



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)
MR A COE
MS M FITZHARRIS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2015

**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 9.30 am.

HEAZLEWOOD, MR ROSS, Executive Officer, ACT Electrotechnology and Energy Advisory Board

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this hearing of the inquiry by the education, training and youth affairs committee into vocational education and youth training in the ACT. We are holding a further and probably a final hearing on this inquiry today. The committee has published 15 submissions on its website.

I welcome you, Mr Heazlewood, as our first witness, representing the ACT Electrotechnology and Energy Advisory Board. I draw your attention to the pink privilege statement which is on the table in front of you. You may have been sent that by the secretary for your perusal beforehand. Have you read it and are you aware of the implications of it?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes, I have read it. I am happy with that.

THE CHAIR: These hearings are being broadcast and recorded, and also streamed. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr Heazlewood: It is my honour to be here, and I applaud these sorts of inquiries. I applaud our politicians for being involved in VET. I have been involved in VET for about 40 years—30 of those years in this town in all roles. I applaud this, and I hope I can make a positive contribution. Thanks for the opportunity to speak today.

THE CHAIR: Could you talk to us a little about what you are currently doing in relation to the advisory board and your relationship with the CIT?

Mr Heazlewood: I am the Executive Officer of the ACT Electrotechnology and Energy Advisory Board. I have been in that role full time for only a couple of months, but prior to that I was in it part time for about 2½ years. I was in that role part time and it was funded by the energy skills council in the ACT—E-Oz. E-Oz makes a good contribution to all states and territories and believes that it needs people on the ground.

I will go back in history in the ACT. This board was established when I was in the department in the early 90s, when the then government brought in industry training advisory boards. They had about 14 in this town. They were funded by the ACT government to provide advice to them on training matters in their particular areas.

I am saying that because the board has existed ever since, and lots of times it has not been funded. The people on there—it represents a good cross-section of the industry, from employers to unions, the community, the department and CIT—are a very broad cross-section. It has always existed, whether it has been funded or not or whether they have had an executive officer or not, and they generally have. They have made a big contribution. I am only saying that because it reflects the industry need to do this at this level. It is great when governments engage with that sort of thing. I think that is notable.

It has been around for a while. I have been the executive officer in a part-time role for

about two or three years, but recently we have decided that the opportunity came for me to go into it full time. It means that I cannot contribute five days a week, but I spread the hours across and it is a great thing.

With respect to our relationship to CIT, they are one of the providers in the town for the electrotechnology qualification, which is the electricians qualification. We engage with them and the board is very interested in the quality of apprentices that are coming out of there. That is based on a pretty high community expectation that the electricians that come out are going to be at the highest standard they possibly can be. That is our role with them.

There are other providers in the town—there have been a few come and go in recent years. We worked with every one of them as much as we can to look at the quality of electricians coming out. It is extremely important to the industry that that happens.

This training package, the electrotechnology training package, is unique. With respect to the cert III that they get when they finish their time at CIT, they get a licence based on that cert III. They can then go out and wire your house or do electrical work. That is a bit unusual because normally, in the past, you did some training at the CIT and when you finished your training and your employer said you were okay, you had finished your apprenticeship, you went off to the electrical regulator and did another test. Your licence was then issued on the basis of that.

When competency-based training came in—I am sorry if I am dwelling on this a bit, but I read the submissions and there did not seem to be that sort of perspective regarding the background, and I think it is important to know how we got where we are—the electrotechnology package is unique in that the outcome is what the regulator wants.

The compromise is that the regulator gets involved as these guys go to their final test, which is the capstone test, the electrical apprenticeship. Our board is involved in that, the regulator is involved in that, the union is involved in that, and the employer association is involved in that. That group sits there. It goes along to the CIT. It is called the capstone review panel. We have terms of reference. We go to the CIT and the other RTOs to look at these guys.

That group can provide industry background. You have to look at the background of the prospective electrician and see that he has had good exposure throughout his apprenticeship. There are a couple of tools to help with that. There is a profiling tool which CIT uses, which is e-profiling. That is a way of recording what sort of work they have been on. It does not indicate competence; the way it is produced is that the apprentice says, “During this week I’ve been involved in these tasks,” which are pre-defined. The employer says, “Yes, he was involved in that.” It is not a measure of competence; it is a measure of exposure. That is a tool.

MR DOSZPOT: Can I ask a supplementary, while we are at this point?

THE CHAIR: Certainly, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Heazlewood, thank you very much for your submission and for

coming in. While you are on that topic, I note in your submission you stated that the EEAB have made numerous requests for a mapping document to be provided to the board. Obviously you are concerned. When was the last time you asked for that, and has it been provided to you yet?

Mr Heazlewood: The last time we asked for that would have been at a meeting that I and other representatives of the board had with the CEO in early April. I think it was on about 2 April.

THE CHAIR: This is the CEO of CIT?

Mr Heazlewood: The acting CEO.

MR DOSZPOT: Has your request been answered?

Mr Heazlewood: No.

MR DOSZPOT: Does that cause you any angst?

Mr Heazlewood: We have not had a direct answer from the CIT. We have been negotiating with the CIT for some time, since about September last year. Throughout our negotiations we became concerned about whether there was a compliance issue, because we received a complaint from the union, tabled at the board, which said, “Here’s some documentation which is claimed to be used at the CIT.” The complainant who had made the complaint to the union was concerned that he did not think it was compliant.

MR DOSZPOT: That is a pretty serious issue to raise, and you quite rightly asked for some clarification.

Mr Heazlewood: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Does the fact that it is now August raise any more concerns with you—that you have not received anything?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes. The board has always had the view of working with the CIT. It is a major provider, especially since the recent demise of Electro Skills, the other RTO, in early 2013. Their numbers have doubled. The industry is looking to them to be the main provider. We are keen to work with them. On any issue we have, we talk to them. We say, “We’ve got this stuff. Please have a look at it and get back to us.” We have not had any formal evaluation of the documentation that was provided. We have had partial, informal discussions about certain things being done, but the board was keen enough to put it formally, and we have not had any formal response.

MR DOSZPOT: What can you do about the fact that you have not received a response in four months? Do you have any other recourse?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes, we do. We talked to the department. They said, “We will see what we can do about eliciting a response from CIT.” That was in about June when we asked the department to become involved. The department got back to me early

last week to say, “Here’s some of the issues. We’ve looked at it. We think the issues are being addressed.” But the department reiterated they could not comment on an item like whether they were compliant or not. They reminded us we would have to go to ASQA for that.

THE CHAIR: Have you subsequently gone to ASQA?

Mr Heazlewood: No. We only got the response from the department early last week.

THE CHAIR: So that would be your next step?

Mr Heazlewood: It would appear to be the case. I have to have a meeting with the board and put it to the board. But as the executive officer, it would be my recommendation to say, “We’ve exhausted all possibilities here. We need to go to ASQA. This is still an issue of compliance.”

THE CHAIR: How often does the board meet?

Mr Heazlewood: About once every three months, unless it is needed to—

THE CHAIR: Would you call an extraordinary board meeting in relation to this?

Mr Heazlewood: We have arranged a meeting for early September.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple of other questions about what you were telling us before. You said there were other RTOs in existence, but then you just talked about the one that closed down. Are there ones other than the CIT, or is that the only other choice that was there and it has now gone?

Mr Heazlewood: There is an organisation called AVTA—Australian Vocational Training Academy—which got registered and was delivering. But they had an issue with the department about funding. Their funding for delivery from the ACT government ceased in about June.

THE CHAIR: So we are back to the one provider; is that right?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes. Just to finish that off, there were about eight or nine apprentices from that organisation who went back to CIT. They are still a registered training organisation, unfunded. I think they are finishing off two or three qualifications at the expense of the participants.

THE CHAIR: When the students have gone through this whole process of competency training and then go through the capstone finally, what is your impression? Notwithstanding this other matter that you are concerned about in relation to a complaint that has been received, what is your general impression of the young people that are coming through and qualifying as electricians? Do you have confidence in them?

Mr Heazlewood: Generally, I think they are okay. We formally get involved at the end, with the capstone, which is a test. It cannot test everything. That is why we

wanted to get involved in the whole process and get some reassurance that their compliance was not an issue. Anecdotally, I get a lot of input from industry people who ring me up, because the industry is mainly micro organisations—less than five employees. They are flat out. They are not really interested in engaging with associations unless they have a particular need. So it is hard to engage.

They will ring me if there is a bit of a problem. Generally, if I ask them to formalise it by saying, “Let’s get going, make it a complaint,” they do not get involved. They just like to sound out. I am hearing concerns from people about some of the concerns; equally, when I engage with other people, I am hearing that some other organisations are saying that CIT seem to be responding to some of the issues we have raised through the correspondence we have had.

THE CHAIR: In relation to the on-site training they are getting with the employer, that person who is the employer does not give some formal feedback about their performance? I know you have the e-report that says they have done this and that, but what about statements from the employer saying, “This is correct; this person has reached this competency and is competent”? Do you have any way of finding that out from the employer?

Mr Heazlewood: CIT have a process of engagement with the employer, for the employer to make statements about whether they think they are ready for the capstone. The CIT teachers will generally engage formally and informally. There is a formal process for the employer to say they think they are ready for capstone, but we rely on the CIT liaising with the employer. With the competency-based training they do some theory and then they have to prove that they have got it. It is hard to follow that up out in the industry because you might want to assess them against a particular thing, and when you go out there he is on a different job doing something else. There are a whole lot of things like e-profiling. We rely on the CIT to engage formally and informally.

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Heazlewood, you mention in your submission that your board has offered to broker an E-Oz pink slip audit, which would provide the opportunity for an appropriately qualified third party to examine and give the college feedback on selected elements of the electrotechnology training. Has this offer been taken up?

Mr Heazlewood: Not with us. It is a document that is available on the web. We offered it to say, “Look, we can arrange a third party to come in and do that.” It has generally been used for other RTOs across the country who want to change their scope of registration. It is like an internal audit. It is an E-Oz process.

THE CHAIR: What does “E-Oz” stand for?

Mr Heazlewood: The Energy Skills Council, which is the ESC. They devised the training package. As the people that developed the training package, they go in and give the RTO advice based on the process they go through. You can get a notification out of that process if you are an RTO to say, “E-OZ has come through and had a look at my processes,” and that is useful for the RTO to take to the ASQA audit, should it be required. They have not formally taken it up with us. We wanted it to be a third party. I understand that they have begun the process. The initial part is to do an

internal process and then engage a third party. They have not formally—

MR DOSZPOT: You have made that offer and you have also requested the mapping documents that you have mentioned and, as per madam chair's question to you, you are saying that the opportunity is now there for you to perhaps go to ASQA.

Mr Heazlewood: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: What would you seek ASQA to do?

Mr Heazlewood: To reassure everyone that CIT's processes were compliant.

MR DOSZPOT: Does that require an audit of CIT?

Mr Heazlewood: It would be a process that ASQA would do. If ASQA decided that they were going to address CIT's issues, they would do an audit, I would imagine.

MR DOSZPOT: I note that point 2 in your submission states:

The absence of a person in the Electrotechnology Department management team with appropriate industry experience and electrotechnology training package implementation experience at a senior level.

Obviously you consider that quite important?

Mr Heazlewood: We do.

MR DOSZPOT: As do a number of other people that have given evidence before the inquiry. Have you followed some of the evidence that has been given to the inquiry?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you find the evidence that was offered to be of an acceptable and reliable nature?

Mr Heazlewood: In relation to that issue, I think it is a concern. It is very important. As I say, the training package is unique to all other training packages. If you worked in another school at CIT and came in to manage this process, the involvement of the regulator and the involvement of the industry prior to the final test is a totally new process. You have to understand how all that works.

