

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

Geelong—Thursday, 24 October 2019

MEMBERS

Mr John Eren—Chair

Mr Gary Blackwood—Deputy Chair

Ms Juliana Addison

Ms Sarah Connolly

Mr Brad Rowswell

Ms Steph Ryan

Ms Kat Theophanous

WITNESSES

Ms Keelie Hamilton, Director, Student and Industry Engagement,

Ms Carley Brennan, Skilling the Bay Manager, and

Ms Tracey Jeffery, Manager, Careers and Training Services, The Gordon.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for being here.

All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today. But if you repeat those things outside, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible.

And if you would like to either introduce yourselves or make a 5-minute statement, we will ask questions after that.

Ms HAMILTON: Great. Terrific. I will take that opportunity, if I may. Mr Chair, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity for The Gordon to give this address in regard to sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. The Gordon is a vocational educational provider skilling people in 250 different course offerings across all cohorts from age 16, including offering VCE and a dedicated alternative school setting known as GTEC. The average age of our learners is 30 years, reflecting the engagement of industry and learners in attaining certificate qualifications throughout the course of their employment and the opportunity for lifelong learning, as people seek to gain additional skills to transition or change careers.

My name is Keelie Hamilton. My role at The Gordon is that of Director of Student and Industry Engagement, with the oversight for the two services that you specifically requested information about sitting in my remit. My background is predominantly in economic development, working with and on behalf of business and industry for sustainable growth.

Skilling the Bay is a collective impact project that has been in operation now for almost a decade. As the manager of Skilling the Bay for almost half of its operational period, Carley Brennan can provide well-evidenced detail on the programs that Skilling the Bay has delivered in support of the collective benefit. A unique model that creates links from secondary schooling to community and higher education through to employment, Skilling the Bay has been in operation over a sustained period of significant economic transition in Geelong and has played a pivotal role in creating connection for the success of the individual but also for supporting stability of sector growth. The evidence is that Skilling the Bay has a key role to play in our region moving forward, as this collaboration has been able to bring to fruition activity and employment outcomes that would not have occurred using a silo-modelled approach.

The Skills and Jobs Centre is an impartial State Government and The Gordon-funded initiative that operates from our primary location in Geelong Westfield, with a second service in Werribee. Funded to primarily support Geelong, the need in Wyndham sees demand for this service as high as Geelong. The Gordon endeavours to meet the needs in Wyndham in the most positive and proactive way it can within the funding constraints. The Skills and Jobs Centre provides professional careers counselling support and direct connection to industry via industry panels and delivers bespoke programs in direct response to identified needs from clients.

Tracey Jeffery is the Manager of Careers and Training Services at The Gordon, oversees the operations and engagement of The Gordon Skills and Jobs Centre and will be able to answer questions regarding specific cohort outcomes in our conversation today.

The brief provided gives you some answers to the questions posed, and we are really very happy to provide further detail this afternoon.

Mr ROWSWELL: Tell us about this wonderful Skilling the Bay program.

The CHAIR: Yes, please do, Carley.

Ms BRENNAN: Thanks very much for asking. I am very fortunate to have an involved in the Skilling the Bay for a number of years now, and it had its genesis, really, in terms of trying to implement a regional approach to the large-scale manufacturing restructure that was happening in the region. It was known that Ford

would be leaving the region, but Alcoa was not even on the cards at that stage, nor the other smaller supply chain organisations. So it was established as a partnership, led by The Gordon and delivered in partnership with Deakin University and with State Government support. So it was seen as a proactive approach to address what was going to be a crisis, really, in terms of thousands of job losses.

I think, in terms of what we have recognised through the program, that it is great to have a responsive approach to the changing economy and changing workforce needs, but we also recognised we needed to take a proactive approach. So we have some programs that you have heard from this morning like Whittington Works and Northern Futures. We work very closely with establishing the workforce development centre as well, which is now the Skills and Jobs Centre.

So there are those responsive programs, but then we have education programs which are based on being proactive and trying to raise awareness of the pathways and opportunities for jobs of the future and really trying to prevent, I think, people from becoming disengaged and ultimately falling into that category of being disadvantaged or vulnerable.

We have worked very collaboratively with our stakeholders in the region, recognising that there are some fantastic on-the-ground services being provided. I think one of the things in the early days that we did was recognise who was providing a good program and how could Skilling the Bay actually strengthen, support and build off that program and help them to extend their reach. So that would be an example with Northern Futures or Whittington Works extending their reach; likewise with the LLEN and the work that they do, particularly around community services, health pathways and other youth-focused programs—so really trying to work with the stakeholders to identify what the problems are and then work about providing some solutions to those.

The CHAIR: Carley, in terms of success, how do you measure that success, particularly around disadvantaged jobseekers?

Ms BRENNAN: Yes, that is a great question. We actually put in place a performance measurement framework, and with that framework we have quarterly reporting around that. As you can imagine we also have in place contracts with our delivery partners, and as part of those contracts we do have some key performance indicators and targets that we want to meet. Where possible we base them on a national or existing benchmark, and if that does not exist we actually determine what that benchmark should be or baseline should be based on previous delivery.

I think we have provided now a snapshot of some of the outcomes that have been achieved, so you can see there, in terms of the job outcomes, we certainly measure that in terms of a positive outcome for disadvantaged. But we also recognise that even a pathway to employment or a pathway into further education can be seen as a significant outcome for some people. So where possible we measure completion of training, and consistently the programs are achieving, I think, between 70 and 80% in terms of training course completions, which is really, really high.

The CHAIR: Wow, that is pretty high.

Mr ROWSWELL: Congratulations.

