



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING
AND YOUTH AFFAIRS**

(Reference: [Inquiry into vocational education and youth training in the ACT](#))

Members:

MS M PORTER (Chair)
MR S DOSZPOT (Deputy Chair)
MRS G JONES
MS Y BERRY

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2014

Secretary to the committee:
Mr A Snedden (Ph: 620 50199)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.33 am.

BAKKUM, MS DEWANI, Chief Executive Officer, Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the vocational education and training inquiry. This is the fourth public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs. We very much thank you for your submission and for appearing before us today. There are nine submissions on the website and we have agreed to receive further submissions. We will be hearing from the Housing Industry Association, the CFMEU and the Australian Education Union later this morning. Are you familiar with the pink card that is before you, Ms Bakkum?

Ms Bakkum: I have briefly read it.

THE CHAIR: You need to acknowledge that you have read it and that you are comfortable with its contents.

Ms Bakkum: Yes, I do acknowledge that, and I am pretty content with it.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement before members ask questions?

Ms Bakkum: Not really. I think I will go straight to questions.

THE CHAIR: On page 3 of your submission you recommend an increase in the amount of tutoring for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Would you see that being provided in the school system or outside the school system, and are you recommending additional tutoring for all of those students—that is, primary as well as high school, or only secondary students?

Ms Bakkum: As I stated in my submission, everything starts when they are in primary school. But we are funded for high school kids, which is 12 years to 25. At the moment what we are doing is a part-time program, and we feel it is not enough to accommodate the demands of this program. Generally, in school I think the curriculum is set for them.

THE CHAIR: So at the moment you have a part-time program for secondary students aged between—

Ms Bakkum: 12 and 25.

THE CHAIR: So beyond the formal school years as well?

Ms Bakkum: Yes. I think this sort of assistance is given to them outside the school, the main reason being that the parents are not able to help them in those areas. They are from a migrant background, and when they arrive here they have very little or no knowledge of English or any other education at all, so they are unable to help their kids from a very young age. What we are funded for is somewhere in the middle, and what we have observed is that it should have started right at a very early age, in

primary school. According to my submission, this is what we have done, with the help of church groups—St Paul’s in the ACT. They give a little bit of funding and we tried a pilot program to accommodate that early age group, and then continued with the 12 years and over in the program which is funded.

MRS JONES: I have a supplementary when you are finished there.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Just to clarify, are you working only with high school students and those who are a little bit older than that, and the people younger than that are getting this program within their primary school?

Ms Bakkum: I do not know whether they are getting that extra help, but I think they have a curriculum which addresses their needs.

THE CHAIR: But you are also working with primary schoolchildren?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, we are.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that clarification. Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Where is the tutoring occurring now for high school students and above? Is that in their homes or is it at the resource centre?

Ms Bakkum: At MARSS, the resource centre.

MRS JONES: How much of the demand are you meeting? Would you say you were meeting 50 per cent of the demand, in your view, 20 per cent, or—

Ms Bakkum: We are trying to meet 100 per cent with whatever funding we have, so we are stretching our help towards basically this group. It is not like anybody is turned away just because we do not have the funding.

MRS JONES: How many young people are in that program?

Ms Bakkum: At the moment there are between 80 and 90 students.

MRS JONES: How much help do they get per week?

Ms Bakkum: It is nine hours a week, which is three hours each afternoon from 3.30 to 6.30, face to face, like I mentioned, at the centre.

MRS JONES: Is that self-referred, are the schools referring to you or is it a mixture?

Ms Bakkum: We promote this program at the Dickson College, which addresses our group of clients, and also through our other services that we provide, especially the settlement grants program, as a lot of families come through that program.

MRS JONES: So you contact the families that you have on your books already?

Ms Bakkum: Exactly.

THE CHAIR: Going back to what you said on page 3, you talk about an increase in the amount of tutoring that should be provided to these students. What shape would you see that taking?

Ms Bakkum: The recent survey that we did with the volunteers showed that the volunteers themselves have noticed that the hours of help given to these kids are not enough. They are not satisfied that it is fulfilling the requirements of these young kids. It is more like a bandaid solution rather than continuing the service for a longer period to address all of those needs. I think that is where we are coming from—that there should be more hours per week.

THE CHAIR: Would the students be able to attend for more hours per week?

Ms Bakkum: At the moment we are doing three days. We could stretch it to five days, every afternoon from 3.30 to 6.30.

THE CHAIR: I am asking you whether or not the students themselves would be willing to put that time aside, not whether you—

Ms Bakkum: I am pretty sure they will.

THE CHAIR: Would that be centre based?

Ms Bakkum: That would be centre based. That is more for security reasons as well.

THE CHAIR: Are you aware of any young people who perhaps are living further out in the suburbs who are not being reached by the program and possibly could not come to the centre?

Ms Bakkum: We looked at that. We do have a home tutor program as well, but the home tutor program is only extended to young people aged 16 years and over, not to the under-age kids. That is why we had found a gap for the younger people, and we are addressing it by having a program in the Belconnen library which is catering for the age of eight to roughly 15. The parents accompany these kids to that centre. We do not allow students—

MRS JONES: Did you say eight to 15?

Ms Bakkum: Eight to 15, yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a supplementary, Ms Berry?

MS BERRY: Yes, thank you, chair. I wanted to get a little more detail about the actual tutoring that you are providing over at the Theo Notaras centre. That is where you provide it. Do you have a breakdown of the numbers of age groups?

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MS BERRY: Are there more younger people coming along and that sort of thing?

Would you be able to provide that information to the committee?

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MS BERRY: Also, I refer to the support through St Paul's Church that you have been doing the work on in Belconnen. I guess that the families with young children who are coming to Belconnen probably have other children with them when they come along—

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MS BERRY: and they just participate as well?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, they do.

MS BERRY: That is the sort of—

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MS BERRY: That goes beyond the—

Ms Bakkum: Yes. What we do there—we started last year with three students, because we found there was a need based on the feedback from the young parents. So through this church we were able to start with just one hour a week, which is continuing now, but it has gone to 30. This is where we have found that there is that need.

THE CHAIR: 30 hours or 30 students?

Ms Bakkum: Thirty students, sorry.

MRS JONES: For one hour per week?

Ms Bakkum: One hour per week only.

MRS JONES: Sorry, I interrupted your—

MS BERRY: No, that is okay.

MRS JONES: Have you considered that same service being extended to Gungahlin as well?

Ms Bakkum: Look, if there are resources, yes, we would definitely do that.

MS BERRY: In respect of the volunteers that you have to provide the tutoring—are they volunteers?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, they are all volunteers.

MS BERRY: Do they have any sort of qualifications or is it more an informal—

Ms Bakkum: I think what we are looking at is the requirement of the students, based on the subjects they need. Mostly we are sourcing all the people, all the students, from the ANU and the UC. Also, we do advertise this program to the wider community. Amazingly, a lot of people working for the government departments are volunteering their time as well. For the younger group, what we have done is engage with a secondary school in Gungahlin. We are partnering with them to send their year 10 kids over to the younger kids. They are very helpful as volunteers.

MS BERRY: Is the funding that you get for the program that you run over here for the 12 to 25 years ACT or federal government money?

Ms Bakkum: ACT.

MS BERRY: It is ACT government funding?

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

THE CHAIR: If you could provide the numbers to the secretary later, that would be really good.

Ms Bakkum: Sure.

MRS JONES: I have one other supplementary on that—

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: while we are on it, because it is so important. If you could redesign the system from scratch, would you put this kind of after-school tutoring in every school rather than in a centre?

Ms Bakkum: I cannot quite say about the school system—how it operates. But, yes, it would be handy for them to do it, but I am not sure how the system works in the school itself.

MRS JONES: No, I understand that. But for the uptake and for the outcomes for the students, to be able to work through their homework and any issues that they are having, I am really wondering about how many have fallen through the cracks.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MRS JONES: Because if your parents are not educated in Australia it can be very difficult to interpret—

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MRS JONES: Even if your parents are educated in Australia it can be very difficult to interpret children's school work.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MRS JONES: I know that.

Ms Bakkum: At the moment we have not worked very closely with all the schools, but wherever we are referring our school kids, especially the new arrivals, we are working very closely with them.

MRS JONES: Yes, so hopefully you are picking up all the new ones.

Ms Bakkum: That is on individual cases, but not as a whole.

MRS JONES: Do you know about every new arrival in Canberra from every ethnic group or—

Ms Bakkum: Yes, because we are doing that service in the ACT at our centre. We are funded by the department of immigration, or at the moment DSS, to provide those services for the new arrivals in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Did you have any supplementary on this area?

MR DOSZPOT: No.

THE CHAIR: I will go to your substantive question now, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. Good morning, Ms Bakkum.

Ms Bakkum: Good morning.

MR DOSZPOT: I commend you also for the work that you are doing in these areas. Our terms of reference for this inquiry are to look into and report on all aspects of current vocational education and youth training programs and strategies in the ACT. As your very good submission addresses some of those vocational issues, I would like to switch my question to that.

The second point in your submission makes reference to difficulties in obtaining apprenticeships for trade qualifications. I want to focus on that for a while. You have highlighted some very interesting points there that I certainly was not aware of about the difficulty for new arrivals in actually engaging in an apprenticeship program. You identified some of those areas of concern. Would you like to elaborate on that for us?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, I mentioned as an example the Calvary hospital refugee mentoring program, which is a very useful program to our client cohort in the sense that they do have mentors. They do take on our clients, and they have mentors to train them in the areas of their need, whether they are nurses, doctors, cleaners, admin—whichever area they need help with. So they are being partnered in that area to get that extra training. That makes it so much easier for them to continue with their studies. So quite a number of our clients we have referred to that program.

Similarly, we were thinking that if there were programs set up like this for other areas of trade qualifications, like mechanics, electricians or whichever area they are in, it

makes it so much easier for our client group to have that experience and to satisfy their education demands.

MR DOSZPOT: Sure. Do you have any feel from your experience in looking into these issues whether there are particular areas that you are getting more of a call for? Is it in the building industry? Is it in electronic trades? Do you have any idea of where the main difficulties in this area arise?

Ms Bakkum: I think it is quite across the board in all the trade qualifications. We can provide you with the numbers, because we are recording all the information. Maybe we can provide it to you, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: That would be good. Our inquiry is to address these exact issues.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: The more information you can give us on that, the more accurate our findings will be.

Ms Bakkum: Sure.

MR DOSZPOT: I have one other point. There are a number of trade-related associations, like the Master Builders Association and areas like that.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Have approaches been made to them on this idea of yours about the mentor program?

Ms Bakkum: No, we have not made an approach to any organisations, based on a bigger program. But individually, yes. We are addressing individual cases because we have a job prep program where we are one to one helping these clients access these sorts of areas of need. But in general—I gave the Calvary hospital example—it is a broad way of addressing it, rather than a bandaid solution for one client at a time. That is what we were trying to get at, more like a bigger picture rather than a one-to-one approach.

MR DOSZPOT: I personally think this is a very important area you have identified.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: I come from a refugee background, yet some of the issues you have raised here I have not given thought to. This is of such significant importance at the moment.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: So even advertising or having an article on your idea about the mentoring program would be useful, I should imagine. I am not here to offer you advice at this point. We are taking information. But I would say that if you have any

other way that you disseminated information on this, please let us know, and that would also help some other ideas come into play on this topic. Again, I commend you for the work that MARSS is doing on this. I think your submission details this in quite good detail. But if you could provide some additional information for us on the numbers in certain areas, that would be good for us.

Ms Bakkum: Sure.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

Ms Bakkum: We are more than happy to supply you with all the breakdown of numbers and approaches that were made to us for this sort of help.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary on Mr Doszpot's question. He asked you if you had made contact with those peak bodies, for instance. What has stopped you doing that?

Ms Bakkum: We did not see that we could do that, in the sense that at Calvary hospital what we were looking at was a big organisation. It was not our idea. That idea came from them. And this is what is now giving us the idea to take it further from there. This was the first time we were able to talk about this. In the past we did not see that we should take this further. I think this is the moment where we bring it out.

THE CHAIR: That is a good start then.

Ms Bakkum: Yes. It is a good start, to be honest, yes.

THE CHAIR: So maybe you will be encouraged to do as Mr Doszpot said?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, for sure.

THE CHAIR: It occurs to me that you would have thought that the cost of this might be borne by the businesses themselves, perhaps.

Ms Bakkum: Yes. I think the recommendation at the end of page 4 is the recommendation that financial incentives are provided to employers of migrants in order to facilitate access and equity. I think this is what we are looking at. We can take this further from here on, I think.

MRS JONES: I have a supplementary to that as well, if that is all right.

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Do you have enough staffing to have time to approach bigger organisations, or is it actually something that you need additional staffing for?

Ms Bakkum: Definitely we are not funded to do certain things, but what we do is we work with a lot of pro bonos and volunteers and we make things possible at MARSS. So we do not sit and sort of wait for the funding to come. If we have the ideas, if we have the volunteers helping us, even pro bonos, we are more than happy to continue

with anything that we can do and start a pilot at least.

MRS JONES: We are not just ACT representatives; we also have conversations at times with our federal representatives. If you could design a situation that would give you the resources to approach bigger companies to set up these relationships, how much staffing would it take?

Ms Bakkum: To be very honest, I obviously have not looked into that at all but, like I said, from here on I think we can, knowing that we are being supported to do that. There are concerns regarding that. We can take it further, but previously we had not done any research or any work on that at all. It is just an idea we are putting now.

MS BERRY: I have some supplementaries too.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary, yes.

MS BERRY: Just regarding the apprenticeships, are there particular apprenticeships that people are wanting to get into? Are you seeing that there are some that are more popular than others?

Ms Bakkum: I think what we were looking at was mainly the trade qualifications. As I remember and recall the staff conversation, it was towards more like mechanics and electricians. Those were the two that I feel that I heard from the staff but, like I said, I can go back and get more detailed information on that.

MS BERRY: Sorry, we are asking for a lot of detail.

Ms Bakkum: It is okay.

MS BERRY: It just paints a better picture for us. And talking about the programs that Calvary hospital have initiated, the mentorship programs, are you aware of programs like this happening in other states and territories?

Ms Bakkum: No, I am not.

