



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

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

**(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2008-09)**

**Members:**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY, 1 DECEMBER 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

<b>Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Department of Education and Training .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Department of Territory and Municipal Services .....</b>	<b>1</b>

## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 21 January 2009*

## **The committee met at 2 pm.**

### Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing

#### Department of Education and Training

Watterston, Dr Jim, Chief Executive  
Vasey, Ms Jocelyn, Executive Director  
Wilks, Ms Trish, Director, Curriculum Support and Professional Learning  
Strauch, Ms Helen, Office of Board of Senior Secondary Studies  
Melsom, Ms Kathy, Director, Indigenous Education and Early Years Learning  
Chandler, Mr Wayne, Director, Schools—Northern Canberra  
Blom, Dr Kaaren, Director, Training and Tertiary Education  
Tardif, Mr Phil, Executive Director, Business Improvement Services  
Bray, Mr Rodney, Director, Schools Capital Works  
Whybrow, Mr Mark, Director, Finance and Corporate Support  
Ellis, Ms Ann, Acting Director, Human Resources  
Collis, Dr Mark, Director, Student Services and International Education

#### Department of Territory and Municipal Services

Webster, Ms Sally, Acting Senior Project Manager, Education ICT, InTACT

#### Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority

Service, Mr James, Chairman  
Stowers, Mr Ray, Industry Liaison Officer

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome everybody to this annual report hearing of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs. I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which is in front of you, so that you are aware of that. Thank you, Mr Barr, the minister, for coming along today. Before we go to questions, Mr Barr, I invite you to make an opening statement.

**Mr Barr:** It is a pleasure to be back again this year appearing before the committee, this time on the 2008-09 annual report of the Department of Education and Training. Pages 11 to 27 of the annual report go through a number of highlights of achievement in the department and, indeed, in the ACT education and training system during the period that is covered by this year's annual report. As an overarching comment, the significant amount of achievement in so many different areas of the education and training portfolio in the 2008-09 annual report period has come off the back of the reform process commenced in 2006-07. Indeed, many of the dividends of that reform process are now starting to be seen in the public education system in particular.

The key areas that I would like to highlight in the 2008-09 annual report period most particularly are the very strong student performance, the renewed focus on literacy and numeracy within our education system, of course the complex and challenging work at an individual school level of implementing the curriculum framework, our support for quality teaching, and the strengthening of early childhood, Indigenous and special education.

A major feature of the 2008-09 annual report period relates to school renewal and the commencement of the building the education revolution program. I think a record level of capital works has been undertaken. That will only be surpassed by the record level that will be completed in the 2009-10 financial year.

We continue our work on post-school pathways and vocational education and training opportunities. At the other end of the education and training system, we see a lot of work on the opening of new early childhood schools in 2008-09 but also a focus on vocational education and training.

Something I mention every year as the territory's sport and education minister, and the only minister in Australia who holds both of those portfolios, is that we have placed considerable emphasis on health and wellbeing through quality physical education programs in our schools. I was particularly pleased to see in the Crawford report on sport in Australia—and we in fact discussed this in a different committee, at a different annual report hearing—the particular call at a national level for a renewal of sport and PE in our school system. I think the ACT has shown considerable national leadership in this area.

Having said all of that, I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear and we are happy to take your questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I will start with a question. You referred earlier to highlights. My question is in relation to pages 19 and 20. It is about IT in schools and the notify SMS system, which has become a part of monitoring attendance. Obviously the system records attendance and notifies parents of absenteeism. I am wondering what has been the reaction from parents and students to the project, whether it has had an impact on attendance records and whether that has shown through.

**Mr Barr:** Sure. I will get the appropriate officer in a minute to deal with the detail of the project, but just as a general observation: I have only received positive feedback in my office in relation to this initiative. A number of parents have welcomed its introduction. The only area of concern that has been expressed is, for parents who do not have a mobile phone, that obviously this technology is not available. But for those who do and who are able to receive these updates, parents certainly value it.

As for students, I suspect some might have been caught out by this system and have had their non-attendance at school questioned by their parents at a rate much quicker than they perhaps thought would have been possible. But I think, overall, it was an important initiative that was, again, part of the 2006-07 budget. It was a four-year program to upgrade our ICT capabilities, and this was just one element.

**Ms Webster:** In relation to feedback from parents, it is not something that at this point I would be able to answer but I am certainly happy to take that as a question on notice and provide that information back through Andrew Barr.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it too early to know whether it has had an impact on attendance rates?

**Ms Webster:** At this point in time, it would be too early. We have only gone out through a number of schools—I believe 17 high schools and colleges across the ACT. We are looking to go out across that further. At this point in time, the focus of the project has been more on the implementation of the system but we are certainly looking to baseline that and get statistics.

**THE CHAIR:** And when do you expect to be doing that?

**Ms Webster:** I will commit to probably in the next few months. I am happy to do that.

**THE CHAIR:** We can expect in the next annual report to see it?

**Ms Webster:** Yes, definitely in the next annual report.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have got a supplementary on that. Minister, through you to Ms Webster: in the same attendance monitoring project, has there been any development with the scanning of the attendance reports as such, to alleviate the manual work that has been done on that? Is there an implementation of the scanning system as well?

**Ms Webster:** Yes, there is. At the moment, we are currently working quite closely with DET legal liaison as well as a few other members of the DET executive in relation to the records keeping act. At this point in time, it looks as though we will still have to continue to do the electronic roll-calling and then print out those documents, say, on a weekly basis. That has not been determined yet.

**MR DOSZPOT:** So it cannot be scanned in on a daily basis?

**Ms Webster:** The answer is no, not at this point, in accordance with the records keeping act.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, at page 24, there is the issue of lowering average class sizes. As I recall, this was an issue that we discussed at estimates and previous annual report hearings. Can you give us an update on how that is going, the planning for that, the progress and, in particular, the recruitment of staff?

**Mr Barr:** It is very good news. We have, through this recruitment round, on my last advice received on Monday, been successful in filling all of the positions that were available. Obviously the 70 additional teachers are on top of our usual annual recruitment rounds. Slightly more than 260 offers have been made but, as I understand it, about 260 offers have been accepted. So that incorporates the additional teachers as well as our ongoing recruitment, because there is clearly a turnover in the teaching staff from year to year.

We continue, of course, to recruit teachers throughout the course of the year on contracts to meet particular requirements in particular schools for things like maternity leave and other changes but, overall, despite some scepticism from some in the community that we would not be able to recruit the additional teachers, we have been able to and they will commence in schools in 2010.

**MR HANSON:** Excellent. And are you able to provide us with the breakdown of what class sizes are currently running at across the schools?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Remember, we asked for that previously.

**Mr Barr:** That information has been, I think, sought by this committee previously.

**MR HANSON:** It has but I am looking for an update, I guess. We have got that information?

**Mr Barr:** It would probably be best to provide that information for the 2010 school year. When we have that census, we will calculate that information, and I am happy to provide it.

**MR HANSON:** That is fine. Can you give us a date by which you would be able to provide that?

**Mr Barr:** The census is undertaken in February and the information becomes available once it is audited. Of course there are formal requirements, because commonwealth funding flows from that audited data. But that becomes available in March. We can certainly make that available. And that is a public document. There is a February census and an August census, and they are released in late March or early April and generally around November of each year. So we report twice a year on this and we will continue to do that. We will make that information available.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** As a supplementary, it was interesting to note that Dr Ainley from ACER presented evidence to the achievement gap inquiry, in response to a question about class size, that it is not a particularly big factor compared to other things such as teacher quality and smaller class sizes for particular subjects. Actually class size is not the main factor. I know the quality teaching project has been a big part of what the education department is doing now. If you will be looking at that, I am wondering whether or not the class size has any impact on what is being delivered.

**Mr Barr:** Sure. I have said that all along. Indeed I copped some criticism from people sitting next to you but I have never said that—

**MR HANSON:** The evidence that he provided was on the impact of class sizes.

**Mr Barr:** The class sizes in and of themselves were the silver bullet, the magic outcome. They are one of a number of factors. The number one factor is teacher quality, by a long way. Certainly, in the top four or five factors that you would look at to improve educational outcomes, smaller class size is there. Of course the key thing there is flexibility and that in some context class sizes much smaller than 21 are required and in other contexts it will not make a significant difference to educational outcomes if the class size is higher than 21.

That is why the government policy settled on an average to recognise that flexibility and the different requirements, because in certain contexts a smaller class size will be important In others—

**THE CHAIR:** As Dr Ainley said, it depends on the subjects as well.

**Mr Barr:** That is correct.

**THE CHAIR:** And one of the things he said was, when you are looking at a number between, say, 20 and 30, it does not have that much of an impact. I am sure you have spoken with ACER in relation to that.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, and obviously a lot of the direct implications across the system will be dealt with at an individual school level, in that we have given principals the flexibility, within their staffing point allocations for each school site, to make staffing decisions and class size decisions within their individual school context, recognising, of course, though, that we have a system-wide policy and that we will clearly expect schools to work within that policy framework. But there is flexibility.