Ms BRENNAN: Yes, it is fantastic. And that is because of the collaboration on the ground between mostly Gordon teachers, the service providers on the ground and the industry partners that contribute. But to have the cohorts remain in that training, complete and get that outcome is really good.

We also measure of the number of participants who might actually go on to further study. So some of them, we understand, are not quite ready. You have heard that this morning. They are not quite ready to be in an employment mindset, but they now have awareness, they have aspiration and they have actually gained some skills in terms of learning to learn again. So they are able to go on to another pathway. So we think that is a pretty good outcome as well. So we measure that. And if we or the service providers that we work with cannot help, we refer them to other people who can, because there are some really significant barriers, and we know that they might step in for a little while, step out and step back in.

The CHAIR: What advice would you give to other regions that would like to take up this initiative?

Ms BRENNAN: Well, that's a really good question as well. I will be giving—

Ms RYAN: That's a Dorothy Dixier!

Ms BRENNAN: I would like to say we think it is a great way to take a proactive approach, again. I think first of all you would want to consult with your local community and consult with your stakeholders and I think identify where there are organisations doing good work and try to extend on that where possible, avoid duplication—so that is definitely one that we all want to avoid—and recognise where different organisations have their strengths. You heard this morning around the work that GROW have in terms of the employment procurement, so that makes it easier for us and our delivery partners to refer in to that program. We create those links; we facilitate those opportunities. We also work with the schools, and the schools are a really big part of addressing disadvantage, so there are a number of programs that we have with the schools—but link them as well to these employment programs and through to the services of the Skills and Jobs Centre. So it is about creating that awareness.

Mr ROWSWELL: Just on that, if I may, would you consider including industry in that conversation as well?

Ms BRENNAN: Yes.

Mr ROWSWELL: The reason I raise that is that we have had evidence earlier today from industry heads indicating to us that there was not a productive, established interaction between schools and industry at the moment, which was concerning. Is that something that you would consider including?

Ms BRENNAN: Yes, definitely. Where possible we actually try to have industry stakeholders around the table either within a steering committee or a working party. We do have one program working with the Geelong Manufacturing Council at the moment, and industry players are actually involved in how that program works. It is the same with Northern Futures and Whittington Works. Some other bespoke programs where we have set up new courses we actually facilitate, so that is really the role that we have tried to play—that is facilitating roundtable discussions with industry to design those courses. I think there is a lot more work to be done there, though, and that is really hard because of the amount of priorities in place in schools at the moment. It is a very challenging environment. Industry wants to connect with them, they want to connect with industry, but you almost need a broker in the middle to facilitate those relationships, and that is a role that the LLEN tries to play and they play it very well in the health and community services space. We also try to do that. There is also now the tech school, again trying to form those links. So there is a lot coming into schools, and it is about how we best facilitate those pathways.

Ms RYAN: Can I ask a question. I put it to G21 earlier, but they said that it was probably more appropriate for you, and it is. I suppose with respect to free TAFE, how many disadvantaged jobseekers are taking up those places?

Ms HAMILTON: If I can just answer that. Carley was in the room and heard that question this morning, so we went away and actually went back to our area and said, 'Can we have that data?'. So Carley has done some excellent work. The only challenge with the data we have been able to get for you is that it goes across all SEIFA areas. It includes Dandenong and everywhere else, so it is not just specific to the Geelong region. But we do have that and we can leave that with you.

The CHAIR: That will be great. Thank you.

Ms HAMILTON: I just do not know how valuable that will be to you right now from a statistical point of view, but we can certainly give you the context that that was drawn from and we can do some more work back just so that you can know about our region. So, yes, we can certainly do that. I think I gave it to both you and Carley.

Ms BRENNAN: Just off the top of my head, looking at the data, it was around 20% of disadvantaged in the free TAFE courses, which is almost the same as the current uptake in non-free TAFE courses. But we have broken down the stats in terms of overseas-born and Australian-born participants, as well and by gender. But it is about the same for the free TAFE and non-free TAFE.

Ms HAMILTON: It is just on the back of the one that I think I gave you, Tracey, so if you just flick the very back—that is it there. Steph might like to see that.

Ms RYAN: Yes, that would be great.

Ms HAMILTON: As I say, though, we just pulled the whole SEIFA index; we did not do just our region, but we can certainly do that for you, and I can certainly forward that through via email or something like that.

Ms RYAN: That would be terrific, thank you.

Ms HAMILTON: We thought that was a great question, and Carley got straight onto it.

Ms RYAN: Excellent. Thank you. The other one I had, Keelie: you mentioned the Skills and Jobs Centre, and I was wondering, in terms of that initiative—this might be a better question for you, Tracey; I am not sure—how many disadvantaged jobseekers are you finding coming through the centre? I suppose is it catering more for people who are already mobile and kind of thinking about what they might be doing? Do you keep that data, around how many disadvantaged jobseekers or people seeking training are coming through?

Ms JEFFERY: Yes, we do. We are funded by the State Government, so we report every quarter. Some of the things we report on are about retrenched workers, mums returning to work, do participants have a disability—sort of all of our key priority cohorts. I can send you through some more data.

Ms RYAN: That would be great.

Ms JEFFERY: I had a look just before at some of the questions that you were asking. We have had almost 1,500 people come through our Skills and Jobs Centre this year.

The CHAIR: Wow! Do you break that down into demographics of what postcode?

Ms JEFFERY: Yes, we do. Predominantly in Geelong it will be Geelong people that are coming in, but we can break it down by postcode as to what suburb people are coming from.

The CHAIR: Because we could roughly tell by the postcode their socio-economic background; that is all.

