

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

(Reference: Vocational education and training)

Members:

**MS K MacDONALD (The Chair)
MR S PRATT (The Deputy Chair)
MS R DUNDAS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 18 MARCH 2003

**Secretary to the committee
Mr D Skinner (Ph: 6205 0137)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

The committee met at 1.06 pm.

THE CHAIR: You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

For the record, please state your name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee in this inquiry.

DANUSHA CUBILLO was called.

Ms Cubillo: My name is Danusha Johana Cubillo, and my capacity is myself. I've been asked to come here and speak about my experiences in vocational education and training as a student/trainee.

THE CHAIR: Will you give us a general blurb about your experiences of vocational education and training?

Ms Cubillo: I have a speech written that I give to job seekers and school leavers, but it goes for a bit. I don't know how long I've got.

THE CHAIR: Until 1.30.

Ms Cubillo: Okay. I'm an indigenous woman from Larakia country, which is located in Darwin, and I have come here today to talk about my experiences. It starts in year 12, when my art teacher said to me that I'd never be an artist. Why do I bother and why should I care about doing art? That totally depressed me, and I didn't touch art for years.

I finished year 12 in 1993, found out about the University of Canberra and the Ngunnawal Centre and enrolled in their foundation program and bachelor of tourism course. I did the foundation program, which taught study skills and communication skills, and you did units towards your degree as well. I found it wasn't really for me. It was big class sizes, and I come from Darwin where you have small class sizes and a small school. There are hundreds of people in one class, so you don't have teacher time.

MS DUNDAS: Just to check, you did year 12 in the Northern Territory and then you come here to Canberra?

Ms Cubillo: Yes. During that course we were asked to do an assignment on a tourism attraction in the parliamentary triangle. I chose the tent embassy. I did my assignment, handed it in and was told by the teacher that it was not a tourist attraction. And I said, "Well, there are buses pulling up outside of it. What's to say that it's not a tourist attraction? Tourists come here to see it. People come specifically from interstate to see it and Aboriginal people travel to see it. So to me it's a tourist attraction, and all you asked us to do was an assignment about a tourist attraction." I found it quite offensive that he didn't think it was.

Also, another teacher, a person that ran the program—I won't mention any names—said to me that I couldn't go away to my sister's funeral. She had committed suicide and the family wouldn't have the funeral unless I was there. I told the teacher I had to go and I couldn't hand in an assignment that was due about that time. She told me she'd fail me for the course if I left. I had to leave, so she failed me. That was the University of Canberra.

I don't have any control about that stuff. With Aboriginal people, if you're not there, they will not have the funeral. I had to be there. Also, in an Aboriginal family your cousin may be your sister, and she was a cousin technically. But she was my sister. She slept at my house, she ate my food; she was my sister. The teacher took that as being a technical term and said that I lied to her—that I said it was my sister when in fact it was my cousin. And I said, "Well, Aboriginal culture is like that," and she wouldn't listen. She didn't understand and wouldn't take a bar of it.

I got very sick in 1998 and had to take time off studies, and the doctor told me to become a vegetable for six months. After the six months I decided I needed to go back and do some more study. I was ready to do that, but I wasn't ready for university. So I thought about CIT. I wanted to do a course but still on the theme of tourism, so I enrolled in hospitality. Two weeks before that course started my father died, so I had to go back for another funeral.

I found the teachers much more understanding. They said, "That's fine. How long do you need to be away for?" I said, "I've got to go for at least a month. This is a serious funeral." They said, "That's fine, we'll catch you up when you get back." I only missed two weeks of class, and when I came back they were just so understanding and helpful. I couldn't believe the difference compared to the last funeral I had to go for.

While I was doing the course I found someone in the library who had been to uni with me, and he said he was doing an indigenous fashion and art course at the CIT. I've always wanted to do indigenous art but no one in my family can teach me because they died or they just don't have an interest in it any more. I said, "Do they teach you everything—how to paint and draw?" He said, "The lot. You even get to make clothes." Like, oh wow!

As soon as I finished my hospitality course, I signed up the next day. And they said, "We're not accepting enrolments." I said, "But don't leave me out. I want to join." So I enrolled then and there, and that's how I got into art. I finally found teachers who could teach me what I needed to know and who were able to teach me in a traditional way and tell me things that I could and I couldn't do. I needed to know that stuff as an Aboriginal artist. And I needed for myself to learn more about my culture.

MR PRATT: What was the background of your teachers? Where do they come from?

Ms Cubillo: The art teacher I had came from Brewarrina. He didn't have any university qualifications or anything. He was an Aboriginal person who had been painting for years and years and he got taught by someone. That's what I understand his background was. The background of the sewing teacher is that she's been teaching for 25 years, so she has a good understanding of that sort of thing.

THE CHAIR: Was the sewing teacher from an indigenous background?

Ms Cubillo: No, she was not, but the art teacher was. You need a teacher in that role in an indigenous capacity to teach that sort of thing. It wouldn't be appropriate learning it from a white person. I learnt painting techniques, drawing, design, screen-printing, sewing and presentation. For my first painting I got offered \$10,000, but I turned it down because I gave it to my mum. She'd kill me if I sold it on her. I designed a screen-print, which I've got photos of, called the Johnny Goo Goo print, which is in memory of my father. It's a turtle print, and turtles were his totems.

All my paintings, except two or three, are about my childhood. I use my stories, not other people's stories and not stories from my country, because I like to tell people about me and about my family. I paint about my childhood, the times I spent with my family and my father and the things we did. That's where I get my inspiration from.

In 2001 I was nominated Indigenous Student of the Year for the ACT Training Excellence Awards. I won that and I got to represent the ACT in national competitions. After winning that I decided I needed some business skills to get my stuff out into the marketplace and to see whether people were interested in buying any of it. I've got all this stuff I've made, and it's just sitting at home in a box. If someone likes it, I need to know how to sell it and market it.

I did a six-week course at Qskillz, which was ending the week before Christmas or in the week of Christmas. It was a certificate IV in small business management. After that I decided I needed to know how to get my art into galleries, how to exhibit my stuff and learn more about galleries and understand them. People sent a lot of their art away to the Olympics. I don't know if you guys know what happened with all that. There was an indigenous art exhibition. Art from all over the country got sent to this exhibition and a lot of it got stolen, was not sent back or was returned damaged and all that sort of thing.

I wanted to work in a gallery and learn the legal side of all that sort of thing because I got burned by that. I had three paintings that were unreturned, and I didn't get reimbursed for it even though I signed a form saying I would be. And chasing them up, I never got onto them, so I'm down \$500.

I did an arts traineeship last year, working with Craft ACT and Canberra Contemporary Art Space. I studied for certificates II and III in business administration, an art and business traineeship. I learnt all aspects of working in a gallery. It was very hard to complete the traineeship because I did it through CDEP as the employer. The host employers were Craft ACT and Canberra Contemporary Art Space. Don't ask me to explain it, because it's all too complicated for me.

THE CHAIR: Do you know what CDEP stands for?

Ms Cubillo: Yes: the Community Development Employment Program. They're located in Erindale. I found that, having no mentor, it was very difficult to talk to someone about problems I was having with the staff. How do I handle it? What do I do?

The thing that really upset me was that there was no job on completion of the traineeship. I was unemployed and basically turned out onto the street—another jobseeker again. I thought that I would get at least weekend work or be asked to come back one day a month or something just to work and earn a few dollars. I had all that experience and then I couldn't use it. But they nominated me for trainee of the year again, so they must have thought there was something good about me. I got nominated for the same award, but I didn't win this time.

THE CHAIR: Did you have a conversation with them about having no job on completion?

Ms Cubillo: I did, and I don't think I can repeat it here! There are other issues involved there. I was very upset that there was nothing—just nothing. I expected that something would happen. I worked for a full year for both organisations, and I haven't had a phone call or anything from them since completing. It's like I don't exist any more. And then they just get another trainee. I don't know if they have, but I heard a lot of places do that—you finish one day, and the new trainee comes in the next day.

THE CHAIR: Have you had conversations with other trainees who have had similar experiences?

Ms Cubillo: I have, and a few of them got jobs, so I was left wondering why I was the one that didn't. I was commissioned by AFFA to do artwork for a publication for them.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell us—

Ms Cubillo: Australian Forestries and Fisheries—

MS DUNDAS: Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—Australia. It's a federal department.

Ms Cubillo: Another artist and I had a week to do 12 paintings, and we completed that. That was a learning experience in itself. I know that I can't survive doing my artwork as a full-time job. There's no way I'd make enough money in a year to support myself, so I've been looking for work and finally found some.

MR PRATT: I discovered the same thing once.

MS DUNDAS: Does the work that you've been able to find require your certificates or use any of the skills you got out of your CIT courses? Has the training you've done over the last couple of years made you more employable?

Ms Cubillo: Yes. I did the business admin course, and the job I have now is as personal assistant. That sort of stuff will be handy—also the small business management because I will basically be running the office. I was apparently the best one in the interview. There were a lot of other good people that went for that interview, and I never thought I'd get it in the world.

MR PRATT: And you've got it.

Ms Cubillo: I was blown away that I got it. I got offered another job, and I had to ring up and say, “I’ve been offered another job. I need to know yes or no if I’ve got this one.” They said, “We really want you. We don’t want you to get away; we want you for this position.”

MS DUNDAS: So the training helped you a lot?

Ms Cubillo: Yes, I feel it did. On paper it makes me more employable. But if on paper this place sees me as being employable, why didn’t the other place see me as being employable for at least one day a week?

MR PRATT: It’s crazy.

Ms Cubillo: And now I’ve got a full-time three-month contract job.

MR PRATT: There’s no logic to all that, so don’t worry about it.

THE CHAIR: You’ve touched a bit on this, but from the perspective of being a trainee—and specifically an Aboriginal trainee—what areas of the system do you personally think need to be fixed up?

Ms Cubillo: The mentors. You need very good mentors. It is only recently that I have found a very good mentor. She was the one that helped me get the job I’ve got now. I went away to Brisbane on holidays, and I received a letter during that time I was away, and it said we had to meet up with her to discuss our CDEP contract—whether we were going to continue. At that stage I’d finished my traineeship. I was like, thank goodness I’ve finished; I can’t wait to get out of CDEP. They’re not helping me. I’ve had no phone calls from them to say, “Come in. We’ll sort something else out for you.” I was feeling a bit down about that.

After speaking with her, I’ve had nothing but phone calls for jobs. ‘Come in. We’ve got interviews for this,’ or, ‘Are you interested in coming in for an interview for that?’ Dealing with her I applied for about six jobs, and I did three interviews in one week and had two jobs come back. I’m still waiting to hear about the others.

MR PRATT: Your mentor took part in all processes of applying for jobs?

Ms Cubillo: Not all processes, just approaching people to see whether there are places available—that sort of role.

MR PRATT: Did she talk you through the preparation?

Ms Cubillo: Not really, because I’ve got that sort of background and experience. She just said, “There are only two questions you’ve really got to nail in the interview: know your issues and know the difference between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.” She said that as long as you can nail those two questions, you’re in. And I did. I went and did research and actually made a list, and they asked me in the interview and I pulled out my list and I said, “Can I read from my list?” That showed that I did research.

MS DUNDAS: Do you think a specific program should be set up to provide a mentoring program for people going through vocational training?

Ms Cubillo: Yes. You need a person you can call on if you've got problems with anything, especially traineeships. That was the hardest thing I have ever done. Uni was hard, but the traineeship was worse.

MS DUNDAS: What kind of support do you need through the traineeships—somebody who knows the program, or something more?

Ms Cubillo: Being an Aboriginal person and coming from another country is hard because you're in a place where you don't know the customs or the laws or things you've got to abide by. You don't know who's the elder. You know nothing. You need to have a person you can call and say you think you made a mistake or to ask if you should talk to this person or that person about an issue. I didn't, and it made it very hard to get through uni without that person. In the traineeship, it was just that I didn't have someone I could bounce back stuff off.

MS DUNDAS: You mentioned the Ngunnawal Centre at the University of Canberra, and there's the Student Association at CIT. Did they provide any support services? Or, because they're trying to do everything at once, was it not focused?