MS BERRY: I was just trying to get the wi-fi on my computer working but it is not working. I understand Victoria has a contract with United Voice for the cleaning of the stadium down there. They run a program down there which is similar to what Calvary hospital—

Ms Bakkum: No, I am not aware of that actually. And what we are doing—partly from the other program that we have done, which is more like a service that we provide to the training organisations while they are training our clients in certain areas of achievement like certificate I, II or III in child care, or any other course that they are doing—one to one, like I said before, is finding work experience for them in areas of that expertise. I think we are very successful in doing that. On our books, we have to do 40 work experiences and sort of place them in certain areas of their qualification. We are very successful. So far we have put about 20 people into those work experience areas. I think from here on, like I am saying, it will give us that scope to look into further arrangements of that Calvary-type program.

MS BERRY: And that goes to the recommendation that you made around financial incentives for employers, that employers maybe provide work experience programs and things like that?

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MS BERRY: Is that one of the challenges that you have found within the different sectors that you have been working with?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, it is a big challenge actually, finding work and even work experience, but I think we do not give up. We just continue doing what we believe in.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a substantive question, Ms Berry?

MS BERRY: I was just going with the flow of all the questions that were being asked. We have had some submissions similar to your own about perceptions around vocational education and training and it being a second choice to higher education, university education. It seems from your submission that that is a perception amongst the people that you have been—

Ms Bakkum: Yes. I think we can see, through our case work, that parents are quite concerned about their kids. They all want to be lawyers and doctors, which is not achievable. So we try to engage with them to make them understand that any job, according to their standard or education, could be possible if it is not lawyers and doctors. We try to pursue that area of convincing the parents. I think if we do that at an earlier age in school, that might help a bit more, because the parents are more engaged with teachers at that level than when they come to us.

They come to us only when they require us. It is not compulsory that they all have to come to us. They all have to go to school because of their kids. I think this is where that should be addressed, that vocational study is just as important or maybe more possible for our client group than to achieve the higher qualifications like doctors and lawyers, which is very difficult. What we are thinking is at high school, maybe year 10, before they leave high school, the parents and the teachers get together and there is sort of an information session or however they organise it to just address that point.

MS BERRY: So from your submission it looks like what you are saying is that by the time they come to you they have already reached an idea in their mind that vocational education and training is not a choice that they would prefer for their children?

Ms Bakkum: Yes. They are not. If they are educated in that area at that earlier point, they might have a better understanding of the education system. We are not experts in the education area, but we try our best.

THE CHAIR: I have a comment to make about that. Years ago this committee, when we were conducting another inquiry, went to a primary school in the Ginninderra electorate where the primary school was actually bringing in tradespersons who were parents of some of the children and working with the children to discuss with them their lifestyle and the advantage it was to be whatever they were, be it a mechanic or a

carpenter, and to talk to the children about thinking about those kinds of things going forward and giving them practical exercises where they can experience some things in relation to those kinds of activities. Would you see that it would be useful to reach primary school children as well as high school children?

Ms Bakkum: I do not see there is any harm in also involving the parents. I think the parents are the main thing because at that point they are looking after the kids. Definitely parents should be engaged. It is a great idea.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: I will start with a supplementary to that, if that is all right. Obviously one of the issues that we have to deal with is perception of different work from country of origin and also financial success of people in trades. What I have learned in this area over the last few years, if I am correct, is that a family's very first need is to get themselves financially settled and as a result they have very high expectations that their children will be financially responsible as well when settled in the jobs that they undertake. I think if we can do anything to demonstrate to the parents that you can be financially successful in the trades as well—

Ms Bakkum: Yes, and that is what we try to do when they come to us. But I think if that is addressed at an earlier age, especially involving the parents, it makes it so much easier.

MRS JONES: Would it also be useful for you in your work if you had a book of examples of successful Canberrans who have been in the trades or something like that?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, for sure.

MRS JONES: Okay. I know we are focusing a bit here on youth, but my substantive question is around people, let us say young adults, who arrive in Australia with a qualification.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MRS JONES: I have met many people in the Gungahlin area who have arrived in Australia with a qualification with an expectation that they will work in that field, and then never make it to that field. Accountancy is probably one of the ones that I have come across the most. It deeply disturbs me that we set up people's expectations that they will work in this area because Australia or Canberra has a shortage of people in this area, and with the pathway, somehow they are not getting through. In your experience, is it a matter of the need to update their qualifications and not having the money to do that because there is a requirement for them to continue to earn money?

Also, I have a question on the back of that. That is one issue. The other one that really concerns me is English language skills for the mums, who are often staying home with their kids. What is your experience of their access to education? I have a lot of people quite emotionally appealing to me when I am doorknocking that they cannot speak English and it is very difficult for them to get into this society. I think that is a

huge failure. Even though we do quite well in Australia, there are still people slipping through the gaps.

My questions are just on those two things—qualifications from other countries and the mums.

Ms Bakkum: In relation to qualifications from other countries, they do go through the process of skills recognition. I think CIT does that. Based on that, obviously they will be assessed on their qualifications. Hopefully, they will find a job. But with the area of the job, the problem we found was more in relation to IT instead of accounting. Most of our clients were IT related. And there are also teachers, and even qualifications in law. There are people coming through that process of skilled migration, and yet they cannot find a job. So there is that problem. I know that with our staff at MARSS we have employed quite a few skilled migrants who are sponsored through the ACT government program but cannot find a job. I know it is difficult, but in that area we are not very much able to help them.

MRS JONES: Is it the qualifications that they need to update or is it just access to Australian workplaces so that they can get the experience to get into a job?

Ms Bakkum: I think it is more about getting the qualifications recognised, and they may be upgraded to do more studies. One of the cases that I can talk about is a doctor from Afghanistan. He came here and is in one of those Calvary mentoring programs. He has to update his qualifications to get further jobs in Australia. So they need that extra education here too.

MRS JONES: Do they have to pay them to update—

Ms Bakkum: Yes, they do have to pay, and that is where the barrier is, because—

MRS JONES: Do you know how much we are talking about here?

Ms Bakkum: To do that doctor's course—I do not know the exact amount, but obviously he has to financially survive to do that course.

MRS JONES: He cannot get HECS, can he, for that type of stuff?

Ms Bakkum: No, they cannot get HECS.

MRS JONES: So he is paying \$20,000 or \$30,000 a year.

Ms Bakkum: Exactly. So in relation to money value, I am not quite sure how much it is, but definitely they have to work to pay for those extra courses.

MRS JONES: Has there been any consideration given—I know I am going a bit long on this question, but it is very important to me—to perhaps charitable fundraising to assist with those qualification upgrades? It is obviously the door that people have to walk through in order to access the Australian jobs market, which is why they came here.

Ms Bakkum: Yes.

MRS JONES: And which is why we need them.

Ms Bakkum: Yes. I feel that skilled migration is basically an area where they get the least amount of support.

MRS JONES: Right.

Ms Bakkum: Because they are expected to do it themselves. They are educated enough to educate themselves further, and with skilled migration they have to show the quantity of money to be able to get that visa in the first place and to support themselves for a period of time.

MRS JONES: I am just wondering if they could have some kind of “pay it forward” where someone supports them and then they support someone else, or something like that.

Ms Bakkum: With skilled migration I do not think there is any sort of provision for that, because they have to be able to support themselves for a number of years before they can get qualified and get further jobs.

MRS JONES: Yes, to have that money in the bank. Thank you so much. I really appreciate that information.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot had a supplementary.

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Bakkum, this is a supplementary on Mrs Jones’s question about trade qualifications and apprenticeships, and the difficulty you have identified that young people have in getting the appropriate qualifications through apprenticeships. Are you aware of any difference between male and female students? Is there any relevance to their gender in finding apprenticeships, or does it cut across both?

Ms Bakkum: I think generally it is the male, for trade qualifications.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay.

Ms Bakkum: But, like I said, we can provide more details of the breakdowns later.

MR DOSZPOT: The other thing is this. I know that there are some trades that find it difficult to get apprenticeships filled, so even though they may not be the first choice of an individual, it may be good to recommend some of those opportunities to them as well, initially, so they can find their feet in the local market—to have a look at some of the areas that do not seem to be that popular. They may get an opportunity to get an apprenticeship there and then eventually move into something that is more like their desired area. You mentioned IT. I should imagine the IT industry would be very good for a number of these young people, but I am not aware of too many apprenticeships in IT as such. There are some in trade-related IT. Does that make sense?

Ms Bakkum: Yes, it does. I think one of the barriers is basically the lack of English,

spoken English.

MR DOSZPOT: Yes.

Ms Bakkum: This is where maybe—we are not sure; we have not quite done the research yet—it is because the communication skills are lacking. That could be one reason. Again, we have to do more research into that to find out exactly whether it is the finance side of it or the language barrier. But generally, we are looking across the board, probably at a bit of everything at this stage.

MR DOSZPOT: I think you have identified a very interesting area where people are falling between the cracks. I do not think a lot of us have thought about this. It is very good. We look forward to getting some further information on that.

Ms Bakkum: Yes, definitely.

THE CHAIR: There was one part of Mrs Jones's question that we do not think you have answered, and that was in relation to supporting the wives of people who are looking for work. They may not be looking for paid work themselves, but they do not have any spoken English or written English. Is there any support that you can provide for these women? Or it could be the opposite way around: it could be a male partner supporting a female partner. Have you experienced anything there?

Ms Bakkum: Yes. We do have a lot of spouses coming through this program as well. Generally, what we are doing is referring them to CIT for further English classes. We are running voluntary English classes at our centre as well. We try and accommodate that sort of gap into our English programs that we are running. I believe there are certain programs that run in Gungahlin as well through other organisations. We run English classes in Tuggeranong as well. To accommodate that client group—especially the spouses who are lacking English and ability in the spoken language—we are providing that at our centre. It is up to them to take it.

MRS JONES: Is there any child care associated with that, or babysitting?

Ms Bakkum: Not really. What we have done now is try to accommodate that as well. We have just put in an application to have a play group for young mothers while these mothers are engaged in this sort of training.

MRS JONES: Fantastic.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot, do you have another substantive question?

MR DOSZPOT: There was your fourth recommendation. I think we have covered this. We have covered your recommendations pretty well, I think, but I would just like to have a look at your fourth one where you are looking at financial incentives being provided to employers of migrants in order to facilitate access and equity. Has MARSS made any applications for this specific purpose to the ACT government at this stage?

Ms Bakkum: No, we have not.

MR DOSZPOT: Is that something you would consider doing?

Ms Bakkum: Yes. I think that doing this process here today gives me a lot of incentive to go back and look at all this. We will definitely pursue that, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: As I said before, you have got a fairly brief submission, but it is very much to the point and you have identified some very good areas. I commend your work in this area.

Ms Bakkum: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Do either of you have any quick questions?

MS BERRY: I do not have any.

MRS JONES: No. I am sure I will come up with more. Thank you. I really appreciate it.

THE CHAIR: Members may contact you through the secretary with other questions at a later stage.

MR DOSZPOT: Can I just add one more point?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Sorry. I did mean to say that you have identified some things here now out of the discussions that you are having with us now and the discussions that you may have when you look at some of these things in detail. If our committee is still in progress, we would very much like to hear about any other ideas that emerge from this and we would include that in our deliberations while this inquiry is underway. I am sure Madam Chair will highlight that point for you as well.

MRS JONES: Can I also ask something in relation to the programs that you are running and the material that you have for advertising those. If you could supply us with a copy of those as well, that would be very helpful.

Ms Bakkum: Sure. Will do.

THE CHAIR: You have taken a number of matters on notice. I will ask the secretary to make contact with you to let you know what they are. You will also receive a copy of the transcript. That will be recorded in the transcript, so you will be able to check on what you have undertaken to do and what we have asked for. Thank you for that.

Could you get those answers to us in as timely a manner as possible? We understand the constraints of a not-for-profit organisation.

We thank you for coming before us today. I was going to add exactly what Mr Doszpot said—that if anything else comes to mind, we would be grateful to receive that. Thank you for appearing before us today.

Ms Bakkum: Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

EVANS, MR NEIL, Executive Director, Housing Industry Association ACT
FOGG, MR DAVID, President, Housing Industry Association, ACT and Southern NSW Region

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Fogg and Mr Evans, for appearing before us this morning on behalf of the Housing Industry Association, ACT and southern New South Wales region. This is the fourth public hearing of the inquiry into vocational education and youth training in the ACT of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs of the Assembly. There are nine submissions on the website and we have called for additional submissions because of the interest that has been shown in this particular inquiry. We realise that you were not able to give us a written submission, but you will be able to talk about what you want to put before us today, and members will be able to ask questions.

Are you familiar with the privilege statement, which is on the pink card in front of you? Could you acknowledge that you understand the implications of the privilege statement?

Mr Evans: Yes, we acknowledge it.

Mr Fogg: And understand it.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Evans: I will kick off. We dropped the ball on this one, actually, because we were not aware of the inquiry and we did not have time to get a submission in. But we thought we would come along and chat about some issues and get back to you with some further details in writing, if you wish.

THE CHAIR: That is fine, Mr Evans. We would be really happy to receive those at a later stage.

Mr Fogg: As well as being the current president of the HIA for the ACT and southern New South Wales region, I am also a builder who employs subcontractors and apprentices, and have been doing so for the last 20 years. My representation here is more about what we are seeing coming into the industry. We have some ideas as an association that we would like to pass on, to see whether that can possibly change the way we educate young people coming into the building side of the industry.

Mr Evans: By way of background, HIA is a registered training organisation. We have just over 600 apprentices on our payroll nationally. In the ACT and southern New South Wales region, unfortunately we only have around 32 at the moment.

The problems we are seeing—and we want to focus on the apprenticeship area because it is a big part of our industry—at the moment are with respect to completion rates. Over 50 per cent of apprentices fall out of their apprenticeship, sometimes in the middle and sometimes towards the end. The industry is becoming more and more difficult and a lot of people that traditionally employed apprentices are less inclined to take on apprentices in the current environment. That is for many reasons, but one of the issues—and I can only talk about this in national terms—is that nationally we are

seeing fewer apprentices being engaged because of the recent wage decision. There is a lack of interest from young people to get into the industry. I think the industry is being viewed in a negative way—that it might not be a good place to start a job or continue a profession within the industry. We need to look at encouraging more people to come into the industry, because it is a good industry.

With respect to some of the issues around work health and safety—accidents, deaths—in the industry, that is all true, and a lot of parents probably try and steer their kids away from coming into the industry because of those issues.

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Evans, could I interrupt you for one second?

Mr Evans: Sure.

