

# **EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE DELIVERY OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SCHOOLS (VETiS) PROGRAM**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2017**

### **SESSION ONE**

#### **Members**

**Ms J.M. Freeman (Chair)  
Mr W.R. Marmion (Deputy Chair)  
Ms J. Farrer  
Mr R.S. Love  
Ms S.E. Winton**

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**Hearing commenced at 10.01 am**

**Ms SHARYN O'NEILL**

**Director General, Department of Education, examined:**

**Mr LINDSAY ROBERT HALE**

**Acting Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, examined:**

**Mr MARTIN CLERY**

**Acting Executive Director, Statewide Services, Department of Education, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today, in this very beautiful room that we are in, to provide evidence in relation to the inquiry into the delivery of the VET in Schools program. I am Janine Freeman and I am the Chair of the Education and Health Standing Committee. I would like to introduce the other members of the committee: Bill Marmion, who is the deputy chair; Josie Farrer, member for Kimberley; Shane Love; and Sabine Winton. It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege; however, this privilege does not apply to anything you might say outside of today's proceedings.

Before we begin, do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

**The WITNESSES:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Would you like to make a brief opening statement or should we just head into questions?

**Ms O'NEILL:** I might just make a couple of comments. I will try not to take up much of your time because I know you have questions you want to ask. This is by way of context really. We have around 80 per cent of public education year 11 and 12 students doing some VET, including students who are ATAR students. Obviously, it is a valuable component of schooling, and one of the things that it would be interesting to be able to talk about today is some of the misunderstandings, outside of the education community specifically, about the importance of VET. One of the things that is interesting to us, when we say 80 per cent of students doing VET, including some ATAR students, is that people have this perception that you are either doing ATAR or you are doing VET, and in fact that is kind of a misrepresentation of how VET works. These days quite a lot of students who are doing an ATAR pathway are doing some form of VET as well. So, back in the old days there would have been probably a more distinct group of kids doing vocational education and doing more of an academic pathway, but that is not the case, and that causes quite a bit of confusion out and about. There has been massive growth over the last decade, but particularly over the last three or four years, and our data shows a massive increase in the number of students getting a VET certificate, including subgroups of our population. That relates to a range of things, treading right back to the raised school leaving age; then we had a focus on attainment, where we set a standard a couple of years ago about the sorts of outcomes we want students to achieve; and then more recently, under the previous government, changes to the WACE requirements. We have done a lot of work in funding; we have done a lot of work in staffing, which we might want to get into. There have been quite a few reviews of that and we are working through those recommendations, and more recently, I guess, a renewed collaboration with the Department of Training and Workforce Development around a work plan. So that is just by way of context. It is a very complex area. It is much more

individualised and expensive than the ATAR pathway of students, and also reasonably misunderstood, I think, in the broader community of how these days VET operates. So, chair, probably I will leave it at that for context and then be happy to help you out with the questions that you have.

**The CHAIR:** I might head straight into the staffing aspect of it, and then we can go down other pathways, because one of the questions that interests me is that if 80 per cent of ATAR students now doing VET, why have we not made representations or strong representations? I am not aware how we set the standards for university education to include a vocational education and a training component in university training. I had a meeting recently with UWA, quite separate to this, and raised that with them and basically got, “We tell students that it might be a nice thing to do, but we don’t require it of them to get a university degree.” But if it is now such a major component of delivery, and given that staff have to get specific training to be able to deliver vocational education and training in schools, what conversations are you having with universities —

**Mr HALE:** Could I just clarify the numbers before we go too far? The 80 per cent figure is 80 per cent of all of our students have a component of VET. It is not 80 per cent of the ATAR students. So about roughly usually we have 30 per cent students each year would complete an ATAR, so that means you are talking about a third of those kids might be having a VET component to their course. It is not 80 per cent of the 30 per cent; nonetheless, it is a third of them, which is a significant number, but we just need to be clear about that.

**The CHAIR:** But 80 per cent of students are still doing vocational education and training?

**Mr HALE:** Eighty per cent of year 12 students —

**Mr CLERY:** Year 11 and 12.

**Ms O’NEILL:** Lots of kids.

**The CHAIR:** Lots of kids are doing it.

**Mr HALE:** There is an awful lot of kids, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, but the difficulty is that they cannot do it unless you have got someone trained to teach it in schools —

**Mr HALE:** Or access to someone who can provide it.

**The CHAIR:** Or RTO —

**Ms O’NEILL:** With respect to the staffing, it is a really good question. Not all teachers teach VET. I guess there is one argument about whether all teachers need to have the VET competency. It is one thing, I guess, through university to have that skill and that training, but one of the things about VET is that there is a recency factor that has to be met as well. It might be a good start for more people to get their certificate IV. Even though teachers have a teaching qualification—Sabine, I think you do, so you would know that—to teach VET you actually have to have a certificate IV as well on top of your teaching certificate, which people find interesting.