**THE CHAIR:** Some schools find that perhaps that is not going to work for them or that they do not have flexibility to have that number?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, indeed, but within the overall policy framework.

**THE CHAIR:** So they still have to have 21?

**Mr Barr:** No. They will have flexibility. I am not suggesting that every class is going to be 21. The average is 21. But for every class there is above 21 there will need to be classes below that to get to the average.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is going to have to measure out?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** I did have a question about the quality teaching area. You mentioned it in your introductory remarks. I know that one of your strong focuses is on quality teaching. On page 13 it mentions an evidence-based professional development approach to this whole question of quality teaching. I was wondering whether you could update the committee on that particular part of the report.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly. I will get Trish Wilks to talk about the quality teaching program. Clearly this is an area of significant budget and policy priority for the government and, indeed, at a national level through the quality teaching national partnership. Education ministers around the country are engaged in an important national reform process and then of course there are significant local implications that flow from that. But I will get Ms Wilks to outline our progress in this area.

**Ms Wilks:** In terms of quality teaching, this year we have three central office based consultants appointed who are operating across clusters. As well for 2009, we have

had the equivalent of 14 full-time positions, and they have actually worked in small clusters of schools to support schools in the implementation of this strategy. We acknowledge that it is a long-term implementation process, but, by the end of this year, every school will have worked with the consultants around developing and understanding the quality teaching model. That is particularly around the understanding of the three domains and the 18 elements that are in that so that there is an understanding of the common language involved.

We have had a range of professional development from whole school professional development days starting with the introduction to the quality teaching model. We have had familiarisation sessions. We have had whole school staff meetings, cluster meetings for school executive staff and quality teaching contact teachers, and there is a quality teaching contact teacher in every school. There have been faculty year level and school team meetings as determined by the schools. As well as that, we have the central office based consultants basically on call working with schools.

We are in the process of developing some additional material around a DVD to assist professional development in schools so that there will be something on call. There are DVDs associated with the model, but we recognise that we need one that is contextualised in the ACT, and that will be developed in January. As well as that, we have had two years of targeted scholarships, and we have over 50 teachers who have received a graduate certificate in pedagogy, which is the equivalent of half a master's degree in education.

We have an implementation strategy for the next two years. Based on the fact that we now have a core of people with an in-depth understanding of quality teaching, we have a model and a process of professional development for the consultants. As well as that, when we are running the professional learning, whether it is in literacy and numeracy, whether it is in leadership, whether it is in behaviour management, we will have a quality teaching lens that goes over that process. So it is part of a united approach to build teacher capacity within the department.

**MS PORTER:** Just a follow-up on literacy and numeracy, if I may. We have actually had really good results as far as literacy and numeracy are concerned. Do you see areas where we can still improve on that, and how does the government strategy that is mentioned on page 11 relate to this? There is a strategy being released for 2009-13. I was wondering how that relates to the really good results that we are getting now.

**Mr Barr:** I think as a general statement, yes, the ACT has performed very well in NAPLAN testing, in PISA, in TIMSS, in all of the various assessment methods nationally and internationally. That continues a fairly long-run trend from our own former ACTAP local testing data. That said—I have been on the public record saying this before—any result other than that would, frankly, be very disappointing given the socioeconomic make-up of our community—that is, the fact that it is the most educated community in Australia. The most recent ABS data shows that, in terms of the population, we are the most highly educated. So one would anticipate and fully expect that that would flow through to our education system results. So whilst they are very pleasing, I think there are areas for improvement. The literacy and numeracy strategy outlines those areas and some pretty fundamental new approaches to strengthening results.

I am obviously keenly awaiting the outcomes of the achievement gap inquiry to make some further recommendations around addressing those challenges. I think, overall, the ACT is performing well with the opportunity to take that very high level of achievement even higher through some of the target policy measures that we put in place. Ms Wilks or Dr Watterston might want to comment a little further.

**Dr Watterston:** Trish and I met this morning with the 33 selected schools that we have identified through two national partnerships—the low SES schools and the literacy and numeracy focus schools, plus some allocation of resources that we provided through the department—to bring together those schools to work in a way that provides a consistent approach. The main mechanism that we are using for that consistency is a coaching model where the professional learning for teachers is provided in the classroom alongside, shoulder to shoulder, where they focus on problems of practice and look to address individual needs of students, which takes us a little bit further back to the class size issue. While it is not a primary driver for school improvement, it is an important prerequisite to have a capacity for a teacher to be able to work on a one-to-one basis with students.

So we have got a coaching program that is common across schools that have been identified to undertake extra work. When you ask how we can improve the results we are already getting, the improvement is through leveraging the expertise that is available within ACT schools already. We do have some very high-performing schools and some incredibly high-capacity teachers who understand what makes a difference.

I think through our model and through the work that Trish has been putting together in terms of the literacy and numeracy strategy, our next level of work, if you like, is to be able to take what works in one school and transpose it effectively into other schools. So for us, it is the next layer in terms of being the highest achieving state or territory and moving to an area that other states have not been able to attain yet. We think that is through internal classroom assistance but also gathering the expertise that we already have within the teacher fraternity here and making sure that we can leverage that success. Trish, I am not sure if you wanted to add to that?

**Ms Wilks:** No, I think you have pretty much covered it. As well, there is the point of saying that there are specific needs in specific schools, and so we have developed programs to meet the specific needs. For instance, it may be that there are issues in early literacy, and so we have an early literacy intervention strategy where we then work with the schools where that is a designated need. As Dr Watterston has said, it is pulling together to meet the needs of the particular school.

**MS PORTER:** Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a follow-up question, Mr Hanson?

**MR HANSON:** It is, in a way, in that it is to do with the sort of stuff we are talking about with NAPLAN. I think we all agree that we should be doing well comparatively and it is difficult then to measure how well we are doing when we benchmark against other states because of the socioeconomic factors. There has got to be some way of

scaling back and saying, “Well, given the socioeconomic factors that we have here, if that were taken into account, are we actually doing well?” Are we hiding our results because we do well because of our demographics? I do not know the answer to that, and I do not know what we are doing to make sure that we are not being complacent and simply getting figures that look good because of the demographics and saying, “We are doing great.” What are we actually doing—

**Mr Barr:** Mr Hanson, you might be aware of a fairly significant national debate in relation to the publication of school results and, through the my school website, the creation of two new important indexes, ICSEA and SEIFA, which I will accept are not common household terms but are—

**MR HANSON:** Do you know what they stand for?

**Mr Barr:** In a minute I will get someone to outline what the acronyms stand for, but they are indexes of socioeconomic advantage or disadvantage. It is a much more sophisticated level of analysis than perhaps previously occurred in Australia where that sort of socioeconomic assessment has been undertaken on a postcode basis or a suburban basis. This takes it to a higher level with census collection districts, which are household groupings of around 200. In the context of an ACT postcode—I will pick mine; I am in 2602, which is shared with about eight inner north Canberra suburbs—there are probably 1,000 to 1,500 households in a Canberra suburb and there would be seven or eight CCDs within each suburb. So you are going to get a much more detailed level of data in relation to school populations.

The ICSEA index then creates a mean score in Australia of 1,000, and so schools that are given an ICSEA score above 1,000 are then above the national mean and those with a score below 1,000 sit below the national mean. So in the national context, the majority, if not nearly all, ACT schools will sit above the national mean, so they will have a score above 1,000. When the my school website goes live at the end of January next year, we will be able to have a like-school comparison that is nationwide. It will compare schools with similar ICSEA scores across the nation. The like-school comparison will be in a bundle of 60 schools, and it is more than likely that, in the context of an ICSEA score, an ACT school will be compared against 58 or 59 schools elsewhere in the country and perhaps only one or two ACT schools within that ICSEA band.

The top score I have seen is something like 1,300 or thereabouts. So it is quite a range from the highest to the lowest. The lowest socioeconomic ACT school would be Jervis Bay, and so it will clearly fall in a different category and its comparative result will be very different from that of other ACT schools.

**MR HANSON:** When does that first round of results come out?

**Mr Barr:** The Deputy Prime Minister, through the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, will launch that in late January. That is the advice we have now. That will give us the first look at the specific issue of how ACT schools compare against other schools with similar—

**MR HANSON:** So you are comparing apples with apples rather than at the moment

where you are comparing apples with oranges.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. We think this will give us the first realistic comparison of that. Although ICSEA is a significant improvement on previous data, it is still not perfect.

