

**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, 22 APRIL 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 10.08 am.**

**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 the Assembly as a serious matter.

Please state your names and the positions in which you appear for the record. I'd also like to put on the record my thanks for your turning up the day after the Easter long weekend.

**KATY GALLAGHER,**

**TREVOR WHEELER** and

**STEPHEN BRAMAH**

were called.

**Ms Gallagher:** Katy Gallagher, Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services.

**Mr Wheeler:** Trevor Wheeler, Executive Director, Vocational Education and Training Corporate, Department of Education, Youth and Family Services.

**Mr Bramah:** Stephen Bramah, Director of Training and Adult Education, Department of Education, Youth and Family Services.

**THE CHAIR:** We have received two submissions from the department. One was a minor change to the other I believe. Do you wish to start by giving an overview, or do you want us to just go straight into questions?

**Ms Gallagher:** I will make a brief opening statement. It'll be short, so you can use the time remaining. Have we got until 11.00?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Gallagher:** I am pleased there's an inquiry going on into ACT VET, particularly as we have two federal inquiries looking at similar areas. I think a focus on what's happening in the ACT is very valuable. I'm joined by Trevor Wheeler and Stephen Bramah today, and they're here to address more of the specifics that you may have.

Since becoming a minister, I've found VET to be one of the more challenging areas in terms of getting my mind around some of the detail and the complexity of what happens. What I can say, though, is that in general terms the ACT is performing very well in the VET sector. CIT is recognised nationally as a TAFE of extremely high quality, and there is also a wide range of private providers of similarly high quality services.

We understand the importance of VET as an essential element for the growth of our economy and because of the broader positive community impacts that it has. In the last sittings, I presented two bills relating to VET to introduce national consistency in the VET sector, and all other jurisdictions will be following the ACT by introducing similar legislation.

We look forward to the committee's report and the recommendations. As a minister, I recognise the need to work collaboratively, using the skills and expertise of the committee to ensure that the VET system in the ACT is as responsive, efficient and effective as it can be. There are some challenges in the ACT facing the VET sector, and there's always room for improvement in what goes on here.

I've certainly been impressed by some of the programs that I've been involved in recently, particularly those offering some support to young people who are disadvantaged or at risk of not completing their education. These programs and partnerships have been introduced, particularly into schools, to support those students and offer them some diversity if they choose a pathway other than university education.

I will leave it there and throw it open to questions. I'll answer whatever I can, but I imagine Stephen and Trevor will do the majority of the answering.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can I ask a quick question about your statement? You said that there were challenges facing the sector. What do you see those challenges as being?

**Ms Gallagher:** There's a variety of them. There are the ones I just mentioned in terms of transitioning from school to work and some of the work that needs to be done there. We have the student pathway program, which will be trialled in the later part of this year. Teachers are going to be trained in it in term 2—that is my recollection of that briefing. That will provide year 9 and year 10 students with a mapping exercise to assist them in how they make choices. It also looks at young people who are at risk of not completing their education and how we can support them.

Increasing the number of apprenticeships and the diversity of apprenticeships is another area. Also, looking at the challenges the ACT faces whilst working within a national framework, I think the work that the ANTA ministers are doing, through this national consistency, is fine, and we will work within that framework. But the ACT is a little different to other states in terms of the industries operating here: the lack of manufacturing and the higher level of government and clerical work. So, whilst working within that framework, we need to look at how we support the industry we have here.

I mentioned a program supporting young people at risk of not finishing school. That was a partnership between schools, the MBA, the Construction Industry Training Council and the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund. There are a couple of programs that are running in the construction industry now that are looking at how we can broaden out some of those relationships. They're just a few.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, what are your feelings about the debate on education in the community more broadly regarding the pathways program, looking at what we need to

do with students who seem to be disengaged. The debate is about whether we should continue to try and keep those kids in the high school stream until year 12 and look for VET opportunities within the schooling system or whether we should encourage them to leave after year 10, if they want to, and go into—shall we call them, in the tertiary sense—apprenticeships or the CIT. Where do you think we should be going?

**Ms Gallagher:** The recent programs, GRAPES, BISEPS and T3 Automotive, which was launched just last month, all focus on high school students. I guess the aim is to get them to finish year 10. The GRAPES program was for extremely disengaged students, and all of them except one went on to finish year 10 and get a job. They went on to have a career outside, in the area they had done their training in.

It's very important that we support students in finishing year 10 in high school. If they've had a positive experience, it's useful for all students to try and achieve year 12 as well. I guess those are the choices the students make themselves, but it's about supporting those students, giving them some choices and encouraging them to finish—particularly year 10. Once they're year 10 and have had a positive VET experience and they then choose to go out to industry, that's fine—they've got their year 10 certificate. The focus is on giving support and encouragement for students to be able to make decisions that produce the best outcome for them and to get a qualification as well.

**Mr Wheeler:** As you know, it's increasingly the case that young people need to get to year 12 and that employers and others are looking for them to get to year 12. So, a lot of what the programs and the schools is about is keeping kids in school so that they complete at least year 12. That's one—and only one—of the reasons for VET in schools, such as the school-based new apprenticeships program. These programs recognise that a lot of students don't necessarily see themselves going on to university, although they may ultimately decide on some tertiary study of some sort; that they are looking for a job; and that employers are looking for higher levels of what they call "employability skills".

Even at the basic level, some of the kids who may be in danger of dropping out may not be as proficient as they should be in literacy and numeracy, which impinges upon their ability to get work or to complete qualifications. The VET system in schools has a lot of objectives, and one of them is to meet the needs of students who aren't going on to university and who need to be encouraged to complete year 12.

**THE CHAIR:** Trevor or Stephen, where do you think the ACT could do better in vocational education and training, and where are its strengths at the moment?

**Mr Wheeler:** Stephen might add something to this. The minister made a comment about the unique nature of the ACT economy, something that increasingly gives us food for thought. The national agenda of consistency, standards and quality—which is absolutely essential; it's about making Australia more competitive on the national stage, among other things—had to be undertaken, and that's been an all-consuming task for five to eight years. These things only happened in the mid 1990s.

We realise that the ACT is quite different from the other states. For a start, we're a city-state with a small population, relatively speaking. We have very little of the traditional

industries—none at all of some of them. What we do have, at the big end of town, is the Commonwealth government, the public sector. Then there's the ACT public service and then teachers and nurses, et cetera.

We have a lot of mini and microbusiness at the other end, which is the area we have the greatest difficulty in penetrating, in terms of training and new apprenticeships, because these businesses are so small. They're either making a conscious decision not to take on new apprentices or they haven't got time or they don't know about it. So, we face a particular challenge in the territory and, as the minister said, that's one of the priorities. It's been made very clear to us that this government sees it as a priority, and we know that we've got to do something about it. Stephen might be able to elaborate a bit more on what that means to us in terms of our training effort.

**Mr Bramah:** Of course, the small business community faces particular difficulties in trying to engage itself in the VET system as it stands. Part of that has to do with awareness. As Trevor said, they're very busy. Many of them may only have been in business for a short period of time and will probably have had no contact with a formal training system prior to going into business and maybe very little since.

Making the small business community aware of what's available is one thing; providing them with an infrastructure that assists them engage in the VET system is another. The group training system has got potential in that area. It was designed to help small-sized organisations that have difficulty coping with the normal demands of carrying an apprentice or a trainee on their own backs for whatever the period of time it is. The group training system in the ACT has the potential to grow beyond what it is now, and that would recognise one of the distinctive characteristics of the ACT economy: the small business component. That's one area we can continue to work on and improve.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have any ideas for encouraging the growth of group training within the ACT? I understand that group training companies are floundering at the moment.

**Mr Wheeler:** That's an interesting observation from them. We have just had some work done on cost structures, and one of the things that came out is that, while workers compensation is an area where they might have a slightly higher cost than elsewhere, by and large the funding that's paid by government to the group training companies is a good deal higher in the ACT than it is in other places. It is probably the third highest after, I think, the Northern Territory and South Australia and certainly well over twice that paid by New South Wales, our all-enveloping neighbour. Stephen mentioned the role that group training companies could play.

One of the things we need to do is work out how to penetrate that small end of town, where there are thousands of businesses, and do it in an effective way. Those businesses may not either want to take the risk of taking somebody on or see themselves as being able to guarantee continuity. That's where a group training company comes in. It can employ apprentices, provide security of employment for them and farm them out to various bodies for training. If something happened to that entity or the entity decided that it didn't want the apprentices any more, then the group training company would have responsibility for placing them somewhere else.

At the moment, we pay a standard rate for apprentices and trainees, but it's possible to look at an arrangement that specifically focuses on the level of activity you wanted to get into the mini- and microbusiness. In other words, it would be a discriminating feature of a funding model. That's just one possibility.

**Mr Bramah:** To add a comment about the nature of the market, we know that there's been at least one new entrant in the last few months, an ACT-based group training provider. There has also been at least one other external provider, a New South Wales provider, that wants to get into the market. You need to take the point about the industry floundering with a grain of salt because, if there are others who want to come into the market, there must be some reason why they think it's worth entering. It comes back to the point that Trevor made about the relative prices that we pay. At least some people, from a business perspective, still see some value in coming into the ACT market.

**Mr Wheeler:** That's not to say they all survive. But it wouldn't be our business to keep afloat all group training companies who want to operate here. What we have to do is make sure that we pay a fair price for what we ask of them and that they are focused in the areas we have seen a strategic need to go into.

**THE CHAIR:** And that is where there's a need for trainees and there are employment outcomes at the end. Presumably, if those group training companies do flounder, the trainees that are then left are picked up elsewhere.

**Mr Wheeler:** That's right. There might be some shake-out in that industry, but it's difficult to see, for the reason that Stephen mentioned, the group training mechanism just entirely ceasing to function.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can I go onto a different topic? A lot of evidence has come through that the success of a VET program in schools or the actual transfer of the skills learned to work placements relies a lot on individual teachers and the skills and enthusiasm they have. That's not something that can be automatically reproduced in every teacher that we have across the ACT. Considering the new focus you have on students' pathways and different opportunities, how are you training teachers to be good vocational teachers and to provide that extra link to work placement or further vocational training?

**Mr Wheeler:** Stephen might like to comment on the teacher competency end of it. I would like to say two things. One is that what you've said is quite correct. That's how it works, and it is often how it works in education generally: inspiring teachers are what makes the difference. Our job is to provide them with as much support as we can and make sure that they're effective. The other thing is on the business of transition. A lot of work needs to be done there, and we recognise that. In fact, all jurisdictions around the country have recognised that.

One of the task forces of the ministerial council that deals with education and training is actually looking at an action plan for some of the things that could be done to assist in the transition. This government has a career advisory review being undertaken at the

moment, which is an initiative of this current budget. That report is still being finalised, but one of the things it is looking at is how to provide support to teachers—not just VET teachers, but other teachers and careers counsellors and so on—making use of the transitions of the pathways. Do you want to comment on the competencies, Steve?

**Mr Bramah:** First of all, we have confidence that the schools as registered training organisations are performing well in that role. We've just been through a whole series of audits or are in the process of doing audits now. We won't finish them until the end of this year for the schools sector. What we're seeing in those audits shows us that there is no difference in the quality of delivery between schools that are registered training organisations and other training providers.

That's not to say that everybody's great, but there's a fairly even standard amongst our registered training providers altogether, and the schools stand up well against the other providers. Of course, the quality of the teachers is a big part of that whole quality assurance process. The new national standards for registered training organisations are fairly explicit about the standards they expect of those who are delivering vocational education. The teachers who are delivering in our schools at the moment more than meet those requirements.

We used money from the vocational education and training allocation from the national system for VET in schools to train up all of the VET teachers last year to certificate IV standard, which the new standards don't actually require. As long as you've got somebody in a supervisory position with that qualification, that is adequate as far as the national standards are concerned.

We went a step further and made sure that all teachers have that qualification. That doesn't mean that all teachers right now have that qualification, because there's been some rotation. However, a mechanism is now in process within the departmental professional development training system to make funds available for the continuation of that professional development training for teachers.

The more critical part, though, for teachers is credibility in the eyes of industry. Have they got the currency in industry issues that VET teachers in CIT or VET teachers with private providers might have? You can't answer that question until you look at it on a case-by-case basis. You might have teachers there who are running a business themselves or who have recently run a business themselves. They would have just as much currency in an area as anybody in the registered training provider business anywhere else. Their currency might even be better than some of those.

Until you look at it on a case-by-case basis, you can't say definitively whether their skills are better or worse than somebody else's. Obviously, there would be some from time to time who we would like to see have better currency and better knowledge of industry. The reason we have been working, and will continue to work, with the industry training advisory structure is to have mechanisms to provide teachers that need it with exposure to industry issues to give them currency and give them credibility.

In addition, there is a pilot program running in three colleges now, whereby industry—in this case, the building and construction industry—provides industry experts to work with

teachers in their classes to bring into those classes more-up-to-date knowledge of what's going on at the industry level, at the coal face level. That seems to be working pretty well. It is funded by the building industry training levy, and the pilot is intended to continue until the end of this year. We'll do an evaluation of it then. That may be one way that we can supplement teachers' knowledge.

In addition, we're also working with CIT on a couple of projects to try and get better collaboration between the teaching community, CIT and the college RTOs to assist each other with their knowledge. We think there's some good transfer that can go on there. There is a project called LearnScope, a national project, which we've got some funding for. We'll be pursuing that. In a nutshell, the answer to your question is that we've got to look at it on a case-by-case basis. We've already got a range of programs going. We recognise the importance of credibility in the eyes of industry, and we take note of that.

Finally, while a few stones have been thrown on the subject of credibility, to date, despite frequent invitations to do so, nobody has presented us with any concrete evidence of deficiencies in the quality of the teaching skills in college RTOs in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** I agree with everything that you just said, and I think a lot of VET teachers within our college system are undervalued for what they do—and they're doing a lot of fantastic work. But I do think there is pressure on them, especially when they're having to teach a few different lines and focus on the VET area.

The return to industry experience, which they'd like to get, is not always something that they can do, because it takes time to go out and do that. How do you respond to the notion that extra pressures are placed on VET teachers within our college system, and how do you think we can help our college teachers in that regard?

**Ms Gallagher:** I must say that I haven't heard from VET teachers themselves in school. They haven't raised the issue with me that they're finding it difficult to manage and nor has the union, in their discussions with me. I'm just reacting to it as you say it. Also, the way you have said it is that there is a problem that we need to address.

I'm sure Stephen or Trevor will have something else to add here, but for me part of the challenge with VET in schools—and, increasingly, as VET goes into year 10 and year 9—is the constant changing of it. As you know, Karin, VET changes quickly all the time and, as the actual teaching changes, I would say that providing support for the teachers to provide that teaching is a constant challenge.

One thing I'm hearing all the time from industry is the need for more VET in schools. Some people are even saying to go down to year 7, which I think needs to be talked about a bit more. There is also the need to monitor the expansion of VET from what it is in schools, being careful about the programs that are introduced and balancing that with all the other areas of learning. Curriculums are so full already. I think that is a challenge.

If it comes up through the inquiry, I am interested to hear about the community's views on how we could better support teachers. As I say, nothing has been raised with me about this issue. I don't know if Trevor or Stephen want to add something.



**Mr Bramah:** I don't have anything to add to what the minister has already said. But I would make an observation, which is true of any area within schooling: teaching is a very demanding profession these days. If you were to go and talk to the heads of department of maths or English or just about any other department, they would probably also say that there are strong demands being placed on them.

When I hear VET teachers talk about the demands being placed on them, I've always got to think, "Is this really relative to? Is it the same as? Is it different to somebody else?" For the reasons the minister gave, demands are placed on VET community teachers because of the changes that have gone on. I am hopeful that the effort we've put into those changes in the last two years in particular might result in some stability for a while.

This national consistency agenda has been quite a demanding one for the ACT. We've been at the forefront of those changes—and the minister mentioned the legislation that we put in place to support that. It's those changes that have created demands—particularly going through the process of quality assurance for the colleges as registered training organisations—if not on all then certainly on some teachers in those colleges.

We've now reached the point where we've got that system in place, and we will have finished the audit round of colleges by the end of this year. I am hopeful that there is nothing on the horizon at this stage that will be dropped on the school system to create further demands for them—for a little while yet anyway. There is nothing visible in the way of emerging challenges. It's a matter of cementing in some of the things that we worked hard on in the last few years.

The growth in the school sector in the last three or four years has itself created a lot of those challenges. If you look now at what's happened, as you'd expect, there's been a plateau in demand for VET in schools. The question now is: where will that go over the next few years? If that plateau continues at a high level, as we've got in the ACT now, that itself will reduce some of the pressures that have come out of the growth in the last three years or so. In summary, I am optimistic that some of the pressures those teachers have experienced in the last few years will probably abate—or have abated already.

**MR PRATT:** Following up Karin's question about the pressures on teachers and going back to the issue of credibility as a perception of industry, how successful do you think we are as a community at attracting teachers into the colleges to meet this increasing demand? Are you happy that we're able to recruit, or find the resources, to develop the existing teaching capability to meet those demands? What strategies do you have to meet this growing demand and respond to this question of credibility?

**Mr Wheeler:** We recruit these teachers by and large through our annual recruiting rounds for teachers generally. That is where we also keep an eye on professional areas that we're particularly interested in. As Stephen said, as far as credibility goes, part of the issue facing the ACT is that some of these comments—which in our case haven't been substantiated—are being made at a national level. They take into account what's happening in various jurisdictions, and not everybody does it the same way.

In this jurisdiction every college is a registered training organisation. Every college has had to go through a quality assurance process, just as if they were a private sector provider. There is no reason to think on those grounds that they're any less competent than any other provider of VET. Unfortunately, at the national level there is a feeling in some jurisdictions that it isn't quite the case—where each college isn't an RTO and therefore doesn't go through the quality assurance process. We've got to stand on our record. We believe we've got very competent, credible teachers at VET, and the college has to go through the same accreditation and validation process as every other provider. That's our best defence.

**Ms Gallagher:** Steve, are you talking about teacher recruitment specifically for VET subjects?

**MR PRATT:** Yes, I am. I'm talking about the issue of people with technical experience and background who would add to that capability in the VET stream. As this demand has grown, and even in the last three to four years, have you had trouble trying to recruit from the experienced industrial background?

**Ms Gallagher:** Teachers have to be qualified as teachers. There is an annual recruitment process that the department goes through, and it isn't an area of shortage. There are national areas of teacher shortage that we're looking at, such as languages other than English, IT, science and maths. We need to be very focused on those in terms of recruiting, but to my understanding we haven't experienced any difficulty in getting teachers to teach VET, along with whatever else they are teaching in the schools.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you have any comment on the return to industry program, through CIT, for teachers to take six months to go back to the industry that they're from. The union commented in public hearings that it has fallen away and that teachers aren't able to participate in it as they once were.