The teachers are very passionate about their trade and they are very keen that they produce the best outcome that they can. The leadership is very important. They need to understand all that. CIT, about three years ago, lost a person who had been senior in there and had the confidence of the industry right across the board. That person left the organisation. There have been some subsequent people put in, but they do not have that knowledge of the electrical training package and knowledge of the industry. You need that sort of combination.

CIT went through a process of about three heads of department in about nine months.

That turbulence created a bit of concern for us about where this was going, why were these people leaving? We offered to be part of the selection process because, through our connections with E-OZ, they have got a really broad bunch of people to draw on. We thought we could contribute that way. We went through one selection process and that failed in an outcome.

We offered to be part of the second one, but we were not involved in that. We offered several times and did not receive any notification one way or the other. I note that they have put in a person as the head of department now. I have particularly a lot of confidence in that individual because she is a good manager, knows the CIT and is a good communicator, but I still am a little bit concerned about the electrical training package knowledge. I have heard anecdotally that CIT are trying to engage industry expertise, but they have not done it formally through us.

MR DOSZPOT: As you stated, within your submission you raise a number of concerns and, as I mentioned before, we have had other people giving evidence before us. One gentleman is Mr Ian Dunstan, whose comments are on record. From memory, I think he captures quite a lot of the concerns that you have. Have you read his evidence?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you find the evidence that he has presented is acceptable and realistic?

Mr Heazlewood: I think so. He was a teacher at the CIT. I did not get involved in what the teachers were involved in. They were involved in a comprehensive mapping of nearly 300 apprentices that came over to CIT from a different training provider. They had a real tough process trying to map all those people and put them into the right part of the training package, because there were differences in the way that things were run. I know Ian Dunstan was involved a lot in that. I cannot comment on the detail of the mapping documents that they used, but, generally, I thought his comments about the leadership had a ring of truth.

There was also an issue about teacher qualifications. I thought he implied that the training package indicated you had to have an electrical licence to be able to teach. The training package does not say that; it is in the ASQA standards that the RTO has to comply with that to teach any qualifications you have to have vocational experience in the qualification you are teaching in. You at least need the qualification and some experience. To get that in the electrical industry, if you get the qualification and get experience, you must be an electrician. It is not explicit in the training package, which I thought Ian mentioned, but it is a very high expectation that it does happen.

THE CHAIR: I want to clarify what you said before about the new person that has been appointed. You are saying that you have confidence in her, that you believe she needs to get up to speed with the training package and that they may be bringing somebody in to help her do that?

Mr Heazlewood: She needs support from the electrical training package. She needs support there. We have engaged with them. We meet with them on a regular basis.

Does that answer your question?

THE CHAIR: Yes, it does.

MR DOSZPOT: There are concerns from you and from other people about the backlog of apprentices due to sit the capstone assessment. You have also mentioned that that is having an impact on the employers as well and they have raised concerns. You have also mentioned that you think things are heading in the right direction. Has this backlog been, therefore, too long a time in your experience, and is it being adequately handled now? The final product, I guess, is what you and the employers will be interested in. The quality of the students is good, but has their training been adequate to ensure the safety of their work in the community?

Mr Heazlewood: The backlog of apprentices waiting for capstone has diminished. It was caused by a couple of things. All of a sudden the CIT's numbers grew by 100 per cent, another 300, coming with different ranges of experience. There was a bubble of apprentices going through because of the response by the industry to employ more apprentices in about 2009-10. That was in response to the global financial crisis. All those programs came out and a lot of apprentices were employed, so there was a bubble of apprentices going through. There were large numbers and people coming from a different school. There was a backlog there.

The EEAB and the advisory group, which I chair, from the CIT—it is CIT's group—worked through this backlog, because it meant that people were due to go to capstone. According to them—they were at about four years or 3½ years—their expectation is to go to capstone, yet they found out they had bits and pieces to fill. It was a trying time. I have asked people in the industry from a range of large and small organisations whether that is having any major effect on them at this stage, and they are saying that it has diminished. It was a significant problem. Jointly, I think we worked through it.

MS FITZHARRIS: You have also raised some of the issues that we have heard previously, particularly the nature of the collapse of Electro Group, which I think is fairly unprecedented in terms of vocational training in the ACT. I am not sure what that would look like nationally, but do you have a view on how unprecedented that was to have 300 people without an RTO?

Mr Heazlewood: It is a significant issue. That is half the electrical apprentices in the town. I have worked in the department; I used to look after group training companies.

MS FITZHARRIS: “In the department”; you mean the education department?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes, I worked in there. When group training companies fold, which are employers, you have got to work really mad. If you get 20, that is a worry. This is 300. I think the department worked well in the initial run-up into that to have processes set in place. But when the actual day came, from then on all the issues became apparent, like the mapping issues. There were a lot of other issues at the time too. CIT undertook to participate in a new program that was produced by Energy Skills Australia—that is, E-Oz. That program was revolutionary; it provided all the training resources that TAFE needed. It provided mentorship, which is a great thing for apprentices, and it was written to a national curriculum.

When that was embedded at about the same time as all these other apprentices came over, it was a paradigm shift for the trainers because, rather than them producing the assessment and doing the assessment, this was a national endorsement. The failure rates were alarming. We had to have another look at that. That is what started to grow concerns in the energy advisory board.

With anything new we are saying, “It may well be the instrument that was an issue.” It may well be a whole lot of things. It could be: have we been teaching to the right standard? That is one of the initial factors that were in there that were complicating the whole thing.

MS FITZHARRIS: When you say that the failure rate was alarmingly high, was that amongst those that had come over from Electro Group?

Mr Heazlewood: No, it was the new cohort going through.

MS FITZHARRIS: Electro Group—the reasons, from your point of view, that it failed? I guess the broader terms of reference of this inquiry are around the role and programs of all RTOs. There has been some concern about the number of RTOs that are in the market across the country, and also here, and how they are being regulated. Particularly there are publicly funded RTOs, in this case, CIT, which, as a publicly provided funder, have a different role and responsibilities. The Electro Group failure—was it also part of where the vocational industry is at at the moment?

Mr Heazlewood: I do not think so. There is a general concern of ASQA to say, “We need to reduce the number of RTOs.” I think they are doing that. Electro Skills’ collapsing was not a result of that. An audit was done via complaint, I think, from the department. I was not part of it. An audit was done. The audit involved a representative from E-Oz to act as an industry adviser to the auditors. My understanding was that they found a few noncompliances. They found a range of noncompliances. Then the board of management of the Electro Group, Electro Skills, decided whether it was worth trying to fix those or just fold. That is as I understand the process.

MS FITZHARRIS: Within the regulatory framework, what responsibility did they have to industry and certainly to their students about deciding to shut up shop? In this case the publicly funded institution was there to help manage that transition. But if CIT had not decided to take that on, what impact would that have had? Was it the regulatory framework that allowed CIT to pick it up, or was it CIT’s—

Mr Heazlewood: No, CIT may not have said it, but the CIT is part of the government, and that is the difficulty. It has a community obligation to not have that happen.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, that is right.

Mr Heazlewood: I was not a party to it, but I would imagine the department have seen this. I think they became aware of Electro Group folding early in 2013. I think they negotiated with CIT and CIT decided to take them on. This is not the first example of that. Back in my day in the department, in the 90s, group training

companies fell over, and you would approach the CIT because they had some sort of a community obligation. That puts an extra onus on the CIT.

MS FITZHARRIS: There have been a lot of recent issues which we have canvassed, but in terms of the broader inquiry, from your industry's point of view is the market now well served in Canberra, and is the regulatory mix between state and federal working okay?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes. The transition from local regulators to ASQA seems to have gone okay. We talk to ASQA from time to time. I do not think the regulatory thing is an issue. With respect to whether we are well served in the market, it would be good to have another player in there, as some sort of competition. Having two equally sized RTOs in terms of numbers of electro apprentices was not a bad situation to be in. In terms of the market, we are always encouraging of people who wish to come into the market. The ACT is small enough so that you get a sniff of this and then you ask any prospective candidates to come and talk to us, so that we can give some intelligence.

MS FITZHARRIS: In your submission you have the number of commencements of electrical apprentices. It looks like the numbers were going down in 2004 to 65, from a peak of close to 200 in 2010. Has that gone down again this year?

Mr Heazlewood: It has just started to pick up. Anecdotally, those results came from NCVER, but I keep a liaison as to who is teaching what. I think it has just had a little bit of a kick up, which is a good thing. Employing apprentices is a good indication for the economy.

MS FITZHARRIS: With the completion rates, do you have a sense of what they are?

Mr Heazlewood: No, I have not tracked the completion rates. I did that to show the bubble of people coming through the system which exacerbated the issue about a backlog of apprentices. CIT went through a really perfect storm. We did not want to sit on the fence throwing rocks. We tried to get involved right from the word go, as soon as we saw there was some sort of an issue.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is it a growing industry? There is obviously now investment in renewable energy.

Mr Heazlewood: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: In Canberra, in particular, as a national leader on this, are you seeing growth in your industry because of that particular—

Mr Heazlewood: It is a bit early to see the growth, but there is certainly a lot of interest. ACT is leading the way in renewable energy. All of those wind turbines require maintenance people. Working with Energy Skills Australia, we have come up with a maintenance plan where we have an entry level for people to come in and do maintenance on those. That is worth mentioning, because we think it is unique. You have the huge wind turbines. You have highly qualified people who have to go up there and do the maintenance on them, but there is also a fair bit of work on cleaning, general maintenance, which is not at trade level. That is certificate II-type work.

When you think about where these wind farms are, they are in the rural, remote areas. You can train the cert IV technicians, then you can start engaging youth and even Indigenous people at that certificate II level to do that basic maintenance. We think that is a great plan.

I have spoken to the CIT. They are establishing through the first round a centre out at the Bruce college. We think that is a great initiative. We have been talking to them about selling this sort of training model. So there is some really exciting stuff coming out of that—solar as well; it is all new. There is some really interesting stuff going on with batteries linked to PVs. There is some really innovative stuff happening. You monitor the situation on a minute-by-minute basis and you either sell your stuff out on to the grid or you buy it in. But that involves batteries in the house. The wiring is different. You have voltage floating around where it might not have been in the past. Those batteries take a fair bit of technology. That is why we are always concerned that the standard of electrician is high.

Through those connections to industry, we want to engage with CIT to get this wave that is coming through from the government about renewable energy. All the things that are happening now here are going to happen in other states when they start doing this sort of thing. So we are really interested in engaging. It is an exciting industry, and people in the industry are really interested in that, too.

We want CIT to be part of that. I think they could be a bit further down the track than they are with this, by providing training for photovoltaic installations and that sort of leading-edge stuff. A lot of our contractors go to Sydney to get trained. We want to try and get it into CIT. So the injection of funds from the latest round will be a good thing.

MS FITZHARRIS: You would like to see that happen in terms of the renewable energy skills sector being further developed in the ACT?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes, it is really exciting stuff. It is hard to say what the numbers are going to be. Some of the people that are providing our power will be employed out of the state. But there are a lot of wind farms around here which CIT could be involved in—some of our people, regional stuff.

MR DOSZPOT: We had a lot of people give evidence or put submissions in, and we also spoke to the CIT personnel. In April I asked a gentleman by the name of Mr Grayson from CIT a question.

Mr Heazlewood: Carolyn Grayson?

MR DOSZPOT: Yes, Ms Grayson; my apologies.

Mr Heazlewood: The deputy CEO.

MR DOSZPOT: I asked Ms Grayson:

In December 2013 a draft implementation plan was circulated. What is the status

of that implementation?

Ms Grayson answered—and I am quoting from her comments in *Hansard*:

Different aspects or components of the plan have been rolled out and are being continually rolled out. A benchmarking exercise has taken place and a range of mapping exercises, learning resources, are being looked at. Workplace assessment options are available, so components of that plan have been put in place.

