



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2007-08))

Members:

**MS A BRESNAN (The Chair)
MS J BURCH (The Deputy Chair)
MR J HANSON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2009

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr S Lilburn (Ph: 6205 0199)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Committee Office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

APPEARANCES

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 9.01 am.

Appearances:

Stanhope, Mr Jon, Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage

Chief Minister's Department

Cappie-Wood, Mr Andrew, Chief Executive

Whitney, Mr David, Director artsACT, Arts, Communications, Events and Protocol

Cultural Facilities Corporation

Elvin, Ms Harriet, Chief Executive Officer

THE CHAIR: I would like to say good morning to everybody and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs in its inquiry into annual reports for 2007-08. I draw everyone's attention to the privilege statement on the card, which you have probably all seen before. I want to make sure that everybody has read the privilege card and that everyone understands the implications of the statement in that privilege card.

Before we proceed with questions, Mr Stanhope, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Stanhope: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, I do not wish to, other than to say thank you for the invitation to attend, and officials stand ready to provide whatever assistance they are able to provide.

THE CHAIR: I will ask the first question, if that is okay with everybody. The first question I have relates to page 14, strategic indicator 5. It is mainly in relation to the centenary of Canberra celebrations. The question I have is about the involvement of other cultural organisations here in the ACT; in particular the Canberra Museum and Art Gallery, and also the Canberra Theatre. Have they been involved in planning for the event? And what about working with other cultural institutions here in the ACT—is that happening at all?

Mr Cappie-Wood: There have been wide-ranging discussions about the nature and extent of the centenary of Canberra. There has been a recent study looking at the possibility of the range and type of events that could take place. This has followed considerable consultation with a wide variety of cultural institutions and members of society around Canberra. I am aware that there have been some discussions with the Cultural Facilities Corporation in terms of the opportunities that that might present. I will ask Harriet Elvin to tell the committee how the Canberra Museum and Art Gallery has been involved.

Ms Elvin: Certainly, the corporation has been closely involved in the interdepartmental committee that is working on the centenary projects. We are discussing a whole range of projects with that committee and with the coordinator for

the centenary. For example, we are looking at an exhibition that might focus on Canberra Gold recipients. These are people who have lived in Canberra for more than 50 years and we think that their stories are interesting stories to tell.

We are also featuring the Dawn Waterhouse collection in a number of exhibitions leading up to the centenary. As you may know, Dawn Waterhouse is a longstanding citizen of Canberra, and indeed went to Calthorpes House—which is one of the historic properties that the corporation runs—as a young child. She built up a collection of Canberra souvenirs and memorabilia which we were able to purchase with a special grant that the ACT government provided. We think that that collection will be an ideal focus for a number of activities and programs in the lead-up to the centenary.

Mr Stanhope: In relation to the centenary, that is an issue, of course, for another area of the Chief Minister's Department. I could go into some detail about some of the thinking and planning that have been done, but I do not know whether it would be useful in the context of the use of time today. Suffice to say that issues around culture, artistic expression and the arts will be, we hope, a very significant feature of the celebrations in 2013. There will be a very broad embrace of all of the cultural institutions and the artistic and creative endeavours generally throughout the ACT.

THE CHAIR: My next question relates to page 39. Is that going too far ahead for everyone?

MS BURCH: No, I think that is where we were going anyway.

THE CHAIR: I have a question specifically in relation to the Canberra Glassworks. It notes on that page that in the first year of operation the glassworks has been attracting quite a large audience to Canberra. Is there any particular data kept on those statistics?

Mr Stanhope: I think there is.

Mr Whitney: Yes, Canberra Glassworks are keeping regular attendance figures at the Canberra Glassworks. I have not got those figures here but I can certainly provide those attendance figures for the first year.

THE CHAIR: All right, thank you.

Mr Whitney: Anecdotally, the weekends, with the weekend markets there, the bus depot markets, often result in thousands of people coming through the Canberra Glassworks. The public programs and activities that happen on the weekends are focused on getting people to stay a little bit longer, and a lot of the programs that involve people doing workshops within the glass centre have kept that attendance figure very high.

Mr Stanhope: It is probably fair to say that the Canberra Glassworks is attracting greater visitation than any other ACT-managed arts facility. Of course, that is very much, as Mr Whitney has said, as a result of the very convenient co-location with the Sunday markets. But weekend visitation to the glassworks is enormous. I think it

really does strengthen thinking or reinforce the thinking that we are doing in relation to the creation of a more concentrated arts precinct within Kingston and within that area of Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I will open it to other members of the committee, if they have any questions.

MS BURCH: On the glassworks?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS BURCH: I have a general question. There were some changes in 2009 to the 2009 ACT arts fund. Can you tell me a little bit about those changes—the first half of those changes?

Mr Stanhope: I will ask Mr Whitney to go to the detail of that, but there were some significant changes. Most particularly, of course, there was a significant additional injection of funding into arts—about a 10 per cent increase in arts funding, the first significant or quantum increase in funding for quite some time. Mr Whitney can go to the detail of the implications of the funding increase and some other structural changes that were made in relation to the funding.

Mr Whitney: Yes, with the arts fund, there were some changes made. Maybe they came out of the process of consultation with the ACT Cultural Council, who provide a process of peer review for the assessing of money that goes out through the arts fund. Looking across the arts sector, there was an interesting divide between what we call our project funding, which is where individual artists can make application for one-off projects, and our key arts organisations, which are the major arts organisations we have, and we have 22 of them.

There was a point in the middle where organisations were not quite of a scale to be delivering key arts organisation activity but were much greater than a one-off project. So we introduced what we call a program category. This was one of the quite significant changes that were introduced to help organisations that might only run one program a year but it might take the whole year to develop that program. So recipients such as the Canberra International Film Festival and Pro Musica, the International Music Festival, are the sort of organisations that have now successfully become part of that program category. So there was quite a significant change there.

The funding enabled us to commit about \$3.3 million to key arts organisations: \$950,000 for projects and community arts activity; \$70,000 for two creative arts fellowships; \$20,000 for out-of-round projects; \$20,000 in poetry prizes; and \$10,000 in book of the year. There is a little bit left over, but obviously there is some rounding that happened there. That is where the investment of that money went, across into the arts fund.

MS BURCH: Are the 22 major organisations a fairly static group or are we growing more arts?

Mr Whitney: It can move, depending on what the art activity is. During the year, we

put one of the arts organisations on notice—Canberra Arts Marketing. They have been around for some time, and the nature of the cooperative marketing project they were running was seen by the field as not necessarily continuing to provide all of the services that were required by individual arts organisations. The Australia Council were a co-funder and have withdrawn their funding as well. They withdrew their funding first, and then the Cultural Council were looking at what Canberra Arts Marketing was able to provide to us. So they were put on 12 months notice and, as that 12 months unfolded, we were able to increase the funding to each of those key arts organisations to pick up the individual marketing and promotional activity that they were saying they could deliver themselves better, rather than have it going through a cooperative marketing process.

The opportunity for a new organisation to satisfy key arts organisation criteria is there. The 22 key arts organisations is quite a large number. The larger ones and the longer standing ones are things like the Tuggeranong arts centre and the new Canberra Glassworks, through to the very modest support we provide to people like the Canberra Potters Society.

Mr Stanhope: The other significant change was moving from three to five-year agreements.

Mr Whitney: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Moving that funding to the individual organisations for the marketing, has that been more successful? Has there been any evidence that it has been more successful than going through a central body?

Mr Whitney: It is very early days yet to see what the effect of that has been. Certainly, we ran a series of consultations and workshops with key arts organisations last year. There is a communication strategy that we are working through with them to provide them with a way forward. Part of the change is towards audience development—actually measuring audiences and ensuring that the audiences grow and continue to expand.

The Australia Council has redirected its funding to a project that they are working on, starting off with where the box office material is collected through ticketing systems. Certainly, the Canberra Theatre Centre is playing a central role in Canberra by providing data that they are collecting. They are also working with the Street Theatre and with Tuggeranong, but there is not the same degree of sophistication in their ticketing system as with the Canberra Theatre Centre and with the Street Theatre.

That information will be collected nationally to provide a much greater understanding of how audiences pick and choose the options to go to theatre. The plan is, over time, to roll that out to other art activity. It is not quite as easy at this stage to do that because mostly with gallery attendances we do not collect patron details. We collect attendance numbers but we do not collect perhaps the exit surveys that we would like to collect—where they live, what choices they have made and how often they will repeat-visit to that particular gallery.

MRS DUNNE: On the question of Canberra arts marketing, Chief Minister, what has

been put in place to ensure that the gap really is filled and what steps were taken to ensure that the money that was originally the Australia Council money is in some way kept in the territory for audience development?

Mr Stanhope: Mr Whitney?

Mr Whitney: To answer the second part of the question first, the project I talked about, this box office project, is called “Advice”, and that Advice project is the one that is providing that data collection. That money is used to engage somebody through Canberra ticketing to work in there and to both collect and manipulate that data so that it can be used as part of this national survey. In terms of the first part of your question, as to what consultation was taken—

MRS DUNNE: No, what is in place to ensure—

Mr Whitney: What is in place?

MRS DUNNE: that we actually do get the same bang for our buck, or a better bang for our buck?

Mr Whitney: Sure. The money was redistributed to the key arts organisations. So we will be monitoring through their business plans that they are doing what they said they would be delivering. They would prefer their own determination of their money going to their own promotional campaigns.

MRS DUNNE: On notice, could you get back to the committee on how the money that was taken out of Canberra Arts Marketing was redistributed across the peak organisations?

Mr Whitney: Certainly. I have not got that here, but we can provide that.

MRS DUNNE: Thanks.

MR HANSON: My question relates to the per cent for art scheme. Could you tell us how much we have allocated in the 2008-09 budget for that, and are we on track to expend that money?

Mr Stanhope: I will ask Mr Whitney, but I think we do have those numbers and I do believe we are on track. I will have to ask Mr Whitney to go to the details of exactly how it is being expended. Just to assist Mr Whitney, let me say that we use a variety of processes for identifying, commissioning and helping to purchase works under the per cent for art scheme. Some of the commissioning processes are quite lengthy. We call for expressions of interest. There is a formal process through a public art advisory council chaired by the head of the Cultural Council that chooses the work through a variety of mechanisms. An artist may then take up to 18 months or more to complete the work.

So in relation to the process of moneys appropriated in this financial year, it is almost certain that the money will not be expended. The money will almost certainly be committed in the financial year and initial payments will be made. Depending on the

purchase process, some of the works are purchased off the shelf, particularly from the major sculpture exhibitions. It would be interesting to do an assessment or an analysis of the numbers that are purchased as opposed to those that are commissioned. But with respect to the commissioning process, in terms of the numbers that Mr Whitney may be able to give you, because of the variety of processes, all that money will not be expended. The cheques will not be paid within the financial year, but I think the commitments will be made within the financial year—at least, I hope they will—and the artists for the identified projects will be—

MR HANSON: And how much is that?

Mr Whitney: That amount is a total of \$991,887 allocated from the per cent for art scheme, and \$104,000 from a second appropriation.

MR HANSON: Have you received any feedback from the community on those public artworks that are going up—the ones for this financial year or last financial year?

Mr Stanhope: In terms of those that have been—

MR HANSON: Have we sought expressions of response from the community to say, “Are we happy with the money that we spent?” That is nearly a million dollars on—

Mr Stanhope: In a formal sense?

MR HANSON: In a formal sense, have we gone to the community and said—

Mr Stanhope: I do not believe we have in a formal sense—whether or not we have undertaken a sort of post purchase or installation process for determining that. We do consult with different community organisations.

MR HANSON: If I could explain my point: we get a lot of community feedback about the various artworks that are put up. A lot of it is mixed, but certainly a lot of it is negative. I am wondering if we have engaged in a process where we are finding out whether this process of putting up public artworks is—

Mr Stanhope: Is supported by the community?

MR HANSON: Is supported by the community. Exactly.

Mr Stanhope: I am not sure that we have.

Mr Whitney: We do not have a formal mechanism after the fact of the works being installed, but in the process of selecting the sites, and also in some cases with the commissioning process, we do involve people from the community in that selection process. For example, with the works that have been installed in the southern area, around the Woden area and down at Tuggeranong, the Woden Valley Community Council and the Tuggeranong Community Council were involved in a consultation on location and have been supportive of the work.

MRS DUNNE: Were they involved in the selection of the pieces?

Mr Whitney: No, they are not involved in the selection of the pieces. The public art panel is the selection—

MRS DUNNE: In relation to the recent installation in the Gungahlin town centre, who was involved in the selection of that?

Mr Whitney: Involved in the selection? That was part funded by the LDA, so the LDA, the local land development association, the Gungahlin Community Council and members of the public art panel were involved. Procurement Solutions were on the tender evaluation team as well.

MRS DUNNE: Who actually selected the piece?

Mr Whitney: Representatives from those organisations.

Mr Stanhope: The LDA, the Gungahlin Community Council—

MRS DUNNE: The Gungahlin Community Council was involved in that?

Mr Stanhope: Yes. Alan Kerlin is the greatest champion of that particular work.