MR DOSZPOT: In your explanation to us, would you be able to give a little bit more detail? When you say “industry”, can you categorise some of the opportunities within the industry, such as the different apprenticeships, as you are talking?

Mr Evans: Sure. When I say “industry”, I am specifically talking about the housing industry, not the overall construction and commercial building industry; it is housing.

MR DOSZPOT: But there are a number of different streams, I would imagine?

Mr Evans: There are. You would probably know locally what areas you have trouble finding contractors or apprentices in.

Mr Fogg: The biggest problem with apprentices in the building industry has always been the labour-intensive ones—the bricklayers, the plasterers, the tilers—because they are not quite as “sexy” trades as electricians, plumbers and carpenters. The thought of putting three kilos on top of some mud and doing that for metre after metre and day after day does not thrill a lot of youngsters. What they forget to realise is that you get paid a dollar for every one of those. So if you lay a thousand of those a day, that is a thousand dollars a day that you can make, and bricklayers do get a thousand dollars a day. It is quite an amazing industry to get into, but it is a matter of convincing people to do it. The average age of a bricklayer these days is 42. So it is not one for youngsters; it is very hard.

The reality is that, with bricklaying, although I simplified it by saying it is about putting bricks on top of mud, it does require a little bit of skill and knowledge, but that skill and knowledge can be gained within 12 months. If we are not doing anything structural, it is just about laying brick on top of non-structural brick—it is a facade. One of the things that we will elaborate on a bit later is that we should possibly have a fast-track system for bricklayers on a staged basis. You could say, “If you’re just going to be a basic bricklayer, you’ll have a basic bricklayers card that will allow you to do that.” It means you get them out of the apprenticeship scheme pretty quickly, in 12 months. They then get on to the real money that they can get while working, and if they then want to upskill and go into building double-brick homes, chimneys and those sorts of things, they need to then upskill themselves at another time. It would be after hours, on weekends or by taking time off from work to do it.

By doing that, we are going to get the bricklayer, as I said, out of a four-year course and into a 12-month course. If he is just throwing bricks, that is all he needs. The same applies to a gyprocker who is throwing sheets. That is all they do—they throw sheets. But it is the skill of the stopper, the setters and the cornice guys that requires the years of experience. For somebody to throw sheets, you could train a monkey to do it. If we could do that we could say, “Right, we can get that out of the trade quickly, too.” The same applies for carpenters who are just going to throw pre-made frames.

Mr Evans: Just to give you a bit of background here—and we will talk more about this in detail—what David is saying is that the industry has evolved over the last 40 years.

Mr Fogg: Yes, that is probably a better way of putting it.

Mr Evans: And the training system has not evolved. We are training apprentices and doing similar things to what we were doing 100 years ago, whereas the industry now has been, for efficiency purposes, chopped up into subcontract areas. As David mentioned, with a bricklayer, years ago bricklayers had to learn how to do bricks around a brick-veneer dwelling; they had to learn how to build two-storey double-brick dwellings; they had to learn about reinforced brickwork for structural purposes—arches, chimneys and fireplaces. Ninety per cent of houses built today are either single or double-storey brick-veneer clad. We are training apprentices for four years to learn all of this, but 90 per cent of tradesmen are just doing this.

We are of the view that the training system needs to look at different opportunities so that somebody, if they wish, can go through their four-year apprenticeship, but if a young lad or a young lady makes a business decision that they want to learn how to be a bricklayer, and 90 per cent of their work in Canberra is going to be putting a brick skin—this is non-structural; all it is doing is keeping the weather out—around a house, we do not believe you need four years of training to do that.

MRS JONES: It is a bit like registered versus enrolled nurses?

Mr Fogg: Exactly.

THE CHAIR: Mr Evans and Mr Fogg, members have asked me if they can ask questions as we go along. We only have until 11 o'clock. We want to give you an opportunity to give as much information as you want to give us without cutting you off, but I know members have questions that they are eager to ask.

Mr Evans: Sure.

THE CHAIR: I will go to Mr Doszpot first, and then we will ask other members if they have immediate questions.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. I am not quite sure how much you heard of the previous witness who was here. She was talking about the difficulty of newly arrived migrants, refugees, with some language problems or barriers in the sense that they cannot speak English as soon as they arrive. Is there an opportunity for people in that context so that you can mentor them? I come back to what you said before about having only 32

apprentices here in Canberra. Do these apprentices have an opportunity with other RTOs or are they the only RTOs we have in the bricklayer, plasterer and carpentry area? We only have 32 apprentices?

Mr Fogg: No, that is just the HIA. We have a whole pile of other RTOs, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay.

Mr Fogg: The MBA and the CFMEU.

Mr Evans: There are other providers offering a similar service, but there are also tradesmen and companies—

Mr Fogg: We take them on ourselves. We do not put them through an RTO.

MR DOSZPOT: Is there difficulty in getting people to become apprentices, from your point of view, or is that all you are targeting at the moment?

Mr Fogg: The biggest problem that we have, to some degree, is that there seems to be an expectation from those who do the ASBA process that it is almost a straight shoo-in to get an apprenticeship in carpentry.

MRS JONES: What is the ASBA?

Mr Fogg: It is the school-based apprenticeships for year 10 or 11 students—one day a week, VET and that sort of thing. We have found that they are next to useless. It seems that those people who put their hands up for that tend to be not genuine, I think, in their approach. As far as we are concerned they start off from day one as an apprentice. They do not get any upskilling. They may come out with their white card, which is four hours of their life that they will never get back. They might come out with safety boots and things, but in reality we are not getting—and this is part of what I wanted to talk about—

MR DOSZPOT: That is part of the drop-off rate, then, is it?

Mr Fogg: Yes, basically. They think they want to do that. They get the apprenticeship and away they go, and the reality is that they are not mentally attuned to it. The other aspect is to only take year 12 students, so that they have to have a good level of maths and they have to have a good level of English. To answer your question as to whether they would fit in, they could certainly fit in to trades as they are learning, and that would possibly be a more standard start. You could say, “Okay, your level of understanding of maths and English is such that possibly you should do stage 1 of carpentry and we’ll get you to learn how to read a plan and put it together like a Meccano set.” Unfortunately, that is where carpentry has gone to. You get a pre-made frame and truss, you throw it up and it is done by numbers.

My company is a design and construct company which deals with extensions and renovations, and you are running into homes that have cut roofs, hardwood frames and rods. If you ask a carpenter today what an under purlin is, they would have no idea. That is how the industry was built in the good old days, and to do renovations,

you need to have the full four-year carpenter. That will always be the case. So you will have those who want to become full carpenters and then there are those who, as Neil said, are quite happy to throw frames, do formwork and do fixing carpentry. We will always have that.

Yes, there is an opportunity for it, but it is going to be limited purely by their ability to absorb and understand what the plan is and get it together in preparedness for an RTO to take them on.

MR DOSZPOT: On that basis, if there are some young people who have arrived on our shores who actually have reasonably good schooling, especially in maths and related topics, but not necessarily in English, is there a great impediment in not being able to speak English, as long as they have the other qualifications?

Mr Fogg: No. I have painters; I have tilers who, I must say, do not speak too much English, but somebody can interpret what they need to do and pass that on. So that is not a problem. I think it is about the preparedness of the industry to actually—

MRS JONES: Give them a go.

Mr Fogg: Embrace it and give it a go; that is correct.

MR DOSZPOT: That is the reason we are raising it. This is something that has just emerged in a submission to us. You are aware of our terms of reference?

Mr Fogg: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: What we are trying to look at, according to our terms of reference, is how we can enhance the opportunities as much as for the young people who are not getting enough opportunities as for the industry. As we understand it, there are gaps that are not being filled. That is our task.

THE CHAIR: With regard to encouraging young people to take up the trades, you are saying that they come through and get keen but maybe their motivation is not such that they can continue. One of the suggestions made by the previous witness was that parents and young people get involved with talking with people in these various industries quite early in their lives in a more informal way and also that there be some incentives for industry to be able to do that. Would you see that as something that the industry would be interested in doing or would you see that you are so time poor in your industry that you would not be able to provide that?

Mr Fogg: Absolutely.

MR DOSZPOT: Take it on.

Mr Evans: We are interested. Until last year there was a federally funded program where industry could go out and speak to students at schools. We were getting some federal funding assistance—when I say “we”, I mean the industry—for mentoring. But my understanding is that that has gone by the wayside now.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any questions immediately, Ms Berry?

MS BERRY: Yes. I just had a question regarding the 32 apprentices you referred to in the ACT.

Mr Fogg: Only for the HIA.

MS BERRY: And you referred to 50 per cent of those. Is that nationally or is that in the ACT?

Mr Evans: ACT numbers are pretty good. We lose a few, but not 50 per cent. Nationally we are losing around 50 per cent. In relation to the drop-off rate, just to go back to your question, there is another way that they seem to fall out of the industry before they complete their apprenticeship. This gets back to the issue we were talking about earlier. You might have a bricklayer working on those houses around Canberra. He is not doing big commercial stuff. In two years he has got very good at it, but he has still two years of his apprenticeship to go. He might be on X dollars. He meets up with a bricklayer at a barbecue or a football game. They get into discussions and he goes, “Come and work for me and I’ll pay you \$55 an hour or whatever.” He goes, “Well, I’m only on \$18 now”—I am just picking these numbers out of the sky—“Yeah, I’ll come.” And they leave their apprenticeship and seek these extra dollars.

What we are trying to think about in some apprenticeships is that there could be opportunities to break the apprenticeship down into skill sets and have people pick the path they want to go down. So after 18 months, two years or whatever, with whatever path they have chosen to try and finish, they are getting reasonable dollars at the end of it because they are operating like a skilled craftsman within that particular area.

THE CHAIR: Would there be opportunity within that to try a number of different things if they could afford to keep living on that wage? I know you said that wage rises were an issue for you, but it is also an issue for young people to survive on the wage. I am not wanting to go down that necessarily at the moment.

Mr Evans: I know how it feels. Just quickly, when I was an apprentice, I went to Melbourne, left the country. I was living in a boarding house and paying \$25 a week, and earning \$32 a week. So I was living on \$7 a week.

THE CHAIR: So you have empathy with our young people trying to survive on what are still very low wages.

Mr Evans: I have, yes.

THE CHAIR: With regard to having the shortened course where they get to a certain point where it could be a cert something or other rather than a—

Mr Fogg: Cert III.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Would there be opportunities for young people to learn a range of skills so they could have a go at several of those different kinds of things perhaps, so that at the end of the process they could end up saying, “This is the one I really want

to get my teeth into”?

Mr Evans: We have not got all the details. This is just a concept that has come up recently in our regional executive meetings. It is like building blocks. I guess it is a bit like if you get a licence to drive a car and you want to go on and drive a semitrailer, you do the appropriate training, get your experience and keep moving up and up. Some people might want to start off driving the truck, but there could be a lot of other people that might want to start off just putting up house frames and then moving on to the next house and putting up a house frame for a builder. This is how the industry is starting to do it—not starting; it has evolved.

Mr Fogg: It has, yes.

Mr Evans: It is getting more and more designed around prefabrication. Years ago, carpenters used to build a set of stairs in the house to go up to the second storey. Now they come in and people that manufacture them install them, and that is all they do.

THE CHAIR: My question was really around, say, a young person starting—

Mr Fogg: Changing trades.

THE CHAIR: That is right. Someone who starts as a brickie, goes 12 months as a brickie and does his or her basic qualifications, and then is offered opportunity to do the basic 12 months as a carpenter and then the basic 12 months as a plasterer. I am talking about that sort of thing—so that at the end, they can then decide whether they want to specialise or not.

Mr Evans: I cannot see why that could not work.

Mr Fogg: It would only be—

MRS JONES: It would be a generalist qualification.

Mr Fogg: Yes, that would be more generalised, but it would be whether or not there would be acceptance under the apprenticeship schemes to take on five different apprenticeships.

THE CHAIR: All of this is up for grabs.

Mr Fogg: Yes.

Mr Evans: It is certainly a possibility, yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot had a quick supplementary, but I do want to go to other members.

MR DOSZPOT: Sure. You mentioned the potential to vary the term of the apprenticeship. As an RTO, are you in a position to vary the term of the apprenticeship or do you have to seek permission?

MRS JONES: They have got to get units of competency.

Mr Evans: I do not believe we have got permission. There is a system out there.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: The question that I have is really around cost, the value for money for apprentices. First of all, I just want to make the comment that obviously the industry as a whole has to do a PR job as well. I think that historically perhaps trades were more respected than they are today, but that is a PR job the industry has to also take responsibility for. Young people need to have it demonstrated to them that they can be successful in this area, that they can make good money in this area if they move up through the ranks—and what those ranks are and how to set up your own company. I have got a brother who is a cabinet-maker; the idea for him of starting his own business is totally foreign, yet he would be more than capable of it. It is a matter of demonstrating to young people that they can make good money and saying, “Here are some of the people who have and here is how they did it.” That is one sort of thing I wanted your comment on. There is national TV advertising or something. These things are not impossible. We cannot always sit back and say that government should solve it; there also needs to be PR done.

But also I want to go to the cost of training. I have had a lot of tradespeople say to me, as I have encountered them over the years: “Well, if I finish this qualification, I only get paid this much. A bloke who did X other qualification did it in three years and gets paid more.” Does anybody ever—or is it maybe more a role for government, even nationally—sit back and ask where the value for money is for these young people, or even older people embarking on a new career? They might say, “I do one year of study at \$18 an hour or less. Out of that I’m going to get this money-earning ability, and it’s going to be worth my investment of my time. If I do a three-year qualification, I come out able to make more money, and here’s the demonstration of it.” As you say, the money does not add up if you are going to get to go to \$55 after two years because someone will give you a go. We do need to keep recognising the level of qualification too. Units of competency are supposed to be able to do that, though. Units of competency are supposed to be able to say: “This person has X competencies ticked off.”

Mr Fogg: Unfortunately, that is not the real world. The reality is that you can have people getting degrees as long as your arm but, as far as the practicalities of things are concerned, not really being able to compete in the real world. The same thing applies with apprentices and, dare I say it, carpenters. I have got a carpenter who did his four years—a brilliant carpenter. He could throw up frames; he had systems in place to do frames, trusses, flooring and things like that. But ask him to hang a door and it took him nearly three hours. A competent carpenter could do that in half an hour. It came down to his skill level. Although he is fully trained up there as a rounded carpenter, we spent two years bringing him up to the standard. He is now worth the money that we are paying him.

