

Impact of parents and schools on career pathways and choices

Michaelia Cash:

Hi, I'm Senator Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family business. Welcome to National Skills Week 2020, and to this year's podcast series, Journeys to Success, brought to you by SkillsOne. In this podcast series, you'll hear from a number of VET Alumni and Australian Training Award winners. They will share with you interesting and varied journeys they've taken due to their Vocational Education and Training. Our VET Alumni and Australian Training Award winners come from all walks of life. They have inspirational stories to share about what prompted their learning decisions, their influences, their training and work journey and why Vocational Education and Training was the right choice for them. This podcast is a great way to learn about the success people have had in their careers and life. There is so much diversity and opportunity that a VET pathway can offer. So enjoy the podcast, be inspired and the best of luck to those who are starting on their VET journey. And if you want more information on where a Vocational Education and Training pathway can take you visit the National Careers Institute website at nci.dese.gov.au.

Anne- Host:

This podcast explores the impact of the school and parents in career pathways and choices. We look at the world from the school, the parent of a Vocational Education student, and from an Australian VET Alumni. Let me introduce you to our panel first, Kristy McDermott is a Queensland 2019 Vocational Student of the Year and Australian VET Alumni and a finalist at the Australian Training Awards. Karin Cahill, is the parent of Jordan Cahill, who has had fantastic success at the New South Wales and Australian Training Awards at WorldSkills and in other areas of his career. Samantha Boreham is the Assistant Principal, Learning Innovation at CathWest College. CathWest is a member of the Parramatta Catholic Diocese, which was the Australian Training Award, small training provider of 2019. Kristy speaks to us of her journeys from leaving school after year nine through to her current career in her own landscaping business, and the choices that she made.

Anne- Host:

Karin speaks about being a parent and her insights and thoughts of supporting her son through his vocational studies and his career. Samantha has a great job to lead a team of school educators in inspiring the VET students of the future. The school offers alternative vocational education options, training pathways, mentors for the students, and encourages students to create their own study and career path. We wanted to ask Samantha about the programs and other work that the school is doing in building confidence in their students. We finish up with some insights and advice for parents, employers, career advisors to get greater participation in Vocational Education and Skills Training. So welcome Karin, Sam and Kristy. How are you guys?

Karin Cahill:

Good, thanks.

Sam:

Very well.

Kristy:

Fantastic.

Sam:

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Okay, so let's just make a start. So thank you for joining us. I thought what we could just do is, Kristy, if we could start with yourself as a VET Alumni, could we just start with your journey? Could you tell us about your journey from high school until now?

Kristy:

Sure. So I left school in year nine and I didn't really have much of an idea where I wanted to go. There wasn't all that much awareness for me at school as far as VET training and all that stuff. So I left feeling a little bit lost, I guess you could say, I ended up going to TAFE after I left school because my mom didn't want me sitting around and all that stuff. My mom was worried about where my life may have been heading, I wasn't happy and I wasn't content, like I said, I was a bit lost. So I went and did a certificate III in health and community services, which led me to a job in an aged care facility. I've also been, I guess unlucky, I've suffered on anxiety for most part of my life, which has had a really big impact on a lot of the things that I've chosen to do I guess, or not chosen to do, I didn't have all that much confidence.

Kristy:

So once I got the job in a nursing home, it became my comfort zone. And I guess, I just stuck in that comfort zone. I didn't really have all that much desire to look outside of that comfort zone due to having anxiety, and nobody really pushed me and I didn't really have anyone to look up to at that stage. Moving on a little bit, I grew up and I had some children, still doing the same job, which I love because again, it was my comfort zone. But I knew in my heart that it wasn't right for me, I knew that I wanted more but I never had the confidence or the belief in myself to actually go out and pursue that dream, I guess. One day somebody said to me, "Oh, have you looked at VET training?" And I said, "No." Well, I had looked at it, but to be quite honest I didn't think that I'd be successful in VET training because I only had a year nine pass.