This was in April this year. In May this year you asked again; there were numerous requests for the mapping documentation to be provided to the board. I find it quite incredible that all of that has been rolled out—it has been told to us that it has been rolled out—yet you, as the board, having requested this in May and it is now August, still have not got that information you asked for. Is that acceptable?

Mr Heazlewood: No. The board was decent enough to document the issues, go and meet, and write several letters to CIT on these issues asking for these things. I do not doubt that Carolyn Grayson is saying those things are happening. But they have not come back to the board and said, “Thank you for the letter. In regard to these issues, this is what we are doing.” I would have expected that.

In relation to that mapping, we find that they had a different interpretation of what that mapping was than we did, despite our explaining, as far back as April and prior to that, we wanted something that linked the industry’s training standard here and what is delivered here and what the links are, so that we can go to the industry and say, “You can rest assured everything’s fine. They’re meeting the requirements.” That is why we need it.

They say they misinterpreted what we asked for and gave me some document which is available of how you map one training package to another. Now, having regard to my latest communication with the CIT, I believe they understand what we are after and they are saying they are working on it. I think it is unacceptable that the board went to the trouble to write to them and we have not heard back formally. There is a lot of stuff happening.

THE CHAIR: You are having a lot of informal communication that is not in writing; is that what you are saying?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes. We are having it informally all the time. I am part of the advisory group. We talk about things down there. There is all of the stuff you would expect to happen, which is good.

MR DOSZPOT: With the seriousness of the issues that we are discussing, surely there has to be some formalisation of the requests that you have made?

Mr Heazlewood: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Without trying to labour the point, there are certain options available to you.

THE CHAIR: We have already talked about that. They are going to ASQA next; is that right?

Mr Heazlewood: With the endorsement of the board, that is what I would be putting to the board—that ASQA is our next option. As I see it, we have to go to the board.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Heazlewood, for your evidence this morning. As we said before, this is being recorded, so you will get a copy of the *Hansard*. Let us know if there is a misinterpretation of your words. Could you get back to us as soon as possible with any comments you want to make. You did not take anything on notice, so you do not have to give us anything on notice. However, if there is some other information you want to provide to the committee at any stage, please feel free to do so—noting that we are trying to wind up the hearings and get our report written. But if there is something that occurs to you after you leave here, please let us know. Thank you for your participation and also for your submission.

Mr Heazlewood: Thank you very much. Good luck with your work. I hope it goes well. I will look forward to your outcomes.

ORR, DR DIANNE, Deputy Chief Commissioner and Commissioner, Compliance
Australian Skills Quality Authority

THE CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before us today, Dr Orr, in the education, training and youth affairs committee inquiry into vocational education and youth training in the ACT. We anticipate that this will probably be the final hearing for our committee. We have published 15 submissions on the website. The program is available if you wish to have a look at the different hearings that have been taking place. Thank you for coming before us today as a representative of the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Have you read the privileges statement before you and do you realise the implications of that statement?

Dr Orr: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to make an opening statement?

Dr Orr: Just to say thank you for the invitation. ASQA is very happy to assist your committee in its inquiry. I am very happy to answer any questions you have.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I realise this is the second time that ASQA has come before us, so we appreciate the fact that you have come before us again. We heard from a previous witness that there is a need, perhaps, to reduce the number of registered training organisations nationally. I am not sure of the specifics of whether there is an issue in the ACT. Therefore, this sometimes causes an issue in relation to students. If an RTO closes, obviously they need to go somewhere else. I was wondering whether there is, in fact, a need to reduce the number and if this is because you are concerned about the standard of training that these organisations are providing.

Dr Orr: I can say that ASQA does not have a deliberate strategy to reduce the number of providers in the training market. This is not one of our strategic objectives. However, we have an objective to ensure that the vocational education and training system in Australia meets the needs of industry and employers going forward. The fact that ASQA has taken some decisions which have meant that providers have left the market is not necessarily a good thing in and of itself. We see it as a good thing that providers who are not doing the right thing are being removed from the market.

Can I paint the picture of the total numbers of ASQA-regulated RTOs in the ACT and the numbers over the four years we have been operating? When we opened in July 2011, 138 RTOs transferred to us from the ACT regulator. There has been a decline over time in those total numbers. In 2012 there were 130; in 2013, 127; in 2014, 121; and a slight increase to July 2015 with 123 RTOs. That is of a national figure of 3,900 RTOs that we regulate.

This trend of numbers going down is happening across the board. We cannot establish a causal link to ASQA's regulation being responsible for the total reduction overall. There are other reasons. People make business decisions to get out of the market, to do something else. People retire, people get sick—they have family issues. All of these sorts of factors impact on a business owner's decision to exit the market. We have taken a number of decisions about providers in the ACT. I am happy to provide you with a summary of those if you would like.

THE CHAIR: That would be helpful, thank you.

Dr Orr: We have done 163 audits of ACT RTOs since we were established in 2011. One hundred and twenty-seven of those—77.9 per cent—were compliant when we audited them, and 34—20.9 per cent—were not compliant, and two are awaiting a decision or have been discontinued. This audit activity—163 audits—led to ASQA making 13 decisions to refuse applications from ACT RTOs. There was one refusal of an initial application for registration out of 21 applications. There were 12 refusals of existing RTOs to add new courses to their registration. The decision to refuse an application for initial registration represents 4.7 per cent of completed applications in this category for the ACT. This is below the national refusal rate, if you like, per application completed in this category. The national rate is 14.9 per cent.

Decisions to cancel registration of RTOs have also been taken. There were two decisions to cancel the registration of an ACT RTO and nine decisions to suspend the registration of an ACT RTO. Furthermore, ASQA made nine decisions to issue written notices of intention to cancel or suspend registration of ACT RTOs and made five decisions to impose other types of administrative sanction. These were probably at the lower end—written directions to fix up areas that were not compliant.

Some 3.1 per cent of action taken by ASQA has been against ACT RTOs, and this is directly in line with the territory's proportional representation among ASQA's RTOs. I think you can see from that that we have been active in the ACT with ACT RTOs. Our action is commensurate with the size and the profile of the provider market in this jurisdiction.

MR DOSZPOT: The last time you spoke before us, Dr Orr, you did not have an awful lot of information about the ACT per se. Since then have you had any information that has been conveyed to you, any issues that have been brought to your attention, about ACT-related RTOs?

Dr Orr: We keep in close contact with the directorate here in the ACT department. Recently they notified us of their decisions regarding their funding contracts and their decisions to continue, not continue or add new providers to their list of funded RTOs. On occasion they contact us directly where there are concerns, compliance issues, with particular RTOs.

MR DOSZPOT: How do you get involved in assessing whether you should be looking at anything regarding an audit, perhaps, or whatever into an RTO? Can you make judgements yourself or do you rely on people coming to you with complaints or recommendations?

Dr Orr: No, we certainly action audits triggered by both. If I could explain: we have an application-based or permission-based approach to regulation as well as a risk-based approach to regulation. In terms of applications, every initial application for registration that we receive from a newcomer is site audited by ASQA. From there forward, at the 12-month point for new RTOs or, under the new standards, it is in the first two years, we are required to do a full audit of that RTO. That much of our audit program is, if you like, pretty well established and dictated.

We conduct what we call monitoring audits that are initiated by us on the basis of a risk assessment that has been completed of a provider. Those risk assessments take into account previous compliance history, any complaints that have been received and the qualifications that the provider is delivering. We make a decision to conduct an audit at any time during the registration cycle of that provider.

For renewal applications, if the provider has been assessed as medium to low risk, we may not do an audit to renew their registration, but we certainly do audit renewal applications for providers who are in the high risk category.

MR DOSZPOT: During our inquiry it has come to our attention with regard to one of the biggest organisations, CIT—which provides tremendous support for Canberra students, one aspect of their activities—the training advisory board for the electrical industry has asked the ACT education directorate to investigate a complaint about the electricians course at the Canberra Institute of Technology. They were frustrated at the lack of response from the CIT itself. Apparently they asked for some mapping reports to be provided back in May; it is now August and they still have not heard. Is that the sort of thing that you would see as something that you would be interested in looking at?

Dr Orr: I checked, with respect to the media article that was in the *Canberra Times* yesterday, and I am advised that we have had no formal complaint to us about this particular matter. We require RTOs, or the national standards require RTOs, to have complaints handling processes in place. Our strategy, when we receive a complaint, is to first check with the complainant if they have used the complaints handling arrangements of the provider they wish to lodge a complaint about. We check that the individual concerned, the industry concerned or the employer concerned has first contacted the provider. But if there is a reason why they do not wish to do that, of course, we will happily receive their complaint.

MR DOSZPOT: That is what I was asking at the outset: whether you are relying on people coming to you with a complaint or whether if something becomes evident to you or appears to be evident that there are some issues, you initiate something yourself.

Dr Orr: Yes, we rely very heavily on the intelligence from the regulated community itself, from the stakeholders of the system—industry, peak associations, employers, employer associations. We have a number of established stakeholder feedback mechanisms that we use to tap into intelligence at the strategic level about where the problems may be. Our industry engagement team is in regular contact with the former industry skills councils and will establish arrangements with the new industry bodies when they are on board.

We use all of this intelligence as data, if you like, to make a decision about where we go and investigate or audit a provider. To date, I can confirm that we have not received any formal complaints and, in the absence of any other intelligence, we would have no cause to initiate regulatory activity with respect to that.

I understand that there were some 300 apprentices that were with another provider

that was subject to ASQA's cancellation—the Australian Electrotechnology Industry Training Centre. We cancelled their registration, with their consent. We had a meeting with the board about their situation on 30 November 2013.

We take very seriously the situation with students, with apprentices, when we make decisions. But that does not necessarily influence our decision to take such a decision to administratively sanction an RTO whose practices have not met the national standards.

In this case, I understand that what led us to conduct the audit of the Australian Electrotechnology Industry Training Centre were, indeed, some very serious concerns that were raised by the directorate in the department here in the ACT. Ann Goleby contacted us about some issues and that was the trigger for our audit, which found that particular provider to be not compliant.

When we make these decisions and it results in the cancellation of a registration, we have a dedicated team, a national team, based in our Adelaide office who then kick into gear to manage the process of deregistration. Part of that process is to work very closely with the state and territory government agencies that are involved in funding those apprentices or funding those places.

We would have done that with the department here in the ACT—notified them of our decision and informed them. Then it is usually because they are the funder that they will arrange to fund another provider to continue the training for those funded students with another registered provider. I understand that is what happened with the 300 apprentices; they, in fact, were transferred to CIT and their training continued there.

THE CHAIR: Dr Orr, that would be a large number of students to be transferred all in the one—

Dr Orr: That is a large number, but we have had occasions where similar numbers or more numbers or far fewer numbers have been transferred.

THE CHAIR: Does this team physically come to the state or territory to manage this process or does it do this remotely?

Dr Orr: No, it is more communication with the relevant authorities in the states and territories. It is managed from our office in Adelaide. For international students, where the Tuition Protection Service requests our attendance at student meetings, we are very happy to oblige and go along.

Our role is really to provide the student with a copy of any records that have been transferred to ASQA, as is required by the legislation, when an RTO closes. There is provision in the act that they must provide student records to ASQA. We hold those records. We retrieve them. On application from any student affected, we will provide them with a copy of their records as kept by that RTO.

Our main role is to support the student in the provision of their records. We are not in a position to find places for students. It is not a service that the regulator provides. But,

as I said, we work very closely with the state and territory government agencies who are perhaps positioned to offer that support.

THE CHAIR: Given there was no other organisation or RTO who could provide that particular training at that time, would you have been concerned that they were going all in one lot to one provider that was being asked to take up the slack?

Dr Orr: I agree that there could be risks associated with that, yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: To follow up on your most recent evidence, whose responsibility is it to find those places for students should an RTO collapse?