MRS JONES: Is that a systemic problem with what is in the qualification?

Mr Fogg: No; that is an industry-driven thing. In the industry, unfortunately, there are

those who just say that if you were to go on to the building sites where you are doing maybe 100 DHA homes, they will have one team of carpenters just go through and do frames, one carpenter just do trusses, one come and do pre-sheets. That is cost-efficient. But the trouble is that the person who is doing it is just saying: “I want money, money, money. I don’t necessarily have a rounded skill.” And if they ever see the job again, it is more because they have been invited for drinks afterwards than because they have actually come back to do the fit-off. That is the problem in that one. To actually gauge it on years of training I do not think is going to work. The problem that we have got—I disagree with Ms Porter, unfortunately—is that we are trying to pay—

THE CHAIR: You do not have to agree with me. I was just asking a question.

Mr Fogg: We are trying to pay a trade a living wage rather than a training wage. The reality is the same for anybody who goes through anything, whether it is a degree or a trade base. If you are to do a degree, you are living at home and your parents cannot afford for you to be there, you have to get a part-time job to finish that degree. So not only do you end up with a debt, but also you are paying for your time and effort to get a job. We are saying in the industry: “We are going to pay you while you learn, but while you learn, you need to understand we’re not going to pay you the full rate until you get to a competence stage that we, those who are employing you, feel that you’ve reached.” We have got one young guy who just won the local apprentice of the year in Canberra, young Bradley Monkhouse, who did it in three years. He is a very talented young man. He could get through on that, and that was the difference. He jumped very quickly up into the bigger dollars because he had that skill base. He did not have to do the four years, because we signed him off early. As an employer of apprentices, I am now looking at going, “Am I getting good value for money?” With these guys, unfortunately, a lot of them are coming off with the hands out first—“You owe me this”—rather than me saying, “Hang on; let’s see what you can do.” And it is—

MRS JONES: Can I go back to my question? Maybe Neil has a comment. It is a lot of information for us to take in and it is really good. We look forward to your written submission, which might have some specific recommendations for us as ACT politicians, but even also ideas for the federal sphere, which we would be interested in knowing about. But I love this concept you are talking about—ticking off after a year to do a certain type of job so that you can get on to a bigger wage. I just think that perhaps, especially in the less popular trades, it is a way of getting people in the door. Do you have specific things that we would need to do to make that possible?

Mr Evans: There is an IR system out there that would be probably a big hurdle to get over. The industry—when I say “the industry”, the training industry—might not like the idea. We need to have a better think about this and come back with some more details. As I said, this was a fresh idea.

MRS JONES: In nursing, as I say, you have got your registered and your enrolled. They do different levels of competency. They have different tasks in the workplace and it has been going on for millennia.

Mr Evans: And it works well. We are building different houses today, and we are doing it in a different style. I think the training arrangements should move and reflect

how the industry is operating.

I go back to your question about competencies. HIA had a huge discussion about this at our national policy congress this year. We are very certain that there are a lot of students being ticked off that claim they have their competencies and they have not. Our new policy position on that is that the training organisation that is training these apprentices and ticking off on these competencies can continue to do that, but it should also be done in conjunction with the builder who is watching, supervising and judging the hands-on experience.

MRS JONES: I think that units of competency ideally are ticked off in the workplace.

Mr Evans: No.

MRS JONES: No, I am saying ideally they would be.

Mr Evans: Ideally, yes.

MRS JONES: Because you could answer a theoretical question and still not quite know how to physically—

Mr Evans: In theory you might know how to hang a door, but to go and grab an electric plane and fit it is so different.

MRS JONES: It is the same as with workplace safety—theory versus practice. I know that some of the top-rating RTOs that we have got in the ACT—they are not necessarily working in this industry—make that extra effort as assessors to go out and do people on the work site.

Mr Evans: Yes.

MRS JONES: And I think that is considered best practice.

Mr Evans: That would be very good.

MRS JONES: It should potentially be publicly recognised—those RTOs that are doing that. People who have been through those RTOs should be recognised as having a superior outcome.

THE CHAIR: In your experience, particularly perhaps Mr Fogg, do you find that students that are coming through the other RTOs—is the training satisfactory or are you tending to find areas such as you just identified in respect of the lack of on-the-job assessment? Are you finding that a problem, say, with CIT?

Mr Fogg: Not with us, because we actually employ our carpenters. Yes, they will go to CIT, but we are very stringent on our apprentices. Most of our carpenters have been our past apprentices. They have stepped up, moved on and gone on to their own businesses. But we are training them the way we want to see the industry go, which is a fully-rounded carpenter who will do all aspects of it.

Mr Evans: In the reno area.

Mr Fogg: In the reno area. But it does mean that they can then go into new homes and be fully competent. So they know every aspect of the build rather than just the carpentry. They know about the footings, the electrical, the plumbing, because they have seen it and they have been involved. The issue of—just lost my train of thought about where I was going there.

THE CHAIR: I was asking about other RTOs.

Mr Fogg: RTOs, yes. On the issue of other RTOs, we have not really experienced—although I do have one with the HIA. I find that has been quite good because they do the on-site assessment, which has helped. But we are also very diligent with our guys because they are going to be our workforce in years to come. So we are prepared to spend the time.

We are unusual in the industry because builders do not employ apprentices. Their trade employs the apprentice. So it then becomes that carpenter who is employed by them who will employ to a subcontractor. Therein lies part of the problem, but that is a decision we made and I think it is better for the industry that we did.

Just a little anecdote: I am a perfect example of somebody who did not do the apprenticeship when my father suggested it. It took me until I was 38 and realised that he had finally learnt something, or I had learnt something. But I then went back and spent five years working part time at night to get a diploma in building construction that allowed me to start my business. Had I done that 20 years earlier it would be a different set of equations. But what it does show I think is that if there is a preparedness for the youngsters to go out there, there is a great wage.

I am a real advocate—I am not a believer in the cert IV, sorry. He is. I think that has been the problem that we have had. We have had IT people who have gone and got a builders licence who get on the front page of the *Canberra Times* for going broke and taking people down. We have got companies that are out there with skill levels that are limited because we are allowing the RTOs to allow this cert IV to go through. Your cousin or brother who wants to have his own joinery business is probably great.

MRS JONES: My problem is that he does not. He should.

Mr Fogg: He should but, again, if his skill level is just purely for joinery, let him work for somebody, because what happens is that good joiners do not make good business people, and vice versa. That is what we have found in the industry. Too many times that has happened.

MRS JONES: Are you saying a management stream?

Mr Fogg: Management stream—you will find the most successful companies that are out there today are people who have had degrees from Canberra uni that are coming out with building and construction degrees. You will see more and more of those taking over the bigger end. The parents have started off earlier—dare I say, the Doma Group—and the next generation is very well educated.

MR DOSZPOT: Can I ask both of you how you found out about the inquiry?

Mr Fogg: I found out through Hugh Boulter. Yes, Hugh is my banker. He happened to mention it to me. I was on my little hobbyhorse.

MR DOSPOT: He did mention the fact that he was surprised that we had not had—

Mr Fogg: No, we had not heard.

Mr DOSPOT: My second question to you is this: you have seen benefit in giving us the information that you said you would give us. Obviously what we are trying to do is provide better avenues for apprenticeships, better opportunities for industry. Are there other industry associations that are related to you, or friends that you have got, who you can inform about what is going on here because, quite frankly, unless we have that input—

Mr Fogg: He cannot say, but I can.

Mr Evans: Yes, I can say.

Mr Fogg: Can you?

Mr Evans: I worked for them for a while.

Mr Fogg: He worked for them. Obviously, the Master Builders Association and why they have not fronted. I think the CFMEU is coming next; so they are going to have their point.

MR DOSZPOT: What I am asking on behalf of the committee is whether you are willing to sort of spread the word a bit, because the more information we get, the more value this inquiry will give. We can only respond to the information that we get.

THE CHAIR: We really encourage you to have a word with your colleagues in that organisation. We have written to them. I understand that they are all busy. If you have an opportunity to have a little word in their shell-like, that would be really good.

MRS JONES: I have a very brief additional question about group schemes. I know that some people obviously go off and do the apprenticeship in one workplace or with one company. HIA obviously have got an RTO wing. But do you have a view on the benefit of the group scheme where the apprentice goes around a bunch of different workplaces versus the one on one, what the difference is and what the different value is of the outcomes?

Mr Evans: David's apprentice won apprentice of the year this year.

Mr Fogg: Yes, this year.

Mr Evans: And that was being with David and learning all the skills from top to bottom. We had a chat two years ago in our group training scheme. We also won the

ACT carpenter of the year. So it depends. We have people that keep a very close eye on what is going on. If an apprentice is being typecast, so to speak, and put in an area doing too much repetition, the company is spoken to. If that does not change, we would probably get them back and pop them into another area.

MRS JONES: So it gives you that flexibility essentially to make sure that by the end of the day the young person or the person has had all the opportunities?

Mr Evans: Yes, we try to offer as broad a set of opportunities as possible. The flipside to David's scenario is that if an apprentice is working for a poor builder, they are learning bad skills for four years.

MRS JONES: That is right.

Mr Evans: There are two sides of the coin there.

MRS JONES: What is the quality control there on the units of competency, again?

Mr Evans: That gets back to our point.

Mr Fogg: We do not have one person in a group scheme that you are pushing from pillar to post, whereas the HIA, if I may say, has a policy of putting them with a builder or whatever trade it is. They will put them with that person based on needs, wants and desires or probably all three, whereas the other organisations tend to use it as a labour hire. The labour hire component meant that my son, who actually started off that way 18 years ago, was pushing brooms for the first 12 weeks. I think he then made waterbeds for another 12 months before we pulled him out and said that this is just not working. I said that he had to come and work for us. We went down that path. Moving them from pillar to post in some areas can give you the broader feel, but the reality is that you do not get that carpenter.

MRS JONES: The detailed training.

Mr Fogg: My business partner was with Civil & Civic. He also won apprentice of the year in 1988, I think. He was pretty damn good. But he could not hang a door to save himself. He was great on site, a great foreman, but when he actually went into the actual home industry, he learnt very quickly. He had the skill levels to do that. But when he came out from his trade, no.

MRS JONES: It would be good if we could get some units for competency for potential politicians.

Mr Fogg: That was a big, big door you opened there.

MRS JONES: All the different skills we have to learn along the way.

MS BERRY: Can I ask a question regarding the fallout rate nationally. Why is it so much lower in the ACT, do you think?

Mr Evans: I have not got an answer to that.

Mr Fogg: I do. I think—

MS BERRY: I think there was a report the other week about Canberra being awesome.

Mr Fogg: I will put it down to, I think, the staff that look after them. There is a degree of—

MRS JONES: It is like a small town in a way.

Mr Fogg: It is a small town and Julie is the mother hen, without being too hard, but she does look after her flock and she goes out and she takes it very passionately. And it is ownership of who they are rather than just a number. I think that is why we look to do it as an individual. He is part of the team and not working for someone else. But to get that across to other builders is the hardest thing, because they just see it as a cost rather than an investment in the future.

THE CHAIR: So it is investing in the person?

Mr Fogg: Yes.

THE CHAIR: As what?

Mr Fogg: Without a doubt. If I could keep hold of young Brad for the next two years and he does not set up his own business, I will be lucky for the two years. He is very competent. Of the 80-20, he is the 20, and right up at the top of it. So if we can retain him, it would be great. But methinks he is going to be the next competition.

MS BERRY: I have another question on apprenticeships in this sector. Do the apprentices move between employers? In some sectors apprentices will move. Apprentice chefs and things like that will move between employers. Does the same sort of thing happen in this sector?

Mr Fogg: For their part, yes; not for ours. He is indentured or employed by us and we have kept everybody. Everybody who has actually gone through and got their apprenticeship has stayed with us for that period of time.

Mr Evans: The HIA employ them and pay them and we charge various contractors that might need an apprentice for 12 months or 18 months.

MRS JONES: So you can fit it into what is available?

Mr Evans: The idea is that we are trying to get more people through the apprenticeship scheme by doing this because some companies just cannot afford to put somebody through the system for four years. When do they really start showing some value for—

Mr Fogg: Year three—on average, year 3. We found with Brad almost 18 months into it he was leading from the top. He was very good.

THE CHAIR: That is unusual?

Mr Fogg: It is unusual. That is correct. And generally it is year 3 when you feel a bit more confident with them. You still need to supervise, obviously, but at the end of the day you can give them a task and know that they are competent in that task of hanging a door, doing a fix or whatever.

MRS JONES: Just based on that also, the last person who was here was saying she is often trying to convince parents that this is a reasonable career option. I was talking before about the PR that the industry needs to do. If there was a publication of success stories in the building industry, people like her would use it to convince parents that this is a reasonable option. I am just making suggestions here.

Mr Evans: That is a good suggestion. There are hurdles there. But going back to that funding we were getting, we went, through ACT and southern New South Wales, to about 30 schools. On two of the days that I was doing the presentation and talking about the benefits of coming into the industry and all the opportunities available, there were about 40 or 45 students sitting in the room wanting to listen. They were keen and it was a really pleasant surprise to see that many people.

THE CHAIR: So you thought that that was an extremely valuable program?

Mr Evans: A great program.

MRS JONES: Do you remember what it was called?

Mr Evans: I will find out for you.

THE CHAIR: If you could.

MR DOSZPOT: But there is more and more of an acceptance by people that there are a lot of unemployed arts graduates out there. I think somebody made the comment that vocational apprenticeships and industries and all that are not attractive. I beg to differ with that a little. My wife is involved in education and I have seen quite an acceptance by people of the fact that trades are becoming quite popular. That is the expectation I have been given.

MRS JONES: It depends where you are.

MR DOSZPOT: But it does not hurt to highlight some of the things that—

MRS JONES: In Switzerland they only allow 15 per cent through to academia and the rest have to be trade trained. You have got to decide at 15 what you are going to do. They are very different schemes.

Mr Evans: It is tough.

Mr Fogg: As I said, it took me until I was 38. I was obviously a slow learner.

Mr Evans: I heard a stat about five or six years ago—it could have been a little longer—that the average age in the building industry is 63. This is where I think young people do not realise that if they do get in and do an apprenticeship, the opportunities that are going to be available to them into the future are massive.

Mr Fogg: Huge.

