



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Forum

Reference: Factors influencing the employment of young people

CANBERRA

Thursday, 6 March 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Members

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Peter Baldwin	Mrs Gash
Mr Barresi	Mr Marek
Mr Bradford	Mr Mossfield
Mr Brough	Mr Neville
Mr Dargavel	Mr Pyne
Mrs Elson	Mr Sawford
Mr Martin Ferguson	

Matter referred for inquiry into and report on:

Factors influencing the employment of young people.

WITNESSES

TEMPLAR, Miss Debra, Training and Development Manager, Retail Training Victoria, Retail Traders Association of Victoria, 104 Franklin Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000 761

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Present

Mr Charles (Chair)

Mr Peter Baldwin

Mr Mossfield

Mr Barresi

Mr Neville

Mr Dargavel

Mr Pyne

Mrs Elson

Mr Sawford

Mr Marek

The committee met at 9.05 a.m.

Mr Charles took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing on the inquiry into factors influencing the employment of young people. The purpose of this inquiry is to consult widely and produce recommendations for government action that will help promote the employment prospects of youth.

The committee has received over 100 submissions and conducted public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Hobart. The committee has also conducted school forums in Sydney, Brisbane and Hobart in which young people discuss their views and opinions with the committee. The school forums are proving to be valuable opportunities to gain the views of our youth, who are central to this inquiry.

I am keen to hear the views of all sections of the community about how we can better equip young people for employment. I am particularly keen to hear the views of people who are active in commerce and industry, for they are the potential employers and creators of jobs for the future.

This is a very broad ranging inquiry. Matters raised in submissions so far include the attitudes of young people, the work ethic of young people and their familiarity with the requirements of the workplace, the adequacy and relevance of the education and training systems, the importance of developing better linkages between schools and the business sector, the need for a more flexible industrial relations system and the effectiveness and efficiency of government programs to assist young people to find employment.

These are not meant to be an exhaustive list of issues the committee will consider or which might be raised. We are entirely open to the views of everyone who wishes to make an input to the inquiry. We are here to listen, to learn and to help improve the prospects of young Australians.

Before I call the representative of Retail Training Victoria, I will introduce my colleagues. They are Paul Neville from Queensland, Phil Barresi from Victoria, Christopher Pyne from South Australia, committee secretary Paul McMahan, I am a Victorian, Rod Sawford from South Australia, Steve Dargavel from the ACT and Kay Elson from Queensland.

TEMPLAR, Miss Debra, Training and Development Manager, Retail Training Victoria, Retail Traders Association of Victoria, 104 Franklin Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000

Miss Templar—Retail Training Victoria is the training arm of the Retail Traders Association of Victoria.

CHAIR—Debra, I know you have not made a submission. You are here today because I asked you whether you would come and talk to us as a result of a very short article in the *Herald-Sun* that rather floored me and, I believe, you. Would you like to start by telling us what it was that led to that statement in there and the so-called rush on jobs that you had afterwards so that we can try to come to grips with all that?

Miss Templar—Certainly. I had sent out a press release to the press saying that we had at that time 140 jobs that we were having difficulty filling for entry level positions in the retail industry. We were amazed by the response. The *Sun-Herald* then rang me. We spent about 15 minutes talking about various issues. Then there was a tiny little piece that appeared in the *Sun* beside Mel Gibson in a bra. I saw Mel Gibson, but I missed the piece. But *A Current Affair* definitely picked it up. At a quarter to eight the following morning the phone rang and it was *A Current Affair* calling about the article in the *Sun*. I said, ‘Oh, yes. I couldn’t find it in the *Sun*.’ *A Current Affair* and Channel 10 picked up on the story. It went to air, I believe, Thursday fortnight ago.

We have in that time been absolutely flooded with responses from people looking for work in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. In fact we knew to the minute that the program had finished in Queensland because the phones started ringing exactly one hour after. We were manning the phones in our office. As of last night, we had interviewed 1,600 people in a week. We have so far placed 150 in work and we still have 250 vacant jobs which we believe we will fill within the next week or so. So it has been rather hectic.

