Dr JENSEN—I take it that you are not working too many hours.

Madeleine—I work. That is something that I enjoy, though.

Dr JENSEN—Yes.

Madeleine—I have hours that I choose. I have done something that works for me. It is the way I want it.

Dr JENSEN—I guess the reason that I am asking this question—this is open to everyone; I know that Thomas had his hand up—is that there are some situations where the companies put pressure on you to increase your hours and so on and—

Madeleine—But everyone has a voice. If you do not want to work say no. I can understand that there are people who are very lenient and cannot say no, but no-one forces you to work. No-one drags you to work and says, ‘Look, you have to work.’ Everyone’s a big person. You’ve got a voice. You can say otherwise.

Dr JENSEN—Some people have got bigger voices than others though, and that is a problem.

Madeleine—Yes, I agree, but you are at school; I think the main focus should be school and everything else should fit in with school. Employers who do not understand that make it hard for the students.

Thomas—I do not disagree with that. I think it is fair to say that if you sign up for it you should want to do it. But in a sense, as Sharon said before, if you are really good at a job they call you up all the time. How many of you guys actually feel guilty when you say, ‘No, I can’t work that shift’? There are a few hands up, as you can see. I actually felt guilty sometimes when I was a casual and I said no. It is almost like saying no to your parents.

CHAIR—That’s not hard, surely!

Thomas—It can be sometimes, because if you work there often enough a work place can become a second home. We had that gentleman up the back who was telling us that he wanted to go to work to escape. When you sign a contract you realise there are going to be a lot of hours and you are going to miss out on a lot of your own time and a lot of schoolwork, but going there is a new home. You have friends there and people who you go out with in town at night. So some times it is ‘suck it up’ time but at other times you have done too many hours and you have to cut back.

Dr JENSEN—Thomas, you had your hand up as one of those who thought they were working too many hours and it was causing problems. What steps are you taking to try to reduce that? Are the steps that you are taking problematic or is the situation basically out of your hands, in your view?

Thomas—No, the situation was in my hands. I think the problem was that I was a casual and with the casual system you have the guy up there who was talking about how they were ringing him up to do his shift. When I switched to a part-time contract, things became so much easier. Casuals are good, but at the same time they are also bad.

Dr JENSEN—So you are saying it was out of control before but it is in control now.

Thomas—Yes, it was out of control but it is in control now. Now I have control over when I am going to work, so I can say to them, ‘Look, I’m going to work here.’ That is why I swapped all my weekday shifts straight onto the weekend, so I had all the free time during the week and the weekend was work time. So I knew exactly what I was going to do, and I could plan my week out accordingly.

Dr JENSEN—Okay, thanks. I think there was one other person.

CHAIR—I should just indicate before you speak, Jessica, that I am conscious that with some of the schools that have come all the way here nobody has talked yet, and I am going to start getting you to get up, because we want to make sure we have the whole region covered, so you might want to start thinking about that.

Jessica—I forgot why I stood up!

CHAIR—Sorry. We were talking about the point at which there were too many hours and how you managed it.

Jessica—Oh, yes. On what you were saying just before, school is a priority, yes—well, to me it is a priority—but some people here, and I am guessing at other schools as well, are independent; they live by themselves and get benefits from Centrelink. Having a job as well while going to school and running your own house is hard. I am independent and I get home and have to clean, cook and look after the people living with me. There is so much that is in the equation, and nobody is really looking at all of it. It is hard for us. I do not know where I am going with it.

CHAIR—No, you have touched on exactly the issue that we are dealing with, in that life is more complex now for students for all sorts of reasons.

Jessica—Yes, and that is where I come from when I say teachers need psychology training. They do, because they do not care enough. If we have a problem, they do not care. Not here—that is why I am still here. I love it here—the teachers do really care—but at other schools they do not. They are there to have a job; they are not there to pass on their knowledge and watch kids grow and learn the things that they are giving to them. They are just there because they have to be. We are here to learn; we are not here to be pushed away.