Ms Cubillo: The Ngunnawal Centre didn't help. I also had problems with students because I was passing units and they weren't, so I wasn't black. They'd come hunting me down because I was passing and try and scare me—"I'm going to hit you on the head." I don't know these people. I arrived in Canberra when I was 16 or 17. I wasn't a person that went drinking, and they all did.

They'd invite me out for bar nights and I couldn't go. By the time I turned 18 it didn't impress me, because I'd see them drunk all the time. You'd see students taking drugs and that sort of thing. It's not something I grew up with and could get used to at all. Seeing it happen to your own people is hard, and you can't help them because you don't know how to deal with it yourself.

MS DUNDAS: And the Student Association at CIT?

Ms Cubillo: They're not people I approach for indigenous issues. They're not people I feel can help me in that way. I'd rather go to someone who's my own kind, someone who I feel would have a better understanding. There are a lot of white people who go and live in Aboriginal communities and may have an understanding, but I'd go and see someone who is black.

MR PRATT: How did you connect with your mentor? How did you locate her?

Ms Cubillo: The one that offered me the jobs?

MR PRATT: Yes.

Ms Cubillo: She just sent me that letter and said that I needed to contact her. I actually met her at a Yurauna Centre function a couple of days after I received the letter. She offered me her card and I recognised who she was by the name on the card. She had no idea who I was and I said, “I need to speak with you.”

MR PRATT: How did she come to write to you?

Ms Cubillo: She had a job in CDEP, and she was just sending out a letter to all the people on the books. Everyone got the same letter. Out of the six of us that started last year only two of us completed the traineeships. Everyone else dropped out because they didn’t have the support. One guy went real crazy. He just lost it, and he didn’t have the support to be able to pick it up again.

THE CHAIR: So what do you see as the positives of training—training in general and the traineeship as well?

Ms Cubillo: The networks I’ve made and the people I’ve met. I now have an understanding of a different country, and I’ve met Torres Strait Islander people, which I never had a chance to do in Darwin for some reason. You’d think that I would have, but I never did. There are lots of them here in Canberra, which is surprising. There are lots of Darwin people in Canberra too, which is even more surprising.

Other positives are the friendships I’ve made and the fact that I have all these qualifications now, which I never thought I would when that art teacher said that to me in grade 12. I guess I’ve proved him wrong in a sense by going out and doing this. I still want to put together a scrapbook and show him.

THE CHAIR: And send it up to him.

Ms Cubillo: Yes. Well, I think he got kicked out of the school anyway for reasons that are a bit dubious.

THE CHAIR: We’re going to finish in a minute or so. You said you’ve brought some photographs.

Ms Cubillo: I just brought photos of the stuff that I’ve done. I’ve been working on a recycling project at the moment, making bags out of plastic bags. Just little tote bags.

MS DUNDAS: Have you figured out how you’re going to market these yet?

Ms Cubillo: No, this is just something for me to do.

MS DUNDAS: Are you marketing your art?

Ms Cubillo: No. It’s word of mouth. I don’t want to make it a business, because it’s a hobby. Once you make a hobby a business then you don’t like it any more. You get tired

of it and it becomes mundane. You're doing something you really love. But then someone says, "I really don't want it in that colour. Could you make it in another colour?" It is really frustrating when you've put effort and work into doing this thing and you think it looks glorious and then someone says, "I really want it in red, not in blue."

MS DUNDAS: Fair enough.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for making the time to come in, Danusha. We'll quickly have a look at that stuff, and we'll hand you back your photos in a second. Congratulations on getting the job.

MR PRATT: And good luck in the future.

THE CHAIR: You never know—we might be looking for somebody to do a cover for the report when we finally get it out.

Ms Cubillo: I do commissions, but guidelines have to be clearly set. With the AFFA one they gave us dimensions. Something got mixed up somewhere, and the dimensions were wrong and we rung up halfway through the project and found we had to extend all the paintings by about 2½ centimetres, so there was a lot of sanding. Thank God we didn't get it on stretch canvas because we wouldn't have been able to sand it back. We did them all on flat canvas and got them framed after we got them photographed.

THE CHAIR: There are some wonderful examples of your work on the back wall of my office.

Ms Cubillo: That's right, and there's lots in AFFA now—and in a lot of homes around the ACT. People say a lot of tourists buy art, but a lot of locals have bought my art. I found that quite surprising.

THE CHAIR: The stuff that I rejected the National Museum is now buying, which I think is amusing!

DONNA REID and

KATHRYN BILLING

were called.

THE CHAIR: I will read a statement before we start. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

For the record, please state your names and the capacities in which you appear.

Ms Reid: My name is Donna Reid. I'm appearing for the Australian Network of Practice Firms.

Mrs Billing: My name is Kath Billing and I'm currently network manager for the Australian Network of Practice Firms.

THE CHAIR: I note that you've given us a presentation flyer, which will go on the record. Perhaps you'd like to open up and tell us about the Australian Network of Practice Firms.

Ms Reid: Thank you. We were keen to have the inquiry familiar with the concept of practice firms, because they are not very well known in the Australian education community. I set up the network about seven years ago. We operate from a department within the Canberra Institute of Technology. Basically, we work across Australia with schools, TAFE, universities and private training providers, setting up simulated businesses so that students can have hands-on experience with business processes as part of their learning and as part of their courses.

The courses that are involved, or those which use practice firms, are very much anything in the vocational education and training line from business to small business, retail, tourism, travel and hospitality. A whole range of different courses can use the environment of a practice firm to deliver their courses. It's like a simulated business that students set up and run.

The idea is to give students more responsibility for their own learning. By running the business, the students obviously have to make decisions. They're in a position where they make mistakes, but it's a great opportunity for them to learn from their mistakes and ask, "Didn't I plan well enough?" They learn from that experience.

We have students working with other students across Australia, whether they be in schools, TAFEs or universities, completing VET qualifications and competencies. Sometimes you'll find that the whole course is delivered in the practice firm. A certificate 2, 3 or 4 in business might be delivered in a TAFE from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday, and the whole thing is done as a workplace simulation.

The students feel like they're at work. They're picking up all of those employability skills, but they're also satisfying the demands of a qualification, or various competencies. The great benefit of being in a practice firm is the students become much more employable. They learn about themselves; they learn what they're capable of; they learn if they can work successfully in groups—or they can look at how they work in groups—how they contribute to the team and what their strengths are. It's a great opportunity for them to look at how they learn—whether they learn better in a visual sense or from working with their peers, or whether they like the student/teacher relationship, with the teacher up the front and being very directive. They learn a lot about themselves and their particular preferences for learning.

Practice firms set up a relationship with a local business, so the students have a business person or persons coming into the classroom to help and advise—and mentor them. That's a great link with their local community. We believe that the students should be connected with their local community and learn more about the opportunities that are in the local community. But they can also look at what they might study in respect of their future learning, whether it be years 11 and 12 or university or TAFE courses.

They can think, "I really like accounting. I've been given a taste of accounting. I might go and study accountancy at TAFE or university." They learn a lot about themselves and they learn about working with the businesses, which might be down the road from the school or the TAFE. They learn what the expectations of that business are, what standards they work to and how the students can work and contribute to that business.

We find some of the students developing little manuals on occupational health and safety or doing a web page, so it's not just the business mentor talking to the students, it's the students doing work for the business as well. It's a two-way relationship. It develops some strong and meaningful relationships with the students. Sometimes they might get employed by the business and, at other times, they might get casual work. But at least they can use that business person as a referee.

We would like practice firms to move more into the development of entrepreneurial businesses and to provide students with ideas about setting up their own businesses. We haven't been able to do that yet, but certainly the opportunity presents itself. So there's a range of opportunities that the technology of the practice firm presents. We wanted to acquaint the committee with that.

MS DUNDAS: What is the relationship of practice firms with ITABs?

Ms Reid: The practice firm works specifically with RTOs. An RTO might decide that they want to deliver a business course, retail course or tourism and travel course in the practice firm. So, in that sense, there is a relationship because the ITABs are involved with the development of the competencies and their assessment. We, within CIT, have set up relationships with different ITABs, as a way of alerting them to the potential of practice firms. If you look at the business services training package, there are quite a few references to practice firms as simulated business environments.

We've also had a relationship with the IT&T ITAB in New South Wales. They give a 50 per cent reduction in the industry placement requirement for a certificate 2 delivered in the practice firm. So, instead of doing 40 hours-plus in the workplace, they only have to do 20 hours. That's a really good mix—to have 20 hours preparation for a workplace. So the students are much more work oriented. When they walk into a business, they know that there's a finance area somewhere—and a sales and marketing department. They've got more business nous then, so it's a good stepping stone.

THE CHAIR: How many practice firms are there in the ACT?

Mrs Billing: At the moment, there are four. There are two within the Canberra Institute of Technology and there's one at Hawker College and one at Erindale College.

THE CHAIR: On a percentage basis, proportionally, how does that line up with the rest of the country?

Ms Reid: We vary from state to state. We have had strong support from New South Wales VET. We'd have about 30 to 40 schools involved and probably 25 TAFEs. We've had a very good relationship with New South Wales. Victoria and Queensland are developing slowly. We had some funding. Of course, we rely on funding from various government agencies. We've had funding from DETYA and then DEST to work in those two states.

We have about 10 TAFE practice firms in Queensland and about 10 schools, and probably a few more in Victoria. We're gradually building up. In Western Australia we don't have any schools at the moment, but we're getting our first school off the ground. We vary considerably according to which state we have invested time and energy in.

MR PRATT: I gather that the success of this falls or flies on the basis of close cooperation between the firms and elements in the community, as well as the teaching fraternity. Is that working well? Are you happy with the feedback you get from the practice firms on the performance of associated students?

Ms Reid: I guess the big challenge is with the teachers. It is a real change.

MR PRATT: To make the time to go out?

Ms Reid: No—to be comfortable in working with a totally different environment. For example, this room could be converted into a practice firm. It wouldn't look like a classroom at all. There would be a reception desk at the door, where you walk in. The student who is the receptionist for the day would be there—and the finance area. There'd be a team over there—and an HR team.

Some teachers feel very uncomfortable with that environment. They are much better staying in a traditional classroom environment and not being put in that situation. Others enjoy it. The ones who enjoy it are the ones who will get a lot out of it for their students,

because they're relaxed. They can then really understand what workplace assessment is all about. Teachers tend to lapse into lecturing. They might say, "Don't do that. This is how you do it—I know"—instead of saying, "What do you think? What happens if you go down that line?" We're better off working with teachers who are open to flexible learning, able to cope with change and, I guess, to take risks in some cases. The teaching staff are critical. If you get the right person, they're totally committed, they've already got a strong relationship with businesses in the community. They just see that as part of their community relationships.

One of the key features for us is to get the right teacher or the right group of teachers in that school, TAFE or private training provider, to run with the concept. Ideally, we don't want one practice firm just for, let's say, the economics class or the business studies class. We want it to be used on Mondays by IT, on Tuesdays by retail—and to make it an across-school facility. That's where you get better value.

We have to charge organisations to belong to the network. We charge \$1,800 per annum per practice firm. The RTOs need to get value for their money. We say, "However many students you want—200 students, that's fine, we don't mind. There's no limit, it's up to you how you manage it and how you can bring the students in and make a success of it with regard to your own outcomes. What do you, in the school or TAFE, want to get out of the practice firm? How can we help you achieve your goals?"

MS DUNDAS: Students are only able to participate where the teacher has coordinated the training through what they're already doing? So you don't necessarily have students who specifically want to do a practice firm but can't because it just hasn't been integrated into the training package?

THE CHAIR: Not the training package—into the school curriculum.

Ms Reid: That's right—whether it be underpinned by a training package qualification.

Mrs Billing: Yes. If you had a language student in a school who wanted to work in a practice firm, unless the school had integrated the language students into the practice firm, then that student would miss out.

MS DUNDAS: You mentioned that there were some in New South Wales—that there were changing components in the competencies because they were being picked up through a practice firm. You said they can do 20 hours in a practice firm.

Mrs Billing: That's work experience.

Ms Reid: Usually with the training package qualifications, there's a training component. Often it's written in that there is an industry placement component, so they can get that practical experience. We have a relationship with the IT&T ITAB to get a reduction of hours required on that.