**MR HANSON:** How do you think we will go?

**Mr Barr:** How do I think we will go? Based on the data that the Victorian government released last week—it was their own—it actually showed that schools that were perhaps adding the most value were not necessarily in the highest socioeconomic areas. I think there will be some surprises and that some people's perceptions of which are the best schools in the ACT will be challenged. That will obviously see some extensive community interest in the relevant performances. But it will certainly give us for the first time information that is a proper comparison of like with like.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, my question is related to page 5 of the annual report; it is the top paragraph on year 12 completion rates. In 2008, 2,817 students enrolled in year 12 public secondary colleges and achieved a year 12 certificate, and 49 per cent—1,341—received a tertiary entrance statement. My question is: why is it that this ACT figure of 49 per cent is so much lower than the corresponding New South Wales figure, which is 79 per cent?

**Mr Barr:** For a tertiary entrance statement?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** That would reflect the sorts of academic packages that students in years 11 and 12 are undertaking in the ACT. We have tertiary courses, we have accredited courses and we have VET courses. Students are able to choose a combination of courses, but if you want to go for tertiary entrance then you must complete a certain set of BSSS requirements for a tertiary entrance statement.

I would have to seek some further advice on the differential between the ACT and New South Wales. Partly it would probably be around the differences in the system. New South Wales has an HSC system, and there might be a greater level of encouragement within that context for people to seek a tertiary entrance rank, even if they are not intending to go on to university, whereas the options within the ACT system for a non-university pathway are clearer and our assessment system enables students to make that choice.

If you are driving at a point that you think ACT students are underachieving or that they are not setting their sights high enough, I disagree. I think a higher percentage of ACT students go on to university than in any other jurisdiction.

**MR HANSON:** It seems quite low, that figure of 49 per cent of people who complete their year 12.

**Mr Barr:** No, that is seeking a tertiary entrance score. The people who complete—

**MR HANSON:** No, that is right. But of the people that complete year 12 only 49—

**Mr Barr:** Only 30 per cent go on to university, Mr Hanson, in the ACT, and that is higher than anywhere else in the country. In most parts of the country you are talking about 15 to 20 per cent who make it to university. Whilst I can understand that, compared with another jurisdiction which has an entirely different years 11 and 12 system, it is a legitimate question, I think the explanation would be that you can sit the HSC and you can seek a tertiary entrance score, but it does not mean that you are going on to university. It probably reflects a lack of flexibility within the New South Wales assessment system rather than being any reflection on subject choices by ACT students. Would anyone like to comment?

**Ms Strauch:** Yes. Essentially, the minister has highlighted the key issues. One is around retention rates. We have a much higher retention rate to year 12. The other is around the breadth of curriculum that is offered in our colleges, a much broader curriculum than is offered in many high schools in New South Wales.

Students have a lot more options to select an appropriate pathway for themselves. As a result, our median tertiary entrance score is about 10 points higher than it is in New South Wales. A lot of students in New South Wales are actually completing tertiary packages but their tertiary entrance rates are quite low. So they are not actually getting ranks that would get them into university and a lot of them do not want to go on to university. But because they have few options in their high school they actually meet the requirements even though it is not their intention to go on.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a question in relation to that. On page 5, in the same section, there is reference to year 12 completion rates of Indigenous students being 70 per cent, and that is against an overall achievement rate of 87. Has that been identified as an area to be addressed? Have you set a level that you wanted to increase? Ideally, it would be, I guess, the same as for others.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed. I always caution on using percentage data in relation to Indigenous cohorts in the ACT—

**THE CHAIR:** It is a small number.

**Mr Barr:** given the very small number.

**THE CHAIR:** But it is still important.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, nonetheless that does not detract from the overall point which clearly is to see Indigenous participation rates and completion rates in education at or above what is achieved by the rest of the student population. There are undoubtedly challenges that the system needs to address. Most particularly, those challenges arise in transition from one school to another.

An initiative in 2007 in one of our supplementary appropriations was to provide, I think it was, just over \$3.5 million worth of additional support for Indigenous education around three or four key areas. One of those was providing transition support for Indigenous students as they move from primary school to high school and

then from high school to college and then from college on to further study.

The other was to work very closely with high-achieving Indigenous students to ensure that they continued their study through those education transitions. You would have seen in the most recent budget through the partnership between the Chief Minister's area within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Department of Education and Training some further funding for Indigenous scholarships, particularly in the teaching area.

So there are a number of programs that have been funded in place. We are into their second or third year now. They are aimed at addressing that retention issue, but then also ensuring that, as we provide support for gifted and talented students, we are also identifying gifted and talented Indigenous students and offering scholarship pathways.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that funding and those programs starting to have a positive impact?

**Mr Barr:** It will be too early to tell for the vast majority of students, mainly because it was introduced in 2007—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, but it does. You can see it continues through.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, certainly. So what we will be wanting to see is improved outcomes in the years ahead. I am not sure we are in a position today to be able to provide some more information on the success of those particular programs to date, unless Kathy Melsom can do so. She is looking at me confidently. Just before Kathy steps up, I would say that this is an area that we have identified and additional resources have been made available. Again, I go back to my opening remarks. The capacity to provide those additional resources is off the back of the structural change that occurred in 2006-07.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a supplementary question to my original question, which you may be able to answer for both of us if you do not mind. I did understand that we have to compare apples with apples in my original question that I asked. The information I was basing it on was a report on the scaling of the 2008 New South Wales higher school certificate that was put out. So you may not be able to answer this question right now, but I am simply asking this: the comparison on face value appears to be that 49 per cent of our year 12 certificate students achieve a tertiary entrance statement as opposed to 79 per cent in New South Wales.

**Mr Barr:** Sure, but I think the key point there is that that is the student's choice. They choose which subjects they enrol in.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Okay. I am simply stating that—

**Mr Barr:** What would be useful, I think, would be the relative performance of ACT versus New South Wales students.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Sure.

**Mr Barr:** What percentage go on to university, what percentage of those who seek a

university admission score are successful. We can certainly provide that data.

**MR DOSZPOT:** What I am saying is that is what I am basing my figure on—

**Mr Barr:** Sure.

**MR DOSZPOT:** and if you can provide us with further information, I would appreciate it.

**Mr Barr:** We will do that, yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps if Ms Melsom could answer the other question, thank you.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**Ms Melsom:** The initiatives that the minister referred to to enhance the retention of Indigenous students in year 11 and 12 particularly are underway and we have just conducted a selection process for students. We had 17 applicants apply for the 10 scholarships that are available in years 11 and 12. We went through an interview and presentation process. It was highly contested. In fact, we are finding that we are struggling to narrow it down to only 10 students.

I think the interesting thing for us is the number of Indigenous students that have embraced this. The way in which we have approached it is through the other part of the funding that has been received, and that is the student aspirations officers. We have appointed three officers that identify through schools those students that are academically capable of and interested in pursuing some sort of academic career.

We are commencing as early as year 6 students, in that we know that unless students set goals for themselves at a very young age they often do not then entertain it at a later stage in their schooling. So we have a number of students now that we have identified and also a number of students that are looking at entering into the ANU secondary college program.

So we are identifying Indigenous students particularly to support them in entering into a range of initiatives that are on offer. We do not believe that we are going to have any difficulty in retaining those very capable students in year 11 and 12 next year, and that will contribute significantly to future outcomes.

The other point that I would like to make is that in the youth attainment NP that we are negotiating, we have set a target of 80 per cent attainment by 2020 for Indigenous students. That is the completion of year 12 or its equivalent.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is 80 per cent by 2020?

**Ms Melsom:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Hunter, have you got a follow-up question?

**MS HUNTER:** I do have a follow-up. The minister had mentioned Jervis Bay. Of course, the ACT education department has responsibility for delivering education to Jervis Bay. My understanding is that we deliver up to primary school level and then students go on to high school in Nowra or somewhere over the border. I am just wondering how this fits with those students. We are talking about transitions and about years 11 and 12. We are talking about a high number of Indigenous students living in this community. How do those things fit together? What are we doing in primary school? Is there any sort of coordination that goes on with New South Wales around transition into high school to be ensuring that we are doing the best by the students and the Jervis Bay community?

**Ms Melsom:** The staff-student ratio for schools such as Jervis Bay is quite high relative to other schools. I do not know exactly what it is at the moment, but we invest more in Jervis Bay for those reasons that you have cited and because of the needs of those children that are there.

The school itself fits very nicely within that community and works very closely with the community and supports the continuance of students that go on. We do provide some advice and support to Jervis Bay through our Indigenous program. That tends to be on an occasional basis when the school seeks support from us, but mostly our focus is on those primary years.

What we have done this year is support the school to expand its preschool program so that we can provide a better start for those children that are coming into the Jervis Bay primary school.

**MS HUNTER:** Has there been any thought about some sort of program that some families may want to take up where a child may be able to continue their schooling here in the ACT? Has any of that been explored with the community?