**The CHAIR:** Demoralising or questionable or all of those things.

**Ms O’NEILL:** It is quite different because training is a competency-based approach, so it is actually a different approach, and then you have got to have industry currency. You might be able to do some more with universities, but then you would have to maintain the currency. I am not sure whether there have been further discussions with universities that you are aware of.

**Mr HALE:** Not that I am aware of. Look, I think, to be really frank, universities decide, make their own decisions about, who enters.

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**The CHAIR:** But do you not have requirements that universities have to meet for teachers to be employed at the education department?

**Ms O'NEILL:** We are an employer. There is a registration body, and they have different requirements. Look, everyone talks and there is collaboration, but their role is for those students to graduate, meeting the requirements of the course. The teacher registration has other requirements, and then, as an employer, we have other requirements. We can influence and talk to universities about what is required, but a lot of that —

[10.10 am]

**The CHAIR:** But if the Teacher Registration Board says, “This is a requirement” —

**Ms O'NEILL:** It is a requirement for teachers to be able to teach. I do not think it still has a direct relationship and the universities therefore have to build it into their course construction.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** It then becomes the choice of the consumer, which is a student. They can choose still to go to, say, UWA, if they do not offer a cert IV component, whereas if Curtin did, then that student would know which course to do.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I think there is much more collaboration, and certainly on the national level as well, around the requirements of the universities—what they have in their teacher courses. I think we are getting closer to those discussions, but I am not aware of any state yet that has like a cert IV requirement, which would be delivered by a different provider. Some schools, in terms of the staffing, obviously the teachers are specifically trained themselves, and, as Lindsay mentioned, then we have quite a lot of schools that outsource to an RTO.

**Mr HALE:** I think the other thing to bear in mind with that 80 per cent figure—this is a product probably of our own in the way we have tended to talk about VET, and I have done it myself for many years. We have tended to talk about university-entrance kids and VET kids, and in fact that is not really an appropriate distinction, because it is misleading, partly because some do both anyway, but also in fact those kids who we normally are talking about when we talk about so-called VET kids are general studies students. They form about 70 per cent of the student population, but their VET component is usually probably about the equivalent of one day in five. So it does not have the same implication to the staffing. It has an important implication, but not as significant as it sounds. It is not as though 80 per cent of our teachers are engaged in VET. Eighty per cent of the kids are engaged in VET —

**Ms O'NEILL:** In some form.

**Mr HALE:** —in some form—but there is nowhere near that proportion of staff needed, because it is only a small component of their overall program.

**The CHAIR:** But it is still a staffing difficulty, is it not, because you need —

**Mr HALE:** No question; no question.

**The CHAIR:** — someone who is trained in that, and it is resourcing. If you contract out to a private RTO, there are all of the risk factors, which we know. If you contract out to a private RTO, you have to have a staff member that has the capacity to do that sort of contractual arrangement. So my next question is around that, which is: in comparison to other states, we contract out to private RTOs on a greater level than other states who use their TAFEs. I intuitively think—I might be wrong—that if you use the TAFE system, which is our state system, then you reduce the risks and you have that higher collaboration. My understanding is that TAFEs are quite limited in delivering a better theme of vocational education and training in schools.