Kristy:

As a mother again, I have a daughter that was around the same age as I was when I left school. And I really thought it was time for me to step up and show my children that even with anxiety, you can do whatever you want and even with a year nine pass you can be successful. So I wanted to be a role model for my kids, and that was the main thing behind taking the career in VET training. So I look into doing a dual diploma in landscape design and not having any idea really what I was in for, I took the plunge and it was absolutely life changing. Doing the course in VET training, allowed me to build up my self-confidence. I gained skills along the way, and I gained a self-belief in myself and it gave me the burning desire to want to inspire others that may be suffering with anxiety, or there may be cultural barriers or anxiety issues and all that stuff.

Kristy:

I succeeded, I was very successful. Out of my training I then pursued to start my own business, which is Dreamtime Landscapes. And I'm a successful small business owner and I'm confident and I'm proud of where I've gotten. And I think without VET training, none of this would have been possible. So I just wanted to share my story and hopefully, like I said, inspire others to know if you've got a real yearning, give it a go because you literally could take yourself anywhere you desire with VET training.

Anne- Host:

Right. So, Kristy there's so much in there and it's just overwhelming what you've already experienced and the things that you've been able to do. I just wanted to ask you some more questions, but when

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you went into the landscaping, you talked about that it was life changing and it gave you skills that you could use. So what was different between the aged care and the community care and the landscaping?

Kristy:

It wasn't all that much flexibility, I think is really what it comes down to. Starting my own business has allowed me to spend time with my family, which is a very important thing for me, and also to enjoy my passion, which... Landscaping and gardening and all that stuff. It's been amazing and at the same time I work around my own ailments and I'm my own boss, and that's a huge thing for me.

Anne- Host:

I mean, that sounds just like the dream job that we all go for, isn't it? Doing the hours that you want, the flexibility, and doing what you're passionate about. Can you just talk to me, Kristy about the dual qualification? When you talk about that, what did you do?

Kristy:

Okay. So in my instance, the dual diploma was a diploma in landscape design alongside with a dual diploma in horticulture, which I did them both at the same time. So I incorporated the two diplomas in the timeframe that I was at the... Rather than doing one and then going back to do the other.

Anne- Host:

Okay, and can you explain to me the decision to do it that way?

Kristy:

So for me, the decision to do it that way, stemmed from having a family... My partner had a family business which was a gardening business. So at the time when I searched it came up with a dual diploma in landscape design and horticulture. And I thought that would be perfect for us because we were already in the gardening industry and we were already doing landscaping, so I thought if I could design the landscapes ourselves, we didn't have to ask... A lot of things we could keep doing as a family business, so we could do the designs and then we could build the designs and then we could also go back and maintain them. So that was the main decision because there was so much skill, and I just thought it was a great opportunity for me to take that lead in our family business.

Anne- Host:

I'd like to now go over to Karin. And Karin, I was wondering if you could tell me about your journey as a parent of a Vocational Education and Training student.

Karin Cahill:

Okay. So Jordan did an apprenticeship in landscape construction. He started after he finished school, he found himself an apprenticeship, during the course of his apprenticeship he participated in WorldSkills and was a silver medalist at nationals in landscape construction. He won a BBM Youth Support Scholarship off the back of that, and went to London and worked at the Chelsea Flower Show with an exhibitor called The Outdoor Room who were gold medalists at the Chelsea Flower Show. So that was a terrific opportunity for him to meet international landscapers. He then went on to win New South Wales Apprentice of the Year in 2017 and was runner-up Australian Apprentice of the Year and also won the Landscape Construction Association Apprentice of the Year. And now he's

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a WorldSkills judge and he also does the interviewing process for the Apprentice of the Year Program for New South Wales TAFE skills. Well, he's now finished his apprenticeship and he's the site supervisor still with the same company with The Garden Makers that he started with.

Anne- Host:

Wow, so that is just unbelievable. So how long was his apprenticeship? Do you mind me asking?

Karin Cahill:

Three years.

Anne- Host:

Yep.

Karin Cahill:

Yeah.

Anne- Host:

So he was managing and doing all those other amazing opportunities during his, managing his apprenticeship, would you say?

Karin Cahill:

All

Anne- Host:

So Chelsea Flower Show, the BBM Youth Program, WorldSkills and then the New South Wales Training Award Apprentice of the Year.

Karin Cahill:

Yes.