CHAIR—What caused the problem in the first place?

Miss Templar—A number of issues in Victoria. Certainly traineeships were one of the major areas that we were looking to fill. We were unable to fill them, despite the fact that we had let the CES system know that we had the vacancies and who they were with. Also the state government and the community based employment network were all very aware of the positions. In relation to Safeway, for example, we had been endeavouring to fill 80 traineeships for the past month. We had filled 50, but we were having difficulty in getting people for the last 30. In that four-week period all the CESs in metropolitan Melbourne and all the community based employment projects had forwarded to us only 50 eligible people.

The criteria we were looking for was entry level young people wanting to start in retail. That was the criteria, and only 50 people had applied. We had run ads in the newspaper. We had some response obviously to fill the 50, but we were having difficulty in getting the numbers to find the people to hit the time lines for the businesses, because commercial business, of course, wants everything yesterday. So that was our major problem: how do we get the people looking for work to come through our door?

Mr SAWFORD—So it was the television coverage that really did it.

Miss Templar—It was. The *Sun* definitely opened doors, and the television coverage has since opened many more doors.

Mr SAWFORD—It raises a whole lot of questions in terms of the CES. It raises a lot of questions about your organisation as well in terms of the failure to market properly, and I suppose that applies to the CES in Melbourne as well. What do you think is the reason for that?

Miss Templar—Which?

Mr SAWFORD—Both. Why doesn't your organisation effectively market jobs available and why doesn't the CES in Melbourne? I just cannot believe that this has happened. In Port Adelaide we went for 1,000 jobs in the period before Christmas with some local business. The CES got on board and 1,200 jobs arrived. That was just local cooperation. Local businessmen got together with the CES. The Port Adelaide Football Club were the marketing tool that we used to get a bit of attention to it, and it worked.

Miss Templar—Your comments of 'I can't believe it,' were my comments: I cannot believe it. Let us take our inability to market first. I agree with that. We were caught flat-footed as an organisation in finding the people for the supermarkets. Since the deregulation of our shopping hours in Victoria there has been a massive increase in jobs in the supermarket sector. Coles supermarkets, for example, have created 1,500 new jobs since December, the majority of which are traineeships. Safeway are the same.

We are an employer association. One area of my training department is a community based employment area, where I have three staff. We match candidates to job vacancies that our members, who are retailers, come to us with. I think our target is something like 250 for a year. So we are well on target for that. We are not a full-time employment agency. We do not have the resources for that.

In relation to the CES, I am mystified. I do not know why they do not market, but I do know that a lot of our employers have a lot of different reactions towards the CES. As a cross-section: as for the service level they will give you, some of the country ones are absolutely outstanding, as are a couple of the metropolitan ones. A lot of them are appalling.

It appears that there seems to have been a mix up over the years as to who the client is. In our way of thinking the client is the employer and the person looking for work is actually the product; whereas for many years it seems to be that the person looking for work is the client, and not a lot has necessarily been taken into account of the employers' needs. That is certainly what we are getting right across the board from the employers in relation to the CES. As to why they did not simply inundate us with candidates, you would have to ask the CES that question.

Mr SAWFORD—I want to add a point, because I think it is an important point to make. I am not in the game of bagging the CES. My personal experiences with the CES have been pretty positive. But I think it is fair to say that the CES, since it was set up over 50-odd years ago, essentially has met government policies of the day. It has always gone through this dilemma. When it looked after the employer—and it has over many years, including under both Labor and Liberal governments—there was a downside to that. The downside was that the long-term unemployed received no attention whatsoever. When the focus changed back to try to look

after the long-term unemployed, the employer needs diminished.

It just seems to be that governments, whatever persuasion they happen to be—and both Labor and Liberal have done this over time—react to different cycles. Why the CES cannot balance the two in looking after the needs of long-term unemployed people and the needs of the employer I have never really been able to come to terms with. But I need to say that in terms of the CES. It is really carrying out government policy. What the government policy is at the current stage I will leave to the chairman. But the CES does have that problem.