THE CHAIR: Are there examples where schools or TAFEs have formed partnerships in taking over a practice firm? For example, if somebody from Lake Tuggeranong decided they wanted to participate in the practice firm at Erindale College, would that be a possibility?

Ms Reid: It's very much up to the relationship between the two institutions. It wouldn't affect us. We would just treat that as one practice firm. We have a practice firm in Cootamundra and Young. That's just one practice firm but it's on two campuses—that's a TAFE, not a school. That's fine—they've got one name. What's happened is that their business partner is Harvey Norman and there's a Harvey Norman in Cootamundra and a Harvey Norman in Young.

Mrs Billing: It is Harvey World Travel.

Ms Reid: Yes. There is a Harvey World Travel in each town. Basically, the business partners are in the same business and they belong to the same company, so that works well.

Mrs Billing: They've also got one of the TAFEs in Western Australia that operates a practice firm. They bring students in from a school across the road. They have a session in the practice firm each week. Again, we're not involved in that side of it—that's an arrangement between the TAFE and the school.

Ms Reid: In Smithton, in Tasmania, the TAFE campus is on the school premises. The TAFE has set up a practice firm to deliver certificates 2, 3 and 4 in business. Students from the school come in and use the practice firm for some of their courses. We'd encourage any of those relationships. In a sense, that breaks down some of the barriers between school and TAFE. Particularly in regional areas, some of the students are very loath to move into a TAFE environment or a university environment. If you can get them visiting, it breaks down some of those barriers.

THE CHAIR: Have you done any surveys on employability following on from participation in a practice firm? Has anybody done any studies of that sort, to get a concept of the value of undertaking work within a practice firm? We may as well call it work, because it is work.

Ms Reid: It's a bit difficult to get a good statistical base. We've got a lot of anecdotal evidence, where businesses who were involved with the practice firm have come in, looked over the group of students and offered particular ones jobs. They have seen them at work in the practice firm. The students know their products, and quite a bit of their induction process has already been covered. The students know the product and the service because they've been selling them across the world.

We had a survey done a couple of years ago by the local branch of an external company—Colmar Brunton. That was funded by DETYA at that point in time. They tried to pin down some of the statistics. It wasn't conclusive because, often, the students are doing the practice firm as only a small component of their total course. They might spend half a day, or a day, per week in the practice firm. When they leave, they might get a job but it's difficult to say that the job they got was directly attributable to their work in the practice firm.

We haven't been able to follow that through, but it's the sort of thing we should do when it comes to following students' pathways. We should try to do a longitudinal study to see whether or not they can tap back into their practice firm experience.

THE CHAIR: Cross-training packages: do cross-studies of training packages come into the practice firms?

Ms Reid: We often have students enrolled in, let's say, business studies. Because of the nature of the work they're doing in the practice firm, they can also get credit for small business, marketing or sales. That's certainly a valuable addition for the RTOs that are prepared to do that.

THE CHAIR: While we're talking about that, how is the implementation of the business services training package going?

Ms Reid: We're getting quite a number of people directly contacting us to say that they have been told to set up a practice firm because of the business services training package.

Mrs Billing: Particularly in New South Wales.

Ms Reid: Yes, and also Queensland. There is quite a bit of pressure being put on RTOs, often by management, in the context of trying to move their teachers and students into a more work oriented environment.

THE CHAIR: You've heard this from me before, Donna. Some of what you do touches on the learning done through the young achievers program. Did you want to comment on the differences between practice firms and possible collaborations?

Ms Reid: It's good that you raise that because you're aware of ECEF—the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation. Last year, they called about six of the enterprise education people together. There were practice firms, young achievers, Australian Business Week, E-teams and SIFE—Students in Free Enterprise. We had about four meetings in Sydney and decided that there were opportunities for us to work together collaboratively. We are just finalising a contract with ECEF in which we will be working with SIFE. They work with university students. We can see a lot of partnerships developing.

I should explain that, once a practice firm is set up, it's set up like a business in that students move through it and the practice firm stays in existence. Australian Business Week operates for only a week. For most of the others, like young achievers, again there are different programs—24 weeks or whatever.

We're unusual in that, number one, we link to training packages; number two, practice firms are continuous—so they go on. We enjoy a good working relationship with the enterprise education people and we can see lots of collaboration opportunities. We're participating in the development of a little brochure which can be handed out to schools, or to people who are inquiring, to say that, if you want to be involved in enterprise education, here are a number of different schemes.

There are lots of opportunities for collaboration, however, I think we recognise each other's differences. It's "one shoe doesn't fit everybody". We want the RTOs to work with practice firms which want to set up a good practice firm and achieve outcomes that suit their own aims.

THE CHAIR: Are you still getting the practice firms to complete a mock business activity statement?

Mrs Billing: Yes. We encourage the practice firms each year to complete a business plan. Each new group of students comes in and prepares the business plan for the year. We try to emulate the real world, so we get them to complete BAS statements—to keep all the relevant records they need to complete those.

MR PRATT: Perhaps they can do mine!

Mrs Billing: We're continually investigating those sorts of things. We've spoken to the tax office, and we've modified their forms slightly. Even though the forms may not be exactly the same as a real BAS statement, at least students know what a BAS statement is and they basically know the information that is needed. We've investigated and found a package that the tax office gives them for free, and we've been encouraging students to use that.

We allocate practice firms a practice firm number, which is equivalent to their business number. We're trying to emulate the real world. At the moment, we're in the process of instituting customs for example practice firms. There are about 4,000 practice firms world-wide. We encourage ours to trade internationally, so they have to go through the same processes a normal business would, if they were trading internationally.

MR PRATT: Are there any simulated banking negotiations like, "This package won't fly, mate"?

Mrs Billing: There certainly are, yes.

MR PRATT: How long has this quite interesting training technique been in play? Is this concept growing?

Ms Reid: Yes, I went to Europe in 1994.

MR PRATT: It's working well? People are satisfied with this medium?

Ms Reid: Yes, it's taking off in the US in a very big way. We've been working with Hong Kong and China—the network. There are about 4,000 practice firms in the world-wide network at the moment. Once it gets into China and South America, it is starting to grow—particularly in those countries that want to learn the western style of doing business—they want to learn business English. There are lots of opportunities. Ministries and education agencies see that this is a more friendly way of getting students to learn about the western style of business, in a protected environment where it doesn't matter if they make mistakes—you're not losing money or anything. You can recover the situation.

Mrs Billing: We're working quite closely at the moment with the United Arab Emirates. They're introducing practice firms into their women's and men's colleges because they have to speak English in those colleges. This is a terrific way of introducing them to business, and a western style of business.

MR PRATT: My wife works there, and she's talking about this. I might get her to call you.

Ms Reid: There are two or three practice firms in Ras al-Khaimah, in the women's college, and I think they're now starting to get them in some of the men's colleges. We are facilitating that because, as you said, there are a lot of English-speaking teachers there—whether they're Canadians, Americans or English. These people can support the students. They're setting up their central office with one of their own Emirati running it. That is seen to be a real step forward in the context of the Emiratisation of the country. So there is lots of potential there.

THE CHAIR: I know that practice firms were a big thing in Germany. Talking about the growth of them raises the question of communication. Is English treated as an international language, or do they have communication issues when it comes to trading with overseas countries like Germany?

Mrs Billing: It depends which country it is. There are a few problems, particularly with Germany. The German practice firms tend to send a lot of stuff here in German, but there are ways around it. We've got a few practice firms in Australia that contract to their language students to translate—both ways. They translate what comes in from Germany, they translate the Australian product list catalogue into German, and they trade that way. That's drawing other people into the firm as well. A lot of practice firms receive something in German and throw it in the bin, so they're losing out on an opportunity there.

Ms Reid: That's where you need a skilful teacher who can see the potential—to expand their horizons and get them learning a little more about the global economy. What happens if they get a job in business where the head office is in Germany, Paris, or somewhere like that? They will have to come to grips with languages, currencies, and different cultures. This is a great opportunity for kids to learn about working with different countries and different languages.

THE CHAIR: We're going to have to finish. I'm forever amused at the fact that, when you first told me about practice firms—several years ago now Donna—you told me about a practice firm in Melbourne who had as their business sponsor the fruit and vegetable markets. As they're virtually trading, they'd made a decision that they didn't have any wastage—that they sold all their fruit and veg, which is a little different from the real world.

Ms Reid: That's right. I think they introduced virtual genetic modification so that their products lasted for quite some time. However, we're chasing up on people like that and saying, "You've got to have a shelf life—stick to it." Because of the nature of the different businesses, those people in computers have to learn different approaches— whoever's selling shoes. There are all these rules and regulations surrounding that industry.

ROBIN BALLANTYNE and

TIMOTHY McNEVIN

were called.

THE CHAIR: You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. For the record, please state your name and capacity in which you appear before the committee today.

Ms Ballantyne: I am Robin Ballantyne. I am the Assistant Secretary (Professional) for the Australian Education Union.

Mr McNevin: I am Tim McNevin, an organiser for the Australian Education Union.

THE CHAIR: You have appeared before us before and we got stuck talking about colleges, as I recall, the last time we met. I think we said at that point that we would make another time for you to come back and speak to us specifically about CIT. I have got your submissions in front of me. Is there anything that you would like to start off with—talking about CIT and where we are at with CIT vocationally?

Mr McNevin: Perhaps in terms of a context, CIT, as you know, is the predominant public provider of vocational education and training in the ACT, offering a variety of courses and a diversity of programs. The AEU covers members in the CIT and our members have for some time now been letting us know about their resource issues that are confronting the CIT, and we are also aware of similar resource issues across the country in other TAFE systems. As to the basis of those resources, as you know, funding comes from both the federal government and the ACT government for the CIT, and probably decisions by both levels of government have impacted on the resources and our members as a result of that.

We are also currently in an enterprise bargaining period and we served our enterprise bargaining claim on the employer, that is the CIT, on the 21st of last month. I suppose the key themes through that enterprise bargaining agreement will be around addressing the workload pressures being experienced by our members, but also providing improved and increased opportunities for professional development of our members, our teaching members, and pursuing a salary increase which will keep employment at the CIT as a viable alternative for future teachers but also the current cohort of teachers.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to add anything, Robin?

Ms Ballantyne: I don't really have any initial remarks to make. We have a few topics that we would like to talk about. Tim, we might go perhaps first to the funding.

Mr McNevin: Sure.

Ms Ballantyne: Funding continues to be a problem for our members and for TAFEs. The ANTA funding, which was effectively cut in the period 1998-2000 under the growth through efficiencies, had a big impact locally as it did interstate. But I suppose locally the two big pressures have been both from the ACT Budget, where \$700,000 was cut last year, and the indexation was forgone. The other has been the failure, if you want to call it a failure, of the state to meet its targets for apprentices for this year.

So the growth monies that we expected to flow to the ACT did not quite flow. There still seems to be some confusion as to what extent they are flowing, and we are hopeful that there will eventually be some return of growth monies to the CIT and obviously also to the private VET providers in the territory. I also sit on the VETA board for the TLC and why the territory was unable to meet its targets in apprenticeships has been the subject of much discussion on the VETA board. I understand that there is a lot of research going on into it, and hopefully we will get some indications, some ideas, as to why we have this problem in the territory. But because of it, I guess you could say that expectations about increased funding that the CIT naturally had were not arrived at or are still sort of up in the air.

So putting the two together—the \$700,000 of what would have been indexation payments which the government did not pay, and the possible loss at least of the proportion of the growth funding that was expected—I think you probably have around about \$1 million plus that the CIT didn't get in this last year, and that is quite a lot in a small system.

THE CHAIR: How is that impacting on a day-to-day basis?

Ms Ballantyne: Tim might have a better idea of that.

Mr McNevin: I think it just continues the pressures that teachers are having to face on a day-to-day basis. We undertook a workload survey of our members last year and a lot of anecdotal evidence has been before us saying that there is an increased burden on teachers for administrative responsibility, and that leaves less and less time for teachers to focus on what they perceive to be their core business, and that is of educational delivery or teaching. That shift towards the administration of the system is largely because of the resources being withdrawn. So teachers are being asked to take up more and more of the burden of that administrative responsibility where previously that may have been able to be funded through support staff.