**Ms Melsom:** Not to my knowledge—

**Mr Barr:** A quick change of personnel. Wayne Chandler is the school director for the northern region, which also includes Jervis Bay, yes?

**Ms Melsom:** Yes.

**Mr Chandler:** Jervis Bay is one of the schools that I really enjoy visiting. We have formed a very strong relationship between Vincentia high school and Jervis Bay. There is an exchange of teachers between the school and the high school. The Jervis Bay students are supported in a transition program because that is where they transition to—over to Vincentia high school. Jervis Bay school is also now involved with the University of Wollongong. We have interns from the University of Wollongong working with the students of Jervis Bay and supporting them. A lot of that work is about their transition from primary school to secondary school.

**MS HUNTER:** That links to page 4 of the overview, where we talk about NAPLAN, Indigenous students and the need to work on those areas. I am sorry; this might mean another switch of personnel. How are we looking at prioritising, and what sort of

strategies and programs are we putting in place to improve those Indigenous students' results as far as literacy and numeracy are concerned, with NAPLAN in years 5, 7 and 9?

**Ms Wilks:** We have recognised the literacy and numeracy needs of Jervis Bay and have just provided them with additional staffing points so that they can have a full-time literacy and numeracy coordinator who will work basically with the teachers in the school in building their capacity in understanding primarily literacy but in some cases some numeracy support. We are working on a program where that teacher will come to Canberra to have some intensive training and also we will be taking officers to Jervis Bay to work with the teachers in the school. So there has been a recognised need which we have met.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter, do you have a follow-up?

**MS PORTER:** Yes, but it is not on the Indigenous issue. I want to go back to the year 12 results and their implications. We have got the 87 per cent result, which is terrific. Obviously, we have got a concerning result with the Indigenous young people. We have heard about the work that we are doing in that area. I want to talk about the young people who do not achieve year 12 at all. What are we doing about those young people? That is of great concern. There is obviously a gap between 87 per cent and 100 per cent.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, yes. That is clearly the focus of the youth transitions and attainment national partnership and the youth compact, and, obviously, the legislative response that this parliament, in conjunction with the rest of the country, has adopted.

There are a variety of different education settings and alternative education pathways that are then available for those students who are not completing year 12 through the traditional college system. The largest of those is the CIT vocational college. As we have heard through the achievement gap inquiry, the CIT vocational college, which is into its third year of operation, is proving to be a very popular and flexible education pathway for a variety of students, be they those who are under the age of 17 or 18 and who are undertaking either year 10 and/or year 12 equivalent studies in that CIT context, mature age students, or students over the age of 18 who had not previously completed year 10 or year 12 and who are getting into that educational pathway and returning to education and training by completing those qualifications in the CIT context and then moving on to further study.

Within the ACT schooling system, we have alternative pathways, particularly around that access 10 and connect 10 program area, where you can have students in a separate setting and getting through that year 10 hurdle and then moving on to further education and training.

The key aspect going forward, Ms Porter, is flexibility, to ensure that we are providing education and training options that are responsive to the needs of those individual students and then, in the context of the year 11 and 12 cohort in the ACT, we have estimated that we will need to be dealing with hundreds of students rather than thousands in this context, and that, across the existing public providers, the existing alternative education providers, as well as a small but growing private

training industry, there are a plethora of education and training opportunities.

The challenge will be to connect people to those opportunities and to ensure that the education and training providers accept the responsibility that comes with that connection. I think we are going to have to achieve a higher level of connectivity and a higher level of personal responsibility not only from our education and training leaders across those constitutions, but also from employers, in the context of apprenticeships and work opportunities, because it is “learn or earn”, so both dimensions need to be treated equally and fairly.

Dr Watterston has recently convened a major stakeholders forum that was attended by about 200 people, so I will get Dr Watterston to outline what went on there.

**Dr Watterston:** We are terming our strategy going forward the youth commitment. We are asking all stakeholders to notionally sign up to this commitment, to share responsibility and accountability for all young people until the age of 17, and hopefully after that time. As the minister has already outlined, the new legislation enables pathways to be developed through education, training or employment. Of course, with education, there is a clear line of responsibility with the school or institution involved to maintain continuity in the relationship and ensure success. But when there is employment or training involved, how that might be constructed is not so clear in terms of that sense of responsibility.

We are asking in this youth commitment for industry groups, employers, non-government schools, both Catholic and independent, as well as our government schools, and non-government institutions that deal with young people, as well as other government departments, to come together and conspire around this notion of a baton. Every young person is considered to be a baton—a relay baton, if you like. If they move from education into training or employment then that baton is passed on. The idea is that we notionally try not to drop the baton. We understand from past years that we lose somewhere between one and 400 students out of the system, which is common around all states. It is in that transition that people drop out and they fall through the gaps.

The notion here is to strengthen participation not just through legislation but through a shared community commitment, whereby everyone is making sure that that baton stays in the air. If a young person is in employment and that employment falls through, we are asking the employer to consider their responsibility and make contact with the department or some central agency so that we can then ensure that the young person is reconnected.

At the moment we are in the engagement stage. We are talking about the idea and engaging people within the ACT community to share that responsibility. The feedback we have had has been terrific. The idea of the youth commitment and keeping those batons in the race, if you like, is one that immediately resonates with people; they can be sure about what it is that we are all committed to here.

There is a little way to go and there will be further dialogue, but we hope to have those people notionally signed up to that commitment early next year, and then we will put processes in place to make sure that the ongoing aspirations and opportunities

for young people, as I have already said, become a shared responsibility, with the person concerned and their family and also with respect to the pathway they are on and whoever is responsible along that pathway—the education provider, the training provider or employer, or a group of two or three of those different pathway contributors.

**MS HUNTER:** Have resources been set aside, or how does a young person negotiate or navigate this system? How are they going to find what might be the best fit? Who is going to be there to support them doing that?

**Dr Watterston:** Kaaren Blom might want to add to this as she is doing some work with her team on the youth commitment. The resources have been set. One of the ways of strengthening this youth commitment is to enhance the opportunity for every young person to create their own pathway and develop a strategy going forward. We want to make that a guarantee as part of this commitment. So we are strengthening our career advice at an earlier age, and we are ensuring that every person that leaves year 10 or transitions from year 10 has got an identified path and documented pathway that they can then use during that transition and as they move forward.

Of course, we understand that people make decisions that they need to be able to change, and there needs to be greater flexibility. But the notion of having those conversations and having that expertise provided to create that pathway plan at an earlier age creates conceptual awareness around that for people to start considering what their options are.

I might ask Kaaren to talk a little bit further about what we are doing in that youth commitment area and strengthening our career planning.

**Dr Blom:** I will go back to some of the existing supports for the young people that we are talking about that are already in place in the department and then perhaps look forward to what is going to be in place when the national partnership is fully implemented, part of which is with commonwealth government support through that national partnership.

The department already monitors the progress of students who are leaving our colleges and looks at where they go from school. That is one important activity that we do. Students who have not perhaps experienced the successful transitions that we would like them to be experiencing are being supported now with a couple of initiatives, like the connect 10 program which has established three achievement centres for students in years 9 and 10, so programs that are set up specifically to assist students at those transition points. The moving forward initiative has put an additional teacher in each public college, starting this year, and that very much works with young people around enhancing vocational learning and career education and so on, and the careers cluster program supports careers advisers and the advice that they give to young people.

Looking forward, we will be implementing the youth attainment and transitions national partnership—and I am only adding to what the minister and Dr Watterston have already told you about that. The ACT will receive reform funding of some \$412,000 per annum to assist us in taking this forward, with a review of structured

workplace learning to ensure that it is really fully embedded and integrated in school practices. We will be enabling the implementation of VET-based learning in alternative programs like CCCares, one of our award-winning programs, the connect 10 program that I just mentioned, the Murrumbidgee education centre, and then implementing practices for career education at an earlier time than currently occurs.

Under that national partnership we have two really significant programs that will commence from the beginning of next year. The school business community partnership brokers are ones that the commonwealth has tendered for, but the ACT has been integrally involved in that tendering process. The successful tenderers will be working with the department of education and with our schools. The school business community partnerships are very much about building and enhancing strategic whole-of-community approaches to improving education and transition outcomes for young people. That is very much about getting business and community involved in the way that schools work, working with community groups and parents.

With the focus perhaps more on the disengaged young people, the youth connections program, which begins next year, is very much about focusing on improving education and life skill outcomes for young people who are at risk of not attaining year 12. Youth connections will support personal development and facilitate the sort of connections and progress through education, working very collaboratively with other service providers in the ACT who work with those disengaged young people.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a supplementary question on the monitoring of the students that go from the standard form of education to vocation-based education. I think we have discussed this in another forum, Dr Watterston, some time ago. How do we ensure that these students do not disappear from the system? In other words, what monitoring system have we got when they pass from the non-government to the government sector? How do we keep track of these students?