Mr NEVILLE—Debra, I have three quick questions. Were most of those jobs full-time jobs?

Miss Templar—Yes, they were.

Mr NEVILLE—Certainly this client relationship may have had a factor in it; but, when kids read ads in the paper and are cynical, I wonder whether it is because we have had endemic youth unemployment for the last, say, decade. I get a lot of kids coming to me and complaining. I ask, ‘Have you been looking for a job?’ They say, ‘Yes; but when I ring up I find it’s some direct house-to-house marketing of plastic products, or encyclopaedias or subscriptions to *Time* magazine’—fairly exploitative sorts of jobs. When they see jobs advertised, they are pretty cynical; whereas, with your idea, when you said that there were jobs and they were real jobs, you triggered a response. The young people saw that these were genuine. Do you think that might have been a factor in it as well?

Miss Templar—Yes, I do. I think it was one of the factors. I think another factor is possibly the perception of the retail industry. There is the perception of working in a supermarket. I think there is a combination of factors.

Mr NEVILLE—You said that a lot of them went to the supermarkets. Obviously that would be in some respects a reallocation of people, say, from the corner store to the deregulated market. That has been the trend in Queensland, and I imagine it is the same in Victoria. Was there a requirement to put those kids through those retail training centres or did they just start in the supermarkets or whatever cold?

Miss Templar—Our jobs?

Mr NEVILLE—Yes.

Miss Templar—Our jobs are traineeships. It is a year-long trainee program. We were looking for people to start off on a traineeship. So they go through a training process.

Mr NEVILLE—On site or through these training centres we have seen over the years?

Miss Templar—Through training centres. The supermarkets very much wanted off-the-job training for one to two days a week.

Mr NEVILLE—That is very interesting. Thank you.

Miss Templar—You're welcome.

Mrs ELSON—When you interviewed these applicants, did you happen to ask them where they were registered and with what CES?

Miss Templar—Yes.

Mrs ELSON—Did you get a bit of an indication so that you could go back to that CES office?

Miss Templar—Yes.

Mrs ELSON—Did you ask why they did not refer them in the first place?

Miss Templar—Yes, many times. We get a pretty common reaction from most of them. The reaction is, 'Look, we don't get much help from the CES. Sometimes when we see a job and we say that we would like to apply for it, they tell us we're not suitable.' That was the reaction we got time and time again.

Mrs ELSON—I think you started the ad off by asking, 'Do you want a future in retail?' Is that right?

Miss Templar—That is right.

Mrs ELSON—I agree with Paul: when young people see an ad like that, they think it is selling books or doing door-to-door work. Did it have more of an explanation underneath that—that it was to go into these retail stores?

Miss Templar—Yes, very much. It was an explanation of the traineeship. One of the major ads actually had the Safeway logo. Another ad had the Coles logo. So it could all be tracked through. There were Harvey Norman ones. These are all the companies which got thousands of phone calls as well. They all had their logos. They had our logo, our name, our address—the whole thing. So it was not like the 'ring now and free training' ads.

Mr BARRESI—Did you think about going directly to the schools and approaching the school leavers? These vacancies have obviously been around for a while. Last year's school leavers might have been fertile ground. What kind of involvement does your organisation have with years 10, 11 and 12 students and schools?

Miss Templar—Previously we have had very little involvement. We have just prepared a careers kit for the retail industry which will be going to every school in Victoria. We have regular contact with the careers counsellors in schools and, thanks to the *A Current Affair* interview, we also now have contact with the Australian traineeship foundation, which frankly I did not even know existed.

Mr BARRESI—Really?

CHAIR—That is very surprising.