I think that is probably the main way in which it is manifested in our members. Workload is a fairly complex sort of issue to discuss, but perhaps one way of viewing workload is rather than looking at a two-dimensional model that deals with maybe the number of students and the amount of time you are spending with those students, to look at a third element, which is the complexity of the role of teaching—and the complexity is a function of all of those diverse tasks, and increasingly diverse tasks, that teachers are asked to do on a day-to-day basis almost simultaneously.

As support systems are withdrawn, teachers are taking up more and more of that burden, which causes them to spend more and more time engaged in those types of functions rather than lesson preparation, liaison with students or actually delivering in the classroom.

Ms Ballantyne: I think perhaps the funding situation has been exacerbated, too, by the introduction of user choice over the last five years, I suppose. It is not just the CIT which has a problem in actually delivering the program under the funding regime that is imposed on providers. The feedback I get from people who represent private group trainers and private RTOs on the VETA board is that they find the funding to be too low, and that they are also cross-subsidising from other areas of their business.

The CIT did for many years do that—cross-subsidise from other areas of business—but has had to stop that because of, I guess, the sort of auditing requirements on it as a public institution. In doing that between two and three years ago, they had to institute quite massive cuts to the number of delivery hours. They had to increase sizes of classes, a whole range of measures, to be able to actually deliver the program in the funding that was available from government. So user choice is still having a financial impact. It is also having some other impacts that Tim might like to outline, too, on the way teachers deliver.

Mr McNevin: There is an increased pressure, if you like, to deliver more and more on-the-job training. The CIT has less and less resources to deliver off the job, so there is a pressure to increase the provision of training on-job, on the job, which, on face value for those people that may be supporters of vocational education and training, may be a good thing. But in the ACT particularly, with the predominance of small employers or small business, whose core business is certainly not training, it seems to be presenting an increased burden on them because they don't have the resources either to deliver sufficient levels of training, nor do they have the resources to deliver the quality of training that is needed.

The feedback we are receiving is that training is the domain of TAFE or of the RTO and that small business are not in the business of training, and so this swing back towards delivering more and more training on the job is almost in conflict with what they would like the training providers to be doing. But TAFE is placed in a position where it really has no choice, given, as Robin said, the inadequacy of user choice funding but also, as I said before, the decreasing resource base that it has. So it is looking for alternative methods of delivery, and one of those that they choose is increasingly on the job.

MS DUNDAS: You have mentioned in your submission two points that relate to this. One is that the ACT local industry does not have training as their core business, so that on-the-job training is not necessarily resulting in the outcomes or competencies that you would expect. Is that something that you are picking up—that it is almost through necessity that the standard has had to drop?

Ms Ballantyne: Well, we have almost micro business here in the ACT. I don't have the numbers but a huge number, an overwhelming percentage, of businesses here are even

one or two-owner family businesses, and they don't have the time for the training. You could probably argue they don't have the money for training either, when they are trying to make a dollar themselves. It is really an atypical sort of state or territory. We don't have big industry groups for whom really the reformed training agenda was devised with a view to someone like McWilliams with 100 trainees in their winery in South Australia who can do in-house training and so on. It is a model that we have devised a system around which sounds good but doesn't necessarily apply in a small jurisdiction like this.

I think it is fair to say that you don't get the same input from industry, even in the apprenticeship area, that you had. It is not just me saying this: it is people from the Chamber of Commerce saying it, that there is no longer the same culture of training of apprentices that there used to be. Whether that has been brought about because of tighter times—people struggling more to make ends meet—or whether it is just that the change in the training agenda has allowed them to give up that responsibility, I don't know. But everybody speaks about a change in culture to the point where businesses don't see it necessarily as being any part of their responsibility to train the new generation, and that's a great shame.

MS DUNDAS: Another quick question I have flows on from a tangent. You mentioned the lack of a career advice provision within the CIT. I guess that is more of outcome at the end of a training package. But if you are doing on-the-job training that is not at the standard you expected or you are needing to change courses because you are doing more on-the-job training and you are finding out that it is not really the job for you, the lack of career advice would then have its impact on the continuing studies. How have you seen the reduction in the number of career advisers at CIT impact on teachers who are then having to pick up those roles, and also impact on the outcome of the students?

Mr McNevin: I think, again, there is a reduction in student support services across the board. Career advice is just one example of where that has been restricted or withdrawn or collapsed. So teachers are taking on that responsibility more and more, as you say. That creates tensions, if you like, for the teachers because they have to engage in this pastoral care role, for want of a better term. In an environment where they are struggling to find time to prepare for classes and all those sorts of things, it is increasingly difficult for teachers who care sincerely about the students that they are teaching to provide sufficient or adequate advice.

So the teachers are placed in a position of having to make a choice: do they continue to provide the level of pastoral care that they wish to for their students, or do they actually make a conscious decision that they are no longer able to do so and sort of go into some sort of triaging of their work priorities. Where they those choose to provide the pastoral care is where the workload starts to become a real issue. They are taking on responsibility for students' personal issues, their career choices, their life choices or perhaps even more diverse issues that are affecting students of very much a personal nature which they are probably not equipped nor trained to do, and nor do they have the time to do it.

MS DUNDAS: We hear a lot about how it is always that some programs with the RTOs fall or float, as Steve said earlier, on the basis of the teachers having the connections with industry to get the work placements or to provide the apprenticeships—all those kind of

things. Do you see that there is a way that that culture can change, that we can possibly give funding back to support services, so that it doesn't necessarily have to be a matter of well personally resourced teachers maintaining all these links but of the ITABs stepping up, the support services stepping up; it would work almost automatically as opposed to teachers being run ragged? How do we make this ideally work?

Ms Ballantyne: Under the system, my understanding is that the NACs really are supposed to perform the role not only of promoting the system but, in a sense, of a bit of pastoral care—certainly of apprentices and trainees. I suppose that really it seems to me they are so busy trying to run their businesses and just get the numbers on which their funding is obviously based, that the other side of it—maybe for good reason—tends to fall away.

One of the ideas we have floated—and this actually applies in Queensland—is the idea of an ombudsman for apprentices, and it could in fact be for all training. I know we are a small town and that these things are costly, but I actually did ask the VETA board a question to see if the secretariat could investigate at least the costs of that. In Queensland, every student, young person, who becomes an apprentice or trainee gets a little fridge magnet which has a number on it, as I understand, which basically says “Call this number if you have difficulties” and so on.

At the moment it is done through the secretariat of the VETA board and maybe it could continue to be done that way. But it is done in, I think, a fairly ad hoc way. It is one of the many duties of people in the secretariat and I think it would be quite nice to see it formalised in some way or at least promoted more. I don't really know whether that ought to be restricted to apprentices and trainees, as I think it is in Queensland, or whether you could see a broader role for it in the ACT—not wishing to pass that pastoral care role from teachers but to make a third and independent party maybe a first port of call for complaints.

MR PRATT: Some form of formalised quality assurance, or is it not quite that?

Ms Ballantyne: There is a lot of very formalised quality assurance going on at the moment through the auditing of RTOs and so on. I know from personal experience that it is still possible to have an employer who can treat an apprentice badly and it is very much up to the apprentice to try and deal with it and sort it out. If you have been placed there through a group training company, you may be lucky and they may change you to another employer. But an awful lot of people don't come into the system through group training companies and they are a little bit alone at the moment.

THE CHAIR: There are less and less group training companies existing—they are all going under, aren't they?

Ms Ballantyne: They are also saying that there is not enough money in it for them, too.

THE CHAIR: You have talked about—and I agree—there being an issue with problems for trainees and apprentices on the job. But sometimes there is also a problem with teachers in terms of lack of understanding or being not prepared to take on board training in respect of new concepts that have come into place. Would you agree with that? I know it is a hard thing for you to do, as the union representing these people.

Mr McNevin: The TAFE system has undergone almost a seemingly constant change for the last 10 years, and I think there is a bit of change fatigue, which is pretty understandable among those people who have been members of the TAFE teaching industry for some time. The process of managing change perhaps within the CIT is something that would be worthy of some discussion, where a bit more of the application of the concept of industrial democracy might be worthwhile to give teachers some ownership of the change rather than change being imposed upon them.

I think it is correct that there are some teachers who are reluctant to change, but that is not necessarily about placing fault with them. Rather, it is about looking at the way in which that change is introduced, the professional development that accompanies that change, and the resources that accompany that change as well. A good example, perhaps, is the Australian quality training framework which was introduced. The demands placed on teachers to meet the audit requirements of that were, in some cases, fairly excessive and there were no resources accompanying that. So it was simply an additional task that teachers had to take on over and above what they were already doing, and understandably there may well have been some resentment towards that. How that resentment manifests itself in the workplace varies as well.

Ms Ballantyne: We have also got as part of our enterprise bargaining claim a strong component of professional development for teachers, and at all levels we are putting in a claim either for X amount of dollars or time off to do it. One of the things that we have been saying for many years is that the return to industry program, which is supposed to be to keep up the skills and the currency of teachers with industry practice, has really fallen away in TAFE. There are some managers who encourage their staff very strongly to embrace it and even push them a bit because, when it is one extra thing you have to do in a year, some teachers are more reluctant than others. But we think that it is essential, really, if you are going to keep up that kind of cutting edge kind of currency that I think you are referring to.

THE CHAIR: Yes. That is good to hear. Certainly I didn't mean to make it an attack on teachers, because it is certainly not.

Ms Ballantyne: It wasn't taken that way.

THE CHAIR: Did you want to ask a question, Mr Pratt?

MR PRATT: Yes. Just going back to the previous issue about the capacity of businesses to provide on-the-job training, are you also indicating here that there seems to be a breakdown in how the suitability of these businesses to provide that sort of ongoing training is assessed, that perhaps they are not being closely assessed? They apply for X number of positions, but are they being correctly assessed on whether or not they should have the right to carry those? Is that a break in the system at the moment in the ACT?

Mr McNevin: It is hard to say. The user choice guidelines are fairly complex and you would need to be fairly heavily involved in the area to have a full understanding of how those things work. My understanding is that some of the burden for determining the

suitability of an employer again is borne by the teacher, that when they are engaging in their on-site visits they have to make some assessments around occupational health and safety, the qualifications of the people in the workplace and whether they are —

MR PRATT: Teacher capacity or—

Mr McNevin: Those sorts of things.

MR PRATT: OJT capacity.

Mr McNevin: Yes, and, again, whether a teacher is equipped to do that, both in resources or in expertise; and what are the implications of that decision for the teacher or for the RTO in the long term, I think is questionable.

THE CHAIR: Which adds to the pressure being placed on return to industry because they should be aware of those. If they are teaching these courses, they should be aware of those things when they are going out to workplaces et cetera.

Mr McNevin: Roslyn asked a question around user choice.

MS DUNDAS: No, it was about how do we fix the problem, I guess, in the short term—

Mr McNevin: Yes, and the career advisory arrangements.

MS DUNDAS: Yes. Teachers working at different levels have different pressures put on them. How do you fix the system so you can have teachers not having the excessive burden that we were just talking about, of doing all the work?

Mr McNevin: Yes, an awareness I think is where I am jumping back to. It is a matter of balance with career advisory arrangements. You could centrally fund something but people have to have an awareness of the culture of the industry and the persons within that industry. Many of those relationships are built on trust, and a belief that the person that the industry is dealing with has an awareness of the industry, has come from the industry, has credibility with the industry and those sorts of things. That capacity is largely held by the teacher and that is why they are employed.

So there would be a balance between injecting funds into some sort of central arrangement to manage those career advisory options and the relationship with industry, as well as drawing on the skill and expertise of the teacher to be able to facilitate that relationship most effectively. That is not an answer but they are the two things that I think would need to be balanced in any strategy that addressed the career advisory arrangements.

MS DUNDAS: What do you see the role of the ITABs being? In a perfect world, what would you like them to be?

Ms Ballantyne: Perhaps I could refer you to the recently released report on the ITABs that the VETA board has dealt with. In a perfect world the ITABs would have the ability, I suppose, to present all of the industry perspectives to government, so that you could have all of the voices in industry being funnelled through to help make the decisions.

We have always held the position that the industry voice is very important, but we believe that our voice in the education sector and the RTO's voice is also equally important and has been left out of the equation in recent years. But that is another story, another hobby horse, I could get onto.