Anne- Host:

And then going on to the Australian Training awards. And also during that time, he was also studying? And also applying his trade directly while he was actually studying and working. And he was also bringing income in, is that correct?

Karin Cahill:

That's correct, yeah. So he started work at the end of January after he finished school. And he's been working ever since, working, studying, Award winning. All of that.

Anne- Host:

Yeah. And you just had to keep going buying outfits to go to all the different awards that you had to go to for Jordan-

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Karin Cahill:

Yeah, [

Anne- Host:

Like, "Jordan, I'm working as well, you know? I've got a job, you know?" I was wondering, talk to me about, Karin, did he come up to you and say, "I want to be a landscaper"? Can you talk to me about how that decision was made?

Karin Cahill:

Yeah, so his school was a systemic Catholic school. So they were quite open in the way that they approached subject selection and their pathways through senior school. They presented both HR and non-HR options, so they talk to the students about the school-based apprenticeship programs and those options that were available to them. He chose to do an HR path because at one stage he thought he might want to do architecture or be a photographer or will find a surfer. And then at the end of year 11, I think, or the beginning of year 12, I can't quite remember which, he came to us and he said, "I think I'm going to do landscaping." And that really made sense because he was very good at art, he had done woodwork in his earlier years and really loved that. He loved environmental science, which was one of his subjects in year 11 and 12. Quite a creative person, so all of those elements together seemed to come in landscape construction and it just really made sense. So never in my wildest dreams did I think that he would end up in London, working at the most prestigious Flower Show in the world. That's just mind blowing.

Anne- Host:

So I want to ask, did you know very much about Vocational Education and Training at that stage or while he was at school? Did you know very much about it?

Karin Cahill:

I knew a little bit. I mean, I must admit, I tended to think it was more related to traditional trades. So just seeing carpentry, building, plumbing, all of those sort of what you would call traditional trades. And it was only when we went to WorldSkills to watch him compete that I realized what the actual depth of the VET program is. There were people doing web design and robotics and all sorts of interesting things that I didn't know that you could study at TAFE, like fashion design and all sorts of things.

Anne- Host:

Oh no, I agree. WorldSkills is a fantastic stage, isn't it? To suddenly go, you can do all this, I agree it is. So what about your friends, Karin? The other parents, when you spoke about, your son was going to go and do a vocational education, or he was deciding to do an apprenticeship. Talk to me about their reactions?

Karin Cahill:

Within our immediate group it wasn't surprising, and those people who knew Jordan said, "Oh yeah, that really makes sense. And that's a fantastic thing for him to do." But in the friends of the friends, there was a little bit of push, not push back, but I could see a little bit of negativity of yeah, be a tradie if you don't know how to do anything else, sort of thing. There was a little bit of that, but certainly not within our immediate friends.

Anne- Host:

And I think that's what he did. I mean, there is the research out that states that only about 16% of parents actually know anything about Vocational Education and Training. So they find it extraordinarily difficult to provide advice or even any guidance because if someone comes in and says, "I wish to do maybe, web design or cyber-security, IT, landscaping, horticulture." According to the research, a lot of the parents don't even know what to do with that. Where to go. And so then quite often they direct them back to their career advisor at the school, but unfortunately we're also caught in that situation that quite often, these careers advisors in general, and I'm not saying all schools, but quite often they will then start to direct over to a university pathway because that's what they know or they think, "Oh, look, this person's doing really well academically. They should go to university." When that's really not what should be the deciding factor of where people should be going.

Anne- Host:

So thank you for your information, Karin, and I'll come back to you because I'll be really interested to talk to you about the future and what that means. But I thought I'd come over to Sam, but I do want to talk to you a little bit about some of the stuff that you've been hearing from Kristy and from Karin. And I also want to talk to you about some of the innovation stuff that you do see actually happening in the schools, because there are changes out there. There is change coming in regards to what's happening in the schools. So can I go back? And I want to just do a bit of a reflection on Kristy's area when she was saying that she left in year nine, and then she did enroll in a VET course at TAFE and then she went through here. Do you see that happen very often in the schools now? Can you talk to me about what's currently happening?

