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Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

**Reference: Involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal
justice system**

THURSDAY, 17 JUNE 2010

CANBERRA

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

Thursday, 17 June 2010

Members: Mr Debus (*Chair*), Mr Laming (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Andrews, Ms Campbell, Mr Oakeshott, Ms Rea, Mr Kelvin Thomson, Mr Trevor, Mr Turnour and Mrs Vale

Members in attendance: Mr Debus, Mr Laming, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Turnour and Mrs Vale

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

High levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system. With a particular focus on prevention and early intervention, the Committee will identify:

- How the development of social norms and behaviours for Indigenous juveniles and young adults can lead to positive social engagement;
- The impact that alcohol use and other substance abuse has on the level of Indigenous juvenile and young adult involvement in the criminal justice system and how health and justice authorities can work together to address this;
- Any initiatives which would improve the effectiveness of the education system in contributing to reducing the levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults with the criminal justice system;
- The effectiveness of arrangements for transitioning from education to work and how the effectiveness of the 'learn or earn' concept can be maximised;
- Best practice examples of programs that support diversion of Indigenous people from juvenile detention centres and crime, and provide support for those returning from such centres;
- The scope for the clearer responsibilities within and between government jurisdictions to achieve better co-ordinated and targeted service provision for Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the justice system;
- The extent to which current preventative programs across government jurisdictions are aligned against common goals to improve the health and emotional well-being of Indigenous adolescents, any gaps or duplication in effort, and recommendations for their modification or enhancement.

WITNESSES

HANSEN, Mr Glen, Director; Indigenous Education Policy Team; Indigenous Education Reform Branch, Lifting Educational Outcomes Group, Schools Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2

MACKENZIE, Mr Don, Director; Ex-Offender Policy Section; Social Inclusions Populations Policy Branch, Social Policy Group, Strategy Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2

McLAREN, Ms Helen, Branch Manager; Youth Attainment and Transitions Branch, Digital Education and Youth Transitions Group, Schools Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations..... 2

PATTIE, Mr David, Branch Manager, Assurance and Student Payments Branch, Income Support Group, Employment Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations..... 2

WOOD, Ms Jo, Group Manager, Indigenous Economic Strategy, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations..... 2

Committee met at 12.18 pm

CHAIR (Mr Debus)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system. I acknowledge the Ngunawal and Ngambri people, traditional custodians of the land, and pay respects to their elders past, present and future. I note that these meetings are formal proceedings of parliament, so everything said should be factual and honest. It could be considered a serious matter to attempt to mislead the committee. I invite witnesses to make comments that will assist us in our inquiry, which is now in its final stage of evidence gathering. Today we will seek to reflect on some of the evidence we have heard from witnesses around Australia and to clarify the status of some Commonwealth program initiatives.

[12.20 pm]

HANSEN, Mr Glen, Director; Indigenous Education Policy Team; Indigenous Education Reform Branch, Lifting Educational Outcomes Group, Schools Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

MACKENZIE, Mr Don, Director; Ex-Offender Policy Section; Social Inclusions Populations Policy Branch, Social Policy Group, Strategy Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

McLAREN, Ms Helen, Branch Manager; Youth Attainment and Transitions Branch, Digital Education and Youth Transitions Group, Schools Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

PATTIE, Mr David, Branch Manager, Assurance and Student Payments Branch, Income Support Group, Employment Cluster, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

WOOD, Ms Jo, Group Manager, Indigenous Economic Strategy, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

CHAIR—I welcome the witnesses from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Wood—I thank the committee for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. The involvement of young Indigenous people in the justice system and the outcomes that flow from that are of great interest to us and are things that we see as being of really high importance for our overall objectives in DEEWR. In summary, we focus on the government's productivity agenda—promoting employment skills and participation—and obviously also the social inclusion agenda, which in a way intersect around the economic and social participation of particular disadvantaged groups, and Indigenous young people involved in the justice system are obviously a very disadvantaged group.

A core part of our responsibility is the Closing the Gap targets across education and employment. We have a particular focus in a lot of our work on outcomes for young Indigenous Australians. The Closing the Gap targets that DEEWR has lead responsibility for are the early childhood target, which is focused on access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote areas; halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy; halving the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment; and halving the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. We see the key importance of young people getting a good start in education, which begins in early childhood, but also progressing and making good transitions at each stage of the education system and then good transitions into employment. We have a strong focus on engagement, recognising that, for all of our service delivery to work for Indigenous young people and to work for Indigenous families, we need really good engagement between the service providers and communities and families.

In terms of the scope of this inquiry, we see the great importance of successful participation in education for young Indigenous people, successful transitions and building skills that will enable them to make a successful transition to employment as a positive pathway that will reduce the likelihood of them ending up going down the justice pathway. For young people that have been through the justice system, building skills and capacity to participate both socially and economically is an important part of avoiding re-offending.

I think we outlined in our submission some of the linkages between justice system participation and employment and education, with Indigenous people who have been charged with an offence being twice as likely to be unemployed as the broader Indigenous population and more likely to have ceased schooling before year 10. So they are more likely not to have those basic foundation skills that are needed for economic participation.

I thought it might be useful to explain to you who the members of our group are so that you can see the scope across DEEWR that has an interest in these issues. I might invite people to introduce themselves and their part of the DEEWR world.

Ms McLaren—My area is responsible for the Closing the Gap target on year 12 or equivalent attainment. That is embedded in the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions. We also have two programs that we run under the national partnership which we outlined in the submission—the Youth Connections Program and the School Business Community Partnership Brokers Program, and I am happy to expand on that later in the discussion.

Mr Pattie—Under my area we have the Abstudy program for assisting secondary, tertiary and apprenticed Indigenous students through their training and education roles.

Mr Hansen—The main things that our group does are to support the Commonwealth-state interactions around the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education plan. Also, our group has responsibility for programs like the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program and the Sporting Chance Program. Those are all programs designed to support the continuing engagement of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the education system.

Mr Mackenzie—My section has a cross-portfolio remit around crime and justice across the whole of DEEWR. We focus mainly on social inclusion aspects and social policy, ranging from Fair Work and childcare to employment and education.

CHAIR—Mr Hansen, you are at the present time revising the Indigenous education plan.