Miss Templar—Seriously, we did not know it existed. We now have a list of all the schools looking at retail. That again says to me, ‘Somehow we have missed some loops. We are out of the loop somewhere and it is crazy, as the peak retail employer association in Victoria.’ So we now are looking very seriously at how to get involved with the schools. We have been attempting to all this year. Of course we started off early January. Everyone was on holidays. The board of studies was unable to give us access into the areas we needed to go. We were just hitting brick walls until that interview, and then the doors started opening. We are very interested in getting involved with the schools.

Mr SAWFORD—In your organisation in Victoria, how do you rate the level of personnel management and general management skills?

Miss Templar—Rating out of what?

Mr SAWFORD—Does it range from hopeless to outstanding? Is it pretty fair? What is it like? What do you think it is like?

Miss Templar—Pretty fair to outstanding, depending in which area. Our organisation, as an employer association, has a number of areas such as industrial relations, tenancy, the training division. So it varies across the board.

Mr SAWFORD—How much potential is there, if there were improved general management and personnel management skills in retailing, to actually soak up a whole lot of positions? It appears to me that a common complaint out there in the public is that service in Australia has fallen dramatically. People go into stores to buy a few products or whatever, they do not get any attention or any service and they walk straight out and do not buy anything.

Miss Templar—That is true. I think there is immense potential. Retailers are now, I believe, of the mind-set that they have finally seen the value of trained staff. For years they really had not seen that value. I think that tide has changed. They now see that they need to have their staff knowing what they are doing so their customers will come back to them. I think that has been a massive change. If we could look at training up all retailers, the potential for new jobs would be phenomenal.

Mr PYNE—On a different issue altogether: how important do you think junior wage rates are in providing opportunities for young people to be employed? Would you like to see any changes to the current system? If so, what would you like to see changed?

Miss Templar—Probably more money, certainly coming from the juniors’ point of view. The wages are important, particularly taken from the perspective of the young people. When we talk traineeships and a national training wage, it is basically 80 per cent of the award, it depends on your age, when you left school and the whole sliding scale to work out their pay, they go cross-eyed and ask, ‘Yeah, but how much is that?’ They are asked, ‘When did you leave school? How old are you? What level did you reach,’ et cetera to find out the rate of pay. It just seems extremely complicated from their end.

Then they add it up and say, ‘That’s really only \$30 more than I get on unemployment benefits,’ or

\$50 more. That is the comparison they are doing. They say, 'For nothing I can get this. But if I am going to have to work in a supermarket and run around all day at the pace expected for only this, then I don't know whether it's what I want to do.' This is not everyone; I think it is the minority thinking this way. The majority of young people are just looking to be given the opportunity to start somewhere. Certainly with our young people they know that where they start is not where they finish, that the first year is a foundation year for them and that the traineeship is that foundation of their future careers. And they are very successful—but it is getting them initially, I think, to see the difference.

Mr PYNE—But if junior wage rates were not present and they were on the adult wage rate, employers would not take them on?

Miss Templar—Probably. It is a catch-22 situation again. Where do you get the balance?

Mr NEVILLE—There needs to be a compromise.

Miss Templar—Exactly.

Mr DARGAVEL—Following on from that: one of the propositions in your organisation's submission, as I understand it, is that if there was an abolition of junior wage rates the employers would be less keen to take on juniors. What empirical evidence are you aware of that puts this proposition up, given that we have a junior wage system currently but youth unemployment is still higher than the adult unemployment rate?

Miss Templar—I would just like to clarify that we have not put forward a submission.

Mr DARGAVEL—Sorry; I am getting confused with the Australian Retailers Association.

CHAIR—It is the Australian Retailers Association submission from last July. We put it in because they are members of the association.

Mr DARGAVEL—Yes, okay. Nevertheless the question stands: given that youth unemployment is higher than adult unemployment with the junior rate system, what evidence is there, do you believe, to continue the junior wage system, or do you feel the evidence is thin on the ground in terms of studies done?