Mr Evans: Because there are going to be a lot of people retiring very soon.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, both of you, for appearing before us. We look forward to your further submission that you are going to provide and anything that we have asked you to provide today. You will be provided with a copy of the *Hansard* so that you will be able to check that for anything that you have undertaken to give us. We very much appreciate you coming and putting in the time.

Mr Evans: Our pleasure.

THE CHAIR: It has been extremely valuable and we look forward to hearing from you in the future.

Mr Evans: Thanks very much.

Sitting suspended from 11.01 until 11.16 am.

JENNINGS, MR JASON, President, Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, ACT Branch

THE CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before us today, Mr Jennings. This is the fourth hearing on the inquiry into vocational education and training in the ACT by the education, training and youth affairs committee. We have heard from the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services this morning, and also from the HIA. We welcome you and thank you very much for appearing before us and also for giving us some written material to work on. Have you read the privilege card? Are you familiar with the privilege card, Mr Jennings?

Mr Jennings: Yes, I saw that in the letter you sent me.

THE CHAIR: Do you acknowledge that?

Mr Jennings: Yes, that is fine.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Jennings: I have been asked to come along and speak to our submission. I was only briefly involved in the submission back when we put it in last year. Shayne Hall, our industrial officer, put that together, with a bit of content from me. There is probably a lot of other content that I can add today around group training and work health and safety training in the VET sector. As we move through, I am sure you will have a number of questions that you would like to ask about where we are heading.

I will speak about two organisations, one being Creative Safety Initiatives, which is a registered training organisation here in the territory. It was started by the CFMEU and the Tradies group of clubs back in 2006, as a result of seeing work health and safety training needing to be delivered within the construction industry at a higher standard. We have been operating successfully since that time across a raft of different training courses—*asbestos awareness training, impairment in the workplace training, suicide awareness training* and so on. I could send some stuff to you around what we do.

THE CHAIR: It would be fantastic if you could provide that at a later stage, Mr Jennings.

Mr Jennings: No worries at all. The second organisation that I run on behalf of the industry and CFMEU is called Construction Charitable Works, which is a welfare support organisation that has been working in one form or another in the territory since probably 1998. It sort of evolved. It started as a building trades group of unions' drug and alcohol program. It evolved over time, after a number of accidents—the airport hangar collapse in 2003, the bridge collapse in 2010 and so on. We do a lot of trauma response counselling as a result of fatalities in the workplace.

With respect to how that works, especially around impairment awareness training, it is around drugs, alcohol, fatigue, heat, cold, and chemical substances within the industry. We educate the workforce around signs of impairment and then how to manage those signs. Obviously, part of that is drugs and alcohol. We highlight with people issues

around drugs and alcohol. We say, “Listen, you can’t come to work under the influence of drugs and alcohol; stay at home.” What do you do then? Construction Charitable Works then takes over and does all of our counselling and drug and alcohol referral.

We have a relationship here with the detox centres, Arcadia House and Woden hospital. We also have our own rehabilitation centre in Sydney called Foundation House. We refer people with drug and alcohol issues, and also gambling issues, to Sydney to get rehabilitation.

They are the two organisations that I work with on a day-to-day basis. As we move through, I can give you an idea of how both of those work.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I have a question around the white card and asbestos courses that you talked about. They are delivered in high schools.

Mr Jennings: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The submission mentions that schools tend not to focus attendance at these courses on students with an interest in the construction industry; they would rather just put it out there and whoever wants to attend can turn up, from what you have said.

Mr Jennings: Yes.

THE CHAIR: In your view, is this problematic?

Mr Jennings: We were the sole provider of white cards in the territory from around 2010 and 2011, and we were doing it in most high schools and colleges. What was happening at the time was that schools would say, “Okay, what do you want to do for work experience?” “I don’t really know.” “Okay, you’d better come and do a white card, because if you go into construction you are going to need to get one.” So you would turn up and there would be groups of 20 or 25 coming to do the white card. Whether they would use the white card was a different thing. I suppose it is like anything in life. If you are made to go and do something, you might think you are going to use it, but maybe you will not use it. The intention was probably not there.

At the moment we currently have about six schools that we still work with. The CIT took over in 2011 or 2012 with delivering the white card to most high schools and colleges. Asbestos awareness training is now another course that is mandatory to get onto work sites. There have been different providers around the territory delivering that training. I heard the HIA witnesses say that, when you go into the industry, if you want to do it you are keener to switch on about it. Obviously, that is a fair call.

The white card has had its own issues, as you have probably heard. It came in in 2009. By October 2010 it was mandatory to have that to get onto a work site. There was an inquiry by ASQA recently into quality training outcomes in white cards. The reality is that it is at a cert I level. If you have ever done a course, you would know there is only so much you are going to be able to teach in a day. As a result of that there were a number of RTOs that were banging people through and ticking and flicking, as we

call it. It was sort of like a sausage factory, bouncing them out the other side. The reality of what we are trying to achieve is educating people around work health and safety, especially in the construction industry. Hopefully, over time the white card will get a bit stronger.

THE CHAIR: Are you getting any improvement in the six schools that you are working with?

Mr Jennings: We have limited numbers with what we can provide. The ACT training fund authority provides some money. If a work experience student is definitely going to go into construction, they will fund some money, whereas what we have been seeing is that, through Construction Charitable Works, we have some funding available to offset the training cost through CSI, so it brings the cost down for the school. Now that students or their parents have to pay \$60, \$50 or whatever it is going to be, they are making sure they are going to use it when they go into it. Slowly, by limiting that, I think we are seeing students coming through that are generally interested in that.

Having said that, we have delivered it to students that are going out potentially into work experience and are working at McDonald's or doing other things, and we are having these discussions about issues around work health and safety in the hospitality industry, the retail industry and so on. I do not think it is necessarily all lost, but it is probably not heavily focused. It is a construction-based work health and safety course, whereas obviously it needs to be specific for different industries.

MS BERRY: Can I ask a supplementary on that?

THE CHAIR: Yes, of course.

MS BERRY: Did you say that you are the only organisation that provides the white card training now?

Mr Jennings: We were. There was a tender process through the ACT education directorate back in 2010, and we managed to secure that. We were delivering it for that period of time. Running VET training in schools, and especially on a walk-in, walk-out basis, where you are the RTO and you do not operate in the school all the time, was problematic in regard to getting the details that they needed. There were also the reporting requirements that an RTO has to do with ASQA each year. It was about trying to coordinate them, to get them to bring in what they needed; you needed two forms of ID to make sure you were the person doing it. When the white card first came out—it is still the case—you could do it online. Different people are going in, and it is a matter of, “Jason Jennings does 50 white cards for different people, and there's your card.” So there are issues around ID, and making sure students were bringing that with them. They are 15 or 16, and they say, “I forgot that.” In the next round, obviously costs go up, and it is a matter of coordinating things. We did not tender for the next round.

THE CHAIR: Are you suggesting that some of the students are doing this white card online?

Mr Jennings: We have had some students that have done it online because it was quicker and easier, and then go to a work site. When you do your white card, you get a statement of attainment. You take a statement of attainment out to ORS; that is the vehicle that gets you your white card. So when you go out onto the work site, you do not need to produce your statement of attainment; you need to be able to produce your white card.

ACT WorkSafe was seeing cards coming through from RTOs that they knew were being done online, so they put a stop to it. Some of these work experience students got caught up in that, and they had to do it twice. They did it online, and then they had to come in and do the face-to-face training. As a union, we only support face-to-face training. We have our issues around online. There are occasions when online training can be supplementary, but at the end of the day you really need to get the face-to-face training in classrooms—

MRS JONES: And assessment.

Mr Jennings: for nominal hours, and then have a ridgy-didge, fair dinkum assessment at the end of it to demonstrate that people are competent when they leave.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you for your submission. I think you have identified some areas that relate to our terms of reference. Obviously one of the areas that we are trying to look at is the role and programs conducted by all registered training organisations, RTOs. Can you reflect in a little more detail on what Creative Safety Initiatives does?

Mr Jennings: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: And how many teachers have you got and how many apprentices, is it?

Mr Jennings: No. They are existing workers. We have done a lot of work for probably the last 18 years at the CIT, where we go in and we deliver work health and safety training to the apprentices there supplementary to what they would be getting in their certificate III courses, which I will talk shortly about.

MR DOSZPOT: So Creative Safety Initiatives is not specifically aimed at apprentices?

Mr Jennings: No. We work to deliver certificate III courses but they are for existing workers. If you had come through and you were a formwork carpenter, for instance, but you never got a formal qualification, we would bring you back in and try to do it, train you up for that. But there are significant issues around trying to deliver that training on site and so on.

We did have an organisation we were aligned with called CITEA, Construction Industry Training and Employment Association, that had been running since 1996, I think it was. Unfortunately, that group training organisation closed last year due to

significant factors mainly around being able to protect the apprentices while they are on placements out in the workforce.

MRS JONES: Insurance-type issues and—

Mr Jennings: No, really coming under your duty of care as an employer. Similar to the HIA, we would employ the apprentice for the three, four-year term. We would then place them with host employers. And then we would train them in-house at the training centre in Dickson. I ran that organisation for about 18 months, from 2010 to just before it closed. The issue we were having there was that in commercial construction, you have got a better chance of being able to protect apprentices. But unfortunately there are limited trades in commercial, whereas a lot of your certificate III in carpentry is designed for residential. When you go out in residential areas, as you would probably all see through media and so on, the safety standards out there are not overly high.

I will give you an anecdotal bit of evidence. We had some apprentices at one stage go out and I went out to do a field visit and they were working by themselves. “Where is your host employer?” “He has gone to get materials,” or, “He is off doing this.” We cannot have apprentices unsupervised. This was a first and a third-year apprentice. We have to be able to protect them in that arena.

We tried everything. We talked about safe work methods and safety management plans to cottage builders. Some of them have embraced it. Some say, “What are you talking about?” When you look at, say, a certificate III in carpentry, there is one unit of competence in there around work health and safety. There are 30 units that make up the qualification. I think we are getting our weighting a little wrong in regard to how important we emphasise work health and safety.

But it goes around in circles, does it not? If you have gone through as an apprentice and work health and safety is not at the top of your mind when you go through, and then all of a sudden you are taking on an apprentice, you are only going to be able to educate someone on what you have got to educate them with.

To answer your question, no, we do not necessarily deal directly on a day-to-day basis with apprentices, but when we go into the CIT and deliver our training courses around suicide awareness, impairment, asbestos and so on, that is where we engage with the apprentices.

MR DOSZPOT: So back to Creative Safety Initiatives, how many students do you have?

Mr Jennings: On average, we probably train about 10,000 people a year. Some of those individuals may do multiple courses. But directly with the apprentices, we are probably training around 1,200 or 1,500 apprentices across the institute.

MR DOSZPOT: And this is all Canberra based?

Mr Jennings: Canberra based, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: And how many teachers do you have?

Mr Jennings: Direct employees, trainers, I have got two, and then we have got specific trainers that I bring in for different courses like certificate IV in work health and safety.

MRS JONES: Part-timers, perhaps?

Mr Jennings: Part-time trainers that I bring in, yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Where do you bring those in from?

Mr Jennings: WorkCover inspectors that have gone out and started their own businesses or gone into specific areas. We spend a lot of time looking for these people. There are some courses that we will do. I am not saying full-time trainers are not quality, but everyone has got different skill sets. For instance, for OHS work health and safety for managers, supervisors and committee training, we bring in an organisation, Mick Peterson WHS. He does a lot of work for us. He is an ex-WorkCover official that started his own organisation. We bring those trainers in.

MR DOSZPOT: What sorts of educational qualifications do your trainers have to have?

Mr Jennings: We draw them from industry. One of my senior trainers had 20 years within the industry as a scaffolder, a crane operator and a dogman. We bring them in. We have got an evolving strategic plan, I think you would call it. At the moment I am looking at other individuals now that I will bring in and probably in three years time they will be a trainer, because it takes that period of time to attract them in off the job, to come in and be a trainer, but also to go through and get their certificate IV in training and assessment.

All the trainers I have do have certificate IV in work health and safety as a minimum. If you are delivering asbestos awareness training you then go into another area. There is CPD, continuous personal development, that I put them through each year to make sure that they are the highest quality standard for whatever they are delivering.

As you can see, our organisation is probably a little different to a number of RTOs. We are a not-for-profit RTO. We generate money to put back into industry through Construction Charitable Works. We do not necessarily have a number of shareholders wanting their dividend at the end of the year.

MR DOSZPOT: I am trying to understand. To a certain extent you compete with CIT?

Mr Jennings: No.

MR DOSZPOT: Or you have complementary courses?

Mr Jennings: That relationship, as I said, started in 1996. We have got a formal agreement with them. There are certain training courses that we do that are probably

not something that they would deliver in house—suicide awareness, for instance. I am not trivialising that but we specialise in it. They deliver the certificate III qualifications which have units of competency. They focus on those, and rightly so. We have managed to build a relationship over time where we go and deliver those specific training courses, the workplace impairment stuff that we have done and prided ourselves on for a long period.

MR DOSZPOT: One of the things I am trying to get my head around is that CIT have a number of very good teachers that have come up through the ranks in various trainings and so forth. And there is quite a change in the way that the education qualifications have to be applied these days. We have had a lot of complaints to my office about people who are very well qualified but who may not have the necessary teaching qualifications to continue in their role, which they have been doing. Do the same educational requirements exist for your trainers as—

THE CHAIR: I think he just explained that to us. He said they have to do training and assessment qualifications up to cert IV.

MR DOSZPOT: Cert IV, yes.

Mr Jennings: Yes. Probably the highlight—if I put this to you, you might be able to understand it—is that the certificate IV in training assessment has changed four times in the 10 years that I have been doing this. I have done it four times.

MRS JONES: You have to keep updating it?

Mr Jennings: Yes, and I think where it comes through is when you walk into some registered training organisations, the RTO will go, “Right, here is your training and assessment strategy. I want you to deliver it that way,” which we have to have under standards of ASQA, SNVR. Then you go, “Here are your training resources.” You do not necessarily have to develop anything. You sort of get up there and you deliver. Part of our continuous PD that we put my staff through is—

MRS JONES: You have then got to write it down.

Mr Jennings: “I want you to go and do remediation on that particular unit of competency. Look at the training resources we have got, and let me know whether there are issues around the resources.” You are right. At the end of the day it is not about getting up in there and being a parrot and just breaking it out and then walking out the door and going, “Thanks very much.”

MRS JONES: You have got to prove it, yes.