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**Mr HALE:** I guess part of it is history and it is about rapid growth, I think. So that is one thing that has probably caused this. The other thing is relative cost, where people have wanted to give students some sort of VET option but it is maybe not the most important component of their program but it does contribute to their ways of looking for the most efficient way to deliver that. That is something we are very aware of in the reviews we have conducted recently, and the Auditor General has drawn it to our attention as well, but in any case we are working very closely now with the Department of Training and Workforce Development. We have three interests in strengthening that relationship. One is to maximise the use of the public resource that is available across the board. The other is to reduce the risks associated with it, because we have seen some really unfortunate examples of some private providers leaving us a bit high and dry that we have had to scabble around to resolve. And the other matter is assurance about quality of the actual programs in any case. We are—and this is work that Mr Clery is probably particularly leading from our perspective—working very closely with the Department of Training and Workforce Development, and we are looking for opportunities to, I suppose, reinvigorate the relationship with TAFE.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Before we perhaps talk a little more about that, the history is quite important and that understanding of how much VET kids are doing. If they are doing a unit of competence, then to have to go off to TAFE for a unit of competence, you have got to look at the efficiency and the logistics of that kind of movement. If we track back to the raised school leaving age, the intention or the assumption actually underlying the policy—and I was involved in that policy—was that the kids who ordinarily were leaving school at 15 would more than likely go off to TAFE. That did not happen. The majority of the students stayed at school, which was interesting because they did not want to come to a school in the first place, but the difference was, having been compelled to be in education, kids of that age group were more likely to want to stay with their social peers than to go into TAFE, which might not have been full-time in the same vein that schooling was full-time. A lot of the parents—we did some semi-structured discussions with parents. If they had to be somewhere, they were more inclined to want them to be at school, where they knew where they were, and there was a greater pastoral care sort of element. So it is quite interesting—the assumption that schools and TAFE or training facilities work on the same basis is quite different. So DTWD, as it is now, has a wide range in its remit, of which VET in schools probably is not their biggest group. I think the basis of the question of greater utility—and we have all heard about some of the perhaps less than optimal take-up of the TAFE colleges or use of their hours. That is of interest to us because we obviously want to maximise that as a state resource. I do not think that we would make any broad generalisations that RTOs generally are risky. Most of them do a fantastic job, and we have had trouble with some, but there is a tension between the timetabling of schools and the TAFE colleges. That is why we see quite a bit of VET in schools done in schools, but it is a small component of a large course structure that a child or student is doing.

**The CHAIR:** I will pass over to my colleagues, but just finishing on that, could that be assisted in terms of that if you could establish the department as an RTO? Someone made a comment in one of our aspects that if the department became an RTO, then you could meet the requirements of the national body and then you could —

**Ms O'NEILL:** We have been examining that.

**Mr HALE:** And we do have some experience of that. One way to think about it is we are still looking at the possibility of would it actually have the desired outcome if the department was an RTO. In fact, we have had parts of the department that have been registered training organisations in the past, so the Institute for Professional Learning. Some time ago I was running it. It was mostly about staff development. We were a registered training organisation for some matters, and, to be frank, we found in the end that the expense involved simply did not justify what that actually provided for

us. It cost us more to comply than it did to go out and buy a quality service from another provider. So in the end we felt that we were basically reducing the number of places we could offer. On the other hand, we do have schools that are registered training organisations, and again, particularly in agricultural education, that was quite a heavy-duty exercise to get up to speed and to maintain it. But we are looking also, given that we have got that capacity, perhaps there is something we can leverage out of that for other schools. One of the other considerations is to look at what we have already got and see whether we could extract a bit more value from that.

**Ms O'NEILL:** It is quite a considerable onus on an individual school to be an RTO, and there are upsides and downsides and risks and advantages to whether the department would be an RTO and having to centralise a lot of that activity, but it is something that we are exploring.

**Mr CLERY:** We have got 15 per cent of kids who are engaged in VET doing so through a school RTO. So there is definitely something worth exploring about whether that could be extended.

**Ms O'NEILL:** And how we can alleviate some of the onus on schools —

**Mr CLERY:** That is right.

**Ms O'NEILL:** —if we maintain that kind of more of an individual school RTO status. Are there things that the system can do for them to alleviate that?

**The CHAIR:** Josie, did you want to ask any questions about how it is delivered in the Kimberley?

**Ms J. FARRER:** I guess the question that I was asked in regards to who is the contact person, and that is the key because the Kimberley is so big, and if it is in Broome, that information needs to get up to Kununurra, especially for those remote places.

[10.20 am]

**The CHAIR:** We were wondering whether there is someone who works up in the Kimberley, in that sort of remote and regional area, that has a good understanding of delivery of VET to the peculiarities of the Kimberley and also whether they are doing some collaboration across the border into the Northern Territory, given that there are synergies there.

**Mr HALE:** Do you want to just talk about the support resource first?

**Mr CLERY:** Yes, sure. The regional office has a dedicated position —

**Ms O'NEILL:** In Broome.

**Mr CLERY:** Yes, who I think would be somebody who would have a really good understanding of the issues and the practicalities of VET delivery in the Kimberley. We actually also partner in the Kimberley with the commonwealth to deliver the Aboriginal youth ranger program, which is actually delivering some really good results as well through some, I think, quite locally tailored qualifications around conservation and some of the agriculture area and so forth. The Kimberley regional office again would have more detailed understanding on the ground around how that works. And we also have some consultants that work out of the statewide services section of the department that also are able to provide information around that for schools that require that support.