Mr Hansen—The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education action plan is a document of MCEECDYA, our ministerial council. We are a member of that council, so my team has been helping support the Commonwealth-state interactions around that. The point that we are up to at the moment is that the action plan has been endorsed by MCEECDYA and has been referred to COAG for its final endorsement. To take it back a step, on 2 July COAG asked MCEECDYA to refer a draft to it by early 2010, so we have fulfilled our mandate in that respect. We are still waiting for endorsement by COAG. Hopefully by the next COAG meeting we will have endorsement of that document.

CHAIR—It is very useful for us to get down to what it feels like in reality to deal with these issues. It is obviously very complicated and difficult for you to deal with a vast array of different particular localities and social circumstances. You have an interesting epithet called wraparound servicing. Could you explain that to us?

Ms Wood—I might give a broad, cross-DEEWR perspective, and others might have specific programs and examples to talk about. We all recognise that many Indigenous young people have a range of barriers and complex needs in terms of participating in education and employment. We all recognise as well that a one-size-fits-all approach does not necessarily work for those young people. The concept which gets talked about in different ways is that the servicing should be tailored to the needs of the young people. We see some success where service delivery takes a place based approach, because that has the capacity to bring together the services in a location and tailor them to the needs of young people, their families and their communities. But even that is not a one-size-fits-all approach, in that it depends on the needs and the particular circumstances in that location.

One of the things that we see as really key is that we start with something that engages young people. We can offer all the services we like, but young people have to be engaged in some way. It might be through some sporting kind of program, but it could be through a whole range of different programs. When young people are engaged, it is a platform that you can then build some of the other support on. So you can build in support around drug and alcohol issues or start to deal with homelessness issues, family issues and a range of other issues.

There is a recognition that we need to do more at the systemic level around how we integrate this range of services for young people. There is work going on between the Health, Ageing, Community and Disability Services Ministerial Council and MCEECDYA to look at how we can strengthen connections between schools, the health system, welfare, family support and youth and community services. Those ministerial councils will be making some recommendations about how at the systemic level we can look at some better integration.

CHAIR—In practice what would that mean?

Ms Wood—In practice it can mean particular arrangements for referral between services to take a client focus so that the client is assessed by someone and connected to the services that they might need. I have seen an example recently up in Broome where the community support program funded by FaHCSIA is actually serving that kind of role. This is not necessarily specifically focused at young Indigenous people but it is focused looking at unemployed Indigenous people in general in that area. I think it is the Red Cross that are providing that service and they are basically taking on the role of being the gateway to other services and referring people to the right service so that they are actually getting support that meets their needs and they are not passed from service to service because they do not quite fit. At the local level those kinds of things can work. I think the School Business Community Partnership Brokers Program which Helen can talk about does that kind of linking up.

Ms McLaren—I can give other practical examples. Our Youth Connections Program is very client centred and providers are expected to provide three different types of services. They have individual tailored case managed support for young people who are at risk and that means that there is a constant support person, a youth worker, shepherding these young people through

whatever kind of other assistance that they need to overcome the barriers that are preventing them from reconnecting with education. For example, they might refer young people to another service—a drug and alcohol abuse service—or they might work with a crisis housing organisation to try to find accommodation for a young person who is homeless. They do not just fling them off; they continue to support them while they are working with those other organisations, so there is a constant support.

As I said there are three services. We have asked them to undertake outreach activities which are designed to try to find the young people who are disconnected who are not being referred to them by other means—so the ones that are not being referred to them by Centrelink, JSA providers, their school or any other mechanisms—basically the ones that have fallen through the cracks. Those services are many and varied. Some of them involve sporting activities such as the example that Jo gave. They also do things like go down to the local skate park and have a yarn with the people down there. They run soup kitchens. They run basketball midnight tournaments.

CHAIR—We have been talking to midnight basketballers.

Ms McLaren—They run any kind of activity that will help them to engage with young people, develop a relationship, develop trust, hopefully get that in person to move into their tailored case managed services and then ultimately reconnect them with education. Jo talked about what is happening at a systemic level or at a national level to try to have a more coordinated approach between services. At a local level we are asking our Youth Connections providers to work with the other youth support or community support organisations to make sure that things are seamless for young people. The partnership brokers that Jo mentioned are assisting them with this, but it is about trying to ensure that there are MOUs or referral protocols and those sorts of things between providers and that they meet regularly and talk about how they are working together and what kind of collaboration they can bring to helping the young people in their area reconnect with education.

CHAIR—Is Youth Connections everywhere?

Ms McLaren—Yes. There are 112 service regions for Youth Connections across Australia. Obviously they are not everywhere within an individual service region, but they are expected to provide services within that service region. At a later stage, I can also talk about the fact that we have an Indigenous quota for delivering outcomes for young people in areas where there is a high Indigenous population.

Mrs VALE—So this is not just for Indigenous young people?

Ms McLaren—No, this is a mainstream program, but one of the things that we have done in relation to this is that, for two very disadvantaged groups in the community, where geographic concentrations can be easily identified, we have identified areas with high Indigenous populations and also areas with high humanitarian refugee populations. For those providers we have said, ‘Okay, your area is designated as an area where there is a high Indigenous population’—for example—‘and so a proportion of your outcomes have to be delivered for Indigenous young people.’ That is partly based on our experience with our previous programs, where some providers were extremely dedicated and had expertise in dealing with young Indigenous people and others could meet their business levels without helping the Indigenous

people in their area. So what we have done is say, 'Okay, if you have a high Indigenous population, you need to be able to demonstrate that you're delivering outcomes for a proportion of young people,' and we are negotiating the level of outcomes. For example, in some areas they have to deliver 39 per cent of their outcomes for young Indigenous people. It is reflective of the population, roughly.

Mrs VALE—Do the young people willingly participate? If the children do not wish to participate, what measures do you have to encourage participation?

Ms McLaren—Basically, the young people who come to the program are referred to the program. It is also linked to the receipt of youth allowance (other). It is one of the activities that young people can participate in while still qualifying for that youth allowance (other). That is the 'stick' part, if you like. The other aspect is the age group, because one of the other things under the national partnership is that we brought national consistency to the age to which young people have to stay in school, at 17. Up to 17, young people have to be either in school or training, in work or in a combination of both. For young people who are under 17, that is the other factor that needs to be taken into account in terms of their participation in the program, because it is a choice of school, training or this. Those are the mechanisms, if you like, that can try to—I would prefer to say 'encourage'—act as a driver for young people to participate.