Dr Orr: If there are students who are funded through a government-funded program then it would be the funder who takes that responsibility. There are fee-for-service students who are paying their own tuition fees who are affected. ASQA can provide those students with a list of other providers that they can contact who are registered in their area. But we do not offer a placement service for students. It is by working with the other relevant agencies that the students are looked after.

MS FITZHARRIS: There are 123 RTOs in Canberra as of 2015?

Dr Orr: Correct, yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: In terms of your regulatory role, do you have a risk assessment as to where they all sit at any given time?

Dr Orr: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: How does that work from your point of view?

Dr Orr: If I could refer to my notes, I can then detail for you the risk rating process and the sorts of considerations that we give. We have been using risk ratings of individual providers. The primary purpose of those ratings is to give us a rationale for risk managing those providers. We do not publish those risk ratings, although we have, on occasion, given that information to state and territory governments where they have requested it.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do the providers know what risk rating they are at?

Dr Orr: They can ask us for that, yes. We use a range of risk indicator data sources that we aggregate to make a decision about risk. The model very much follows the Australian standard for risk management. We get this information through, as I said earlier, customer complaints about training providers, engagement with industry and other government licensing authorities, meetings with provider representatives and information-sharing arrangements that we have with other agencies like TEQSA, the NCVER, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, and state and territory governments.

The profile consists of a risk rating that is based on their past performance—whether they have been compliant, their compliance history—complaints, intelligence reports

we have received, registration and application history—for example, it might be significant that they have added 200 courses to their scope in the last six months; that sort of history is informative as well—and regulatory decisions that have been taken with that provider.

We will be using the total VET activity data once that becomes available. Completion rates and information about the numbers of enrolments will be made available through this total VET activity collection that is happening against the AVETMISS standard. NCVER is gathering that data and will provide us with a report which we believe will also be helpful in establishing risk. We also use other sorts of risk indicators. I mentioned the scope increase and the number of complaints that have been raised about a provider.

THE CHAIR: Is there a point at which it triggers an audit? Is it a sliding scale upwards, as it were, where the number of indicators adds up to a trigger for you?

Dr Orr: Yes. We call these the threshold in terms of where we would take action. Yes, there is a threshold point at which we undertake a monitoring audit of a provider based on reaching that threshold in respect of all of those sorts of data sources I just explained.

MS FITZHARRIS: So they are not published?

Dr Orr: No.

MS FITZHARRIS: With CIT, for example, you cannot say where they might sit in that?

Dr Orr: No.

MS FITZHARRIS: When you were established, your submission says it was to “address emerging quality concerns”. After four years in operation, do you think you have addressed those quality concerns now through the regulatory processes you have?

Dr Orr: We are working towards that, yes. From our regulatory findings we have influenced or had input into the redevelopment of the standards for registered training organisations. The revised standards came into effect on 1 January 2015 for any new provider wanting to enter the system. They came into effect from 1 April for existing providers.

We have been auditing against those new standards, and those new standards, I think, have made a difference. I refer to our regulatory reforms in terms of providing more education to providers about compliance and about what they need to do to be compliant, and the publication of an extensive users guide to those standards has helped. We are seeing some improvements in our compliance rates for providers when they are audited as opposed to what happened previously. We are seeing a slight improvement in those compliance rates.

Other ways in which we have addressed those quality issues have been through our

strategic reviews. We have just released the strategic review report into childcare training, which we initiated as the outcome of some Productivity Commission findings into child care in Australia. That report is available. I have a copy here that I am happy to leave with the committee, if you would like that.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

Dr Orr: It is published now. It is available on our website. I will make that available to the secretariat. With the findings of those strategic reviews, the first lot were into aged care, the white card in construction and the marketing practices of RTOs. The second three strategic reviews we have done have been on childcare training, equine training—any training to do with horses and horse riding, in particular—and security training.

Through our conduct of these reviews, which go a bit further than audits in terms of engaging with industry, speaking to employers and students and that sort of thing, we have found some common quality issues across the system. One of those is assessment. In particular, the childcare review has identified that assessment was generally not valid and reliable. The workplace assessment which was prescribed in the training package had not been occurring. The other significant finding across all of those reviews, I have to say, and in this one, is that the training programs that are being offered are far too short for an individual to gain the skills and competencies they require in order to be issued with the qualification.

We are very concerned, and we have informed the department and the minister about those concerns, about the way in which the market appears to be driving courses into shorter and shorter durations. We believe, and in fact have recommended, that there needs to be a benchmark. We know it is a competency-based system, but within that competency-based system we believe there should be some benchmarks about the duration of training for, let us say, a newcomer coming into a particular occupation. How much training do they need? We have seen some horror cases of very short training being offered.

MS FITZHARRIS: Did they happen to be in the ACT?

Dr Orr: I can inform you that there were no issues identified in the childcare strategic review in the ACT. But there are a number of recommendations in the report that go to ASQA's increased scrutiny of childcare training providers, and that also go to recommendations about how the training package might be improved. Certainly, one of those recommendations is about some benchmark for the time over which competency must be developed.

THE CHAIR: We had some evidence given to us about online training, so that the person is not doing face-to-face training necessarily but doing a lot of desktop training. Was one of the concerns around that, in particular in relation to child care?

Dr Orr: I can certainly dig that out for you. It was a particular concern when we did the construction industry review—the white card review. Many providers were offering that online. You can go online, enrol, get your white card and, of course, it is about the induction you need to go on to a construction worksite. It is a very important

bit of training. It is about work health and safety and a lot of those sorts of issues. There were concerns in that review, particularly about the authenticity of the person enrolling and being issued with the statement of attainment and thenceforth the white card. Providers were paying scant attention to any methodology around proving who the person was that was coming in online, doing the thing and being issued with the qualification. Online training can be of concern but there are providers in Australia who do a very good job of online training and online assessment.

THE CHAIR: You said there was no childcare training provider that was found to be noncompliant?

Dr Orr: In the ACT.

THE CHAIR: In the ACT, with the strategic review?

Dr Orr: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Were there any who were not ACT based but who were working in the ACT?

Dr Orr: I would have to take that on notice and let you know.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. As you know, the ACT is quite a small jurisdiction, and sometimes providers operate across borders.

Dr Orr: Yes.

THE CHAIR: That would be interesting to know.

Dr Orr: Our data on this is not really robust. When providers register it is a national registration. They are asked to identify the jurisdictions in which they will operate and to notify us when they no longer operate. But this data is not terribly reliable, I have to say.

THE CHAIR: Is that because they do not notify you?

Dr Orr: Yes, usually.

THE CHAIR: If they do not notify you, is there some sanction involved in that?

Dr Orr: Yes. Certainly, if we become aware of it, we would issue them with a written direction to complete that notification. I will take that on notice and see what I can get for the committee.

MR DOSZPOT: A supplementary. Dr Orr, further to the report that you have tabled, has there been any similar report on training programs for the education and care workers in special needs and disability?

Dr Orr: No.

MR DOSZPOT: Is anything planned in that area?

Dr Orr: Not that I know of. We make decisions about these strategic reviews on the basis of the analysis and census of data that we have available to us. We do an environmental scan, which is refreshed every quarter. It is through that scanning process that we pick up where there may be quality issues and decide to follow them up with this particular strategy of a strategic review.

MS FITZHARRIS: We have terms of reference around youth training. Are you doing any work around youth training in particular, which could of course go across a number of different industries, but specific to youth?

Dr Orr: No, we have no particular programs directed at particular cohorts of students. We administer the regulatory framework and the standards for all registered training organisations regardless of who the cohort of students are. I would say that the revised standards that we are using put front and centre client needs. There is a particular group of standards. I am referring directly to them. Standard 4 is about obligations to learners and clients. That particular standard has been improved upon to ensure that providers are ultimately responsible for ensuring that all learners and all of the clients they are dealing with receive the best quality services.

For example, an RTO must provide information that is accurate and factual about a range of things that are listed. It must provide information about certain things prior to enrolment. The standards have been strengthened in this area of an RTO's obligations to its learners. I imagine that would impact also on young people who are in training with RTOs.

MS FITZHARRIS: One of our other terms of reference specifically goes to the effectiveness of programs. Do you have a role beyond compliance and the strategic reviews of assessing the effectiveness of the sector?

Dr Orr: No. We assess quality issues in particular areas of training, in industry sectors or subsectors of industry, and, generally speaking, any broad issues that might be impacting.

MS FITZHARRIS: Presumably the standards—I have not had a chance to look at those—go to effective vocational training programs?

Dr Orr: Yes, they do. They are very much focused on what a registered training organisation must do in order to deliver qualifications that have integrity in our system. The Australian qualifications framework has qualifications that have integrity. They are the standards for registered training organisations and they prescribe a number of things about the quality of training, the quality of assessment in particular, and, as I have just mentioned, the obligations of an RTO towards their learners.

MS FITZHARRIS: We had some evidence before and had a discussion around the renewable energy sector. The ACT is doing a lot of work in that industry. It is all new. Whose role is it to set the new standards in a specific industry, and how would that work, for example, in renewable energy for skills training in that sector?

Dr Orr: The training packages specify the assessment requirements and the resource requirements and, indeed, the competencies that an individual needs to have to work in an industry. It would be the people developing the training package qualifications that would be responsible for setting out what is required. Our role as a regulator is to regulate against those training package requirements.

MS FITZHARRIS: Who does the training packages—which organisations?

Dr Orr: It has recently changed. They were called the industry skills councils, and they are being replaced by—forgive me, I have forgotten the term—skills bodies. I am happy to provide you with some information about that particular reform.

THE CHAIR: When you roll out these new standards, do you have a plan to audit all existing RTOs against the new standards, given that they are brand-new standards? One would imagine there would be a need to make sure that everyone can come up to speed with those?

Dr Orr: We do not have a planned audit program to ensure that everyone is audited by a certain date against the standards. We ask the CEO responsible for the RTO to declare that they are compliant, to submit a statutory declaration that they are compliant with these standards. We started auditing against the new standards from January this year, and we will continue to do that.

We ran a very significant information and education campaign about the new standards. We conducted full-day workshops for RTOs in every capital city and in many regional areas where we have RTOs. That was focused on these standards, the changes, the sorts of things that RTOs should focus on. We published this users guide which we made available to all RTOs. Clearly, we are concerned that people comply with the new standards. These are the sorts of efforts we have made to ensure that they know about them, understand them, and can work with them to comply.

THE CHAIR: You talked initially about the fact that people are audited as they apply.

Dr Orr: Yes, within two years.

THE CHAIR: Is there another trigger—say, five years or 10 years?

Dr Orr: No. Renewal of registration can be another trigger. However, we apply a risk-based approach to that. We do not audit everybody on renewal.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Dr Orr. You took a couple of things on notice, so if you could get those to us as quickly as you are able to. The transcript of the hearing today will be sent to you. You will be able to have a look through that to check its accuracy against what you have said. I do not know whether members might have further questions. I know this is the second time you have appeared before us, but there may be some further questions of clarification. I would ask committee members to get those to you.

Dr Orr: I am very happy to take those and provide you with anything else.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, and also for coming for the second time to appear before us.

Sitting suspended from 10.59 to 11.18 am.

McCABE, MR MARK, ACT Work Safety Commissioner, WorkSafe ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the hearing of the education, training and youth affairs committee into vocational education and youth training in the ACT. We have received 15 submissions to the inquiry. Thank you very much for appearing before us in your role as the ACT Work Safety Commissioner. These hearings are being streamed and also recorded. Are you familiar with the pink privilege card that is before you? Have you read it and are you aware of its implications?

Mr McCabe: I am. I have read it. I am aware of the implications.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr McCabe. We do not have a written submission from you. Do you want to make an opening statement?

Mr McCabe: A very brief one. In my role as Work Safety Commissioner, I intersect with the training world a fair bit. Training is obviously a very important aspect of work health and safety. One of my goals has been to increase the commitment to health and safety training in industries and to improve the quality of health and safety training.