**The CHAIR:** And are you okay with us contacting them through you and asking —

**Ms O'NEILL:** As a committee, do you mean?

**The CHAIR:** Yes. We are interested—Shane may ask some questions about the midwest as well. Part of the issue is that—you are right—VET has grown substantially, and when you look at the information that has been provided to us, there is a very large proportion of those students who are Aboriginal, and so I am making that assumption that that means it is a big component in our remote and regional and country areas. So what may apply in the city does not necessarily apply —

**Ms O'NEILL:** I am happy for local people to be called to give evidence. It is more appropriate that their evidence is about what they are doing in their situation, not about the policy.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** Delivery—how they deliver it and how it can be delivered better, and the problems they encounter. I can only imagine that if you are setting up a number of students to do a certain course in Derby, and there are two people who want to do the course and no-one else does, and then someone else wants to do photography and no-one else does, and then five people do it, and you cannot get a person for one or you might get seven, and the only person who can deliver that might live in Kununurra, so I would imagine it is a most frustrating and difficult job to do.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I think it becomes most evident in country and remote areas about how complex VET is because it is so highly individualised. The other thing we have not talked about, but it is really important to understand, is that students are doing VET for a whole range of reasons—some because they are actually interested in a vocation in a trade, for example, so a pre-apprenticeship sort of line. Other students are doing vocational education and training out of interest. Some do it as an offset to their ATAR, and some students that we have—and some of those are in the Kimberley, as Josie would know, and in the midwest as well—are undertaking VET for a very early engagement strategy. So the term VET is used because you are all doing VET, but the purpose of doing the VET can be wildly different, and this is where sometimes the discussion with industry can be interesting. We are trying to talk to them about VET but we are actually talking about a child who just needs some engagement, because they do not come to school and this is an interest and an entry point, so obviously they are not going to be work-ready straightaway, as opposed to a student who has a vocational aspiration. But in regional areas you get the full range of the reasons why students do VET. Our minister has a particular interest in equity, as you know, and has asked us to work closely with DTWD about the kind of provision that we have in places like Halls Creek, where sometimes we have to use outreach with the TAFE college. We have tried mobile arrangements, where you have someone moving around. It is pretty complex. Broome Senior High School, I think, has had some particularly good outcomes, and we are using that and learning from that for other places as well.

**Mr HALE:** I was just going to add, particularly in relation to Aboriginal students, that support that Martin has described is not the only support. From the beginning of this year we have actually made a significant change in how we organise ourselves as a department to support our work with Aboriginal children and young people. A key part of that is a new directorate we have formed, named with perhaps an odd-sounding name: Aboriginal Education, Teaching and Learning. The focus is on teaching and learning. Rather typically our work in Aboriginal education has been focused on programs. We have maintained the programs in the mainstream and then into other work, and we have got this targeted group who are focused on—what can we learn and what do we need to do in relation to teaching Aboriginal children and young people; what impact does that have on how schools operate; what are the factors or implications they have for school leadership? One of the people on that team, our principal adviser, Kevin O'Keefe—very experienced in Aboriginal education, a former senior high school principal, an executive director of Aboriginal education, most recently our executive principal in the lands schools—has a particular interest and is doing particular work with a number of our schools about this very challenge of secondary education for Aboriginal children and young people, particularly in regional and remote areas, and how we might link up our approaches to a more personalised living approach with VET components. That certainly will have implications for the work in the Kimberley, and particularly probably Fitzroy Valley and Kalumburu are two focal points we are thinking about, but it will have broader implications as well.

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**The CHAIR:** Across the board, but particularly in certain remote and regionals, having the mandatory requirement for students to have a certificate II to gain their WACE in VET, does that cause a problem? I mean, the SSTU and others have given evidence that suggests removing that would take away some of the complexities in terms of having to be an RTO or some of the complexities around delivering VET. Given that you are saying that VET is not just really the TAFE channelling through—it is all of these other things—having to have that certificate II, does that cause an obstruction?

**Ms O'NEILL:** I think we have to think about why it was put there in the first place—certificate II or an ATAR of 55 plus<sup>1</sup>. It is for the purposes of graduation. I think that is an important standard to have been set, and it is aspirational. The numbers of Aboriginal students who have achieved certificates has increased. I was just trying to find it.