Ms JEFFERY: Yes. I will get that data and I will send it through.

The CHAIR: That would be great.

Ms HAMILTON: And I think, Steph, your question in relation to people presenting from, you know, sort of more disadvantaged background, what is really interesting about the Skills and Jobs Centre is it plays to a need in the community for people who just fall through the gaps for every other reason. It might be that a spouse has been retrenched but gets a package or whatever else, but the partner is still in really difficult circumstances or whatever it is, if they have not been able to go back and get perhaps the education they have wanted to achieve or a job outcome, and it has really almost comes down to the mental health and wellbeing of people. Some of the programs that Tracey's team really work very hard on are delivering bespoke responses, so taking that information from the client and unpicking it right down to the very basic level. What we particularly find for women is it is a lack of confidence around returning to the workforce. Whether you see that as disadvantaged or whatever sort of prism you look at that through, if you do not feel you are appropriate for the workforce or can get back in, that kind of catchphrase of disadvantage really does apply.

We have worked really hard on a number of bespoke programs. We have got Workwise Women; we have got a Men at Work program. They are very much just about: just come and socialise again, get back into a group of people and then look at what you might need moving forward. The industry panels have been really eye-opening. When you get the likes of, say, Cotton On and GrainCorp standing up in a room and saying, 'Don't go and get a warehousing qualification. We don't want you to go and get that qualification. We just want to know that after a week of being on the job, standing on your feet or sweeping the floor, you're going to be here. If that's the case, we know we can train you'. That is really valuable information.

Ms RYAN: That is really kind of consistent with what industry said to us earlier, that soft skills are really what they are looking for and if people have got soft skills then they feel—

The CHAIR: Job preparedness.

Ms RYAN: Yes, that is their critical thing.

Ms HAMILTON: And we are really hoping to do more work with industry around those kinds of comments because we do not want industry feeling like TAFE is just trying to train you in retail or warehousing or whatever, just to fill seats, because that is not the case at all. Our role is to ensure people do get tangible employment outcomes that are sustainable, so if we hear that kind of thing we use that intel as a TAFE and really say, ‘Well, what’s this warehousing course doing; what’s it providing? How do we make that actually meet a need that, you know, Cotton On and GrainCorp are going to say is valuable to them moving forward?’.

Ms RYAN: Do you feel like there is enough flexibility? Obviously we have got a national qualifications framework and really slow-to-change packages. Is there enough flexibility for you to actually respond to industry need when they come forward and say, ‘This qualification isn’t quite ticking our boxes’?

Ms HAMILTON: Yes, that is really challenging. Carley has got great experience in putting together new packages. Skilling the Bay actually put together the first qualification in carbon fibre, which is really exciting, so listening to industry about what that was. I think Carley can talk to the complexity.

The CHAIR: That is the future of the advanced manufacturing space, isn’t it, really?

Ms HAMILTON: Absolutely, yes.

Ms BRENNAN: So that was a really exciting example, and we actually were able to get some retrenched Ford workers to go through that program and—

The CHAIR: Yes, straight transition with a bit of upskilling.

Ms BRENNAN: Yes. They were employed through Carbon Revolution. We had Quickstep technologies around the table, Carbon Nexus. There are probably two parts that I think Tracey and I want to answer to your question. But, first of all, around tailoring the training packages, there are some things that our trainers and teachers can certainly do with industry experts coming in to teach in the classroom or having site visits. That is one level of tailoring training to suit industry needs. But it is quite challenging when you are trying to change the training package or incorporate units from other training packages which might be more suited, and then it all comes down to, unfortunately, the funding rates and the student contact hour rates and how many students are you going to have in the class to make it viable. So everybody tries to be as creative as possible, and unfortunately sometimes there is a point where the TAFE or the training provider has to do a balancing act between what is a commercially viable course here and now versus the longer term. Now, mostly organisations would say, ‘We would take a loss for a little while until we know that’s going to be sustainable’. Sometimes that is not able to occur. Obviously we try for that not to happen. That is where again we try to be creative and tap into what resources are there, and sometimes Skilling the Bay can provide some of that gap funding where necessary to subsidise the costs so that the TAFE is not losing any funding there.

Another program that we also implemented was a Returnships program, because if you are looking at what employers are looking for, they are often looking for experience or people to have had some experience in work, so we devised a Returnships program, which is a paid work experience program for mature age workers. So if you think about it, school students have the opportunity to try a different industry or try a different employment, but how could we actually provide that experience for mature age workers who might be transitioning from a declining industry sector and want to go and work in maybe the new insurance sector or back-of-house operations at one of the new emerging organisations? I will let Tracey talk about that. But it was a pilot program, and we achieved some pretty fantastic outcomes.

Ms JEFFERY: So there were lots of people that we were seeing coming through the Skills and Jobs Centre, especially retrenched workers, mums returning to work—just anyone that had had possibly a bad employment experience or no employment experience in the past. There were lots of people, and we were thinking if they

could just get a foot in the door somewhere that they would be right. They were very employable, but they did not have confidence when they were trying to sell themselves to a particular employer. They did not know what to say. They did not have any experience that they could talk about, no referees—you know, the sort of thing that we probably see from jobseekers a lot. So we did work with Skilling the Bay to put the Returnships project together. Originally it was around retrenched workers, but we found that a lot of the people that we ended up placing were mums returning to work. We have got the strong women's program. We have actually got three of those running at the moment: one here in Westfield, we have got one out on the Bellarine Peninsula running and we have also got one up in Werribee. So I think we have got about 36 women in that program at the moment—this week. We have got lots of women in that program that have not worked for a long time; they have got their kids going back to school.