THE CHAIR: I am mindful of the time. We have got less than 10 minutes. I do not want to break off questions, but I was wondering if we might have some questions on the other report—the Cultural Facilities Corporation.

Mr Stanhope: I might just say that it is an interesting issue and it has been controversial. Perhaps there is an issue worthy of broader philosophical debate in relation to the role of government in the installation of art and the role of government in art. I see some criticism of the fringe festival this year but I would defend to the death the art that was presented through the fringe festival.

The other day, just in the last week, I was minded to see the visitor numbers to the Eiffel Tower in Paris. I think 120 million people a year or something absurd visit the Eiffel Tower. It is interesting to go back a century to read the editorials and the community feedback on the Eiffel Tower—saying that it was an absolutely appalling waste of money and an outrageous expression of a government priority to build such a useless structure, a structure with no purpose. Yet it is the most visited icon in the world. It is a debate that I really enjoy having—perhaps at another time.

THE CHAIR: We probably do not have time to have it here.

MR HANSON: If we can continue it some other time, Mr Stanhope, I would like to do that.

Mr Stanhope: Yes, I would enjoy that.

MR HANSON: As would I.

Mr Stanhope: It is an interesting issue.

THE CHAIR: We might move on, because we probably have other questions and we have only another five minutes or so.

Mr Stanhope: I have no doubt that through the public art program we will one day strike our own David. I have no doubt of it.

MR HANSON: If you continue spending that sort of money on the—

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson and Mr Stanhope, can we move to the annual report of the Cultural Facilities Corporation.

MS BURCH: I have a question on the Canberra Theatre Centre. In the report it said that the year was a high year, with the highest number of subscription packages sold. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Ms Elvin: Yes. The year 2008 was a particularly successful one for subscriptions; we had the highest number ever sold. This year is shaping up well—not quite as strongly as that, but it is shaping up well. Of course, we still have quite a long selling period for subscriptions. You can sell subscriptions to a certain point in the year as long as there is available theatre product to put together a subscription package.

MS BURCH: On the other side, it makes a comment on a number of anniversaries through this period. Was that a success and did it have a ripple impact on numbers coming through the different facilities?

Ms Elvin: There were certainly a number of successful anniversary celebrations. The Playhouse celebrated its 10th birthday. Canberra Museum and Gallery celebrated its 10th birthday with a whole program of activities that went right throughout 2008 and culminated in the launch of a major publication that focuses on the CMAG collection. Calthorpes House celebrated its 80th birthday in 2007, so that fell within the reporting year and again there were a range of community-based activities to help celebrate that.

THE CHAIR: I have a question in relation to the Nolan gallery and collection. I know there have been a number of issues about that. The family have expressed strong wishes that the collection stay at Lanyon house. I am just wondering whether, by funding the new space in the Canberra Museum and Gallery, the decision has been made that the collection will not be returning to Lanyon house.

Mr Stanhope: This is a very vexed and difficult issue for the government. We have a view about the suitability of Lanyon. We do not believe that it is suitable; it is not fit for purpose in its current state. That is why the works were removed. They were removed to be safeguarded.

We the government have had a long-held view that, whilst respecting the views of Lady Mary, we have been concerned at the level of visitation that the collection receives. To be pragmatic about it, we have some concerns in the context of the level of visitation and the cost of maintaining and securing the collection at Lanyon. Visitation was down to 5,000 a year at Lanyon—and at significant cost in terms of staffing and the facility. We the government have a sort of fairly pragmatic view or

response just to that issue of visitation and cost, and the cost of maintaining a significant collection in a reasonably isolated place.

Our thinking is informed by a number of different—and at times conflicting and competing—views, but at the end of the day the collection is the commonwealth's. The ACT government has maintained it on trust. I have sought to engage the commonwealth in a final decision around the collection. We are awaiting advice from the minister for territories, Mr Debus, in relation to our proposal that the collection be permanently housed at the Canberra Museum and Gallery. We have been waiting for some little time. I know that Lady Mary has very recently written to Mr Debus, again expressing her view. I have had discussions with Mr Debus in relation to the ACT government's view and perspective; we are awaiting a formal commonwealth position on its view about how the collection might be best maintained and housed.

THE CHAIR: We have probably got time for one more question. Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: I want to look at the parking study. Where are we with the parking study? Has it been completed? Where might it go from here?

Ms Elvin: Yes, that parking study has been completed. It was looking at future parking needs for Canberra theatre patrons. In the past, we found that patrons are very keen to have convenient, accessible car parking. Indeed, that is quite a major determinant of whether they choose to come to the theatre or not. Maunsell Australia have done that work for us. They have looked at various future projections, because obviously the sites to either side of the Canberra Theatre Centre may be released for development in the future. One thing that we wanted to build into that process was to try to ensure that there are sufficient publicly available car parking spaces when those surface car parks disappear, as inevitably they will.

The demographic of theatre goers tends to be women—middle-aged to older women. They have particular concerns about the accessibility of car parking, and security, lighting and so forth. There is also a concern by a number of our older patrons that they can easily access disabled car parking spots or in other ways ensure that they have ready access to the theatre.

We are trying to build the needs of our patrons into all the planning for those sites around the Canberra Theatre Centre.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Burch, did you want to ask a question?

MRS BURCH: I am conscious of the time, so I might just put it on notice. It is just a question around the return on investment through arts.

Mr Stanhope: Our souls are enriched incalculably.

MR HANSON: But our pockets are empty.

Mr Stanhope: But it is our souls that are important, Mr Hanson.

MS BURCH: We are looking at this for every dollar of public money invested.

MR HANSON: Is it? And you go out to Belconnen—

THE CHAIR: Ms Burch is speaking. Could we just have one person at a time.

Mr Stanhope: The wealth of the soul is a very important determinant of the welfare of the community.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We are out of time.

MS BURCH: I just draw your attention to it.

Short adjournment.

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Planning and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation

Department of Education and Training

Davy, Ms Janet, Acting Chief Executive

Howard, Ms Joanne, Acting Executive Director, Schools

Harris, Ms Carol, Acting Executive Director, Business Improvement Services

Whybrow, Mr Mark, Director, Finance and Facilities

Vasey, Ms Jocelyn, Director, Training and Tertiary Education

Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority

Service, Mr James, Chairman

Guy, Mr Gary Chief Executive Officer

THE CHAIR: I welcome everyone to the committee meeting. We have new people here. Mr Barr, thank you for coming. I draw people's attention to the privilege statement, just to make sure that everyone has read that and that they understand the implications in the statement.

Before we proceed to questions from the committee, I invite Mr Barr to present an opening statement he would like to make.

Mr Barr: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today. I am very pleased to be able to discuss the department's 2007-08 annual report. From the outset, I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the team at the Department of Education and Training for their hard work during this annual report period—and of course all of the time. I am very pleased to be able to work with such a dedicated team of public servants, who assist me in my role as minister and play a leading role in educating the next generation of territorians. I thank them all very much for being here this morning—in quite large numbers; I did not realise there were so many of you. Terrific. Thank you very much for being here.

The 2007-08 annual report period covers a number of significant achievements within the ACT education system. We grappled with some significant national reform proposals and took a leading role in national debate in relation to a number of important education reforms.

At a local level, we had a significant school capital works program through the 2007-08 financial year, building on the work that commenced with the 2006-07 budget. There was a significant—I think record—level of capital works within the ACT public school system and it was no mean feat to achieve the level of refurbishment and new school infrastructure and to address some of the pretty significant challenges that our public school infrastructure has faced, particularly given the average age of ACT school buildings. I see that as a significant achievement in the 2007-08 financial year.

Aside from a bricks and mortar response within the education system, we undertook

the first year of national testing. There were a number of significant new pieces of work in terms of the new curriculum framework that came into place in the territory following years of work and a trial period. So there were some significant reforms that have had to be implemented through the ACT education system.

There are the challenges that we continue to face in responding to students who have high and complex needs. They continue to provide challenges for the department and for our schools. The government has responded through additional resources in a number of key areas that are outlined in the annual report and I am sure they will be the subject of questions as we move through the hearing.

I will wrap up on that note. I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear and we look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Barr. I might just kick off with questions. My first question relates to the very first page. Ms Davy, I note that you are acting in a position at the moment and that two of the three school directors are also acting in positions. I am wondering if there has been a time frame established around filling those positions permanently. And supplementary to that, I am wondering if having acting positions has had any impact on negotiating the EBA.

Mr Barr: In relation to recruitment, I understand that interviews are taking place this week for the director of schools position, and a formal process for a new chief executive is underway. We have a very talented team within the department, so I do not believe that having people acting in other positions has in any way impacted on the operation of the department. In fact, it has provided some useful experience and opportunities for the next generation of leaders within the department. In relation to the EBA negotiations, they have not formally commenced. The bargaining period has not been notified. A series of preliminary meetings have occurred with the AEU; I think they number two in total at this point. The current EBA does not expire until 30 June this year.

THE CHAIR: My next question is in regard to the first page of the overview, page 4. The report refers to the program for international student assessment results. It says that this is evidence that ACT students perform better than other Australian students. The report does not make reference to the shift towards low equity results in the ACT or the related growing gap in terms of achievement for some students. The annual report does not give any details on how those issues are being addressed; I am just interested in how that is being handled.

Ms Davy: If you turn to pages 106 to 109 in the annual report, it does actually give you more detail in terms of the international assessment programs that have occurred in this reporting period. The significant one was PISA in 2006, results which we were able to report on in this annual report. Basically it tells us that the ACT, as you can see in those three graphs, is still performing above the national average and better than any other jurisdiction in Australia.

On page 109 it actually reports on an independent analysis that we got the ACER to do in terms of looking at our trend data I guess from PISA in 2000, 2003 and 2006 because we were concerned that there had been a number of statements made about

low SES and equity results. Basically, that analysis shows that we are still performing strongly. There are some small issues in terms of low SES in the bottom quartile but we have got to remember that in PISA the low SES group is defined as the bottom 25 per cent or the bottom quartile for each jurisdiction. So our low SES group is not comparable to the low SES group of New South Wales, Victoria or other jurisdictions.

In terms of what we are doing, what we have done for all of our assessments is to look at both our local ACTAP data and the most recent NAPLAN data in terms of our literacy and numeracy achievements. We have also looked not so much at the PISA results but, again, at all of the other international results. We have done an analysis of all of that to try to determine where we believe might be our strengths and where might be our weaknesses. Certainly it is showing that we are doing strongly in issues of reading and in all aspects of numeracy. It is showing we do need to do a little bit of work around the writing and spelling aspects and it is certainly showing in our jurisdiction, like most other jurisdictions across the country, that it is our Indigenous student results where we need to actually focus our attention. I guess that is why there is a major national agenda under COAG looking at the Indigenous student results.

THE CHAIR: As you have noted, we are still performing well. The issue I am more interested in is about actually closing that gap. What has been done around that end? You have noted Indigenous students are a particular group. Obviously, because literacy and numeracy might not actually be the best, you need to engage them in other ways. I guess I am asking what is being done to do that in terms of closing the gap and keeping them engaged in the school system. I am talking obviously about Indigenous students and also other students who are performing at a lower level.

Ms Davy: I will talk about Indigenous students first. As you have said, numeracy and literacy is only one aspect of trying to close the literacy and numeracy gap for Indigenous students. We have to remember that we have got a very small Indigenous student population and they are reasonably spread around all of our schools; so we do not have a solid concentration of them in any one school. Some of our strategies are probably a little different from those in other jurisdictions.

The first big thing around literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students is about keeping them in school. We are doing a lot more work around Indigenous education workers based in clusters with high schools and primary schools trying to connect with their parents, their communities—trying to encourage them to attend schools first of all. We are also doing some work around trying to track Indigenous students so we can actually track them through school as they are moving from year 3 into year 9, so we can actually have a stronger look at their results.

There is some significant work being done in terms of school principal leadership development around understanding the needs of Indigenous students and we have been running in the last two years some substantial PD for principals around that. We require schools to have particular targets and strategies around Indigenous education in their school plans. We have been developing those over the last couple of years, making sure every Indigenous student has their own individual learning plans within schools.

I guess another component is quality teaching. We might want to talk about quality

teaching in more detail later. Certainly, the quality teaching framework that we have adopted in all of our ACT schools is one that comes with a strength of evidence that shows that it can make a difference for Indigenous student learning outcomes; so we are implementing that from the start of this year in a strong, focused way.

Specifically around literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students, we have got what we call a K-4 early Indigenous literacy and numeracy strategy, which is basically trying to pick up students as they come into kindergarten—pick them up early—and provide them with intensive literacy and numeracy support, provide the teachers with intensive literacy and numeracy support. We have actually got five staff in that team that work in a number of schools in quite an intensive way, both with the teacher and with individual Indigenous students, around literacy and numeracy achievement in the early years. I could probably go on, but that might be enough.

MS BURCH: Also on page 4—it is mentioned also through the rest of the document—mention is made of the curriculum framework “Every chance to learn”. I understand that it is a new curriculum implemented over this reporting period and you have highlighted it there. Can you tell us a little about what support has been provided to assist schools in that implementation and where it is going today?

Ms Davy: Yes, I think in the last budget we got some additional funds to support the curriculum framework. Basically, since it was released in 2007 we have done quite a number of things. First of all, the actual curriculum framework itself has been given to every teacher.