**Dr Watterston:** I am happy to answer that. From a legislative point of view, they need to request delegated permission through the chief executive to engage in another pathway, so at least they are going to be in traditional mainstream school and we will have a record of where they are and who they are. But of course the best-laid plans can come unstuck when people become disengaged, so there are two answers, if you like. How can you put structures in place to make sure that the procedures are followed, which is one way, and how can we provide the pastoral care, the connection and the relationship to make sure that we keep those people engaged in the system?

That is the work that I talked about, the youth commitment, because there is a moral imperative around that work that transcends just a legislative requirement or structural or procedural requirements. If people want to disappear, they disappear—we know that now—even at the required leaving age of 15. We are still worried about maintaining connections with all young people. Hence I go back to the youth commitment. What we need is a territory-wide commitment where people outside education but who are implicitly connected feel a sense of responsibility, through us, to share in keeping that happening there, if you like.

The best way we can do this is to put the structures and regulations in place—no doubt, but we know that is not enough. It is trying to create that symbolism around the

shared responsibility, the moral imperative, the need to make sure that these young people get given chances in life, despite their own challenges that they may face, and connect the agencies that are involved and the government departments and the stakeholders and employer groups to the one cause. That is what we are trying to rally people around at the moment. This compact that we will be asking people to notionally sign has no legal obligation to it; it will be about making sure we go the extra mile to commit to resurrecting a young person's chances when in fact they sometimes are destabilising themselves.

We are all aware of the difficulties that young people go through from 13 to 17. It is a stage of life that some people manage better than others. We need to develop better care systems around those people. It is a hard stage. If they are going to be involved in employment where there is a bit of rough and tumble, living a very different lifestyle than they would be in school, we are going to ask people to keep an extra eye out to make sure those support mechanisms are in place.

That is probably not the definitive answer you are looking for, but what we are trying to create is a shared sense of responsibility right across the community, which we will manage as a department. We will put the nucleus of the strategy in place in our office so that we can be the central repository, if you like, for people to connect with us to make sure that we can deal with young people that are at risk.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I appreciate the effort that the department is taking on in this. One additional factor I guess that complicates life from a Canberra perspective is the fact that we are so close to New South Wales, to Queanbeyan and other areas, and this is part of the reason that we are trying to focus the government on looking at parallels with the other jurisdiction, in New South Wales, which is so close to us. The more we can interact with it on a number of these areas, the better it would be. This is one of the other factors that I think we ought to have a look at.

**Dr Watterston:** I understand that state and territory boundaries should not get in the way of what we are trying to do, so the strategy I am describing is about having the student at the centre rather than perhaps stopping the traffic when they cross the line. So I agree with you.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, this committee produced a report on the school closures, which was tabled in the Assembly, and the majority of that committee recommended that the schools at Tharwa and Hall be reopened. I think that you previously made it pretty categorical that you will not be reopening schools. Now that you have received the report and read it—I appreciate that you have not responded formally yet but I assume that you have now had time to consider it in some detail—are you able to give us a view on where you are? Is that your position still, that those schools will not reopen, or have you been able to—

**Mr Barr:** The government response to that committee will be released within the three-month response time frame that the government has agreed with the Greens, as part of our parliamentary agreement, that our best endeavours will be made to respond to all committee reports within three months, and I will not be pre-empting that government response. It is still to go to cabinet. It will emerge from cabinet and will be released within that three-month period.

**MR HANSON:** So there may be some change. You have been, previously, categorical in saying that those schools will not reopen.

**Mr Barr:** I remain categorical.

**MR HANSON:** Thanks. I just wanted to know that.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, I know what you said about the boundaries, and I appreciate what you said. We talked about Jervis Bay before. The students go from Jervis Bay primary school into a New South Wales high school. So where is the baton tracking, or keeping the baton in the air, for these young people if they should leave that high school and then go back into Jervis Bay? Who is tracking those students from that area now, who are clearly our students?

**Dr Watterston:** I am not looking for an escape clause, but I guess what we are talking about from a youth commitment at the moment in terms of the ACT is that commitment being between 15 and 17 and how we make sure that we keep a close connection and strong support mechanisms around those students who are in that vulnerable period; also a pathway that is going to be flexible beyond the school boundary. The students that are moving from Jervis Bay to the New South Wales high schools are, of course, primary age students. It does require an obligation on our part to make sure that their transition is done smoothly—I am not sure if Wayne has got a comment about this—but, in terms of our thinking, it is the normal work that we would do to support any transition for a primary school student through to their secondary education, making sure that that transition is smooth and seamless in a way that that learning continues at the same rate.

In terms of the Jervis Bay/New South Wales experience, I do not see that really being much different from what we do in the ACT already. Primary schools work closely with the intended secondary school; Wayne might be able to elaborate a bit more about how they do that in Jervis Bay.

**MS PORTER:** Just to clarify, in case I have misled you in any way, Dr Watterston, what I am talking about is the student, say, at 15, 16 or 17, who has been in the high school and is now not achieving and has come back into Jervis Bay. Have we got sight of that baton at that stage? Do we know what we can—

**Mr Barr:** As in they would be resident within the ACT, in Jervis Bay, but attending an education or training facility in New South Wales?

**MS PORTER:** That is right. Are we able to track them and get hold of that baton? That is the question.

**Mr Chandler:** Basically, the Vincentia high school work very closely with the school community, with the wider community of Jervis Bay, and they would certainly be responsible for working with that community for those high school years. Our presence in Jervis Bay is basically the primary school, but the other departments and the New South Wales department work very closely with the Jervis Bay community. So there are certainly plans in place there. There are pathways from the Vincentia

high school into the national park, which the Indigenous people manage. So there would be pathways there, but certainly our responsibility in Jervis Bay is primary education.

**Mr Barr:** I make one final observation on that. This is a national partnership and New South Wales will be part of this as well, so they will have their own response. We are just checking exactly when New South Wales changed their legislation to 17 years of age. This would be an issue they have already been dealing with.

**MS PORTER:** It is an interesting dynamic, isn't it? Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** I might go to a new question, relating to page 22 and also discussed briefly on page 28, about the building the education revolution stimulus funding. Those pages note some concerns expressed under risk management. Can we get a progress update on how the construction of that project is going? Have there been any complaints received from parents, students, or even local residents, about particular projects? How is it being delivered in an effective and timely manner?

**Mr Barr:** Overall, I think we can say that the ACT is performing very well in meeting the commonwealth performance targets for this program. I will just make a few general observations and then I will get Mr Bray or Mr Tardif, or both, to go to the specifics.

Unlike larger jurisdictions, the ACT was able to engage the architecture profession in the design of these major projects, so ACT schools were not just forced to choose from a series of template designs, unlike what has occurred in some of the larger jurisdictions. The building projects have commenced or will commence in the ACT as part of the primary schools for the 21st century program. That is the largest individual element of the BER program overall. They are the projects that range roughly between \$2 million and \$3 million—the new libraries, the new halls. Those sorts of bigger projects have been designed on an individual basis, with significant architectural input and clear input from school boards, school principals and school P&C associations. That sets the ACT apart from other jurisdictions in Australia.

On Monday, I was able to announce the completion of the 50th national school pride project in the territory; that was completed at Forrest primary school. So we are well on schedule for the national school pride. They are the smaller range of projects, up to about \$200,000 per school site—classroom refurbishments, playground upgrade, shade structures, new front entry areas for schools. It is quite a diverse range of projects and they have been progressing very well. As I said, 50 have been completed.

I think one of the very first such projects completed in the country was at my old primary school, the Turner school. That was opened; I remember it being a freezing cold day and we were standing in the sleet, so that makes me think it was in June or July of this year. That work has been progressing very well. Given the challenges that the commonwealth sets states and territories to achieve this work within that time frame, the ACT has done exceptionally well. Which of you two gentlemen would like to add further comment? Mr Tardif?

**Mr Tardif:** Just to add a little to what the minister said, under national school pride,

all of the 84 approved projects have to be completed by 1 February. We are well on track to achieve that. Of the 68 projects under the primary schools for the 21st century initiative—they are the much larger ones, such as classrooms, libraries—we have commenced 47 of those. Again, they are all on track to meet their completion dates. We were not successful in our applications for any of the science and language centres.

In terms of the question about complaints that we have received, we are in a fortunate situation in that we are a small enough jurisdiction to be able to respond individually to individual complaints and to respond quickly. There has been a small number of complaints, and I think in each of those we have been able to address those, hopefully to the satisfaction of the people who have raised those issues.

**THE CHAIR:** Have they primarily come from local residents or from people in the actual schools?

**Mr Tardif:** It has varied. It could be from individuals on the P&Cs or local residents.

**Mr Bray:** Did you want more exact—

**THE CHAIR:** I do not know; I thought someone else was—

**Mr Bray:** From memory, we have had two formal complaints that went to a higher level. One was from Hughes primary school and the second was from the Cranleigh school.