But in terms of the industry, I think that what has happened in the ACT—and I guess I am taking this from the report that was released—is that some of them have done the job extremely well in very difficult circumstances, with very low funding, and others have really been struggling to do that. One can only hope that the rationalisation, if you like, of this new board—I am not quite sure of the exact name that it is going to carry—and the new way of operation might help that to happen more fully.

But there is a real problem in a small territory where you still have a large number of industries. Even though we don't cover all the industries, we still cover a huge range of industries, and how do you get all of those views? Typically, it has been said to us by our members that it is the voice of the small businessman or businessperson that is not really filtering up through the ITABs. That is probably because there simply is not time to go around and talk to the different people.

I think to think that any one industry speaks with one voice is a nonsense and I think that you would get a variety of views within the IT industry or any other industry. So it is a real problem as to whom you are representing and how you represent all the views, and what you do when you have got all of those views. How do you weight them, how do you decide whose views are more important?

THE CHAIR: If we can just move on to a slightly different area. I am interested in this, both from the perspective of how you and your members at CIT view CIT dealing with it, as well the relationship that you, as the educational union for the major public provider, have with training and adult education and ARC, the Accreditation and Registration Council. I suppose their board being the VETA board, which you are on, Robyn—

Ms Ballantyne: Tim is on ARC, so you might like to—

THE CHAIR: Yes, their relationship and where TAE, ARC et cetera can be doing a better job, and where they might be falling down.

Mr McNevin: I have been in this particular job for about 20 months or so and I have found that the relationship with TAE has improved over that period of time. I think that is as it should be, given that the AEU represents public teachers in the system and TAE is a government department. There is lots of opportunity for the AEU to have representation on various boards and committees that TAE run, and I think the awareness of TAE of the contribution that the Australian Education Union can make to those committees and boards has increased, and I think that is a positive.

I think that TAE is doing the best that it can in terms of what it believes to be the direction for setting the agenda for public education. Having said that, there is probably improved scope for the involvement of teachers actually in that decision-making process.

It is very difficult for a union perhaps to represent the views of all teachers. And in terms of the way in which change is managed, an ownership or a participation in the way in which things are implemented, teachers would probably enjoy a bit more involvement in that.

I suppose the dominant relationship between the CIT and TAE is in regards to the funding and the purchase agreement. I think that there is scope for an examination of that mechanism of funding for the CIT, to look at the way in which those purchase agreement targets are set, the way in which they are reviewed and the way in which they are adjusted. Again, I think there is a role for the ITABs there, but there is a role for a broader input into that decision-making process than there currently is.

Ms Ballantyne: Might I just add that, in terms of my union role, I sat on the Accreditation Registration Council for a few years and now I am on the VETA board, and I have no difficulty working with the TAE officers. In between those two roles when I was back working for CIT in a curriculum area, I was actually given the brief of liaising with the ITABs and with TAE. I found the ITABs to be much more approachable, and I had much better relationships with the ITAB executive officers than I was able to establish with the industry liaison officers in the department.

I know that my TLC colleague on the VETA board would put it more forcefully than that. I understand that they are busy—I certainly don't blame those individuals—but I think there have been some problems with the industry liaison role of the department. Perhaps they are alerted to that now and perhaps things will improve. But with that exception, I would say that the relationship has been reasonably friendly.

I think Tim is right in saying that teachers feel they are somewhat estranged from the department, and perhaps they are not aware of the avenues that there are for them to sit on committees and so on. It is always a bit difficult because there always is some of that feeling, whether you are talking about school teachers and their department or TAFE teachers and TAE.

THE CHAIR: Are there any final questions? Is there anything further that you want to state.

Mr McNevin: Just going back to the funding issue: it is a very complex formula that determines funding for the VET system, let alone the CIT. That is as it is, and I am not sure that we can do much about that. But one area that I think could be explored more is the level of industry investment in training in the ACT. There is a strong reliance on government and, as a public education system, that is as it should be. Industry is very quick to tell us which directions we should go but it is not necessarily prepared to put money behind those ideas. I think that is probably worth investigating, and in our submission we actually suggest that we review that.

I think the relationship also between the CIT and other education sectors is good but there is opportunity for that to be enhanced, particularly now that vocational education is looking to move into the high school sector and into colleges. I think it is important that whatever lessons have been learnt between the college and the CIT relationship get

looked at and not perhaps occur again as vocational education moves into the high school sector. An example of that may be the way in which CIT central courses are funded, where college students go to the CIT. There is some concern about the burden that those courses place on the college system, and I think that again is worthy of some examination.

One area that interests the AEU particularly is the operation of the commercial arm of the CIT—CIT Solutions. We understand why it was established but we are not sure that we necessarily support those reasons as justified. There seems to be some duplication between the CIT Solutions arm of CIT and the mainstream offerings of CIT. And that obviously, in a system that is fairly resource starved, would not seem to be the most effective use of some of those resources. So I think an examination of the relationship between CIT and CIT Solutions would be a worthwhile thing to do. They would be the only other things that I would like to add.

THE CHAIR: This is the second time that you have appeared before us and we thank you again for your time.

Short adjournment

THE CHAIR: You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by Assembly as a serious matter.

Please state your names and positions and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today.

VAUGHAN STEWART CROUCHER and

ROD BRIGHTMAN

were called.

Mr Croucher: I'm Vaughan Croucher, Dean, Learning Services, Canberra Institute of Technology. I'm here representing the Director of CIT, Peter Veenker, who sends his apologies because he has a previous engagement.

Mr Brightman: I am Rod Brightman, Senior Manager, Institute Directorate. I am also representing Peter.

THE CHAIR: We have received a submission from CIT. Do you want to start with a general thing?

Mr Croucher: It wasn't my intention to go through the submission in great detail, and you've indicated you are possibly going to visit CIT.

THE CHAIR: We're hoping to, yes.

Mr Croucher: So there might be another opportunity to tease out some things. What I thought I'd do is emphasise a couple of key issues for CIT with respect to the inquiry and then invite questions on any aspects and, if you wanted me to, elaborate on those issues. What we attempted to do in the submission was provide some background on the institute and its role within VET in the ACT and nationally. One key message is to assert the role and value of the technical and further education system.

People at CIT are extremely proud of the institute. We see it as characterised by quality, innovation, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness. I hope that in the submission we provided we've illustrated how each of those occurs. Particularly with respect to efficiency and effectiveness, we can point to a number of local and national measures which demonstrate the efficiencies we've achieved in terms of cost reductions and increasing our outputs over time. The statistics are provided in the paper, and they're backed up by the statistics that appear in the Australian National Training Authority's annual report.

MS DUNDAS: Where did the statistics in your submission come from?

Mr Croucher: They're drawn from our annual report. Most of them are raw data. One of the issues that you've probably had to grapple with is the variety of VET statistics that are used and the whole host of different measures, which is why we try and confine ourselves to those which are readily available and published, such as in our annual report or in ANTA's annual report. Essentially, they demonstrate that we have been achieving efficiencies and that in many respects we're doing better than the national average. That is one key message: asserting what we see is the value of TAFE and the integrity of CIT.

In terms of the inquiry, the key message we would like to deliver is that VET in the ACT would benefit from greater flexibility. There are several ways we've tried to set out that this might be the case. One of the principal things that we would urge some reconsideration of is the purchaser/provider model. In the submission we indicated that it's clearly being looked at in terms of the health system, not just in the ACT but in other jurisdictions. We'd argue that there are benefits in revisiting that with respect to VET. It goes along with what we see now as a broader interpretation of the capacity of VET to assist in community development and in the general economic development in the community.

As we've identified it here, we see some constraints in the narrow interpretation of what CIT is able to do. Linked to that is some flexibility within the competitive training market as well. It is a question of whether, in a small jurisdiction such as the ACT, trying to duplicate the extent of competition that has been adopted in the large states would be effective for a small jurisdiction.

The first area of flexibility is revisiting that purchaser/provider model. As we advocated in the submission, our preference would be for some sort of service level agreement. But essentially what sits behind this is seeing ourselves in partnership with government. After all, CIT is a community-owned resource that, one would hope, the ACT community is very proud of, and we want to see it in a position to deliver the maximum of its capability, and we want to see VET administered in a way that allows it to.

That notion of looking at a more flexible arrangement for purchasing might also support broadening the scope of CIT, particularly with what the Australian National Training Authority is doing at the moment. You may be aware that they're holding national consultations to support the development of their new strategic plan. Along with that, there's quite a lot of consideration of the scope that VET has within the economy and particularly the role that TAFE should play.

We would advocate a broad interpretation of the role of TAFE within the community. In the past ANTA declared TAFE an industry-led system and therefore treated industry as the chief client of the system. We would advocate that learners are also important clients of the system and because of that you need a more flexible way of treating the purchase arrangements.

At the moment we have a particular profile, which is based on a range of industry advice. What we'd be advocating is going somewhat beyond that. We still need to address issues that are identified in planning: the industry needs of the ACT and also some broad community needs. But what we would focus on is what learners need and particularly

how CIT can work within a collaborative and cooperative model, building partnerships to address either currently emerging needs or future needs. At the moment, because our planning processes tend to be based on past history, in our view there isn't sufficient capacity to be forward looking with them. That is a second area of flexibility we'll be looking at.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to expand on past history now, or do you want to talk about it later? I've got a certain amount of understanding, but I don't know that the other members of the committee do in terms of funding models and what they are based on.

Mr Croucher: Can I come to that in a moment? I'll just finish what my key points are and, if you remind me, I'll come back to that.

THE CHAIR: That's fine.

Mr Croucher: The notion is that we'd like some flexibility in expanding the scope of our operations. As we've indicated in here, sometimes that's going beyond training packages. We've already done that. We've developed particular curricula going beyond the training packages, which have often identified needs that are broad community needs. Examples are in forensics, with our degree in forensic science—once again, it goes beyond training packages—and in design and our degree there. We see those as important for flexibility and we also see that they address real needs in the community—particularly those examples. That's the kind of flexibility we'd like to build on.

Mr Brightman: We are also starting to get involved in emerging areas such as photonics, which you can't predict more than a couple of years in advance. Being able to get in and get the groundswell going and the foundations developed, you're there ready to leap into it when it takes off.

Mr Croucher: The implication in terms of planning and policy is that we'd like to see ourselves as a partner with government, and the purchaser/provider model in some respects provides a barrier to that. We'd like a model where we are more of a partner in the VET planning and policy role, both locally and nationally. As we pointed out in the submission, at the moment there's little opportunity for us to have input into the national agenda through the ACT government submissions. As we've pointed out, we don't get the ANTA MINCO minutes and so on. We're not generally involved in those briefings.

This would seem a logical extension to me. CIT, although by national standards a medium-sized institute, has quite a high national profile. The incidence of our degrees is one which gives us that profile. In our link with the University of Canberra, I'd say we're unique in that regard. We administer a couple of national projects, which are very influential in the VET system. The example I'd give here is the Flexible Learning Advisory Group.

The Australian National Training Authority has a blueprint for VET for building Australia's capacity for flexible delivery through a whole range of programs, including professional development, marketing, increased online resources and access to it, enhanced standards of online resources and increased management capacity. We're managing the project—on communication and policy around that—through CIT, so it

has a huge influence nationally. It is one we've taken on this year, and it is about \$3 million worth of projects. In the past we managed the flexible learning leaders, which was a really key national project looking at the quality of VET and trying to identify champions within the system.

You may have seen the reference in here to lifelong learning and learning communities. We are attempting to provide a lead in the ACT with the newly established ACT learning community committee, through the Adult Community Education advisory committee. We've also taken a lead in trying to draw together a number of TAFE institutes nationally that are working in that learning community context.

Another example of where I think we play a major and significant national role is through our research unit, the Centre Undertaking Research in Vocational Education. That is a small unit within my division, but it has an extremely strong national reputation. It has picked up a lot of work on behalf of both the Australian National Training Authority and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. At the moment I think it is the only TAFE institute that's actually working with universities in VET research, and we've established a VET research node.

They're just some examples of where CIT definitely exerts an influence on the national agenda operationally, and we would like to see that reflected through opportunities to influence the ACT policy and planning process.