We have created a new “Every chance to learn” website, which includes a lot of information for teachers about some of the research background around why we put some content into that framework. It provides sample units of work, and school programs. We are trying to increase that as we get schools to share some of those things. It provides links to other teaching resources et cetera.

The other strategy we have used for some time since we were developing this over a four-year process is to have every school, both government and non-government, have a curriculum renewal contact person who is teacher identified. We have supported those over the last few years with a range of PD opportunities.

We are going to keep those contact teachers going as networks, bring them out at least once a term and that is an opportunity for us to monitor how implementation is going, but also to support them with new resources to take back and work within the schools. We have developed a lot of different resources. We have sourced a lot of different teaching resources from other jurisdictions to populate, I guess, both the website and the range of resources that teachers have to do that.

We have an ongoing professional learning program for teachers. You can have a look at that on our professional learning calendar and see the range of opportunities there. They are in different categories of things. We offer PD for different subject groups—for example, for maths teachers or for English teachers—around how to implement the curriculum framework. We also offer PD for different categories of teachers like early childhood teachers or teachers in secondary schools et cetera, so they can look across the board about how to plan.

There is quite a range of support available, and that is just the range of specific support for curriculum implementation. I would argue that things such as quality teaching and other initiatives that we have provided in terms of physical education and languages education also link to and support the implementation of the new framework.

MS BURCH: With this website, is there opportunity if there is innovative curriculum development in one school for it to be shared around other schools?

Ms Davy: Yes, very much so, and it is one of the things we are encouraging and trying to use those contact teachers for. Certainly, when we do some of the PD activities, if some of our curriculum officers see that this teacher from this school has come along with a really good idea, we will work with them and encourage them to put their sample program onto that website.

THE CHAIR: Just around that too, in terms of the support being offered, is that also around topics which teachers might not necessarily be confident in, in terms of if it is arts, or if it is music? I am thinking in particular of languages. If that sort of program is being implemented, what sort of support will there be around teachers to do that? I am thinking probably just beyond too the one-hour lesson a week if it is a language. What has been done to promote that so kids keep those skills?

Mr Barr: That has certainly been a focus for the government. Additional resources have been provided. I think that this year we have 11 additional primary schools now offering language programs. The additional budget funds that were provided both in the second appropriation in this financial year we are talking about in the annual report and then in subsequent budgets have provided the capacity for the department and schools to respond and to offer additional programs.

Of course, the challenge we face always in recruiting teachers in specialist areas is a considerable one. It is a competitive market for quality teachers; there is no doubting that. We have been innovative in our response and sought to establish good working relationships with, for example, embassies that are able to provide some additional support to the school system.

We take advantage of being the national capital and having those facilities available to us. It has obviously been the subject of some debate within the Assembly around how we operate our language programs. We did take a decision a little while back to reduce the number of languages we were offering to try and concentrate on eight key languages and to ensure that there were pathways for students, so that in the case of primary schools that fed into a high school, you could continue that language study through high school and then on to the feeder college.

Previously it was a bit disjointed. If you commenced study in a particular language in primary school you may not necessarily have been able to continue on in high school. That was raised by students and the P&C a few years back; so we went back and had a look at how we were delivering our language programs. We sought to utilise the technology we have available to us, particularly through our broadband network, to be innovative in how we deliver those language programs.

MR HANSON: My first question relates to page 6, where reference is made to early childhood education. It is stated:

Preliminary plans have been completed for four early childhood schools to be developed on the sites of Isabella Plains, Lyons, Narrabundah and Southern Cross Primary Schools.

How is that going? Are the enrolments what we expected? What are the numbers there?

Mr Barr: I think the enrolments have exceeded expectations for the first year of those schools. I have just been passed a note here. Southern Cross in Scullin has 42 in the preschool, 13 in kinder, 10 in year 1 and eight in year 2. Narrabundah has 48 in their preschool, eight in kinder, four in year 1 and two in year 2. Lyons has 28 in their preschool and seven in their kindergarten. Isabella Plains has 57 in their preschool, 13 in kinder, 10 in year 1 and three in year 2.

As we have discussed in the Assembly, Mr Hanson, the expectation always was that the preschool would be where the enrolments would be strongest and that those preschool students move into kindergarten next year, and so on and so forth. These are small schools, they were always designed to be. So the capacity in each is around the 42 per year level; so you are talking about 170 students in total.

Once we add the childcare component, I think they will be very strong in their key focus, which is birth to eight years of age. But it is no surprise to me that enrolments in year 2, for example, where the students will be at the school for one year, are not particularly high in the first year of operation. But by the fourth year, when this year's preschoolers are in year 2, that should flow through and the schools will reach capacity.

The reason I am confident about this is that the one existing government preschool to year 2 school, the O'Connor cooperative school, has been operating at actual capacity for years. It has been a very successful program. It is a small school; it has one class in each year. It has about 84 students I think in total, but it operates very successfully. There is always a waiting list to get into that school; so I think expanding that model to other parts of the city will be very popular. I have no doubt that with the co-location of childcare on the site, it will be very attractive for young families.

THE CHAIR: Just around that, with the early childhood centres, when was the promotional material first made available for these for the target communities?

Mr Barr: 2008.

Ms Davy: Last year. We appointed the principals of the four schools in the second half of last year; so they actually took on the role of principal and started working in the local school communities, talking to parents around it and promoting the services that would be available.

We also provided brochures and leaflets to communities in the local area, households

in the local area, community organisations, shopping centres et cetera, in the second half of the year to promote that. I think we had some of the principals out there in shopping centres with the school banners trying to promote it with shoppers on Saturday mornings as they were coming in, and a number of different strategies such as that.

THE CHAIR: The promotion and those actions, has that encouraged students to stay on, I guess is what I am trying to say?

Mr Barr: Certainly that has been the feedback from when I visited the schools and spoke with the principals. These schools appeal most to young families who have kids really in the zero to five age group. It then means they can avoid the double drop-off, if they can have childcare and that early childhood education on the one site. So that is its most appealing aspect for younger families.

It is often a challenge if you have got a primary school age student and a younger child. You have got childcare somewhere and the school is somewhere else. Having the two combined is very attractive and there is no doubt from the expressions of interest we are getting for the childcare provision that these schools will be full within two or three years.

THE CHAIR: Where there may have been an indication that there were going to be smaller numbers, has any risk assessment around that been done and what will happen to those students if there are smaller numbers? Have you done that?

Ms Davy: Yes, it has, but we are taking these preliminary figures from this first year as a very strong indication that we are not going to have to manage a lot of risk around building the numbers. As the minister indicated, we were always under the impression that the year 2 would be difficult in the first year to have at capacity and a number of these schools are running with a combined year 1 and year 2 class. That is common practice, not just in early childhood schools but in our primary school sector where there are small numbers; so we are not envisaging any major issues at all with this.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Does anyone have any further questions about that?

MS BURCH: Not right now, no.

THE CHAIR: Did you want to move on?

MS BURCH: I am happy to.

THE CHAIR: Did you have any further questions, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Not on that, no. But I have a question on another issue.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR HANSON: On page 9 reference is made to schools renewal. I have some questions about the Urambi primary school and actually what is happening there. Is

that school closing, I suppose would be my first question?

Mr Barr: We are currently engaged in a consultation period as required by the Education Act. That act stipulates that the minister must put a proposal to the school community. I know that at the end of 2006 I flagged that such a formal proposal would be put. In the interim we have been having a series of consultations with that school community around the design of a new facility that will be about 150 to 200 metres further along the street that Urambi is on.

In relation to the former Kambah high site, under section 20 of the Education Act the minister for education is able to build new schools. That decision was made following a consultation in 2006 around future uses for Kambah. It was, I think, a specific recommendation of the education union in their submission on the 2020 process, but it was also raised by a number of community representatives during meetings with me over that six-month period back in 2006. There is a formal requirement under the Education Act for a formal six-month consultation period on a proposal to close or amalgamate a school and that is the proposal that the government has put forward. In practical terms, it means that Urambi primary would move 200 metres up the road into a brand new building.

That is the proposal and to date—and it is only early in the formal consultation stage—the feedback on that is very positive. There are a number of advantages, obviously, in a new school building, not least the capacity for such a building to have the latest in information communication technology and the latest in specialist teaching facilities and—I think most importantly for schools in northern Tuggeranong that were built in a hurry in the late 1970s—and to be a much higher quality building with significantly improved environmental performance. There is no doubt that the schools that were built in Kambah and Wanniasa in the late 1970s were particularly poor performers against any environmental assessment.

MR HANSON: In terms of the consultation process, I understand that this school was not part of the original bunch of schools which were listed in the Towards 2000 policy in 2006, was it? It came afterwards.

Mr Barr: No, this was not listed. It was not a proposed school for closure at the beginning of the 2020 consultation process, but during the consultation process it came up as an option. It was specifically recommended by the education union in their submission because, as you may recall, at the time of the 2020 announcements, a previous consultation period, the decision had been made in relation to the Kingsford Smith school to effectively consolidate two primary schools and one high school on the one site. The question was raised during the six-month consultation period: why not undertake a similar redevelopment in Kambah? The original proposal in 2020 was to close two of the primary schools and the high school. Following that consultation period and a range of issues that were raised, the government responded to those ideas and committed \$54 million for a new school—I think I am happy to table the letter—on 13 December 2006.

In announcing the decisions, I wrote to the Urambi school community indicating the outcomes of the consultation and the next steps in the consultation and what would be required. It was also signalled in the document that they were the final decisions on

the 2020 consultation process. So it is interesting, just as an observation on the political process, that throughout 2006 I was accused of not listening and not responding to community views in relation to the 2020 process. Here is a classic example of stakeholders and the community submitting an alternative outcome as part of that process that the government agreed with. We are now progressing that and I am very happy to table those two pieces of correspondence.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, I have a follow-up question to that. In the letter that you have just tabled I think you mentioned, and I am paraphrasing you, that in all likelihood Urambi primary school would close and that you would seek consultation to that effect.

Mr Barr: That is correct.

MR DOSZPOT: Is that within the spirit of the Education Act—that you are foreshadowing the closure before you have the consultation?

Mr Barr: Yes. The Education Act requires the minister to have a proposal. There must be something to consult on. Obviously this is going to be the subject of an inquiry by this committee, so I will make the observation that the way the act is worded at the moment it does require the minister to be both the proponent and the arbiter of a decision. The committee is free to examine those issues, but it becomes very difficult to consult if there is not a proposal and someone has to be the advocate of the proposal. The way the act is written, it means the minister has to do that. I suppose it would be easy for me to delegate to an official and say, “No, it is the chief executive of the department who formally puts forward a proposal,” but that is not the way the act is written at the moment.

Ultimately, the minister has to decide against a set of criteria that are outlined in the act, but there must be a proposal. You have to come forward with something, and that either means closure or amalgamation. Obviously there are legal issues in relation to how you must formally go through that process. In my view, what we are proposing is that Urambi moves 200 metres up the road into a brand new building but technically, in terms of the law, it is a school closure because you are closing one building and opening another. But it will be the same kids; it will be the same school. It is just moving 200 metres up the road into a brand new building.

MR DOSZPOT: Would you be willing to share with us some of the evidence of consultation that has been done since 2006?

Mr Barr: Certainly, yes. I understand that parents from that school community have been taken on tours of other new schools in the territory to get an idea of the sorts of options that are available. I have visited the school and I have met with staff and student and parent representatives. I understand there have been a number of other consultations and we might even be in a position now to verbally advise on some of those.

Ms Davy: Most of the main consultations have been around a proposal in relation to the new Tuggeranong P-10 school. The Urambi school community has been involved. I can get you the dates and specific details, if you like, in terms of a number of

meetings with the design group around the concept of a P to10 school and the design plans around what the school might look like, what facilities it might have et cetera. They have been an important part of that process.

MR DOSZPOT: Obviously, I should imagine, there are schools that were closed that may not take a lot of comfort from the fact that the consultation is being done now, but it is commendable that it is being—

THE CHAIR: I might note—and I am sorry to interrupt you—that, as Mr Barr has noted, there is an inquiry which will be conducted by this committee around that, so those types of issues will be examined in that as well.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay. Could I just take it one step further?

THE CHAIR: No.

MR DOSZPOT: I am not talking about the closure. I now want to talk about Flynn primary school, which has been trying to talk to the minister about—

MS BURCH: Can I have a question?

THE CHAIR: Yes. I am just not sure if that is—

MR DOSZPOT: Okay.

THE CHAIR: No, we probably do not want to lose the point of that to be able to go through the report and ask questions on that.

MR DOSZPOT: I apologise, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: And there will be an opportunity for schools to have an input through that inquiry process.

MR DOSZPOT: Right.

THE CHAIR: Ms Burch, you had a question?

MS BURCH: At the end of page 10 it deals with school renewal upgrades and capital works. It is stated that there was \$90 million-odd through the refurbishment program. Are we at the tail end of that refurbishment program or are we at the beginning? Where are we?

Mr Barr: We are about halfway through—although with recent news from the commonwealth I think we are about a third of the way through—what will be a magnificent transformation of pretty much every public school asset.