**Mr HALE:** It has increased dramatically, particularly in the Kimberley actually. It is incredible.

**Ms O'NEILL:** If we do not have it here, we would be happy to provide that to you. Look, you can go two ways. You can lower the standard and more people achieve it, or you can have a higher standard that actually is the standard that industry expect people, as a low-level entrant into an industry, into a trade or something else, to come with. So it is a vexed question. At the end of the day, we are, I think—I would not say satisfied, because there are no Aboriginal outcomes that we have to date that we would be satisfied with, but we are at least pleased with the number of Aboriginal students who are now getting a certificate who previously would not have got a certificate. If you aspire to a certificate I, you are aspiring to a pretty—what would it be fair to call it?—basic standard.

**Mr CLERY:** I think it is just a low level —

**Ms O'NEILL:** Having said that, for a bunch of kids to get a certificate I would be a good outcome, but I am not sure that we would want to set an aspiration at certificate I.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Just on that, because it sort of goes to one of the questions that I was interested in. Have we got any post-school destination survey, because it is one thing, I guess, to say kids are coming out of school with better qualifications, but are they then using those qualifications? Have we got any data? That is where the real success indicators are.

**Ms O'NEILL:** We do post-school destination survey work. I am not sure that we have it with us today but we would be happy to provide the committee with some summaries.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** That would be really interesting for us to see whether they are actually using those qualifications and certificates.

[10.30 am]

**Mr HALE:** It is difficult, and you would not be able to go to a great level of detail on that because it depends how you are thinking of using those qualifications. In the broad sense, the data that we have would be based on post-school intention in the broad sense of: was the intention that I wanted to get to university, I wanted to get to TAFE, I wanted to get to work? At that level, certainly you could see, I am sure—I do not think we have ever attempted to then go back into a deeper level and say, “Well, how many of these kids were in a VET program?” I do not think that is available.

**Ms O'NEILL:** It is complicated by the fact that there are different reasons for students taking VET, and it might not be for employment purposes, for example.

**Mr HALE:** To try and illustrate the point, it is hard to extrapolate sometimes one particular VET component just on paper to assume its intention. An example we often use is if, say, a young person is interested in electrical trades. One might think, and a lot of kids think —

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<sup>1</sup> A letter of clarification about this part of the transcript can be accessed on the committee webpage.



**Ms O'NEILL:** Or parents.

**Mr HALE:** —and a lot of parents think, “I need to be doing something. My cert II needs to be in something directly related to electrical trades.” In fact, that is probably not necessarily what they should be doing; it is not necessarily what an employer wants them to do. What they should probably do is the hardest English course they are capable of doing, the hardest maths course they are capable of doing, and a cert II that might give them some generic preparation for the workplace—it might be a cert II in business, for instance. So you could look at that on paper and say, “Well, this kid looks like they were on their way to a career in retail or something”, when in fact they have quite deliberately chosen a program with the hope of getting into the electrical trade.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Last year I spoke to one of the big electrical group training organisations, whose base requirement is the highest level ATAR maths. That is virtually their entry criteria, and after that they consider—it is nice to have a certificate II. So I think industry's, particularly in the higher licensed trades, approach to, and view of, the cert II or the 55-plus ATAR<sup>2</sup> actually is changing. It is not the same across all trades, but particularly for some, whereas in the past it would have been, “Have you done a pre-apprenticeship? That's what we want. Off you go”—getting a high result in the highest level of maths. So that is slowly changing some students' approach to wanting to go in trades. They are going through quite a different pathway. We would not have seen that before.

**The CHAIR:** No, and I also think that is the changing of trades as it is becoming more technological. One of the comments that was made by the State School Teachers' Union is that the role of the career counsellor is no longer at schools. We all had career counsellors that used to —

**Ms O'NEILL:** It worked so well for us, though, obviously!

**The CHAIR:** We did okay!

**Ms O'NEILL:** We were at the same school, in the same class.

**The CHAIR:** The career counsellors used to point you to—although mine did tell me not to do physics and I did. Is there an idea about that now, given that what you are saying is that parents get an idea and schools get an idea? Is there a move to reintroduce career counsellors?

**Mr HALE:** No. I think there is a bit of a slight misunderstanding about what actually happens in our secondary schools. We do not, as a department, dictate that a school has to have a guidance officer, as they used to be. That is certainly true, but that does not mean that support in terms of making good choices about courses and careers is not provided by our secondary schools. It very much is. It is often run and delivered by people with a whole raft—the job might have all sorts of names, but that, I am sure, is present in every one of our secondary schools. Probably in some of our smaller school environments it is more challenging and we probably need to think about how we provide better support there. But we also, as a system—and Martin might be able to comment more on this—continue to provide support to people, right from year 7 through, as to how to approach this encouraging kids to think about their connection to life beyond school, but also the pathway they might take through school to get there.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I think the nature of secondary schooling, as it has changed, has evolved with the sorts of roles, too. When we were at school there was a person in a little office over there who was called the guidance officer—something like that—and some people saw them and some people did not. Now, because course counselling is very different and starts much earlier in secondary schooling, in most secondary schools, and certainly all the ones I meet with, every individual student undergoes course counselling. That would not have happened when any of us were at school. It might have