CHAIR—To be fair, I think that as a whole community and society we have to understand that, don’t we? It is not just the teachers in your school; sometimes the problem is also the employers, who are getting a great benefit out of you—let us face it; you are flexible and cheap. That is why they like giving you work. So they get lots of benefits, so they have a responsibility. At parliament’s level, we do not talk to young people enough either. We are making rules and regulations for what happens to you, so we agree that we should get out and hear from you honestly what the reality is instead of just saying to you, ‘I’m sorry; my view is you should not work and should just study.’ My experience with my two sons is that they just say, ‘Yes, sure, Mum,’ and then go off and do what they want to do anyway and just do not tell me anymore. So we do have to listen to you.

Jessica—There is another thing. I cannot remember what we were talking about, but we should not be given an ultimatum—that is what we were talking about. On jobs and work, we should not be given an ultimatum; we should be given options that will help us through it.

CHAIR—To manage it.

Jessica—We should be able to do everything we want to do. Sometimes it is not possible, but we should not be told to make a choice. It should be with us, not somebody else's opinion or what they want you to do. It is what you want to do.

CHAIR—What do you think about guidance? The other side of it is that we talk to people who are 30 who look back and say, 'I've made bad decisions and paid a price for it,' so we do have a responsibility to give you guidance as well.

Jessica—Yes. If somebody approaches a teacher and asks for their opinion, I believe the teacher should give it, but if your opinion is not wanted then do not give it. Not only is it not wanted, but it is giving somebody things that they do not really want to think about. Something somebody says could completely turn over the choice that they have just made. I hate it when that happens. I am done.

CHAIR—The line of thought! That is fine. There is one more contribution on that.

Stephanie—I think we are putting too much focus on teachers and schools to understand work and school. I consider school as a long-time thing. We have been there since we were pretty small, while work is only a small part of our lives. I think more attention should be paid to employers understanding our school rather than teachers understanding our work.

CHAIR—Or both ways?

Stephanie—Yes.

CHAIR—Have you got some ideas from your experience about what we might be able to say to employers who are employing young people about ways they could do it better?

Stephanie—When I had a job, I worked limited hours, which was good for my schooling, so that was all right. But I think employers are mostly out for themselves, to earn their money, as anyone would want to do. Maybe they should be given more information about how people need to support their families while trying to finish school so they can get a better job for the future to support their lives.

Lauren B.—I just wanted to talk about the ultimatums and how not only young students but older students have to make those ultimatums as well. That is something that I had to choose, also. I had to make a decision about whether to go back to work full-time or to study in order to get myself into a better position later on. There are sacrifices that you have to make, which I had to just currently do, due to my home. I had to move back home with my mum, due to my dad's passing, but also to help me because of how tough schooling is on family situations, and that is now going to benefit me. When I was younger I had to go out and work and support myself as an independent, so I did not get my education then. Things like that need to be addressed when you

are younger so you do not get in the situation I am in now, as a mature-age student still having to make those decisions. That is what I am trying to say. Those ultimatums are not just for when you are younger but for when you are older as well.

CHAIR—And if we do not get the balance right when you are younger we are just delaying the problem for you down the track.

Lauren B.—Because I am having to deal with it 16 years later, anyway. So it is always there.

Caterina—I give my boss my roster, what I can do for the week because I go to school, and they do not consider homework afterwards. I play soccer as well, and that is three nights out a week. They just think, ‘You’re not at school, therefore you can work all the time.’ My friends that go to uni put down their uni timetable and then it is like, ‘You don’t have assignments. You don’t have homework. You just work all the other times.’

CHAIR—When you do your roster for them and put down your availability, will they accept you putting down blocks of hours as, ‘This is homework or study time that I am not available for work,’ and respect that, or not?

Caterina—Yes, they do, but then they complain and say, ‘You don’t work much,’ and stuff like that. And in the holidays they expect you to work every day, and say, ‘You’ve got holidays now. You can work every day.’ They just do not see that you have homework.

CHAIR—So there is some educating we could do with employers as well, about understanding that school is not nine til three, and there are other legitimate time frames required.

Caterina—Yes.

Jaison—About the issue of saying that everyone has a voice and you have to say no, with my job at McDonald’s, if you keep saying no, no, no, they will stop ringing you, because they expect you to just say no. I used to get a lot of shifts in holidays, and now, because I have to say no because of school and stuff like that, I rarely get a shift in the holidays anymore, which I want.