Mrs VALE—Do you have any figures on how many young children do not want to participate?

Ms McLaren—Not at this stage. The program only came into existence on 1 January. Really the whole point of the program is to try to work with an individual young person to overcome that kind of reluctance—'I don't want to be here.' The youth workers are quite expert at working with young people who do not really want to be there.

Mr OAKESHOTT—I have asked these questions of previous departments—FaHCSIA and A-G's. One of them is in relation to input from Indigenous communities or individuals into all of this policy process. I represent a high Indigenous population on the mid-North Coast of New South Wales and, reporting back to you, there is movement at the station: there are many good things happening on the ground. But one of the anecdotal complaints is that quite often policy is whitefella talking to whitefella about blackfella and that decisions are taken—with all good intent—about people and their lives. So the question that I put to the other departments and that it would be good for this committee to get some feedback on is those systemic issues: at what level, in what numbers and at what stage is DEEWR generally having Indigenous input into policy development and implementation? That can be taken on notice, if you want.

CHAIR—No, they look as if they want to answer!

Mr OAKESHOTT—That is my first question.

Ms Wood—I can start broadly and there will probably be more specifics we can provide on notice. We think about engagement and consultation at different stages. Obviously the establishment of the national congress will be a really important national level opportunity for engagement with a whole range of Indigenous stakeholders and engagement directly in the policy process. We have put out for consultation at the moment a draft Indigenous Economic

Development Strategy and that strategy has a really broad scope. It does look at education, employment and training, business development and financial independence. The strategy sets out that the policies under that strategy will be developed through ongoing engagement through a variety of mechanisms, of which the congress is one, and then sector-specific mechanisms and expert engagement around particular issues. I think there has been quite an extensive engagement process in developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, which Glen may be able to expand on a bit.

Mr Hansen—I mentioned before that COAG had set MCEECDYA a couple of mandates. One was to get something back to them by early 2010 and the other was to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of the action plan. The action plan was developed by a subgroup of the ministerial council called the Indigenous Education Working Group and our Indigenous education consultative bodies are represented on that, so they were involved at the very initial steps of this. At a stage before we went to formal public consultation Indigenous education consultative bodies were requested to provide input. On top of that a review was done of the precursor document to this, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008*, undertaken by some fairly pre-eminent Indigenous academics—people like Professor Paul Hughes, Professor Peter Buckskin, Dr Kay Price and Dr Chris Sarra. They were all involved in the review that informed the action plan. That was the development of the document.

What is in the document? There are a number of spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become involved in processes throughout the actions. There are national systemic and local level actions and probably the thing that you are most interested in is how we build in that local level involvement. There are actions around developing school community partnership agreements—that is one of the things that would be expected. There are things involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in development of local attendance strategies and involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in individualised learning strategies for their children. Those are a few of the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are being involved at the local level so that the school is something that the communities and families value.

Mr OAKESHOTT—Could you give us any more detailed feedback separately? I think this is going to be a valuable process when, hopefully, recommendations are made to dispel some myths about paternalism. Hopefully, if some good media recommendations are made by the chair and others there will also be some ownership of those recommendations. Please give us any detail you can, even if it contains figures from within the department itself of who is who, at what levels and at what stages they have had input into some of the work being done. That would be very valuable.

The second question is with regard to issues also raised with FaHCSIA and AG—and that is the silo thinking of various departments and the issues around the silo—or the ‘showerhead’ or whatever you want to call it. I have just come from an Indigenous employer in my local area—this question is probably for you—which has had to shut its doors, it says, because of CDEP changes and some contract changes. Kempsey, which is one of the Vincent hotspots, is not getting picked up in those changes with regard to any contracts. That has flow-on economic impacts throughout the whole community but the point for this exercise is the frustration that everyone feels. Everyone I talk to who has been in this space for some time says that the

strategies have to be 10-year or 20-year strategies. This is heavy lifting for a long time, yet the great frustration is that changes come along every couple of years, or a change of government throws things, or funding requirements are for only a certain time frame. Can you shed some light on that and, hopefully, give some recognition that this has to have some 10-year, locked-in, heavy-lifting strategies by everyone?

CHAIR—Just to supplement that, everywhere we go, all over Australia, after half an hour's conversation, Aboriginal people begin to talk about their terminal frustration with the fact that they are exposed to a wide spectrum of government departments who deliver programs that have pilot status and never get out of it or funding that is for one or two years and uncertain. In one particular meeting we had an almost-amusing account of what was called, by our witness, 'asymmetric accountability', in which he explained the kind of requirements of the federal Public Service, for instance, on a local Aboriginal organisation, in which all of the hard work was done by the Aboriginal organisation. People in chairs in Canberra change frequently so we cannot avoid the sort of circumstance in which we are bound to talk to the federal Public Service about the need for exactly what Robert has described—programs that are stable and acknowledge the need for a long life if they are to be successful; that are, to a degree, transparent; and that give Aboriginal people within those organisations a serious say in what is going on. At one level it just seems like common sense. In fact, at every level it seems like common sense. We do not expect that you have the answer to all that but we are very interested in your observations.

Ms Wood—I think the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy is a starting point for tackling some of these issues, because it is a 10-year strategy. It sets out, in a broad framework, priorities from 2010, so it is actually an eight-year strategy.

CHAIR—That will do!

Ms Wood—It is longer-term than government often works on. It sets out priorities needed to support economic participation by Indigenous people across the full spectrum of economic life, starting with participation in education all the way through to the wealth, assets and financial security of families. It also looks at some of the underpinning fundamentals you need to support economic development around infrastructure and the tax and welfare systems—the systemic environment. It looks at what individuals need in terms of capability and support but it also looks at the broader changes government needs to make to facilitate that. There is scope to tackle some of the things that you are talking about—around working across silos, funding certainty and all of those regulatory environment issues—under that framework.

There is infrastructure across government and through COAG to start to connect better across the silos. Within the Australian government there is the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs and there is another layer under that which actually does a lot of the business connecting up across government. DEEWR, FaHCSIA, Health and Ageing, Attorney-Generals and DEWHA are represented in those forums. The Executive Coordination Forum on Indigenous Affairs, which sits below that secretaries' group has a joint work plan and the intention is that it joins up what we are doing. It also has a coordinated approach to Indigenous measures for the budget process.