THE CHAIR: In your role do you also become aware of when there are concerns with any particular industry in relation to practices that are not compliant in regard to that?

Mr McCabe: Occasionally. It depends on the types of complaints. There have been a couple over the years since I have been in this role. Generally, I would refer them either to the department of education or to ASQA as the body that oversees RTOs. It depends on the nature of it. Some of these issues might be issues I could deal with myself, if they related to the technical content of the training. But where they are about the bona fides or the conduct of an RTO in particular, I would generally refer it to another body.

THE CHAIR: How would these complaints come to you in the first place? Would they be from the observation of an officer that you have on a site or would they be coming from, say, the employer at the site, for instance?

Mr McCabe: They are generally from external parties. The local industry is a small industry. It is not uncommon for them to criticise each other to me, and I take all of that with a grain of salt. I always take it on board but I am conscious that they sometimes are trying to position themselves as the star performer and maybe undermine their competitors. Some of that goes on.

Wherever there is a serious issue, I will always ask a person to put that to me formally. It is generally information that comes to me from external parties, as I say. It is generally from members of RTOs; sometimes from industry associations. It is not an issue that our inspectors tend to pick up on. Complaints do not generally tend to come through that avenue. They tend to come up to my level or to someone more senior.

THE CHAIR: You usually act on it, unless it is extremely serious and there is more than one complaint, so that you can check the bona fides; is that what you are saying?

Mr McCabe: It is more where they are prepared to put it in writing. Sometimes it will just be a bit of a gripe. You get a lot of that in all industries, I guess. People are griping about different issues. If it is an issue that I think is serious enough to warrant them making a formal complaint, I will ask them to do so. I will ask them if they are prepared to go on the record and make that complaint, or I will say to them, “That’s the appropriate avenue,” or “The appropriate avenue is X or Y, to go to the department or talk to the RTOs et cetera.” It is a judgement call based on what the issues are.

Sometimes people are just trying to say that they are a better trainer than others. There will be some that are better than others and some that are worse; it does not mean they are doing anything wrong. But if I do get something said to me that suggests there is something inappropriate going on, that will then generate a different kind of response from me.

MR DOSZPOT: I will quote from a question that I put to the minister for education back in April. The quote I am about to read reflects on a statement that you made. It is the Education Union that I am quoting, if you can keep those parameters in mind. I quote from page 6 of the document that I was referring to the minister:

Recently, the ACT Commissioner for Work Safety, in an effort to stem the high incidence of injuries and deaths in the construction industry, has highlighted the need for high quality and consistent licencing assessments for all trades associated with the construction industry. This wisdom should be extended to all VET qualifications as a measure of competence of licenced operators in an environment which in its current state may deliver an inconsistent quality of graduates across its VET programs. An external agency to monitor the quality of the outcomes of students being assessed in each VET qualifications would prevent this.

I should read the opening paragraph, to put it in context. When I was talking to the minister I said:

I have a few more questions to put in, so I will look forward to a response to them; thank you. My last question is based on the Australian Education Union, ACT branch, submission that came in.

I was quoting from page 6 of that submission. I was interested in the minister’s comment, but I am obviously very interested in your comment. Can you elaborate on what the Education Union said about your comments?

Mr McCabe: Yes. Perhaps I could give you a more general comment on the whole question of people being granted licences on the basis of their training qualifications. In recent months—about two months ago—my role was expanded beyond work health and safety to encompass building regulation. In that role I am responsible for an area that licenses a whole range of trades. In the work safety arena, my remit included what is called high risk work licencing. My new remit includes licencing for all of the occupational trades—electricians, plumbers, builders et cetera.

What I am seeing there is a similar issue to what I saw in high risk work licencing—

that is, a statement of attainment from an RTO is not a guarantee that a person has the competence to do the task that we are asking them to do when we give them a licence. Let me explain that a little bit further. In the vast majority of cases it is. Most RTOs do a good job and when they issue a statement of attainment that a person has been trained in a particular area, you can have confidence in that. But you cannot have 100 per cent confidence. There are people that slip through that net, probably for a variety of reasons, that get a statement of attainment from a legally appointed RTO and you wonder how they got that qualification.

That can be some deficiency in the assessment process of the RTOs. It could be a deficiency in the whole RTO process, in that maybe there are some RTOs out there that are not being as rigorous in their assessment as others. Those are really issues for ASQA as the body that approves RTOs. But, of course, our workplaces are on the receiving end of that. If we get people that have those qualifications and do not have the skill, that is of concern to us.

There are a couple of ways we can tackle that. As I said we have raised our concerns with ASQA and they will work through those. Wherever we have specific concerns, we will refer them to ASQA, and do. At the broader level, in Access Canberra we are looking now at going through the various licences that are issued by that body, which includes all the ones that I have just talked about, and working out for which ones we think we should have an additional test over and above the statement of attainment that is supplied by the RTO before we grant them a licence.

I have discussed this with industry members from both the employer and employee rep bodies and they all favour it strongly, which suggests that they share my concern that there are some people getting through that process that should not get through it. We will do it on a risk assessment basis. So builders of multi-storey apartments is probably the first qualification that we will tackle, because that is one that has bounced up and impacted on the community quite a lot in recent days. We will be looking at electricians and plumbers' high risk work licences. We will go right through all of the trades and work out for which ones we think we need to do that.

In effect we are lifting the bar a bit, in one sense. In another sense, we are not. Anyone who has done an approved course with an RTO should be able to pass the kinds of tests we will be putting before them. So it is not an additional level of knowledge they have to have; it is more a verification that they do in fact have the knowledge.

This is going to increasingly come to the fore as there is more and more online training. Online training, it seems to me, is virtually unstoppable—it is the way the world is going. But there are all sorts of concerns about whether the person doing the training is the person who is purported to be doing the training. I know there are a whole range of ways they can try and control that, but I think it opens some problems for us.

The other issue we have is mutual recognition. People will get their licences interstate and then come in to the ACT and we have no guarantee that they were trained appropriately. We believe this additional test will also screen out people that are coming in inappropriately through that process. Our challenge is to do it in a way that

does not add a layer of red tape and a layer that is not adding value to the process. That is why I say it will be on a risk assessment basis. We do not want to create a whole flood of additional exams just for the sake of it because it seems like a good idea. We will work through and see where the evidence is that there are issues.

That would stop people getting licences who do not really have the qualification they purport to have. We also have to deal with any legacy issues. There might be people who already have licences. We are considering looking at it on renewal of licence as well. It may be that you set such an exam every second time your licence renews, so that you are on a three-year licence, rather than every renewal.

The other problem we face that also is linked into this area—you can see it is quite complex—is that a person goes to an RTO. They get trained to be, say, a crane operator. They get their crane operator high risk work licence. They never actually operate a crane for many years, yet they have that ticket. At any point they can go to an employer and say, “I’ve got a ticket to operate a crane,” but they may not have operated one for seven, eight or more years. We feel that a simple, relatively short test, maybe on every second renewal, will help screen out those people who are just renewing their licence for the sake of it.

MR DOSZPOT: How often are licences renewed?

Mr McCabe: Many of the licences are for three years. They tend to vary, but they probably average out at about three years.

MR DOSZPOT: Is there any question that would try and identify if there is a long gap on the application?

Mr McCabe: There is not at the moment. At the moment we do not ask, “When was the last time you actually used this licence?” I was talking to someone very senior in the building industry recently. This is a little bit on a tangent but it is the same issue. They are an engineer. They got that engineering qualification 20 years ago and have never used it since. Yet purportedly they are an engineer and someone could say to them, “You’re an engineer; you can come and do this engineering thing for me.” No, we do not tend to test how long, and if we did it would largely be on their say-so as to how long it was since they used that particular qualification.

THE CHAIR: I would like to ask you a supplementary about that matter, but a second question would be: you mentioned that the first cab off the rank for this process would be the building industry.

Mr McCabe: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Have there been any alarm bells ringing? There have been some recent accidents and things like that. Have there been any alarm bells ringing in any other areas? Obviously you are concerned about the building industry, but have there been any others?

Mr McCabe: There have not in the ACT. For us it has been the construction industry where this concern has arisen. I have no doubt that it must be an issue in some other

industries. It has not come up to the surface through accident rates or concerns expressed to me. I guess we are not going to go looking for the problem. It is a big enough issue in the construction industry. If it did arise in other industries, I guess I would not be totally surprised, because what it suggests to me is that, at the broad, the reliance on an RTO to issue a statement of attainment that a person has a qualification is not a 100 per cent guarantee. I cannot see why that would be restricted to the construction industry.

It is of concern to me that that is the case, and I guess you would expect that every system is never going to be 100 per cent, but I think most employers and most industries are relying on the fact that people are going to training organisations, they are being trained, and they are expecting them to come out of that training with that competence. It is an economically driven industry as well, so it is competitive.

THE CHAIR: I go back to the issue about the gap and the question Mr Doszpot asked you about whether or not after a gap, when they come back after three years, you ask them, “Have you been practising or not?” In some professions that is an absolute standard—you have to show a record of employment from point A to point B before your registration is approved again.

Mr McCabe: Yes.

THE CHAIR: If you cannot show that, you are offered some way of doing some kind of training or education in order to get back that registration that you now cannot attain. Why is it that particularly in these high-risk industries that you are talking about this has not been in place? You are not aware of why it has not been in place?

Mr McCabe: It is a national process that we have here in the ACT. It is standardised across the country. I do not have a good answer to your question other than to say that, as far as I am aware, it is the same process right across the country. One issue with ascertaining whether people have used their qualification in that period is that it does not prove, of course, that they have used it competently or that their knowledge has decreased in some way. In some cases there are simply developments in those industries or with the equipment they are using or whatever and, even if they are using it, they probably need to do refreshers.

I suspect one of the things that will arise if we are going to test people in this way—it is something we are examining at the moment—is the development of an industry in refresher training for people. I think that would be appropriate if that is the case. I am aware that Victoria, for example, do a similar test for electricians before they get their electricians licence. They have their own test, just like we are proposing here, but they apply to someone who has come straight out of an RTO with a qualification that says they can be an electrician. I am told that the failure rate for those tests is higher than 50 per cent, I believe, which is enormously high and quite surprising.

That is why we think we need to do it here as well. I think it is a national problem, not just an ACT problem. But we want to move slowly on it. We do not want to all of a sudden put blanket tests right across the whole spectrum. We want to trial it in a couple of areas, see if it makes a difference and see what it tells us. If we put the tests in place and everyone passes them, it would suggest to us that we do not really have a

problem and we can withdraw it.

THE CHAIR: Do you have the resources, Mr McCabe, to be able to do that?

Mr McCabe: Yes. In fact, this is a relatively low-resource way of dealing with the issue. We have to develop the test. We can collaborate with other jurisdictions about doing that. Victoria, for example, have said they are only too happy to share their material with us. It is a relatively simple matter to bring someone in. The test would be done on a computer, but there would be a monitor there to make sure that it was the right person. It would probably be a 20-minute test, something like that. They would come into one of our shopfronts and do it. Assuming they got through it, they would then progress to the next stage. Because it is computer based these days, it can be done relatively inexpensively. We are also looking at doing it for only one category of the building licences initially—probably the one that we are most concerned with, which has relatively low volume. Once we got those processes in place, we would then step them up further.

Another option for how we could have dealt with this—this is done in New South Wales in the field of health and safety—would be that the workplace regulator approves the RTOs that can do specific types of safety training over and above the fact that they are an RTO. That is a resource-intensive way of doing it because it means that we have to be out there assessing those RTOs and their courses on a regular basis. You could assess them one week but then they drop the ball in a very short time. So you would be constantly doing it; you have got to be constantly attending their training courses. It has some attractions, but it is a very resource-intensive way of doing it.