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<sup>2</sup> A letter of clarification about this part of the transcript can be accessed on the committee webpage.

been done for one or two people, but I meet with some of the bigger schools. Every student is involved in course counselling, with parents also involved. So I think it starts much earlier. It takes a different form. There are lot of career sessions, career advice, career resources that are around that would not have been. Lindsay is right. In small regional schools, they would not have had it in the past and they will have it in different forms now. They would not have a dedicated resource. Some senior high schools will have a dedicated resource; others will do it in different ways. But it is certainly present in every senior high school.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** We interviewed someone who is actually involved in the policy of the 15 to 17, so my question is a high-level question. We have talked about all the people choosing courses. We have sort of hidden the people who do not really want to do anything. I have been invited at Shenton College to go and talk to some people—the teachers, and it was—I am getting to the question—the kids that do not want to be at school. So I go there. It is very sad to me that you have got kids going to school if they want to. I rock up and there are six kids and they all have dreadlocks. “Sometimes we have seven. This is the first day she’s been this week.” So that cohort of people, in my day, would not have been in school. They might have been working in a shop or doing something—I am not sure. They might have been at home, too. But what are we doing for those kids that do not—if you had a career guidance officer, they would not be interested at all. They would have been forced to go, and they would just go back and not be interested. So, the policy—now that you have seen it working, how is the current system now compared with the previous system, and can we improve the VET course for those people? How can we engage those people?

**Ms O’NEILL:** The short answer is that there are a lot more kids in school than there was previously. Most of them did not go to TAFE. They stayed at school for some of the reasons that I outlined before. We now have, as a result of that policy at the time of the raised school leaving age, participation officers and we have notices of arrangement, so students have to be in school or in a job that has reasonable ongoing prospects—not just a couple of hours a day. They can be at TAFE or some other agreed program, and there is what is called a notice of arrangement. It has to be agreed by the department for them to be able to undertake that. But that being said, there remains still a group of students who come to school, or do not, that our engagement and participation officers now actively follow up. That would not have happened in the past. You would have left and no-one knew whether you left for a job or any other reason. It does not mean that it is not a challenge. It is a challenge. It is a challenge certainly in the Kimberley; it is a challenge in the midwest; it is a challenge particularly in regional areas, but it is more particular to low SES but not only. So active follow-up of those people—sometimes they are pretty hard to find. When they do come to school, though, we tailor highly individual programs. That is why I was saying VET is used for engagement for those people, unless there is that tension I was referring to sometimes where industry thinks that that is VET in schools for industry purposes. It is not yet, but we would like to get that as a pathway. It remains an issue for us.

**The CHAIR:** I think the question was: do you think it is successful?

**Ms O’NEILL:** Certainly, it is successful. A lot more kids are at school undertaking certificates, doing meaningful work, that previously would not have been at school and we would not have known where they were. So, “yes” is the answer to your last question.

**Mr HALE:** And there is an important protective factor in engagement in schools that those kids would otherwise miss out on. Even for the highly disengaged kids, there is still a point of connection, and if really we think that from the kid’s perspective school is not going to be it, then there is still support to do our best, as an education system, to make sure they are connected to something, but

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on the whole, I think that more kids being in the school environment has been a good thing for those young people.

[10.40 am]

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Just in terms of cost to the system, does the department know how much it is costing, in terms of does it collate, because I imagine it costs different things for different schools, depending on what they choose to do? Do we have those figures somewhere altogether, what providing this in schools is costing?

**Mr HALE:** Different schools will be expending different amounts of resource, not just based on the number of students, but also on what they choose to offer and how they offer it. It is very hard for us. We do not, as a central body, gather that information, but we are very clear on the resource we allocate to schools specifically to assist them to provide that.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Yes, I know that, but my question was: do we collate information?

**Mr HALE:** Well —

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** So we do not know the system —

**Mr HALE:** It is just about infinitely variable, because on any day it will depend on the choices that school is making about how to deliver and to whom.

**Ms O'NEILL:** What we do know—we are talking about secondary students—is for every year 7, 8, 9, 10, there is a set price per student, and for year 11 and 12 there is a set price, regardless of what they are studying, and then the VET component, the \$20 million, that we add on top of that. So it is quite difficult to pull apart, for a student that is doing the general education and some VET, the component pieces, student by student, because you would have to build it up from the ground to make a total cost, and we do not have that.