It is going a step further under the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement in those—admittedly—29 sites, but it has got to start trying to do these things differently somewhere. Under that national partnership agreement, the Australian government has established flexible funding pools in those sites that are jointly overseen by FaHCSIA, DEEWR and DoHA. They try to provide some support for things that are community priorities and that maybe do not easily fit in one of the silos. They are a mechanism to start to deal with some of those things.

Around the funding certainty and the impost on Indigenous and community organisations in dealing with government, we obviously always have a tension between the drive for accountability and the drive for streamlining from the perspective of the organisation receiving the funding. This is probably an area where the steps that have been made forward are generally incremental. Although there are some concerns from some communities about the impact of CDEP changes, one thing that did happen with those changes was that the organisations that were funded for CDEP from 1 July were funded for three years, which I understand was the first time they had that kind of length of funding commitment. People will still say that is not long enough, and I understand that, but I think there is some scope to start to push some of those boundaries a bit and to give people a bit more certainty. But we are tied to a financial accountability framework that does limit how far we can push some of those things.

Mr OAKESHOTT—I will not get into a local issue now, but as an example for this exercise, there is one of the top six postcodes in Australia for Indigenous incarceration rates and juvenile crime—it is right up there. From an economic strategy point of view, it has somehow missed out in the changeover. How on earth, if we are serious about this, can that happen? I accept the point about the 29 sites. I take comfort from the previous meetings that there is recognition that it is stage 1 and that the regional areas will get more. My beef up until now has been this corridor issue of the majority of the Indigenous population from Sydney to Rockhampton missing out on a lot of the action because many of the eyes of this place are on the Northern Territory and Cape York. I would hope that we can get this east coast corridor in the game sooner rather than later. I just make that point.

This segues into my final point about place. Place matters, in my view, and I know it does for many people, particularly within Indigenous communities. There has been, I think, a reluctance for Canberra to recognise the significance of place in policy development and funding. When some vocational education options were put up as a place based submission from the local Indigenous communities in my area, a senior minister said that it did not fly because certain people thought that they had to move to go to uni, so why shouldn't everyone else. Getting past some of that thinking is really difficult, but is there recognition of the importance of place and place based strategies from DEEWR in dealing with some of these issues on the ground, and, if so, in what form? Hopefully, you can tell us lots of good news.

CHAIR—As far as DEEWR deals a lot with schools, that eliminates some of the problems we are talking about.

Ms Wood—Certainly we recognise the importance of looking at place and understanding what is needed in a place. It is not easy to effectively respond through a range of national programs to exactly what is required in a particular place. In terms of our focus at the local level and how you bring that together, we work a lot through our state offices. We rely on the fact that

we have a network of people out there that are quite well connected with their local communities. One of the recent initiatives responding to the economic downturn was the introduction of the local employment coordinators in about 20 or 21 regions—I have forgotten exactly how many. Reasonably senior people were put in particular regions to work with a range of stakeholders around the employment impacts of the economic downturn in the region and to keep people connected with opportunities.

Mr OAKESHOTT—That has been good.

Ms Wood—Yes. There is also a lot of scope—and we are doing this in various places—to look at where something is working. Schools are working really well in terms of engaging Indigenous families and getting outcomes for Indigenous kids. There is a particular training program that is working. I think we need to start with some of those hubs that are successful and connect other things around them. How we do that is an ongoing conversation with our state network.

CHAIR—Is the extra disadvantaged school money useful in this? I have an impression that an awful lot of that is going to schools with high Koori populations.

Ms Wood—Yes. The major national partnership agreement on low-SES schools is focusing on a number of schools that have a high Indigenous population, and the action plan that Glen talked about is focusing on 900 schools where there is a high Indigenous population. That will bring together all those investments into local level plans in those schools that are focused on the outcomes for all of the Indigenous kids in those schools. That is an important mechanism to bring it together at the local level.

CHAIR—Can I ask Mr Mackenzie to talk to us a little about more specific policies you have for offenders.

Mr Mackenzie—As I said, I am across the portfolio, but I guess we focus on the productivity of offenders and the industry or the sector accepts that educational work really reduces recidivism. So that is where we are focused.

CHAIR—We have had apparently conclusive statistical evidence given to us that suggests that the best way to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal people in custody is to stop reoffending.

Mr Mackenzie—Going back to your first comment about wraparound servicing, a key tenet of that service planning is preventative action. In the ex-offender and crime and justice space we are looking at models in each jurisdiction that work really well and at why they work. It is not about rolling that out nationally; it is more about understanding the place and why it works so well. It is a consorting approach versus the Through-care Program model in WA, which is an equivalent approach to wraparound servicing around the pathway before, during and after incarceration. The frameworks that influence us are the social inclusion principles, which focus on locational disadvantage as a major tenet and, again, the wraparound servicing, which applies to other cohorts like jobless families. So we have this great intersection of social inclusion and the cohorts that we target, and we see juvenile justice and ex-offending coming up in lots of those areas like homelessness and jobless families. In short, our policy is focused on

engagement, education and training, and where the Commonwealth can supplement state labour market programs or where we can fit with the local place and jurisdiction to supplement that.

CHAIR—From your perspective, an offender is someone who has a particular need in the wraparound servicing package that you make.

Mr Mackenzie—Yes. It is unique in each jurisdiction. Other aspects like health, disability, indigeneity—all those other things play a role.

Ms McLaren—May I just add something quickly?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms McLaren—I think we highlighted this in our submission. The Youth Connections Program was tailored in each jurisdiction and we negotiated what kind of tailoring would be required in jurisdictions to complement what was happening on the ground in each state. In South Australia, those negotiations involved us setting up a special Youth Connections provider that works only with offenders—while they are still incarcerated and after. The aims of the program are still the same. It is about providing that individual case-managed support to try to help them overcome their barriers, to re-engage with education or indeed to develop the fundamental employability skills—literacy and numeracy skills—to enter the workforce if re-engagement with education is not possible. That is not specifically targeted at Indigenous offenders; it is targeted at all offenders. For example, at the moment they have 22 young people that they are assisting and 10 of those are Indigenous young people.