**Mr Wheeler:** Are you able to comment on that?

**Mr Bramah:** No.

**Mr Wheeler:** I don't think we know enough about that. I have heard that some teachers find it hard to get the time to do it, but I'm not aware that it is a serious problem. There will be cases where some teachers can't find a placement or can't get the time to go. The question then arises: how do you ensure the currency of your skill base in those circumstances? I'm not aware of any endemic problem with return to work.

**THE CHAIR:** What sort of assistance does the department give to teachers wishing to do return to industry?

**Mr Wheeler:** It would be a matter for each college to work through. It would be their responsibility to provide the time off for the teacher.

**THE CHAIR:** I don't just mean taking time off; I mean finding a placement. That's often the hardest part of it.

**Mr Wheeler:** I don't think we do anything centrally to assist with individual placements.

**MR PRATT:** Do you have a program in place which would indicate at what particular times return to industry needs to be undertaken in a teacher's career streaming? Do you run a template over that?

**Mr Wheeler:** No we don't.

**MR PRATT:** Should we?

**Mr Wheeler:** It's worth thinking about; there's no doubt. As a practical issue, the people most likely to be able to organise a placement are the teachers themselves—who have the links with their particular industry area—rather than any central arrangement, which would tend to be rather bogged down in bureaucracy and process. It's worth thinking about whether there ought to be some template against which a teacher's currency could be assessed and some further guidance given to colleges about when that return to industry might take place.

**MR PRATT:** I would flag that as a possible policy issue. Could you otherwise have confidence that good, faithful teachers who have been in the system for years are ensuring they maintain their currency? Shouldn't the system ensure that we encourage people at appropriate times to recycle back in? Mind you, that raises the question of how to create the capacity to do that. How do you provide time for teachers to be able to go away again? Can you talk to industry to find gaps? It raises questions, too.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, it does. You've drawn an issue to our attention that needs to be seriously looked at. In terms of the teachers, though, they're under continuous assessment with the audits that Stephen has already mentioned. So there are some checks there already. The point you raise is really valid and one that we should be looking at.

**Mr Wheeler:** I think the time off is more the issue than the placement.

**THE CHAIR:** How often are the audits being conducted on colleges these days?

**Mr Bramah:** The standards lay down what the frequency is for auditing any registered training organisation, and the standards applied to colleges are the same as applied to anybody else.

**THE CHAIR:** It's been a while since I've actually done one.

**Mr Wheeler:** It's three times over five years.

**Mr Bramah:** When the rules were written up, they said there'd be an audit when a training organisation wanted to seek registration and then there'd be another one when they were going to be re-registered. I think there was going to be one somewhere in between. In reality, if an established organisation is continuing—and you'd expect all of the colleges to continue in that way—how often should it occur?

The original deal was that it wasn't supposed to happen any more than once every three to five years. Right now, I wouldn't expect colleges to be audited any more frequently than once every three years, but it might in fact be longer than that. To answer your question, the standard lays down what's required, and we apply the same standard as we do to other registered training organisations.

**THE CHAIR:** I ask because the AQTF was just starting to be thrashed out when I left the ITAB, so I haven't paid that much attention to what the standards are these days.

**Mr Bramah:** That doesn't mean that, if somebody raised a concern with us, we couldn't organise an audit on the basis of concerns. If we had a formal complaint of some description, that might be sufficient grounds for us to conduct an audit, albeit selective in what it looks at.

**THE CHAIR:** Turning to a different issue, where do you think the ACT is headed with encouraging people into and promoting lifelong learning?

**Mr Wheeler:** We've got a very vibrant adult community education program running. In fact, if we had more money we could even undertake more training. There's quite a deal of demand there.

**THE CHAIR:** I am distinguishing ACE from lifelong learning. ACE is encompassed by lifelong learning, but you also have certificates or training packages included in lifelong learning. Certificates and diplomas are included in that; it is not just about going out and doing community type education.

**Mr Wheeler:** I was taking the broader picture of encouraging people to undertake learning that might go beyond the bounds of what's required for employment. There is a move in all jurisdictions, driven nationally, towards upskilling—if that's the word—the skills of existing workers. It is an encouragement for them to think about the next steps.

The ACE council is also looking at the notion of promoting lifelong learning as part of a learning communities type approach, which tries to get partnerships going with all the education providers to promote various pathways and linkages that have, at their heart, among other things, inculcating in people a desire to take on more training and more learning—whether formally for a qualification or more in the ACE area.

Lifelong learning is a clear stated objective of the learning community's approach to learning. The ACE council has devoted some funds into doing an audit, particularly of IT training and qualifications in the territory, as part of that exercise and to have a look at whether they can make those linkages with the other education institutions through a learning communities type approach.

**Ms Gallagher:** I think on the whole that in the ACT we do very well. We've got a high level of retention in our schools, we've got a high level of entrance to universities and we've got an increasing level of students going through vocational education and training.

I know you're visiting the CIT next week, and I went on a tour there last month. One of the areas I was really impressed with there was the flexible learning centre there. You can walk in on a day and say, "I'd like to do this," and you can be set up and you can self-pace learn at the library down there. For a lot of people in our community, that's a very attractive thing, particularly if they've got caring requirements and a whole range of other burdens in their lives. Providing that sort of flexibility in how people access learning is a really important thing.

The other challenge we always face is attracting groups from disadvantaged pockets of our community. How do we get them involved? People who are doing okay can find learning opportunities in various ways. But how do we encourage people who don't have similar life experiences to engage in lifelong learning? That's a challenge we need to be looking at all the time.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you think that the battle to promote vocational education as a different path is being won? A lot of people have come before us and said that there's still a lot of stigma attached to vocational education because it's not university education. But university isn't for everybody. Do you think enough is being done to break down that stigma and to show VET as a valid and important educational choice?

**Ms Gallagher:** I think we are taking the right steps. I think some of the national work that's being done is really assisting that in terms of standards, consistency and the framework which we all operate in. I think you're right, particularly in a place like Canberra where the emphasis is much more on university education, primarily because of our industry base. The days are gone when you got into the public service without any qualifications, so there is an emphasis on university learning.

Part of the improvements have been the partnerships and bringing together the MBAs, the building training industry fund and the CITEAs—very diverse positions within this community working together to promote vocational education and training. The work that's been done in schools so that parents understand VET as a legitimate choice is really useful.

I've been speaking to some parents whose children got onto these programs, like BISEP, and they said to me that they would have preferred their children to be academic achievers and go on to university but that it was more important to them that these students would be leaving high school with a year 10 certificate, if they all stayed on the program, and might take a pathway somewhere else.

We are changing, but a lot more work needs to be done in terms of bringing VET alongside university education. Hopefully, you will have all heard the ads that are on the radio and seen some of the promotion work that is being done, putting it out there in the public that apprenticeships are here and that they're a good way to go. For many students it's a real opportunity—where there may not be others.

**Mr Wheeler:** There are so many young people that don't go on to university, and they need opportunities and they need pathways. These are being provided within a system

that relies on high quality and on consistent standards across the country. There's a real push. The growth in VET in schools in the last few years in every jurisdiction, particularly in the ACT, has been enormous. I think that's because it's meeting a need.

I take the point about the perception of VET. One of the things in awareness raising and promotional campaigns to get more people into VET or to take up new apprentices has got to be to change the perception. But there are a lot of young people and others who need those skills in order to get into employment, so they see it as quite a valuable thing to have. That's one of the reasons there has been such a great take-up.

**Mr Bramah:** The numbers in school now taking VET has got to be our best weapon to raise status/perception/awareness. More than half of senior secondary school students are participating in a vocational education training program of some description. That means their parents know about it, and it means they know about it. They're the new generation, which will be able to influence others. That's a very powerful way of advertising the benefits of this sort of program and of raising its status.

**MR PRATT:** That includes kids who intend to go to university, which will help break down that particular stigma.

**Ms Gallagher:** That's right.

**MR PRATT:** Perhaps you can provide us with more information on how schools are going in selling the pathways program. What's happening in very early high school years to sell pathways and break down this stigma? Are our schools now determining student capabilities and options open to them? Have we moved on that area? Is career counselling, for want of a better term, being upgraded in earlier years to help define these potential pathways?

**Ms Gallagher:** Do you mean years 7 and 8?

**MR PRATT:** Yes 7 and 8. You were talking earlier, quite rightly, about VET coming down to the 7/8 area as well. If that happens, you will have to identify individual student capabilities.

**Ms Gallagher:** When I mentioned it, I did say that there are people out there who are encouraging a move into years 7 and 8. I'm yet to be convinced that that's necessary, but I'm happy to have a discussion about it. A lot of work is going on in high schools, Steve, to support students make the transition from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood in terms of the decisions they make.

An important initiative, which is to begin in schools next year—although it doesn't address your issue of years 7 and 8—is to provide every student with an individual pathway plan in years 9 and 10. The focus of that plan will be on areas of interest and opportunity for those students. But a lot of support for year 7 and year 8 students is provided in the day-to-day teaching environment by teachers encouraging the students to make choices, as they go on through high school, in areas where they excel or show interest.

I'm not sure that answers your question specifically. Trevor or Stephen may have something to add, but the focus on pathway planning and career education is happening more in years 9 and 10 and during the transition to college than it is in years 7 and 8.

**Mr Wheeler:** There are always the questions of how early you start and to what end. The view that there ought to be some exposure to VET in the last couple of years of high school is as much as anything that students who are starting to contemplate those last two years in college, where VET becomes a very serious consideration, should be given some exposure to the life of work to and be better informed.

I'm not an educationalist, so I can't tell you how early you should start exposing young people to this and just how focused it should be, but a lot of the cross-curricular work that's done in schools these days is focused on things like the ability to make decisions, to evaluate, to communicate and to contribute. You increasingly need all those skills not only in general and in work but also to make certain judgments as you get to the end of your high school years. In that sense there's a building of capability, as I think you put it, in those earlier years. But I personally wouldn't want to take it any further than that.

**MR PRATT:** Yes, you are restricted in what you can determine and assess about individual student capabilities in years 7 and 8, but you need to give children the opportunity to grow and show what they're capable of. Clearly, you're looking at some sort of pathway decision in year 9 perhaps. Is there a milestone there when formal assessments or counselling discussions occur to help kids and families make decisions together at that junction point where you might be looking at any one of three pathways beyond year 9?

**Ms Gallagher:** We are formalising that through the individual pathway plan. I think that's exactly what you're talking about at year 9 and 10. It's being trialled in schools in terms 3 and 4.

**MR PRATT:** Is that pathway still being developed?

**Ms Gallagher:** Well it's being formalised. Some of it's already going on—and for particular students. We've been looking at students who don't fit into the square in terms of some of the VET programs. They've been focusing on students who are at risk of not completing their education. We'll broaden it out; we're not just going to focus on them.

Every student has the opportunity to have this pathway plan developed—specifically to create a pathway. It's not to encompass their other areas of education; it's specifically about pathway planning and choices they make about their education for years 10, 11 and 12. And it will go out to all schools next year after the community consultation process and trial that happen. I'm not sure if I've just announced this. I think I have.

**Mr Wheeler:** I think you might have done.

**Ms Gallagher:** I think I've just announced it. There you go.

**MR PRATT:** Would you like us to keep it mum?

**Ms Gallagher:** People will know we're doing the work. I think it assists the discussion here to say that.

**MR PRATT:** Actually, I agree with the comment you made earlier that years 7 and 8 are not the place even to start certificates I or II.

**Ms Gallagher:** They're young.

**MR PRATT:** Is thought being given to broadening the curriculum to provide, shall we call it, preliminary skills education in those years for kids who might already be showing a bent in that area—particularly kids who we identify to be disengaging? That is a group of kids that we need to identify good pathways for, before they get lost.

**Ms Gallagher:** I think it's fair to say that schools go into a lot of work on an individual basis to support students at risk of not completing their education in years 7 and 8.

**THE CHAIR:** There are already programs that cover those areas, separate from the mainstream high schools.

**MS DUNDAS:** There were problems last year with regard to the targets set federally for apprenticeships, and that had a flow-on effect on federal VET funding that came into the ACT. Can you explain how that situation arose and how it's been addressed?

**Ms Gallagher:** Again, I think Trevor and Stephen will have more of the detail. We didn't meet the target numbers that had been agreed to, under the previous agreement, as to what the ACT could meet. I came in at the point where we hadn't met the target, so the logical question for me is: were the targets too high, and were we ever going to be able to reach them? It's a difficult one to answer. In fact, I've asked Trevor that myself.

We're still in discussion with the federal government about what we can do about the growth funding. We've received two-thirds of it. It's the final payment, which the ACT government matches as well, that we are currently in discussions about. We're up to about letter number 4.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is that to get that one-third again?

**Ms Gallagher:** That's to get the final—

**MS DUNDAS:** Also, what about in the future to make sure that this problem doesn't arise again?

**Ms Gallagher:** A new agreement is being negotiated at the moment. That's where those discussions need to be had about what targets are agreed to. Trevor's involved in that.

**Mr Wheeler:** There will be a new agreement, and we'll be very conscious of what some of these elements of an agreement mean for a jurisdiction such as the ACT. We'll be on the lookout for this one. It's unfortunate in a way and it was probably an unintended consequence, but what the national agreement was all about was growing the training effort and making sure that jurisdictions really put a lot of effort into it.



It had several components, one of which was matching the Commonwealth dollar for dollar, and we've done that. Another one was undertaking projects of an innovative nature, and we've done that. Overall, we have increased the amount of training that is actually provided. Where we fell down was in the number of apprentices against a benchmark taken in the year 2000. The difficulty for us comes back to the uniqueness of our economy. Because the top end of town is really the public sector, we haven't always been in a position to influence the amount of apprenticeships and training numbers that they take up. As a consequence, we just could not meet the targets that had been set; in fact, we went backwards.

We have undertaken to grow the market by a number comparable to the number we'd first been given, but on an adjusted base—one that we actually achieved last year. We think we can do that, which is in part—and only in part—what's behind this promotion campaign. We know we've got to get out there and grow the new apprenticeship market anyway, and we want to do it so that industry knows what's available and individuals know what's available and they take it up.

But as a consequence of that effort we'll probably grow the numbers, we think, to satisfy the Commonwealth. As the minister said, we're still exchanging correspondence to see if the sorts of measures that we propose are enough to get us over the line. But we've got two-thirds of the funding.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are there students willing to take up apprenticeships and businesses willing to offer them?

**Mr Wheeler:** Not enough new apprenticeships have been taken up to not only cater for the completion numbers but also grow above the base.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is that a lack of students, a lack of placements, a lack of support?

**Mr Wheeler:** It's probably no one thing. If there is one thing—Stephen might like to elaborate on this—it's the proportion of trainees to apprentices that we get here. Because they have a shorter training period, it means we need a lot more of them to keep the numbers up. Do you want to add to that, Stephen?

**Mr Bramah:** Yes. It's an interesting question, given the anecdotal evidence we have. Looking first at the issue of whether there are adequate applicants, in the sense of school leavers or students who want to take up an apprenticeship, I've heard claims from some businesses—I think Chris Peters was quoted in the papers over Christmas making a claim—that there weren't adequate applicants.

But when I talk to people who are in the business of attracting those applicants and ask them how they're going—the building industry, for example—they say, "We've had a good number of applicants for the stream we've been looking for, and they were good quality applicants, as well." So, I can't say I've seen any evidence that there aren't enough applicants for the jobs that are available. But we are in an economy that's

running pretty hard. The ACT has a very high level of employment anyway, so it's possible that there mightn't be enough applicants for those jobs because there are other jobs out there that might be more attractive. But I don't have any evidence that that's the case.

Looking at it from the side of the employers, obviously, part of the reason why we haven't achieved the targets is that the apprenticeship game is a demand-driven exercise. It's primarily a matter for employers to say whether they want to take on apprentices or trainees, whether they have a place to take them on and whether the incentives are attractive enough.

When you look inside the total numbers for the ACT, the answer to your question is that they vary dramatically from industry to industry and skill area to skill area. You can't generalise and say that there aren't enough employers putting their hands up and offering places or that employers have more places than we can fill. You've actually got to go and look at the individual details.

You can pick out particular areas in the building industry—for example, bricklaying and plastering. We know right now that we are critically short of people to do that, even though the price being paid for laying bricks has increased dramatically. There are other areas that you can pick on as well. That probably hasn't satisfactorily answered the question, but you can't generalise across the board. You've actually got to get down and look at industry sectors to answer those questions.

It may be that there are some of those industry sectors where it's a combination. On the one hand, maybe employers are not interested in taking on people; on the other hand, people aren't interested in doing that work. The T3 program, which the minister mentioned earlier, is a good example of industry's response to what they quite rightly see as a matter of perception amongst the younger generation and whether or not they're attracted to some of these employment streams.

With T3, looking at the automotive industry, where the perception seems to be that it's a dirty game—who would want to get into it?—the automotive industry is saying “Hey, that's the way it was 20 years ago. These days you rock your car into the automotive repair yard and hook it up to a computer and they tell you what the answer is.” There's a raft of things in the area of industry's response to this to make the streams that they're having difficulty in more attractive to students, and the T3 is an example of that.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are you confident that the support being given by the government is adequate? Again, this might be a perception—and anecdotal. But we've had evidence about the number of forms and where they have to go and the complication that a small business or micro business needs to go through to take an apprentice on. Are the government processes working to support apprentice schemes? Here I am asking you! You can say yes, if you think they are.

**Mr Wheeler:** We recognise the need to streamline administrative processes, and some steps are being taken, including on-line paperwork to do that. I guess we should keep on doing it. I think it would be one of the issues for the micro and minibusiness end when

we get into how they take up some of these places. They're going to say that it's got to be a lot less cumbersome than it is. Frankly, providing we meet the national consistency gain, we can make the changes that we see fit—and we should.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are you looking at them?

**Mr Wheeler:** Yes, we are.

**MS DUNDAS:** So it's a down-the-track plan?

**Mr Wheeler:** The e-commerce, if we can call it that, is almost operational now, isn't it?

**Mr Bramah:** We've been participating for over a year in a series of discussions on reducing red tape in the area of new apprenticeships. We are already engaged in doing the sort of thing you're talking about now. We've been doing that in collaboration with the other states and territories, and the aim is to have a seamless process whereby it wouldn't matter who you were or where you were. You'd approach the system and see that the same things have to be done.

Included in that is the development of an IT portal, which will make it easier for businesses, large or small, to locate the information they need more readily than they can now. I think we can say quite confidently that we have improved and are improving right now. Whether we get to the point of nirvana and say, "Yes, this is now a perfect system," is another matter. I'm sure we'll still find that there's work to be done after we've done this round of changes. When we find out what they are, we can make them as well.

**THE CHAIR:** I'm going to have to cut it short there. Nirvana will be our ultimate goal. Thank you for attending today.

**RUDOLF SCHNEIDER** was called.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Schneider, I will read this to you. 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 you have the responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Please state your name and the capacity in which you appear for the record.