Ms BRENNAN: Domestic violence.

Ms JEFFERY: Yes, and lots of family issues and other things going on. And even though it is for mums returning to work, we find we have young women in there that have never worked before and may be out of touch with training and work. We have some older women in there that maybe have lost their job or have lost a partner and have never worked before. It is great to see that women of all different ages are facing these same challenges and they can get together in a group. It is often just about the confidence building. We really did get a lot of women coming straight out of that program and then into the Returnships program, and then we really brokered that with the employer and got them out there. It was great because we were able to support them from our end as well. So a lot of the silly questions that they felt like they might have to ask their employer, they had somewhere else that they could go to say, 'What does this mean? What is this pay? They want me to do this. I don't really understand what's going on here', and that we could get them through that sort of process and they had a bit of a network there that they could go to as well.

The CHAIR: Were there people from non-English-speaking backgrounds coming in?

Ms BRENNAN: Definitely.

Ms JEFFERY: Yes, quite a few.

The CHAIR: People with disability or Aboriginal?

Ms JEFFERY: Yes.

The CHAIR: A cross-section?

Ms JEFFERY: A cross-section, yes. Originally we thought it was going to be just for retrenched workers, but then when we had a look there was a need just for people. I know there was one young man that was looking for an apprenticeship, and he had had a lot of stuff go on in his background. He just did not have parents or had got to that stage where he was really on his own and he wanted an apprenticeship. So we were able to get him in with an employer, and he just went straight into an apprenticeship.

Ms HAMILTON: He was a lovely case study, because he had a lot of mental health issues in his life, and he had actually pulled himself out of employment previously. I want to say as well, having worked in economic development for quite a long time, the outcomes—I think we ended up with about 58% of people gaining employment.

The CHAIR: That is amazing.

Ms HAMILTON: I have not seen that kind of statistic before.

Ms RYAN: So effectively what it is doing is it is placing people, adults, in a paid internship.

Ms HAMILTON: Three weeks full-time.

Ms RYAN: So you are giving employers the opportunity to see what they are like in the workplace without having to make the full-blown commitment where, if they do not come with referees or—

Ms HAMILTON: Yes. So The Gordon actually met the salaries and wages and did all of that back-end stuff as well, so we kind of tweaked our systems to be able to take those people on board and pay them through our own systems at The Gordon. We had companies like LBW who literally straightaway—they are an accounting firm here in Geelong—rang and said, ‘We want more people’. They put that person on. They created a job for her because they just knew her skill sets were something they did not want to lose.

Ms BRENNAN: We had another lady who actually presented an A3 spreadsheet of all the different jobs that she had applied for.

The CHAIR: This is the sort of stuff that we need to actually publicise so we can inspire others to do it, potentially.

Ms JEFFERY: There is a video on the Federal Government website; the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business.

Ms ADDISON: How do we google it?

Ms JEFFERY: I can send you the link.

Ms ADDISON: That would be great.

Ms JEFFERY: That program was done through Simon French as well, the local employment coordinator.

Ms RYAN: So how did you fund it?

Ms HAMILTON: Again through Skilling the Bay.

Ms RYAN: So it was paid for through Skilling the Bay?

Ms HAMILTON: And through Commonwealth funding for the local area coordinator.

We have done a couple of those now. We do taster programs through that Commonwealth funding stream as well, and those taster programs are predominantly around just getting—you know, it might be bricklaying, a bit of carpentry, a bit of horticulture—a bit of tasting of all of the trades and then getting those people directly into employment with employers.

We were speaking earlier around the bespoke nature of supporting people, but it is almost one-on-one. They might engage and you might get them so far this time around but then they will disengage. But then they will come back in. The case studies are just amazing.

Ms JEFFERY: I guess there is the importance too of being able to offer that individualised support. Through a lot of the programs that we do and even through the Skills and Jobs Centre, people can access it as they need to, so they can come in once or they can come in—I think the most that we had was one of our Ford women that came in I think about 45 times for one-on-one careers counselling, just because she had so many barriers and she had so much going on for her that it really was a supportive approach for her. She was using some other services as well. Then she was actually able to get employment after that.

Ms HAMILTON: It really is an incredible State Government program, the Skills and Jobs Centres. I cannot speak highly enough of them as a network as well.

Ms JEFFERY: We have got some of the Ford workers. Once they did actually finish up there they sort of had nowhere to go, so we had a lot of them that—

The CHAIR: And some of them got a payout and misspent some of their money, you know—invested in the wrong places.

Ms BRENNAN: You think you need to give them support for a period of time, but you actually still find them coming back two years later because they have spent their money.

Ms JEFFERY: Even just to have somewhere to go. We have got a coffee machine, we have got couches and there are computers that you can use. It has been really nice because there was a lot of the guys out there that were probably the lower skilled and they were really struggling, so a lot of them came in every single day. They had a coffee, they had a chat, they did their emails and they searched for some jobs, and you could really see that it was somewhere for them to go. They would meet up with each other in there and then they could go off and have coffees and, 'How you going?', and there were quite a few of them that were coming in straightaway. It was really lovely to see that as they got work there are less of them coming in. We have still got one lovely gentleman. He is working, which is great, but he still comes in on his days off. He does his emails, he cleans the coffee machine and he has a free coffee. It is just a bit of a social network for him. But, yes, it is funny. We do not see him every day like we used to, but he still comes in on his days off, which is really lovely.