The last area of flexibility I wanted to touch on was having purchase arrangements that allow us greater opportunities for cooperation and collaboration to support lifelong learning in the community. We can point to a number of collaborations in the ACT that are beneficial for the ACT community and for CIT. For example, we have a memorandum of understanding with the National Museum, and we've provided support for their professional development programs. But it has also been a great benefit for our students. These could be communication students, who've been involved in a lot of the multimedia work, or they could be conservation students from our faculty of design.

Our indigenous students were very involved in the Tracking Culture program last year, and we've managed to tap into the indigenous unit at the National Museum. We're looking at Margo Neale's involvement in developing an artists' cooperative for indigenous students at CIT, so that once they've finished some of their basic design work we can provide an opportunity for them to foster their development as artists and maintain a link with CIT, even though they're not studying there. That's just one example of a partnership that we see as having mutual benefits in the community.

Another example is the work that our communication and new media unit has done with the National Folk Festival. Over a number of years that's grown in prominence so that now the work the unit did filming it each year was shown on ABC Television.

Similarly, our link with the University of Canberra is one of the strongest between a TAFE institute and a university in terms of articulation arrangements, pathways and so on. It's now quite a mature relationship. We have a joint status committee, which

continues to work on pathways issues for students. We're trying to negotiate the best deal for our students, and we produce a pathways booklet which sets that out. They're just a couple of examples of the sort of collaboration we would like the opportunity to expand.

Our Dean of Business and Information Technology, Peter LeCornu, is a member of the ACT Knowledge Based Economy Board, which is a recognition that the institute does have something to offer in this regard. It is the sort of relationship we would like to have with government and its advisory bodies that we think would be advantageous for us in terms of the extent to which CIT is able to contribute to the regional economy.

Those were the key messages in our submission. Madam Chair, you wanted to return to the history of the planning issue.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Croucher: The planning mechanism in the ACT tries to draw advice and information from many sources: the industry training advisory boards; CIT—about our own measures of need and demand; from professional bodies; industry and business groups; and government itself—on its own economic priorities, which are sometimes delivered, sometimes not. The Impulse Airlines situation is an example of one that didn't come to fruition.

Obviously, there is the opportunity for the general community to contribute to the ACT planning mechanism, and it also draws a lot on various labour market statistics. In the past they used Access Economics as a source of professional advice. That has ceased now and they're tending to use the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and their statistics as workplace advice.

The key view is that most of that looks at what has been, and the fact that it's quite involved inevitably reduces the capacity to start looking ahead. The capacity to look ahead, particularly in terms of regional economic development, probably requires a relationship with Chief Minister's Department, as the aspirations for the ACT in its regional development are expressed there.

From my personal perspective, most of those aspirations were reflected at the end of the ACT VET training plan as ACT government priorities, and there have been three or four of them. Invariably, the airport is invoked as a potential priority in the future, and I think light rail even got a guernsey at one stage. We'd like to see that as a somewhat more substantial view of what is likely to happen in the region and of how CIT can help shape the future rather than simply address existing needs.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions?

MS DUNDAS: Let's talk about resources as one topic. There has been a lot of concern that providers have had to do more with less—"coping with efficiencies", or whatever the program was called.

Mr Croucher: Growth through efficiencies.

MS DUNDAS: Yes, sorry. Your statistics show that you've had increasing numbers of enrolments. At what point does the stretch on resourcing have an impact?

Mr Croucher: We'd say it is having an impact. Whilst we've been able to maintain our output, we've got to look at what gets cut back: the opportunity to develop new programs, our capacity to contribute to regional economic development and look at emerging needs in the future and our capacity to innovate.

For example, the level of resources we can invest in flexible learning, particularly online training and upgrading our systems, would suffer—and the amount we can put into professional development for that. There is an impact on the amount we can put into our own research. The research that I mentioned sits within my division, and I think they do a mighty job. But let's be very clear: they do it because they manage to win a lot of outside work. If that were to cease, our capacity for research would shrink. We would argue that it is those things that you are not able to develop in a tight resource situation.

Mr Brightman: There is also an impact on the support we can provide to the teachers in the way of ancillary, technical or administrative staff, which means that teachers or the heads of department have to pick up more of a load. Over the six years that we've had the cuts we've found it's been getting tighter and tighter. Heads of department have one of the hardest jobs within the institute.

MS DUNDAS: You said earlier that the key clients were industry and the students. How is the resourcing issue impacting on them?

Mr Croucher: I was pointing out ANTA's view that it was an industry-led system. Inevitably, we want to make sure that the resources are directed to our current and prospective students and to supporting our staff. It's the capacity to look to the future which often suffers—for example, how long it's taken us to rework our web sites, which is quite a demanding task in terms of human resources. Ideally, we'd like to provide much better electronic services to students, but we're not able to do that. We have benefited from some ACT government funding—for example, to set up our online campus. But when you compare what we're able to offer with other systems, it really is pretty small-scale.

MS DUNDAS: If teachers are being asked to do more with less and students are not getting as much as they could because the resources aren't there, what's the flow-on impact on students then going out into the industry after they've received the training?

Mr Croucher: I don't know that you can generalise about the "more with less". What I'm saying is that it actually inhibits innovation and the development of new programs. We've clearly demonstrated that we're able to maintain quality and standards, and when you look at our statistics for client satisfaction—of students and employers—we have demonstrably maintained those standards. The issue is our capacity to be something more than that.

MS DUNDAS: So what will suffer are future industries?

Mr Croucher: Yes. You're not directing your priorities into things that look ahead. An example of that would be electronic services for students compared with what universities are able to offer, even in terms of our electronic resources through the library. We're not happy with the age of our collection in the library; we'd prefer it was a much younger one.

THE CHAIR: You talked about the articulation between CIT and the University of Canberra. Did you talk about articulation between colleges and CIT?

Mr Croucher: No, I didn't mention that. We see a partnership with schools as very important. Along with the training and adult education branch and the department of education, the CIT has been focusing a lot on VET in schools, particularly what CIT's role should be. We've set up some fairly close consultation with the schools around that.

We're also just setting up a bit of work monitoring the flow-on from schools or colleges to CIT, and the statistics are quite interesting. You may not be able to quote me on this, but the indications are that there is a decline in that. We noticed that there seems to be a pattern of deferral as well. Whilst you might not have the same numbers flowing on straight after year 12, the year 12 cohort tends to be spread out over three years and eventually coming to CIT. We don't have sufficient statistics to say anything definite about this; it is just something I noticed now that we've begun to look at it. A question was definitely raised about numbers flowing on to CIT.

We see VET as having an important role in schools because it establishes a pathway for students who are interested in CIT—although not all students, even if they undertake a VET course at school, necessarily regard CIT as the pathway. There are a number of pathways; they could go directly into the workforce. We're trying to work a lot more closely with the school careers counsellors. In fact, last year we convened a meeting of all of the careers counsellors for the ACT, in government and non-government schools, and asked them: how can we help you to do your job?

Out of that have flowed some key initiatives, one being that we've got a central point of contact to enable them to book sessions. We determine whether a school is asking for generic promotion of CIT, in which case there is an area that supports that, or whether it has students with particular interests, in which case we usually refer it to the faculties. We've been trying to expedite things by providing resources to them online and allowing them to give feedback on the way the CIT assembles its information—for example, the level of detail in the handbook—trying to anticipate future needs.

THE CHAIR: Does the pathways booklet you mentioned talk about articulation pathways between college and CIT or only between CIT and UC?

Mr Croucher: No, between CIT and further education institutions. In a sense, the CIT handbook is also something of a pathways document for school leavers—a pretty daunting one.

THE CHAIR: But not necessarily a clear one.

Mr Croucher: The reason we've been working with the careers counsellors is to ask: exactly what do you want? That way we can target information to them.

MS DUNDAS: On the public perception of VET and CIT—specifically, VET and its impact on CIT—most teachers in the schools themselves had to go to university, so university is put up on a higher standard. What is the impact of that on your ability to attract students, and what have you been doing to counter it? Do you believe there is a perception out there that VET is the lesser of the educational strains?

Mr Croucher: I agree.

Mr Brightman: Our people from the CIT Student Association will probably comment on that later. Recently there was a situation where some students, because they weren't planning to go on to university, spoke to the careers adviser from one of the local colleges. They asked what the options were, and CIT wasn't mentioned. The students went off and actually got that information themselves.

That was about two years ago. In the last year, as Vaughan indicated, we have made a real effort to work more closely with the careers advisers. One of the priorities this year of our new external relations unit for teacher marketing is to focus on that—how we can develop an interaction with the careers advisers so that they put CIT, and TAFE in general, up there with the universities for people who indicate that they don't necessarily want to go on to university. Of course, TAFE can be a stepping stone to uni as well.

MR PRATT: But in terms of the overall ACT VET strategy and the partnership between high schools and colleges—principally colleges—and CIT, clearly there needs to be a better co-ordinated, overarching strategy to get the pathway links, which might start in year 10, to lead logically through to CIT, if CIT is able to provide what those students need. So what further resources are needed to tidy up that partnership? What are you lacking in being able to help encourage that marriage?

Mr Croucher: Principally, we lack human resources. But it also goes back to the role I was trying to describe of being a partner with government. If you look at VET in the school—

MR PRATT: So it's more than resources; it's also a management change.

Mr Croucher: It is. I agree. That's a valid perception in the ACT. If you look at the profile of the ACT, you'll see that there are more people with higher education qualifications here. Most parents would aspire to the same level of education for their children; they possibly wouldn't be looking at TAFE as the first option.

What we're saying is that there's a role in educating people about CIT. After all, our pathways now include the full spectrum of the AQF, up to degrees. There are quite attractive pathways. In a sense it's an education role, a marketing role to let people know what the options and the advantages are of TAFE. It also works at the other end. We're starting to see university graduates coming to CIT for a much sharper vocational focus in assisting them with their careers as well.

But if you look at the resources that apply to VET in schools at the moment, they're only a couple of officers within TAE, and they feel very stretched. A few more people need to be able to support that.

To give a practical example of trying to work closely with college careers counsellors, we have one careers counsellor for CIT, and that person is supporting our own students, trying to work with schools and trying to facilitate the faculties being in touch with schools. If that reflects our capacity to address these perceptions just in the school community, and even just amongst teachers, you can see how many more resources we would need to apply if we wanted to go beyond that.

MS DUNDAS: So, the careers counsellor at CIT has the role not only of helping students at the institute find the right career path with the courses that they're doing; they are also supporting career advisers in the colleges and high schools by filling them in with information.

Mr Croucher: It's a facilitation role. Most of that direct advice comes from the faculties because they're the ones closest to the program. Our careers adviser is helping CIT set up the careers expo and Tertiary to Work.

MS DUNDAS: How many students does one careers adviser service?

Mr Brightman: This year, in total, just under 20,000. But we've got publicly funded students—about 14,500.

Mr Croucher: You have to remember that that is the designated career position. Often the people best placed to provide direct career advice on a specific industry area are the teachers and heads of department. You can't really discount them as part of the career advisory process, because they're the ones who have the close industry links.

Mr Brightman: They will use their local knowledge and local contacts with the children who are in school to liaise with careers advisers. They'll attend the careers markets and give up some of their time to do that. It is additional duties but, as Vaughan said, they are the people most suited to talk about a particular discipline in many cases.

MR PRATT: A lot more needs to be done at the strategic level of identifying the ACT's training needs. You believe you must have a much greater role in the exercise of shaping what the needs are and determining the training plan, and there's a long way to go on that. That's what you're saying, isn't it? You simply don't have much of a role to play at all in strategic ACT planning?

Mr Croucher: We have a role that derives from our status as a registered training organisation from whom the government purchases services. Under the current model, we're obliged to be treated as any other registered training organisation, albeit the biggest.

THE CHAIR: I think it is a little simplistic not to acknowledge that the CIT has a unique place amongst the RTOs in Canberra. I know that the pressure has been on, but they still have a unique place. If people think about doing a course, the first set place that comes to mind is CIT. It's not XYZ private provider out there.

Mr Croucher: In terms of the planning process, the sort of advice that is normally sought from CIT is on our historical need-and-demand figures—what has been delivered and what programs we've provided—rather than broader policy advice.

MR PRATT: The five-year plan, or whatever.