**Mr Schneider:** My name is Rudolf Anton Schneider. I appear as the Chief Executive Officer of the Recreation Industry Training Company.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for the submission you've given us. Do you want to make an opening comment about your submission? We can then ask you some questions.

**Mr Schneider:** I wish to say that the name of the company is a misnomer. It should be the Recreation Industry Traineeship Company. We're not a training provider as such. We're a surviving NETTFORCE company, set up to promote traineeships and labour market programs in sport, fitness, community recreation, outdoor recreation and racing. We see ourselves as the conduit between government and industry, nationally and locally.

We believe that the government has programs because it wants things to happen—it wants things to change. Industry often wants things of its own to happen, but doesn't necessarily know how to go about that. There are a number of times in the past when we've been able to bring the two together, with some fairly good outcomes. You have my submission, and I've given you an update. I'm here to answer questions or to expand, as you wish.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you explain for the committee what the NETTFORCE companies used to do? I remember when they were around but, for the record, it might be good if you could talk about what they used to do, where the system is at present, and as it has been since the NETTFORCE companies were no longer funded—several years ago. Tell us where you feel the system could possibly fall down.

**Mr Schneider:** The National Employment and Training Task Force—NETTFORCE—was established by the Commonwealth government in 1994, to increase the take-up of trainees, as they were then called, across all industries. They were set up as industry-owned companies, and there were some 26 established altogether. They were bipartite, consisting of employer and employee representation. Their job was to develop, or foster the development of, a new generation of traineeships and then to market them within industry—if you like, to drum-up business or to drum-up vacancies, which could then be passed on to the Commonwealth Employment Service for filling action.

That system worked pretty well. Nationally, there were probably 16,000 traineeships in 1994-1995. A number of those were a previous generation of traineeships. Within a

couple of years that had gone to 50,000-plus commencements per annum. These days it's harder to track commencements, because the Commonwealth government deals with the number of trainees in training. But certainly in its day, NETTFORCE and its companies made significant progress towards the implementation of the traineeship system.

**MS DUNDAS:** You mention, in your submission, the decline in the commencement of sport and recreation trainees, after the commencement of the Job Network and new apprenticeship centres. Do you want to expand a little more on why that happened? Was it people going across to apprenticeships, as opposed to traineeships?

**Mr Schneider:** Before NETTFORCE came along, the traineeship market was well established in admin, retail and hospitality—traineeships were entrenched in those industries. With NETTFORCE, there was an opportunity to move into a lot of niche industries like sport and recreation, which, prior to NETTFORCE, had no traineeships whatsoever. Those then developed because each industry training company was funded to work within its own industry and had the luxury—something it had never had before—of being able to concentrate on one market.

With the introduction of the Job Network and the new apprenticeship centres, they tendered competitively. They had to pay the rent, and they were bound to targets through their contracts. So they did what the CES did before them. They went to where the wins were—admin, retail, hospitality and then small business.

Industries like sport and recreation are too expensive to service. There is no traditional market. You might have to make three visits to an employer to sell one traineeship. You can go to Coles and sell them tens and twenties. Because that market was harder to service, and because the new apprenticeship centres were desperate to meet their targets, they didn't go to those hard industries.

**MS DUNDAS:** But your organisation was still there, trying to promote trainees?

**Mr Schneider:** We were. Our original structure was a head office here in Canberra and a representative in each state and territory. We were not able to maintain that because our funding was reduced. The Commonwealth funded us to provide a technical information and support service on traineeships in our industry to the new apprenticeship centres. The new apprenticeship centres were very polite. They thanked us very much for our help and advice—but that didn't get them out the door. In some respects that was a futile exercise, although it did help us to continue to promote traineeships within our industry organisations and through our enterprises.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you explain your relationship to ITABs—or specifically to the larger ITAB that the recreation industry is part of?

**Mr Schneider:** I'd like a dollar for every time I've been asked that question. I tell people to consider us as the employment arm of the ITAB. The ITAB develops products. Once upon a time, ITABs developed curriculum, but now they develop training packages. But a training package is this big and sits on the shelf, unless something happens in the marketplace. Our job was to turn that into employment. That's probably the simplest explanation I can give.

**THE CHAIR:** You're obviously talking about national ITABs.

**Mr Schneider:** National and state. Once a training package comes to life nationally, it still has to come to life in each state and territory. Each state and territory has its own VET legislation and its own ITAB, to make sure the requirements of that legislation are met. Once a traineeship comes to life in a state or territory, what happens then? Who's going to tell the employers that it exists and how they can make good use of it?

**MS DUNDAS:** In your submission you're quite strong on the need for ITABs to continue as a network. Do you think the ITABs themselves need to expand their selling of certificates—the programs they develop—or does every industry need a body like yours sitting with the ITABs?

**Mr Schneider:** We need something. Back in the early 1990s, a number of ITABs also operated as group training companies and training providers. They were made to divest themselves of those things—by the Commonwealth government, I believe. I'm not sure where state governments stood on that matter.

ITABs at federal and state level had other functions. They were obliged to divest themselves. Whether we go back to that remains to be seen. Somebody needs to turn product into employment. Whether it's a combination of organisations or an expansion of the ITAB role probably doesn't matter, as long as it happens.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps you could talk a bit about the Skills 500 program. There are some additional comments in what you have handed to us today. I've just had a look through it. You were talking about the lack of knowledge of the program out in the marketplace. Do you want to talk a little about it?

**Mr Schneider:** The Commonwealth government has a range of incentives that covers one and all, but various states and territories often have a need of their own to address. In the ACT, the Skills 500 program was an initiative of the government to increase the number of traineeships in the territory. It's a bit disappointing to go out on the road with a NAC field officer and have them not mention it whatsoever to an employer. We have to raise it, and we've had to do that more than once. So I don't know how effectively the word is getting out. As a program to address a local need, I think it's a good initiative with potential to grow, depending on where the government wants to increase its efforts.

I mention in my submission an "at risk" component. In Queensland we've done quite well, in relationship with the state government, in promoting traineeships as a solution for young people at risk—homeless, young offenders, indigenous and long-term unemployed—where an extra effort's needed. We've been able to do quite well there. I believe the Skills 500 program has the potential to be expanded into other target areas.

**MR PRATT:** In trying to develop this young people at risk aspect, can you tell us a little more about what success you're having here with that particular target group of youth?

**Mr Schneider:** Here in the ACT?

**MR PRATT:** Yes. I'd like to know a bit more about how that's going and what numbers you are talking about.

**Mr Schneider:** Our great success was in Queensland, which was a specific program. Here in the ACT, we work with young indigenous people as a special group. Success can be measured in two ways—commencements or completions.

**MR PRATT:** Perhaps both.

**Mr Schneider:** In respect of commencements, we're capable of placing 15 to 20 a year. In our latest contract with TAE, we're running at 10 placements, which is about half what we should be doing. But they're quality placements and they won't fall over. We could certainly take 20 kids from anywhere and place them, but in three months time we'd be looking for another 20. The skill is in trying to meet the needs of the employer and the young person. If we're a bit careful about that—if we put square pegs in square holes—there's every chance that not only will the traineeship be completed but it'll result in ongoing unassisted employment.

**MR PRATT:** Are you having difficulty finding demand to connect with the number of kids that you know are seeking placements for traineeships?

**Mr Schneider:** Sometimes. We'll advertise for young people for a particular occupation. We'll get a lot of other young people coming along and saying, "Do you have anything for a gardener or a motor mechanic?"

Rather than saying, "How sad; what a pity; never mind", we would prefer to say, "Leave your details with us and we'll go and look." Sometimes that will be easy and sometimes it won't be easy. We tried to place a number of people into horticultural traineeships just before Christmas—but of course that's summer. Employers are busy in summer and don't want to take on a trainee in summer. At the moment, as things are a bit brown rather than green, it makes selling that particular occupation a little harder.

**THE CHAIR:** Danusha Cubillo appeared before us at one of our previous hearings. She was talking about the lack of support for trainees. Do you have any comments to make about that, in respect of making sure that you complete it and follow up on trainees to provide that underlying support?

**Mr Schneider:** Firstly, it's a requirement of our contract. Secondly, it's something we would want to do anyway. If we don't know there's a problem, then we can't address it and the placement is likely to fall over. The problem can be on the employer's side, on the trainee's side, or both.

We try to match each trainee with a mentor. We had a very good mentor last year, but he died. Rather than replace him with a single person, the approach we're using now is to pick a person who best suits the trainee. I won't take up your time here, but I can give you examples of each trainee and their mentor. It's not just somebody who can talk to the trainee, it's also somebody who can go to an employer and say, "Look, this needs to happen." Sometimes the employer is at fault, and at other times it's the trainee who needs a nudge.

**THE CHAIR:** But this doesn't happen everywhere. For example, new apprenticeship centres aren't required to provide a mentor to each trainee.

**Mr Schneider:** The only way we can do that is through our contract with Training and Adult Education. If we're not funded, we can't provide that service. New apprenticeship centres are funded to monitor, but they don't have the resources to intervene.

**MS DUNDAS:** On a different topic, how much are the external pressures impacting on people who are undergoing traineeships? You mentioned bus fares as one factor, in that young apprentices and trainees should be receiving assistance because the cost of public transport is prohibitive. Can you explain that a little more? What other issues can the government intervene in, to help make the training a success?

**Mr Schneider:** The reality is that there'll always be whinges about the level of the training wage. It's what people have to do with their training wage. If 20 per cent of your take-home pay goes into travelling to and from work and/or your training provider, that's a big impost. The ACT government introduced a \$250 levy a few years ago, which applied to every trainee who went to a training provider. At the time, I spoke against that levy because it was more than a week's wages for many trainees. I think the practice has been that the employer—particularly group training companies—will pick up that levy on behalf of the trainee.

**MS DUNDAS:** Where does that levy go?

**Mr Schneider:** To the ACT government.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you see it coming back in through training assistance or vocational programs? Do you think it should?

**Mr Schneider:** I can't say.

**THE CHAIR:** Did you want to talk a bit more about group training companies? You've added some extra stuff, along with a recommendation, about reviewing the formula for group training organisations.

**Mr Schneider:** We act as a local agent for the Australian Training Company, formerly the Rugby League Group Training Company, based in Sydney. The ATC has been in Canberra for some time, and we became their agent about a year ago. Their activities here are not funded by the ACT government, as those of other group training companies are. I guess that adds to their costs and their charge-out rate. But, more importantly, it is a disincentive to the group training company to continue to operate in the ACT. The result of that would be that other group training companies would operate in sport and recreation, but other group training companies are set up around the needs of their industries.

A group training company that looks after electroskills or construction has its own charge-out rates, based on the industrial relations arrangements in that industry. They don't sell in sport and recreation and it's not as well cashed as building or electro. The



Australian Training Company can offer a school-based trainee for between \$4 and \$4.50 an hour. Other group training companies have gone to our employers at \$8 to \$10 an hour. Sport and recreation employers won't pay that for a school-based trainee.

**THE CHAIR:** What are the long-term effects of that?

**Mr Schneider:** No school-based trainees. I'd like to see the Australian Training Company treated the same way as local group training companies, with the same sort of funding arrangements, so that they will continue to maintain a presence here in the ACT. Then we can not only serve the industry but grow the number of trainees in our industry.

**THE CHAIR:** You've spoken to me about this before and it might be worthwhile talking about it on the record. Do you want to talk about getting school-based traineeships within the sporting area, and the problems which have been faced in that area?

**Mr Schneider:** Okay. There are three ingredients needed for a successful placement—an employer, a trainee, and a training provider. With a normal traineeship, if I go to a provider—particularly a private provider—and say, “I have an employer who has this need—what can you do for them?” That training provider will generally say, “We can fix that. We'll use this package and we'll make a few modifications here and here”—and it's all okay. If I have a problem, I can run that past the ITAB to make sure it's kosher.

With school-based trainees, firstly it's a bit harder because employers are reluctant to take somebody for just a few hours a week, but they do. We recently had an opportunity to place over 40 school-based trainees with one of our enterprises. So, in the spirit of Glasnost, I called a meeting of the colleges and said, “We have an opportunity. We have an employer who needs 40 or more school-based trainees, and he's here to explain his needs to you”—and he did so.

One of the college representatives turned to me and said, “Which training package do you want us to use, Rudi?” I said, “It doesn't matter. I imagine there are a number of packages that might be suitable—and, I guess, depending on what you deliver, you will be able to flavour that to the needs of the employer and still meet your requirements.”

With a private provider that probably would have worked, but I was reminded that colleges have an obligation to their students and that that must come first. I don't deny that. I was asked to convene a meeting between the employer and the board of secondary school studies to map the competencies that that employer might want against the existing and new training packages. Then I could go back to the colleges and tell them. That is a nonsense. Since when do we send an employer to the BSSS to map competencies?

The first meeting was held a couple of months ago. Since then, we do not yet have a single school-based trainee. I guess it's my job to continue to try and break that down, with the assistance of our ITAB and CIT, to see if we can get some trainees started next semester. But certainly the bureaucracy has worked against us on this occasion.

**THE CHAIR:** So you'd be in favour of a streamlining of the process, or a rethink of how we approach school-based traineeships?

**Mr Schneider:** I'm not meaning to bag any or all of the colleges, but they're focused on their needs. Their needs are to see their students graduate—they are not employment orientated. My understanding is that any involvement in school-based traineeships does not count towards their funding or towards the teachers' hours.

Those are internal workings that I'm not across. But if teachers get no acknowledgement or benefit and it's just more work for them—they probably have enough work to do, as it is. If colleges don't see employment outcomes as a major objective, then they won't push it hard. It certainly comes down to a number of individuals to drive this. It's not an institutional thing, as it could be.

**THE CHAIR:** You were talking about yourself, the employers or RTOs running things past the ITAB. Obviously we're talking about the territory ITAB in this case. You are aware, of course, of the changes in the funding arrangements for ITABs in the ACT. From your perspective, what do you think the threats are to the ITAB? Do you think there's a threat to the ITAB's existence? How would that impact on your business?

**Mr Schneider:** When I pick up the phone with a need, there must be someone to answer it. If we have one big ITAB, does that mean that all the resources and all the attention will go to admin, retail, hospitality and small business? Where will I stand under a one big ITAB structure?

Under the old structure, we have somebody who knows the industry and its products and is a specialist in those products. When this nonsense with the school-based trainees arose, I was able to ring her. She was able to come to the next meeting and say, "This is not necessary. This is a nonsense. This is how it should happen." I was very grateful for her assistance. Under a one big ITAB structure, I don't know that that's going to be available to me. That's my biggest single worry. I could stand to lose a knowledgeable, experienced and dedicated resource.

**THE CHAIR:** This is a loaded question, but do you believe that poses a threat to the engagement of industry within traineeships, or the take-up of traineeships?

**Mr Schneider:** In a nutshell, it's a real risk. At the national level, when ITABs were forced to amalgamate and recreation was forced to amalgamate with the arts, the resulting priority shift and funding shift meant that one of my five sectors walked away and never went back. Others were very resentful that they were no longer the priority that they were. Under a one big ITAB arrangement, if sport and recreation, enterprises and industry peak bodies see themselves as add-ons, then they'll walk away.

This industry survived without a national VET system and without traineeships for a long time. It has had its own system of training. Through some cajoling, bribery and beating about the head, the industry came under the VET umbrella with all its credentials and qualifications. There is nothing to stop that being reversed.

There have been jockeys and trackwork riders for years, and there will be jockeys and trackwork riders from here on. Whether they're part of the VET system or not remains to be seen. There have always been coaches and fitness instructors—there have been

outdoor rec leaders for decades. Whether or not they continue under the VET system depends on whether the VET system is seen to be working for the industry or seen to be an encumbrance.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there anything you want to add, Rudi?

**Mr Schneider:** No. I think I've covered everything.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing today. We'll get the transcript to you when it becomes available.

**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 the Assembly as a serious matter. Please state your names and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today.

**TIM SMITH,**

**PAUL FACER** and

**BRUCE CALDER**

were called.

**Mr Smith:** I thank you for the invitation to give evidence on behalf of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. My name is Tim Smith, and I'm the National Executive Officer.

**Mr Facer:** I am Paul Facer, ACPET, New South Wales/ACT Executive Officer.

**Mr Calder:** I'm Bruce Calder. I'm on the board of ACPET. I'm the ACT representative on the board of that national body. I'm also the Managing Director and part owner of the Australian Business Academy, which is based in Canberra but also has a campus in Parramatta.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want to give a general overview to start off with, or do you want us to launch straight into questions?

**Mr Smith:** I would like to give a brief preamble on behalf of ACPET. ACPET is an acronym for the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. ACPET is the national industry association for private providers of post compulsory education and training. We have 500 members across the country—all the big commercial RTOs, a number of enterprise RTOs and not-for-profit RTOs.

Our members trade or are active in three areas: higher education, vocational education and training and ELICOS, or teaching English as a second language. We're appearing before the committee in connection with its inquiry into vocational education and training in the territory. We have members in all states and territories, and Mr Calder is the ACT representative on our national board of directors.

Our membership in the ACT is small. You have about 100 private RTOs in the territory, many of which are very small in a national context. Some are big traders; Mr Calder's organisation is a big RTO. Our membership here is approximately 10, so we don't have a significant representation in the territory at this stage. That's something that we're keen to change. One of the reasons we're here today is to talk to you, as it is very important that legislators and government decision makers have an appreciation of the nature and extent of vocational education and training by private providers.

Private providers are quality assured under the AQTF, to which the government and the Assembly subscribe. It is a national quality system, and anybody who wants to trade has to meet those quality standards. Private providers are the same as TAFE or public providers in that context. We're proud to be part of an industry that is probably the second most regulated industry in the country after health. That means that our products—our students—are quality assured in that sense.

What is interesting about the private component of our industry is that—and I'd be happy to give further evidence to this effect in detail later—up to 45 per cent of the delivery of accredited vocational education and training in this country is done by private providers. That's not far from half the training. Of course, you look at CIT in this territory and it's a very big, impressive public provider. But across the country, 40 to 45 per cent of training is done by private providers and, of that, three-quarters, or 70 per cent, is delivered on a fee-for-service basis—that is, no government contribution.

The evidence given to the committee so far—certainly, the evidence I've heard this morning—turns very much on government funded training programs and the involvement in apprenticeships and traineeships of the territory government in terms of the contribution it makes to funding training. There are three components to funding of training in this country: government, employers and the students themselves.

The reason we're here today is to impress on the committee that VET is more than apprenticeships and traineeships, and it's more than meeting skill needs as defined by industry, employers or a group of employers. It's also about meeting the skill needs of individuals as those individuals see themselves. VET is a very big area in this country today in terms of the total education and training picture. We'd be delighted to give evidence on issues in our submission or other matters that members of your committee may wish to raise.