Ms BRENNAN: The support. I think you asked earlier, Juliana, about the digital technologies and digital literacy for disadvantaged jobseekers and vulnerable cohorts. That was a huge learning curve for a lot of retrenched workers, just the new techniques in job search activities. And then if you are from a more vulnerable community and you do not have access or nobody has ever showed you how to apply for a job, they are the kind of things that all of our delivery partners provide such intensive support on, and different programs that you put together.

Ms HAMILTON: Just on the digital literacy side of things as well, even partnering with the Learn Locals around digital springboard and the like, if you cannot use LinkedIn, because that is where people are looking for their next jobs, you kind of do not even really appreciate that until you go and do it.

The CHAIR: Or having an email address.

Ms HAMILTON: Absolutely. You cannot apply. The Learn Local partner has been great.

Ms JEFFERY: Or how do you turn the computer on when you have never, ever had to do it before? That is often what we see from people. It is so confronting.

Ms ADDISON: I was up in New South Wales when the Newcastle Skillworks closed, and then we had the iconic closure of Alcoa and Ford here. I am from Ballarat and obviously we do not have such large-scale industries like you do, but what are key things that could be downsized from the experience of these very significant industry closures that perhaps could be really transferable to other regional centres?

Ms JEFFERY: I think it is if we can get in as early as we can. Often we do not have the time or businesses do not really know that they are going to close. Ford did. Bob Hope, who was working for ASA, now works in our Skills and Jobs Centre. He was actually in there working in Ford. A lot of people were retrained, and they knew what they were doing once they finished. With a lot of the other employers that we work with, we have some people that show up to work and their work is all closed for that day, and then they present at the Skills and Jobs Centre. So for them, they do not have any time. It is just, 'What can I do really quickly, because my pay check that I thought I was going to get isn't coming in anymore?'

But it is as much time as we can get so we can prepare workers. We do go out and do the workers in transition sessions, which are great because we can get the information out there. Often people have only just found out that they are losing their job, though, or sometimes they do not know—'Is it me or is it you that's going to be going when we get the tap on the shoulder?'. They are often not even thinking about what information is being presented, but we do find that that is really helpful because we send out a friendly face and there is someone. We do not try to bombard them with too much information, but we just will let them know, 'Hey, we're here. This is where we are. This is what we might be able to do to help. Come in when you need us'. Then it is great because they are just able to come into the centre and they know that they have seen someone who is friendly. They remember that information and come in.

Ms HAMILTON: It is one of those things in an economy like ours, where you have got Ford and Alcoa, who were almost what you would say the mainstays of employing apprentices. In their heyday Ford, for instance, would have 100 apprentices a year. That does not happen now. So the engagement that it takes with those subbies to support employers is completely different than it used to be, because really you used to have Ford, which was almost like a training ground, and Alcoa, like a training ground. You knew it was almost like a

benchmark of training that you were getting by being there. Now you do not know. You can have individual employers who are putting on an apprentice. They do not particularly know their rights and obligations towards that apprentice, and we are really finding that that has an impact on retention rates for people into their apprenticeships. That is something that we probably did not even recognise would be a consequence. It has only been later where we have gone, 'Oh my goodness. Now actually having to get those apprentices into employment requires so much more individual support'.

Ms ADDISON: It is also that with places like that—and I worked up at BHP in Wollongong—the apprentices would be moved from department to department, so they would be fully skilled up in all aspects of the process as opposed to now working in a small shop. You might become very, very skilled in one section of being a fitter and turner, but you may have no heavy industry experience.

Ms HAMILTON: And you have got construction wanting to do exactly that. They just want the carpenters to go and sign bill frames. That is all they want them to do. And we are saying, 'That's not going to give the breadth of the skill set that you need to be an apprentice and to actually be fully current'. That is the American model. The American model—they are in a lot of trouble now because they have only got people who can just build the frame and they cannot do anything else. I know industry are really under pressure because they have got to build.

We have got a project at the moment called RISE, and you may have heard about the Regional Industry Sector Employment program. One of the challenges we face at The Gordon is that as a collective it comes together to meet the need of a sector, and the sector is engaged. Master Builders are fantastic. UDIA are fantastic. We have got the right people. We have got industry around the table. We have got community support. Gforce have put the money into this particular program, which again is unheard of. They have put in \$200,000 over three years, which is amazing.

The challenge The Gordon has is when you have got 12 people or 15 people when you start, the course is viable. When that drops down to three or four, which it does on every intake, it is no longer viable for us as The Gordon because we only get paid on the hours that the students actually undertake their education for. So by the end of the course we are paying our teachers \$110,000 a year to be in these courses—the return is not there. So it is incredibly challenging for vocational education when really the program probably costs blah but we are getting that much out of it in the end.

As much as, from that community social responsibility perspective, you want to be in that game, the crisis is enormous, so where do you make the biggest bang for your buck? So we are having the conversation right now about how do we as a TAFE provider have some bucket that sits there for these kinds of programs? Because we do not want the program to fail but we are going to be the linchpin about whether it does or does not, and that is really hard.

The CHAIR: Can I ask about the women in non-traditional employment roles, the WINTER project? Can you expand on that?

Ms JEFFERY: That was something I guess that we were starting which has not really gone any further at this stage.

The CHAIR: Oh, okay. Was there a reason behind that?

Ms JEFFERY: It was a little bit difficult to get traction, and there was a lot of I guess what Carly talked about with duplication; there were a lot of other people that were in that space. So, yes, it is something that we are definitely still looking at, and we do try to promote women getting into—

The CHAIR: What is the concept? Can you talk around the concept of it? Like, what generated that idea? What was the—

Ms JEFFERY: It was just really about the major projects and them needing to get more—

The CHAIR: So non-traditional—as in, get into construction, for example.

Ms BRENNAN: Advanced manufacturing.