Mr Croucher: Another key thing we'd be advocating is that, rather than a 12-month purchase schedule, you would be looking at, say, a three-year plan.

THE CHAIR: How long have we been advocating that for now, Vaughan?

Mr Croucher: Some time.

Mr Brightman: Many years.

THE CHAIR: We're going to have to wrap this up, but just briefly, and please don't take this as a criticism, I'd be interested to know from both of you what areas in CIT could be done better.

Mr Croucher: Everything can be something better is the short answer. If you were to ask staff at CIT, it would probably be their capacity to work with industry and to work more closely with different industry groups and employers. Where you tend to feel this is in the areas of work-based learning, particularly traineeships and apprenticeships. Our cost structures are such that it is a very expensive exercise to get out and work with small numbers of students in dispersed workplaces. I'm sure that teachers working in that environment would identify that as an area where they'd appreciate some greater flexibility and probably more resources to cope.

I've got a bit of a bee in my bonnet about how we're managing to keep up with electronic services for students and what we're able to provide there. Our view of the most desirable delivery situation is blended delivery. We're not committed to a vision which moves everything towards online learning; our view is that you need to blend those options and provide a choice for students. We'd like to provide greater choice, and sometimes that means duplication so that there are choices available.

Mr Brightman: I think it is the issue we've been discussing: a better liaison with the schools sector to provide pathways for the students to see that college-university is not the only direction they could look at. There should also be the option to look at college-CIT-work and then university. Those options aren't currently out there in many people's minds.

Mr Croucher: The final area where we'd like to be doing better—particularly with disadvantaged target groups—is that of indigenous students. It is an area we've already

identified where we want to increase our enrolments. You might be aware that we've recently introduced an indigenous student scholarship scheme as one step towards that. We want to not only increase the enrolments but also increase the level at which students are studying, which means higher level qualifications. To support that we need to lift the number of indigenous staff members at CIT.

THE CHAIR: We're going to have to call it quits for today. As I said, we'll be coming to visit you in the next few weeks, and we'd like to pursue further questions when we come and visit. I look forward to visiting the Reid campus soon.

Mr Croucher: Thank you for the opportunity to come and talk to you. We'd be delighted to host a meeting.

MICHAEL AXELSEN and

ELAINE WALLS

were called.

THE CHAIR: I welcome Mr Axelsen and Ms Walls. I presume you heard me reading the statement before and that I don't need to read it again?

Mr Axelsen: Yes.

THE CHAIR: For the record, would you please state your name and the capacity in which you appear today?

Ms Walls: My name's Elaine Walls and I'm the Student Services Coordinator at the CIT Student Association.

Mr Axelsen: I'm Michael Axelsen and I'm the Finance and Commercial Services Coordinator for the CIT Student Association.

Ms Walls: We've tried to stick to your terms of reference. We're not challenging CIT's educational position. We'd like to talk about things that surround it. As the Student Association works always with students, our perspective will be a student perspective not a bureaucrat perspective.

The first thing we want to say about the effectiveness is that we think the effectiveness of the administration of CIT is hindered by the multicampuses; we've said that before. We find operating on five campuses expensive, inefficient and difficult. Since we spoke to you once before, we've seen the closure of the Watson campus and that group of students from the Faculty of Design moved to Reid two years ago. It has been a really positive transition for that group of students. We've seen the resources redirected to Reid. The students have benefited from a larger student body and from the resources that that larger campus provides.

We always struggle with the dilemma of the equitable services that we can deliver and we know the same applies to CIT. We've got really under-resourced libraries on all campuses at CIT and it's because it is spread over five campuses. Our Fyshwick campus doesn't even have a campus librarian; it's run by an admin officer.

You asked earlier what effect the growth efficiencies have had over the last six years. They have had a tremendous effect on resources. We've seen the facilities budget reduced. We have poor maintenance. We have libraries that have collections that are well below national benchmarks, to the point where we've looked at giving Student Association grants over a five-year period to all libraries. A dilemma for both us and CIT has been about where to spread those resources.

MS DUNDAS: This is the information I was trying to get to before. What impact is that having on the students and their learning?

Ms Walls: I'm sure it has had a huge impact over that period of time. I think the question was answered to the effect that there's been no effect on the outcome of the skill, and I think that's true. But I do think that there's a lot more self-directed learning, less face-to-face teaching. The library resources are definitely the poorest I've ever seen, and the librarians will testify to that.

As for outdoor facilities, come and have a look how many tables and chairs there are to sit on at Reid. There's probably seating for about 80 people on a campus that has 5,000. Maybe CIT makes the right decisions in directing those resources into educational needs rather than facilities, but we may not look as good as we need to look for a campus that delivers excellent education. Maybe that's where our image lies: it looks run-down. The design school is a new building; it might be a showpiece. Reid campus is an old campus with not a lot of resources to show off.

Mr Axelsen: I can't say any more, Elaine. That was just fantastic. It was interesting for us to sit and hear their perspective. We kept thinking that we're almost on the other side of that. While recognising that CIT have done a fantastic job educationally, they've had to withstand the budget cuts by transferring their money internally, and that has really affected a lot of other things on campus.

Elaine alluded to the maintenance. The building maintenance budget for the campus was cut by 20 per cent a few years ago, just to cover the general day-to-day maintenance, not bigger budget items. When little airconditioning units go bung, that's a couple of grand straightaway. So there were those sorts of problems and there was no choice in doing those things.

The administration of the education is quite good. We have some other comments we're going to make about that later, but in our opinion growth through efficiency can be achieved by looking at reducing the number of campuses. That would have an immediate effect without changing the budget for them—as long as they kept getting the same budget allocations. We have to stress that.

MS DUNDAS: Do you think the facility has been run down and the lack of welfare support, to use that term, is not helping the perception problem of VET and CIT?

Ms Walls: The perception thing has always puzzled me. I think it's historical.

MR PRATT: It's national too.

Ms Walls: Yes, it is. We were asked the same question a week ago by Nelson's adviser, Zoe Mackenzie. My response was that the perception and the reality are not the same.

MR PRATT: Yes, it's an unnecessary stigma that arose about a decade ago.

Ms Walls: It is. I don't think it would matter how good that sector got, people still have a perception of TAFE as the last choice—not the second choice but the last choice. That was reinforced last week when we spoke with a group of year 12 students who said that they were not advised about CIT courses in their secondary program. She said she was

encouraged to do the Headstart program at UC because she didn't have a UAI high enough to get her straight into a university course. She wasn't given any alternatives by her school counsellor. It surprised me because—and we've written it here—CIT's promotion of themselves is quite good. They have a newspaper campaign, they have a television campaign, they're involved in the careers market and they do Tertiary to Work. I do think the relationship with the secondary colleges has dwindled. We used to be involved in them.

THE CHAIR: Over what period?

Ms Walls: Over the last three or four years. We used to go to Goulburn, Crookwell. We used to do a regional tour with the careers advisers—I've been to Goulburn with students—but we don't do that any more. Everyone's lobbying for the same group. ANU would be there, UC would be there, Sydney uni would be there. We've all got the same target market. But under these efficiencies CIT has probably redirected that money. There used to be two full-time careers advisers; there are now two part-time careers advisers. I know Vaughan said that every teacher is a careers adviser but it's not that specific. You're talking about—

MR PRATT: Well, it's a specialist job.

Ms Walls: I think it's done department by department. If perhaps a department has a shortfall in student numbers they will go to a college and promote their course.

Mr Axelsen: Particularly where a VET course is running at that college they're able to pick up people moving in. Maybe that's an appropriate thing to do: if you've got a shortfall in enrolments, you hunt for that group of students. If it's IT, what's the point of pushing IT if you can't place the students anyway because there's no unmet demand?

MS DUNDAS: To pick up on something you just said, a link between what's happening in CIT and what's happening with VET in schools isn't as strong as it could be either.

Mr Axelsen: Possibly not.

Ms Walls: I think you raised the issue that a careers adviser is not promoting the TAFE sector. I think it's a bit of both.

MR PRATT: I just think it's a broader problem. I think the ACT has got to recognise the worth of VET and the roles that CIT play in all that. It's not just CIT's problem; it's a government, departmental and community problem to sell to kids that when they're in year 10 they'd better start determining what pathway they're going to pursue. "And, by the way, for some of you a CIT pathway is absolutely the best for you, with perhaps university later" et cetera. Would you agree with that statement?

Ms Walls: I still think you have to think of it as a first choice, not as an alternative or a pathway even. You have to look at what sort of courses TAFEs are offering, and they're offering qualifications. You don't need to supplement it. You don't need to think about another option. You need to think about whether that's your choice. It always seems to be given as an option for kids who don't make it. Why not decide whether the course is what you want to do?

THE CHAIR: It's the failures' option. It has been treated as the failures' option.

Ms Walls: It is. It needs a new image nationally.

MS DUNDAS: But is that still happening with the strong pushes towards VET in schools? The VET program across year 12—

THE CHAIR: A better question is: do you think there is a strong push towards VET in schools?

MS DUNDAS: Well, compared to where it was 10 years ago, VET has become a very strong component of the school system.

MR PRATT: Or is it just starting and it hasn't quite matured?

Ms Walls: I know that there is VET in schools and I assume that those students who choose to do certificates I and II in schools know that they can go on to the TAFE sector. It's the other group that need to know.

MR PRATT: Do you know whether schools are providing student and career counselling in those middle high school years to make sure that kids know that?

Ms Walls: I've been to the careers market and my observation of it is that it's mostly high school kids who go to that careers markets and check it out. There are busloads of kids from year 10 who wander around. I'm not sure that they're really that interested in a career in years 9 or 10 either.

MR PRATT: So you don't have confidence that high schools have got those careers counselling structures in place to manage pathways and to make sure that kids are fully aware of what CIT has to offer?

Mr Axelsen: I don't know if we can comment but, given what we know, we're not sure. Having listened to what Vaughan was saying before about the program they've implemented in secondary colleges, we know that only last week a young woman told us that her counsellors didn't give her the option at all. It was her father who pointed out to her: "Did you know there's this alternative?"

Ms Walls: The focus, if they don't get a high enough UAI score, is that they can do the Headstart program at UC. Obviously, the focus is still on a degree program for most year 12s, not a TAFE diploma or degree or a vocational qualification, which are equally viable.

MR PRATT: Or a CIT as a bridging option before going to university.

Mr Axelsen: There's a range of options, isn't there!

Ms Walls: One of my issues is then: why is the TAFE sector not in the tertiary sector anyway? By definition, there's secondary, there's tertiary and there's TAFE in the

middle. We've been in no-man's-land forever. We're not anywhere. We're not higher ed, but we're not secondary. We're post secondary. It's like being post war; we just haven't got anything. We don't really fit anywhere with any self-esteem. It might help if we had a better image of what our role is nationally. We said this to Zoe Mackenzie last week. Why are we nowhere? They talk about tertiary and secondary—and then there's TAFE. It's as though they forget about the people in the middle.

THE CHAIR: I know that you, Michael, have been involved with the CIT Student Association for over a decade now—close to two decades—and that puts us, and CIT, in the very valuable position of having your historical knowledge. I know the CIT Student Association previously was a lot more active in representing its students and going out and lobbying, which is quite clearly still happening because you're here today and you've been to see the federal minister about issues. Do you think that's unique for TAFE student associations?

Mr Axelsen: Absolutely. In Australia, there are probably only four or five active student organisations like ours. Ours is a student service based lobby group. There's one in Wollongong TAFE that was set up probably about the same time as we were, 25 years or so ago. There are two in Sydney that I'm aware of, and in Victoria there's an organisation that represents students and apprentices that is quite an active group. But they don't provide services either; they are purely a lobby group.

MS DUNDAS: That's VTSAN?

Mr Axelsen: Yes, VTSAN.

Ms Walls: CITSA was incorporated in 1972.

Mr Axelsen: It was some time in the 1970s, so we've been around for a long time and have grown and developed in different ways. We now provide a lot of university type services, and we're definitely in a unique position in the country.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, I'm hogging the questions here. Elaine, you were talking about having fewer campuses in order to provide better services. How do you marry that with the issue of accessibility to courses and campuses? At the moment we have a flexible learning centre down at Tuggeranong, we don't have a campus at Gungahlin and getting to Belconnen or Reid is not always easy.