We have opted for this option which Victoria has gone for and which seems to have been successful in Victoria. My thought on the matter is that if it does show a high failure rate for people who ostensibly got the qualification from an RTO, I would want to publish the results by RTO, effectively naming and shaming the RTOs whose people could not get through a simple test, and then also provide that information to ASQA and put some pressure back on those RTOs.

I would be very happy if the information comes back and says, “Look, everyone’s passing it; we don’t have a problem.” But I suspect it will show some people. It may even just act as a deterrent. Some people, knowing that they have to do that, might think, “Well, I can find a way to get an RTO somewhere to give me the qualification”—a shonky RTO, I guess, if they exist—“but then I’ve got to sit up and front through this test as well.” That may deter them from even trying to go down that path. That would be a good thing as well.

MR DOSZPOT: As you may be aware, our inquiry takes in vocational education and CIT are one of our major providers of vocational education. They do a very thorough and good job in the ACT to provide for the needs of our vocational students. However, we have received some submissions that question whether the CIT comply with the current electrotechnology industry training package and issues associated with that. Have you come across any issues which you would feel uncomfortable about regarding what is happening in the electrotechnology section there?

Mr McCabe: No, I have not. In respect of the process that I have just talked about around these tests I have mentioned to CIT, their response was they favoured it; they thought it was a really good idea. Of course, each RTO that I have talked to about it has favoured it and I have said to each one to them, “You’re an RTO; you’ll be assessed.” I have made it clear as a reminder to them. But, no, no issues have been raised with me with CIT. My perception of them is they are one of the strongest performers in this field in the ACT. I am not out there doing courses, so that is only the feedback that I am receiving. But the feedback I have received is very strong.

MR DOSZPOT: The concerns also come from the ACT Electrotechnology and Energy Advisory Board, who are pretty well across the issues. They are simply raising some concerns. I was interested to know what has come back to you. In terms of the level of training that is given, you come into the safety aspects of it, but the electrical industry is a very important industry. You have mentioned the issues within the construction industry, and the construction industry takes in a fair bit of the electrical industry.

Mr McCabe: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: You have had no issues in any regard there?

Mr McCabe: No. In my new role—I explained that new role associated with the building industry—my concern with training now goes beyond safety to competence, I guess. In the area that I manage within Access Canberra, we have an electrical inspectorate who go out and do inspections of all new electrical installations before they are connected to the system and a percentage of modifications or amendments or alterations to existing systems.

We have pretty consistently over the last four years or so—which is the only period for which I have seen the data—had about a four per cent failure rate that we have detected in those inspections, which I regard as relatively low. It would be nice for it to be lower. We do about 17,000 inspections per year. That suggests to me—it depends what you think about the four per cent, I guess, and it is hard to put it in perspective when it has been a fairly stable figure over several years, but that seems to me a relatively low rate—that people know what they are doing in the industry. We have to zero in better on what the four per cent are and what is causing that four percent. That is one of the questions I am now asking: what are we doing about that four per cent? Are those people coming, for example, out of particular parts of the training industry? I do not think we have done that kind of analysis in the past. It will be interesting to see what comes out of that and whether that will show there are particular RTOs that have a higher value rate amongst their alumni.

MR DOSZPOT: For you to do a similar assessment to what is being done in Victoria, are you able to initiate that or does that have to come from the RTO itself to volunteer for it?

Mr McCabe: No, we can initiate it. What happens is an applicant comes to us and says that they want a licence, they want to be a licensed electrician. We consider whatever evidence they can bring to the table about their qualifications, which is usually a statement of attainment from the RTO. In some cases they have to provide

references or some indication of experience in the industry. We make that assessment. So an additional part of our assessment would be applying this test, which is really just confirming their qualification to be granted that licence. If we decided that they should not have a licence based on that test, that would be appealable by them in ACAT. There would be an appropriate due diligence process for them to appeal that. We could do that as is; we would not require legislative change.

The other thing I would add about that is that I have talked to employer groups, unions and pretty much everyone in the industry, and everyone has favoured it. I was a bit surprised at that because I thought there might be someone who would resist it. I guess the people who will resist it will be the new applicants because it is another layer for them. But it has been universally welcomed by the industry. That in itself says to me that the industry feels there might be some problems out there and that additional layer of testing would be a good thing. No-one has said to me, “Why would you do that? They’re already getting a qualification from an RTO. That seems superfluous.” Everyone has said to me, “Good idea,” and they said it in strong terms, which suggests they all share a little bit of concern about: is everyone coming out of the RTO process appropriately qualified?

THE CHAIR: To finish off with this section, you said that the construction industry would be the first cab off the rank—namely, the building industry?

Mr McCabe: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Then you would go through those others trades that you mentioned—the plumbers, the electricians et cetera—

Mr McCabe: That is right.

THE CHAIR: after that, because this is rather like a pilot at the moment to make sure you have got the system working properly?

Mr McCabe: Yes, and that it is adding value. The last thing we want to do, as I was saying earlier, is add a process that is just another layer that people have to go through and nothing is really changing. That would be of no benefit to anyone. We will be working with industry on that, so it will not just be our call. I think we need advice from industry as to whether they see this as valuable. Like I said, they have welcomed it with open arms.

MS FITZHARRIS: That is interesting; I am very pleased to hear that they have welcomed it with open arms. But should that not be ultimately the RTO’s job? In a perfect world you would not need to do that?

Mr McCabe: You are exactly right; we should not have to do it at all. We should have 100 per cent assurance that people coming out of an RTO with a qualification have the competence that we expect them to have. I have to be honest and say that I am disappointed in that whole ASQA and RTO process in that it does not guarantee that. It is not my direct field, but I have to say that I have concerns about the whole training arrangement where we have RTOs approved by ASQA and yet some of those RTOs people do not have confidence in. It is a bigger issue than mine. I am sure there

are a lot of complexities, and ASQA is only relatively new, so I would like to think the world is going to change at some point.

I think one of ASQA's biggest limitations is that they can apply a level of scrutiny to an RTO about the training world and how to train properly and training arrangements et cetera, but they do not have the industry knowledge. They are assessing training across such a vast array of industries they would need industry knowledge in every one of those to know whether the course that is being delivered is going to deliver the competency.

MS FITZHARRIS: ASQA were here earlier this morning. I think they said that the national standards, which are quite new, and the training packages come from the new version of the industry skills councils. ASQA can only enforce compliance on the standards. They said they do not have a role in effectiveness. But you assume that the standards include the competencies, but behind that the industry skills councils have—

Mr McCabe: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: The question is: where might the problem start?

Mr McCabe: If I really think it through, I suspect the problem is in the assessment of people coming out of that process. Industries, as you say, contribute and they often are the ones who develop the industry standards that are applied through those training programs. Yet somehow a small number of people are slipping through that system without the competence. Somehow they are getting through that assessment process, and you wonder how that is. One side of me says that it is a competitive industry and ultimately an RTO is set up to make money. I wonder whether they have the right motivation sometimes about scrutinising people who maybe do not have the competence to get through.

I do not have evidence about any particular RTO that is doing that. Every now and then someone will bubble up that has clearly not got the competence you think they should have and yet they have got the bit of paper that says they should. I find it a bit disappointing that we are going to have to overlay another exam over the top when that is what the RTO process should be.

MS FITZHARRIS: Despite my previous question saying, “In a perfect world this does not need to be your role”—but it is, and it is great that there has been good feedback—will you then look to provide a feedback loop to the RTOs if there are very common things that are coming out that you find they are not providing?

Mr McCabe: Absolutely. If we assume that we go through this process and we find that people fail, or some significant percentage—enough to justify continuing to do it—my intention would be to go back to individual RTOs and give them that feedback and tell them that I will be passing that data on to ASQA. I would pass my concerns on formally to ASQA in those cases.

I suspect ASQA would welcome that feedback. They probably do not have that kind of objective data quite often for them to act on, so, in their defence, they might say,

“Lots of people tell us that certain RTOs are no good,” but getting objective data is very difficult. I am hoping by saying to the RTOs that that is what I intend to do and I intend to publish the results, it might eradicate the problem. I suspect it will not totally, but I think some of them might lift their game on that basis.

MS FITZHARRIS: ASQA said they do a risk assessment of RTOs, but they do not publish it. They may, in certain situations, provide it to the funder, but they will not publish that.

Mr McCabe: It will be interesting to see what pushback I get when I go to publish the data.

MS FITZHARRIS: This is not directly related to the inquiry, but I gather your new roles encompass part of what was formerly the construction services branch?

Mr McCabe: It does. It is the construction services branch. Now I am responsible for what was the construction services branch, WorkSafe ACT and the EPA. There is lots of overlap in the construction world between all three of those. But WorkSafe and EPA also have a role beyond the construction industry across all industries.

MS FITZHARRIS: So an early example of Access Canberra bringing things together and finding ways to solve problems?

Mr McCabe: Absolutely. I guess it is giving us an opportunity to look at things a bit more holistically and break down some of the more silo approaches that were probably in existence before it came together. I guess any change in structure also generates a bit of navel gazing, a bit of questioning of how things have been done in the past.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is WorkSafe itself an RTO?

Mr McCabe: No.

MS FITZHARRIS: But you have a range of training packages; is that right?

Mr McCabe: Yes.

MS FITZHARRIS: Or are they delivered by an external RTO?

Mr McCabe: No, they are delivered by WorkSafe ACT. They are fairly limited in nature. The primary one that we have delivered through WorkSafe ACT has been bullying. Quite frankly, the reason we did it was that there was not much that was very good in the field of bullying at the time we introduced it, which was maybe three or four years back now. Since then it has become a much more topical issue and a lot more of the RTOs are running courses, so we are finding less demand. So, in a sense, we led the way with that. We felt we needed to step into a gap in that instance.

MR DOSZPOT: A supplementary on your last comment about navel gazing or self-assessment. Part of your biggest issue, I should imagine, would be to get organisations, RTOs and so on, to recognise that there is a problem before they can address it.

Mr McCabe: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: That is what we are concerned with as well within this committee. We are trying to understand why people are putting in submissions that highlight a problem and we are expecting more than just covering the base for other reasons. We are trying to get to the bottom of it. We wish you all the best in your endeavours, and anything that you think may assist our inquiry into the RTOs in Canberra and, in particular, the education sector and the issues that have come before us at the moment which have had a fair bit of publicity.

Mr McCabe: One thing I could comment on in relation to that is that there is a culture, I believe, in the construction industry—this is a sweeping statement; it is not across the industry—of not valuing training. The construction industry like to do training when there is a legislative imperative to do it; they are not so keen if it is not legislatively demanded. That to me suggests they are not recognising training as a value-add for their business; they are just seeing it as an imperative.

Whenever you have got that scenario or that culture, they are going to go for the cheapest training they can get. This is what I believe will happen anyway. There are some good companies out there who seek out the good RTOs. There are quite a few of the small players who seek the cheapest one they can get, and that probably drives some of the issues that you may be seeing and some of the problem areas we have in the industry.

We are doing a fair bit of work trying to lift the attitude of employers to get them to understand that training is something that can add value to your business rather than just be a cost. But that is a long road to go down, especially in what is a low margin industry and one that is probably going through difficult times at the moment having come off a boom of several years. I think that probably goes to the heart of some of the issues that are coming up before your committee. I do not have an easy answer.

THE CHAIR: To go back to the online question that you mentioned earlier in your evidence, do you see the use of online as a way of cutting costs and leading to some of these issues, perhaps?

Mr McCabe: I have mixed feelings about online. In some instances, white card training, or the construction induction training, is done online in some jurisdictions but not here. I think anyone can sit down and do it overnight or they could get their brother to do it or their father or whatever and they get a card. It concerns me that they are not necessarily getting face-to-face training and getting the competence. I have that concern about online training. But, at the same time, I did some study recently myself at a pretty high level through a university and it was done online and it was fine. Where you have got a person motivated, online is really good. But the question is: is it a vehicle also for just churning out statements of attainment? It needs to have good controls, but it is the way of the world.