MS BURCH: All schools will benefit?

Mr Barr: Yes, there is no doubting that. The commitment in the 2006-07 budget was for a \$90 million capital injection on top of the regular capital upgrade program. To

put that into some perspective, that program was running at about \$10 million to \$11 million a year. We added \$90 million on top of that from a territory perspective and then on top of that there has been the new money for new schools, most particularly Harrison primary, Kingsford Smith, Gungahlin College and the Tuggeranong P-10 and the early development work for the Harrison high school component, which effectively means that we will be constructing a new school every year—Harrison primary opened in 2008, Kingsford Smith opened in 2009 and Gungahlin College will be opening in 2010 for the 2011 school year—along with the first stage of the new Kambah school. So there is a significant building program in terms of new schools. Whilst that has been going on, pretty much every school in the territory has been refurbished. That ranges from—

MS BURCH: I was going to ask: what are some of the things that the schools have—

Mr Barr: It ranges from, if you like, the very sexy end—new gymnasiums and performing arts centres and that sort of work—through to, shall we say, the more behind-the-scenes but important aspects—school boilers, toilets, those sorts of upgrades. A series of programs have operated, each of which has had a particular goal, be it targeting our 10 biggest energy using schools to improve their sustainability through to some pretty significant asbestos removal work in some of the really old schools.

A program of older school upgrades focused on whole of building, so that is everything from replacing roofs and guttering and facia through to internal and external painting. There has been a series of subprograms within that, but it has been the most comprehensive capital works upgrade program in the territory's history. It is now going to be taken to the next level with the commonwealth's funding over the next three years. That will effectively extend and enhance the level of capital works provision in our schools over the next three or four years.

MS BURCH: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I had a question around the school enrolment figures, which are listed on page 11. With the figures showing an increase in total school enrolments, have they been adjusted for the inclusion of the preschool students?

Mr Barr: Yes, that is a direct match on that. Where we are seeing the most significant growth is in preschool enrolments. They have been up. It was five per cent and then six per cent over the two calendar years in the annual year reporting period, so a cumulative increase of 11 per cent.

What I need to stress is that what we are seeing is an increased take-up of preschool education. Roughly speaking, there are between about 4,200 and 4,500 students in each year level in the territory. That varies. We went through a bit of a dip in our birth rate so the number dropped below 4,000 for a couple of year levels but, generally speaking, that is roughly the number of students we will have in each year level. We are seeing preschool education and participation pick up from about 3,300 of those 4,200 to about 3,800 or 3,900 students engaging. We are getting a much higher take-up.

Obviously it is not compulsory to enrol in a preschool program, but it is a combination of our move from 10 to 12 free preschool hours and then subsequent to that the commonwealth's initiative to fund the territory to provide up to 15 hours. We are rolling out that program. The 15 hours of free preschool is currently in place in our early childhood schools. That, I think, is driving the strong interest in enrolments, but over the next three years, under the agreement with the commonwealth, we will roll out 15 hours of free preschool across the territory. That is boosting numbers in spite of there not being a significant increase in the birth rate. In fact, when you compare the data over the last 30 years, our birth rates have been consistently lower. That is why our school age population has been reducing. But what we have been able to achieve is a higher level of engagement. That has fed into the extra enrolments in this annual report period.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible for the committee to get information on the enrolment figures not just for the preschools but if there has been an increase or decrease across the other levels?

Mr Barr: That is published every year in the census. There is data going back more than a decade. If you are interested in matching that with ABS demographic data, on the ABS website you can get the number in each year level, as in the number of one-year-olds, two-year-olds, three-year-olds, four-year-olds, going back to the 1970s, I think. That is available online, so you can pretty well see and match exactly how that cohort is going to flow through the system.

THE CHAIR: I am just wondering why that information is not put into the annual report.

Ms Davy: There is more detail in other sections—

THE CHAIR: Yes, I am aware of that. Obviously there is a lot of information about the preschool year, but we are looking at the other years.

Mr Barr: In terms of matching the ABS data, that would be a publication in and of itself, and it is a publication in terms of the school census. But it is not too difficult. If you print out the two documents that will give you an idea of the demographic trends. Just as an observation, I think only in the last few years has the total number of births in the territory gone beyond where it was in the 1970s when our population was half of what it is. When we had 200,000 people we were having 4,500 kids a year, back in the 1970s when birth rates were significantly higher. We have now got a population of 350,000, and I think last year was the highest number of births ever recorded at 4,750. Only in the last year have we been getting above the birth rates of the 1970s in terms of the absolute number of students, yet we have many more schools in the territory than we did in 1975.

MR DOSZPOT: I have one final question, on page 10—school upgrades and capital works. I would like to ask the minister what is the status of Kingsford Smith school. Has all construction now been completed? If not, when do you expect to take the—

Mr Barr: The final piece of construction relates to the synthetic oval, which I am advised will be complete by the end of this calendar month.

MR DOSZPOT: This calendar month?

Mr Barr: This calendar month, so the end of February—only a matter of a couple of weeks.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. I have received a number of queries from parents who are concerned about the fact that—I have not seen the school; you have not invited me; I am looking forward to that.

Mr Barr: I would love to host you, Steve. I will even put on morning tea.

MR DOSZPOT: No morning tea required. The question that parents are quite concerned about is that apparently the toilets are located within the construction area. Is that correct?

Ms Davy: No, that is not correct. As I understand it—we have followed up on some of those inquiries—the issue seems to be year 2 students, who, at the moment, are taking some of their classes in the year 3 to 5 building. Most of the toilet block for those older students is outside the classroom environment. In the P-2, in the early childhood section of the school, the toilets are within, so they can go from the classroom to the toilet. We have been working with the school principal around resolving some of the issues and allowing the younger kids who might be having classes in the year 3 to 5 building to use the toilets within the smaller building inside. As far as we understand it, in following up on that, that seems to be the issue.

MR DOSZPOT: You understand the parents' concern, obviously, so thank you for looking into it.

MS BURCH: I have a question on page 13 and probably elsewhere in the report. The report highlights significant investment being made in smart schools and smart student initiatives to improve information communication technologies in ACT schools. Could you inform us or tell us a little bit about how the implementation is progressing and whether the program will ensure that ACT students are being prepared as the best ICT resourced public schools?

Mr Barr: Thank you for the question. In a minute, I will get some officials to outline the detailed progress and implementation of the program, but again this investment started in the 2006-07 budget. Perhaps, not surprisingly, given the context of that budget and all of the other education policy debates at the time, it was somewhat overlooked in terms of the significance of it for our education system and in terms of the public debate around reinvestment and investing in quality in our education system.

This is a significant investment. When you add in the additional \$7.7 million in the 2008-09 budget, that is nearly a \$30 million investment in a broadband network for our public education system. That places us well ahead of any other jurisdiction in Australia, and quite likely in the world, in relation to having a broadband network with that capacity.

There are obvious advantages that we have as a city-state. It is much easier for us to achieve this sort of outcome than it is, as you would well imagine, for Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales, where the vast distances involved in linking schools with this sort of network present some pretty significant financial and logistical challenges. This is an area where we have a comparative advantage and one that I believe we should be investing in.

That is why we took the decision back in 2006-07, and then further supplemented that. In light of federal government investment decisions in relation to the digital education revolution, we are the best placed of any Australian jurisdiction to implement that commonwealth government program. We have developed our broadband network. We have the wireless capacity within our schools, so we are not as constrained as some other states and territories were in relation to accepting that commonwealth funding for all of those new computers as part of that commonwealth program. A little bit of foresight, back in 2006, around investing in ICT has paid significant dividends for us. Janet is going to outline a little of how we are going in rolling out that program.

Ms Davy: Thank you, minister. As the minister indicated, the first major project under that smart schools initiative was the broadband rollout. It says in the annual report that we are expecting all secondary schools to be connected by the end of 2008. I expect that they will all be connected by the end of this month. We ran into a bit of rock in a few places. Certainly, the primary school rollout will be completed by 2010, so we will have one gigabyte capacity in terms of fibre optic cabling.

There are quite a number of other initiatives under the smart schools program. As the minister mentioned, there is an initiative around wireless connections in schools. We have now got 25 schools which have wireless capacity; we will continue to add to that. There is an SMS messaging project for parents; we trialled that last year in a number of secondary schools in terms of notifying parents of student absences via SMS. That is working quite successfully in a number of our secondary schools. We have upgraded the year 12 certification system, so now students can get their year 12 results online. That has been a significant project under smart schools. We have upgraded all central servers. That is not a particularly exciting project, but we have actually centralised a lot of storage—

Mr Barr: The IT buffs are very thrilled with that.

Ms Davy: Under the smart schools program, we had originally intended to put \$1 million towards what at the time we were calling a multimedia centre. What we are now intending to do—part of building on the election commitment of the Labor Party last year—is turn this into a partnership with the University of Canberra. We are calling it “inspire” at the moment, an inspire centre. I think it stands for something, but I am not quite sure what; I cannot remember what it stands for at the moment.

Essentially, it will be high-tech, high-end technologies which preservice teachers from UC can access in terms of their preservice training. We can use it as a professional development site for our own teachers in terms of upskilling our teachers in terms of IT. And hopefully, over time, we will also be able to use it as a bit more of a research capacity, because nationally and internationally there is not much research around in terms of the aspect of how much ICT investment actually makes a difference to

student learning outcomes. We would like to do a fair bit of research around that in future years as well.

MS BURCH: Yes, the IT buffs love servers. I know my children are more IT savvy than me sometimes. Given that you are running forward with IT, how are you training the teachers? How are you teaching the teachers?

Mr Barr: That is one of the challenges—hence, the commitment in the last election to the inspire centre. I do not want to make general statements about different generations, the old joke being that the average five-year-old could program the VCR in the household and the parents could not. There certainly are—I have experienced it in my visits to schools—kids in kindergarten and year 1 who are more technologically savvy with the equipment in the school than the minister.

There are a lot of professional development opportunities for teachers. I think we do have to acknowledge that, for some who are more used to not using those technologies, and who have spent the vast majority of their teaching career in that way, there is some resistance. That said, we do not tend to experience that with newer teachers coming into the system.

That process, though—I want to be careful not to generalise, because it is not always the case. Not every young person likes to utilise that technology and not every older teacher is averse, but we recognise that it is an issue. Over time, of course, it will become less of an issue as that technology just becomes embedded in the workplace. But there are certain sectors of the education system where the age profile of teachers is more skewed to the baby boomer generation where this is a greater challenge. There is no doubting that.

We continue to work through those issues with professional development opportunities, with a forward-looking approach around a partnership with the University of Canberra in terms of teacher training for the future. It will be a few more years before we are going to be in a position where we could confidently say that every teacher in the system is utilising the technology to its fullest potential. That is a little way off at this point, but you have to start somewhere.

MR DOSZPOT: If I can just ask a supplementary on that, from your experience and from the department's experience with the implementation of IT initiatives, what is the feedback? Is this proving to be more of a motivational tool—having PCs in schools—or is it something that actually adds value to application and education?

Mr Barr: I have visited about 110 of our 130-odd schools in government and non-government systems across the territory since I have been minister. There are clearly some schools that have leapt ahead in terms of their use of technology, and both the staff and students embrace the opportunities that are there. In other schools you see sad old computers tucked away in the back of classrooms. To be frank, it is not universal yet.

MR DOSZPOT: Sure.

Mr Barr: But certainly, as time goes on, the level of engagement increases. Once the

full capability is in place, particularly with this broadband network, I expect to see exponential growth in the use of technology as more teachers become more confident with that. There are some who are streets ahead in terms of their use of the technology. We want to engage them as leaders within the education system. There is no doubt. That works cross-sectorally as well. It is not something that is just in government schools or in Catholic or independent schools. It needs to work across the system.

MR DOSZPOT: Sure. That is from someone from the older generation who does like computers?

Mr Barr: Indeed. As I say, there are many younger people who are technophobes, so it is not to generalise.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further questions around that? I have another question that was about NAPLAN, but it will be better to ask it after we have a break.

Meeting adjourned from 10.27 to 10.49 am.

THE CHAIR: We will commence again. At the present time, we have until 12 and then between 12 and 12.30 we have the ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority. I ask members just to keep that in mind. I will start with a question then. I note something that we have mentioned before—the NAPLAN results. I know you said that the ACT education system performs the highest in Australia on that. Do ACT students perform significantly better than students in, say, Sydney and Melbourne in terms of those figures?

Ms Davy: In terms of NAPLAN?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Davy: As you know, with NAPLAN, last year was the first year of testing; so this is our first set of data. What it is showing is the ACT is performing the highest or equal highest in all aspects of the test across all years. But it is also showing that certainly in some areas we are equal with, or close to, Victoria and New South Wales.

THE CHAIR: Are there particular areas where that is apparent? Is it significant?

Ms Davy: No, it is not significantly different in terms of a statistical point of view and in terms of particular geographic areas. NAPLAN cohorts are not broken down into geographic—

THE CHAIR: I did not hear that, sorry.

Ms Davy: The cohort testing is not broken down into geographic areas.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. My next question is not for quite some time. I was just wondering whether you, Ms Burch, have any questions. I have just asked a question about NAPLAN. I was just wondering whether you have any questions for the next

few pages.