Ms Walls: I don't think accessibility comes into it, because our campuses are based on courses. If you live in Tuggeranong and you want to do something at Bruce, you go there. We have students travelling to Watson from Gilmore. It's not as if we have everything at the closest campus. You go where the course is offered.

MR PRATT: I presume that CIT can't manage it any other way, can it?

Ms Walls: No way—because we have to concentrate those resources.

MR PRATT: You need to specialise and focus resources.

Mr Axelsen: No, and in fact it's a duplication of teaching resources then. Prior to self-government, there were three TAFE colleges in Canberra: Bruce, Reid and I think it was called Woden in those days. Those places often ran courses in opposition to each other. They all ran secretarial studies type courses and year 12 or year 10 equivalent courses against each other. The first thing that happened with the Institute of TAFE, as it was first called, was that they amalgamated as many as those as possible to save money immediately, and I suppose we are still going through that process.

Ms Walls: I don't place importance on accessibility any more. Ten years ago it might have been an issue, but we've got kids who pay \$11 a day to travel from Queanbeyan to Bruce with a private bus company.

Mr Axelsen: I don't think it's an issue at all. It is if you live there and want a campus, but it needs to be explained that that doesn't really come into it.

MS DUNDAS: Coming back to the terms of reference, which are the better services? Where is the unmet need being addressed through CIT?

Mr Axelsen: CIT offers a huge range of services to students. This is going down to number 3: unmet needs and gaps. It offers a large range of support services through its student services unit, which is in Vaughan's area. They've got equity units, counselling, child care, employment service, peer tutoring, disability support and career support. I had to stop then. I was writing them down flat out, and I thought, "There's more than that, as well."

We're concerned that the other RTOs can't offer that sort of support either, and it becomes very difficult for some of the smaller organisations to offer that range of support for students. They can also come through the student organisation. We have a range of loans we advocate for students. We have our own free accommodation service and employment service as well, which offer different things. There are positives experiences in the student life we are able to offer those students.

You can't support every student, Roslyn. The disability unit is a fantastic service at CIT, there's no doubt about that. But sometimes people don't want to take advantage of that either. The number of support services has increased over the last few years because there's been seen to be a need for a range of services and I think they've settled into a fairly good pattern. There are counselling units pretty well in all the three major campuses. From our experience, we're often the first port of call for students in need.

THE CHAIR: Danusha Cubillo was in here before. She wasn't talking so much about CIT as her traineeship and the need for mentors, especially within the Aboriginal training area. What sort of mentoring or services for Aboriginal students are you aware of at CIT?

Ms Walls: The Yurauna Centre exists purely for that group. It's a really difficult one, the Yurauna Centre. I'm not sure whether it provides the service that the client needs. I'm not sure whether anyone knows what the indigenous community really needs out of education. It's better to have something there to provide support. It's an intense unit,

with its caring role for students and its support for them through its programs. I think they're the mentors on campus. Most of the students stay in that unit, and every aspect of their education is monitored by the indigenous staff.

We have quite a lot to do with them because we support the students financially, and we try and integrate them socially into our recreational programs. But I just don't know whether anyone's got the answer to increasing the number of indigenous students. I don't know what sort of support they have when they leave and go into a traineeship.

MR PRATT: From what Danusha was saying earlier, mentoring is by far the most important support mechanism required. So I guess the question is whether that particular centre is able to provide adequate mentoring.

Ms Walls: It does it on campus with its—

MS DUNDAS: Across the whole campus body, though, for the whole student population, do you think that mentoring services are what they need to be?

Mr Axelsen: There's a peer tutoring service, but I don't think that covers it, does it?

MS DUNDAS: But do you think the general student population is looking for mentors to help them?

Ms Walls: In what way? Do you mean someone who will take them on within the workplace or within their education?

MS DUNDAS: Maybe it does link back to the careers situation. With one careers adviser for the entire student population and teachers taking on the burden of—as somebody else put it—pastoral care, do you think we need to resource the teachers better so that they can do that or set up another group of people on the campus or maybe give more money to the careers advisers so there are more people there?

Ms Walls: It is probably the area that would have dwindled. Teachers were mentors in the past. I know that there are pastoral care teachers allocated for international students, and that's something that happens within CIT. The way international students are integrated is quite intensively monitored, but the general population would only have access to pastoral care if the teacher had the time. As far as I know, it's not an official role of a teacher.

Mr Axelsen: Some students see the counsellors regularly for the same sort of encouragement. It becomes part of their program to book in once a week to go. It might have started out of one need, and then it becomes the need for a person able to give them encouragement, reinforce their classroom information and keep them going.

THE CHAIR: Speaking of teachers, how do you think the teaching population at CIT has changed? Do you think there's been any change? Do you think there are any issues with recruiting teachers?

Mr Axelsen: There have been groups of teachers on short-term contracts.

Ms Walls: There's been an exodus of teachers hitting 54 and 11 months, which is a bit tragic for some but not for others. Perhaps for some students it is tragic because they've lost a lot of corporate knowledge and history, but maybe for others it is timely. If these are replaced by more industry-relevant, younger teachers, that's preferable. That is emerging in some areas. I know that the fashion design course has now got much younger and more industry-trained teachers, which is good because it gives people a chance to get in. The profile will change gradually. We've got that bulge—50-year-olds and over who have been there for ever.

Mr Axelsen: Twenty years or so, Karin!

Ms Walls: One thing I find good is that we've got students who are graduating from degree courses who say they'd like to be TAFE teachers. I find it extraordinarily positive that a graduate wants to do that. We've got two students doing the grad dip ed at UC this year.

THE CHAIR: I haven't heard that before, and it's always nice to hear that sort of stuff.

Ms Walls: It's something we haven't seen, because the degree courses are only three or four years old. People haven't thought about what to do with them other than the vocational part.

THE CHAIR: You talked about industry-relevant teachers, and there is another area I'd like to ask your opinion on. I will make a statement, and then you can agree or disagree and argue with me on the merits of the statement.

I believe that CIT has failed to perform in the area of traineeships and apprenticeships, and this is partly because providing pastoral care for students out in the workforce has been put in the too-hard basket. One of the biggest problems facing CIT is that they're not keeping up to date with the fact that people in the industry don't necessarily want to send their trainee off. They don't want them sitting in a classroom full time, however many hours a week. They want them learning on the job and occasionally being able to go into CIT or they want them doing it through flexible learning. Do you agree or disagree?

Ms Walls: I don't actually know whether it has or hasn't failed. I've done a wee bit of work out at Fyshwick, and my understanding of employers not wanting their students doing one day a week is more to do with their productivity in the workplace. When the new apprenticeship scheme was revised it was like stand-down time for them to be in class. I thought there was a whole revision of how they were to be paid. I don't know if it's totally in CIT's control.

Mr Axelsen: We've lost a lot of apprentices. They no longer come to CIT but go to other RTOs somewhere else.

THE CHAIR: The blue collar apprentices? Traditional apprentices?

Mr Axelsen: Yes, apprentices in that area. That's had an impact on the campuses themselves. They've had areas set up for training that they can no longer use. I guess they're hoping they'll get some back in the future. But they also lost all the teachers, who possibly went out and set themselves up to do that training.

We have had a few trainees ourselves in the Student Association, and on most occasions it has been a very positive experience. And we've always put them through CIT, of course, because we made the offer. "Do you want them put through Quest?" "No, we'll stay with our own training provider, thank you very much." We've had very good experiences with CIT in those traineeships. Other than that, I don't know the answer.

Ms Walls: Maybe you're right. Maybe they're not abreast of the flexibility that employers want for their apprentices. Maybe this fixed one-day-a-week release or block release of one week every six no longer suits the demands of the market. That's how I would read it. If they're not going to be flexible and other organisations are, then they'll lose students. It hasn't been a problem in the hospitality area, but it has in the automotive and metal trades.

MS DUNDAS: Do you have any relationship with the ITABs?

Ms Walls: None.

Mr Axelsen: No.

MS DUNDAS: Do you have any opinion on the ITABs?

Ms Walls: I know nothing about them. All I know is that they're part of the process of determining what our courses will eventually be.

Mr Axelsen: This morning when we were reading the terms of reference about the extent to which they satisfy demand and the community's needs, we got stuck a little bit on thinking about what the community's needs are. Are we talking industry there?

Ms Walls: Who monitors them?

Mr Axelsen: Are we talking "learners", as Vaughan was calling them? Whose role is it to monitor and anticipate those needs? Often we don't think that's done adequately; it can be very difficult. A lot of builders will be required in Canberra this year. We could never have anticipated that. However, a couple of years ago—I think we talked about this last time, Karin—at our Weston campus, the number of horticulture students dwindled dramatically to almost none. Yet this year suddenly there's been a double enrolment again.

When Urban Services outsourced all of the horticulture work, there was no need for people to train anymore because the people who trained would take up all the positions, so they didn't take on any apprentices. That's where we saw the dwindling nature of horticulture. So, in the future, what needs will there be, who's going to monitor and are we running courses we should never run?

Ms Walls: The horticultural area is where they worked with the secondary colleges to pick up cert 1 and cert 2 students. We had a lot of Year 11 and 12 students at the Weston campus doing horticulture, and they may have boosted the numbers that way.

THE CHAIR: Yes, because there's been that interest. People have got the taste and they go, "Okay, I like that and I want to continue it through."

Mr Axelsen: Yes.

Ms Walls: But we were asking ourselves: what are community needs? We were talking about whether or not CIT should have got a bush regeneration course going for this year. There are obviously areas that need flexibility, which I think they're saying they don't always have, because it's always two years later before it gets onto someone's agenda.

We wanted to say one thing about placement services. I've noticed that students are often unable to get placements in the ACT in the areas in which they're studying. Two areas I've seen are nursing and welfare. The placements in those courses are huge. It could be 200 hours that they have to do—a whole semester in a service. Unless they can do it, they can't graduate from their course, but we can't find enough placements in the ACT.

That has always been a dilemma. You offer a course that has a huge placement, which is a great attraction because being in the industry often results in a job but, unless you can guarantee that, you can't offer a place on the course. I don't know who organises it or whether it's funded. I don't know. I know CIT staff spend a lot of energy.

THE CHAIR: I can answer that, partially, from my knowledge of a couple of years ago. Each faculty takes a different approach to it. For example, the building design students' placement is a big component of actually completing the course. The students are required to find placements themselves. They will receive some assistance from the department, but they have to go out and do the work themselves. It is an ongoing issue, and it's a catch-22 situation because industry is saying that it wants students coming through who have got placement experience, but they're not prepared to actually put them on because they're too small and don't have the time to spend every semester or year with a student. Or they just don't have the time at that particular point, or nobody's approached them, for whatever reason.

Ms Walls: If I was a student I'd be really upset if I had a 200-hour placement in my course, say, at the Canberra Hospital, and I couldn't get it. I'd want someone to tell me why, if I'd been to all this trouble. It's usually the last semester of a program, and it's someone's responsibility to make sure that that component happens, whether it's the institute or the hospital.

THE CHAIR: Has that been coming up as an issue to you?

Ms Walls: The outcome for CIT is a restriction in the number of students it enrolls in the course. They won't take more than a certain number if the hospital can't provide placements, and that's the fallout from that sort of situation. If you've only got 20 places you only take 20 students. In fact, I would have thought the demand for nursing was huge. I don't understand that. I don't understand that one at all.

MR PRATT: Have nursing placements declined? What are they doing? Are they recruiting nurses from out of state?

THE CHAIR: They have to do a placement when they're at CIT.

MR PRATT: Sure—OJT. But are they avoiding taking on trainee positions because they find it more efficient to recruit people from other sources rather than putting them through the training?

Ms Walls: No, this is a placement.

Mr Axelsen: We don't know the answer to that, I'm sorry.

Ms Walls: I think CIT's probably restricting the number of nursing positions it's offering to how many it can provide placements for.

THE CHAIR: I'm going to wrap it up there. Thank you very much for your time; it's been most interesting.

Mr Axelsen: We did have one other thing, but we can talk about that later. That is that we think there are some cumbersome enrolment procedures and other things, which students find extraordinarily exasperating. I think everyone would acknowledge those problems. They are perennial, aren't they?

The committee adjourned at 4.06 pm.