Miss Templar—I think again it is a balance thing. Certainly it would be a major problem if the wages went up; retailers would have a problem with paying more. But the problem they have is the attitude, or behaviour or lack of communication skills they see in young people specific for the retail industry. I can only speak for the retail industry because it is all about interaction with people. I have employers say to me almost daily, 'Where is the enthusiasm in the young people? What are the schools teaching these kids? Can you find us young people who are enthusiastic, willing to work, can speak in sentences and are pleasant to people?' I say, 'Of course we can,' but we have to go through quite a few interviews to find those people. There are a lot of young people without communication skills at the level that the retail industry wants.

Mr DARGAVEL—My question went to the youth wage system. As I understand it, there has been, over a number of years, essentially, a change in work organisation retail with the introduction in Australia I

suppose of large retail outlets like the Targets and the K Marts and so forth, where service is perhaps not one of the key features of those organisations to the extent that you do not have someone at the counter serving you like you might have had, say, 10 years ago when you had—

Mr SAWFORD—No service.

Mr DARGAVEL—Yes.

Miss Templar—Yes, I understand.

Mr DARGAVEL—What potential do you think there is really in the sector, given those work organisation changes? I suppose it is a fairly open-ended question for you to express some views.

Miss Templar—It is a different style of retail. I think we have to look at retail as not only shop floor and service. Retail is everything else involved with it, which can be your buying, your merchandising, all that is behind the scenes. I still think there is immense potential. If you look at Target, I do not think there is any mistake that it is one of the leaders of the Coles-Myer group, with proven statistics. It is also one of the biggest supporters of youth training. I know we put 100 people through a pre-vocational training program with them last year, 90 per cent ended up in full-time employment with them. It is the same with K Mart. Again, they are all under that Coles-Myer umbrella. But I think while that area is expanding, so is specialised niche shopping. What has been the major change is part-time and casual jobs away from full-time jobs.

Mr DARGAVEL—As I understand it, from the evidence earlier that some 1,500 new positions have been generated out of deregulation of shopping hours for the larger retail—

Miss Templar—For Coles supermarket.

Mr DARGAVEL—Yes, for Coles. I take it that the level of consumption in Victoria has not grown substantially—that is, people are not, for example, eating more as such? Are these 1,500 positions essentially coming out of the small business operator that is getting locked out of competition from the larger outlets, in your view?

Miss Templar—I believe only time will show that answer. I think it is too early to tell.

Mr DARGAVEL—That is the experience in Canberra. If you go out into the suburbs, to all the little shopping centres, you find that a lot of them are closed, burnt out or boarded up. I think that was our experience.

Miss Templar—We certainly hope that will not be our experience, but we need a little bit longer to get the facts.

Mr MAREK—Do you think that our school leavers have higher expectations nowadays and have a perception that they might have to go through the higher education universities and those sorts of things, not

apply for retail jobs, basically because they may not understand that there is a career path in the retail industry?

Miss Templar—Yes, I do.

Mr MAREK—Do they know that?

Miss Templar—I very much believe that is the mind-set of the majority of students.

Mr MAREK—That they do not know?

Miss Templar—They do not know about retail. Retail is a job you have until you get a proper job. It is a job you have in the holidays.

Mr MAREK—Do you think we need to tell school leavers that there is a career in retail? Do you think it is our responsibility or could it be something that the education system could be looking at?

Miss Templar—I think it needs to be an alliance. It is our responsibility; it is industry's responsibility; it is education's responsibility; and it is the community's responsibility.

Mr MAREK—Therefore the schooling area might be just telling the students that they have to go to university and their parents are telling them that they have to go to university, that they need that higher education and not to get into retail. Maybe that is another reason why we are losing a lot of people going into apprenticeships and those sorts of things.

Miss Templar—Easily.

Mr BARRESI—I am absolutely astounded when you mentioned that you are not aware of Australian traineeship system. As someone who has worked in Safeway as a teenager, there are opportunities in organisations like that. Quite a few of the store managers, et cetera, work their way up from being a packer right through the system.

Miss Templar—We are aware of the system.