**THE CHAIR:** Do Mr Calder or Mr Facer wish to add anything to that statement?

**Mr Calder:** I will put a slight ACT perspective on it. In a broad context, the ACT is a very efficient provider of VET services. We're what looks like a small community, but we have a very efficient ACT government instrumentality—the VETA board and ARC. In other states that's not the case, and from a very quick discussion with one of the officers, I understand that could potentially leak across the border into the ACT.

As a business we are fortunate—by choice—that we started in the ACT and can expand from here to other areas through mutual recognition. It's much more difficult to start in Sydney and move out. The other issue I'd like to stress is the regulation. Some would whinge about it, but it is most important that we have no objection to the regulation. Sometimes we might mutter about the costs. Indeed, in private education there have been some scallywags, if I may I put it like that—

**THE CHAIR:** That's a very kind term, Mr Calder.

**Mr Calder:** Part of ACPET's charter is to assist wherever we can to clean up those remnants of the industry. We've had some quite strenuous court cases against particular

operators we've taken a dislike to, for valid reasons, but it's cost the organisation time, effort and money to help them move from the industry to where they should be. I don't see any of that occurring in the ACT, but we have to be vigilant. Those are a couple of local dimensions.

**MR PRATT:** Paul, if you are going to add to the overall brief, can you tell us a little bit more about the scope of your RTO and the numbers? I'd like to get a grip on the size of your operation.

**Mr Calder:** At the moment, we've got about 140 students, of which about 120 are full time and the balance are part time. We have five streams: marketing and management, information technology, graphic design, travel and tourism, and sports management. They're the five streams. We can grant certificate diplomas or advanced diplomas in any of those streams, as appropriate. That's the Canberra campus. It's fully private fee paying. About 45 per cent of our students come from the nearby Waggas and Dubbos and Batemans Bay, and so on.

We're a CRICOS licensee, which means we can deliver to overseas students. Typically, Canberra is not as attractive a destination for overseas students as the Gold Coast, Sydney and Perth—for a couple of reasons. One is that it is one flight to the other destinations, and it's a couple of flights to Canberra.

**THE CHAIR:** No beach.

**Mr Calder:** Yes. The main reason is the beach: it's an experience. ANU is an educational institute first and foremost, and much of Australia's international education is based on sun, surf, sand and all the other S's—school at the end of it. We just don't have that profile. For evidence of that look at the hotel schools. The one in Manly, the one in the Blue Mountains and the one in the middle of Sydney turn students away, but the one here can't recruit enough.

**MR PRATT:** Can't you promote the ACT as a safer, cleaner environment than those wretched places?

**Mr Calder:** Maybe if we got to the parents, but to an 18-year-old in Korea, the sun, sand and that—you can't shift it. Melbourne, Tasmania and Adelaide have a similar image problem, and Tim can support me on this. The concentrations of international students are to be found where there are those hedonistic lifestyles.

**Mr Smith:** Mr Calder is being a little bit modest. You will see in our submission that we believe that there is a real opportunity to increase the proportion of international students in the territory to at least the national average. Seventy per cent of international students in this country undertaking VET programs on-shore are enrolled in private provider colleges—in private RTOs.

That is not the case in the territory. In the territory it's almost exclusively—we're talking VET now, not higher education—CIT. We believe there's some scope for change, and we've made a positive recommendation in our submission. The hedonistic lifestyle,

which I think the committee appreciate and Mr Calder refers to, is certainly a factor in the marketing. Mr Pratt made a comment about safety and security—very apt these days—and the fees for international students are more often than not paid by the parents.

There are many international students wishing to come to Australia. The territory could look more closely at ways to encourage those students to come here. Notwithstanding the extra plane flight, the scope for students to be encouraged to come here is enormous. Given the safety and security aspect Mr Pratt referred to and, of course, the opportunity to articulate through to some of the finest universities in the country and to do that within the territory, there's a real possibility to do that. So we would urge the committee to look closely at our recommendation on that aspect.

**MR PRATT:** The ACT could provide free busings to the Gold Coast on weekends.

**MS DUNDAS:** Your recommendation talks about the need for marketing to international students, as you have just gone through it. Do you see this as something that the government itself would do, or do you want the government to support you or the individual RTOs to do it? Which way would you like to see it happen?

**Mr Smith:** I was a member of Minister Brendan Nelson's national branding project, looking at why international students come to Australia and why they might choose Australia over other countries. It goes very much to the nature of the country, the comfortableness that students feel when they get here and the prospect of part-time employment. It is how you attract them to a particular destination.

There is an impression given of the jurisdictions and the various states and territories competing against one another. At the end of the day, that is what's happening. We are suggesting that the territory government focus on attracting international VET students to the territory. At the moment, that is very much left to CIT to do—and they do it very well. But there are reasons why 70 per cent of the international students in this country go to private RTOs, which are mainly that private RTOs offer niche education and a smaller, closer community approach to the way in which study is undertaken. That appeals to many overseas students and, more importantly, to their parents as well.

**MR PRATT:** What's the point of difference?

**Mr Smith:** Between CIT and private RTOs? The factor of size.

**MR PRATT:** I imagine there are a number of factors, but what are the key points of attraction for overseas students in the private RTO system?

**Mr Smith:** The size or lack of size, for a start, Mr Pratt. Secondly, the fact that private RTOs—

**MR PRATT:** More dedicated environment.

**Mr Smith:** offer niche education in many cases, specialise in particular programs or courses and can counsel students more closely than a public provider can. Public

providers also have obligations to a wider cohort than private providers, who are very much on a fee-for-service basis and therefore need to deliver value for money—or they'll be out of business.

**Mr Facer:** There is another factor there, if I might just chip in, which is flexibility. Private providers have that. They're not regimented; they can start students every other week if they choose to do so—if the demand is there.

**MS DUNDAS:** Another section in your submission was on the role of ITABs, and you note the complex communication issues that have arisen from the fact that not all ITABs necessarily feed into the national ITAB and those kinds of things. What would you like the future of ITABs to be?

**Mr Smith:** Ms Dundas, the previous witness, who spoke about ITABs, probably inadvertently revealed one of the problems with ITABs in this country, which is that they are too structured, too regimented and, in some cases, too ideological in their approach. There's very little flexibility on the part of many ITABs, both at national and state and territory level.

Some of them have become captives of their particular industry or of unions or employer groups. Take, for instance, the private sector. ITABs have shown very little interest in the private sector. They tend to be focused very much on the needs of big industry, and 75 per cent of employment in this country is small business. This is an arguable case, but ITABs have shown insufficient interest in the employment needs of small business and have shown particularly little interest in the role that private providers can play in the delivery of accredited training. Yet we contend that up to 45 per cent of accredited training in this country is delivered by private providers.

We would submit that the private sector—Mr Calder's college, for instance—has a very good feel for the skill needs of industry and for the needs of employers because all the students who leave Mr Calder's college, or leave the colleges of my members, invariably have employment outcomes. If they didn't, they wouldn't be paying the fees upfront to attend and the colleges would very soon be out of business.

ITABs tend not to seek advice or counsel from private providers. There is a major need for change. Our submission is 12 months old—as your inquiry has been going almost 12 months—and since that time there's been a lot of discussion of just where ITABs are in this country and what change is needed. We would submit that there is a need for a major change in the approach to and funding of ITABs.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you aware of how much ITABs get funded?

**Mr Smith:** Nationally?

**THE CHAIR:** No, at a territory level.

**Mr Smith:** No, I don't have the detail. I imagine they would be under massive funding pressure now because of the withdrawal of federal funding.



**Mr Calder:** Most of the ITAB representatives indicate to us that they're short of funds and they're merging and sharing. We get an impression that they're not well funded.

**MS DUNDAS:** You said that there needs to be a restructure of how funding is working for the ITABs—that they need to restructure themselves. What would be your preferred model?

**Mr Smith:** We have a vested interest in this, of course, Ms Dundas. One of the possibilities would be to fund the private providers to be able to look more closely at the skill needs of employers in relation to where their students are going. They need to think laterally about it, rather than be concerned, as the previous witness seemed to be, about continuing to fund ITABs on the basis of specific industries.

They need maybe to look at a consolidation of that industry advice and look at it from the point of view of involving providers more in formulating that advice. There's always concern about involving providers because they are seen as the supply side, and there is concern that it should be an industry driven system. Yet we've had an industry driven system in this country, a la ANTA, for 10 years, and we're still having difficulties. It's partly because our industry driven system is driven too much by big business.

**THE CHAIR:** Taking the topic away from there a bit, at a big picture level, what role do the private providers play in comparison to the TAFEs?

**Mr Smith:** The position in my organisation, which is the national industry association of private providers, is that we believe there needs to be a partnership in this country between public providers, TAFE and the private providers. At an individual level there is. For instance, CIT, under the directorship of Peter Veenker, is a very progressive public provider and works closely with a range of private providers across the country.

The attitude in some areas is not as forward thinking as that, but private providers see the future in closer partnerships with public providers and also in a recognition by government and decision makers at the bureaucratic level that private providers need to be encouraged to develop and prosper and not to have placed in their way unnecessary impediments.

We accept that regulation and quality assurance are important. But we are concerned that the compliance costs associated with the AQTF and the way it's administered at state and territory level are growing all the time, and there's insufficient recognition by government that those costs inhibit the provision of training.

**MS DUNDAS:** Your submission also talks about the support services that private training organisations provide to students, and you request that we recommend that the government recognise and note the considerable contribution. Can you explain in greater detail what you see that contribution as and what recognition you would actually like from the government for that?

**Mr Calder:** It comes back to Ms MacDonald's question. The differentiation between private providers is mostly about support services. We measure our business on the basis

of jobs won or university places gained rather than graduates. We have a stream and a student advisor whose job is to make sure that every student leaves with a CV and with good interview, job-searching and networking techniques. Even once they've graduated, she will ring them and point out jobs that would fit them. We quite often get jobs coming through our front desk. Our involvement extends to making sure that they get an outcome from their education.

We have dual-mapped a lot of our courses. There is an ANTA training package requirement, which satisfies that side of the house. We also provide a graded assessment, which is mandatory as far as universities are concerned, to allow our students to enter university some time in second year or the middle of second year with full standing for the tuition they've done with us. A fair bit of effort goes into making sure that we're producing outcomes, in terms of the students' aspirations, rather than a whole lot of people that cross the stage on graduation day, then that's the end of it.

That's how I would characterise the difference in what we do. We also offer quite intense pastoral care. As I mentioned, 45 per cent of students are coming in from the country and are settling into the bigger city, with all the usual hassles that that provides. It is that sort of thing that differentiates us, plus class size.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is that factored into the fee that students are paying? When you attend university, you pay a student services fee to support the services that then support you. Is it factored into those fees?

**Mr Calder:** Yes it's factored in. There's no separate fee for that. That's part of what we offer.

**MS DUNDAS:** But you do put a little bit extra in on your fee so that you can provide these extra services?

**Mr Calder:** I'd put it the other way around. We designed the service we offer to include those services and then the fee is there. But when we're talking to parents of students from, say, farming communities—and you're talking students who have gone to a one- or two-teacher school—the step to Canberra is quite substantial in all sorts of dimensions. Those parents feel reassured and comforted that, if their son or daughter doesn't turn up for school for three days in a row, we will ring the student and we will also ring them—even given the privacy agreements—and say, “This is what's happening.” That brings people to our academy, we think, ahead of other choices. The parents are more comfortable with that sort of offering.

**MS DUNDAS:** What recognition do you want from the ACT government for this?

**Mr Calder:** I would say that we were exporting services to New South Wales. I'm not looking for funds or money. One of the biggest problems we face is student accommodation. Again, our student advisor spends a lot of time around Christmas hunting out places for students to live. There are clearly difficulties for students who can't get rental references because they've never rented before, and those things matter. For students coming from interstate—dare I say it?—some capacity for rental guarantees would help.

**MS DUNDAS:** I guess you want the government to look at the way it itself supports students across the board so that there would be something that you could tap into?

**Mr Calder:** I think that would go across all education.

**Mr Smith:** The best way government can assist students enrolled in private providers at this time—this applies not only to the territory government but to all jurisdictions—is to support a proposal that we have put and which is currently before the Senate education committee. The proposal is for what we call a VET graduate education loan scheme, and we'd be delighted to give the committee more information if it wished.

What we are proposing is an income-contingent, deferred payment loan scheme—not HECS, but something akin to what exists at the moment in the higher education area: PELS, the postgraduate education loan scheme. This is where a student can borrow some money upfront to undertake the course of their choice, pay the tuition fees or a portion of them and then pay that back over a period of time. That's something that this country has become very familiar with in relation to HECS—and you argue about the extent of student contribution in higher education.

In terms of VET, we're not proposing that this apply at the initial point of entry, which is the apprenticeship or traineeship. That is very much an employer responsibility. But, increasingly, in terms of career paths for individuals and the skill needs of industry, individuals are doing more than their initial apprenticeship or traineeship: they're going on to other VET programs, and they're going on to certificates, diplomas and advanced diplomas.

Individuals might be changing industry or employer, and sometimes there is no employer or parent support for that. But they're still in a sense VET graduates, and they need some support. What we're proposing is that they access a government-funded loan scheme whereby they're not getting a hand-out from the government but are getting a loan from the government, such as the one higher education students are entitled to at the moment, and are then able to enrol in the provider of their choice.

At the moment the only students who can afford to enrol in private providers are either those who themselves have the funds to pay the fees upfront or those whose parents or employer pay the fees. We think students should have a basic entitlement to the provider of their choice. We're not talking about a voucher; we're simply talking about students being able to have a commercial arrangement with the government to borrow money to pay the fees and then to pay that back over time when they get rewarded for having a greater level of skill.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you looking at that being administered on a national basis?

**Mr Smith:** It would be difficult. These things have to be talked through. HECS and PELS are administered through the tax office at the moment, and those things can be handled because higher education is a nationally based thing. It would take cooperation

and commitment by all jurisdictions, including the territory government, but we believe that, with encouragement to the minister from your committee, the minister may well want to support that sort of thing through MCEETYA. Where there's goodwill, there will be a way.

**THE CHAIR:** Moving on to a couple of other issues, Mr Calder, you were talking before about international students being placed into second year university or halfway through the second year. In that regard, do you see yourself as a competitor for the university entry programs?

**Mr Calder:** No, not at all. If we were talking about the University of Canberra College, we would see that as in some form of competition. But we don't measure ourselves against them, because more than half our students take their qualification and go on to work. We offer that as an alternative pathway and people choose us. Often, they come with the idea of going to work, find they like study habits and then go on. They don't start by having that in mind, but during the year they might.

We've had conversations with the people at University of Canberra about our students in second year, and they've told us how successful they are because their study habits have been developed. First year uni is one of the greatest times of your life, if I remember it, but it doesn't necessarily make for good study habits. There's some success, in having been through that small institution, going on to university. To answer your question, we are not directly competing with University of Canberra College, but many of our students go through the same sort of process by choice.

**THE CHAIR:** How much do you employ RCC and RPL—recognition of current competency and recognition of prior learning, for the benefit of the sound people—with your students?

**Mr Calder:** Constantly. Say they've done a VET in schools program and they're seeking credits for some of the units they've done, we'll put them through an RPL process, a testing process, with a subject matter expert—it might be a conversation; it might be a short test—to understand their level of competency, so that we can grant a competency if that's appropriate.

That's quite deliberate because I don't think there's anything as bad as sitting in a classroom doing stuff you've done before. It's a turn-off and it can seep through into other subjects. We offer new education to students who've already done that RPL rather than make them go through the same thing again. It is important for our students who graduate and go to university that they also expect the RPL process to reward them for the study they've already done. The RPL/RCC process is very important because it leads to a pathway.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it automatic that that question is in the application form to get in?

**Mr Calder:** The question “Do you intend to seek RPL for any subjects?” is on the enrolment form. Often we can do the RPL before they start at school.

**THE CHAIR:** Do people say, “What's that?”

**Mr Calder:** Most of the students are very aware of their options. They sweep around the careers markets and take a lot of stuff, but they clearly study it. They ask us some fairly searching questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Is RCC/RPL included in the overall course cost, or is it an additional cost?

**Mr Calder:** No, it's included in it. We try not to have additional costs for things, because that leads to confusion.

**THE CHAIR:** It's interesting how other organisations conduct RCC/RPL, especially if they're not charging in the same way as you are because it's an additional cost to them that is not covered by any funding arrangements. It's a vexed question, in that a lot of people who go in don't automatically get asked or told about it.

**Mr Calder:** Or they find that it's another expense that they hadn't budgeted for and think, "I'll just let it go and sit in a class that I've already done." That can dull the student. That can just be, "Look, I've done this stuff. Why am I doing it?"

**MR PRATT:** Can you tell us, from Bruce's experience and also the national perspective, something about your relationship with industry, your currency, keeping current in competencies and return to industry for your teachers and instructors? How's that working?

**Mr Smith:** Very briefly, I'll put what I think would be the situation for all my members, and Bruce can say whether I'm right or wrong. In a nutshell, the position is that in most cases our providers are the industry. There are very few full-time or permanent teachers. Obviously, the owner or the director, who in many cases will have an education background or business background, such as Bruce has got, will be by definition full time and involved.

The director of studies will probably be full time, but almost all the rest of the staff will be casual, sessional, part time; they will actually be working in the industry. In terms of a need for them to return to industry, they're in the industry and they're actually returning to education and to training. Bruce can verify whether that statement is accurate.

**Mr Calder:** Yes, that is the case. In regard to the other relationships with industry, one of our philosophies is that work experience—genuine work experience, not just sitting at the end of somebody's desk but having doing some practical application of what you've learnt in the classroom—is fundamental. There's a week's work experience built into every six-month course.

Again, our student adviser spends considerable time making sure that we have the support of industry in placing our students during their study. They are applying, and they also have an opportunity to exhibit their range of skills and knowledge to potential employers.

As an example, our sports management students will be supporting a couple of the AFL matches that the Kangaroos are running in Canberra. It's a two-way value. We

negotiated pretty hard that they're not just to stand at the gate and collect tickets but will do things that will help them with sports management, and that team will get some benefit out of that.

It's important that we maintain really good connections with industry, and they will tell us if the skills aren't appropriate. That's a really good test of our education. If a travel agent comes back and says that a student wasn't up to speed in such and such an area, we immediately ask, "Is that a trend? What do we do to fix those issues?"

**THE CHAIR:** I'm going to have to cut you off there. I'm sorry about that, but we have another witness. If you want to hang around, we've got one more witness. I'm sorry that I misled you before, and I thank you for your attendance today.

**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 the Assembly as a serious matter.

Please you first state your name and the capacity in which you appear today before the committee.

**IAN JAMES GIBSON** was called.

**Mr Gibson:** My name is Ian James Gibson and I appear as Head of School of the Academy of Interactive Entertainment.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing today. I've heard some good things about your school, so I was keen to actually hear from somebody not necessarily involved with the construction industry or the blue-collar industries, to hear about some of the innovative things that you're doing.