Mr Jennings: Drawing from industry has its issues. I was talking outside. You do not necessarily go, “I will go and do a university degree in education and then I will go and work in construction for 20 years and then one day I might come and be a trainer.”

MRS JONES: And sometimes they are the best trainers anyway.

Mr Jennings: Yes, especially around our forte, which is work health and safety. Some of our trainers that I have had in the past have come through and then had to reskill themselves to come back into industry, not as a crane operator or a scaffolder but as a trainer to give back a little of what they have learned within the industry.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones, did you have a supplementary?

MRS JONES: Yes. I am just trying to remember what it was exactly. I will come back to it in a moment.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry?

MS BERRY: I want to talk a bit about the face-to-face training and assessment. We have heard that a few times. Is that something that has changed or has it always been the case that there has been a view by some RTOs that you just tick and flick or do it online? How could it be formalised? Do you have an idea of how it could be formalised in a way where RTOs are required to do practical on-the-job assessment?

Mr Jennings: I will probably draw on some of this work health and safety training that I was saying earlier on we were doing for a number of years but are now not doing. There are certain things that will move in and out of the training; otherwise we cannot be competitive in the way we deliver. That is not that we go over and above. We deliver to what we believe is the national standard, especially around high-risk licence training.

I will use scaffolding as an example. About a year ago, Safe Work Australia came out with mandated assessment instruments that you use to ensure that someone is competent. That assessment goes over three breakdowns over a five-hour period. The first is theory, which is high-end level calculations, theory and so on. With some of our participants, their numeracy and literacy levels are not there to get through that. Then it moves into a practical component and then goes into the calculations component. To deliver the training to those individuals to make sure they get through the assessment, it comes with time. We might be delivering in over 48 hours or whatever. That was 48 hours for basic scaffolding. We were approached by a subcontractor that was going to come and do the training with us, and then decided that they could go out and do a course with another organisation where it was four hours face-to-face training and the rest of the training was delivered on the job.

When you come down to the mandated assessment instrument, it says in the practical that you will build the scaffold five metres high, you will use safety nets, you will use a gin wheel, you will do this and you will do that. If you have ever been on a construction site, you will know that to deliver that assessment on site, the whole job does not just stop because you have turned up and you want to assess five people. “Can I have all your scaffold over here. Can you stop building the building. We are going to do the assessment over here.” It just does not work like that. What it does is drive down the quality training outcomes, because you get into these situations where you cannot do it correctly.

MRS JONES: Probably with some of this stuff you have to have off-site sites.

Mr Jennings: Yes.

MRS JONES: Non-working sites.

Mr Jennings: Yes. We invested a significant amount of money in our training centre. We have got our own materials and hoist. We have got our own crane up there and so on. But when you are delivering to the standards we believe you need to deliver to, all of a sudden people are going: "I can go and do this for four hours over there. Why shouldn't I go over?" What ended up happening in that particular case was that the subcontractor came back and said, "This particular individual now cannot base out a scaffold." We tried to indicate that there are no short cuts in high-risk licences.

MRS JONES: What is the current recourse? Do you go back to the National Training Authority, say?

Mr Jennings: When ASQA come out and do audits on RTOs, and I am not having a shot at ASQA in any regard, they come out and look at a set of standards. They will go through the standards and go, "Okay, you have got that, you have got this and you have got that." Where I suppose there is a sort of void is that, when you have got a mandated assessment instrument like Safe Work Australia give you for basic scaffolding, which says, "You must do this; you must do that," ASQA probably are not going to get down to the level of detail to make sure you are building a scaffold at five metres, you are making sure the net and the gin wheels are there or—

MRS JONES: They should occasionally do those sorts of in-depth tests.

Mr Jennings: Yes. After they have started out, they are getting more into that. I think that is probably where the frustration for our RTO was: "Hold on a minute; we are delivering it to that standard, which we believe is where it needs to be delivered to." You walk out of our classes as a dogman; you walk out as a scaffolder. You will do X amount hours in a logbook, and we will audit that logbook. We ring up: "You said you had Jason Jennings in there for 10 hours in his logbook. What did you actually do with him?" We make sure that those hours are legitimate in there.

So there is one side of being compliant with your registered training organisation, but the other side of it is: what are we putting in in industry here? We have the *Getting home safely* report around changing culture within the industry; we need to change culture by educating people around work health and safety and the importance of it.

MRS JONES: Yes, so you have a higher expectation of yourself.

Mr Jennings: Yes. I think the construction industry training council for a period of time was engaged by WorkSafe ACT and Mark McCabe to have a look at high-risk licensing. We sit on that council. We looked at nominal hours for RTOs, what they should train face to face, how long the practical should be and what logbooks should be. I think they are still working through that.

Ms Berry, to answer your question, I think it comes down to a situation where we see face-to-face training as a way of shortcutting training. There are a number of RTOs that are in a position where it is big business for them. The success of the asbestos

awareness training course at the moment is that there have been limited providers that could actually meet a benchmark to be able to deliver. That was that you would have a cert IV in OHS, you would have your training qualifications, you would deliver the package as it is licensed to you, and your organisation would be audited every 12 months. For me, running Creative Safety Initiatives, any time there is an audit I am happy to be the first one. We spend a lot of time and effort to make sure that we are delivering at a high standard. Otherwise, we are not going to change the culture around work health and safety.

MS BERRY: I just wonder on that. We had a submission from ASQA about their regulation, but if you look at some of the figures that they have about applications that have been received from training organisations to be a licensed provider, you see that they received something like 15,000 nationally—I think they have provided us with some ACT details—but there were only a couple of RTOs that had their licence removed because they were not meeting the standards. However, we hear from submissions that the quality from all the RTOs is not the same, and there are organisations that do them online or—

MRS JONES: It is good if they do it in moderation, but—

MS BERRY: But how does it get fed back to ASQA? And how do they know? The industries, you guys and all the other sectors know where the training is falling down and where the problem RTOs are, but they are meeting whatever the minimum standards are when they are being checked by ASQA every 12 months or however often it is. It is still not being resolved. We are still getting a mixed level of quality.

Mr Jennings: I think they went out and did a big sweep of RTOs delivering white cards, for instance. I think a number of RTOs—a large number—were sanctioned in regard to the delivery of the white card. That was probably through the national CFMEU and other key industry stakeholders saying, “Listen; this is becoming a bit of a joke.”

To answer your question, I do not know; I am not working in that arena. From our perspective, we will operate in our arena doing what we do. As you can see by the numbers I am giving you today, people come to our organisation because they want to be able to do the task at the end of it. With the stuff that we are delivering at the CIT, we have got different models that we will do for first, second and third years as we see them.

Then, over that three-year period when we have access to the apprentices, we can also talk about Construction Charitable Works: “When and if you have an issue later in life, you know where to come and get some welfare support services.” We provide that to the industry free of charge. We go out and raise money. We have a charity breakfast that we invite a number of you guys along to. Unfortunately, it is in September, and it is a very busy time of the year, but we get a few people to come along and see what we do.

From the media, you may remember Jayson Bush, who fell down the lift shaft in Nishi. I am having a meeting with him after this. He is going to come on as a trainer, working with me so that we can transition some of this stuff from young workers. In

the CIT and through other access we have to apprentices, we are seeing: “Work health and safety? That won’t happen to me.” It happened to him, and it happens to her. We need to be able to educate them a bit. That is where we are drawing trainers from.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES: I have remembered my supplementary; I had actually written it down. With your RTO—this is just my supplementary—do you deliver whole certificates or just units of competency? Are you basically coming in to plug in those units of competencies in those particular areas for other RTOs?

Mr Jennings: A lot of the stuff that we do in the CIT is supplementary. That is through building a relationship over the 18 years. I made the comment earlier that there is one unit of work health and safety in a certificate III in carpentry. They would see that there are other issues that need to be discussed, so we would go in and do supplementary training over and above.

MRS JONES: Okay.

Mr Jennings: To answer your question, no, we do not deliver full qualifications; we deliver units of competence. We have delivered certificate IVs in work health and safety. The unit of competence around high risk is not a full qualification, but it is a unit.

MRS JONES: You are probably just value adding in your area of expertise and passion, I guess.

Mr Jennings: We see a number of RTOs, especially in construction, come in and go, “Okay, we will just do everything.” When we first started out, we would do everything. Over time, we have come back and gone, “Let’s focus in on the core stuff that we need to get across to the industry.”

MRS JONES: To change?

Mr Jennings: Yes. Working safely at heights, confined spaces, first aid—that sort of stuff.

MRS JONES: My main question is about group training. You said you had some thoughts you wanted to share with us about group training and how that works.

Mr Jennings: I think the model that is operating at the moment is not really working.

MRS JONES: Can you explain what that is, for those who have no idea?

Mr Jennings: Theoretically, the HIA was talking earlier about the fact that you would have your son or daughter go through to a group training organisation and they would be indentured to that group training organisation. So that would be the employer. Then they would be trained either in house there by that group training organisation or by the CIT. Some of the local GTOs send them over to the CIT. The group training organisation would then place them with hosts. I heard the comment before around

body hire, and that is unfortunately how a lot of them have to operate, because funding is very low.

We were paying over-award wages for our group training organisation. We had income protection for them so that if they got hurt on weekends they were covered and could continue working. But that puts on a lot of stress. You get to a situation where your competitors out there are paying \$20 an hour for a first year, for instance, and you have to say, “We’re on \$25 because we’re making sure they are covered across the board.”

But financial cost was not necessarily the reason we closed it down. We saw issues around the quality of training. They are actually with you as the employer for about five per cent of their time. They are with you on the job for 95 per cent of their time. It was about being able to go out and ensure they were getting the quality training outcomes that they needed, and you could not ensure that.

MRS JONES: Do you think that the responsibility should be with the placed employer to make sure that they are ticking off the full units of competency?

Mr Jennings: Some RTOs—

MRS JONES: Is that what you are saying is the downfall of the group?

Mr Jennings: Yes.

MRS JONES: There is a possibility that that is not being done properly on the ground?

Mr Jennings: Again, having heard what the HIA said, some first-year apprentices do push a broom for a whole 12 months, as a carpenter. You are not a broom-maker; you are a carpenter. So you go and dig the hole and you go and sweep the floor for 12 months. While you are at your RTO doing your training, they are systematically going through the units of competency and delivering that. But where does the practical component come in?

MRS JONES: Yes; you must have an employer who is up with what you are doing and who is interested and invested.

Mr Jennings: That is right. There are a number of employers around that will indenture apprentices, or go through a group training organisation and train them right, and they are usually the ones you see as apprentice of the year and so forth.

MRS JONES: One of the things that they raised, which I would not mind your view on, is that sometimes a smaller company cannot really afford to commit to the full four years, and what they are trying to do is increase the numbers that are able to get through the system, so—

Mr Jennings: Yes. When it originally started—and I was not here doing it in 2000—it was designed so that you would have a placement for three, six, 12 or 18 months. What has happened over a period of time—

MRS JONES: Six weeks here, six weeks there.

Mr Jennings: Well, you are lucky to get six weeks. You might get six hours and then they say, “We don’t want you; we’ll send you back.”

MRS JONES: I guess that would be something that ASQA could be checking on, to see what the standard lengths are.

Mr Jennings: It is a two-fold thing. You have a group training organisation handling one thing, which I think at the moment is done by the directorate here; they go and audit group training organisations to standards. Then you also have the RTOs. When we were doing it, there was a three-party sign-off in regard to the RTO, the trainer and the individual, and making sure they were competent when they left. At the end of the day, you do not want people waltzing around and building houses that have not—

MRS JONES: Whose responsibility actually is it? If you are part of group training, it is actually their responsibility to ensure it.

Mr Jennings: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: I have a supplementary. Are you aware of any figures of how many apprentices there are within your industry sector at any one time?

MRS JONES: Or could you get back to us?

MS BERRY: HIA said 32 in housing.

MRS JONES: No, 32 in HIA.

MS BERRY: Sorry, 32 in HIA.

Mr Jennings: If you were to make contact with the construction industry training council, Vince Ball, he does a number of statistics each year for the directorate, and also the training fund. He would be able to give you exact numbers. I would say that it may be around 2,000, because I know there are roughly around 1,200 at the CIT.

MR DOSZPOT: In your estimate, is there a shortage? Is it hard to find apprentices in the trade?

Mr Jennings: You probably have two different models. At the moment you have licensed trades, which are plumbing and electrical. A lot of individuals in schools that are academically up to that will be gravitating to that, because it is a licensed trade. Then you have the handful that are carpentry, painting, plastering, tiling, that are not a licensed trade. Let us be realistic; this afternoon I could go down to Bunnings, buy a paintbrush and call myself a painter. I am not a really good painter, by the way, but I could literally do that.

THE CHAIR: You are not suggesting that I have you around to paint my house?

Mr Jennings: No, probably not, Ms Porter. I would not be very good at it. But the reality is that I can go and do that; I could probably start up a business tomorrow and waltz around calling myself a painter. What qualifications have I got? You are not necessarily going to ask me when I turn up at your door, “Have you done a certificate III in painting?” and there is no licence for it. In New South Wales, Fair Trading ask you to demonstrate that you have formal qualifications.

There was an inquiry put together by the Land Development Agency, Craig Simmons, back in 2009, where they were looking at licensing some of the sub-trades. I think that tied in with the bridge falling down, out on the Barton Highway, where, unfortunately, a number of workers were brought in for that day and they had no background in concreting whatsoever. I am not saying that that is what happened; there were different issues out there. But it does come down to this fact: how are we going to change a culture within an industry, from our perspective around work health and safety, and also quality for buildings?

MR DOSZPOT: The reason for asking the question—I think Ms Porter already referred to this—is that one of the witnesses, from the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, identified quite an interesting issue that we were not aware of, that is, the difficulties for people, new arrivals, who cannot speak English properly, in obtaining trade apprenticeship qualifications. Is that something that has been brought to your attention at all?

Mr Jennings: I can give an example around the asbestos awareness training. I am working through a number of issues now with workers with English as a second language. I am in the process now of getting all the assessment instruments translated into their native tongue, so that when we deliver our training, we deliver it with a translator, and then we give their assessment in their native tongue or language. What you find when you go to a building site is that the safety signs are not necessarily multilingual. There has been some discussion through the industry around that. With multicultural Australia and where we are heading, and rightly so, we do need to start looking at how we are going to embrace this.