One of the other big issues for the construction industry and one of the reasons they do not value training so highly is the real cost for them is not the cost of the training, it is the cost of the time for people away from the workplace. Online might be an

answer to that as well. Online is a really vexed issue, but I suspect it is a train that we cannot stop. It is coming, and we need to get on board and work with it rather than resist it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McCabe.

ROBERTSON, MS EMMA, Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT

CUZZILLO, MS REBECCA, Policy and Development Officer, Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this hearing of the inquiry by the education, training and youth affairs committee into vocational education and youth training in the ACT. This is what we think is our final hearing for this particular inquiry. We have published 15 submissions on our website and the hearing program is available.

Welcome, Ms Robertson and Ms Cuzzillo. You are here on behalf of the Youth Coalition of the ACT. The hearing will be recorded and transcribed but it is also being streamed. The pink card in front of you—I think you may have received that information previously—is the privileges card. Do you understand the implications of that and are you happy?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

Ms Cuzzillo: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You did not put in a written submission. Do you have an opening statement you would like to make?

Ms Robertson: I would like to say thank you to the committee for allowing us time to appear before you today. You have noted that we did not put in a specific submission to this particular inquiry, but I would like to note that we have made comment around this issue through a whole range of submissions over the last few years, including our submissions to the ACT budget, which we do each year. We made a submission to the board of secondary school studies review of the requirements for year 12 completion.

In the last couple of years there have been inquiries into improving employment participation of people with a disability and also the needs of students with disability, submissions on out of home care, and particularly transitions from out of home care, improving ACT high schools and colleges, inquiring into the educational achievement gap, and also the previous ACT youth plan and the current work that is being done around an ACT youth commitment.

The reason that I mention all of those is that I think the issues we all raise here today are things that we have been raising for a number of years in community. We see, in particular, vocational education and training as a really important aspect for the needs of the young people who our members work to support. Our membership have concerns for those students who are at risk of disengaging from education or those who have disengaged from education.

Some of the groups that we identify have specific needs in this area and include newly arrived refugee young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people who have experience of out of home care, young people experiencing mental health issues, young people experiencing homelessness, young carers, young offenders and also children of offenders, LGBTI young people, young people with a disability and young parents.

It seems like quite an overwhelming list and we know that some young people are experiencing a number of those things on that list. But we recognise that all of those issues are things that can have an impact on people's educational pathway. One of the things that vocational education and training can offer is a different kind of flexibility and engagement into pathways, particularly for students who are not necessarily academically oriented or heading towards a university career. We see that voc ed is really important in that sense.

In opening, we want to recognise that we have spoken a lot and said a lot over the last couple of years in terms of the context of changing the programs that are available. In particular, we were very vocal about the defunding of the youth connections program, which was a federally funded program, and our concern about the impact that would have in the ACT. One of the things that we thought was particularly good about the youth connections program was that it was able to show its successes by measuring not just how many people completed the program but where they were up to six months down the track and then again 18 months down the track—whether people were still engaged in education and employment pathways.

We think that evaluating and measuring the success of programs is really important. We particularly advocate that we do not just look at completion of the program but does it lead to a sustained, ongoing pathway and involvement in education and employment for young people who have participated in the program—that it is some measurement down the track rather than just completion of the program.

We recognise that the ACT Education and Training Directorate has in recent years brought in the flexible learning options program, which we have supported but also flagged a concern that they are very short interventions. Again, we are looking to see that we have a system and a strategy that looks at the sustained and ongoing pathways for young people.

We also believe that we need to consider, with vocational education and training, what kind of meaningful work experience we are offering students alongside their education.

Something that is very important to us is looking at not just what is happening in the education sector and what education is delivering but particularly, when we are concerned about students who are more vulnerable in terms of succeeding in education and employment pathways, how are our services working together to make sure that we are offering not just educational pathways but the social support services that students need in order to remain engaged with those pathways?

That is my opening statement. I would ask Bec to speak particularly to the conversations that we have been having with young people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background about their experience.

Ms Cuzzillo: Last week we held an event with youth workers and teachers and people in the education sector looking at the transition and careers and the barriers that multicultural young people face, particularly newly arrived and refugee young people. We had some conversations with young people specifically who have that experience and we heard some really interesting stuff. In particular, one of the major things raised

at the forum, unsurprisingly, was language barriers, particularly for newly arrived young people. That is a really big thing.

One of the young people we have spoken to raised the issue that ESL support, English support, is available to students at school if they are doing vocational stuff, if they are within schools, but it is not necessarily available to people outside that. If you are just at a vocational education program you may not necessarily be able to access English language support, which is a really big thing for some young people.

A couple of other interesting things they raised was that sometimes, particularly for that group of young people, they can be encouraged to only focus on their English language when they come to Australia. They arrive here and go to school, but they might have teachers who say to them, “Look, don’t worry about all that other stuff. Just work on your English at the moment.” That can be a big barrier to young people who might have dreams for doing certain things.

We heard from one young person who had had that experience where they went to an education program. They were struggling a little bit through that but they really wanted to become a nurse. The person who was teaching them said, “Look, maybe you don’t want to do that. Maybe you want to do something else.” I think that can be a really big barrier for young people and something that we definitely do not want to see. We want young people to be supported to do what they want to do, particularly in jobs that are needed within the community. English language support is something that is very much needed for that group of young people.

At the same time we heard of some really great things that are going on. We noted that MARSS made a submission to the inquiry. Their homework program, the PASS program, is a really positive program, and a lot of the young people we speak to have worked with them.

There is some other stuff going on. The Calvary hospital has a mentoring program for refugees where they can have a placement in any part of the hospital. There is someone in that area who has been trained to be a mentor and they get supported by an agency like MARSS or Multicultural Youth Services to take on that placement and get a bit of experience in the workplace, which is something that is really positive. There is some good stuff going on and then there are some barriers that we see coming up.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned earlier, Ms Robertson, about making sure that the person was still engaged some time afterwards. Who does that checking? Who makes sure that that is happening and finds out that that is happening?

Ms Robertson: I think at the moment we do not always do that. We would argue that we need to build a robust evaluation framework into how we deliver any of these programs. For example, with the flexible learning options programs, you might be able to go and do a program when you are in year 10, so you might be 15. It might be a 12-week program and then you are back into the mainstream school. I think some of those programs may lead to apprenticeships or people being able to do the ASBAs and things like that, but we do not then go back and look 12 months down the track at what happened for those young people.

Certainly for the highly vulnerable groups that our members work with, short-term programs are not going to change their trajectory in the significant way that we need to assist them to change. If they are struggling at school, a short-term program may well engage them, but if they then go back into the same environment with the same external pressures and issues that are going on without support, they will revert back to struggling.

We are very much interested in, when we offer a program, that it gives people a different way to connect and some hope that that is then able to be sustained and replicated right through to them leaving their educational experience, hopefully on to employment pathways and so forth rather than us offering scattergun, short, one-off things. We already know from the other work we do with people in community that these groups need that longer-term sustained investment and support.

THE CHAIR: Who is the “we”, though, that is doing the checking? Are you talking about the ACT government?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The actual school that the young person has been at and may be no longer at—if the person, say, has done this short course or whatever and has returned to the mainstream of their school but has now left at the end of year 10, 11 or 12, whenever they go? Who is the “we”?

Ms Robertson: I think it needs to be the ACT government as the coordinating body that is rolling out these programs. The “we” is the coordinating body that is looking at evaluating whether they are programs effective; are they working? It is more difficult. It is easier to be able to record a completion rate at the end of a 12-week program or a 12-month program. We are talking about the need to track people further down the time line. I think that fits very well with education and training and the work the directorate has done around pathways and tracking student progress.

MS FITZHARRIS: In terms of that evaluation and where people are, do you have a sense of what are the reasons people drop out or drop off a particular pathway and do not find their way through formal education into vocational education and into employment?

Ms Cuzzillo: There are a lot of reasons that that can happen. We are talking about specific groups of young people. If you are in the out of home care system or if you have got a mental health issue, there are certain things in your life that come up that may make it difficult. That is where vocational education comes in, because if young people are struggling to stay in mainstream education because of X, Y and Z, that is where these other types of programs can come in and be an alternative pathway that is a little bit more flexible and can fit around whatever is happening in that young person’s life. Maybe that is for the short term; maybe it is a longer term thing. It is hard to say what the reasons are because there are so many.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you have a sense of whether young people have enough information about what is available as opposed to just not being able to access it? Is

there a mismatch between desire and knowing where to find the information, for example, to start at CIT or find a course or find out how it is funded or how they might be able to afford to do a course?

Ms Robertson: I think we can always improve the way in which we offer information, but we also need to recognise that often at the point at which young people need that information they are disengaging from school because they are having a negative experience. It might be they are getting in trouble because they have not been attending. They might be getting in trouble because they are acting out and their behaviour is not appropriate for the cohort et cetera.

We are certainly not advocating that the solution is a whole range of external vocational education and training programs. We absolutely think that this needs to be in partnership with schools. I think we have seen the success of programs like the Australian school-based apprenticeship program where people can start to do apprenticeship qualifications while they are still in mainstream school. We think that being able to offer vocational education and training in schools is really important because while you are connected to a mainstream school you have access to a whole range of other social norms and behaviours and cohorts.

We do not want to take people out of the normalised environment and just put them with everybody who is struggling, if that makes sense. But recognising that we think the reason those programs have success in schools is that they offer people a different flexibility and a different way of learning.

Certainly in terms of the vulnerabilities and the reasons that people drop out, we need to recognise that young people exist not just in the context of their own but within their family and things that are going on. The impacts of domestic and family violence, family experiencing homelessness, young people caring for a parent who is ill and those sorts of things can have huge impacts and interrupt schooling. Once your schooling is interrupted, it is very hard to catch up, particularly if you want to sustain and move along with your peer group.

There are particular experiences, and Bec spoke about newly arrived refugee young people who are coming often with trauma and then trying to make adjustments across everything in life, including education. We also need to recognise the significant gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and that sometimes what vocational education and training can offer is a program more tailored to how their community want to do learning and want to respond.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you have much contact with RTOs yourselves? Do you have any direct contact with RTOs on behalf of young people?

Ms Robertson: We do. A number of community organisations are now also RTOs. Certainly some of our members are RTOs and will deliver year 10 and year 12 qualifications as well as other trade-specific qualifications. I think we have seen that one of the positives through the flexible learning options, the FLO programs, has been that push to a link between an RTO and a community service provider—so recognising the social support needs that go alongside supporting students who are at risk of disengaging.

There are other RTOs who have not necessarily worked in that space. Again, I think the partnerships and links that we can make working together, making those sustainable and well thought through, are really important because short interventions, particularly with the highly vulnerable group, as I have said, are not going to lead to the significant trajectory change that they need.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do young people come back to you and say they have had experience with RTOs and it has been poor—perhaps not the community sector RTOs but other RTOs, whether it is in trades or other industry RTOs—in terms of the quality of the course and the way they are treated and that sort of thing?

Ms Cuzzillo: You hear good and bad stories, I think. I talked a little bit before about someone who was encouraged not to continue with the program that they were doing. We hear some negative stories. We also hear some positive stories about people doing great work where they link in with other community support and stuff like that. For us, the biggest focus is how the community sector can work together with education providers, whether that is an RTO or a school or a university. We are working together as an ACT community.

Ms Robertson: Young people speak to positive experiences of relationships they build with particular workers. Often they will make that link to the organisation, but it is about the workers. It might be the first person who said to them, “You’re a good leader,” or “You can achieve.” Those are the sorts of connects that young people will make and see make a difference to them. Equally, they are well aware that if they have heard the message that they are not good at something from an early age, that reigns as being true.