MS BURCH: I have a question relating to page 15 and the safe schools program. There is a comment on the bottom of the page relating to the second budgetary appropriation and funding for pastoral care. Can you just tell us a little bit about this initiative and how the safe schools program is going?

Mr Barr: Sure. That particular initiative was a 2004 election commitment to provide extra resources for high schools. Clearly, all of the data we have had over a number of years shows that the age group where students are presenting the most challenging behaviour is in that high school area; so there was an identified need to better coordinate the range of services that were on offer. Government high schools have youth support workers and counsellors and they had a range of student welfare and support already provided before that particular initiative.

However, I think there was an identified need for some additional resources to coordinate an entire pastoral care approach within each of the government high schools. We funded an additional promotional level position for a teacher to perhaps provide the overarching educational background, bringing in then the support of professionals in other disciplines. In addition to the one additional position in each high school there is then a multidisciplinary team that works across the school system. That was also part of that pastoral care initiative.

It is a pretty comprehensive response to the concerns that had been expressed by parents and students and had clearly been identified in terms of the research the department had undertaken. Just looking at the data around a number of indicators—be that truancy, suspensions or critical incidents within schools—there is a range of challenging behaviours that we need to respond to and that was what the initiative was targeted at. It has been in place now for one full school year.

The feedback I have had and the opportunities I have had to meet with a couple of pastoral care coordinators in the high school context have been quite positive in respect of the team building that is possible. As we are building the infrastructure within the schools and particularly some of the new administrative features of, for example, the Melba Copland school, we have been able to construct a quite impressive student support-student welfare area with co-location of all of those professionals and a clear student services area for the students to engage with. There is now a similar process occurring across all of the high schools.

We will take the opportunity with the capital funds available in the next few years to ensure that the working environment and the facilities that those professionals are working in are of the highest standard. With that additional resource, we are placing very high hopes and expectations on those professionals to deliver some improved outcomes in terms of student engagement. In combination with the safe schools task force and the work we have done there—for example, the security code of conduct—we are starting to see some encouraging trends around a reduction in critical incidents that are referred to on page 15 of the annual report.

I suppose the point that I will always stress when we discuss these matters is that every day in ACT schools you have 60,000 people interacting. It is unrealistic to

expect that that will be trouble-free, that there will never be any incidents. But I think we have in place a framework and a mechanism to respond to try and minimise conflict and we have appropriately resourced that.

MS BURCH: Just two questions. Firstly, is the uptake from students and family—the direct support—good? Do the numbers indicate they are being utilised?

Mr Barr: Certainly, if you ask any high school principal whether they value having that extra position, I think the answer is a resounding yes.

MS BURCH: In addition to direct support to students and families, do they also provide support and advice and is that, sort of by way of osmosis professional development, coming through to the other teachers, do you think?

Ms Davy: Yes, they do a number of things. They provide professional support to teachers within the school but they also provide the outreach services in terms of working with the parents of the students within the school, connecting students and parents and families to other agencies if that is a need et cetera. I might just share with the committee that I chaired the safe schools task force only yesterday at our February meeting. We had some members of the Youth Advisory Council along and we were talking about bullying in schools.

We had present two students that are in our current secondary schools at the moment. They were both commenting about the pastoral care worker and the youth support worker in their high schools and how much of a difference that had made, and how it was really good that they had somebody who was not a teacher that they could go and talk to and share issues with. That was some nice feedback that we just got recently.

MR HANSON: Could I ask a question on that in terms of the recruitment for those positions and retention. Has that been working well? Have we recruited all positions that we had and have we been able to retain them? Has there not been too much turnover?

Ms Davy: Yes, we have recruited all the pastoral care positions. In terms of retention generically across the organisation, we say in our annual report in a couple of places that retention is a particular issue for the organisation but we are not dissimilar to many other organisations in this climate. We will be working hard on a number of strategies to ensure that we retain those.

MR HANSON: What sorts of things are you looking at doing to retain those staff?

Ms Davy: We do a number of things. Within central office we look at things such as the greater rewards and recognition program in terms of both central office staff and our school staff. Again in central office, last year we did an organisational climate survey. We encouraged all central office staff to complete the survey and we had a great response. About 75 per cent of our staff responded to that and that allowed us to get a sense of where staff felt that there were areas for improvement within the organisation.

MR HANSON: Can you allude to any of those areas?

Ms Davy: I might start with some positives.

MR HANSON: Sometimes it is good to finish with the positives.

Ms Davy: Certainly our staff were very much telling us that they felt great job satisfaction within the organisation and that they felt valued within the organisation. They felt respected and they felt that their contribution to the organisation was worthwhile. There were three areas where a number of them told us we needed to do more work. The first was around performance management and feedback. We have a performance management system in place but there was a sense that we could be better about the nature of the feedback that supervisors gave their staff.

The second area was that of resources. They felt that on some occasions they did not have enough financial or staffing resources to do a particular piece of work. The third area, dare I say it, was that they wanted a clearer direction from senior executive in terms of communication and direction and vision of the organisation. We shared those results with all staff at the beginning of this year and talked as a senior management group about some of the strategies we are going to put in place this year to address some of those.

MR HANSON: Is that an annual survey that you do or was it a one-off survey?

Ms Davy: As I understand it, the organisation had tried on a couple of occasions in previous years to do similar sorts of surveys. What we wanted to do with this one was to start it off next year. We will repeat it on a two-year cycle so we are able to use it as a bit of a benchmark and then as an opportunity to monitor staff satisfaction with various aspects of the organisation. We intend to do that.

MR HANSON: Could we have access to that, minister?

Mr Barr: The survey?

MR HANSON: The survey—the results of the survey and the questions that were asked and so on.

Mr Barr: Yes, that is—

Ms Davy: Yes, I am happy to provide those.

MR HANSON: Thank you.

MR DOSZPOT: In relation to safe school environments and the smaller class sizes promised at the last election—and that was such an excellent and innovative idea, Andrew—how is the actual implementation of reducing class sizes to 21 progressing?

Mr Barr: There are different challenges depending on the different sectors of the education system. For example, in high schools and colleges there is greater flexibility clearly in that students have different teachers for different subjects. At the beginning of this school year we provided an additional position in each of the colleges that will

go towards reducing the average class size in colleges. They are currently around 20 down to the 19 that we have set as our goal over this term of government. The high school context is probably where we have the greatest distance to travel in terms of moving from the current average, which is around 24, down to 21.

In relation to primary schools, clearly we refer to the government's initiatives going back to the early years, kinder to year 2, which is already at 21. I am advised that the overall average for primary schools is around 22. We will get more updated data once we have this year's school census. I am looking at data for 2007. Because half of primary school is already addressed through previous initiatives it is not as significant a move as will be required in high schools.

The bulk of the new teachers will go into the high school system. Obviously there will be some significant improvements in terms of additional staff in the year 4 to year 6 components. That particular initiative commenced earlier this decade. I think the start of it occurred under Minister Stefaniak. It was then extended under Minister Gallagher and one would hope it will be completed through kindergarten to year 12 whilst I am minister.

MR HANSON: As a follow-up, minister—and obviously you can make statistics say what you want by saying it is an average class size—we have already discussed the fact that in some classes we have low enrolments or structural issues, which you have highlighted. Are we using that to balance off statistics? My concern is that you might have a class with, let's say, 30 in it and because you might have low enrolments in another school the balance looks like it is 21 and everybody is happy. Can you allude to those schools where you are tracking well above the 21 and say what we are doing there?

Mr Barr: Sure. That is why the government's commitment was to average class sizes; it was not a maximum cap on class sizes. We already have maximum caps, or the AEU certainly does, in terms of the number of students that their members will teach in any given year level. Some classes can extend over 30 students in certain year levels depending on the nature of the class. That was a quite deliberate policy position—that the costs associated with a maximum class size across the system would be prohibitive, not to mention the capital costs associated with creating all of the additional classrooms. That obviously was the subject of quite considerable debate through 2008. The government's commitment was to reduce average class sizes. Of course "average" means that for every class that is above that size of 21 there have to be classes below that.

MR HANSON: But you take my point, don't you, that if you have a class that has low enrolments—and we have discussed that—and you are using that as part of your statistics to say, "Look, we're achieving our average of 21 and everything's fine," that might be hiding a reality.

Mr Barr: It is not hiding a reality. Some classes are small, others are larger. I take the point you are making, but the government's policy position—and it was debated extensively through last year—was to aim for an average class size reduction across all the levels of schooling. The contrast that was there for the electorate was a Liberal Party commitment to a maximum class size in primary school versus a Labor Party

commitment to reduce average class sizes across all levels of schooling. We have the result of the election and we are getting on with implementing our policy, but it was always clear from the start that we were talking about reducing average class sizes across all levels of schooling. The point I would make and reiterate is that for every class that is larger than the average there must be a class that is smaller in order to achieve the average.

MR HANSON: I suppose the point I am making is that the—

Mr Barr: The key advantage is that it gives schools flexibility because if you have a maximum cap of 21 and you have, say, 23 kids in that year level you then have to create two classes, and that becomes quite difficult for schools to manage, whereas if—

MR HANSON: I appreciate that, particularly in small schools, there are issues with the management of that, but I think the intent of both our policies was to reduce class sizes to a measure that is as close to the figure of 21 as we could make it. My concern is that in a number of schools we are well above that mark because we are using the statistics from areas where we have low enrolments—and that is not a good thing either—to make that average look more acceptable. I would be very interested in seeing where—and maybe you can give me this information—we have schools which are tracking above that 21. Rather than just saying that the whole thing is averaging at 21, where can we see individual classes that are above 21? Are you able to provide us with that information for enrolments this year?

Mr Barr: That data could become available post the census but then it would change very quickly from semester to semester and from class to class depending—

MR HANSON: Year to year, it would; but I would not have thought it would, semester to semester.

Mr Barr: It would, semester to semester, because in colleges and high schools you would be enrolled in a different unit. But certainly what we can—

MR HANSON: But certainly in the lower schools?

Mr Barr: Yes, absolutely.

MR HANSON: I think that there would be less—

Mr Barr: At a primary school level it would be much easier to get that data.

MR HANSON: That is right. If you could get us that data, that would be useful.

Mr Barr: Yes. That is not a problem. But I come back to the point that the government's commitment was to reduce average class sizes. I again stress that, for every class above the average, there must be classes below the average.

MR HANSON: I understand that. I suppose the point I am making—and I will wrap up now—is that I imagine that the community would be expecting, from that policy

you have put out, that most schools would be tracking at or near 21. I would be very interested to see whether that is the case.

Mr Barr: In order to effect a reduction in the average, every school will need more teachers. So every school will benefit, except for those that are currently below the average. There is no point in putting additional teachers into a school where all the classes are already fewer than 21.

MR HANSON: Sure, and I am not arguing with that. I just want to see those stats.

MS BURCH: Moving from numbers in classes to quality teaching, on page 21 there is a comment discussing the implementation in the ACT of the New South Wales quality teaching model. Could you tell us why you see this as important, what support you are providing and how that results in quality teaching?

Mr Barr: I think this is the most significant issue and challenge that the education system faces. Class sizes are an important aspect. Quality of school facilities is important. A rigorous curriculum is important. But the number one with a bullet factor, in terms of getting better outcomes, is quality teaching. That is why that is the primary focus of the government's investment in terms of new initiatives in the education portfolio.

In a minute I will get Ms Davy to run through the implementation of the particular budget initiatives. But this feeds into the government's negotiating position on the next EBA and really is the silver bullet in terms of improved outcomes across our education system. Obviously the public sector will take a leading role here in that what has tended to happen is that EBA structures and certainly the salary outcomes within the public system have tended to significantly influence what the non-government schools do. So I have no doubt that they will be watching very closely how we progress through these negotiations.

But my intent, and the government's intent, is to set up a new structure within our public education system that rewards quality teaching, that provides, over the life of the next agreement, six-figure salaries for classroom teachers. At the moment the current system effectively means that teachers who want to pursue that sort of salary and that sort of career need to move out of the classroom. We would like to adjust the way we reward our teachers to ensure that those who want to stay teaching can earn that sort of an income. I think that will have an important outcome longer term in terms of raising the status of the teaching profession.

Commensurate with that sort of approach, though, is a need for agreed professional standards for teachers and that is another major piece of work that is underway at a national level and will feed into some of the national reform and national partnership agreements that we have with the commonwealth on teacher quality. I think the advantage we have, in approaching this EBA and this reform agenda, is that we have a partner in the commonwealth government rather than an opponent. So that does, I think, make it easier.

In my view, this is the once-in-a-generation opportunity. If it does not happen now I am not sure it will, certainly in the next 15 to 20 years. This will be the one and only

opportunity to take that leap into a system that rewards teachers based on merit, not on seniority. And that is going to be a key element of what I anticipate will be difficult negotiations. It is not easy to achieve this sort of structural change. But it is important that we do so. And if we do not take the opportunity now then it will not come along again probably for 15 or 20 years—the New South Wales quality teaching model.