Mrs VALE—Don, you probably answered this question when you talked about the wraparound services, but is the individual case-managed—I know your program does case-manage—by specific officers from DEEWR or is it welfare officers from—

Ms McLaren—No. Each Youth Connections provider is given—

Mrs VALE—That provider does the case management?

Ms McLaren—Yes.

CHAIR—You make a tender for each of these providers?

Ms McLaren—Yes. We had a national tender.

Mr Mackenzie—We have a range of ex-offender specialists in the Job Services Australia model and program, but I guess Job Services Australia needs to an Employment Pathway Plan that is tailored to the individual, so I guess it is not case management per se, but that is the focus based on need. We have the job seeker classification instrument, which is a relative tool, in which nine out of 49 questions are based on criminal justice and ex-offending history, and those questions are voluntarily answered. All those tools add up to the Employment Pathway Plan and the Employment Pathway Fund, which can be spent on a job seeker. So those different avenues add up to—

Mrs VALE—They are different programs to the Youth Connections Program?

Mr Mackenzie—Yes, that is employment.

Mrs VALE—During our hearings we have heard about the incidence of FASD, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, especially in remote communities. Do you have any program for dealing with it? Do you have any idea how big a problem it is, especially in remote Indigenous communities? I am aware that it does not happen just in Indigenous communities, but from what we could see there is far more visibility of it. An example, when we were at Fitzroy Crossing the principal of the school said that something like 75 per cent of the 300 children at his school had various levels of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder—which is huge. He said:

FASD is not recognised as a disability—yet paediatricians estimate that a quarter of my school population, at a minimum, is affected.

The principal himself felt that it was 75 per cent. He went on to say:

Some say that when you look at the spectrum for FASD early-life trauma, when you look at the trauma that a lot of these children have coped with, it could be up to 80 per cent ... in terms of funding it, it needs to be a prescribed disability—and because it is not a disability—

and it is not a disability, apparently, on the forms that the principals and teachers have to fill in, where they can tick ‘disability’ or ‘Down syndrome’. There is nothing on the form where they can tick ‘FASD’ at all. He said:

... because it is not recognised as a disability, there is no funding for it. It is as simple as that.

Is there any research or any program? Are there any measures or initiatives that the department is doing to have a look at the incidence of FASD in all communities—not just remote communities but mainstream too? That is the question. How are we dealing with this? If there is up to 80 per cent—that is what he said, but he feels it is 70 per cent of his school’s population—it is a huge problem for governments—not just the federal government but state governments. It is a huge problem and a challenge for all of us.

Mr Hansen—The definition is actually a state based definition at the moment. The Commonwealth will provide additional funding for students with disabilities once they are identified, but they are identified based on a state definition. What you might find at Fitzroy Crossing might be different from a school in South Australia. That is where, if you like, the limit of our control is at the moment, but we are looking into ways that we might be able to come to a more comparative type of definition around disabilities. That is happening in the early childhood space and in the schooling space at the moment. That is one of those data reform initiatives, if you like.

Mrs VALE—Are students in South Australia who have FASD identified as having this issue?

Mr Hansen—They may be. I cannot tell you that for a fact.

Mrs VALE—Is the department as a national body looking at this? This is a serious national issue if it is the case.

Mr Hansen—One of the things, particularly under the action plan, that we have been looking at is the connections between health ministers, community services and disability services ministers and education ministers. Foetal alcohol syndrome has been one of the things that we have been talking about as one of our key actions around supporting young Indigenous Australians with disabilities.

Mrs VALE—For how long has the department been aware that this is an issue?

Mr Hansen—I am not quite sure that I can place a date on it. I know that certainly since I have been in the department we have been quite aware of it—that has been for the last six years. I am sure that it is an issue that was identified by the department earlier than that.

Mrs VALE—Do you understand the problem? We have children with this syndrome —nearly 70 per cent of this particular school's population—and then a lot of these children end up in juvenile justice situations, because they really have no understanding of the fact that they are committing antisocial behaviour or crimes. This gets even worse, because we have had evidence that children of children with FASD are also damaged, and it does not seem to me to matter what level of FASD they have. This is an intergenerational issue. But, just for dealing with the children that we do have today, DEEWR, as a national body, is in a pivotal place where it can actually show some strong leadership on this issue. This is a huge problem for Indigenous communities.

Ms Wood—I think that what Glen is talking about, making the connections at the national level between health, disability and community services and education, is really what we need. As you say, the data and the level of incidence is anecdotally very high, but having the actual evidence in such a way that we can shape policy is a gap at the moment.

Mrs VALE—It is a huge gap. It is a real worry.

Mr Hansen—Certainly, being able to clarify the definitions of disability across Australia—

Mrs VALE—You are working on that, are you?

Mr Hansen—That is one of the things that have been progressed in our group, yes. We have an area responsible for disabilities and students' wellbeing.

Mrs VALE—Is there something like a chain reaction here? Once the department has an appropriate national classification, will state government departments fall into line with that?

Mr Hansen—No, and that is the issue. We need to be able to come up with a nationally accepted definition of disability. It is not something that this department can unilaterally come up with.

Mrs VALE—Is this ever discussed at COAG? Is it raised as an issue on the agenda at COAG?

Mr Hansen—I understand it is one of those issues that were flagged as part of the data improvements by one of the groups that hang off MCEECDYA, so in that way yes, but not COAG specifically.

Mrs VALE—Thank you.

Mr TURNOUR—I want to pick up on the conversation prior to that about people getting work and the support services that you have. A systemic issue that I am aware of and concerned about in my electorate of Leichhardt is the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' responsibility for the Indigenous Employment Panel, that program and the like. We have CDEP being run out of FaHCSIA and we have Centrelink paying people benefits when they get out of prison. I am not sure whether the issue of the timing has been raised. It is not you, but with Centrelink it is a couple of weeks between when somebody gets out of prison and when they get their payment, which can provide them with a level of difficulty in meeting their basic needs prior to getting some funding from Centrelink. The issue, really, is particularly about people in remote communities and, effectively, three different government agencies having responsibility: one for finding them work, one for paying them a welfare benefit and the other one, if they cannot find work, for getting them on a work for a dole type program or another program.