Mr BARRESI—And there is lots of diversity within the store as it is. I think it is, actually—if I can blunt—an indictment against the Retail Traders Association and all the other associations for not marketing the opportunities and what it offers better than what it already has. That is just a comment. In terms of the new system that you have just created, is there an on-the-job training component in your traineeship system? If so, I read recently some criticism of the Victorian system that there are some employers who are requiring their trainees to work up to 80 hours a week.

Miss Templar—I know where that was.

Mr BARRESI—Because of the on-the-job training component. Apparently, it is a loophole in the

system. Are you aware of that? Have you brought it to the attention of the authorities?

Miss Templar—Yes. If I could go back to your first comment, I am very aware of the traineeship system. We actually currently have in training ourselves, as a private provider, 300 retail trainees—shortly to rise to 500. What I was not aware of was the Australian Traineeship Foundation. I had never heard of that organisation. That was the difference there.

Yes, I am aware of that particular thing that hit our airwaves in Melbourne about three weeks ago. It was actually a hairdressing traineeship—which I do not believe there is any such thing—or a beautician's traineeship which came under a particular traineeship that is marketed very much as fully on the job. I believe the authorities are fully aware of that situation. It is not a traineeship that we are involved in.

Mr PETER BALDWIN - Are you talking about the AST efforts, the Australian student traineeship, as being a relatively recent thing?

Miss Templar—Yes. I have never heard of it. I know it now.

Mr PETER BALDWIN - I think we introduced it about two years ago.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr PETER BALDWIN - It was not a large-scale policy. It was not trivial. It was about—

CHAIR—It is not something you would necessarily know about, because it deals largely with finding money for schools. The group training companies would know very much about AST and some of the schools that are switched-on do, but you would not necessarily.

Mr MOSSFIELD—I refer to your comments relating to the attitude of young people. All of us as politicians go around to the schools and get a bit of a feel for attitudes. I do think we are putting the wrong slant. I would say that a very large majority of young people have a correct and good attitude. I think we are being snowballed with the fact that there are, unfortunately, those at the bottom level whose attitude are not good and which come about because they may not be doing well at school. They know that jobs are going to be very difficult to get and when they do apply for a job they have a very defeatist attitude of, 'I'm not going to get it anyhow.' They have probably been knocked back two or three times.

What can we do to help those people at the bottom rung of the ladder? I have a feeling that some times we are keeping those types of people at school too long. Is there a stream where we could get them into the work force at an earlier age and maybe change their attitude as a result of that change from school to work?

Miss Templar—We are finding that we are getting to them too late.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Yes, that is probably true.

Miss Templar—It is after they have left school and after they have been long-term unemployed that

we take them and rebuild them.

Mr MOSSFIELD—You have the tough job.

Miss Templar—Yes. Our organisation, the Retail Traders' Association of Victoria, has a 95 per cent placement rate with our long-term unemployed into jobs, because we do work with them. We build the person and then teach them the skills. Yes, I believe we need to get to them earlier. We need to somehow be able to recognise their needs, work with them and stream them rather than perhaps keeping them at school.

Mr NEVILLE—If you were trying to find a compromise between the needs of the employer, who says, 'I'm not going to pay a full wage to kids that aren't trained' on the one hand and the kids saying, 'Well, it is only \$20, \$30 or \$40 above the dole' on the other hand, would there be a case to have in the age groups—17, 18, 19 up to 21—perhaps three levels of competence? For example, there might be levels one, two and three in each age group where perhaps a 17 year old might be paid \$180 if he or she was just a raw level three, \$195 if they were on level two and \$210 if they were on level one, and doing the same thing in the next age group, so that the employer would have some measure of that young person's competence as well as their age. Is there a case for that?

Miss Templar—Perhaps. I would tend to think a lot of employers would look for the lower level so they could pay the lower wage.

Mr NEVILLE—There is an education thing to be done with the employer as well.

Miss Templar—Yes, there is.

Mr NEVILLE—In the last parliament, this committee went to a number of these retail training centres. I do not use the term disparagingly, but there seemed to be very much an emphasis on the competency of the checkout chick type thing. I can only remember one that actually trained them in retailing relationship with the customer and sales techniques and things like that. Is there not also a case for perhaps a more mature form of training?