**Mr Gibson:** Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want to tell us a little bit about the academy?

**Mr Gibson:** Sure. We train people for the 3-D graphics and computer games industry. I don't know how much you know about those industries but they're new. Basically, our students go into film, advertising, the defence simulation industry and increasingly architectural design areas: 3-D animation is big in a lot of those areas. Our specialty is in computer game development, so that's training people to develop games for PC, Sony, PlayStation or Xbox.

We've been going for about six years and I've been there for two and a half or three years. We're currently training about 200 full-time students. The definition of full time is 20 hours a week. We have about another 60 or 70 part-time students. We also work very closely with a games company which exists on the same site as we do, so—the former witness's evidence prompts me to say—quality assurance, in terms of the industry, is reasonably easy for us.

We organise the Australian Game Developers Conference, which is the only games developers conference here, in Melbourne once a year. The academy is a founding member of the Game Developers' Association of Australia, so we have a lot of contact with most leading developers in the country. They come regularly to our place to talk to students and we talk to them. We have monthly teleconferences. We've very much involved with the industry. For instance, there's a big games development conference in the United States soon and our material will be there courtesy of our games developer partners and friends.

The academy sees itself as a driver of industry, not just a trainer: we like to see ourselves as being in the middle of what is happening, which is hard at times, but we really put a lot of effort into doing that. We're very, very closely involved with games and games development in Australia, and that's very much a growing industry. That area is going to be huge, we believe.

As well as that, yes, one of the interesting things we do is have a good partnership with CIT. I echo the previous speaker's statements about working with TAFEs and CIT. I think ours is a good example of that. Basically, our students train for two years and that bar is constantly lifting, but the first year's training, which is a certificate IV, is done through CIT, if it's graphics we're talking about, not programming. Students in this graphics course, which currently has about 90 students in it, enrol through CIT. They pay their money to CIT and they use all the services that CIT has to offer, but we deliver the training for CIT. It's a tender arrangement, if you like. CIT says, "We want somebody to deliver 3-D." We've done it for the last four or five years. It works very, very well.

**MS DUNDAS:** So they're CIT students, not academy students?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes, they're CIT students.

**MR PRATT:** And you're carrying out components of their actual curriculum?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes. The course itself is accredited to both AIE and CIT, which means you have to be friendly otherwise you have intellectual property issues at times. Basically, the students come to us and they see themselves probably more as AIE students because we do most things for them. But, if they need access to student support or accommodation services or whatever, CIT can do that for them. So we don't have the same problems in first year that Bruce has, for instance, because this large public education entity supports the students. We deliver the specialty, if you like. It works very well. We work with the faculty of design at CIT.

In second year, the students then choose to go into either a games stream, a film stream, a general 3-D animation stream or a programming stream. Some of those courses require fees paid up-front to us. In the past, some have been at CIT and some are also funded through Training and Adult Education, through its industry training programs. We have a lot of funding arrangements with different people and that's how we work.

First year is great for students because they pay about \$3,000. It would cost, in Sydney or Melbourne, about \$13,000 for the equivalent course. CIT funds us per contact hour, so they pay us somewhere in between to deliver that course for students. It's something we need to discuss with them because it's probably not enough, but it's great for students. We deliver it for about cost, and that way it's good for us because students can flow through to the more specialised courses later on. It's also great for Canberra. Canberra is now delivering more 3-D computer games training than anywhere else.

More importantly we're leading that—this sounds a bit like marketing, but it's true. We advise Charles Sturt University about a course which it has just set up. Universities are now frantically trying to run any form of course with games in the title because it's sexy



and it's marketing. The Game Developers' Association is actually very concerned about it because you find that they're just doing a bachelor of communications in games in brackets or a degree in IT with games stuck in there somewhere. It's a very big market overseas and universities are trying to get in on the act but, interestingly, in this instance, vocational education is leading higher education. It's fascinating where this area is going.

Sorry, I've gone on a bit too long. That's CIT—I think it's an area in which consideration should be given to a lot more private RTOs working very closely together.

We also have a good relationship with local games companies such as MicroForte, Irrational and others. We're trying to set up a local digital industries network at the moment for government to talk to and deal with, because that's been lacking in the past. We're trying to push that. We have sponsorship arrangements with Sony. One of our students each year goes to London and works in London with Sony game developers. It's worth about \$10,000, but Sony gives us \$20,000 per year for somebody to go over there and work, usually in PS2 titles.

We've got a good relationship with Microsoft as well. They gave us software to set up our programming stuff in the first place. We have worked quite closely with Xbox developers with Microsoft in the United States, so we have a lot of good international connections as well. We believe in trying to pull it all together to give the best experience for students. We work quite well, I think, with Training and Adult Education here to fund equity courses, which are very popular.

Finally, we have a good course called the certificate II in 3-D animation, which is run through government colleges. It's part of CIT's voc ed in schools scheme. We can provide a pathway from years 11 and 12 into our full-time courses and then through to industry. Again, students enrol through CIT, come to us in the evenings and gain a certificate II while they're studying in college. That's part of their year 12 package—shut up Gibson, okay.

**THE CHAIR:** No, you're right.

**Mr Gibson:** I go on too much. Ask something specific and I'll try to be briefer.

**MS DUNDAS:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but there's no real ITAB for the computer gaming industry, so you seem to be doing a lot of the ITAB work yourself.

**Mr Gibson:** I would say to some extent we are but, having said that, the arts and recreation ITAB in the ACT has taken us up very firmly and I work very closely with its executive officer, Jenny Wardrop.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you go into more detail about your relationship with the ITABs and how you see the ITAB working?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes. I've only been in this area for three years. My background is in public education through schools and colleges and various other places, and then in vocational education. I rely very much on the ITAB for advice, for background about politics, and about what's happening and processes in particular.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is that the process of dealing with the government end, or do you find that the ITAB is connected enough with the industry to provide you with the advice from the industry end as well?

**Mr Gibson:** No, we do all the industry stuff.

**MS DUNDAS:** So they do the government stuff?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes, government stuff. I've never asked Jenny for advice on industry because we're so intertwined with industry that I really have not found it necessary. Where the ITAB has been valuable has been in dealing with ARC, dealing with Training and Adult Education, general advice, support for new courses and that sort of thing. My experience of ITABs is only through that one and it's very positive, I have to say. However, increasingly it's noticeable that less and less can be done because of the funding squeeze and such things. It hasn't affected us dramatically. As I say, that's probably because we can get all the industry information pretty directly.

**MS DUNDAS:** But the government stuff is still very important in looking through those changes?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes, very much so.

**THE CHAIR:** How do you think it would affect the academy if the arts and recreation ITAB were to no longer exist?

**Mr Gibson:** I think it would have a very serious impact, frankly. We've built up in the last three years. At times, that's been a bit touch and go. There are very small margins and the biggest problem of all is finding time to do things. If, for instance, I had no access to more independent advice about who to go to, even what to ask, then at times I think I would have said, "No, this is too hard, forget it." There has to be some area providing advice. I know a lot of smaller, private providers are in that position as well.

I do recommend much more of a partnership arrangement between CIT and private providers. I think it can work very well. However, there is almost, I guess, an inevitable—I don't know if arrogance is the right word but I'll use it—arrogance about large providers. They tend not to have too much patience for smaller providers. I talk to numerous small providers who all say the same thing: "We don't know who to talk to, we don't know what the language means, we don't know what the jargon is." I know of two small providers who've gone out of business because the AQTF material just proved too hard for them. Yet these were groups who offer highly specialised training which delivers people directly into the work force. One of them was a local television training company. Without the ITAB, those people would have gone out of business quicker, frankly.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have a different topic now. You said that vocational education is leading the way in your specific field compared to some of the universities. There has been a lot of discussion since we've been holding this inquiry about the stigma attached to vocational education, especially in the ACT where university is seen—rightly or wrongly—as the correct pathway for students to take.

As a leader in your field, with vocational education, how are you addressing that stigma? Is it there for you even though you're leading?

**Mr Gibson:** It's interesting. It has not been but it's starting to grow now. Generally, film production companies, games companies and whatever, don't care what qualification you have as long as you've got two things: a lot of talent which is demonstrable on a demo reel which you can give to people, and evidence of being able to work in a team. Those are the two T's—talent and teamwork. The teamwork is something I can possibly come back to. Three years ago, they couldn't care less. Now, they're beginning to grow up, they're beginning to want people to have degrees—

**THE CHAIR:** Why?

**Mr Gibson:** Snobbery, I suspect, and tradition—a lot of people running games companies don't have degrees themselves, interestingly.

**MS DUNDAS:** And this is degrees versus certificates?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes, versus diplomas. There are a whole lot of reasons. I find it fascinating. I've talked to GDA people about this. We have an education committee. I've raised it and they all say the same thing. They believe that higher calibre people get into university, therefore they believe those people will be higher calibre when they come out, even though they accept that they might have to retrain them.

One of our roles is to provide a postgraduate pathway into the industry which we do particularly for programmers. Most of the programmers who come to AIE already have degrees.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you're picking them up out of university or another career and retraining them yourselves?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes. It's interesting. The games industry is quite happy with that, but for some reason some of them want people to have this university exposure and experience. It's not a dramatic change, but it's changing slightly, so they're moving towards encouraging universities to offer courses in these areas.

**MS DUNDAS:** How do you think we can counter that or does it need to be countered?

**Mr Gibson:** As a former high school teacher, I believe that the place to start countering that is in high school.

**MS DUNDAS:** With the teachers in high school?

**Mr Gibson:** Teachers and students in high school. Until we do that, until we are actually saying to people, "There is no higher education,"—if you can't get into higher education which is way up here, then by implication you have to do lower education, which is vocational education—until the line between the two can be blurred, I think that problem is always going to be there. I believe that that should start happening in high school.

I think a few ways we can do that are to support the introduction of an associate degree, which of course they have in other countries, for instance, the UK, which is seen more as a practical degree, halfway between the university degree and the VET qualification. I think I'd agree with the previous speaker that we need to have some sort of funding arrangement for voc ed courses, certainly at diploma level or advanced diploma level—entry level.

We say to our students, “Would you rather do a degree or a diploma?” and they say, “We couldn't care less, but we'd rather do the degree because we get HECS, and our parents like it better.” That's basically why they want to do it. It's not because the training is better, it's because of parents and funding. I think we would start to address that by providing funding. Looking at how we are advising students in high schools about where they go would also start to blur those distinctions.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you think that industry itself would accept an associate degree—

**Mr Gibson:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** —as opposed to a full degree?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes, I do. That's my belief.

**THE CHAIR:** Since you've brought up the topic of schools, do you have any dealings with the schools and colleges?

**Mr Gibson:** Yes. Well, we do with the colleges in terms of certificate II. We run courses in virtually all government colleges through the CIT's voc ed and schools scheme, which sends students to us each semester. We train about 50 college students per year. Other dealings with schools, mostly with colleges, are informal but they phone us to obtain perhaps some expertise on different games things. I know a number of people in colleges, we send speakers out—those sorts of things. But the only formal contact is through the certificate II program that we run.

I get enthusiastic about this, but there's a lot of evidence now to show that games and games technology is very, very useful in helping, for instance, students with attention deficit disorder. There is also a lot of evidence that they can help students with reading disorders. We've a number of students out there who can't read, but they can do good work so they've got a chance of employment. It's a great thing for wheelchair users because it's image based. Our training is visual: you don't have to read an awful lot, you don't have to write much at all and it's commercially based. You come in and you create your thing. You then ask whether it is good enough or not. If it's not, you ask how you make it good enough. There's a lot of industry involvement so it's very practical.

Now I believe that that form of training will eventually move into schools. I believe that schools will start using interactive technology and visually based learning in all sorts of areas. It's something that, if I had the time, I would love to get into, because I've seen it so many times—students who can't focus on many other things will learn through playing a computer game or creating an image. It's a big thing. Sorry, it is one of my pet topics.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are you turning students away from your courses?

**Mr Gibson:** Just about. In fact, we want to reduce the number of students we have because we think we're probably training a few too many now. More to the point, some of them don't take our advice so they leave after one year with a certificate IV. We say to them that that's not entry level, and "Even with your talent, we don't really believe you'll get a job," but they try to get into the industry early. So a number of people are circulating now who are not fully qualifying. The entry level is going up and up and up, unfortunately.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is that too many in that the industry is becoming saturated or too many so that you're not able to give the specialised support to students?

**Mr Gibson:** Too many in that the industry is being saturated by applications from people who are not fully qualified, we believe, particularly in Australia where it's still quite a small industry.

**THE CHAIR:** My question was about how good is the knowledge of your courses among careers counsellors in colleges.

**Mr Gibson:** It is getting better, but it is still not great because it's still a hard industry to understand. If you say "computer games" to people, they think of kids sitting in rooms playing violent games. It's not really the profile now. As you know, it's a mature industry. Thirty-five per cent of PS2 players are 35 years old and over. It's an industry that's bigger than the film industry now, by revenue. So, no, many people in schools don't have comprehensive knowledge of the industry. As with many of the emerging industries, it's hard to understand, so you tend to advise people about what you're sure of rather than about something for which a pamphlet's arrived, some new industry. It could be better.

Could I say a couple of other things that I just jotted down? Along with the previous speaker, I believe that the voc ed sector in Canberra would benefit from greater exposure through government trade missions, and so on, going abroad to places such as China and so on. I don't think the private sector is often well represented, though CIT is.

I believe that we need to provide greater pathways from high school, beginning earlier in high school.

**MR PRATT:** That's what I wanted to ask you.

**Mr Gibson:** Particularly for interactive technology, you have to start early, because kids who are 11 and 12 understand this industry far better than their parents do. They're not frightened of it and they'll be in these things. They understand this industry far better than do the teachers and the powers that be. I know because I used to be a teacher. They're looking for more knowledge about these areas. It's not just games: there's a whole interactive technology field which we need to get into in high schools.

I think we need to focus on more than generic skills in high schools. I've no doubt you've heard a lot of those things—communication, teamwork and so on. That has to start happening in high school. I think we need to get people such as industry figures in to talk about those things at high schools. I know of at least 10 I could give you tomorrow who'll go in there and talk about communication skills, teamwork and so on. When we hear a lot about online learning, we forget that, as I said, the top criterion for production companies—be they film, television or whatever—is communication. That's what they need.

We talked about blurring the lines between higher education and vocational education—a need for HECS-style funding. Possibly the only other thing I wanted to say to you for your consideration was that we need to have a more flexible method of accrediting courses. For example, PlayStation 3 is coming out in two years' time. It will probably use a new architecture so it's hard to develop for. On its arrival, if I could run a course which didn't have to be formally accredited and wasn't necessarily from a training package, and even be given funding to do that, then I could lead the way in new technologies. If I have to wait for a year or 18 months to write the course, get it accredited to fit all the bureaucratic funding cycles, which I understand, I'm going to be behind the eight ball.

In Western Australia, I talk quite regularly to the Film and Television Institute in Western Australia. It has the ability, through its training and education body, to run experimental courses which are not accredited, which are new, which are different. Flexibility in accreditation is vital, because some of the areas we're talking about develop so quickly that you have to be able to respond very, very quickly. At the moment, the processes probably don't allow us to do that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for coming along, Ian. It was fascinating.

**Luncheon adjournment**

**JACQUELINE RYLES** and

**ROS WILLIAMS**

were called.

**THE CHAIR:** I will read a statement that is made to all witnesses. 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, would you state your names and the capacity in which you appear today.

**Ms Ryles:** I am Jacqueline Ryles. I am a director of Capital Careers, a private registered training organisation.

**Ms Williams:** I am Ros Williams, the other director.

**THE CHAIR:** Did you want to start by giving us a bit of an overview of—

**Ms Ryles:** What we are involved with?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Ryles:** We are in our tenth year of operation and we are an accredited registered training organisation. We receive government monies to deliver a series of programs. The majority of our qualifications are competency based and nationally accredited. We work mainly in the area of administration, IT, telecommunications, call centres, medical/legal reception, and we have a very special niche where we help people who have disabilities. We teach blind people to use adaptive technology, and we work within other ranges of people who are extremely disadvantaged.

Currently we are doing a lot of project work. We are introducing competency-based training into John James Hospital and Calvary Hospital. That is taking us in a slightly different direction now, but this is quite ground-breaking and has not happened in Australia before. At John James it is actually being now built into their EBAs, their enterprise bargaining agreements, so that is quite a big thing.

**MR PRATT:** Well done.

**Ms Ryles:** I think that is pretty much what we do.

**THE CHAIR:** Steve, do you have any questions or do you want me to start?

**MR PRATT:** I wanted to know a little bit more about how you are organised and set up, but that can wait till after.

**Ms Ryles:** No, that's all right.

**MR PRATT:** Can you just fill in the blanks in my mind about how you are laid out; a little bit about your curriculum, student body, instructors, whether they are part-time, casual or—

**Ms Williams:** We are essentially a small business. We have a training centre running out of Belconnen and we deliver quite a lot of primarily community-based programs on-site in Belconnen. We have got two information technology laboratories and some quite large classrooms and then we also deliver quite a lot of training off site as well. So we would be going out to organisations looking at training sometimes in the evenings to meet the needs of people who are in the work force.

We have got a staff that varies between, I guess, eight to 15 people. We have maybe four full-time people, quite a few part-timers, and the business also uses the services of a number of specialist consultants. When we are delivering very specialist courses we link into other small businesses, often sole traders in Canberra, to use their services for training delivery.

**Ms Ryles:** Our qualifications range from a certificate II to a certificate IV.

**MR PRATT:** Certificate II to IV.

**Ms Williams:** Yes.

**Ms Ryles:** Up to a certificate IV. We don't do diplomas but that is probably going to be our next step.

**Ms Williams:** We have done some certificate Is as well for people with disabilities. So it is really that fairly basic level of the vocational sector that we are, as it were, operating in.

**MR PRATT:** Right. And you aspire to diploma?

**Ms Ryles:** Yes.

**Ms Williams:** We may deliver some diplomas.

**THE CHAIR:** It is currently being debated, I would imagine.

**Ms Williams:** That's right. The business has been growing. We started with the two of us 10 years ago and every year it expands a little bit more. I guess from our point of view we have got to a stage where it is operating profitably. We have got quite a good reputation in Canberra. We have won the training award once, and then Jacky and I got an award for our services last year. So we have got quite a good reputation. We don't aspire to become a national company; we just want to provide a very good service in the ACT and the surrounding region.



**MR PRATT:** Right. Just to recap on what you were saying, and I was writing furiously: your competencies are based around what group of specialities?

**Ms Ryles:** Training packages, which are the business services training package—

**Ms Williams:** So that is essentially business administration.

**Ms Ryles:** —the IT, the information technology, training package; telecommunications.

**Ms Williams:** Call centres as well.

**Ms Ryles:** Call centres, and those really are our main ones. We are now going to move into the health training package because our longer term intention is, now that we have a model of introducing competency-based training into the medical hospital industries, we would like to take a wider scope for that. At the moment we are just working with the managers and administrators. We would like to have a whole of service—the people in the kitchens, the laundries, the additional service providers there—and then take it national. We see that as a huge leap but I have to say that we have had a lot of support from our state training authority for us to get this established.