MR DOSZPOT: I would like to echo what my colleague has said. We are looking into vocational education and obviously it is important for us to get feedback from the young people of the community on issues that concern them. I am obviously aware of some impediments to vocational education. Even though you have not put in a submission per se, once you leave here, if you hear of things, we are very happy to hear about specific issues that we can address. We will be making recommendations to the government, so it would be useful to have some concrete issues that we can address. We are not looking for problems, but obviously if we are trying to improve things then we have to understand what the current circumstances are.

One of the questions I have for you is: have you had much feedback from the young people, vocational education related, about post-school options, say, for young people with disability and special needs? I do not think the situation has changed a lot over the last few years. We would be interested to hear how young people are coping with some of the post-school options that should be or are available to them. That is a long-winded way of asking whether we can draw you out on some vocational-related things that you may have come across. If not, please feel free to send us some further information.

Ms Robertson: I would agree with you. We had a look at the employment participation of people with disability through an inquiry a couple of years ago. Some of the comments we made at the time would still be true today in terms of young

people talking about not just having a job but having a meaningful job. As we have seen a shift and change in our community generally around entry level work and what that looks like—and there are far fewer entry level jobs these days—we are seeing that it is harder and harder for all young people. If you have a barrier to employment additionally then it is much harder as well. I think it would be fair to say that we still need to do some work around post-school options, particularly working with families of people with disability.

One of the things we were talking about on our way here today in the disability space was about understanding the experience of people with cognitive disability and mental health issues as well. We have some understanding around barriers for people with physical disability but particularly in the space of people who have, say, learning disabilities or significant mental health issues, we are still a long way from understanding what are the supports that they need. What does it look like to be on an educational pathway that will lead to employment? What kinds of transitional support do people need? How do we overcome stigma and fear? That is something that young people have certainly talked with us about, particularly around mental illness. While there is a lot more knowledge in the community about the presence of mental illness, there is still a lot of stigma there.

THE CHAIR: I want to go back to the comment you were making about the social support that young people need. You went through quite an extensive list of different kinds of young people who would need these kinds of additional support. I would say there are probably not many young people at some stage in their lives that do not need that kind of support because that is often a difficult stage of their life in any case. There are many challenges they may experience along the way. You are probably aware of the blueprint model that is being rolled out in west Belconnen?

Ms Robertson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you see that some form of blueprint model for your young people in this area that we are talking about today would work?

Ms Robertson: Absolutely. We are involved in the blueprint, both at the oversight level and within the project that is happening around youth unemployment in the west Belconnen area. The aim of the blueprint and the architecture of the blueprint around doing systems design change are crucial. I have spoken already today about the need for community services and education providers to work together. I would like to throw employers in there as well because, at the end of the day, we can prep people for employment as much as possible, but if we do not know what employers need and want, we are not going to be doing that successfully, are we?

The work that is being done in the blueprint and what is being looked at in the west Belconnen area is really important in terms of giving us some insight to an approach here. But we absolutely need to coordinate our resources and our responses in a much better, more aligned way. In that sense, that is why I would see that if we only look at vocational education and training in the context of education providers doing that, we will continue to see people falling through the gaps. If we only in community services look at the social support people need and do not look at their educational achievement and outcomes, we will continue to see people fall through the gaps.

Young people do not do school from nine to three and the rest of life from three overnight, do they? What is happening at home and in the rest of your life has a big impact on your concentration and your ability to engage in school. Equally, if you are having a terrible time at school, that is going to impact on your relationships and experience outside of school. We have to arrange our services and systems in a way that holistically supports people.

The rubber really hits the road when we start to talk about money and resources. The more that we can look to the aims of the blueprint, the better services projects and the work that is happening around thinking differently about our resources rather than them being in silos—thinking about them in terms of deploying them to respond to people and communities—is absolutely the way forward.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned employers as to what they want. What about the reverse side of that as to what kind of environment young people want to be received into? Have you done any work in talking to young people about their experience perhaps once they get into a job and find maybe that it is a different kind of environment from what they expected?

Ms Cuzzillo: I think that is why work experience can be so important in getting an idea of whether you like that career path and that kind of thing, and doing it at an early age so that people get a good idea of what it is like to be employed and work in an office or work in a hospital or wherever it is. That is where meaningful work experience comes in. So often you hear about young people going to work experience and they get to file things and photocopy things and stuff like that. But getting that meaningful work experience I think is the key where you get to understand what the work would really be like.

Ms Robertson: It reminds me of a work experience student we had who was in year 10, who came and worked with us for a week. I remember having a conversation with her at the end of the week where one of the things she identified was that she felt really tired. It was exhausting coming and doing it because she was then doing her usual after-school activities after work as well. The adjustment can be really significant for people.

The other thing about meaningful work experience and building work experience and connections with employers and industry into our education programs is that the market is tighter and tighter. People need a foot in the door. They need to be able to link in and try something out. They need to meet some people in industry and hear what their expectations are rather than just go straight into it and then maybe fall down because they did not have the right understanding.

There is a lot of talk in community that young people are different these days and they are not as loyal to employers and so forth. We have often talked about the fact that the employment environment has changed as well. Certainly we see that most young people are going to go into jobs where they are casuals to start with. If it is a casual market and their experience is that they can walk in and out of jobs then maybe loyalty is not something that we should be expecting from them if we do not have that same way, if that makes sense.

I certainly take your point that it is really important to talk to young people about what they understand and view work as, particularly in an environment where we grow young people up and tell them they can be anything—hopefully. Sometimes I think people get messages at school or at home that maybe they cannot be anything, and that can be incredibly detrimental.

Young people get to a point where they are kind of out on their own and if they go and give something a go and it is not successful straightaway, they can easily feel like there is something wrong with them—rather than supporting that moving from school through to work is a transition that takes time and adjustment and everybody falls over at some point and needs that kind of support to see that that is normal and they need to keep giving it a go.

Ms Cuzzillo: I might just add that you picked up on that connection where young people will often get their first job because their parents know someone or they have got connections somehow in community. One of the things that came out of our forum last week about newly arrived and refugee young people was that they often do not have that connection to the community. They and their parents are newly arrived; they do not have friends and family who own this shop or can help you get a job somewhere. Recognising that there are certain people in the community who do not have those kinds of connections that help them get their foot in the door in the first place is important.

Ms Robertson: We have spoken a lot for the young people who come through our out of home care system. It is very similar. If the norm for most young people is that your parents assist you to get your first job then the territory as a parent could be assisting those young people around their first job and experience and that transition.

THE CHAIR: I can understand what you are saying about a make-work type of work experience, which is where employers say, “Lovely that you’re here. Can you shred this stuff? Can you file this stuff? Can you photocopy this stuff?” However, as we know, the work environment can be quite stressful at times with a lot of things to do and then you have this person here who has no experience in any of it. Do employers need some kind of incentive and support in order to be able to give meaningful work experience to these young people?

Ms Robertson: Obviously I think that would help, particularly in the context of small business people who do not have a big human resources department or a huge staff team. That might well help. We have observed a shift in the way that schools do work experience. For example, we are looking at taking on a student. Rather than them coming for five days in one week, they might come one day a week over five weeks, which is going to be a different experience for them.

Schools are increasingly seeing the flexibility within that, but I think we need to talk to employers about what would make a difference and what would help them do that. Also, ACT government is a major employer in this town, so it is really important for the government to look at, as a major employer in the ACT, what is government’s role in supporting work experience placements.

THE CHAIR: Is there some role in some education for employers as to how best to work with young people who are coming through on work experience, for instance, or some form of mentoring for the young person as they are going into work experience? I am searching for ways that these young people, but also the employer, can be supported in order to make it a good experience.

Ms Robertson: Absolutely. Again, it is probably the experience of how much you know about the young person who is coming to your workplace. Just from our perspective, as an organisation that supports work experience placements, it is entirely dependent on the person in the school who is making that connection. We have had people come where we have known very little about them beforehand and then we have had other experiences where we have had quite a lot of dialogue beforehand. We are always interested in designing a program where it is going to be a positive experience for the young person, plus we are going to feel positive about it and not feel like it was a big imposition and a big drain on our resources and we do not want to do that again.

These things come down to what kind of time people have in schools and what kind of focus the program is given in terms of work experience. Employers probably want to know what things they do not have to worry about that are taken care of and supported by the work experience program or the other supports that are in place for that student.

Ms Cuzzillo: I do not know a lot about some of the programs that are going on, but the one that I mentioned before, the one at Calvary hospital that is mentoring for refugees, framing it in that mentoring way rather than work experience could be helpful. I do not know a huge amount about it, but it has got there that all the people who are in those mentoring positions have been trained to do that. The hospital goes out of its way to train certain people in different areas to make sure that, if they want a placement in HR, there is always someone in that area who has done some training and knows what it means to be a mentor. That kind of thing could be a model that people look at.

THE CHAIR: Do they do front-line work as well in Calvary or just behind the scenes?

Ms Cuzzillo: From what it looks like, they say, yes, you can have placements in any of their areas. I do not know a lot about it, though.

MR DOSZPOT: Your constituents, for want of a better word, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the age group for that is?

Ms Robertson: Twelve to 25.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you have any figures on how many of those—obviously not at the 12 level—from the upper age groups are involved in vocational education of one form or another?

Ms Robertson: Not directly, but we can certainly get back to you.

MR DOSZPOT: It would be interesting to see what part vocational education plays in the life of young people and, if it is not as prevalent as we think it is, how important is it and what can we do to encourage it? These are the sorts of things that would be very useful for us. By the time you get that information, we will have concluded this inquiry. But if anything else comes to hand over the next few weeks, that is what we are interested in—vocational-related issues that young people face.

Ms Robertson: Certainly there has been a big push in Australian society towards university education and vocational education pathways have not been seen as having the equivalent value, yet we need the workforce to work in these industries. For highly vulnerable young people the experience is much more common, particularly if they have disengaged from school and they then connect with a community service provider or social support service provider. If they are looking at re-engaging with education it will be through vocational education and training.

I know that CIT, for example, have done a lot of work over many years around the realisation that they had very young people coming in to do their year 10 course, which was designed for adult learning, for people who are coming back after some years of experience. What they were seeing was that it was young people who were, for whatever reason, dropping out of or being excluded from school and were ending up in their program. That was a significant thing that I know CIT then had to look at—how they modified the program and what kinds of supports they put in place.

It would be fair to say that for people working in community services, the vocational education and training pathways have been essential for working with people who have disengaged from school.

THE CHAIR: What happened to the young woman who wanted to be a nurse?

Ms Cuzzillo: She is still hoping to be a nurse.

THE CHAIR: Good.

Ms Cuzzillo: She is hoping to start studying next year. She is just finishing off her preparation course. She is currently working in aged care. She is about to finish her certificate III in aged care and she has a job in that. She is doing really well.

THE CHAIR: That is terrific to hear. As a former registered nurse, I know about that pathway. I was very persistent and I got there in the end, but I did have some people trying to dissuade me in the beginning. As long as you persist. It is good to have the social supports. That is a really important lesson for us, to make sure it is not just education, and that we are looking at it in a holistic way.

Ms Robertson: Yes, absolutely. Again, particularly for vulnerable communities and the young people within those communities, their family and immediate community may not have that resource in place. That is why we need to come in and help assist in that way. I am always amazed by the resilience of young people and the young person that Bec has spoken about. It is often a very small thing or one person that actually believes in you and says something significant like, “I really think you can do this,” that can make a really big difference, if the other things are available at the right time

and place.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing before us today. I mentioned before that this has all been recorded so you will get a transcript within a couple of days. Have a look at that and if there are any problems with the transcript, if your words have been interpreted incorrectly, please let us know. You have taken one question on notice, so if you could get that to us as soon as possible?

Members may have some further questions following on from this hearing. If they do, I ask members to get that to the secretary and then to you as soon as possible. As Mr Doszpot said, if there are other things that occur to you, feel free to forward those to the secretary because they will obviously be good for us to be able to include in or in some way inform our final report.

The committee adjourned at 12.45 pm.