Ms Davy: The New South Wales quality teaching model that we have adapted for the ACT basically came from research that started off with authentic pedagogies in the US and then went to Queensland in terms of productive pedagogies that you might have heard about. New South Wales worked with two academics from the University of Newcastle, Professor Jenny Gore and Associate Professor James Ladwig, to develop what essentially is called the New South Wales quality teaching model.

It is a PD model. It has three dimensions, 18 elements, and it is basically saying, on the basis of research, distilling of a lot of research over a lot of years, that the three most significant factors that impact on quality teaching are: intellectual quality, the depth of knowledge that you provide as teachers to students; the quality of the learning environment, that nature of whether you have high expectations of students and engage them; and the third element is significance, whether students can see connections between what they are doing in school and their outside world and that whole notion of inclusivity. So it is quite a strong model based on research.

What we have done in the ACT is that we have got a licence agreement from New South Wales for all of that work. We provided the resources on all of that work to our teachers. We have engaged with Newcastle university in an academic partnership, if you like, so we have got Professor Gore working very closely with our schools. Last year, we put all our principals through a professional development, I think a five-workshop, series with Associate Professor Ladwig to introduce them to the model. They were very keen to be leaders of this within the schools.

We got \$2.4 million in the last budget to support some of this work. We have engaged three additional school leaders to work with each of the three school districts and they will be our quality teaching experts, if you like, and they will work with individual schools and school clusters on their implementation. This year, every school cluster has determined how they want to work on quality teaching and they have all got a cluster quality teaching contact. The 2008-09 budget initiative allowed us to provide 0.5 release time for each of those cluster contacts. Again, we provided a lot of PD for them.

We have targeted our scholarships, some of our teacher scholarship money. Last year, we had over 30 teachers do the quality teaching graduate diploma from Newcastle university and we will have a similar cohort this year with some of our teacher scholarship money.

From something that started as a foundation last year, we are spending a lot of energy and resources trying to get our ACT public schools very much aware of this model and how they might use it in their classrooms, which New South Wales did probably five years ago.

MR DOSZPOT: I have a question that relates to the discussion we were having on smaller class sizes, if you do not mind my taking you back to that for a moment. Minister, what was the average class size when you made the promise in 2008 during the election campaign about smaller class sizes and what is the current average class size as of today's date?

Mr Barr: The 2007 data, which was what was available at that time, was: primary schools, 22; high schools, 23; and colleges, 20. I am now advised that, as a result of a couple of other initiatives, primary schools are edging closer to 21. Now they are 21.6; so still not quite 21 but we are getting there. High schools are 23.5 or thereabouts. As I said, it still will require the bulk of new teachers to go into the high schools to get them to 21. Primary schools will still need some extra resources. And as a result of the new teachers that come into the college system, we have now got colleges, I am advised, to 18.3. So we have already exceeded our election commitment in that area.

MR DOSZPOT: On page 19, international fee-paying students, as I understand it, the ACT government charges the highest fees of any state or territory for international students who are studying in the ACT which I believe acts as quite a disincentive for a lot of these students to come and study in the ACT. With today's economic conditions, would it be worth looking at how much we are charging to the children who are coming into our local schools? Is there any way of re-examining that and making it more attractive?

Mr Barr: Yes. This matter has come up at least three times since I have been minister. Whilst it would be appealing and easy to say yep, all fees are gone, that has a pretty significant cost impact on the budget. I have not been in the position to do that. There just has not been the financial capacity. However, we do have the capacity to provide concessions and to look at individual circumstances. My view is that a blanket policy of fee reduction or fee withdrawal would not necessarily be equitable in that some people who come here clearly have the capacity to meet those costs; others do not. So I think we need to look at individual circumstances. It is a small number of cases.

MR DOSZPOT: I guess that is what I am getting at. Whilst it is a small number of cases at the moment, the cost would not be all that incredible. But when you consider that WA and Victoria have waived all fees and how many people they are attracting as family units and the effect it has on our economy—

Mr Barr: It is a very legitimate policy question. I have got to weigh it up against other competing priorities in the portfolio. To date, I am yet to be convinced that there is a need to depart entirely from the current policy. But we have certainly given concessions. I know I have been approached and had representations on individual cases and I am certainly happy to consider those on a case-by-case basis. But a blanket policy decision has significant implications. It would mean we have to not do something else.

MR DOSZPOT: This is in the interest of a bipartisan approach to increasing our ability to attract people to our city at this stage.

Mr Barr: I fully understand those issues.

MR DOSZPOT: I would strongly urge you to perhaps do some modelling on it.

Mr Barr: I have just been passed a note that, in 2008, 212 students received a fee waiver. It is not that that does not occur. But as I say, a blanket policy does have resource implications. I am told we collect about \$5 million a year in those charges.

MR DOSZPOT: Excellent. Maybe if we reduced it we could collect \$10 million by getting more people bringing in their money.

Mr Barr: It is an interesting theory.

MR DOSZPOT: It obviously deserves some economic modelling work.

Mr Barr: Indeed.

MS BURCH: On quality teaching, there are two short paragraphs on page 21. They make reference to a graduate certificate in educational studies at the Uni of Newcastle and then a certificate in career development. Can you tell me a bit about the linkages of those certificates for teachers in your quality framework?

Ms Davy: Okay. The first one, the graduate certificate in educational studies, is in quality teaching at the University of Newcastle; so it is actually a graduate certificate which is solely focused on the New South Wales quality teaching model taught by Professor Jenny Gore and Associate Professor James Ladwig and some other associates. So that was a particular focus last year, to direct our scholarship money to getting as many teachers who were interested through that program. As it says there, we had 34. Some of those 34 teachers have gone on to be some of those quality teaching contact people for the school cluster this year. That is great. As I said, we will have another cohort this year.

The career development certificate IV is something different from that. There is a national expectation that staff in schools that are providing career advice hold a certificate IV or equivalent in career development. Part of the transitions and vocational education budget initiative from last year from the ACT government was to not just provide a transitions teacher in each of our secondary schools but also to ensure that they all got a certificate IV in career development. We are actually doing that this year. CIT is delivering that program for us.

Mr Barr: If I could just return to Mr Doszpot's earlier question, I quoted a figure for college average class sizes. That was for semester 2 of 2008. Perhaps to illustrate the point I was making earlier about how there are variances from first semester to second in the college system, I am advised that semester 2 is generally lower than semester 1, as students who might begin years 11 and 12 may then undertake a different course of study and may not be enrolled in the college in the second semester. But for the second semester of 2008, the average class size in ACT colleges was 18.3.

MS BURCH: I have a question on page 16. Then I will stop going backwards. I promise I will start going forwards. On student pathways, given that there has been some talk about quality of teaching, you made mention that years 11 and 12 students

sometimes will not complete. There is mention here that there has been some research to look at the pathways. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Ms Davy: I might ask Carol Harris, who looks after the college sector, to answer that question, if you do not mind.

Ms Harris: What we have been able to do on this is: through the Atelier Learning Solutions college review which was conducted in 2006, we took advice about the fact that we needed to think more clearly about the sorts of transitions and pathways that were available to students. One of the critical areas that we have worked in on this is transitions. We have had a working party, consisting of a college principal leading that and representatives from across the college sector, look at what sorts of things we needed to be doing more effectively at the college level and how we might better connect with the high school sector. Indeed, for a period of time, we trialled a transition officer that worked between the high school and the college sector to ensure that students moving between the two had more seamless transitions. In the 2008-2009 budget, the government was able to provide continued support for that position.

What we know, from evidence coming through, is that, if we really target our learning programs to the needs and the particular interests of students, we have a better chance of ensuring that they continue through the school system. To that end, we have developed much closer links with the CIT, for example. We have a committee with departmental representatives, with representatives of our college principals and the CIT, looking at how we can make better connections. We have in fact had a teacher who works in the CIT for part of the time and whose job it is to look quite closely at the sorts of opportunities that are there for students to link and to develop those seamless pathways.

We have done significant work with business and industry to create additional pathways, through Australian school-based new apprenticeships. For example, we have introduced new apprenticeships in electro-technology that students have been able to pick up. We have also worked with both the University of Canberra and the ANU to see how we might be able to forge closer links there and partnerships and pathways for students. The ANU secondary college program, for example, is one of those initiatives which identify high-achieving students in mathematics and sciences and in Japanese languages. It provides them with an entry path into the ANU early, if they are able to successfully complete the programs that are offered through the ANU secondary college program.

I guess that what we have done is: we are aware of the research that talks about the need to have closer links between schools and the tertiary sector and the wider world of work and the wider world of further study, and we have been building partnerships that are quite strategic and very focused to ensure that the whole range of opportunities are covered for our students as they transition out of the college sector.

MR HANSON: I have one quick question. There is a parent survey, I believe, that has gone out. Is that right?

Mr Barr: There are parent surveys every year.

MR HANSON: You do one every year, do you?

Mr Barr: Yes. I think it is a third of the schools at a time. It takes three years to do the full cycle of every school but that survey occurs every year.

MR HANSON: Are they the same questions in each survey or do you vary the questions? Can you track trends that show how parents are going year to year?

Ms Davy: It is part of our three-year school improvement cycle; so schools that are in the first year of that cycle undertake the parent satisfaction and teacher satisfaction surveys and have done for the last three years. And yes, they are the same questions but you cannot actually compare because you are comparing different schools. It is the third of schools in year 1 and it is the second third of schools in year 2 et cetera.

Last year we actually reviewed our whole school improvement framework process and we have decided this year to implement a process whereby we will do those satisfaction surveys systemically every year which will do exactly that, which will allow schools themselves to track any trends and allow us, from the system point of view, to track any trends.

MR HANSON: Is that information publicly available?

Ms Davy: Yes.

Mr Barr: I was reported on.

Ms Davy: Yes, it is. Yes. It is one of our indicators.

Mr Barr: It is reported on in the annual reports. One of the indicators of that is in the budget papers.

Ms Davy: We can certainly provide them.

MR HANSON: What would be interesting is to track individual schools and see, if you are using the same report now, where those trends are going. Once we get the form back from another school, we could actually measure those schools' performances.

Mr Barr: Yes. And there are a range of other surveys that the department conducts and they are on the department's website; so feel free to peruse.

MR DOSZPOT: At the bottom of page 99, output class 1 public school education, point e refers to the average cost per public special education student in mainstream schools. The target was 23,227; the result was 22,000, which is minus 5.3 percent. My question is: do we have any comparison of those costs with non-government schools?

Mr Whybrow: I can answer that. We do not have a per-student cost of mainstream students in non-government schools. I guess it is probably an important point to note that the ACT government does provide its funding to non-government schools for

students with disabilities through the same process. It is a scan process.

A little bit of background on that, though, is that obviously the ACT government is only, I guess, a minor player in the funding of the non-government schools, with the two biggest components being the commonwealth government and the parents themselves. In that sense, we only provide a portion of the amount that we provide to our students in government schools, reflecting that funding mechanism.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. I do understand that. I guess my question relates to special needs students, children with a disability, who require a lot of assistance, regardless of which system they are in, government or non-government. It would be interesting to have a look at how parents can be assisted more, the difference in assistance that is given and the effect that has. We have not got those figures at the moment. Can we get those figures?

Mr Whybrow: Our requirement from the non-government school sector is not by a student-by-student cost break-up. As we provide funding for their operations, we do the monitoring from the school as a whole. On individual costs, we simply require that they spend the funds that we provide them for the purposes we provide them, not on an individual student basis.

MR DOSZPOT: I understand. I am not trying to be problematic; I am simply trying to get to the root of the issue here. We have got 630 students receiving assistance in mainstream classes in government schools. If we were able to get the figure of the number of children in non-government schools and the amount of funding that goes to them, we should be able to get an average cost there, surely?

Mr Whybrow: I can provide the number of students who are identified through the scan process in non-government school and the amount of funding that is provided to those schools in total. That is available.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. If I could get that, I would appreciate it.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS BURCH: At page 101, under vocational education and training, I note that the satisfaction of employers and apprentices seems to be a good result. Given the economic climate that we are in now, vocational and trade skills are critical for maintaining work in an ongoing economy. What are we doing to maintain this level or improve it?

Mr Barr: It is a combination of responses. There is never a simple answer, is there? There are some targeted initiatives in terms of additional funding, through a concerted effort on school-based apprenticeships. There are a number of different policy responses. I just noticed on the news this morning that the commonwealth government are, I understand, talking about stepping in to assist small business with the costs of keeping apprentices in training through this difficult period. So there are a number of initiatives.

On user choice funding of our additional VET teachers in secondary colleges, some

additional capacity within the department of education and additional funding for the students participating in community enterprises, the SPICE program, are just a few examples of ACT government initiatives in this area. Again, of course, it is a partnership with businesses and the commonwealth government.

I think it would be fair to say that all of the stakeholders are working cooperatively to ensure that we build on these good results. The ACT government itself, in terms of its own employment policies on taking on apprentices in particular ACT government agencies, is an area that we are working in and can directly impact upon achieving some of our targets, certainly for Aspergers. We have got some election commitments in relation to that, in terms of my portfolios, education and training and sport and recreation as well.

MR DOSZPOT: Can I ask a question related to your statement regarding raising the school leaving age from 15 to 17. What current checks do we have in place when, say, a 14-year-old from school X leaves school X and does not turn up at school Y? Do we have any checks and balances that tell us somebody has not gone on?