Ms JEFFERY: Yes, just into any different—

The CHAIR: Because those traditionally have been sort of blokey industries, haven't they?

Ms JEFFERY: Yes.

Ms HAMILTON: Just to add to that though—yes, they have been blokey, but the employers who do want to employ women, they are facing barriers that they have never even thought of. Where are the women's amenities? Where are their toilet facilities? The blokes have got their posters on the wall. And this stuff is still real. As much as we do not think it is, those workplaces are still very male-oriented.

Ms JEFFERY: And even the mentoring and things for women when they do go into some of these projects—

Ms ADDISON: Even uniforms and having safety boots that are the right size—there are a whole lot of things that people just do not think of.

Ms HAMILTON: Absolutely. And we have done some work at the moment because of our VET and school students about the uniform they need to wear into construction—bits and pieces—and I said back to my work colleague, 'There's not much representation of women wearing hi-vis in this thing. Can you go and have a look?'. And he said, 'Do you know what?'—he came back and he said it is actually 80% more expensive for women to buy trade clothing.

Mr ROWSWELL: Wow.

Ms HAMILTON: And I just went, 'Well, what a barrier'.

The CHAIR: That is bizarre.

Ms HAMILTON: Their shoes, everything—if you want it tailored for a women's physique, it is 80% more expensive than the blokes' stuff is. So we have even got to figure that barrier out.

The CHAIR: But they are meant to be smaller. They are meant to be cheaper.

Ms HAMILTON: I know. Less fabric, John!

Ms BRENNAN: Less material.

Ms HAMILTON: I know. So we have even got to figure that out.

Ms ADDISON: Economies of scale, I think.

Ms HAMILTON: All of those small things.

Mr ROWSWELL: John, let us leave that conversation to the experts.

Ms HAMILTON: So the barriers are real, and we are just kind of chipping away at those at present. We are working with Lily Price at the moment, who has a business called Cosmopolitan, which is a labour hire company just for women. She is a crane driver herself, and she hangs the glass in the major Melbourne buildings in Collins Street and the like.

Ms ADDISON: Lily?

Ms HAMILTON: Lily Price is her name. Her father was in construction, and she really found a number of barriers in her own employment. When she would be on site, she would never break any glass panels at all. The blokes would come on, they would break three glass panels a day, but the employers would still say, 'He gets a job over you just because it is easier'. She's confronting to have on the worksite because the blokes don't know

what to do with Lily. So she created her own labour hire company, and she also is extending that out now into the women's clothing, because she has recognised, you know, we have got to make it accessible.

Ms ADDISON: But even there are issues when women are pregnant as well, that they need to not mix with certain chemicals and with lifting and everything like that.

Ms HAMILTON: Absolutely.

Ms JEFFERY: And even just the flexibility. We often talk to the women's groups about some of these different roles that they might want to get into—you know, 'Hey, such and such a project is actually calling out for women'. But what they want is women that can work full time, that can get there at 7 o'clock in the morning and that do not have any caring responsibilities. So for a lot of the women that we see, even if they do want to go into those roles, it just is not viable for them. I guess coming out of the women's programs and for mums that are returning to work, often what they are looking for, more than what the actual job is, is, 'Can this work in around what I need?'

Ms ADDISON: School pick-ups and drop-offs and basketball and everything like that.

Ms JEFFERY: Yes, can I get flexible hours?

Ms HAMILTON: It is really limiting, because you know you have got a certain skill set and you know you could apply that skill set, but you would need to work around certain hours because industries cannot accommodate.

Ms ADDISON: Absolutely.

Ms BRENNAN: And in terms of preventing further disadvantage or having that impact in a family environment, we know that the mother generally has the most influence over the career opportunities or the education of the children, so if we can expose children earlier to a working parent as a good role model, then that is a long way forward in preventing further people falling into disadvantage or disengagement.

Ms ADDISON: That is a very important step for work readiness, to be able to see—you cannot be what you cannot see.

Ms JEFFERY: Exactly, and it is really interesting with some of the women's programs that we are doing out in the community. This is our third now sort of towards the Bellarine Peninsula in partnership with Opportunity East or Whittington Works. The first one we did in Whittington, the next one I think was Clifton Springs, and we are in Drysdale at the moment. For those women, they do not come into the shopping centre. They would never come into Westfield. They have never set foot in a TAFE before, so even to go to the campus for them, they are in there saying, 'I've never been here before', which for us, you just think, 'That's just amazing that you would not think that's an option for you'. I suppose if you have got no money and you are unemployed and you are looking after your kids, why would you go shopping?

Some of the things that we do, we get them in to get their hair done by the hairdressing students, so it gets them into the TAFE, and we do it in about week three or week four so they have started to build some friendships within the group and they have got a bit of a network and they feel really comfortable going in there. Then while they are there we say, 'Let's go on a tour and we'll have lunch in the caff' and all that sort of thing. But we were just really surprised to actually go out there and to hear from those women that none of them had ever been to the TAFE before. A lot of these women—there were some young women but there were older women as well. Just to think there is The Gordon in Geelong, you would think most people would have visited at some stage—they had never been there and would never think that they could.

Ms ADDISON: And I am sure you would say the same about Ballarat. It is right in the centre of town and people drive up and down past it all the time and they would have never been in.

Ms JEFFERY: No, and you see it, but it is like, 'That isn't something that's attainable for me'. We have got some of the women out of that program that have now gone on to—we are doing an intro to community services in partnership with the Learn Locals in the community centres. So now they have pathwayed from

Workwise Women into the intro to community services. Then from the first one that we ran of that there were some people that actually got straight into the diploma after that, so they had applied a few times and just were not quite there, so just to be supportive through that approach they have been able to apply. They will be studying the diploma next year, which is just amazing.