Sam:

Yeah, sure. Well, just to give you a bit of a context, I'm an assistant principal at CathWest Innovation College in Western Sydney. We're part of a Catholic system, the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta. So we're one college, one senior high school that is a part of another 28 secondary colleges where we deliver Vocational Education and Training at those colleges. Within our diocese of those 28 delivery sites, 270 teachers of Vocational Education and Training exist within our schools, and out of that we deliver as part of our Registered Training Organization, our RTO, 27 qualifications under our RTO. And I don't like talking generally, but generally speaking, regardless of what profession you're going into, the skills that exist within vocational training are transferable, they're relevant to any particular career. So yes, I was listening about Jordan and also hearing what it was that Kristy was doing within her time and thinking, jeez, for both of them, our school really would have been fantastic for both of them.

Sam:

We are at CathWest and we have two pathways. One of them, we call the Inquiry Pathway, and I'll talk briefly about our Trade Training Centers. The government put out some funding quite a long time ago about Trade Training Centers, so that schools could start offering students an opportunity to undertake school-based apprenticeship or traineeship whilst they're at school. So it is like getting a head start really. And so students come to us at the end of year 10 to apply to go into the Trade Training Center in years 11 and 12, where they commence their school-based apprenticeship or their apprenticeship. It's just that their first year of that apprenticeship is undertaken whilst they're at school. So when they graduate from year 12, they graduate into their second year. And whilst they're at school, they gain a couple more birthdays, which means they have a little bit more oomph

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when it comes to making decisions. They don't expect to be foreman on day one. We focus on the heavy trades, as well as the light trades.

Sam:

School-based apprenticeship and traineeship is just a way in which we can say that during school they're undertaking that apprenticeship or traineeship, and within our Trade Training Centers, the reason why we're quite successful actually, is because we've tailored the program around the timetable, giving them that day a week to go to work. So they have three days of undertaking their HSC courses, which is non ATAR. So we know that there's students not going into university, so they undertake three days of the training for those subjects. They do one day on the job, just like a normal apprentice would do with the employer. And they also do one day of training, whether it's on our school grounds or at TAFE, and we partner with those training organizations, such as TAFE to deliver that qualification to our students, to the same industry standard that any other student, I guess an apprentice would do outside of school. So they're already working, they're earning earning money. They also go out for two week blocks every single term so that they meet the required days on the job while they're at school. So it's a headstart more than anything else.

Sam:

So yes, to answer your question, Anne, it is vital, it exists, it's not about what's happening, it's already been happening. The Trade Training Centers have been here since 2010, we've got the runs on the board, 10 years of it, as a mom all we want for our kids is to be happy, healthy, and earning a living so they can move out. That's very true.

Anne- Host:

That's very funny. There's so much in there. I wanted to talk about, first of all, the earning while you're learning, especially with the youth unemployment currently. I mean, I know we're in a COVID situation, but even prior to COVID youth unemployment, was, depending on what state you're in, between 11 and 13%. It's now moving right up with the COVID, so we're not going to ignore what's happening in the current landscape. So the idea that your school-based apprentices have an opportunity to work and actually earn some money at the same time, how do they react to that? I suppose that would be a great selling point as well for them.

Sam:

Absolutely. I mean, I think just to tap into all of that careers advice within schools is on the up. I mean, it's a slow movement forward. So ensuring, I think number one is that students have a good understanding about what career or profession they want to go into, so that when they get that job, they've got a vested interest in it for the long haul. It's not just a part timer and they're going in for the long haul. So I think that's key, regardless Vocational Education and Training is above and beyond just training for that particular job. It's about the transferable skills, as I mentioned before, those skills that if they do lose their job because of unforeseen circumstances or they want to try something else. The statistics are that students will change their career and profession many, many times in their lifetime. So it's essential that these students get experience whilst they're at school, but also on the job, they can transfer from one job or one industry to the next.

Sam:

That's the key really that it's focused on what it is that the students love to do, that there are so many jobs out there and if nothing else, these hands-on physical jobs are going to be on the up and up here in Australia. And it's essential that our students have access, exposure to it, experience in it.