Ms Davy: Yes, we do. We have unique student identifiers in our MAZE, our school administrative system. So we certainly do know when a student has left a particular school and has not re-enrolled in another school and we will put in place mechanisms to start asking questions of where that student might have gone to, yes.

THE CHAIR: My next question relates to page 103. It is in relation to the figures for non-government education. Is there any requirement in the ACT that we collect numbers on students enrolled at non-government schools?

Mr Barr: Yes, the annual school census is for all schools; so we collect that. We collect that data annually for all schools and twice a year in the public system. But the non-government school is in the annual census. It is in February. It is coming up in a few days, I believe.

Ms Davy: Tomorrow.

Mr Barr: Tomorrow. That data is required for access to funding. There are a number of ACT and commonwealth government programs and it is fully audited to ensure that it is accurate, because dollars flow from enrolment rates.

THE CHAIR: I was interested in it.

Mr Barr: So that data is available by school and by the number of students in each year level at each school, and that is on the department's website.

MR HANSON: Can you elaborate on the committee consultation process on the school standards authority and highlight where we are at with that process?

Mr Barr: We have now been through two phases of consultation: an initial proposal with a range of options and then a more detailed and refined process. That concluded, from memory, over the course of the election campaign; it was the end of October, from memory, that submissions on that closed. I have received some advice from the

department in relation to community feedback on that second round. Perhaps unfortunately, in terms of ease of decision making, it has resulted in some diverse views in relation to where to proceed next with the issues that were a part of that consultation.

I think there is pretty clear consensus on the need for teacher registration and our forward approach there largely relates to how we will integrate with the national requirements. There is a proposal for there to be a national teacher registration and national teacher professional standards. That work is continuing through MCEETYA and COAG. We will watch that closely.

There is no point in our going off on a completely different tangent from the rest of the country only to find three months later that we will be required to meet a national outcome. We are progressing that work. But I would see that as a particular opportunity, as we are now the only jurisdiction without a formal teacher registration scheme, to access some of the commonwealth's funding under one of the national partnerships to develop such a process.

In relation to the other issues that were canvassed in that consultation, there are mixed views amongst education stakeholders about how much, in terms of regulation, would be taken out of the department of education and perhaps placed in a new school standards authority. I think it would be fair to characterise that the non-government schools are more supportive of an independent body that would oversight the regulation of non-government schools. There are some concerns from public sector stakeholders that they would prefer the current arrangements to remain. I am still considering that feedback and will come back with a government position once I have gone through the—

MR HANSON: We are not sure we are going to actually establish the authority still?

Mr Barr: We never committed to establishing one. We committed to consulting on the options, because a number of different options were put forward. There is some very strong support for it and there are some people who are very strongly opposed. There is not a consensus to move down that path. I had hoped that, following two rounds of consultation, there might have been greater unanimity of view across education stakeholders. There is not. So it is going to require a little bit more work and perhaps changing aspects of proposals in order to keep everyone happy. It would be my preference that this is something that everyone embraced, rather than having people who are upset at having a new structure imposed on them.

I acknowledge the complexities here, but there are aspects of the work that can be advanced—and, I believe, should be—that do have support from all of the stakeholders. It comes down to how we structure certain administrative functions within the department. One example and one possible model is that the education department is principally responsible for running government schools and all performance measurement oversight and all the rest sits independently with the schools standards authority. That is one model at the extreme. Another is that you would simply establish a teacher registration function and keep everything else the same. That is perhaps the other extreme. And then there is perhaps a path in the middle, looking at our registration and regulation of non-government schools and

home schooling. What you might do with certification—bring in year 10 and year 12 certification together under an enlarged BSSS.

MR HANSON: Do you anticipate coming up with a new model and putting that out for consultation? What is your way forward?

Mr Barr: I am still considering those issues. A third round of consultation? Some people will look at me and go “Hurry up; make a decision, minister.” There is a limit. We will start getting commentary about too much consultation soon.

MR HANSON: Never.

Mr Barr: But having been on both sides—the too much consultation debate and then not enough—I will probably move—

MR HANSON: Whichever way you are going to go forward—whether there is more consultation or it is just establishing the authority or not—do you know when you are going to make that decision?

Mr Barr: It certainly will not be possible to take a radical policy approach without further consultation, and there would be some structural changes that clearly require—

MR HANSON: Can you give us a view of when you will make a decision about what decision you are going to make?

Mr Barr: I am certainly looking at this. I have already had some discussions, and that will continue over the first half of this year. I would have to say, though, that, in terms of order, there are matters in this portfolio that are of higher order priority. Quality teaching, the EBA and the capital works programs are all more important in terms of devoting time to further consultation at this point. So there are other things that are more important than this at this point in time, but, given the amount of work that has gone into it, it is not something that I am dropping.

MR HANSON: You are not sure?

Mr Barr: No. I am not making a decision this week, and probably not in the next few months, but I think I would be confident in saying that it is a matter that will continue to be discussed this calendar year. And we are waiting on some important national work, as I indicated, particularly around teacher registration. It would be pointless and a complete waste of resources for us to go off and develop our own model only to find that we have to meet national requirements. Things are changing. You have to constantly adapt your position to respond to other events that impact in these areas.

To wrap up this conversation, I suppose I could say that there is not a sense amongst education stakeholders that the current arrangements are not working. We are not in a crisis position where we must change in order to meet a pressing concern at this point in time. The reason we pursued this was that we believe that in the longer term there may be some advantages. The fact that not all stakeholders agree does present a challenge in terms of getting an easy outcome. If everyone said, “Yes, this is terrific,”

we could have marched ahead easily. But not everyone is saying that.

MR HANSON: Are the results of that consultation freely available?

Mr Barr: Yes, as with the first round of consultation. It is all there—and the discussion papers. It is all available.

MR DOSZPOT: I want to go to school equity funding, initiated in 1998. I believe it was set at up to approximately \$200,000 per year of additional funding for predetermined low socioeconomic area schools. Is this funding still available for schools in lower socioeconomic areas?

Mr Barr: Yes. In fact, it has been enhanced significantly over a number of budgets.

MR DOSZPOT: That was my next question.

Mr Barr: Yes, it has. More money has been put in.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you know what it is now?

Mr Whybrow: I do not have the figures in front of me.

Ms Davy: I think the school equity fund has remained pretty well the same, at about \$280,000. What we have increased is a position to support and work with schools that get school equity funding money, because it is particularly targeted at literacy and numeracy achievement. The secondary bursary scheme—which is what you might have been thinking about, minister—was increased in the last budget, so we now have year 7 to 10 students able to access that scheme. We also have the student support fund, which is \$500,000 per annum. So we have three major programs or funds to support low SEs.

MR DOSZPOT: Has there been any assessment of the impact of this funding?

Ms Davy: Not in any formal way, no.

MR DOSZPOT: So how do we know whether this is enough—whether this is sufficient for current means?

Ms Davy: In terms of things such as the bursary scheme and the student support fund, they are mostly money which families use to buy resources or to support costs of schooling and support around that. Anecdotally, I would imagine that our school directors would say, from our response from principals, that that is welcome support. In terms of the schools equity fund, the way we look at that is that it is a small bucket of money as part of a larger resource which goes to supporting all students' literacy and numeracy work. We have done a lot of work over the last 12 to 18 months in looking at our whole investment in literacy and numeracy and seeing whether we are directing those resources in the right places. School equity funding has been part of that review.

MR DOSZPOT: Does the reading recovery program come under that?

Ms Davy: The reading recovery comes under our broader literacy and numeracy strategy; it is specific to school equity funding.

MR DOSZPOT: How are we going on that? Is the reading recovery program funded sufficiently, or is that being gradually eroded?

Ms Davy: The reading recovery program, for those members of the committee who are not aware of what it is, is a very specific program. It targets year 1 students who are not achieving in the literacy domains as best they can. It is a one-to-one program—one teacher to one student—over an intensive period of time. It is a licensed program by Marie Clay from New Zealand. It has been around and been used in many jurisdictions for some time.

As part of our review of all of our literacy and numeracy programs last year, we made a decision to not continue with the full formal licensing of reading recovery. We have found that many of our schools who used to run reading recovery in the past are now not interested in doing that. It is very resource intensive. It is very costly. It does not spread to impact on many students, because of its very strict licensing arrangements. Like most other jurisdictions across the country, we are now moving away from formal licensing of reading recovery and support and trying to look at the strategies under reading recovery and put them into more of a holistic teacher professional development program, enabling more teachers to get access to it in a different way and, therefore, enabling more students to get that support.

In terms of the quantum of funding, we have not changed the quantum of funding that we have provided in the past to reading recovery as a formal licensing arrangement. We have just diverted it to a more holistic teacher professional development program around early intervention.

MR DOSZPOT: I thank you for that and I also thank you for the previous briefing you gave me on this topic. I must report back to you, though, that I am consistently getting a number of people who are concerned about the way the reading recovery program is heading. I simply want to make it known to you and the minister that if there is an opportunity to look at whether that is the right decision, I would encourage you to do so. There is a lot of angst in the community about it—in the teaching community.

Ms Davy: Maybe we can get the details of that and follow it up.

MR DOSZPOT: Certainly. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: There is a question that I would like to ask, but it is jumping ahead.

Mr Barr: That is all right. We can jump around.

MR HANSON: You are the chair; you can do this.

THE CHAIR: It is about the sustainable schools initiative, which is on page 236. It mentions the types of buildings and those sorts of issues. I am just wondering what is

being done—this may be a different program—about involving students in terms of learning experiences in sustainable education.

Mr Barr: You can talk about the new curriculum program.

Ms Davy: There are a number of initiatives. First of all, there is the new curriculum framework that we talked about earlier, “every chance to learn”. One of its 25 essential learning achievements—or organisers, if you like—is around students’ understanding about environmental sustainability. All students from preschool to year 10 must have access to learning about that, and all schools have to put environmental sustainability into their school curriculum. As part of the support around curriculum implementation, there are quite a number of teaching resources and units of work up on that website and there is continued work going on in that area.

We are working very much with the AuSSI program—the Australian sustainable schools program—with TAMS. That is developing cross-agency units of work. We work with ActewAGL and we have some units of work in teaching resources up to support students around that.

We have also got the Birrigai site. Over the last year we have been looking at the nature of the Birrigai site and how we can expand the educational programs that that offers and better connect them to the curriculum framework. So there are quite a number of strategies in place around the curriculum.

THE CHAIR: It is interesting that you mentioned Birrigai, because I was not able to find any information in here about that and the ongoing commitment to maintaining that particular site.

Ms Davy: Yes, there are. I know that there is some—

Mr Barr: I was just going to say—it was the subject of a question in the Assembly last year—that, from a political and policy perspective, the government is committed to Birrigai and to a stronger partnership with Tidbinbilla. There is a new structure that was worked through. Carol might be in a position to talk about that.

Ms Harris: We have been working very closely with Tidbinbilla since the *Shaping our territory* documents were released. Those documents recommended that there should be a much closer association between the two properties that are joined. In doing so, we recognise that the investments that have been made on the Tidbinbilla site, particularly the new sanctuary, offered enormous opportunities for school students who visit the Birrigai site. In forging a closer alliance, not only is it our intent that the programs that have been offered at Birrigai that have been valued by schools and the community will continue but also there is a great opportunity to expand those opportunities now that we have access to the new site. The closer working partnership between the two agencies that have responsibility for those two sites is opening up a much greater opportunity than previously existed just on the site at Birrigai.

Birrigai has been working on notions of sustainability. You will be aware that the buildings that were erected there after the bushfires have been built on sustainability principles. They are able to be used as teaching points for children coming into that

site.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS BURCH: I have a question around page 134. Learning is a lifelong exercise and not restricted to years P-12. It is just a brief commentary around adult learning. Do you want to expand a bit more on the opportunities for adult learning—community-based adult learning—and how successful it is?

Ms Davy: I may start. If you want to get into more detail, I might ask Jocelyn Vasey to come forward. She is our director of training and tertiary education and might be able to give you more detail.

As part of the activities of our training and tertiary education directorate, we take responsibility around Adult Learners Week in the ACT and help to promote some of that work and make some of those connections. Jocelyn might want to talk to you in more detail around what we actually do.

Ms Vasey: We have about \$250,000 that we spend on a grants program for adult and community education. That is a competitive process. There is actually a lot of unmet demand, but a number of different community organisations bid for that money and provide a range of different programs. There is also a reasonable fee-for-service adult and community sector in the ACT that is run by a number of different organisations and community organisations.

MS BURCH: So the subscription to adult learning is good?

Ms Vasey: Absolutely. It is very strong in the ACT.

MR DOSZPOT: Page 99—I will not be able to sleep if I do not get an answer to this; it questions my numeracy capabilities—output class 1 (c), percentage of year 12 students who receive a tertiary entrance statement: is it a typo, the variance?

Ms Davy: Sorry, you are worried about what?

MR DOSZPOT: A target of 50 per cent?

Ms Davy: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: Result, 48 per cent, variance, minus four per cent.

Mr Barr: I think that would be not in percentage point terms but in overall variance.