Ms ADDISON: And is that a part of free TAFE?

Ms JEFFERY: Yes, it is.

Ms ADDISON: I know we talk about the diploma of nursing being \$15,000. Is that a similar price? It is a huge saving for people to be able to access it through free TAFE.

Ms HAMILTON: Community services is not quite as much as nursing. It probably is about \$5,000, \$5,500 per annum?

Ms JEFFERY: I think it is more than that. It is about \$10,000 altogether.

Ms HAMILTON: So it is still a barrier, yes.

Ms ADDISON: And it is just removing that cost-prohibitive nature of a diploma? Amazing.

Ms HAMILTON: Absolutely yes. And the pathway work that Deakin have done as well I have to really say has been fantastic. With The Gordon, any course that you do that is a diploma course or an advanced diploma, they will guarantee you entry into Deakin. So at the bare minimum it is a bachelor of arts, but there is a whole schedule that if you do a diploma at The Gordon, you can pathway, whether it is into commerce or business or real estate or whatever it is, which is just fantastic. And that lasts for five years. So you might study with us, go into industry, get some experience and then you can still go back to Deakin and directly enrol, which is great.

The CHAIR: We spoke a fair bit about skills matching and the gaps that exist in various areas. Different regions have different requirements for the workforce. In terms of Geelong and the career advice that students may receive at various schools, do you think that is adequate in terms of skills matching at the moment for this region?

Ms BRENNAN: I think there are certainly improvements that we could make. I think there are some really good initiatives that have just started in terms of some of the, you know, new Education State reforms and investment in careers teachers in schools, but those are going to take time to actually get some traction and gain some benefits. So I think our next challenge is really linking those careers education teachers with places like the Skills and Jobs Centre, where they can come in and experience the industry panels or we can do some more professional development for teachers in that space.

Teachers would understand, or the advisers would understand, some of the high-level trending industries, if you like. You know we talk about the health and community services sector, and construction, but again it is the jobs that they can see that come to mind. We have run a number of programs in terms of opening up awareness of advanced manufacturing

For a long time in Geelong we were talking about the decline in manufacturing. At the graduations from those events where we have had up to 40 students come through, it is amazing: the parents come up afterwards and say, 'Gee, I didn't realise the opportunities that are available'. Because in their mind—they are reading the paper or social media which is saying it is all doom and gloom for manufacturing. But actually it is transformed, so we are trying to get that message out.

The CHAIR: It is a bit higher paying, too.

Ms BRENNAN: Higher pay, different skill set—and probably one of the biggest challenges that we have as a region, which we have not touched on, is the impact our digital disruption and automation.

So that is probably the next thing that we need to be thinking about, because there is the potential for—I think if you look at the McKinsey global reports—up to a third of the Western workforce to be disrupted, and that is probably conservative. But that would equate to around 75,000 jobs in Geelong. That is a huge amount of

people, and the jobs that are being created—which is fantastic in Geelong, we are taking advantage of all the opportunities we have—are not like-for-like. They require different skill sets, and in some cases even the structure of employment has changed.

And we are already seeing it—more part-time positions being created, which is okay in one sense with flexibility. But then there is the gig economy, which is again sounds fantastic but our other systems have not caught up with that. How do you get rent if you are doing work in the gig economy? How do you prove that you have got a sustainable income? How do you buy a house? How do you buy a car? All of those things—they are kind of the next challenges I think we have to be thinking about.

So I think in terms of—going back to your question, John—how we encourage our teachers and our schools to think about those jobs of the future, I think what we are trying to do is give people the underpinning knowledge and skills to keep retraining and reskilling. It really is around that lifelong learning, dipping in and out of education and training when you need it, but knowing who to go to for advice. And that is all of us having to be up to date and current and often working with industry to be on the cutting edge. So that takes time. We need that time to be proactive, I think.

Ms HAMILTON: And I think it just requires staying in the game, because it is always going to be evolving. It is always going to be something like this. So really, for the likes of Skilling the Bay, just having the longevity of 10 years as somewhere to go where this stuff is actioned and is actually happening has been a real stalwart for Geelong, I think, and made an enormous difference. Tracey can probably speak more to the careers because she is out of the school career system herself and now has probably about seven staff who are professionally careers qualified sitting underneath her.

The CHAIR: It was also suggested that careers advice is hesitantly given in case it is the wrong advice and the student at some point comes back to school and says, ‘You’ve given me the wrong advice’.

Ms JEFFERY: It can be. It just so varies depending on the school and depending on who you have got in the position: is it a private school or is it a public school? Some of the stuff that has been done around the Morrisby testing at Year 9—some of that looks great.

Ms ADDISON: Someone else talked about that—

The CHAIR: Yesterday.

Ms ADDISON: the Morrisby. They mentioned it yesterday. I do not know about it.

Ms JEFFERY: Yes. All Year 9s at government schools—so that is starting to roll out. It really great from our perspective as well knowing that in a couple of years the students that we will be seeing will have done that testing, so that will be something that we can pick up on.

We are starting to see more teachers moving into the field and getting qualified, and that is great because they have been coming to us. We have had someone come on placement to actually build some networks and to broaden what they are doing. But yes, it is just difficult. I know it is changing. I worked the sector a few years ago; I was full time, luckily, in the role but I know that a lot of the careers teachers are not. So you just know that they would struggle to keep up to date with everything.