**MR PRATT:** That leads me to my first technical question. ITABs: what support do you get? What is your relationship like? What do you think? What do you—

**Ms Ryles:** Could she leave the room.

**MR PRATT:** What do you think about the ITAB system and, in terms of you being a private RTO, what service do you get, what benefits do you get?

**Ms Ryles:** I guess, seeing as we have been asked to be honest and up front, we probably would teeter on the fence somewhat on this issue, but probably fall towards saying the ITABs could have been more prominent in the past and could perhaps be promising more for the future. We haven't found that the ITABs have been instrumental in the success of our business. There have obviously been times of need that we would speak with ITABs but we haven't found them to have made any difference to the way that we operate. And in some areas we have gone outside of the state to seek information, maybe from a national body rather than defer to an ITAB here because the information was not current. So I think that was always a complaint we had, that information was not always current.

**Ms Williams:** There seems to be a little bit of duplication I think, too, in terms of the role of training and adult education and the role of the ITABs. For us, we often feel as if perhaps one needs the signature of the other rather than performing perhaps an effective role. If you think about it, the role of the ITABs is really to service industry rather than to service the training industry. So ideally we would see the ITAB as a link between us and industry perhaps to convince people of the value of competency-based training or to get people to think about moving their whole organisation towards competency-based format.

So I think that there is a role there for them to be liaising very closely with industry rather than a need for them to be servicing the training industry. For one reason or another, I don't think that has been particularly successful in the past. Obviously, the question of resourcing is an issue but from our point of view we have close links with industry just because that's our business. So we don't really need any intermediary to be making that happen or it hasn't been like that in the past.

**MR PRATT:** So you see their role as being in benchmark advice—competency-based advice—to industry on what benefits they can get out of seeking the sorts of training you can provide, selling the—

**Ms Williams:** Yes, selling the concepts, selling the AQTF.

**MR PRATT:** You don't need them for technical advice because—

**Ms Williams:** I don't think so.

**MR PRATT:** of your close relationship with industry?

**Ms Williams:** We are delivering the training packages every day. I think it would be fair to say we know more about them—

**MR PRATT:** You are almost part of industry, aren't you?

**Ms Williams:** That's right. We know more about the training than the ITAB could possibly know because we are delivering those services every day. So I don't think there is so much of a role there for them. Each ITAB varies. Quite often we go to an ITAB function and there will be a lot of training providers there but there wouldn't be many industry representatives. So I don't think that that link between industry and the ITABs has really been strongly forged, for one reason or another. I know that resourcing is an issue.

**MR PRATT:** Following on from a point raised by another private RTO this morning, do you need that ITAB link for, I think as he described it, policy and government matters, support in those sorts of areas; the politics of doing what you have to do as opposed to the technicalities of what you are delivering?

**Ms Ryles:** I think in fairness the answer would be no, wouldn't it?

**Ms Williams:** Probably not, no.

**MR PRATT:** A pretty sad day for the ITAB, Minister.

**Ms Williams:** The politicking would be done perhaps by the Association of Private Providers, the APP. They would probably be more effective rather than the ITABs. The ITABs would find themselves caught between TAFE and the private providers, and I think our interests sometimes are quite different.

**Ms Ryles:** And as you rightly said, as a small business we are part of industry as well as we are part of the training area. It is in our own best interests to promote ourselves and our services with the high level of competency-based training which we really do believe in. I don't know whether we are typical of other RTOs, but we are fairly independent and we find our own way around gathering information, or confirming facts, or promoting what we do.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you are quite happy working by yourself with any government regulations or through the bureaucracy, as well as working with industry?

**Ms Ryles:** I think one of the best things about operating here in Canberra is the accessibility of people. You can soon build up a rapport and a relationship with people in the Chief Minister's Department or with our state training authority. That is how we operate. We talk to people directly. We very seldom would veer off and work through an ITAB. We might sound them out and see if we have their support, because if we move into a new area we are required to have the support of an ITAB. So it would be in our best interests to do that. But it probably wouldn't stop us from moving forward with a new idea, whether there was an ITAB there or not or they were that supportive of the way that we were going.

**MS DUNDAS:** Separate to the ITAB issues, do you believe that there is enough communication and cohesion across the entire VET sector? Do you see yourself as part of—

**Ms Ryles:** The VET sector?

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes.

**Ms Ryles:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** You talk about being able to manage things yourself as quite an independent small business, but how do you link in with the rest of the VET sector?

**Ms Ryles:** Again, it is a very small industry. We all tend to attend the same functions, we are all in competition with one another for business, but I wouldn't necessarily say that we are in competition in an awkward kind of fashion. There is a lot of sharing of talk and friendship between us. So I think we have our own informal networks and sometimes we share trainers, or we might even share resources in terms of accommodation.

**Ms Williams:** We work in partnership quite often with other training organisations. And certainly Training and Adult Education would often be organising forums. I think you have attended two in the last two weeks, where training providers would get together. So, yes, there is quite a lot of talking that goes on in the private sector.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you believe there is an effective communication opportunity out there?

**Ms Ryles:** OTAE will create opportunities; APP creates opportunities. I guess that is where it mainly comes from.

**Ms Williams:** I think it is one of the strengths of working in Canberra. Jacky talked about the accessibility of people who make decisions and also that it is a small enough community for people to know each other.

**THE CHAIR:** You talked about partnerships. Can you give us an example of a partnership that you have with another training provider?

**Ms Ryles:** We have had partnerships with training providers in informal ways. We have in the past had a formal relationship with TAFE, CIT, and that worked extremely well because we were able to have a clear division of who could play what role. Some time ago part of the funding requirement of OTAE, as it was then, was the encouragement of partnerships. But the word “partnership” was never clearly defined. We found it a very awkward and cumbersome process because who actually was the proponent for the contract, who split the money?

Just as a little anecdote, in our very early days of business we did enter into a partnership with someone who was delivering a florist qualification and we were doing the business management part. She ran off with the money, so we didn’t get paid. So partnerships are always a bit of an awkward thing for us unless we can clearly see where the responsibilities can be divided and how the money is going to be split.

So we tend to say that we work collaboratively or cooperatively with people. You can only have one person who is going to hold the purse string—that is just the way things are.

**MR PRATT:** Is she in Rio?

**Ms Ryles:** We don’t know where she went but she’d better not come back here.

**THE CHAIR:** I doubt it was enough to go to Rio, though, was it?

**MR PRATT:** Living with Saddam.

**Ms Williams:** People have worked together as well perhaps in not such a formal way, Karin. For example, recently the training organisations had to comply with 12 quality standards. So we worked with another training organisation to come up with a risk management strategy. It is really a template for private training providers Templine to use. So that brings us together as well. I guess you could think of that as a partnership. We have jointly delivered training as well with Training for Health and Community Services and also with some organisations that might be registered to deliver this qualification, and then we can put on an add-on bit like the same workplace.

**Ms Ryles:** Or Chubb Security. We have done that in the past.

**Ms Williams:** Chubb Security was the other one.

**Ms Ryles:** They are an RTO, a registered training organisation. If we want to deliver something which may have included first aid, our choices could be that we would go to

St Johns Ambulance or the Red Cross. But we would go with Chubb Security because they were an RTO. We have worked together on several chief minister sponsored programs, particularly with people from the indigenous community. And we did that for a number of years, didn't we?

**MR PRATT:** In the area of work that you do or the spectrum of subjects that you cover, do you think there is room for both private RTOs and public RTOs who deal in those same subject areas to complement one another? Is there a position for both to work closely together and complement, or is it just a waste of time and energy?

**Ms Ryles:** I think it's a waste of time. It is really. Maybe we have the same clients, but those clients would have different needs. We often pick up people who would not cope in an institution or a large complex. We have different spectrums that we work with. We have a lot of people, disadvantaged groups, who are entering into the work force. I think it is important they have an environment which is non-judgmental and very supportive. I am not saying that CIT does not supply that, but they work under such different strictures and structures that they could not possibly provide the intimate support that we can, being a small organisation. There is room for both of us, and there is room to have the same qualifications happening, but it is just a different style of delivery.

**MR PRATT:** There is room for both of you in terms of student choice—

**Ms Ryles:** Yes.

**MR PRATT:** but not necessarily in achieving outcomes?

**Ms Ryles:** We are working together.

**Ms Williams:** Yes. I guess we are talking here about having a partnership arrangement between CIT and private providers. We have done it a couple of times successfully, but there has always got to be a really good reason for a partnership. So I think trying to artificially make those partnerships doesn't work. Nevertheless, I think it is important that the people have the choice in terms of what provider they come to. We complement each other but it is quite a different service.

**Ms Ryles:** And quite frequently we will do the foundation work and encourage people as their next step to go into a CIT course. So it is that preparation and the confidence building and then they move on to further qualifications.

**Ms Williams:** I guess the difficulty from the point of view of a small business is trying to compete with TAFE, because they get their recurrent funding. Quite often, when we are applying for our registration, we are expected to provide libraries and student areas and all those sorts of things that would be funded, I think, under CIT recurrent funding. We have to take that out of the monies that we are making in a commercial way or else through our government funds, and that's quite difficult. I know there has been a lot of debate about the parity, having comparable fees. But, nevertheless, when the product providers aren't getting any recurrent funding then it is quite difficult—no way can we provide the same sort of student services. It is a different sort of service and competing with very low student fees from our point of view is often quite difficult, especially if we are servicing highly disadvantaged groups.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have been asking this question of everybody: as a pilot RTO you are dealing with, I guess, a different type of client—I am going to make the assumption—but are you facing problems with people seeing that as the second choice; that there is the expectation that people will go through school, go to university, get a degree and they will be knowledgeable and everything will be great; that, as somebody put it, that is higher education, so obviously there is lower education also? I am not saying that is true—it is the way somebody phrased it. Are you finding that you are having problems—

**Ms Ryles:** That is a very interesting comment, no.

**Ms Williams:** It is suggesting there is a need. In the survey forms we got back today there were quite a few people who got a high qualification. We have recently surveyed one of the large organisations we work with to think about filling in the gaps for training where people haven't had an opportunity recently. Quite a few of those people have got tertiary qualifications and they still expressed an interest in participating in our certificate IV in business management. So our impression is that I just don't think that is happening at all.

**Ms Ryles:** Another example of that is that we have a large project with John James Hospital. We have introduced competency-based training there and the executives have said, regardless of what level of degree is held by the management there, they will all undertake certificate IV in business management. So that will be benchmarked throughout the whole of the hospital. So we are a bit surprised by your comment.

**MS DUNDAS:** So it is coming from industry themselves, that they want people to take on the training.

**Ms Ryles:** And, in fact, with John James, a lot of the recruitment processes now on their general advertising states that you must be prepared to undertake competency-based training as part of the employment agreement.

**THE CHAIR:** What percentage of your students would be coming straight from college?

**Ms Ryles:** Very few. Traineeships but not classroom.

**Ms Williams:** I think 15 per cent or even less. For us it is mostly people who have been away from school for some time.

**MS DUNDAS:** They are already in industry and getting retrained or they are looking to re-enter an industry?

**Ms Ryles:** Both.

**Ms Williams:** But I guess, too, don't forget the people in the work force who have often gained their tertiary qualifications some time ago. We are working with some at the hospital. Those people got their primary qualifications some time ago. They might have been working for 10 years and so they see that the vocational qualification is a chance to

have their skills recognised—the skills that they have learnt during those 10 years in the work force—and also to refresh their skills. I guess one of our most popular courses at the moment is business management. Ideas about management change all the time. I think people just see it as a great opportunity to upskill, so they can cope with their changing work environments.

**THE CHAIR:** What RCC/RPL processes do you put people through when they actually apply for your courses?

**Ms Ryles:** Stringent.

**Ms Williams:** And varied.

**THE CHAIR:** So everybody undertakes an RCC/RPL process, or it is in the question?

**Ms Ryles:** It's by invitation; our advertising includes it. That option is available, and it's horses for courses to some extent, Karin. That facility is available. But I was surprised somewhat that people still would like to gain training and be part of a group or follow through some form of structured training. So although we offer it, and we do do it, I think most of our RPL would probably be in the certificate IV in assessment and workplace training. That is an industry qualification of people from our own industry, and that is a requirement to meet the new quality standards. So we do a lot of RPL and RCC in that area. But, generally, people still are saying that they will always learn something different and will be upskilled with new knowledge. So we do offer it and we do conduct a lot of RPL, but I would say that the majority of students will attend training.

**Ms Williams:** I think, too, that as you go up to high qualifications, when you are up at the certificate IV level, it is often as time consuming to prepare a portfolio of evidence at certificate IV level as it is to attend the training. Certainly from our point of view, it is often more expensive and I think perhaps this is somewhat under-recognised. It is easy for us to deliver a class and, from the point of view of small business, conducting extensive RPLs is very, very expensive in business, and it certainly costs us a lot of money.

**THE CHAIR:** We heard from another RTO earlier on, and they said that they included the RCC/RPL process within their overall cost to students but they were taking a lot of out-of-school students, so they were looking into their courses and they charged quite a high fee for what they were doing. I take it that if there is an RPL/RCC process, that is an additional cost to the cost of the course or is that—

**Ms Williams:** Not necessarily, no. It depends where our funding is coming from. So if it is funding that we are getting from, say, the industry training program, then that would be covered in the costs. To us it is really just a matter of how many hours the extras are going to take, and we cost that out. For commercial clients, there is an extra fee. It is expensive. It is very time consuming.

**THE CHAIR:** How do you find the administrative arrangements from TAE and from ARC as well?

**Ms Ryles:** We have to say—stick your fingers in your ears—that we have the utmost regard for the way that TAE have—

**Ms Williams:** I am going to interject.

**Ms Ryles:** As I said to you before, we have a very good relationship with them. I guess over the last few months there have been a lot of staff changes and that has impacted. I guess if we have a gripe—it is the first time in years we have what we believe is a genuine gripe—it is the length of time that has passed in the last little while for tenders to be called, and I am sure other people are telling you the same thing, which has a direct impact on small business.

We were fortunate towards the end of last year that TAE actually invited us to extend some contracts and we negotiated sufficient work to take us up until the end of May. But we know that in some circumstances some of the RTOs are really struggling. Cash flow is a problem for them. We used to moan that OTAE took a terribly long time to settle our invoices but we have got to rely on that lateness now and we can see now it can extend our business by six months every year whilst tenders are being processed. But this year it is an issue that it has taken such a lengthy time for tenders to be called.

**Ms Williams:** Forward planning is really important for small business, especially if we want to stay competitive with the TAFE. They can write down what their curriculum is for the full year. In terms of our government-funded programs, we can't do that and it has been a case of “the tender will come out”, and it will come out next month and next month. So people I think are starting to lay off staff. We are looking at our rooms and thinking, well, perhaps we may need to cut back on the training rooms that we are using. So it makes forward planning extremely difficult.

In training, you need an appropriate running time for recruiting. It really takes as long to recruit for a course as it does to deliver a course. Trying to recruit for courses in a month or a week sometimes is very difficult. So from our point of view, we need notice of funded programs that we are going to be able to deliver. Six months notice would be wonderful but quite often that just isn't the case.

Also, we don't always have a clear idea of how much money, the total amount of monies, is available for a program. At the moment there is a program for existing workers in the ACT that is taking off and we think it is an excellent program. Nevertheless, no-one can really tell us how much money there is in the bucket and whether that program will be around by September or October this year.

That is very, very short time frame. So we become very reactive and I often think that maybe because of that the planning is not done—it is a little bit ad hoc rather than in a considered fashion, not so much from our point of view but I think in terms of the overall planning for training for the ACT.

**Ms Ryles:** I think another consideration could be—and it is something that we have been forced to do—to look for more lucrative markets. I think that is very nice for us but for the community that is not a good way because we believe our expertise is very much in



working with disadvantaged groups. If we find over a period of time that we have put in the hard work and move on to the lucrative market, there will be nobody really prepared to pick up that particular niche because of the delay in the funding being released, and I think that would be a pity.

**MR PRATT:** Are you picking up year 10 students out of high school coming direct?

**Ms Ryles:** No. A couple of years ago we did the SNAPS program, and we got an award for that one, too. We have a few concerns with the college system at the moment in terms of what level of qualification they are actually being issued with. I don't know if it is appropriate to talk about that right here.

We think it is going to be a very awkward time for the young people to be given certificate III and certificate IV qualifications, which are based really on a lot of work skills and experience of the world, and we see that they eventually will be disadvantaged in the workplace. The only time that we feel easy with it is when people talk about IT, and I guess there is some justification and reasonable argument that young people accessing IT qualifications in some units at certificate III will be able to move into a reasonable level within the work force. But I think if they feel that they are going to leave college with a qualification which is attractive for employers, they are being misled.

**MR PRATT:** Right. Related to that but on perhaps a different tack, are you receiving students who have come out of college with a year 1 or year 2 certificate coming to you for III and IV?

**Ms Williams:** Certificate I or certificate II.

**MR PRATT:** Coming to you for III or IV—

**Ms Williams:** Not very much.

**MR PRATT:** in IT and business admin?

**Ms Ryles:** Maybe under a traineeship arrangement but not to sit as part of a course, no.

**MR PRATT:** Right. I wanted to ask, just to get a feeling for what you thought of their competencies at that level and whether they were ready to come onto III/IV training with you.

**Ms Williams:** I think certainly certificate II in schools works, but I think once you get to certificate III level there are a lot of things that people can only learn when they are in the work force for some time. It is not something you can pick up if you have done, say, 20 days in the work force—things like working as part of a team and communicating in a business environment. So if I am very honest, I would be very suspicious of people coming out of school with a full certificate III qualification in those sorts of areas. You would think that word processing and business writing and all those sorts of things can be taught well in a school but it still somehow has got to be transferred to the work environment. But II I think works quite well.

**Ms Ryles:** II works because it is an entry level qualification.

**MR PRATT:** I hope you don't mind me asking you about a broader VET family of issues. You actually feel that students attacking certificate I/II in your family of subject areas—IT, business, et cetera—would be reasonably well looked after in the college system?

**Ms Williams:** I think so. To II level, certainly.

**MR PRATT:** Okay, thanks.

**Ms Williams:** We would still like be delivering certificate II, by the way. A lot of people are re-entering through different pathways. But no, I think that's fine.

**THE CHAIR:** That's a different issue though—the availability of certificate II still at post-college level?

**Ms Williams:** Yes. I suppose you are aware that it can disadvantage them in terms of when they move onto traineeships, and I think that has been addressed. If people have a certificate II qualification and then the employer takes them on at certificate III, it may be a disincentive because the employer will get more money if they did a II and a III. So that is another issue but it is really a side issue.