I know there is work happening in this area, but it is an area that I have great concern about and that I do not think is working as effectively as it could be on the ground in my electorate of Leichhardt, and I am sure that is the case in other parts of the country. So I would not mind hearing comments from you about that, because if people are not supported in the right way then they often end up back in the criminal justice system. I just want to flag that. Perhaps you would like to comment about that.

Ms Wood—Yes, I have just a couple of comments about the transition for people out of custody into the community. We recognise the critical need to support that transition, and there is capacity for Centrelink, depending on the jurisdiction, to engage with and visit people before their release from prison, to register them and to undertake the assessment about what sort of support they need. There is also the capacity—again, depending on the jurisdiction—for our Job Services Australia providers to work with people before they are released. The key mechanism to make sure people get what they need, which Don talked about, is the Employment Pathway Plan. That is something that the Job Services Australia provider, Centrelink and the CDEP provider all have access to, and it is supposed to ensure that they are getting that joined up.

Mr TURNOUR—My understanding of that, though, is that they all still have to fill out the individual departments' forms in relation to that, so we have to guide people around. We have low literacy and numeracy through the different silos. I would like—and I am talking to the minister about this—to try to get one streamlined system. There is a division, and I do not think I am going to come back, but I want to flag that with you. I am happy to get a response on notice.

CHAIR—We must go to a division.

Mrs VALE—Chair, do you mind if I stay? I will sort that out with my whip.

CHAIR—Go for it.

CHAIR—There is one question to ask, which is to ask Mr Pattie about Abstudy and how it works, particularly with a program that is not being taken up in prison.

Mrs VALE—Would you like to answer that, Mr Pattie?

Mr Pattie—Sure.

Secretary—Sorry to interrupt. Procedurally we are now meeting informally. I have asked Hansard to keep recording, and when the committee comes back we can take as formal the evidence now being given. I just need to advise you of that as a matter of procedure.

Mrs VALE—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended at 1.16 pm

Mr Pattie—Among our student income support programs, Abstudy is the one aimed at Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. That support is a living allowance and some other allowances and income support payments from secondary school through to tertiary, including masters and doctorates—all levels of education. The one that we were asked about in particular regards the lawful custody allowance. Once a person is in custody, they cease to receive the other Abstudy payments but the lawful custody allowance is available to them. That allows for essential course costs on approved courses, and the prison or wherever they are held can apply to have that funding for that individual to do courses that can contribute to either their apprenticeship or their student studies and things like that. There is no limit on that funding; it just has to be an approved and appropriate course at an approved location.

Mrs VALE—I do not know if the chair wanted you to expand on that Abstudy question. Could you just hold on a minute.

Mr Pattie—Sure.

Mrs VALE—There is a question here about the low take-up rate of this payment. Could you expand on that?

Mr Pattie—The program that we run is delivered essentially through Centrelink who provide the funding—

Mrs VALE—Do you work with Centrelink on this?

Mr Pattie—Yes, we run the policy manual round Abstudy generally and Centrelink do the delivery of that in the sense that they deliver our other income payments as well. Particularly for the lawful custody allowance, but for all other payments, Centrelink do all the promotional materials for that so the fact sheets and the information to potential recipients. In the case of the lawful custody allowance they have fact sheets that they give to the prison liaison officers and to families. Also they have some videos, one is called, for instance, ‘Are you prepared for release?’ That goes through these allowances that they can qualify for and can get assistance for. They do that through the prison system and also directly to affected people.

Mrs VALE—Is there any support mechanism for the young people doing that. Are they very much left on their own not just to source those particular benefits but to carry through with the programs that they start?

Mr Pattie—Do you mean after their release?

Mrs VALE—Yes.

Mr Pattie—I do not have any information directly in front of me about what happens after their release but, obviously, after release they then qualify for income support payments. In preparing for their release process maybe they are doing an apprenticeship and while they were in custody they have continued that apprenticeship through the lawful custody allowance and once they are out they then requalify for Abstudy normal and carry on that process.

Mr Hansen—In Queensland the department of community services actually works between the release from juvenile detention into schools and helps to case manage that student back into a mainstream school environment. There is that support that is provided at the state level.

Mrs VALE—Is that just Queensland?

Mr Hansen—That was just an example in Queensland but other states have a similar service.

Mrs VALE—The states are very much of their own independent view of how they handle this—they develop their own policies of course.

Mr Hansen—They run the corrective services as well as the education system. They are the ones that work between themselves on those matters.

Mrs VALE—This is one of those areas where, even though you love being part of a federation, you wish there was actually some big broom that you could take and just sweep it all up. I wanted to ask you about foetal alcohol syndrome because it really is of concern to me. We have learnt from evidence that once these young people are born with this syndrome there is really nothing you can do. They are permanently brain damaged but, if you get them early enough in an education system with the proper support from the time they are very young, you can help in some ways in creating behaviour that is not antisocial as it can be later on.

We are looking now at Indigenous people in the juvenile justice system and we do not even know how many children we are dealing with, we are just taking anecdotal evidence. We also do not know how many children across Australia, mainstream and Indigenous, might have this syndrome and are in the juvenile justice system. We do not know how many Indigenous people in the juvenile justice system actually have this problem. This is something that I believe has to be a priority. We have to focus on this. I want to ask you, and I know that you are working with other government departments on this, is there any suggestion of an audit being done? How do we know how many we are dealing with?

Ms Wood—I think it comes back to some of what Glen was talking about about having a definition which I know sounds very dry and unhelpful but it is where we need to start to collect the data.

Mrs VALE—It does sound very bureaucratic but I understand that you have to be able to define what we are speaking about and how many people fit into this particular definition.

Ms Wood—There is a commitment through MCEECDYA, which is a council of education ministers, to really improve data collection on a range of fronts for Indigenous education, and this is one of the issues that they are looking at in that. Until we do have better data and we are not talking on an anecdotal basis, it is hard to design a strategy, because we do not know what scale we are working on. We expect that there are probably particular locations—

Mrs VALE—Where it could be worse.

Ms Wood—Yes, where it could be worse. So we want to make sure it is actually targeting the right places with the right kind of support and, as you said, starting as young as we can.