**THE CHAIR:** Talking about the risk that is associated with risk management, is it around the complaints or is it around the actual time line process? It is a pretty strict time line that the federal government has set.

**Mr Bray:** No, both those complaints were in relation to the proposed projects that were to be delivered at those schools.

**THE CHAIR:** No, I am talking about the risk management process, which you have identified to us on page 28, where you talk about that risk associated with the project.

**Mr Tardif:** I guess it covers all of those things. There is a whole range of risks: there are safety risks, delivering the projects on time, keeping within budget. Yes, it is right across the board.

**MR HANSON:** I am going to follow up on another one of Comrade Gillard's glorious revolutions, in this case the digital education revolution.

**Mr Barr:** Parodying the mad monk already, are you? How long has it been?

**MR HANSON:** I am not sure why building school halls is a revolution or delivering computers is a revolution, Andrew, but—

**THE CHAIR:** Have you got a question, Mr Hanson?

**MR HANSON:** I do, indeed, and it is about the glorious digital education revolution.

**Mr Barr:** This is on behalf of the Luddite league of the Liberal Party, is it?

**MR HANSON:** Well, I am just not quite sure why, unless you were a Trotskyite, everything must come from revolution, but they explain—

**Mr Barr:** All the labels are coming out now.

**MR HANSON:** Well, it may explain why we have badged everything—

**Mr Barr:** I have never been called a Trotskyite, Mr Hanson. I have been called many things, but I have never been called a Trotskyite.

**MR HANSON:** To Comrade Gillard you are one of the proletariat that implement the glorious revolution.

**Mr Barr:** Let me mark this moment: it is at quarter past three on 1 December. Trotskyite, all right. Anyway, I will let you ask a question, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** It is using the language, I should say, of the revolution days. Anyway, the computers that are being delivered: can you tell us how many have been delivered or are going to be delivered through the—

**Mr Barr:** From memory, the first round was 2,847. I know they were completed. There were subsequent rounds, and I do not have that figure in my head so I will—

**Ms Webster:** Under the national secondary school computer fund, so far we have completed round 1 and round 2, and round 2.1 was recently completed in terms of deployment. That so far has seen us spend a total of \$940,000 of the allocated \$1.37 million, which has a combination of 826 laptops and PCs from rounds 2 and 2.1 in addition to the round 1 numbers that the minister spoke of just then.

**MR BARR:** That is 3,600.

**MR HANSON:** We have received 3,600?

**Ms Webster:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** And there are more to come?

**Ms Webster:** There are more to come from round 3.

**MR HANSON:** How many?

**Ms Webster:** At the moment we are looking at releasing the net books in round 3 for the secondary schools. The numbers are yet to be determined. We are still completing audits, and these will be delivered once we have actually finalised the wireless infrastructure.

**MR HANSON:** In terms of ratio of student to computer, what is that?

**Ms Webster:** At the moment?

**MR HANSON:** I understand that the commitment was one computer per student.

**Ms Webster:** By 2012 we need to meet the ratio commitment of one to two. At the moment, we are probably at a ratio of one to four in some schools still, but we will meet that ratio of one to two by 2012.

**MR HANSON:** That includes all the networking, does it, and the support for those in terms of IT support?

**Mr Barr:** If you were a close follower of the news, you would have noted that—

**MR HANSON:** Well, Andrew, if I were to follow every time you are on the news—

**Mr Barr:** Again, on behalf of my media adviser, I thank you very much for that compliment.

**MR HANSON:** He works magic for you. Cricket last night, was it not?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it might well have been; it is the cricket season, Mr Hanson. Very good, yes.

**MR HANSON:** The light on the hill.

**Mr Barr:** COAG discussed this matter around the additional support that would be required for infrastructure, and there was a decision made that the commonwealth would make more funding available for the rollout of the machines, recognising that the PCs or laptops in and of themselves were not the totality of a requirement for an individual school.

In the ACT context, again, it is worth noting that the 2006-07 budget provided significant funding for the backbone of the network across ACT public schools. So all ACT public schools, through that initiative and subsequent budget funding that provided broadband rollout funding for primary schools, have in place those important and critical networks. Wireless is another area. For the actual rollout in individual schools, particularly in some that were ageing and did not have modern infrastructure, wireless solutions were sought to provide universal, high-speed broadband connections across all of our schools.

The ACT is perhaps better placed than any other state and territory to accept this new technology because of the work that was undertaken starting in 2006 to ensure that we had the broadband network. Again—perhaps a point that is not well understood and has not been well acknowledged—the sorts of speeds that the ACT set as a standard and a benchmark for our system are, in fact, 10 times faster than the national benchmark that the commonwealth is trying to get the rest of the country to as part of this national approach to digital education.

So three or four years before the commonwealth was in this position, when we were sagging under the weight of the Howard government and a complete lack of investment in education from that government, the ACT took the bold step in 2006 to invest heavily in this area. As such, when we got to 2009 we had completed our infrastructure rollouts, which has enabled us to take advantage of this particularly significant commonwealth initiative. Now, of course, it took a change of government and a party at the federal level that actually believed in investing in this area.

**MR HANSON:** Everybody gets a computer, fortunately.

**Mr Barr:** It is good to see, is it not?

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Hunter.

**MS HUNTER:** This is about a rollout, I am fascinated by round 1, round 2 and then 2.1—

**Mr Barr:** Point one.

**MS HUNTER:** I will leave that one. Is there recurrent funding? Obviously, you roll out these computers, but they do need to be upgraded and they do need to be replaced and so forth.

**Mr Barr:** It is a four-year replacement cycle; so the expectation is that the machines will be updated. The commonwealth has provided that funding ongoing. We, of course, have our own significant investments out of the territory's budget in ICT. So we have got our own maintenance budgets, our own operating systems budgets and this commonwealth money is supplementing an already very strong ACT government program. Clearly though, Ms Hunter, were the current federal government not to be re-elected, although given today's outcomes I think the chances of that are diminished considerably—

**MS HUNTER:** But back to computers.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, the ongoing funding of this is something that will need to be renewed by the commonwealth government after that four-year period. I made a little political aside. Nonetheless, there is not bipartisan commitment to this program; so there is a risk—

**MS HUNTER:** If there were a change, the ACT would have to make that decision about whether it picked it up?

**Mr Barr:** We would either maintain those machines beyond their four-year lifespan or we would be left with, if we were going to replace them all, that cost. That is a risk that all states and territories face that the commonwealth will after a four-year period withdraw their support for the program. But we have that funding guaranteed for four years. It has been made available and it is in our budget; so that is important and, that said, I am increasingly confident that we will see the program renewed as a result of the commitment of the current federal government.

**MS PORTER:** I would be less confident about the ACT elections.

**MS HUNTER:** Do we also have, along with that, some sort of e-waste strategy that is being—

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, I have had the opportunity to visit a particular innovative small business, Charity Computers out at Charnwood, that have been the recipients of a number of our older machines. I do believe they reached capacity and they simply could not take any more. Through no waste, as I understand it, there is a particular initiative. Again, I got caught in a very long line—like half of Canberra, it seems. There were a couple of free days where e-waste was able to be recycled. So we have taken advantage of those sorts of opportunities.

But judging by the success of Charity Computers, there is an opportunity for other businesses to step in in that context. As well, I understand that the department has sought to utilise the best parts of the older computers.

**MS HUNTER:** Cannibalise them.

**MR BARR:** Yes, effectively cannibalise them to maintain those workable components within the school system.

**MS HUNTER:** Does the department see that it is formalising some sort of approach around the disposal of e-waste?

**Ms Webster:** Yes. We are certainly going through that. That is part of our involvement with the NSSCF program. We have to actually maintain and take part in a very formal process with e-waste.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter, do you have a follow-up on that?

**MS PORTER:** Yes, it was back to Mr Hanson's rather disparaging remarks about the education revolution. I note that we have got our own capital program with new gyms and new facilities. Notwithstanding his remarks—

**MR HANSON:** I just do not know why it needs to be a revolution.

**MS PORTER:** Notwithstanding these remarks about what that does for education, I just want—

**Mr Barr:** You would like to adopt a Fabian approach, would you, Jeremy. You would like a quiet change?

**THE CHAIR:** Let Ms Porter ask—

**MS PORTER:** Sorry, it is probably my own fault, I should not have—

**MR HANSON:** I can come up with some new names for it if you want it.

**MS PORTER:** I should not have mentioned Mr Hanson's remarks, but

notwithstanding those remarks, what renewal in education is brought about by these capital works that the ACT is engaging in from our own budget as well as the money that we are getting through the other—

**Mr Barr:** Sure. If you look at the totality of the ACT government program across school renewal, repairs and maintenance, capital upgrades and new schools, it is heading up towards half a billion dollars. Then you add in the forward estimates period—I suppose from the 2006-07 budget going out to 2012-13—and you are talking about nearly half a billion dollars in ACT government investment. Then when you add in the commonwealth bill and the education revolution component, that is \$700 million or thereabouts across 83 school sites. It will grow once you add Gungahlin college and Harrison high school to 85, but that is a considerable amount of investment in school infrastructure.