**THE CHAIR:** I think a few years ago you were doing a partnership with one of the colleges.

**Ms Ryles:** Lake Ginninderra.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you still in a partnership?

**Ms Ryles:** We did the SNAPS program with them. Yes, we are still. In fact, what we still continue to do is towards the end of the year we have an open day and students come over from Lake Ginninderra and spend a day with us—normally in the call centre, because the call centre qualification is customer service and communication—and they usually just have a wonderful time. We do say that you can move on and gain a qualification. Just before Christmas last year we actually had some young people whose parents paid for them to come over for a number of days to get some additional training as a result of that show and tell day. Yes, we like that kind of arrangement.

**Ms Williams:** Yes, and it is coming back to this idea, Karin, that there has to be a reason for a partnership. The reason that that call centre program works so well is because we have expertise that the schools don't. We have got a simulated call centre set up and in the schools they don't have that. So that works really successfully when we provide the specialist add-on.

**Ms Ryles:** And the scope.

**Ms Williams:** That's right, they wouldn't have scope to deliver that. Things like IT: I don't think there is any point in us going and knocking at schools, because they have good set-ups in schools, they have highly qualified trainers and they can deliver it themselves. So in terms of our partnerships, we have got to look for niches where we can add-on.

**MR PRATT:** So that is where the complementary comes in?

**Ms Williams:** Yes. In fact, we have done it again. We did it in commercial cleaning with Koomarri. We have recently had a group that—

**Ms Ryles:** And business admin with Koomarri.

**Ms Williams:** And business admin with Koomarri, that's right.

**Ms Ryles:** That was the SNAPS program again, actually.

**Ms Williams:** Yes. That program worked well I think for a different reason—that sometimes for some students it is better that they move out of their school environment, and coming to us was a little bit like going to work. They had to dress up, they had to come into the business environment. So it was a very nice intermediary step between school and commercial training provider and then they went into the workplace after that. So, again, that partnership works because everyone has got a very defined role and we are doing our specialist bit.

**THE CHAIR:** I am going to cut it short there. Thank you very much for attending today.

**Ms Williams:** There is one thing. I don't know whether you have got the time, but there is something I feel we should mention. Have we got time to quickly touch on that?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Williams:** I guess the other issue we think should be raised is that a lot of organisations in the ACT are fulfilling more than one role, and to me there seems to be a conflict of interest often between an organisation working as a new apprentice centre, running the job network and also providing training. We were talking about this earlier today and there do not seem to be as many disadvantaged people knocking on our door, and that is fine and our business is doing other things. Nevertheless, we feel that the reason for that is that people are probably coming in and getting one service, then the same organisation can provide the next service and the next service and the next service. That may seem like streamlining but often it is double dipping and not a terribly effective use of funding.

Certainly in terms of the new apprentice centres, I think that there should be a separation between new apprentice centres and training providers because it is too easy to go out and make the first contact with the employer and then say “now come to us”. I think that is a huge issue that really needs to be looked at seriously.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. Thanks a lot for your comments.

**JACQUELINE JONES** and

**JEANNIE COTTERELL**

were called.

**THE CHAIR:** Jacqui and Jeannie, before we commence I will read this statement. 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 today. 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, would you state your names and the capacity in which you appear today.

**Mrs Jones:** I am Jacqueline Jones. I am the Director of Quest Solutions. I am also the president of the ACT Association of Providers of Training Services, which has represented training providers for about 10 years in the ACT.

**Ms Cotterell:** I am Jeannie Cotterell. I am Training Manager at Quest Solutions and also a committee member on the Association of Providers of Training Services.

**THE CHAIR:** I note that we have received a submission from the Association of Providers of Training Services. Do you want to start by making a general statement about the submission?

**Mrs Jones:** I have reread the submission; we sent it in quite a while ago. I do note that some of the issues that we were concerned about when we wrote the submission have actually changed. I think in priority two we said that the existing employee traineeships model was significantly different in New South Wales and its implementation was not working in the ACT. Since that stage the ACT government has essentially adopted the New South Wales model. Certainly, my company is actively marketing existing worker traineeships and we are looking forward to quite a big boost in traineeships in the next month or two. So that has changed from our original submission.

Also, we mentioned in there that we have had some problems with TAE in terms of planning and issues related to consultation. That has significantly improved in that we have had a lot of consultation and we have been involved in the planning process. However, a lot of the consultations and the planning processes have not eventuated in actions. So we are concerned that, although we are included, sometimes I believe the actions are not being implemented because a third organisation is involved. For example, in industry training programs, which are grant programs that are put out sort of on an annual basis, we have actually consulted with TAE to change the way they award the training programs. We have asked for them not to be price sensitive. We have asked for them to be based on quality and to fix the price.

The reason behind that request was that for a long time we believe that training providers in the ACT have been missing out on work because they have been undercut by interstate

providers. And then there have been serious problems with the quality of delivery of those interstate providers. For example, at one stage we were getting down to them quoting \$2 or \$3 per hour for training and when they actually delivered those programs, all they did was send out a disc and a follow-up. There was no actual face to face and the distance learning was considered to be, by everyone concerned, quite substandard.

So as an association we have actually asked for this model to have a quality score on our providers. They can use whatever dimensions they like, but the obvious dimensions that we would look at would be things like getting people to actually do the courses and complete the courses, which is obviously pretty standard. In some cases, those courses are designed to be employment orientated, so you might look at an employment outcome. You could look at the past results of the training providers. You could look at the compliance issues in terms of administration.

Stephen Bramah from TAE is actually quite open to that model. We have also asked him to add a fourth dimension of consumer satisfaction. But it has now gone to the procurement board which, I believe, is a different department and we don't know where it is at. So that has stalled.

In terms of the long-term impact on training providers, this kind of bureaucratic stalling has been happening for at least the last six years. We have had constant consultation about when is the best time to start courses, and the best time for us to market and start courses is to know by about October, November at the latest, that you have got the courses. Then you start marketing. And then you have got a fresh group of students coming out of school, or even students finishing university, and it is a very, very good time to market. I think in the last six years that has coincided with the release of tenders once. At one stage we had a delay of six months because the minister needed to make a decision about whether to charge fees or not and it delayed it till about May. Now, May is a terrible time.

We have made quite frequent representations to ask them to try and coincide the release of the tender results to match the times when we have actually got people out there wanting to do courses. If it is delayed, what happens is they take up other things. They do part-time work, or they go to CIT which has a regular intake, and they know when they are going to start. The training providers in the ACT spend a lot of time and a lot of money marketing courses where there are inappropriate numbers out there to take them up. So that is something that I would really like to see addressed.

We don't get paid to market; we get paid to deliver. We don't get any money to do all this marketing. I might have staff spending two months marketing a course, trying to get the numbers in the seats. The dual problem is that then TAE doesn't have the numbers. So it can't report back to ANTA that we have filled our courses because we told them that it was inappropriate at this time for us to have 60 days to fill courses. It is a very practical thing. I don't know why it has not happened, but it hasn't happened—it has happened once in the last six years.

**MS DUNDAS:** When you tell TAE that this is what you would like to happen, that it does need to coincide, what is the response? Is it “we're trying” or—

**Mrs Jones:** Well, there are various responses. In the instance when the minister took six months to decide about the fees, it was out of their hands because the minister was doing it. In this instance, they have rolled over some of the programs. In the case of my company, the rollover was not enough, based on what we earned last year. We didn't get a response from them until four weeks ago, which is again into a period where it is costing us a fortune to try and find students. There are various usual bureaucratic reasons.

**MS DUNDAS:** Somebody else mentioned the high turnover of staff as having an impact in how TAE is working. Is that something you have experienced?

**Ms Cotterell:** The submission definitely does say that that has been an issue. I think in the last six months that has improved in TAE. I do feel like I have specific contacts that I can go to for specific things which previous to the past six months I didn't feel that I had. So, yes, it has been a problem. I do think it is improving, though.

**Mrs Jones:** Personally, as the president of APTS, I have had to go to Stephen Bramah and say, "Listen, it's happening. Please take note of it." On the occasions when I have done that something has happened. But I think with this particular delay at the moment, it is just another reason; it is another government department they have to deal with and they just can't get them to act quickly.

**MR PRATT:** Have the reasons mainly been bureaucratic processing, or funding, or both?

**Ms Cotterell:** We have been told it is processing. That is the impression I have been given.

**Mrs Jones:** In this instance, because we are asking TAE and TAE is asking the procurement board to change the way it funds training, then I think there is a sorting out of the rules of the procurement board because they normally have such a big emphasis on price sensitivity.

**MR PRATT:** It has never been the case that TAE thought that what you were asking for was not possible, or relevant, or too much to ask for?

**Mrs Jones:** I don't think so. I think that what happens when APTS goes to Stephen or one of the other officers is that the committee has gotten together. We have actually been talking amongst the providers for six months. So it is a considered opinion and usually it makes sense. Take this classic model of the existing employees traineeship. For two years APTS has been saying, "You're disadvantaging the ACT. Please change it to the New South Wales system. We're marketing New South Wales; we've got heaps of traineeships." And it took two years for them to actually get it. I think it is a bureaucratic thing. They couldn't understand what we were talking about. And then they introduced an existing worker traineeship which was not going to attract the Commonwealth funding because it wasn't two years long.

It took us 12 months to get them to realise that it was not going to work. They just couldn't understand what we were talking about. Eventually we sort of said, "Look please do it," and somebody listened. We have implemented it. I don't know what other providers are finding, but my company is about to put on about 60 new trainees in the next couple of months on the basis of this. So it was very frustrating when we knew it was happening in New South Wales but ACT didn't seem to understand it.

**MS DUNDAS:** You raise that in your submission as something that needed to be fixed in terms of the community need. You also raised reasons why the ACT industry training program is not as successful as it could be, due to, I guess, price inhibitions so that the private RTOs aren't being seen as directly competing with CIT and the government wants you to run these services. Can you explain if there has been any progression on, I guess, the catch-22 that has developed there? Is there anything that you think could be done to address it?

**Ms Cotterell:** What we think needs to be done to address that is to focus on quality rather than price, which is exactly what Jacqui has been talking about. If the focus on quality is implemented—and we see TAE is trying to do that and there are processes; and that is not happening for one reason or another—there is a good opportunity for private RTOs to excel in that area because we are flexible in those things that CIT can't necessarily do.

One of the other reasons the industry training program isn't successful though is because of the fees that have been imposed on students. That is almost the fundamental problem. If a student is disadvantaged enough that they require subsidised training, they usually can't afford to pay anything. And so as soon as fees are introduced on industry training and training for disadvantaged client groups, they are then excluded again. So we are getting into a situation where the same thing is happening—we are marketing to a group that is just not big enough because we are excluding financially disadvantaged people by introducing fees.

**MS DUNDAS:** So would you prefer to not have to introduce fees or would you prefer the government to pay them? How do we fix this problem?

**Mrs Jones:** It is an interesting problem because, if you want to again compare the ACT TAFE system with New South Wales—and my company operates in both the state and territory—in New South Wales if I am an unemployed person I can get to do two semesters free at TAFE. In the ACT I have to pay a fee if I am an unemployed person. So I am totally disadvantaged if I am here.

What we found is that in the past with ITP programs we were able to pick up those people who never were able to afford to go to TAFE because they never had the fee. Even though CIT discounts it by 50 per cent if they are unemployed, it still can be \$300 or \$400. So what the ITP program was doing was getting free courses. So we were actually targeting those people who could never go to TAFE. Now those people can't afford to do our courses because we have to charge them a fee. It is an obligatory fee and it was designed and it was promoted by the VETA board because of CIT lobbying because they didn't want the ITP programs to be competing with their fee-for-service courses.

**MS DUNDAS:** And when was that introduced?

**Mrs Jones:** That was introduced about 18 months ago. I find it very frustrating. I am also a Job Network member and that means that I look after people who are unemployed. If any of my clients want to go to TAFE in the ACT they only can give us the 50 per cent discount. They have got a ruling that says if a Job Network member is paying the fee then the 50 per cent discount is not applicable. And so that means that Job Network members might be saying to the disadvantaged clients, “I’m sorry, we’re not even sending you to CIT because it costs too much. They’re charging more than we would get as an outcome. If you stayed there six months we might get an educational outcome but they’re charging more than that.” So I think that system is pretty bad. But my major concern is the comparison between New South Wales and the ACT for unemployed people—they have to pay.

**Ms Cotterell:** As a training provider as well, there is an interesting little clause in the contract for the industry training program where a person who is currently receiving a certain number of benefits, including Newstart or youth allowance or parenting allowance, can get a 50 per cent discount on the fees that are charged. However, the provider is not compensated for that 50 per cent reduction in fees. So we are getting less for providing the training but we are not compensated at all through our funding through TAE. The TAE funding is a fixed price, plus we are obliged to charge a certain amount to students. That total cost is what it costs us to run the course.

We are then delivering that course to, let’s say, 15 people and 10 of those people are only paying 50 per cent of their student fee. We have been running below our own operating costs because we are not getting compensated at all for the 50 per cent tuition reduction. That is something that has caused quite a few problems for us as well in terms of trying to operate a course at cost when we are not getting that money in.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is that something that is affecting Quest? Is it affecting—

**Mrs Jones:** It is affecting all providers.

**MS DUNDAS:** across the sector?

**Mrs Jones:** Yes. This submission was a joint submission; it wasn’t just a Quest one. But the fees have been a real problem. It is even a problem for employers. In the ITP program, some organisations—for example, TRAHCS—that specialise in community service and childcare-type activities, can’t afford to pay fees for their clients to do the courses either. So it is the employers as well which are also saying, “We can’t afford to pay those fees,” not just the actual clients.

**THE CHAIR:** Does the APTS exist outside the ACT as well?

**Mrs Jones:** No, it mainly represents the ACT providers. But it doesn’t have a charter just to represent ACT. We could represent providers outside the ACT. You would notice, Karin, that we have just actually started an ACT assessors network in conjunction and that will attract a lot more people, and it already has.



**THE CHAIR:** So how many RTOs are members of the APTS?

**Mrs Jones:** Before we started the ACT assessors network we had about 42. We have now got a lot more members, including government departments who have just joined up.

**Ms Cotterell:** We don't have the numbers.

**Mrs Jones:** I don't have the numbers of that. I think there have been about 20 individual people joining the ACT assessors network on top of the APTS membership.

**THE CHAIR:** So is that across the border—that goes across into New South Wales as well?

**Mrs Jones:** Currently no. Currently we are not marketing in New South Wales but there is no reason to stop us from doing that. Currently we have just got too much to do in the ACT.

**MS DUNDAS:** You also raised in your submission a problem with ITABs in the way that they are not working for private RTOs. If we could redevelop the RTOs to do anything you want, what would you like them to do, how would you like them to operate and is there a place for them?

**Mrs Jones:** The problems with ITABs is that an ITAB is often one person who works for industry or to industry or finds out information about industry and then reports it to TAE, and often the information that we get has in the past not reflected what we have seen.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you are getting the information back through TAE?

**Mrs Jones:** Back through TAE. TAE is saying, "We're doing this because the ITAB said." There are classic examples of this. We had a course that we won through ITP. It was a course in marketing and we were specifically told it had to be targeted at the childcare industry. When we went back and asked why, they said, "That's what the ITAB said." So we went back and asked the industry and they said, "Why would we need to market in the childcare industry? We've got a ready-made market. That's not our problem—it's getting our staffing."

So we get information like that which is actually being used to direct the way training is done and direct the moneys to certain industry groups. And then when we as training providers are asked to implement it, we go out to industry and find that it's not the case.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you see that there is a role for ITABs but it just needs to be redeveloped to provide a communication linkage? Or are you happy as an individual or as an association working directly with industry yourselves and working directly with government yourselves?

**Mrs Jones:** I think that of all the stakeholders who are in the VET sector, the training providers are more in touch with industry, especially now that we are doing assessment on the job. We are out there talking to employers all the time and we probably feel we have got more expert knowledge than one particular person in an ITAB who has maybe often a large number of employers that they see.

There is a need for intelligence out there. We are actually working a lot more closely now with one particular ITAB who is on our assessors network committee. But I think it is a very large job for one person to do. I think what we need to do is to get TAE to actually listen to the training providers who are out there delivering it because we know what they want. Our bread and butter depends on us getting it right with employers. We have to ask them what do you want and then provide it for them. So with having a third party involved like an ITAB, we often find the information that is fed from those ITABs doesn't gel with what we are then asked to deliver. It doesn't work.

**Ms Cotterell:** I see a role for national ITABs in supporting resource generation and those kinds of things around training packages for industry—very much like WRAPS has done for the retail industry; they have a set of resources that are available. The assessment is consistent across the nation because everybody is looking to the same point. I do see a role there. But I very much agree with Jacqui that the accuracy of information on a local level has been lacking.

**Mrs Jones:** Also, in the past individual ITAB CEOs have often worked on their own. Some of them are extremely good, and some of them are just not in there, not doing anything. We have got one ITAB from which we have never had for the last five years any recommendations in the planning for that industry to have any training. So we have never had any training in that industry for the last five years. It is not that the need is not out there; it is just that that particular CEO has not done his homework. So it is very depressing when we look around. We know we could get a lot of training done in that industry, but this will not happen as long as TAE is listening to the ITAB and the ITAB is not doing their work.

**THE CHAIR:** We will have to leave it there. Thank you for attending today.

**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 the Assembly as a serious matter. Please state your name and the capacity in which you appear.

**JOSIE PORTER** was called.

**Miss Porter:** My name is Josie Porter, and I am the Training Director at Outward Bound Australia.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want to start by giving us an overview of what Outward Bound does and how the national training framework fits into that?

**Miss Porter:** Sure. Outward Bound is obviously an international organisation. It started in the UK in the 1940s, came to Australia in 1956, up in Sydney, and moved to the ACT around the early 1970s. We have the national base out at Tharwa, just on the south side. By national base, I mean that's where our offices are, our stores area, our accommodation for most of our operational staff and so on.

The main business of Outward Bound is personal development through outdoor education. It has a great belief in human potential and pushing—not pushing—encouraging and inviting people to step outside their comfort zones to learn from that experience.

**MR PRATT:** Pushing people over cliffs on ropes.

**Miss Porter:** Yes, you could put it that way. No, we certainly try not to push, but rather encourage. That's the main work of Outward Bound.

Our main clients are schools groups. Probably 60 to 80 per cent of our business would be schools groups and entire years will come for anything up to 12-day programs. Those programs are usually no less than five days in length. Then we also have smaller lines in corporate work and training, obviously.

The organisation has been an RTO since 1999. It was one of the first organisations in the ACT to become a training organisation. It took that step very much with the aim of increasing the skill level of its staff and also then the standing of its staff, so giving the staff a few more accolades to leave with, to move on with throughout their career, whether it was still within outdoor education, in personal development or in a different field.