We do find, which is really interesting, there is sort of a point when students are looking at subject selection and we will see that all of our services have a lot of parents and students coming in really distressed, looking for, ‘What’s my alternative to school?’ options. So it is really interesting, from outside services like we technically are, not working directly with the schools, you can sort of see where that point is, because we have a lot of parents and children coming into Westfield—they are coming into the TAFE and they are really starting to look at what the alternatives are.

So I guess from our perspective it is worrying. Yes, they have found their way to us, but there would be a lot more that have not. And it is worrying that there are all of those young people that are not being supported by their school—or obviously not getting what they need from the school—and are then going and looking for alternative options. And it is lucky that there are other places, but I just sort of think that there are probably a lot

more out there because that is not really our initial target market. There would be a lot more out there that have not found their way through and are potentially just dropping out of school with nothing and nowhere to go, and that is really concerning.

Ms BRENNAN: Just to add to that, one of the interesting things that we have found working with different schools is that a lot of the public schools do not actually have a compulsory work experience program or a work placement program.

Mr ROWSWELL: That is true, yes.

Ms BRENNAN: So that in a way could be a challenge—that if you do not actually have access to networks or resources currently within your own family, how do you gain access or exposure to a workplace? We have worked with different schools and industry to provide some of those pathways opportunities or exposure opportunities. So for the Geelong Tertiary Futures program, we bring students in from four schools within the region that were identified as disadvantaged or as hosting disadvantaged cohorts. They come in and experience a 10-week program at The Gordon and they get to preview at least five different vocations as part of that program. And they do two units of employability skills, so they actually walk out with a certificate and credit for those two units in employability skills.

The CHAIR: And there were some industries that said that work experience in certain industries is really hard because of the safety aspect of it, and so there are some challenges there but also in terms of the expectations of school leavers, for example, in terms of, ‘Do I want to get into an industry which is hard to do, laborious, dirty, or do I want something different?’. So the perception is out there in terms of trying to match the skills to the needs of the future jobs in the region.

Ms HAMILTON: And I think we do need to do more work in schools about what those jobs look like.

The CHAIR: That is what I mean—in terms of a campaign, potentially by the industry.

Ms HAMILTON: Yes. We were fortunate enough to go to Bendigo a bit over a week ago for the National Careers Institute session around what they are looking at, and that was really interesting. But we really struggled with—it is almost like a step change that we need. I am a parent of young children going through exactly this and I still have the mindset of sending my kids to uni, even though I know full well for my daughter it is not the right thing for her mental health. And for my son? Why am I doing that? He might want to be a snowboarder or whatever. I do not care. But I still have this bit about, ‘No, the way to go is that way’. So it is almost like this ecosystem that we need to build just to enable people to perhaps have their eyes opened in a different way to what the possibilities are. I heard a great podcast this week from a plumber in Wyndham, and he was a business winner of the year. He basically said, ‘Wherever I go I need to educate people that it’s not like it used to be. There’s so much more technology. It is not as hard on you as it used to be. It does not wear my body out like it used to, all that sort of thing, because we are not lugging around cement pipes or’—

The CHAIR: No, it is not like being car mechanic 20 years ago.

Ms HAMILTON: No, exactly. That is exactly right. And yet we have all got that perception of it as a really tough, laborious thing, and he is going, ‘It’s really a great job’. They are out there having a ball.

Ms ADDISON: It is interesting: I met with painters and decorators who had just finished their pre-apprenticeship course at Federation a couple of weeks ago, and they were nearly all girls, which surprised me. So I literally tried to have a chat with everyone—

Ms HAMILTON: That is great.

Ms ADDISON: and one girl had started child care because her mum thought child care would be very good for her. She hated it. She is now loving being a painter and decorator. Another girl thought she wanted to do welding and everything like that, started it, hated it, and is now loving painting and decorating. So I think anything that we can do with this tasting idea, where you have a preconceived idea that, ‘I’ll be great in child care’ or, ‘I’ll be great in welding’, go and try it before you lock yourself into anything.

Ms HAMILTON: And we do need to get them kind of at Year 9, which is where Skilling the Bay has been doing some great work for that taster stuff, because you need to get them before you actually start your subject selection. We even have what is called the Girls Big Day Out. So all the schools come to our East facility and they get to put mud on bricks and stuff like that, and they just love it. And when you survey them and say, ‘Does that make a difference to your thoughts?’—and to the parents—the answer is, ‘Yes’. So without that actual hands-on experience, the kids will just still go to school, doing the same thing, until you can actually give them that hands-on experience of picking up a saw and doing something different, which you would think is something you could do at school. But if you do not choose that subject, you do not ever see it.

Ms ADDISON: You do not get exposed to it.

Ms HAMILTON: Yes, exactly.

Ms JEFFERY: And even with some of the taster programs, like something like the Introduction to Community Services, we have had quite a few students who have got to the end and have gone, ‘Oh, that’s not what I thought it was going to be and I actually don’t want to study that anymore’, which for us is a great outcome—‘Let’s do some careers counselling. Let’s figure out what it might be’—but without things like that, they would have been enrolled, they would have used up their free TAFE and then they are in it and then they are, ‘Well, do I drop out or do I keep going?’.

The CHAIR: Good point.

Ms JEFFERY: Yes. So some of that we have found has been really interesting.

Ms HAMILTON: We are concerned about free TAFE and using your free TAFE and then not being able to do something else, so we try to come back this way and give people as much exposure to the sector or the industry before they make that choice to go into their education. That is a program and an example, and it is working really well.

The CHAIR: We could go on all day and night. Any further questions, or would you like to make any last comments?

Ms HAMILTON: No, just to thank you for your time.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Ms JEFFERY: Thanks so much. Nice to meet you.

Committee adjourned.