MRS JONES: We at least have to have practical assessment of the languages in each place, even if you did not have 20 languages on every site.

Mr Jennings: Yes.

MRS JONES: Once you have a population of native Bengali speakers or something—

Mr Jennings: Yes. So it is definitely a changing environment. Through the training centre, we might run two asbestos awareness courses a day, and there are different people coming through there. We invest a lot of money, as I said before, in educating people, and also in numeracy and literacy. At Construction Charitable Works, we engage tutors and translators, we will translate assessment instruments, and we will spend time on making sure that we can get people through, notwithstanding the mandated assessment instrument that I mentioned before from Safe Work Australia around high risk. It clearly says on the opening page, “If you cannot read or write English, you are unable to do this assessment.” That is probably one of the other

reasons we are not involved in it.

THE CHAIR: The submission mentions, towards the back, young people who are in Bimberi and the courses they are delivering. Their literacy and numeracy skills are hindering them in participating in those courses. I think you have just mentioned that literacy and numeracy is a problem. So it is more widespread than just that particular instance.

Mr Jennings: Yes, when we were delivering some of the white card training back in 2009, 2010, I would deliver the impairment awareness training as part of that. Again, we were delivering over and above on the white card to give them a true perspective of what issues we do have in our industry.

You would say to some of the students in that arena that they needed to write their street name. They could not write their street name. That is probably a bit of a sad indictment of where we are heading. Putting that aside for a minute, I am not over-academic myself, but I could manage at an early age to write my street name.

Then there are some individuals that we sit down with and say, “Look, you want to come in and do a tower crane operator ticket. I know what assessment you are going to have to go through. I am not being disrespectful at the moment but I need to do some pre-work with you to get you to a level where you are going to pass this.”

Again, you see the other side of this. It involves people’s self-esteem—“I cannot get through that; so I am just going to be a labourer for the rest of my life, and that is all I want to do.” At the end of the day, there have to be ways. RTOs need to invest time and money into making sure that people get through. When I say that, it is not about going, “Okay, no worries at all, thanks very much, you are through.” We need to help them through. That is part of the role. The Creative Safety Initiatives and Construction Charitable Works should work together so we can get support, counselling, tutoring—whatever we need.

We did run some programs out at Bimberi. But, again, do they really want to do the program we put together or was that something they had to do while they were there? It is like everything in life. If you really want to do something, if you are gung-ho and into it, you will. If you are just doing it because someone is telling you to do it, you are probably not going to put your 100 per cent in.

THE CHAIR: I just have one quick question before we go on to the next witness. The submission mentions school administration of courses as being problematic.

Mr Jennings: Yes, I highlighted that before around the white card.

THE CHAIR: Yes, so that is the area. Is it around what kind of students are put in or asked to go into the training, or is it more widespread than that? Is it more systemic, I suppose, in—

Mr Jennings: Yes, it was more highlighting the fact that when you turn up to do a course—say it is a white card course—you need to have supporting documentation for them to administer that before you get there. This was problematic. You turn up

there—back when the asbestos awareness course first was launched, you had to have your white card as a prerequisite to get in. What would happen is that people would turn up—this is just not apprentices; this is across the board—and they would say, “No worries at all; are you coming in? Okay, we need your white card.” People would reply, “Jeez, I did not bring it with me.” It is a prerequisite. They cannot let them in unless they know that they have got it.

THE CHAIR: So is it a student’s responsibility? Do you think it may be that the school has so much to do at the school, at the education end itself—

Mr Jennings: Yes.

THE CHAIR: that this is just an additional thing that they have to do at the school and it is too much for them.

Mr Jennings: That is exactly right. As you know, some colleges have their VET school embedded in them and some operate very well. But what you are finding, I think, when you are delivering, say, certificate I and certificate II in construction—this is some of the feedback we are getting from their employers—is that they are doing that in an environment where the practical is probably not realistic. When you have done a cert I and a cert II, you actually get credit transfers added to your certificate III. So you do not retrain that part. If you have done five units of competency under 30, when you leave on an ASBA—Australian school-based apprenticeship—or you have done VET in school, you come out and you are not necessarily revisiting any of that stuff.

Unfortunately—not necessarily unfortunately—the first unit is a prerequisite you will do in any certificate III. It is the work health and safety unit. So if that is not delivered at the highest possible standard, you are not going to go back and revisit that again, because as you go through you are doing competency.

MRS JONES: You have got it.

Mr Jennings: Yes, you are moving through the course. You get to unit 30, you have done it and you are competent and away you go.

MRS JONES: Yes, there has been a fair bit of criticism of the school-based apprentices when they come out.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Jennings, for appearing before us today. You will get a copy of the *Hansard*. You will be able to see if there is anything that you have undertaken to get back to us on. We would really welcome any further thoughts that the CFMEU might have to submit to us. We are going to be hearing from other witnesses and having future hearings, so there is plenty of time for you to get those to us. Members may have other questions that they may put to you as well. So you may get some further questions on notice.

Mr Jennings: I am happy for anyone to approach the branch office. If you want individual meetings on certain things, we can come back on that.

THE CHAIR: It will be through the committee. Thank you very much for appearing before us today.

PURTILL, MR GARRETT, Industrial Officer, Australian Education Union, ACT Division

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Mr Purtill. Thank you very much for appearing today. You are our lucky last witness for today to appear before the inquiry of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs into vocational education and youth training in the ACT.

This has been the fourth public hearing and there will be additional hearings afterwards. There are nine submissions on the website but we have made a call for additional submissions as there are some areas that we wish to hear from that we have not to this point. We definitely generated some additional interest as we go through. Thank you very much for your submission. I know members are eager to ask questions of you. Are you familiar with the privilege statement on the pink sheet?

Mr Purtill: I am, chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Purtill: Thanks for the opportunity to address you and members of the committee this afternoon. I am the industrial officer with the AEU, ACT branch. I enter an apology on behalf of our branch secretary, Glenn Fowler. I would like to make an opening statement, chair, if that is permitted?

THE CHAIR: Of course.

Mr Purtill: Our submission is self-explanatory, but given the passage of time since the submission was put in, I would make on behalf of the AEU the following statement: the VET in schools program is one that is littered with half policies, programs and partnerships, good ideas and lots of opinions. But it lacks a galvanizing governing central strategy in ACT schools. It is populated by a dedicated band of teachers who do their very best but who for too long have laboured without adequate assistance and the resources of a central policymaker and implementer in ACT ETD.

The consequence is that VETIS—VET in schools—exists as a fringe dweller in the ACT ETD policy space. This absence or omission must be made good or even the best staffed and resourced program will not bear the fruit of its expectations. So from the outset, the AEU is arguing, through this committee, for ACT ETD to open the policy shop and to give the program the serious time it is overdue in receiving before the program is hollowed out and falls to the ground.

I will just pause there. The current national policy of VET in schools dates from 2001. At the April meeting of education ministers, there was a serious view put that the policy should be reviewed. I understand that it is under review but at the moment there is no outcome.

At the time of our submission towards the end of last year, AEU surveyed its VETIS members. Here are some excerpts from the survey. We do not pretend that there was any science to the survey other than the fact that we asked the questions and we got

the answers. So we are not saying it is the most scientific survey.

Nearly 80 per cent of the respondents said that they did not have adequate time and support to deliver their VETIS program. When they say time and support, you appreciate that in schools teachers are entitled to what is called release time or planning and preparation time. Sixty-four per cent felt that their school did its best but that their workload as teachers was excessive, and 77 per cent nominated more release—that is planning and preparation time—as the single most important change that they would like to make to their current level of support.

On that particular issue, 61 per cent of teachers who responded indicated that admin tasks comprised the largest part of their workload—that is, ensuring that the subject matter was current, that assessments were compliant with the various standards and that proper records were maintained. Incorporated in this workload was making the required adjustments to course content promulgated throughout the teaching year.

This is a huge burden that I have to say teachers in CIT also nominated as one of their vexing complaints. This is an issue that resonates also with our CIT members. Many courses are a continuous litany of adjustments that are time consuming and for which little or no support or time is provided.

Interestingly, these laments almost exactly replicated those raised by VETIS teachers in a 2009-10 examination of their workload in which teachers indicated that their VET workload was in addition to their ordinary teaching load and that they could not get any relief to cover for absences or for professional development, mainly because there were few suitably trained casual relief staff.

This study is not a public one, but it was conducted by ETD in association with and in conjunction with the AEU. There are a lot of learnings and recommendations in it which we have been attempting to work to but I have to say, as an act of self-criticism of the AEU, probably as indifferently at the moment as ETD is. Whilst we would chide ETD, we would also chide ourselves.

There are approximately 140 teachers in ACT public schools who have some involvement in VET. There is hardly anybody who teaches it on a full-time basis. Therefore, obviously, the remainder are teaching it on a part-time or incidental basis. Each is required to have statutorily a cert IV in training and assessment. Some have diplomas in addition to maintaining current and additional competencies at their own expense.

Teaching is like any other trade or profession. As things are added to it, you are expected to add to your regime of competencies. Just as courses change that they are required to teach, so the manner of teaching changes. For example, recently literacy and numeracy, about which I will say a little bit more later, have been added to the core competencies for the cert IV of training and assessment.

One of the ways AEU believes the excessive workload and the chronic lack of support for VET teachers could be alleviated is if current multiple numbers of schools registered separately as RTOs could be rationalised, either by consolidating them into one or merging them with the CIT. It would provide a ready-made platform for

economies of scale for the scarce resources of teachers' support and time. It would also allow for a central coordination of compliance assessment and administration.

Presently, there are 29 public schools that have some involvement in VET. There are nine of those that are registered as RTOs. As you know, the CIT has its own RTO status. Some of the schools have small populations. Some of them have large populations. Within those populations there are more or fewer students involved in a course as opposed to another course.

There are also a small number of private sector RTOs servicing some courses in schools. Many private RTOs provide their courses exclusively online, which adds to their attraction but does not necessarily provide for a trained practitioner. I refer back to the last set of remarks in the exchange that was just before us with the last witness.

In far too many cases CIT teachers are complaining—I hasten to add that there is no science to this; we get a lot of this anecdotally; so I pass it on with that caveat—to the AEU that they are challenged by the thinness of the skill base, cert Is and IIs particularly, bequeathed to them by the current VETIS programs. There is a strongly felt perception that the lack of resources in schools means that shortcuts have to be of necessity taken and that the graduates on entering CIT are not sufficiently trained to be able to confidently grade them as equivalent to those coming from employment.

This is particularly the case in construction but also in a number of other areas where our CIT teachers, with no complaint about the teachers in the schools but simply about resources, are saying that when they get someone who is graded as a cert III—exactly as the last witness was saying—you cannot reach back and make up for that which is missing. You have to assume it. You have to deal with it and then try and make good as you go through into the cert II, cert IV and diploma.

A recent analysis by NCVET has concluded that the size of the employer has a large effect on the completion rates for apprentices in particular. The reason is that large employers have the resources, both human and other, to dedicate to supervision of on-the-job and off-the-job training. Smaller employers are dedicated primarily to staying afloat. I make no judgement other than that.

AEU would contend that it is the same with schools. Where there are small numbers of students involved in VETIS, it becomes harder for teachers to get an adequate ration of the schools' precious resources to invest in those programs. So AEU would submit that VETIS requires first and foremost its own differentiated policy space from which it would become an easier task to identify the proper measure of resources and budget required to invest in and get value from the effort of teachers and the expectations of students. From that policymaking, the teacher issues which have been coming to the AEU since at least 2009 would stand a better chance of being remediated.

I will conclude on this point: we are currently negotiating a log of claims with ETD for the making of our next schoolteachers enterprise agreement. There is a log item in there for teachers in the VETIS area to be given release time. That concludes my opening remarks.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Could I go back to the literacy and numeracy point that you made. Would you expand on that, please?

Mr Purtill: There are two aspects to literacy and numeracy. Over the last couple of years, for all the reasons that we know, literacy and numeracy have become highlighted in schools, public and other. The result is that there are now specific officers in schools whose job is to make sure that literacy and numeracy are given a higher profile. To reciprocate that, in CIT, because of the same issues, CIT now has a foundational studies program. It has evolved over the last couple of years but this year it is now an embedded stratum. When students are being assessed at entry, on enrolment, they are also being assessed against their literacy and numeracy skills.

Numeracy is not just being able to count; it is basic mathematics. A lot of courses, particularly licensed trades ultimately, require a reasonable degree of mathematical competency in order to just do the basic units. They now have that ingredient as part of their assessment of enrolees. Now you are finding more and more students having to pass through a foundational studies stratum in order to actually do their latest studies, particularly those that will ultimately be licensed by the ACT regulator.

Those are the sorts of book ends of the literacy and numeracy space. There is a dramatically increased workload at the CIT end of things. We are now getting some commentary back from the teachers in that space. I hope that answers your question.

THE CHAIR: We have before us another report that has just been put out about how young people are faring in 2013. It is from the Foundation for Young Australians and is a national report. It does mention that only one-third of all public VET graduates in 2012 were employed in the same occupation as their training course. Would you like to make a comment about that?

Mr Purtill: I have not read that report yet, but there is quite a bit of work being done in relation to apprentice completions in particular, some of the ingredients that are active and why it is that there is such a dropout rate not only from school to TAFE but also during TAFE and following TAFE. There are a couple of aspects there. Support from parents is one. It is really huge. There is the size of the employer, which is why I made the point about transferring it back to the size of the school or the population that is enrolled.

I think there is an additional element which may be particular to our jurisdiction. We are a heavily tertiary-governed jurisdiction. We put a higher price on a tertiary education and I think, in the public parlance, there is a default to TAFE being somehow a second chance or a lesser credential. That is something I think that we might want to think about from our side of things or from the policymaking side of things.

In countries like Germany and others, what we would call a TAFE space has the same standing as having a university degree. They not only regard this area as really important for producing the tradespeople but also ideas, innovation and new inventions in that same space. We do not give the same status to the TAFE space.

THE CHAIR: The point was made by a couple of witnesses today actually—maybe

all of them—that getting information out into schools, to young people and parents as well and involving parents in that information sharing, is extremely important. It is important that industry be involved in that, particularly with people who have come from a country where English is a second language or maybe they have no English at all when they arrive here and they may not be literate in English, written English as well as spoken English. In this route and in whatever review and reframing of the way that VET in schools is actually conducted, as you are suggesting might happen, would you see there would be a space for looking at that at the same time?