Our staff work extremely hard, as any not-for-profit organisation's staff tend to. They work extremely hard for very little gain so it's nice to be able to give them something else. It obviously wasn't going to do Outward Bound's reputation any harm to become a registered training organisation and to have fully trained staff with nationally recognised

qualifications. For quite a while, I suppose, Outward Bound had a name—it wasn't particularly true but it had that name—for having underqualified staff and for being unsafe and so on. Our safety record is very, very good, but that didn't stop people from casting aspersions, I suppose. It was very good to be able to sit up and say, "Hey, we've just turned ourselves into a training organisation, and here are the steps that we take to make sure that our training is of a high quality."

So started the certificate IV in outdoor recreation, and that's the main certificate that we deliver. The way we deliver that is through a 12-month internship program. Anybody wishing to be an instructional staff member has to come along and do that, unless they have prior training that makes it unnecessary. We have intakes twice a year. We're looking at moving to three times a year. Those intake numbers are anything between 12 and 20. We've just had a record number of applicants in the current selection process, which is very encouraging.

That training lasts for 12 months. It doesn't take 12 months to learn the skills, but we believe it takes 12 months to become qualified instructors and people who know what they're talking about. Obviously, there are a lot of risks and safety problems and so judgment must be involved in what we do. The training gives people the theory and then the practical element of actually applying that with groups, while under our supervision and care throughout the year.

**MS DUNDAS:** You mentioned an application process to choose which students will come and do the certificate with you. Does that mean that you're actually turning students away? That you're not meeting demand?

**Miss Porter:** Absolutely.

**MS DUNDAS:** Why is that? Is it just a safety thing on your part or a funding thing?

**Miss Porter:** It's a bit of everything.

**MS DUNDAS:** If you could take all your applications, would you?

**Miss Porter:** No, we couldn't possibly deal with that.

**MR PRATT:** Capacity, surely.

**Miss Porter:** We wouldn't have the capacity for it, particularly not with the standard of training that we deliver. If it was just all classroom based, it would not be a problem. If it was just practically based, we could maybe do it at a pinch, but it would take away from our main business. Our main business is very much linked to our philosophy. It's linked to the Outward Bound philosophy internationally and we don't want to step away from that too much. That's the personal and social development of people, fostering human potential and aiming for a better world. Although that can be seen as quite lofty, it's amazing the little steps you can make towards that and the successes that you get along the way.

The main reason we couldn't take everybody is the quality of the training and the experience section that we deliver. We simply don't have enough courses happening with real students in real time to give people real experience in leading those courses and developing their confidence and abilities within that group.

**MR PRATT:** There's safety as well, isn't there? You only have so much scope to make sure that everything is safe.

**Miss Porter:** That's right. Usually, if you overstaff training, you can very much run into problems with safety: a diffused responsibility situation can happen much more easily if you overstaff.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is there industry demand for more people to go through the training you offer?

**Miss Porter:** Any entrants who complete their certificate IV at Outward Bound are in high demand in the outdoor industry. The certificate IV that they leave Outward Bound with is seen in the industry as being of a particularly high standard. All certificate IVs are meant to be the same and so on but the experience element is the difference: in a certificate IV direct from TAFE the experience may be a couple of weeks working with groups and that's it, but ours is easily six months' time with a group, working in teams and so on. We find that anybody who leaves OB—if they find that OB isn't the job place for them, and they want to stay in the outdoor industry—will be snapped up. Yes. They go on to greater and better things, too, either in the industry or outside of it.

**THE CHAIR:** Josie, there have been mixed comments today by a few of the RTOs and people and we've been asking this question pretty much of everybody who comes in: can you tell us about your experience with the ITAB that you deal with and how you find that ITAB? What would happen if it didn't exist anymore?

**Miss Porter:** Yes, dealing with just the one ITAB, I find that they seem to be snowed under, they seem to be very much overworked and are always rushing from one thing to the next. It is hard sometimes to know if you've been heard and if your request is just another thing loaded on top of the camel's back, or whether it's something that can take the load off. That can leave you feeling a bit guilty that you're adding something else to the tasks of somebody who already looks as though they're struggling, and genuinely struggling. I'm not talking about being wishy-washy about something—they seem to be genuinely struggling with their workload.

I find the ITAB to be very supportive, inasmuch as it can be, so very supportive versus being so busy that, every now and again, it can't really give you the attention that you want. It is supportive in putting forward proposals, trying to move you and your organisation forward, and it is also a great sounding board when you ask, "Are we doing okay?" I find that it's quite hard to benchmark, as an RTO, how you're actually going and what sort of job are you doing. Are you doing it okay or not? In comparison to other RTOs out there, are we ahead of the game, in the game or way behind? Are we so far back that we can't even see the back of the pack? I find the ITAB really good for that.

**MR PRATT:** An industry benchmark—that's one of its—

**Miss Porter:** Yes. Having said that, I think the ITAB that we deal with is an ITAB for every man and his dog—that's arts and recreation, and training as well, or something. I can't remember all the areas that Jenny's ITAB covers. Again, her scope seems to be so vast that it's hard to keep track of.

**MS DUNDAS:** Besides being a sounding board on the industry benchmark, what else does the ITAB do or what else would you like the ITAB to provide you with?

**Miss Porter:** Definitely support in funding applications. That is current but, again, I'd say that we don't always know when to ask or what a realistic timeframe is for that person because of the workload. Yes. That's probably about it, because I pretty much find that Outward Bound's quite self-sufficient in many ways. We're a fairly big organisation, at least we think we are. We're not big in the scheme of things, but we're big enough to be able to manage most things by ourselves.

I think we're also in a situation where we don't know when to ask for help, as well. I've noticed that this year in particular, with the bushfires and so on. After the fact, I found out that we could've got help with this, funding for that, or this could have covered that cost. We didn't even think to ask. It's more as though we say, "Okay, this has happened. This is where we're up to. This is where we've got to get. Let's just weave the path and get there," rather than sticking our heads up and saying, "Anybody want to give us a hand?"

I think that's quite indicative of the organisation that we're in as well. Not that we think nobody else can help us or do it for us, but we're used to being adaptable and flexible and getting on with the job. That doesn't always help us.

**THE CHAIR:** You're self-sufficient.

**Miss Porter:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You're obviously the national part of Outward Bound. You're a national organisation but you're based within the ACT, just.

**Miss Porter:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** How do you find your dealings with training and adult education?

**Miss Porter:** Again, I find them very good, very supportive open people. If I had to pick a downfall, again I'd pick at time lines and support whenever it comes to the funding end of things. We have 101 dreams within the training end of things, and we've been putting a lot of proposals through to TAE and pretty much all of them keep coming back. Again, they come back without TAE giving us an understanding of why they come back. What nail is it that we're not hitting? Have we just missed it or have we missed it by a mile?

We're not in the game to get the funding and make money and run off and rub our hands together. We genuinely want to help. A lot of our funding applications have been aimed at VET in schools and trying to support the teachers and all of that. We find, through our

affiliations with organisations such as the ACT Outdoor Education Association, that there is a bunch of hard-working teachers out there who want their kids to have the chance at vocational education training courses. However, they're snowed under with their normal workload, never mind trying to bring online a new type of delivery and bring all the teachers in who think, "Yes, this is going to be a good thing." They really struggle with that.

They are also struggling, particularly again in the outdoor education side of things, with the need to keep their own skill levels up in the different activities, so that they adhere to the mandatory procedures and so on. They even struggle with that to ensure that, when they take that canoe trip on the weekend, they're as safe as they could be. They struggle with finding the time for that, finding the funding for that. We're trying to work in partnership with them to crack that nut and to solve that problem, and we're finding that extremely difficult.

I don't know. Our final proposals went in to TAE a couple of weeks ago and I haven't heard yet. We'll see. Yes, TAE is full of lovely people and again it is very supportive, but where it seems to fall down is getting those applications through, getting them back to us and helping us find out if, for example, "That's really not the focus right now, but this is." We could then say, "Okay, that doesn't fit with us so we'll leave it for a bit."

**MS DUNDAS:** Is it also a timeframe thing that you're sending things through and it's taking so long for them to come back?

**Miss Porter:** Yes, absolutely. An example of that was the skill centre funding for which we applied over two years ago. It took over 18 months for the final decision on that funding to come through. That's a huge amount of time and it means that all the quotes that we put in now have to be requoted. Our needs have changed so some of the items that we felt that we needed 18 months ago we don't need now in the current climate. Apart from anything else, it means reworking. It also means that we do not know if we're going to get it or not and therefore, as an organisation, we are not sure whether to try to find that funding through other means.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds to me, as well, that you're talking about the transparency of process as well. Would you agree with that?

**Miss Porter:** Yes, I think so, for sure. Yes, that's exactly the case with the funding applications. Also, in a lot of cases, the funding is not the bottom line: it's the wanting to do something. It's the seeing a need and wanting to help to fill that need. Yes, a bit of funding helps because we don't have the spare cash to just throw at something and go for it. We do our best with all the applications to make sure that they are in line with the current government guidelines and sway.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, Steve.

**MR PRATT:** Yes, you were talking before about working with outdoor education and then approaching TAE to see whether you could further develop that. What's happened there? How have you come to find yourselves working with outdoor educators? Have they come to you seeking assistance or has somebody asked you to marry up with them to create programs for certificate training?

**Miss Porter:** It's a little bit of both, Steve. As an industry link, we try to sit on different committees and get involved in different outdoor education as well as training groups. We do that on a national level because ours is a national organisation. For example, the current proposal that we have in with TAE is for a partnership between Outward Bound, Lake Ginninderra College and ACTOEA, the ACT Outdoor Education Association. It's a link, it's a partnership, with all three of those buying into this three-pronged attack. We've hit them with the first prong at the moment. It all hinges on whether that goes through or not. We will see, then, if we can follow it up with the other two waves.

It's a bit of both. Sometimes we have people coming to us. Peter Blunt is an outdoor education teacher at Lake Ginninderra. He approached us and asked us to put him through a certificate IV so that he had a certificate and an understanding of the whole of the VET process. We were able to do that for him. He was a fantastic candidate. He went through his skills assessment with no problem, got them all signed over and that was in his time, at his expense. Now he's just started off a certificate II outdoor recreation program for his students but, again, it is his program design and it's his extra time and effort and, well, more time, which has gone into that.

The proposals that we're putting in are aimed at supporting teachers such as Peter, and therefore the students. Outdoor recreation fits beautifully into that training, like a glove. I think it's an industry that has a lot of growth potential. If you think of the spin-offs for the environmental side of things, for tourism—

**MR PRATT:** Health education in schools.

**Miss Porter:** Yes, exactly. There are an awful lot of positive spin-offs for the students, whether they make them their careers or just something that gets them interested in the outdoors. Let's face it, Australia has plenty of it when it isn't burning.

**MR PRATT:** Rather than burn it down, yes.

**Miss Porter:** Yes. Even on the basis of state and territory facilities, Canberra has amazing facilities for outdoor recreation—second to none. I think it would be a real shame if outdoor recreation did not get a bit of a push. At the moment, I think Outward Bound is the only provider, certainly of certificate IV, in outdoor recreation in the ACT. The CIT was providing a course but it has backed out of that now, I believe, after one year.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you believe that there's enough communication across the VET sector?

**Miss Porter:** What do you mean by the VET sector?

**MS DUNDAS:** Your work with other RTOs, keeping up with training practices or working with TAE to keep up with government directions, working with other industry groups who will take on your students if they leave Outward Bound, communicating with students at all levels, such as your school links into Lake Ginninderra College, but



also the students who are coming to you. A number of the submissions just mention that there are problems with communication, with linkages. Is it something that you've experienced or do you just see your organisation that way and feel that it doesn't necessarily matter because you have such a specialised training program?

**Miss Porter:** Yes, I think we're in a little bit of a different situation in that we only deal with two training packages—the outdoor rec and the workplace training and assessment. Those are the two that we deliver and deal with. It is quite specialist, certainly in comparison to somebody such as Jacqueline who was just here.

I think you make your own communication, whether that's right or wrong. There are certainly times when funding applications or proposals come through and you just think, "Jeez, I've got two weeks to pull that one." The deadlines for the proposals and so on can be a little bit tight. I wouldn't see it as a major thing, though, but maybe that's because, like you say, we or I have quite a narrow focus. Certainly, a lot of our communication is through the other committees and the like that we sit on, such as those of ACTOEA and the New South Wales version of that, and the ORCA board—the Outdoor Recreation Council of Australia. We learn a lot through those other national links as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Outward Bound's on the ITAB board as well, isn't it?

**Miss Porter:** Yes, Zoe is.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, and you meet with other RTOs and people involved with VET through that as well.

**Miss Porter:** Yes, that's right. Going to different workshops or seminars and that sort of thing, you meet other people as well.

**THE CHAIR:** How do you pick up most of your work? Is it through word of mouth?

**Miss Porter:** The training work? It's all pretty much in-house. We put an application out, select the interns, they come along and we train them. That's pretty much it. We have quite a good link with the Emergency Services Bureau as well. We've put a lot of their staff through their workplace trainer or workplace assessor qualifications. That has been a really nice link to have, actually, and I hope that one continues. We're working ourselves out of work, though, on that one. That keeps us quite busy.

We also have scope for the diploma in outdoor recreation and we really want to try and get that up and running by the end of this year. That's more as a recognition of our current staff, staff who stay around for a couple of years, to allow them to gain another feather in their caps before they—

**THE CHAIR:** You are pushing them that bit further as well, or getting them to push themselves.

**Miss Porter:** Yes, hopefully by using a little bit of a carrot. Definitely, we need as many carrots as we can get. It will be dangled as a little bit of a carrot now—stay for two years and then you get the chance to do your diploma—and why not? I think, if we offered

anything less than that, they wouldn't have the appropriate skill level, not for a decent quality diploma. Also, if we offered any less than that, then it becomes worthless. We very much want it to be seen by our staff, as well as anybody else, as a useful piece of paper, a useful qualification to have.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there anything else you wanted to add?

**Miss Porter:** There's one other thing and it's a bit out of left field, but I'll give it a go anyway. I have the audience so why not? One thing that we're looking at at the moment is the Birrigai Outdoor Education Centre, which obviously suffered a lot of damage in the bushfires. We had quite a good link with the Birrigai staff. Some of our interns used to go there for a bit of work experience, to see a different client group and so on. So we feel their loss very, very much. We were very close to being burnt out, ourselves, so it's all the more poignant.

Birrigai, from our perspective, just seems to be being left sitting as it is, going to rack and ruin, and the staff have been scattered and are trying to run programs out of Dairy Flat. If anybody's been to Birrigai and been to Dairy Flat, you'll agree with me that they're worlds apart. The Birrigai centre was in the middle of the bush and still is in the middle of the bush, albeit blackened. It was very different experience for those school kids, and also for the teachers who came along.

Obviously, as somebody who's been an outdoor educator for a long time, I feel it is very important to link young people to the bush and to establish an understanding. If you can make that link at a young age, so much the better. Birrigai did us a lot of favours: they got primary school-aged kids introduced to and interested in the bush, so that maybe one day they'd be interested in doing an Outward Bound course. They certainly are not a competitor of ours.

One grand plan that my boss, Karim Haddad, has is to raise Birrigai and have it running and functioning again. If there's any part that Outward Bound can play in that, we're more than willing and able to do that. One thought is that Outward Bound could go into partnership with the Department of Education and get Birrigai up and running again as it was, as it functioned so beautifully and so perfectly before. Why not? What's in it for Outward Bound? Just what I said. It helps us maintain our client base for the future. It also helps to keep outdoor education in the eyes and minds of parents, teachers and schools, all the way through from primary school to secondary school, which is where we kick in at the moment.

It would also give us the chance to use it as a training venue. Why not start our interns off up there with young kids? That would get them hands-on experience and increase the quality and the experience level of our internship right from day one. It would get them out there with the little kids, playing a few games or having a teddy bears' picnic—whatever it takes. Then we could round them up to maybe come down to national base and do the rest of their training there. They would do the exciting things that we do there: going mobile—going to Western Australia to run programs there for three months, then going up to Darwin and doing it there for three months, then coming back and being in Canberra for a month before you head off somewhere else again.

It would give a vast degree of breadth and depth to our program, which I think we currently have, but it can always be improved on. It would increase the number of people that we could take on, rather than turn away. It would definitely increase the scope as well. We have scope from certificate II right through to diploma, but at the moment it's really just the certificate IV that we deliver. However, we can definitely see that, with Birrigai, the certificate II would be very easy.

It would be a great place to help support the ACT teachers with the whole VET in schools angle, particularly with outdoor recreation, but in general as well. It would help them set it up and get it running with minimal fuss, because it takes a lot of setting up. Once it's set up, it pretty much runs itself, but it's the getting it set up that's difficult. That's where all the heartache is and all the hard work. That's where people can become very demoralised and give up on it a little bit too soon.

**MR PRATT:** Madam Chair, can I just say for the record that I embrace everything that has just been stated. Certainly, I have asked why the Department of Education did not accept the overtures of OBA months ago to crank up an MOU quickly. I can't understand why the Department of Education questions, or perhaps has slowed down, the creation of an MOU. They are taking their time to carry out the goddamned safety inspections at OBA, an organisation which is a frontline safety training provider. Clearly, yes, a whole bunch of primary school children have missed out on this year's engagement with the bush. Second, from a VET perspective, I have to say, exactly, certificate II candidates are missing out on an opportunity to get on with their training.

**Miss Porter:** It definitely seems that, once you get people involved at the certificate II level, you have the opportunity to bring them up through the ranks. It is the same with the certificate IV and diploma: if there's another level there then people are encouraged to move on through. The VET, too, in schools is a brilliant move. I really do applaud that move. I just think the teachers need a lot more support because at the moment they're struggling. If they're struggling, it means they're not taking it on or they're not that interested in it which, in the end, means that it's the kids who are missing out.

**THE CHAIR:** That's very interesting because I raised that issue this morning and the response was, "Oh, we hadn't heard that."

**Miss Porter:** Really? Gosh! Sally and I went to a meeting—I can't even remember who it was with now, but it was a meeting of ACT teachers. I came away absolutely dumbfounded and just thinking, "Who would ever want to be a teacher?" because all day all we heard was problem, problem, problem. It wasn't that they were whinging: they were simply being realists. They were just saying, "Okay, we want to do that, but this is the problem. Or if we go that way this is the problem." There just seemed to be more red tape, more paperwork and more expectations placed on the way they used their time than for others.

Outdoor education teachers already do so much Duke of Ed stuff on their weekends and so on. It's not just outdoor education either: I'm sure a lot of teachers do that. But, certainly, outdoor recreation takes a lot of after-school and outside-of-school hours. I think they're fantastic for doing it, but I think there also needs to be a bit of a line in the

sand that says, “Okay, it stops here and this is what we can do to support that. We still need you to put in, but this is what we can do to recompense you. We can at least recognise that you’re making an effort, doing these things well, doing these things safely and developing your skills to make sure that you keep our students safe so they don’t appear in the papers next week as another fatality.”

**THE CHAIR:** We might finish there. Thank you for coming in today at reasonably short notice.

**The committee adjourned at 4.18 pm.**