Ms Davy: No, that is not a typo. You will see that none of those variances actually meet—

MR DOSZPOT: Okay, sorry, it is a variance—

Ms Davy: —because they are percentage points, not percentages.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

Ms Davy: My measurement person is nodding at me.

THE CHAIR: We are just about out of time. Thank you all very much for making yourselves available today.

Ms Davy: Madam Chair, could I just correct the record regarding something I said before in answer to your question about NAPLAN data and whether it is broken down into geographic areas. In the more detailed report, the December report on NAPLAN data, it is broken down by metropolitan, by rural and by remote, but the ACT is only classified as metropolitan, so we would be classified as metropolitan only.

Mr Barr: It still does not enable us, though, to do a Sydney-Melbourne comparison, because metropolitan New South Wales would also include Newcastle, Wollongong and some other places.

Ms Davy: I also provide for the record a copy of the organisational climate survey which Mr Hanson asked about.

MR HANSON: Thank you. That was quick.

Mr Barr: A very efficient department.

Short adjournment.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming today. I draw your attention to the privilege statement. You are probably aware of that. I want to make sure that you understand the implications of the statement.

I might start with a question. Page 9 refers to the entry level of existing workforce training. How much of this training relates to issues such as energy efficiency, retro-fitting and those types of issues around sustainability, and what plans are there to expand on the provision of training in these particular areas?

Mr Service: In response to your first question, I do not actually have that data available to me. We rely very much on industry to tell us where those demands are. We respond to those in a direct sense because we are not a policy authority, if that makes sense. We have seen a rise in requests for training related to energy efficiency. We do quite a lot of work in areas with the Housing Industry Association, the Master Builders Association and organisations such as ActewAGL, and more recently with a number of new registered training authorities that have sought amounts of money for that sort of training.

Mr Guy might want to add something to that, but in terms of going forward those issues are very much at the forefront of the minds of everybody in the community. Our approach has been to respond to those demands. Whether they will increase or decrease in more difficult economic times I guess remains to be seen.

Mr Guy: Just following on from what James said, we depend on what the RTOs put

to us regarding what training they require. It will be a thing of the future. I was speaking to the MBA and a couple of the other RTOs the other day, and they mentioned that environmental training will be one of the avenues they will be seeking to go down, and they will be seeking funding through us to do the training in those particular areas for entry-level apprentices. But a lot of the areas covered are already in the training packages—the national training packages that are funded through the federal government and the state government.

THE CHAIR: You do not currently keep any of the numbers on that. Are there plans to keep numbers so that you are getting an indication, given that it is something which may very well be on the increase?

Mr Service: We do not ourselves have any plans to keep a demand register, for want of a better description. Our approach has been in terms of maximising the amount of funds we have available for training, not to duplicate what we would expect the industry to reasonably do themselves. In terms of entry level, the biggest growth has in fact been occupational health and safety training, and that has been as a result of a process of record keeping, both in the various RTOs and in industry groups, and also a greater focus of emphasis by WorkCover, which is a good thing overall for the industry.

We have avoided keeping substantive demand registers. We have really relied on the industry to tell us where they would like us to spend their money. Really, at the end of the day, we are collecting the stakeholders' money and trying to disburse that in the best way we can.

THE CHAIR: I just have one other question regarding something that appears on the same page. With the economic slowdown and also the flagging of quite a significant increase in investment in capital works, will this place any sort of pressure on the training fund authority? Could you envisage that there would be a point where there may be problems in meeting demand for training?

Mr Service: That is a very interesting question. Interestingly enough, perhaps in an almost obtuse sense, it is probably less likely in the next 12 months that we will be at risk of not being able to fund the number of places. The authority has been quite meticulous in ensuring that it can in fact deal with difficult times. You will see in the report that we have in fact established and maintained quite substantial reserves. One of the reasons for that is to deal with these very issues that the overall community now faces. When the authority was established nine years ago, we had a policy position to never have less than six months of expenditure available to us at any one time, over and above our normal budget income. At this point in time I am not concerned that we will not be able to meet those demands.

Challenges about retention of apprentices will never go away because it is really about the value of their wages, at the end of the day. We have seen some announcements by the federal government recently to support the payment of apprentice wages. That will go partway towards hopefully maintaining some of those apprentices in jobs, but one of the great challenges which still remains over many years is just the amount that employers can afford to pay apprentices.

I am comfortable we can keep the apprentices that we have. Having regard to the demand that we expect over the next 12 months to two years, we can continue to fund that. We have done some work over the last 12 months—and I think that is also covered in the report—to look at how we rebalance the ratio of funding in various courses. Part of that has also been to continue to be able to maintain the apprentice-level training.

MS BURCH: I have a question on the connection between industry and training. Industry is on board and is able to meet the demand for training places. You can train but you do need to have that industry placement. Can you tell us how you engage with industry to ensure there is that placement opportunity?

Mr Guy: The RTOs are the training arm and they are the people whom we fund, unless it is an individual person coming to us and asking us for funding on his or her own for a small business. The RTOs are out there and are looking for people to come and do the training and they have got a number of courses across the construction industry. We have got plenty of courses available. We have got plenty of RTOs available to do the courses and the funding is fine. I do not think we have got any problem in that particular area.

Mr Service: I think it is worth adding that we also have an ongoing engagement with the Construction Industry Training Council and we run a number of information forums leading up to the production of our annual training plan. We see those as being quite critical opportunities for the industry—almost at all levels, whether it is an individual employer, whether it is a worker, whether it is an industry association or an RTO—to have input into, if you like, a centralised process to create the annual training plan which then comes through the minister to the Assembly. That is updated every year. That is why we are very meticulous in making sure it is an annualised document that in fact does address changing circumstances.

As we go into the next iteration of that, which will be the 2010 training plan, because it is a calendar-year plan, I guess there will be some quite different things in that plan as perhaps opposed to what is in this year's. Just the speed of the change in the economy has meant that there will be a whole lot of changes.

We think, financially, we are reasonably well placed to deal with that. It will be interesting, in the next six months, to see how industry's expectations and demands change, and perhaps when we come back and talk to the committee again next year we will be able to give some different answers.

MR HANSON: My issue is about retention. Are you having an issue with apprentices that you have got dropping out of the program and how is the tracking?

Mr Service: Gary may have a different view on this. We are not yet seeing this happen. I have to say that, from a business perspective, I expect that will be a problem. Whilst governments of all levels have done some extraordinarily quick and sensible work in terms of looking for opportunities, that will not necessarily work in every single sector of the construction industry. There will be some lag. The difficulty with lag, of course, is there is the cost of retention. That is a risk. We have not seen any great change in that yet, but I would not say that you could rule that out as being

a problem, no.

MR DOSZPOT: I understand that there was a roundtable called last week, was it? I think you had a roundtable.

Mr Service: Not that we were part of, no.

Mr Guy: No. The Construction Industry Training Council held it and invited all group training companies to attend to speak about retention rates and what funding may be available.

MR DOSZPOT: Did you attend that meeting yourselves?

Mr Service: No, we did not.

Mr Guy: We were not invited, no.

Mr Service: Can I say—not that that is an issue from our point of view; we are very careful—since the authority was created there has been a quite clear delineation and it is an important thing in terms of our exercising our responsibilities under the legislation. We very much have made sure that the industry and its coordinating body do that work, both at a needs level and at a government level, and then we are able to react quite sensibly without any risk of our being placed in a difficult position about how the money is then spent.

I have to say that, from my own point of view—the minister may have a different view—I think that has worked exceedingly well. There has never been a conflict in terms of the way we respond to need and we deliberately do not impart our own views, as an independent authority, on the needs of the industry. If they want it, we deliver it. I think that has worked very well.

MR DOSZPOT: In parliament there were a number of issues that were raised, and one of them was obviously the gaining of enough employers to take either an apprentice in their own business or access them through a group training company. Is that a concern to you as well and is there anything that can be done about that?

Mr Service: This year, the skills shortage trades that the training fund will be funding will be the plastering trades—wet plastering, solid plastering and the gyprocking plastering—wall and floor tiling, cabinetmaking or kitchen making and roof tiling. We will be giving any employer who takes a first-year apprentice on in those particular trade areas in 2009 a grant of \$4,000—\$2,000 paid after three months probationary period of the apprentice and then the other \$2,000 paid at the completion of the apprentice's 12 months. That is to increase apprentices into the trades where there are skill shortages already.

No-one has come to us at this particular point in time and told us there is a huge problem with retaining apprentices. It may come down the track. We have money set aside if we can help them out in certain ways. As James pointed out, the federal government this morning announced that they were putting \$1 billion to \$2 billion into employer subsidies to continue training apprentices.

MR HANSON: That roundtable highlighted the issue of retaining year 2 and year 3 apprentices?

Mr Guy: I was in the system in the 1970s where we terminated a lot of apprentices because there were problems in the industry and a downturn in the industry, and you will lose those people. So our intentions would be to get those people through their apprenticeship term, be it through accelerated training or simulator training or stuff like that. You certainly do not want to lose the apprentices that are currently in the system.

MR HANSON: How long has the authority been going?

Mr Service: I think we are just into our ninth year. I think the legislation was passed in April or May nine years ago, something like that. This is my third term as chairman.

MS BURCH: Is there enough interest from young folk or old folk to pick up trade apprenticeships, whether it is in those skill shortage areas or generally? I was looking at some of the promotions you have here: Canberra careers market, try a trade.

Mr Service: We co-support those events, if you like. We do not necessarily create them ourselves. Certainly, I would expect the feedback from industry was that each of those has worked in the market which it has been targeted at. A number of those events have been going for quite a number of years now. Again, if you like, in terms of the longevity of the authority, for each thing that we decide to support or be part of the promotion of, we have looked for multiyear arrangements where we can actually get some traction; you get some recognition value. It is almost like any event; once you have done it for a couple of years it actually has some recognition.

In relation to the try a trade thing and the things we have done in the schools—I think the first time we did it was about six or seven years ago—in the first year it was a bit of a try and see exercise but, as they have grown, we have got as many applications as places at the moment. Those things, I think, are working quite well. In some senses, again in more difficult economic climates, those opportunities to promote the building and construction industry are the ones which we will continue to work with the industry to take advantage of.

THE CHAIR: There was something in the report on ESD and there was a recording of different measures about office light and power. It would be good to be recording that over time and see how it changes. Are there plans to do that?

Mr Service: I am happy to take that on board and discuss, with both the executive and my board colleagues, the opportunity to do that and if we can do that in some sensible way we will certainly look to include that in future reports.

THE CHAIR: I found that quite comprehensive. It would be good to see how that is going over time.

Mr Service: Understood.

MS BURCH: On page 21, on access and equity, on increasing training places for women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, young workers at risk, are you getting overrun with women plumbers?

Mr Service: Interestingly enough—

Mr Barr: Trainee of the year.

Mr Service: Trainee of the year, yes. In fact, I have been to a couple of things over the last few months. I went to one not a week ago. It was a function for fathers and sons or daughters. There were three daughters there, all of whom were electrical apprentices. We launched a women in construction program last year at the Housing Industry Association in Fyshwick.

Mr Barr: That is Erin from WIN News?

Mr Service: Yes, Erin Molan, who is our sort of ambassador for that program. We had, I think—Gary, can you remember?—15 or 16 young women apprentices across plumbing, electrical and other things.

We have done a lot of work in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. I have to admit that it is not the easiest program in the world to get a lot of places out there in the market but we have been moderately successful. There is not in any sense a lack of desire by the industry to take on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentices. There is not as much demand perhaps in some sectors and industries still.

There is still a bit of an issue about building construction not being seen as a glamorous trade perhaps compared to IT and law and arts and things like that. But it has made a lot of headway in the last nine years. If in nine years I was lucky enough to be sitting here again, I suspect we probably will have at least doubled our numbers.

MR HANSON: You are adding to the glamour, are you?

Mr Service: We are doing our best. And certainly the women in construction thing has got really good recognition value. It has given at least some recognition that the building and construction industry is not just blokes in blue singlets and blue shorts on a building site. I think that is a good thing; it is showing the great diversity in the industry.

THE CHAIR: In terms of people with a disability, how is that going in terms of attracting the—

Mr Guy: We will pay a subsidy to the person who has employed somebody with a disability. We have had circumstances where a young boy had difficulty hearing; so we provided the employer with a subsidy to put in certain machinery into his workshop and stuff like that. There were lights when the saws were on and things like that so that the boy understood what was happening. We paid the employer a subsidy to put those particular items in and, to employ the young lad, we gave him a wage subsidy for a couple of years because the young boy probably was not as productive as somebody else but, in the end, he turned out very successful.

Mr Service: It is certainly something we do promote in the consultation the Construction Industry Training Council and others do for us, that we do have that available, and we are quite happy to respond to requirements or requests for it.

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Service, can you give us any idea of the numbers of people with injury or disability who have taken a program?

Mr Service: I can take that question on notice, if that is all right?

MR DOSZPOT: That would be good, thanks.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any further questions?

Mr Barr: That was hard work for me, that one, wasn't it?

Mr Service: We do our best, minister.

Mr Barr: Yes, you do.

MR HANSON: No, I have got no more questions. I am saving mine for the inquiry.

THE CHAIR: That being the case, this hearing is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 12.21 pm.