Mrs VALE—Appropriate programs have to be put in place for those young children that will help them with their disability, because it is a real disability. Until I was on this committee, I had absolutely no idea about this particular incidence. I think I can share the sentiment of some of my fellow committee members: we were quite alarmed to hear of the impact of it and of the fact that this is a real challenge for Australia. Do you have any authority over the Northern Territory regarding how it deals with FAS?

Mr Hansen—No. The Northern Territory decides, on a schools basis, whether or not that is classed as a disability. As I said, we are trying to make sure that there is a common definition. In terms of taking leadership in that space and here, MCEECDYA is looking to take leadership in bringing together health ministers and community services ministers. We have been trying to keep it manageable, if you like, because you could do a thousand different things as part of those interactions. The fact that we have actually been speaking about foetal alcohol syndrome is, I guess, recognition of the evidence that you have heard.

Mrs VALE—Could you give me a time frame as to when this definition might be in place?

Mr Hansen—No. It is not an Indigenous-specific definition. The definition of ‘disabilities’ is mainstream.

Mrs VALE—As is appropriate.

Mr Hansen—Yes. But we could certainly take on notice to provide some information about what the processes are so that we can at least give you a little bit more information.

Mrs VALE—I would be very grateful to receive that from the committee. Thank you, Chair. We got a good, comprehensive answer from David to your question.

CHAIR—Good. I have a general question. How important do you think education is to the issue of Aboriginal incarceration?

Ms Wood—We see it as absolutely critical that education be a step on a pathway to positive social and economic participation in whatever form. When we lose young people from education, there is a whole range of possible negative consequences, of which ending up

incarcerated is clearly one of the worst. It is critical in terms of the link between education and health, between education and incarceration and between education and homelessness. Education is the foundation for positive engagement in life. I do not think you can overstate its importance.

Mr Mackenzie—Also, when you look at the profiles of ex-offenders or at juvenile justice issues and when you look at the protective factors and the risk factors and what you want to improve and reduce, educational attainment is one of the key indicators; it is an early warning bell that goes off in our heads around a pathway or a journey to offending. This is especially the case in the Indigenous space around what the data shows us about the graduation through the different stages of the justice system—diversion, cautioning, bail, remand and custody. When I look at the profile and when I look at our social policy approach, that is one of the headline indicators.

CHAIR—I have another generality: can you give us a word picture of what you would hope a school with a significant Aboriginal population would look like and how it would work if your Indigenous education plan were operating at full strength? These are not trick questions, but I know they are hard—deliberately.

Mr Hansen—There may be some contrast between this and where we are at the moment, but the school that we hope to see in the future is a school where families, teachers and the principal are in regular communication. There would be acknowledged priorities across the school—that is, an acknowledgement of ‘things that we can’t do at the moment but we’d like to do in the future and things that we can do now’. There would be involvement between the parents and the teachers about how an individual student might be supported. There would be well-skilled teachers who have an appreciation of cross-cultural awareness but also an appreciation of the strategies that have proven most successful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. That should be characterised by increased engagement of students—that is, students who are actually interested in participating in school, in the curriculum and in learning from their teacher. That, in turn, results in improved outcomes, not only in literacy and numeracy but in behavioural development, as well as across the full ambit of the learning areas, to a point where you have successful attainment of year 12 such that students will be able to take on university courses of their choosing or undertake a vocational training opportunity. That is the sort of thing that we expect.

Ms Wood—Another important thing about the environment, which is implicit in the picture Glen was drawing, is that it be an environment where there are high expectations of young people’s achievement and where those young people, in turn, have high expectations of themselves and aspirations for further education and employment. The kind of work that Chris Sarra is doing through the Stronger Smarter Institute has a really strong emphasis on ensuring that everyone in the school really does expect a lot of Indigenous students and does not come to teaching Indigenous students with an expectation that they will not succeed. Aspiration is intangible but incredibly important in terms of engagement and seeing the purpose, relevance and opportunities of education.

CHAIR—We had evidence in Darwin from a man called Dr Damien Howard, who has done some work that is funded by DEEWR. He sent me an email in the last couple of weeks talking about:

... hearing screening carried out by Telethon Speech and Hearing in a detention centre in Western Australia ... finding high levels of hearing loss and unhealed perforations among female Indigenous inmates. The testing that is partially completed has found 46% of Indigenous inmates had a significant level of hearing loss. Approximately 30% of those failing the hearing screening (14% of all Indigenous inmates) had perforations of one or both ear drums. Hearing loss caused by such perforations can usually be successfully remedied through surgery.

The evidence that was given to us in Darwin by Dr Howard suggested that extraordinarily high levels of Aboriginal kids have had a hearing infection and therefore have impaired hearing capacity. Then he gave evidence about the effects of that incapacity in a schoolroom and the difference between the effects on kids' hearing of different kinds of amplified projection. If you use an ordinary microphone it makes it worse. If you use some diffuse method of broadcast, the circumstance is much improved for the hearing impaired child.

What he was saying—almost by himself—is that this particular problem, hearing disability, is overwhelmingly important in underachievement in education. It sounds as if you are aware of it, but it seems very instrumental in the context of many of the other things we have been talking about. It also seems to me that a quite specific strategy could have a massive effect if we chose to implement it.

Mr Hansen—That is exactly one of those other strategies that we are talking with health ministers about. So, otitis media and hearing issues are some of those things that we are also talking about in that mix in cooperation across those areas: the health ministers, the community services and disability ministers and the MCEECDYA ministers. There will be a meeting across sectors on 29 June to try to work out what the three or four things are that we are going to start with. Foetal alcohol syndrome and otitis media are two of the areas that are being considered in that space.

CHAIR—Sometimes we make quite useful connections between people and I wonder if I could get you to contact him?

Mr Hansen—Okay, or I can arrange for our people who are doing the actual—

CHAIR—Or whoever you think is relevant in this context.

Mr Hansen—That would be fine.

CHAIR—I will give you his name. This is not a frivolous suggestion, this is a man who has much published work and who has been funded by your department in other contexts. It seems ridiculous for us not to pass on that intelligence.

Mr Hansen—We have actually been assisting the states and territories with their funding responsibilities here. For example, in the Kimberley region we have been supporting a pilot—it is a pilot, and I accept that—about understanding the impact that those sorts of support mechanisms around sound amplification may have on improving learning outcomes. We have measured pre posts, so that study is underway at the moment.