If you say there are a lot of niche markets out there and a lot of retail markets outside the supermarkets, surely the level of training is important. An adjunct to that that I would like you to comment on, and picking up the point that Mr Dargavel made, is that, if there has been a transfer from the small business sector to the supermarket and department store area because of deregulation—to which your response was, 'We'll just have to see how that comes out in the wash'—wouldn't it be an idea for your organisation to start surveying the small businessman now to find out what employee he or she needs to replace the kid that has gone into the supermarket?

Miss Templar—We are. We are in the process of doing that now. We do not have those statistics or facts, yet, to be able to give them out. The deregulation in Victoria is very new. You will find that the supermarkets have gone to seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Most other businesses have not. There is still a wide debate in the community as to how they are going to implement it or if they will even do so. It really is a matter of months, I think, before we actually have facts that we can look at. In relation to the training, I

believe that has been addressed in the current new certificate 2 in retailing, which has been streamed for fashion and in the different sectors of retail—

Mr NEVILLE—Who is delivering that in Victoria?

Miss Templar—We are—the Retail Traders Association.

Mr NEVILLE—What about the TAFEs and the group training companies?

Miss Templar—They all have access to it, depending on—

Mr NEVILLE—Are they doing it parallel with you or are you the only organisation that is actually doing it at this stage?

Miss Templar—No, we are not. It depends on who won the competitive tendering. I believe there are approximately 280 private providers training in retail and they should all currently be training certificate 2 in retailing. It came into operation as at 1 January this year.

Mr NEVILLE—Niche market is being recognised?

Miss Templar—Very much so.

Mr MAREK—I have made an observation from past meetings that it appears students do not seem to understand what their opportunities or options are when leaving school. I am just wondering whether schools still have career officers at school? I really wonder about that.

Miss Templar—I believe they have. I believe many schools have career counsellors. We are certainly in touch with the career counsel organisation in Victoria. In the past, I doubt that retail would have got much of a run as a career, because that perception that it is the job you have until you get a proper job or it is income before you go on to uni is still a very big perception of retail. That is why we have put together this kit for the school counsellors—to show them the opportunities within retail so that they have a tool they can utilise. It shows what it is, salaries, job positions, case studies—the whole thing. They have a tool they can now refer to when they talk to their students.

Mr MAREK—I would be extremely interested to hear from one of these career officers—if we would have someone address an inquiry into that—and get an idea as to exactly what they actually tell students. When I was in school and leaving in grade 10 or 11, they would say, ‘Listen, looking at your results and your marks over the period of your schooling, I do not think you want to be a doctor. But if you want to go into a trade, it would be the way to go.’ Do you know what I mean?

Miss Templar—Yes.

Mr MAREK—I would just like to hear what some of these school career officers are telling the students.

CHAIR—As a result of television exposure particularly, you said you got 1,500 kids in.

Miss Templar—Yes.

CHAIR—You have placed 150 or 200 of those?

Miss Templar—Yes.

CHAIR—The ones that you did not place, what were the range of problems or the range of factors that led you to discard them? Can you give us some idea of the percentages of problems? For example, how many were of poor literacy; how many could not string a sentence together; how were they dressed; what was their attitude; what level of education did they attain; and what was the age group, et cetera?

Miss Templar—Sure. I will give you a broad brush picture as accurately as I possibly can.

CHAIR—I did not really expect you to have a table with a check list.

Miss Templar—It ranged from 16 year olds through to 64 year olds.

CHAIR—Wow!

Miss Templar—It ranged from ex-prisoners through to one woman who was agoraphobic and could not possibly come to the interview but wanted to work in retail. We said, 'Look, if you can arrange to get someone to get you here, we will most definitely work with you.' She did not show up. We had chronic schizophrenics, people who had been retrenched and school leavers. We had quite a few people who had left school early, still young—under 20—who had major literacy and numeracy problems to the degree that, when we are in the information centre sessions, I specifically tell them, 'When you go into the interview process, could I encourage you to speak to us in sentences so that when you are asked a question, don't just say, "Yes," "no," or "um" to everything. Talk to us in sentences because that will definitely assist you in the process.'