Mr Purtill: Absolutely, and that is why one of our views is that this whole thing needs to be gathered into one place. There is already a training and tertiary unit inside ETD but we think it lacks the policy muscle that it should have, which would allow it to proactively go into the school space and actively encourage, actively support, students, giving proper weight to VET in schools programs so that it is not seen as something that is peripheral, it is not seen as something that is second best. That would include the way in which VET in schools is presented to parents and would also involve industry more directly in that space so that when students are contemplating, they can see a continuum. You start the journey at school and you can follow that it into TAFE. You can follow it into university if you wish. You can follow it into the workplace. And there are a lot more chaperones along the way that help people to make that journey, to start it well, to navigate it well and to arrive at a destination which is to the benefit of all.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: I commend you and the Education Union for the submission you have put in. I think it is very detailed and covers a lot of areas of concern that our terms of reference try to address.

Mr Purtill: Thank you.

MR DOSZPOT: In your opening statement you also covered a couple of very interesting areas. It is hard to know where to start, but I would like to open with just a couple of areas that I would like you to elaborate on. You mentioned the issues that teachers have in upgrading their qualifications, especially at CIT where they have to have dual qualifications basically. My office has received a number of inquiries from concerned people who are reaching the end of their teaching career basically. They still want to teach for the next few years but it is quite a lot of expense and personal trouble to keep upgrading qualifications which they will not need for a great deal of time. So we are in danger of losing quite a few of those people and there is no substitute at the moment with their expertise. I am all for upgrading qualifications, as I think all of us are, but there has got to be some practical addressing of this issue, for one.

The other one, which you have touched upon in quite a bit of detail, is the fact that the CIT has offered 600 different qualification courses and currently there are potentially 500 of the CIT courses in 2015 at risk of being made full fee-paid courses or removed from the profile in time. These are somewhat different, but they relate to similar topics where certain courses cannot be offered because you have not got teachers with the right skills available. Sorry, it is a long question, but I think it is something that

needs to be addressed. I really value your input into it and if you could elaborate on both those points I would appreciate it.

Mr Purtill: Thank you for those two questions. The first one, teachers in the VET space at schools—and I am not overexaggerating here—are a precious commodity. They are very hard to come by. They all love the space, but they want an overarching policy, they want dedicated resources, and that includes time and support.

Quite a number of those are getting on in years, as we all inevitably do, and with them is going to go a lot of corporate knowledge and a lot of skill knowledge in terms of what they teach as well as how they teach it. If we had an overall policy, if we had a dedicated, centrally coordinated policy space, then the question you raise would be able to comprehend those areas and be able to then either extend those careers or have some planned management succession.

I do not want to be rude to teachers outside the VET space—they are the majority of our members, so rudeness is not the order of the day—but it is a slightly different order of problem. With English teachers, maths teachers, whilst there is a supply and demand issue, it is not of the same quantum as it is with teachers in the VET space.

In a lot of cases, although you have got quantum teachers, you are also asking people who may have been in a trade to go and get various qualifications. To ask them to come out of that is a big ask, and it may be, in part answer to your question, that there are people who are getting to the end of their trade area who could then be encouraged into the VET space from that supply side rather than almost exclusively from the teacher supply side. That is a long answer but, to me and from the AEU's point of view, if we had a policy actor in the space, then it could be able to comprehend those sorts of questions and be able to work out what to do.

The other one is in relation to fee paying. Inevitably there is going to be an extension of fees in the VET space. Commonwealth governments of both political colours have looked at this. The new commonwealth government is active in this space. The ACT government obviously, in the way in which it looks at its skills profile and then looks at what sorts of support subsidies it is going to give, influences those types of judgements that are made in the TAFE space.

Fee paying would not offend the AEU. After all, we are not going to be paying them. But to be more direct about it, at the end of the day we get a very good product for a very cheap investment out of the TAFE space, whether it is TAFE beginning at the schools or it is in the organised TAFE space. We would not expect a university to provide what we expect out of the TAFE space for what goes into it.

At some stage, there has to be a more sensible way by which TAFE is funded. It is not fair to government to expect them to lift it all into the space. It is not fair to expect parents and students to lift it all into the space—but some type of mix. You can already see it with the FEE-HELP extension into the TAFE space. That has to be a good thing. By iterations, we are getting into an interesting space for TAFE. In 2016 the new funding arrangements from the ACT government will take place. CIT is already getting used to that. We and our teachers are getting used to that.

Again, if there is some overarching policy actor that bridges across from the schools to CIT and back again, then, hopefully, a whole lot of dots that are more or less active can be joined up and a lot more energy can be put into that. And that goes back to the question the chair asked before: how would you encourage someone at a school to become involved and their parents to see it as a viable pursuit? Then you say there are all of these things available for you and these supports and chaperones will be there when you make that decision.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: I have a supplementary.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary, yes.

MRS JONES: With your request for more attention, policy wise, to this space, would the AEU see it as appropriate to have a junior minister in the VET space or something like that to draw attention to it? Also, in relation to certificate IV, if someone has got a cert IV in training and assessment, should that be enough for them to be able to teach a VET course in a school? It is enough for them to teach in a CIT course. We are putting some effort into this policy space. If they know how to construct a course and get units of competency across, why should it be any different in a VET classroom in a school from a VET classroom in CIT?

Mr Purtill: It is a fair point, and I will start with that question. It goes back to a question that Mr Doszpot raised. If you are approaching the VET in schools space exclusively from the teachers' side, then necessarily "what is" is what we have got. If you were to approach it more multi-dimensionally and say, "Okay, we will have some dedicated people in this space who are not going to teach anything else"—

MRS JONES: They might be part time.

Mr Purtill: Or people who are getting to the end of their trade life but still have a useful instructional life ahead of them. Maybe that is a space that we could use as an entry point. Those people would only be teaching automotive, carpentry, painting or whatever it is. That then becomes the dedicated space. At the moment, we have got teachers who are teaching other things and VET. If you had people who were exclusively VET, the answer may be as you described it.

MRS JONES: Or, indeed, a mix.

Mr Purtill: If you had somebody looking over the whole thing, you could start to have a more differentiated response to the resources, I guess.

MRS JONES: My actual substantive question was about that.

Mr Purtill: Yes.

MRS JONES: It is about the idea of the CIT as an overseer. How would you imagine the control? Obviously, at the end of the day, that would be the question. Schools like control over what goes on in their own premises—of course they do. Perhaps what

you are suggesting is a CIT standardised tick-off for what is going on in the schools so that you know those people are ready to transition through to a cert III or a cert II if they have done a cert I. In this inquiry we have constantly heard the complaint essentially that school-based VET quals are just not up to scratch. It reminds me of the Army Reserve versus the full-time soldiers. It is that kind of comparison—that one is such a part-time trade that we are not getting up to the standard. To get a solution, would you see it as perhaps a regulatory role that CIT could play?

Mr Purtill: It is a difficult argument. I would start off anecdotally by quoting a CIT teacher in the construction area who was asked, “How do you differentiate the competency of a cert II from a school for accreditation in the cert III program?” They said, “If they know what the tools are, as opposed to being able to use the tools.”

MRS JONES: Right.

Mr Purtill: It is simple but it is effective. We can all identify things from a screen, but can we pick it up and do something with it? Getting back to your point, we would see a role for CIT which we probably would not see in any other jurisdiction. CIT is such a big occupant of the space that it has a role, as the big RTO, to have some say in what happens that is coming towards it.

MRS JONES: Feeders, yes.

Mr Purtill: That is why we raised the point that of 29 schools there are nine with separate RTO status. Why should that be? That is duplication. That is small.

MRS JONES: If it was less of a process, they could be given a set of standards, even if it was in written form, a set of policies—the CIT gold standard for entry to CIT: “If you want your students to be VET trained to enter CIT at the cert I or II level, these are the competencies your VET course has to tick off on.”

Mr Purtill: Why should CIT accept anything less coming out of a school than it would accept from a new enrollee at its own counter?

MRS JONES: Absolutely. We have also discussed, and I am interested in your views on this, the hands-on aspect of much of this training and the fact that some schools, for example, might only offer VET in childcare and might have a childcare centre on site. So they actually would be ticking off the physical, practical nature of the VET courses that they are offering.

Mr Purtill: That is true.

MRS JONES: Maybe even with a very small school they are doing a great job at preparing people to go into cert II and III. Another school might be trying to do three or four things and doing them less well.

Mr Purtill: I think there is a fair point there about rationing. Should every school that offers VET offer the same thing? Should everybody offer automotive when economies of scale say that two or three could be offering that? Given the amount of material that is involved, the hardware that is involved, should it be re-rationed? If

there is something that does not require such a large physical resource, maybe that is something that could be offered more broadly. Should there be some speciality? Should there be a re-rationing of what is available?

The trade training centres are an attempt to do that, but we are still seeing that proceed by fits and starts. It gets back to the fact that VET has grown up by fits and starts over a period of time. What we have now got in front of us is a multi-coloured creature that we, on our side, from the labour side of it, the teacher side, are trying to make sense of. And you guys, as policymakers, are obviously trying to make sense of it. We are not alone, but the fact that we are not alone is not always of great comfort, because we seem to be jumping up and down on the same spot. We really need to start to say, “This is where we need to move to.”

MRS JONES: Someone needs to paint a picture, whether it is us, you or someone else, of how you could actually resolve it.

Mr Purtil: Correct.

MRS JONES: And where you would get to.

THE CHAIR: We will just go quickly to the first part of Mrs Jones’s question about the junior minister. Then we will go to Ms Berry.

MRS JONES: Yes.

Mr Purtil: We have not gone into that space, and we would not, I guess—for this reason: really, it is back in the doing bit. Do not take that away from the political side, please, but it is back in the agency; it is back in the directorate. You need to get that energy constructed. You need to get that shaped, formed and pointed in the right direction. I cannot see that a junior minister is going to add value to that, not to be rude to whoever that might be. It is really at that end. It does not matter who the current—

MRS JONES: So you want to see a dedicated policy?

Mr Purtil: You need a dedicated policy space. There are people in that space, but the policies we see are not fully formed and are not a part of an overarching strategy of where we want to go to. There have been attempts to get a strategy in this area. They have not yet reached any point of maturity, which is a disappointment to us. I have to say that, from a union point of view, this is an area where we have been jumping up and down on the spot. As an act of self-criticism, I would say that we need to move on a bit as well, but we cannot do it on our own. We need to have other people cooperating with us, sharing our views and adopting them. We are happy to cooperate with anybody who can move this space on. We have got 2,000 kids in the VET space at the moment. That is a lot of kids.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: I want to get some clarification from you, if I could, about the qualification requirements and updates that a VET teacher in a school is required to

have, and also the personal development or professional learning for teachers in the school space and how that can possibly be managed by a human in the time.

Mr Purtill: You are absolutely right. It is difficult enough in the CIT space, where you have got people dedicated in electrical, automotive, heavy vehicles or another space—where that is your gig; that is what you do. In the school space, where your time is perhaps rationed across teaching maths, VET and sport or whatever it is you are doing, inevitably the rationing of your time is a competitive one. The teachers in schools are faced with the same thing as teachers in CIT are faced with; it is just that, not to make light of their load, they have a more dedicated space for it.

The qualifications, particularly for licensed areas, are changing quite a lot. It has created quite a lot of commentary where people are now acting back and saying, “You need to temper the frequency of the changes.” Some are large and some are small, but people say they have to implement the changes so that when people come out of that unit of competency, they have a contemporary unit of competency and it has not been aged by the changes not being built into it.

When you take that back into a school space, where you are doing English today, maths tomorrow, sport the day after that and then VET, the workload becomes much more complicated. They have very few supports. There are very few school systems in this space. This all has to be done by the teachers themselves. This is the major source of the lament about not having the planning and preparation time when they have to do this themselves. Whilst the CIT teachers are doing it from a cert III perspective, the teachers in schools have to do it from a cert I and a cert II perspective. It is the same amount of work, and it is done with the same amount of labour, but it is with less support.

Again, we say that if the space was properly populated, you would be able to have a look at what was required and come up with a ration of resources that would more benefit the space. As I say, we have got 30,000 people enrolled at CIT, and that has a whole dedicated thing. We have got 2,000 students in schools in this space at an earlier iteration of their career development, yet we do not have the same dedication, we do not have the same resource allocation, and we do not have the same policy dedication. We give those kids the expectations. The teachers are doing the right thing and encouraging them. When they get to the portal at CIT, they are saying, “You now need to do foundational skills,” or, “You need to do this supplement,” as the previous witness was saying, “in order for you to be properly assessed as being able to do a cert III or cert IV.” That is unfair to those kids.

MR DOSZPOT: I just have a brief supplementary further to what Ms Berry has asked. Part of the professional development dilemma is that there are a diminishing number of people available to act as relief teachers.

Mr Purtill: There are practically none.

MR DOSZPOT: That is what I am talking about. I am getting this, but it would be good to get this reinforced from your area as well.

Mr Purtill: That is exactly what is coming up to us from the 2009-10 examination

and from our survey done about this time last year—the almost total absence of relief. You cannot just put anybody in that task.

MR DOSZPOT: Correct.

Mr Purtil: And that goes—

MR DOSZPOT: How do you do your professional development if you have not got someone to replace you?

Mr Purtil: With great stress. You have to squeeze it in. You would be doing it during stand-down time—during the breaks between semesters, between terms. Again, that is a big ask. You can do that in the CIT space, because in the enterprise agreement that is reflected not only in enhanced career development but in enhanced remuneration. Where is that in the school teacher space, the classroom teacher space? If I go on and do a cert IV and then I go on to do a diploma and advanced diploma, that is quite a lot of time and also quite a lot of expenses un-recouped from ETD. But also, it does not of itself result in any additional remuneration. You have not only got a rationing contest in terms of time, but a situation of “Where is the incentive”, to be blunt about it. I could transfer to CIT; they will take that burden off me. If I stay in the school, that burden remains on my shoulders.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before us today. I am sure we have got lots of other questions. Our time is limited. I would like to thank you very much for the submission and for your additional thoughts. You may have some further thoughts that you wish to put before the committee. They would be very welcome. Members may have some other questions. I am not sure whether you took anything on notice, but could you just check the *Hansard*, which will be provided to you, to see if you did. If so, could you get those to us.

Mr Purtil: Thank you for your time. Thank you for your questions.

THE CHAIR: It was a very useful contribution.

The committee adjourned at 12.44 pm.