**Mr HALE:** Then you get into really complicated matters of the administrative costs and so on. What we did do, though, a few years ago now was go through a very rigorous process with Treasury to reasonably identify the resource that would be needed to give a school sufficient flexibility, alongside the student-centred funding, to deliver a VET program for those kids who are likely to require one. In reality, many schools then use the resource available to them flexibly to offer more than that.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Yes, I understand that. But we do not audit that to see how much schools collectively are spending in the sector?

**Mr HALE:** No. It would be incredibly expensive, and I do not know at what point in time you would even do it. That would be a forensic audit across every school.

**Ms O'NEILL:** It is a per-student analysis, and because of the student cohort, you might have a chance of doing it for the reasonably stable cohort, but there is a bunch of students where the schools are gymnastic-like in terms of their agility, because it will change day by day because they are not coming. It is not that we would not be interested in a unit cost, but it would be an individual, variable unit cost.

**Mr HALE:** There are matters related to that, though, that we are working on, and Martin is leading some of this work for us at the moment. We allocate something just over \$20 million to our secondary schools for VET, but that is not the only funding that goes into our schools for VET. There is over \$25 million that goes into VET in schools that comes from the Department of Training and Workforce Development. Our allocation is on a dollar per numbers, whereas their allocation is really about programs and students, and one of the things we are looking at is to really get a handle on that and make sure that the two together are being provided in an equitable way, and also to make

sure that they are being provided as efficiently as they can be, because if there are inefficiencies in the way we are doing that together, we could probably expand places and numbers by getting a saving back from that. So that is a key piece of work because that is another variable. I have often said to people that my experience as a secondary principal, some years ago now, was I was lucky enough to arrive in a school where VET, even in 2004 when I arrived, was very strong, and those folks, prior to my time, had worked out how to extract every possible resource right across government, both from our department and others, to run those programs.

**Ms O'NEILL:** It is certainly a reasonable question, and it sort of tests our mind and those of every other state about how you get the analysis so you could understand a per-unit cost, and it is because it blurs the lines into our engagement funding, which has a vocational aspect to it—we would not like to say we will never get there, but it is a challenge for us.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Just finally, in your submission you said that you would hope that this inquiry would provide further direction to strengthen the VETiS. Are there any suggestions that you make or recommendations you would hope to see in the inquiry to support the work you do?

**Ms O'NEILL:** We are always hopeful for further illumination—put it that way—in this area.

**The CHAIR:** How can we help you there?

**Ms O'NEILL:** There have been a number of reports and inquiries, and we have quite an extensive plan to address those. One thing for us that would be helpful to us is to have a greater shared understanding outside of education—parents, for example, the community, industry—on that wide range of purposes of VET, and they are all valid in their own right.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** But to have a shared understanding of it.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Yes. I often talk about the language. So if we talk almost about VET, or vocational education, for vocational reasons, there is VET for engagement. We talk about disaggregating the numbers and talking about them perhaps even with different language, because they get so mixed. But they are all underlining and they are all using training as a means to achieve a different purpose. That would be very helpful, because we do get that criticism that you would have heard —

**The CHAIR:** So it would be training for life skills, training for employment.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Just the direction of what it is and then we will —

**Mr HALE:** Even within the truly vocational, there is a broad competency development to prepare you for further training or engagement in the workforce, and then for some things there are much more specific vocationally relevant competencies that they are hoping to develop, so just us doing a better job of communicating that, but probably a shared approach to what the messages are and a shared understanding would be very valuable.

**Mr CLERY:** We are very dependent on our partnership with employers and industry, particularly when it comes to our staff being able to maintain their industry currency in work placements and —

**Ms O'NEILL:** And with DTWD.

**Mr CLERY:** Yes. We have got good relationships and partnerships in that space, but we need to make sure that they stay there.

**Ms J. FARRER:** Who is the person, whether that person is just in Broome, or who is the contact person in regards to a lot of these VET training issues that sometimes I get phone calls on? I get people from Derby; I get people from Fitzroy. You covered Fitzroy. You also covered Halls Creek. I do not know in Halls Creek who does it. The TAFE that has been there for the last four years almost closed down because there were only two people working in there. There are no courses run out of

the TAFE there, so it does not assist a lot of these young people. I have had young people who wanted to go away and study and go to university because that is what they wanted to do. But we had to ring around to try and find out how we can get this person in there.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Josie, we could give you a contact list.