We are professional enough to know the difference between fear and people who have difficulty in communicating. I suppose 10 to 15 per cent would have had literacy or numeracy problems overall. With regard to age, for working in entry level supermarket, we would have had about 30 per cent who were 50 years and over where just the sheer activity in what is required perhaps would not be an ideal situation for them. However, we are looking for other work for them. We have not discarded anyone. They are all on our file. As jobs become available and if they are suitable, we will match them.

We had quite a few people, I think, who showed up simply so they could go back and put on their form that they had been at the Retail Traders Association on such and such a date, saw so and so and could not get a job. They were dressed inappropriately and their attitude and behaviour was, 'Well, I am here because I have to be here.' I would not be able to give you a percentage of that.

The majority of people were fantastic. They were simply looking for an opportunity. They needed to be guided and they needed to be taught the rules of the game. They needed to be taught how to come up at

interviews, what to say, what to wear, how to act and how to best present themselves. That was the weakness that the majority had. But, overall, the people who came in were very good. The ones that we put aside to look for work at another stage, we will be looking for work for them.

CHAIR—Good, thank you.

Mr SAWFORD—Before Mr Marek and Mr Barresi ask questions on career advisers and secondary schools in general, how many staff does your organisation have? You said you had three doing training.

Miss Templar—Is that with regard to retail training?

Mr SAWFORD—Training.

Miss Templar—We have nine full-time staff and 30 contract trainers.

Mr SAWFORD—What are the views of your staff? What sort of contact do you have with career advisers and the secondary school system in Victoria?

Miss Templar—Up until now we have had very little contact. We have had contact with the board of studies. We have had contact on a number of government committees looking at what to do in the education sector in Victoria. We have had contact through the industry training boards, but we have not had a lot of hands-on contact with the schools. That will now change thanks to the list that was provided to me by the Australian traineeship foundation.

CHAIR—Australian student traineeship foundation—ASTF.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you have enough staff to liaise effectively with the school system?

Miss Templar—No.

Mr SAWFORD—Will you have an opportunity to increase your staff?

Miss Templar—Yes. The submission is already in.

Mr SAWFORD—Will it be approved?

Miss Templar—I certainly hope so.

CHAIR—Are there anymore questions?

Mr MAREK—If I could make an observation, it appears as though the whole problem is the lack of networking or communication within the country. The education system, employer groups, training groups—the whole thing does not seem to be melded together enough so that everybody is networking. Everybody is off on this tangent, this group is over here, that group is over there and, until the whole lot can come together

and get one good networking body, I can see the problem continuing. If ever there was an observation of what is wrong with the country, it is the lack of communication throughout all the different interest groups.

Miss Templar—Communication would certainly help. We take as much blame as anyone else and we take as much credit as anyone else. But we all need to communicate and work together. It is a common goal, a common problem we are trying to solve. We need to get on the team and do it, I believe. I do not believe it is only government, education or industry. It is all of us. There are so many streams out there at the moment all heading in the same direction. We are just not aware of each other.

Mr MAREK—That is why I am of the opinion that it is probably costing so much money for all this to go on in this networking that is not coming together. If there is anything that the government could do, it is to force groups to come together to one significant area.

Miss Templar—To encourage them to come together.

Mr MAREK—Yes.

CHAIR—Debra, thank you very much for appearing before the committee. We are trying to come to grips with, as I have tried to tell everybody, two things. Basically, we are trying to figure out how we can help young people become more employable and how we can encourage employers to make more opportunities available to our youth. We intend to conclude our inquiry and bring down a report, we hope, in June. We will certainly send you a copy of the report. We trust that it will have some significant impact. Thanks, once again.

Miss Templar—Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned at 9.54 a.m.