Again, close followers of this debate at a national level will note that the Australian Education Union a few years ago commissioned the report into decaying public school infrastructure.

**MR HANSON:** Well known friends of the Liberal Party.

**Mr Barr:** Well known friends of the Liberal Party? But the AEU had to leave the ACT out of their report because the situation here did not fit their national agenda, which was to say that state governments and the commonwealth government had let public school infrastructure crumble. They mounted a very strong case that billions of dollars worth of investment from both levels of government was necessary to upgrade public school facilities.

The ACT was excluded from that. There is a little footnote saying that we had undertaken such a significant amount of investment and we were such a small territory that it would skew their overall figures. Whilst it was disappointing that they chose not to use that report to highlight the good work that was occurring in this jurisdiction—

**MR HANSON:** Was that before or after you closed the schools? I cannot recall.

**Mr Barr:** Nonetheless, I go back to where I started in this hearing: we would not have been able to undertake this level of investment if we had not taken difficult decisions in 2006-07. Nearly every element of infrastructure renewal and new programs has come off the back of those difficult decisions. Like it or lump it, we would not be able to do what we are doing now if we had not undertaken that reform. That is unarguable.

**MS PORTER:** But back to my question. Mr Hanson was sort of saying: what is the use of the infrastructure? Is that improving outcomes for our students? I guess that is the question, is it not?

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, the variety of new and improved teaching and learning spaces, classrooms, specialist teaching areas, the technology upgrades and the considerable improvement in the sustainability of our schools that are available now have made a considerable difference to the teaching and learning environment. There is no doubting that. I think if you go to page 136 through 138 of the annual report you will

see marked improvements in students, staff and parent satisfaction in the public education system.

**MS PORTER:** I did notice that.

**Mr Barr:** I am sure the committee will spend a lot of time examining those results in the two hours that remain to us.

**MS PORTER:** Yes, I do have a question about that.

**Mr Barr:** That clearly has made a noticeable difference on the ground. Schools are clearly workplaces and places of learning; so higher quality environments, having access to new technology and having access to pleasant working environments makes a clear difference to staff morale, to student morale and then obviously that flows through to improved outcomes. I just randomly pick a few examples of projects that will make a significant difference.

**MR HANSON:** What—prepared earlier?

**Mr Barr:** I highlight the new performing arts centre that is nearly complete at my old high school at Lyneham.

**MS PORTER:** Lyneham, yes.

**Mr Barr:** And that will be one of three new performing arts centres. There is one at Canberra college and one in Mr Doszpot's electorate at Calwell that were very warmly received by those school communities and will make a considerable difference to the performing arts in each of those regions.

Whilst these new performing arts centres are attached to those individual schools, they are strategically placed throughout the city to provide regional venues. They will be open for other schools and other performing arts organisations to access for performance and rehearsal space outside of school hours, for example.

This past month we have seen the completion of new gymnasiums for Belconnen high school in your electorate, Ms Porter, and Stromlo high school in Mr Hanson and my electorate of Molonglo. It means that every ACT public high school now has a separate gymnasium and hall; so they are not having to compete for that available space for PE and other activities. They do not have to compete for the use of the hall. These have been important additions to each of those schools. Again, I think they are important dividends from difficult structural reform that occurred in 2006-2007.

**THE CHAIR:** We are actually due to go to afternoon tea break; so I think we might just stop here and if we can be back here—

**Mr Barr:** We can return to talk about the revolution after a cup of tea, is that so?

**THE CHAIR:** I am sure we will.

**The committee adjourned from 3.31 to 3.52 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome everybody back.

**MR HANSON:** I want to add to Ms Porter's point. Certainly, from the opposition's point of view, we welcome the additional infrastructure in ACT schools, wherever the source. But you have got to remember that it is in the context of a global financial crisis. A lot of money has been spent. I think it is \$14 billion nationally on the revolution. It is our responsibility to make sure that that money is spent in the most prudent fashion and that what is being delivered is of benefit to the community and is value for the money that is provided.

You can build a school hall and say that is a good thing, but we have got to make sure that that is the best way to spend that \$2 million, for instance. I think sometimes that message can get lost. The decision has been made by the federal government. It is being delivered by the ACT government. It is our responsibility to make sure that it is spent wisely. I just want to make sure that, in our banter in the guise of questioning, that is made very clear.

**Mr Barr:** Of course the government has an interest in ensuring that.

**MR HANSON:** Of course it does. I do not dispute that. The efficiency dividend—and I appreciate that is not in the last financial year or so—obviously is a one percent target you have got to achieve. I cannot remember what that is for education in terms of real dollars. Is it \$4 million?

**Mr Whybrow:** It is approximately \$4 million.

**MR HANSON:** Have you identified that? Have you received submissions? What is the process and where are you at?

**Mr Barr:** That will feed into the budget process for 2010-11. Agencies were tasked, in spending for this financial year, to provide options and investigate providing options for budget cabinet. Budget cabinet has begun its meeting process but no final decisions have been made. Watch this space. All will be revealed in the 2010-11 budget papers.

**MS PORTER:** I want to go to page 15. It refers to the new early childhood schools that have opened in 2009. You are on record as saying that you believe this is an important reform in our school system. I was wondering whether you could inform us about the progress of these schools, how they are all going.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed. There are four new early childhood schools for the territory. In your electorate, Ms Porter, there is one at Southern Cross in Scullin. There are two in Molonglo, at Narrabundah and Lyons. There is one at Isabella Plains in Tuggeranong. I formally opened three of those schools in the one day. A number of members of the Assembly were present at those openings. Lyons school was the fourth in that series and it was some months behind the others as a result of a decision not to commence the work at Lyons until a period of 12 months ago, once their school year had concluded.

Enrolments are very strong across those four sites in the schooling program, preschool to year 2, but also I think, importantly for the future, in the childcare components. The clear advantage for parents in these new early childhood schools is that it is effectively a one-stop shop and that you are eliminating two transition points for younger students. If you were to follow an alternative education path, you would have to go from child care to a preschool and then from preschool to a primary school. You can be in the one setting from birth to eight years of age under this model. For parents with young children, particularly if you have multiple young children, in that birth to eight-year period, it provides a very convenient set of community facilities.

In addition to the childcare and education programs that are on offer, there are support services provided through the Department of Health and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. So it is an innovative model. The early childhood schools were the first to move to the 15 hours of preschool education. It is part of that national partnership model. There is a program of rolling out that universal access model that particularly sees disadvantaged areas and Indigenous students targeted first. That program is a four-year one and is due for completion in 2013. We have commenced with our early childhood schools. I think that has been very well received in each of those settings and has been important in driving enrolments. Kathy might be in a position to tell us how many enrolments there are on each site.

**Ms Melsom:** I would love to, thank you. The early childhood schools have been progressing very well and are being well received, I think, by the Canberra community. I have been tracking the enrolments for next year. That gives us a really good indication.

Already at Isabella Plains there are 120 children. I am speaking here about the preschool to year 2 component, the education provision. There are 71 children at Lyons, 116 at Narrabundah and 124 at Southern Cross. What we do know about each of these schools is that, come the commencement of the school year, we will see more children and families approach these schools, because they sit, each of them, in a lower socioeconomic environment, if you like, if we can describe that for anywhere in the ACT, and therefore have a history of families coming on day one of the school year for children to be enrolled in the school. They are very positive numbers for that cohort of children in those settings.

Lyons is the one that is lowest. Because it was operating out of the school hall for most of this year and has only recently taken occupancy of its new building, the enrolments have been quite low. But the interest of the community is extremely high. For example, the childcare centre at Lyons has a waiting list of 200 children. So we are really quite on the mark, I think, in establishing Lyons in that vein. Certainly that is what our information showed us. So that is very pleasing.

**MR DOSZPOT:** This is a supplementary. On pages 15 and 21, it talks about universal preschool access. What portion of the funding has been rolled out so far? What percentage of the funding has been rolled out for that?

**Mr Barr:** That is a very good question. Kathy, are you able to answer it?

**Ms Melsom:** Yes. The amount that we will receive in total is \$13.1 million. We

received \$1.3 million for 2008-09. That is the amount that is showing. Some of it flows over into 2010; so it is a bit skewed. It was actually—

**Mr Whybrow:** I can answer that. I know people do not have this document in front of them, but I refer them back to the 2009-10 budget papers, budget paper No 4, page 371. That documents the amount of money in relation to the national partnership, universal access. I will quickly read out the numbers. For 2008-09, it was \$440,000; for 2009-10, \$920,000. That is the \$1.3 million in total we are talking about.