The other part of the study is also to understand how you best support teachers to deliver a lesson in that environment. It is not just about having the equipment but also the way that the

teacher operates and works. That is the premise of the Kimberley sound amplification project that we are currently funding.

Ms Wood—Although it is a pilot, it has actually put that technology into all the classrooms in the Kimberley. It is a big pilot, I guess, looking at—

CHAIR—How many?

Ms Wood—Four hundred and fifty-eight classrooms.

CHAIR—Can you tell me your email?

Mr Hansen—It is glen.hansen@deewr.gov.au.

CHAIR—Well, of course it is!

Mrs VALE—And there is not really anything wrong with pilots. As a government you have to do pilots, it is just that we see so many that seem to have good outcomes but then they never get lift off after that. You can imagine that people in Indigenous communities are just really over it.

Ms Wood—To some extent it comes back to being sensible in what we do pilot. You can pilot something that is not replicable or that just cannot be scaled up. We have probably done a lot of that in the past, and that is where some people's expectations get raised and then nothing happens so they become a bit disillusioned. It is trying to find some things that actually are replicable; if they can be done in other places but also if they can operate on the scale that we need.

Mrs VALE—David, you spoke about Abstudy: does your department actually have any collaborative arrangements with state education or training bodies regarding young people when they come out of prison? You spoke people getting Abstudy while still in detention or prison. Do you have any collaborative projects either in mind or on foot at the moment to support young people?

Mr Pattie—Certainly from an income support point of view, no. We do work with state education organisations. For instance, Queensland are doing some interesting work around Abstudy secondary school students. We do liaise with them about what we can learn from state approaches to apply federally, but on the direct question: no we do not.

Ms Wood—I think we, through the employment services that we fund in some jurisdictions—WA, South Australia, New South Wales and young people in Victoria—the Job Services Australia providers are working with young people pre-release and with Centrelink to coordinate support as they make that transition. That goes to helping them plan what happens after their release and ensuring they get the right kind of support to make a transition to employment. In the jurisdictions where those services are not in the prisons it is because the states have other arrangements which—

Mr Mackenzie—Jo was talking about those available for day work release—licence work release—but there is also vocational education and training operating in prisons as well. That is administered by state governments. VET in prisons is a well established—

Mrs VALE—Has there ever been any assessment done on those programs to see how productive they are in reducing recidivism rates? Do you know?

Mr Mackenzie—Not off the top of my head.

Mrs VALE—Have these programs been going long enough to do that? Do they have a program whereby these programs are going to be assessed?

Mr Mackenzie—I think they would have at the state level but off the top of my head I do not know. I know there are limitations on the courses that are offered within prisons. I guess there are foundational skills of literacy and numeracy, as well, before the other VET training kicks in. We could find that out, on notice, when we talk to our state colleagues.

Mrs VALE—That might be helpful. Thank you. I do have one follow-on question. I was stunned about this FAS business when we came across it. It was traumatic. One of the problems and one of the concerns I have about it is that if we have young people in juvenile justice because of foetal alcohol syndrome, they should be more appropriately looked after by the health department not by the justice department—that is, on an individual basis for those people. It is a tragedy that they end up that way.

CHAIR—This, of course, might be said about a lot of people in prison who have other complaints too.

Mrs VALE—Maybe there is a bigger story.

Quorum formed

Mr LAMING—You could take this on notice. If you take a large Indigenous community in a remote part of Australia, is there a way that your department and Education can meet almost seamlessly at that point where kids are disengaging from school? We have been informing ourselves about the evaluation of the Cape York initiative under Noel Pearson and the trigger points where, if someone misses school on two occasions in a semester, there is a process with parents. Is there a way where, rather than just having a case-by-case approach, we take a holistic, community-wide approach that has an earn or learn plan for absolutely every member of a community, leaving no-one out so that the minute moves from being a school attendee to a non-attendee it triggers a DEEWR alert so that you guys then instantly find a way of re-engaging them? It would be seamless with education, so that no child is left out.

Ms Wood—We talked before about what would be the characteristics of a school that was doing really well and getting educational outcomes for young Indigenous people. One of the characteristics would be that the principal and teachers are quite proactive about following up kids who are not attending and talking to families and having a good line of communication. So, in an ideal world where that is all working really well that should be happening as a matter of course. But there are commitments to have plans for all Indigenous young people from year 9—

Mr Hansen—That goes to the personalised learning strategies, and those are in place. I guess that is more preventative than responsive. The idea behind that is to build up aspirations of the families, the students and the teachers around the pathway that that particular student may want to take. The idea is that if a student moves away from that pathway then the families have got as much of a vested interest in making sure that they return to that pathway as the school does. I guess that is more preventative. I wonder whether a better way of looking at it is the way that Youth Connections were transitioning, so that, if a young person does become disconnected from education, then obviously a first point is around the schools trying to re-engage the student, but at some point there is that referral.

Ms McLaren—That is right—to a Youth Connections provider who is trying to reconnect them. They would be the ones that would be monitoring their attendance at their own programs et cetera. There is another aspect. Our school business community partnership brokers have all looked at the priorities in their region. In areas where the Youth Connections provider has been given a flag that there is a high Indigenous population, we would be expecting the partnership brokers, as one of the partnerships that they facilitate, to look at some of the priorities for engaging young Indigenous people in school. So we would be expecting them to bring together the kinds of groups in the community that you talked about and say: ‘How do we best support our young people? What kinds of procedures can we put in place? What are the first things that we want to tackle? Do we want to tackle attendance? Do we want to tackle literacy and numeracy issues? How do we best do that as a community with a number of stakeholders?’ So you might bring together people from the Indigenous community—parents and families—

Mr LAMING—Employers.

Ms McLaren—Employers, and other community organisations that support young people, and develop a strategy that might involve a community approach to nonattendance, for example.

Mr LAMING—That answers my question. Thank you.

CHAIR—I thank you all for your attendance and your patience. It might be that we follow up with some more questions in writing, and I think you said there were one or two things you were going to send to us.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Vale**):

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.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Laming**):

That the committee take as evidence to the inquiry the informal discussions held with the Hon. Danna Vale MP while the hearing was formally suspended due to a division in the House.

Committee adjourned at 1.43 pm