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And as well as students here at the Trade Training Center at CathWest are working continually through COVID, regardless these heavy traders they're out working, their jobs aren't lost. Our 17, 18 year old males and females are out working and helping to pay the bills. And if that's not life skills, I don't know what is.

Anne- Host:

The conversation is just exploding in regards to the idea that skills of vocational training and the jobs and those career pathways will be what will actually lead us into our recovery and out of this post-COVID environment, that the jobs that are the future are a lot in regards to the vocational area. So I think it's critically important that we do have this discussion. I want to just come back and talk to you about future and some of the advice that you've got. So what would be some of the things... I mean, your experiences that you've had, can you talk to me a little bit about what would be the advice? If they're coming to the end of their year 12 or they're considering what are they going to do? What would your recommendations be?

Kristy:

I would really encourage young children, especially leaving school to give it a go and believe in yourself. Because, I think VET training for me has given me not only a sense of achievement and success, school wasn't for me, I didn't really think school was for me at all, but I would suggest that if you have any inclination or any interests, pursue that goal, because you're only young and I think you'll have a lot more success giving your hundred percent to something that you are completely passionate about or something that you love. So I'll just suggest that if there's something you want to do, give it a leap of faith and give it a shot, because I literally believe that VET training would take you anywhere you want to get in life, not only with your skills and your career, but like I've said in my instance, I still encountered anxiety, but I'm confident now and I'm proud of myself.

Kristy:

Okay. So I'm an indigenous woman. I'm a proud indigenous woman. And one of my huge passions and my step towards doing landscape design was my keen passion on Bush tucker. So I want to keep the passion in Bush tucker alive, and I didn't really know how I could do that whilst working and making careers. So I think I've been very fortunate to be able to do the landscape design and pursue my passion and keep that knowledge alive. My passion is Bush tucker, and I hope to inspire as many young people as I can. And if I can inspire one person to be interested and spark their yearning, I guess, and that's really important for me.

Anne- Host:

I'm hearing that you seem to have really found what you are, and who you are, and what you want to be. And you can hear the confidence in your voice. I know you talked about anxiety throughout your whole life and that's a really contributing factor when you think about, where do you want to go? How do you want to learn? Will you be supported? I just wanted to ask in regards to that, what sort of support did you get through your studies in vocational education?

Kristy:

The support that I received through VET training was absolutely amazing, the teachers were really helpful, all the resources were readily available. There was nothing too silly to ask, I literally walked in feeling unsure and I left the first day knowing that these guys are here to support us, they want to see us be successful. Basically, it didn't matter what it was as far as resources, asking a mentor,

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speaking with a teacher, making friends, I gained support from everybody and that was really important to me.

Anne- Host:

Sam, I want to just come back to you. So what are some of the things that are happening in the school education system now that would be really good for parents to know about in regards to some of the programs? What are some of the things that the schools are doing or what some of the programs that are running to try to meet those needs?

Sam:

So the best way for young people, teenagers to have an understanding about what career they want to go into or knowing what skills exist or ones that they need to, I guess, up-skill in, is by going and doing work experience or work placement. So usually those students undertake a VET course in years 11 and 12 whilst at school, and that will automatically require them and therefore give them exposure and experience in doing work placements, time on the job. It's a mandatory component when they're using the VET course as part of their HSC package, that they are required, in a non-COVID world, to go out and do time on the job. So they live within that world for a set period of time, usually between five days or one week per unit that they do. So maybe one week in year 11 and another week in year 12, say. So that over the time they're at school, they've chosen subjects that they're interested in. And then they get to go out and experience that in the workplace to see how they apply their learning to the job.

Sam:

From my point of view, as an educator, I'd love to start exploring. I know we're doing it here at CathWest, by the opportunities that educators can give to kids to increase their skill capacity, and then having an opportunity to go into the workplace to then show off.

Anne- Host:

Sam, you can see the passion and you can see the actual commitment that your school has towards vocational education or providing students with the opportunity to explore pathways, with not necessarily a push that they have to go into this space. And I suppose I know that you're part of the group that won the 2019 Small Training Provider of the Year at the Australian Training Awards last year. And you can tell it's justified because it's not about sitting back, I've done that politely, just sitting back and just saying, "Well, leave it in the kid's hand." You're actually taking a really proactive.