CHAIR—Can I just have an indication by hand. We hear this a lot. Young people do not dare say no because they think, ‘That’s it. I won’t get any more work,’ and in fact that is the reality. If you believe that is the case—it does not have to be your particular job, but if you think it is pretty common to young people’s experience—just put your hand up, if you think it is fairly common. Thanks for that. It is a good point.

Alysha—I attend Illawarra Sports High. Obviously you have come here to see what you can do to make our lives a little bit easier, so here is what I think would be the best thing to do. I do not remember signing a contract as to how many hours I would do. I think it would be beneficial to everyone if there were some contract that stated how many hours you were willing to do, what you were studying at school, and whether you would like to be called in—I think you should have the choice. I know I am always doing schoolwork. I have a tight schedule and I work out where I am going to fit everything in. If I get that call from work I will go in, and then that is something else that I have to work around. I reckon you should get the option of whether you

would like to be called in or not, and whether you want to work night shifts and so on. I reckon it should all be down in a contract.

CHAIR—When you first start work?

Alysha—Yes, when you first start or, if you are working, I think a contract should come into place so that your manager knows that they cannot breach it. That is all I would say.

CHAIR—Okay. That is a useful suggestion.

Ivana—I am from Warrawong High School. Like Alysha just stated, with employers you should write down what times you can work—and maybe build a relationship with the employer, rather than just have a contract on paper. You do build relationships in the workplace, with friends, with customers who come in and stuff like that. At school you build relationships with friends; you can build a relationship with your teacher—

CHAIR—If something like that were in place, what about also requiring your parent to sign off on it so that the employer would understand that another adult was also looking at that agreement—what would you think of that?

Ivana—Yes, but you do have the responsibility by yourself. Back in your younger days you do not have to make so many hard decisions; then, when you get older, you only have one job and you have a family. When you are younger you only have primary school and playing around; when you are in high school you have school, friends, work and everything in one. I reckon people still do not understand that. We go through way more than the average person does—an older person would not go through as much as we do. We do go through stress. That is probably why we come down with stuff.

I reckon a relationship that is built with an employer does help. With my employers, every time I talk to him or her, saying that I have an assignment and I cannot come in that week, even though I am contracted, they do understand. They have been there; they have done it. Even preparing beforehand helps. So, at the start of last year I told them that I was close to my HSC and that around that time I would be taking a couple of weeks off and that I could not be there at all. They did respect that because I respected them enough to come forward and tell them beforehand instead of just calling them up and making excuses—

CHAIR—At the last minute.

Ivana—Yes.

CHAIR—That is a good point.

Reece—I am from Edmund Rice College. I was just wondering: is work the only factor that affects schoolwork, or is it work and out-of-school activities that affect schoolwork? I could reach up to 25 or 30 hours last year, and I still managed to get higher marks in school.

CHAIR—So what other things do you think affect it? Maybe it is balancing more than just work and school?

Reece—I know people do sports out of school and other activities. I know friends who travel with that as well. They minimise their work hours. But they still struggle because they have other commitments out of school. So is it just work, or is it out-of-school activities that affect it as well?

CHAIR—So it is the whole life balance?

Reece—Yes.

CHAIR—Good point.

Mrs D'ATH—Leading on from that, what we heard in evidence to us yesterday is that there is a view sometimes that schools are more accommodating if a student needs to have time off because they are involved in sport or in the performing arts or something like that as opposed to work. Does anyone have any experience of that? I see a couple of nods.

Jessica—I am from Illawarra Senior College. My sister is very musical and very talented. She sings and plays 50 instruments. At our last school they were very accommodating of her because she was doing well for the school and giving them a good name, but when it came to her having work and stuff like that they did not want a bar of it. When she was doing something for them they were happy, but when it was not for them they did not care.

Cristian—I am at Edmund Rice College. Alysha made a point about a sort of contract or agreement, when you get the job or when you are applying for the job, on the hours you want to work and the days that you want off for study, sports or whatever you have to do. Until I came here today I thought that happened at every job because that is what happens at McDonald's. Now I have realised it is not everywhere. I want to point out that everywhere should have that because that would just make it a lot easier to cope and to get through.