**Ms J. FARRER:** I would like to know who is situated in the Kimberley, and if it is just in Broome, obviously we do not hear about this person. I have had that phone call from various places in the Kimberley. Broome is a thousand kilometres from Kununurra. If we do not know who this person is—my office is in Broome, but we do not know; I do not know, and my office gets these calls all the time. So could I please ask if you could send those contact names and details of those people, whether it is the shire, whether it is a school or whether it is a TAFE?

**Ms O'NEILL:** We will give you the list. I think you are meeting later with DTWD, but we can work with them, and so you are not getting multiple lists, we will give you a consolidated list between the two departments of the key contacts across the Kimberley.

**Mr HALE:** I think the complicating thing is probably for school-aged young people, really the first port of call is best to be the school, and then the right support can be attached to it. The broader question for other young people in the community—I think we will have to work with others to get you that.

**Ms J. FARRER:** Yes. We need to support these young people. The social and emotional wellbeing of these young people that we talk about—we need to help to make, I guess, their dreams as to their aspirations come true, but if we do not have the contact person's details, how do you work with these young kids?

**Ms O'NEILL:** That is only going to be one component of that, but we will supply the VET details.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** For the total initiative funding, you have put \$20 million or thereabouts into VET. That at the moment, as I understand it, is done by an allocation for the number of students who are below the seventieth percentile.

**Mr CLERY:** Correct.

**Mr HALE:** We use that as a proxy to estimate the kids likely to know the program.

[10.50 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Hang on. That is not a question; that is a statement. The evidence that you have given today is that people no longer use VET—there is no particular set of students who might be performing at a level, but everyone is using a bit of VET. So is the allocation of that money strictly on a per-student number of people underperforming, if you like, or performing at the seventieth percentile level? Is that still a valid way to distribute that money and would you not be better to actually look at areas of unmet need, such as district high schools and smaller regional centres where they do not have the ability to partner with industry, and other issues? Josie has highlighted some of the issues up in the Kimberley. Would that not be a better way to spend that money on a targeted program to achieve some defined outcomes in areas where VET is not being delivered properly?

**Ms O'NEILL:** Shane, we believe at this stage it is the appropriate way to go for a couple of reasons. It is not perfect—no funding model is perfect—but it is much more equitable than we have ever had before. I guess if you just look at the \$20 million or so injection on its own, you might extrapolate some of the sorts that you have just mentioned there, but on top of that we already have what is called a local access, which is a different type of initiative that gives funding directly to district highs to enable them to do that, and that has been in place for quite some time. We have other targeted initiatives that provide similar support to different schools, and on top of that we also have in the

funding model the low SES additional funding that goes in, so I think you cannot contact one component of all of the funding. I will get Lindsay and Martin to talk about the specifics in the funding model and why we think using that proxy measure of performance as a reasonable performance—but I guess the point that I want to make is that you have to look at the total funding. This is only one component of the funding, and there are other funding sources to alleviate the kind of issue that you are raising, particularly in district high schools in regional areas. With the funding model, the proxy measure, why we think it is reasonable.

**Mr HALE:** Because, look, it is only intended to be funding complementary to the student-centred funding in order to provide access to VET. This is for year 11 and 12 students. We already invest more per student into year 11 and 12 anyway than we do for in lower secondary, for the very reason that as you expand curriculum choice, including VET, but any curriculum choice, the cost goes up. We had to find a way that was proportionate to need. So the proxy is simply to divide the line that says, because we do not attach it to individuals, that this proportion of kids are likely to be on an ATAR pathway. They may want to do some VET but they do not need to in order to meet that pathway. Every other child—70 per cent of the upper secondary population—will be on a general studies pathway, and it is just intended to be complementary funding to make sure that VET can actually be delivered to those students.

**Ms O'NEILL:** A decision was taken not to fund the students who are typically ATAR, because typically they are going to achieve an ATAR and do not need the cert II to graduate, so it was more targeted towards the students who are more likely to need a certificate II to graduate. So the student who is at Shenton College, for example, that does phys ed or marine studies as an aside—alleviation, as some of them call it—we do not think that is a good use of our resource to fund that group of students for VET. It is a finite resource and judgements have to be made about its best application.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. Thank you very much. We have gone a touch over time. If there are any other questions that come out of it, we may send you some additional questions. We appreciate your time, considering how busy you are. I did not ask about the federal funding interaction, but we may put something in writing to you as well.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Okay. We would be happy to receive those questions—after our estimates appearance!

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you.

**Hearing concluded at 10.55 am**

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