Anne- Host:

Karin, I just want to come back to yourself for a moment. If you've got parents listening, you've got career advisors listening. What would be, based on your experience as a parent, because we know that parents and specifically mothers are one of the key or one of the critical decision makers in regards to what their children do, where they go, what they do. So your influence as a parent is really, really important. What advice would you be giving to parents and careers advisors who would be listening to this podcast?

Karin Cahill:

I think the thing is to be really open-minded and to really drill down and try and figure out what it is that the child's interested in, and look at all the different pathways to getting to a point. There's not just one way to get to the career that you want to get to. I think a lot of people think, "Well, I went

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to university, therefore my children should go to university." My husband and I have three degrees between us and he retrained as a teacher, mid-way in his forties. So he's now a primary school teacher, but neither of our children took university options and that was not a problem for us at all. So it was about them finding what they really wanted to do and then working out how you get there. So that would be my advices.

Anne- Host:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Because I think it's important that we don't discount the importance of vocational education and the importance of university. Neither one is necessarily better than the other, they all play a part in society. And there are things that you can only really do in one area that you can do in the other. But I think what is very critical is that there has been an absolute bias, even up until now, there has been a bias and the assumption that university is, we're all working together to change that idea that that should be the plan, it shouldn't be the alternative option. It should be, "Well, this is the option. And if that doesn't work out well, maybe I might do it." And I can see, Sam, you wanted to say something on that.

Sam:

Yeah, I did. I think the biggest part is education, is educating our parents, educating society. It's not until we have success within a range of different careers that are vocationally, educationally trained along the way. I think it's essential that whatever we're doing out in the real world and the kids are getting those hands on experiences, that that is shown off, showcased that the stories like what's happening with Jordan, your son, Karin, and also for you Kristy. I mean, they're the stories that matter, that young people, young teenagers and the parents of those teenagers are empowered by your stories. And the more that they're out there and the kids here that they can do this, they don't have to fit in with the social stereotypes of university pathways being the only way that you can have a secure job. We need to change that socially, because I think there's stigma that is around it. And that's not driven by the kids, it's not necessarily even driven by schools. I think it's just the way it is and therefore that's not okay. The way it is shouldn't be the way it always has to be.

Anne- Host:

And what the audience and the listeners can't see is the fact that everybody here is nodding their heads going, "Yes. Yes, that's absolutely right." I know on other podcasts that I've run, a lot of the panelists, and they're young, are saying, "It's not our problem. It seems to be a problem of the older generation enforcing this stigma, but really in fact, we're all okay until we get confronted by these perceptions about what should be the right pathway. So I'd like to finish off by saying, thank you very much to everybody. I do appreciate it. As all of you have said, the stories are so critical to getting people to actually consider and open their mind to the possibilities. And that is what is important. 17 jobs over five to six careers is the current statistics in regards to what people will be doing. So I think it's critically important that we just open our minds, identify the fact that the success one person is not necessarily what success looks like for another person. What drives them or how they define what success looks right. But success to some other people, is just a recognition or a realization of themselves that they can do something. And that they are able to contribute to community, to society and to look after their family.

Anne- Host:

Even though I'm saying that I... Kristy, I can see that you're wanting to say something.

Kristy:

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Yeah, just really touching based on what you said. I really just wanted to put in one last thing that VET training really is a big test. You know somebody that is a little bit unsure of himself, just encourage them to give it a go. I really, I can't speak highly of it enough.

Anne- Host:

That's beautiful. So everybody I'd like to thank you for your contributions and for your time, I appreciate the conversation with you because it is. It is, it's a real critical conversation. We just need to continue it happening. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors and I'd like you to stay safe, especially in this time. It's been great to listen to what you have to say.

Anne- Host:

Thank you very much for joining us for this podcast. We hope that you enjoyed listening. If you want more information on Vocational Education and Training, career pathways and your own way to succeed, check out the National Careers Institute website. You can find them nci.dese.gov.au. This podcast was an initiative of the Australian government. We looked forward to you joining us for another episode in this podcast series, but in the meantime, please stay safe and take care.