CHAIR—You make a really good point. I think Dennis mentioned to you before that we have had very different evidence about McDonald's and some of the other fast-food places. It seems it is very much driven by the manager. Sometimes if you have a manager who has teenage children themselves and understands the pressures or, for whatever other reason, is understanding then they can do it well, whereas if you do not have that then the systems fall apart and fail. I think that information you are giving us about perhaps having a more government controlled requirement around those shifts and availability issues might be something we can look at.

Cristian—Yes, it would make it easier. It would be better.

Stacey—I am from the Senior College. I have been to schools where, compared to this one, the teachers seem to choose who are their favourite students. If you are completely and utterly smart you are their favourite. You get top marks. They pay attention to you. I know there are a lot of kids who come to the Senior College who have struggled and they got nothing. Teachers just walked past them and went: 'Don't care, whatever, you're not going to do anything. You're not going to do your HSC because you're not studying.' Half the time people cannot study because they do not know; they never had the experience. Some kids have had troubles when they were children. When they went to primary school they did not learn because there were things happening at primary school. High school teachers do not get the point that kids need

help, no matter if they are the top A kid or the kid struggling. The kid struggling could be the top A kid and get further than the kid that is top A.

CHAIR—So you are saying sometimes because you are in the older teen years we start to expect too much responsibility.

Stacey—Yes, the teachers expect too much. Here they do not. There are a lot of kids who come here for the Austudy and just do not care about school, but there are kids here who have struggled in so many different high schools and when they come to this school they are top of the class.

CHAIR—Good. Thank you.

James L—I am in year 12 at Smith's Hill High School. I have been working consistently since I was mid year 10 and I also do lots of extracurricular activities through the school. I run some clubs, I am in the student council and stuff like that. The teachers have been really understanding, no matter what my excuse was. If I say I have to work they go, like, 'Okay, don't worry, as long as it doesn't affect your overall mark.' In our school your excuse does not really make a difference, as long as it is a legitimate excuse.

CHAIR—It is the outcome that matters, not the excuse.

James L—Yes.

CHAIR—We have about 10 more minutes.

Kye—I go to the Senior College. I want to go on from what Stacey said earlier about how teachers at other schools would concentrate on the students that are topping the class, they would concentrate on getting them up and working, and they honestly could not care less about the students down the bottom. It is the same with workloads. If you are still getting your marks up and an issue comes up with work so that you cannot get homework or an assignment done, then they would be lenient and say, 'Sure, we'll give you an extra day or two,' while if you are not able to keep up those standards then it will be looked upon as, 'You're not putting in the study or the time for that, so why should we give you lenience for the workload as well?'

Jessica—Another thing that really gets on my nerves about school is they say: study, study, study! How do you study? Half of us here have not been taught how to study, what to do. We have all these expectations but we cannot live up to them because we are not being taught how to.

Jaision—I reckon sport is a big issue as well as work. You have training usually twice a week, and then you have a game on Saturday or Sunday. Trying to do all that with work is pretty big as well.

CHAIR—The other big time user for young people is the internet and computer stuff. You are all laughing! It is true, isn't it? It is a big part of your life as well.

Jessica—It is our whole life.

CHAIR—But they are not negative things, are they? Having computer based sports, music or arts—that is a rounded life, isn't it? Sometimes what we are worried about, when you are doing all work and all school, is whether the cost of that is having a balanced, well-rounded life, because you can get sick, stressed and all those things.

Jaison—Sometimes you miss out with your friends. You keep missing out, and sometimes you always miss out and they will not acknowledge you when you go out.

Thomas—I want to talk about sports and school activities. We spoke before about getting certificates for the work you actually do. I think that would actually encourage students. They would be able to get more leeway off their teachers because they are actually doing something that is going to contribute to their certificate. If you simply say to your teacher, 'I had work,' the teacher will not accept that, because the teacher does not see that as actually helping you in the future, only giving you more money.

CHAIR—So a lot of teachers are making the assessment that that is just about money and the now and that education is about the long-term. If you can marry the two of those together in some ways, that would be useful.

Thomas—Teachers try to look towards the future, whilst, as youth, you kind of look right now. You just want to get your money now and you want to go out and spend it on whatever you want to do with it.

CHAIR—Thank you. That has been tremendous. You have all participated, except the guys who came in late. You came in halfway through the conversation, so I do not blame you. Do you want to give us an idea, from your own year group at school, how many are working and whether there are particular issues that you think might be coming up? What is your year group's experience of work and school balance and whether there are some challenges or issues we should be thinking about?

Tahleea—I have two jobs, 10 hours a week with one job and up to 11 hours with the other.

CHAIR—What year are you in?

Tahleea—Eleven. A lot of other people in my year have jobs and struggle, and the teachers do not really care. Other schools said their teachers are really good. Yes, we have good teachers but we have some who think that it is not an excuse and that you are there for school. But, when you think about it, you are at school your whole life but what are you going to do after that? You are going to work, so you need to start building that work commitment up. You need to start learning what to do with your life. So it is hard.

CHAIR—Students value their work and they understand the importance of it, so what happens if the pressure is on? What happens if you are being told you have to choose and things like that? How do most people react? Do they argue it or do they just keep quiet and keep doing it?

Tahleea—Some people rebel and just do not do the homework. They just say, 'I don't care.' But others have to cancel work.

CHAIR—So it is a similar circumstance.

Bianca—With the work and school balance, it is kind of important. A lot of the time you work so that you can go to school more. You do not need to work for high school because, for most people, your parents pay, but university is pretty expensive. It is something like \$60,000 you have to pay. You do not want to be paying HECS until you are 50 or whatever, so a lot of the work that you do is to try and pay for your degree so that you can get a good job. So, yes, it is pretty important, I reckon, for parents and teachers to take into account that working is important for us.

CHAIR—I will have to round it up there. It is fascinating evidence. We really appreciate your honesty with us. We are going to have to think very seriously about what recommendations we make because we want to assist you, as I said at the beginning, maximise your educational outcomes and maximise your work outcomes. You will be pleased to know that the evidence shows that a part-time job while you are in years 11 and 12 is a positive. Your educational and work outcomes are improved by having a part-time job, but—and it is a big ‘but’—that depends on the hours you work—the number of hours and the times. From hearing directly from you we are trying to find some good ideas. We have heard some really useful suggestions here today about things as a government we can put in place to make sure that we get benefits for you—including those students who might want to get part-time work to get the benefits but are not getting an opportunity at it—and make sure you do not start paying a price and seeing the negative side of it. Your evidence is critical to that. Dennis, Yvette and I really appreciate your honesty and your contribution today. Yvette has one question that can be answered by a show of hands to finish this up.

Mrs D’ATH—This is not based on whether you think you are coping or not, but think about the reason why you first started working and whether it was just to earn a bit of money or thought it would be nice to have a part-time job and had the support of your parents. Did the reason you went into work and what you expected change? Did it get to a point where the job became demanding but you felt trapped having made that decision to start work with the support of your parents? Was it what you expected? Did the job become demanding, but you felt trapped and that you could not change your mind and stop working? Has anyone felt that way about why they went into the workforce?

CHAIR—There are 10 hands up, so it is a significant number. It is very useful for us and we really appreciate it. We will be providing advice back to the minister about some recommendations and things that we think can make the process better. It is important we get it better so that people are not like the lady here who says, ‘If you had supported me when I was 17 and 18 I might have got my qualification. Now I am back here 18 years later trying to do it.’ It is important for these reasons that we get it right, so we appreciate your evidence. Thank you all for your attendance today. We have not asked for any additional information. A copy of the transcript of your evidence will be sent to your school and it will also be published on the committee’s website, so you can go and get a copy of that and have a look and remember what it is that you said.

Dr JENSEN—You are on there forever!

CHAIR—That is right! Once again, thank you very much. It has been an invaluable thing for us as a committee and we really appreciate your honesty and openness with us. I am sure you look forward to the recommendations. Maybe we should come back and talk to you and have a debate about the recommendations! Thank you very much everybody for your participation and thank you to your schools for supporting you to come along.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs D'Ath**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 2.59 pm