**Ms Melsom:** Thank you.

**Mr Whybrow:** You have mentioned that. We are consistent. For 2010-11, it is \$1.16 million; for 2011-12, it is \$3.56 million; and then full implementation, for 2012-13, it is \$7.08 million.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a couple of supplementaries on that. Is this for all sectors, including independent preschools?

**Mr Barr:** The national partnership talks about universal access. It talks about provision in a variety of settings. So in the ACT context we have provided support in the initial round for the early childhood schools and for the Catholic Education Office for a preschool at Gowrie, I think. Then they are proposing to further expand their network. The national partnership has a particular focus, as I indicated in response to Ms Porter, on the early rollout in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage and Indigenous students. But over the course of the program there is an expectation from the commonwealth, which the ACT were pleased to meet, to provide universal access in a variety of settings.

That said, I need to stress that it is not universal provision. It does not mean that everyone who is currently operating any form of preschool service will have access to funding under this partnership. It is not universal provision; it is universal access. That means that we will have to make some allocation decisions in relation to settings outside the public system, and that will be done on the basis of ensuring our concurrence with the national partnership, which is on universal access. We will have to make decisions in relation to geographic provision. Where there is not a government preschool or a non-government preschool, then we could look to the childcare sector to provide that universal access.

So there will be a review in 2010 of our rollout. This, of course, crosses over between Education and Training and children and young people. Until a few weeks ago, it was all in my bailiwick; so I am quite familiar with what we intend to do in 2010. The carriage of the childcare sector will fall to Minister Burch, going through that process.

Yes, I am aware and I have had representations from the childcare sector where there are programs in long-day care and other settings that are linked into a preschool arrangement. In some contexts, that can mean the long-day care provider walks the kid down to the government preschool. In other contexts, it is a program delivered within that childcare setting.

We will need to examine how we can go about ensuring that it is delivered in the

variety of sectors but the one thing I can state pretty clearly is that there is not enough money in the national partnership for everyone who is currently providing some form of preschool program to have that increased to 15 hours. The money simply will not stretch that far.

The government's policy commitment is that government preschools which provide education for about 90 per cent, I think, of the four-year-old cohort will all, over the four-year agreement, move to 15 hours. We will provide support for Catholic and independent schools on application and against the criteria of universal access, not universal provision. We will also look at the childcare sector for settings. Again I really need to stress that it is about access and that we will want to ensure that there is no part of the city that does not have, within very close proximity, access to those 15 hours.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Would you see independent preschools such as Blue Gum and Montessori falling inside or outside that parameter?

**Mr Barr:** Certainly we will look at their applications. I know they are seeking to be part of the program. It will depend, as I say, on a suburb by suburb, site by site, assessment. Off the top of my head, Blue Gum's program is in the suburb of Dickson. I do not believe there is a government preschool in the suburb of Dickson. That would work in favour of Blue Gum. I hasten to add that does not mean I am committing today to Blue Gum but that would certainly be a factor.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I thought you had.

**Mr Barr:** We will obviously have to consider that. The statement of fact is that there is not a government preschool in every suburb in Canberra.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Do you think the preschools understand the way you have just explained this, or are they under a different understanding?

**Mr Barr:** We have certainly communicated with them through their peak body, the Association of Independent Schools, and, in the Catholic system, the Catholic Education Office. Obviously, in year 1 of the program, the CEOs have been involved in rolling out the 15 hours in one of their sites. I know from a meeting with Moira Najdecki that they are looking at expanding that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I am specifically talking about the independent schools.

**Mr Barr:** Independents, yes. Some independent schools are already offering 15 hours; so they would not qualify for additional government assistance to move beyond that. The application is for 15 hours, although I can understand an argument that that would be unfair.

The ACT overall was sitting at 12 hours prior to the national partnership. Some other jurisdictions were offering no preschool at all. Like the other states and territories that were providing some preschool education, we were disadvantaged in the level of commonwealth support to get to 15 hours. But in the totality of all of the national partnerships, arguments of comparative unfairness in individual national partnerships

have been addressed through getting better outcomes than some of the others.

That said, the ACT's socioeconomic position puts it at some disadvantage in terms of winning competitive funding rounds at a national level when the determining criteria is socioeconomic status.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I am sure, with your influence with the federal government, you will be able to get that across.

**Mr Barr:** I work very hard to get good outcomes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** We have full faith in you.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly all of my colleagues at the ministerial council know it is a standing position that I raise on behalf of the ACT that we do have pockets of socioeconomic disadvantage, that we must address those and that the ACT should not be left out in those national considerations.

**THE CHAIR:** I have got a question in relation to the review of special education services which I know was previously mentioned under the contracts on page 249. I was hoping to get an update on when we can expect to see that.

**Mr Barr:** The Shaddock review?

**THE CHAIR:** The Shaddock review, yes.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, yes. It will be part of the government's submission to the inquiry. I understand the submissions are due at the latest on 24 December; so it will be within the next 23 days.

**THE CHAIR:** You can appreciate there are a number of other groups waiting to see that.

**Mr Barr:** I certainly understand that, yes, very much so.

**THE CHAIR:** Will it be released publicly?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it will be.

**THE CHAIR:** And will it be released in about the same time frame as that or before that?

**Mr Barr:** That will be subject to cabinet. I need cabinet's approval on the government submission. COAG is next Monday. So our regular Monday cabinet is being moved. We will have two cabinets on 14 December. All things being equal, I will get an answer then and we will move to release that material very quickly after that. I suppose I am narrowing it down to 10 days between 14 and 24 December.

**THE CHAIR:** It will be released publicly at some stage during that time frame?

**Mr Barr:** It certainly will, and before Christmas, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Collis, did you have anything to say?

**Dr Collis:** I do not think I have anything to say.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, that was my question and it was answered. Mr Hanson, did you have a follow-up to that?

**MR HANSON:** I was going to follow up specifically about autism. As I understand it, there is a lot of work done in education here in the ACT for autistic children. I have seen some of the units that operate. The advice is that autistic children should be looked after by a multidisciplinary health team, not just necessarily in an educational setting. What have we done to make sure that children in ACT schools who are autistic are receiving the multidisciplinary approach that is recommended by the commonwealth government for autistic children rather than just a—

**Mr Barr:** Are you asking in the context of our autism units or students who are in mainstream classroom settings with a teacher's—

**MR HANSON:** I think both, to be honest. There are degrees of severity of autism, of course, but—

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, and hence the different settings within the education system.

**MR HANSON:** That is right, so I just want to make sure that the autism unit is a multidisciplinary team, and then how do we take that approach as we look at children who are in more mainstream school settings to make sure they are getting the support that they need?

**Mr Barr:** I will get Dr Collis to answer that.

**Dr Collis:** As you have pointed out, there is a range of needs across the autism spectrum. The commonwealth recommend multidisciplinary teams, particularly in the context of early intervention and those early years after identification. I believe the commonwealth have invested quite a significant amount of money in terms of supporting those multidisciplinary team services into the years of identification to school age. In fact, some of that investment actually ceases when a student is of school age.

Certainly, as with all severe disability areas, a multidisciplinary team is essential in terms of making assessment, programming and providing an appropriate program. In the Department of Education and Training, we work hand in hand with Therapy ACT to get those services into our schools. Therapy ACT currently have a policy where they support primarily the family and then the educational setting within which the young person goes to school. Schools will have access to those therapy services. In addition to that, there are school counsellors who are psychologists who are working within our schools.

In terms of students with autism specifically, we have the full range, as you would

appreciate. The majority of our students with autism are supported within mainstream classes, and then the next largest group would be those who are in learning support units specifically for autism. Then there would be those students who are in special schools who have autistic disorder and have high level needs. The very nature of that is that the therapy and multidisciplinary support increases as the level of need increases, and the setting becomes more tailored for that level of need. Broadly, the answer is that we provide those services across a range of settings and, dependent on the student need, we, in fact, get the multidisciplinary team approach across those settings as it is needed.

In this year there was a program from the commonwealth, positive partnerships, which was rolled out across the nation. It is actually the commonwealth approved professional development and professional learning for teachers and schools generally, because the approach is actually for the school executive team—that is, the principal and the teachers who are teaching the students with autism. But parallel to that is, in fact, a program run for parents. So far this calendar year, we have had 14 of our schools attend that training, and that is current, up-to-date approaches to the teaching of autism. We have had two parent sessions which have been fully subscribed, and there are 80 parents representative of 80 families in the ACT who have benefited from that.

The Department of Education and Training are, in fact, supporting the rollout by continuing the findings and the relationships onward into schools with our inclusion support and our other services. That program goes into round 2 next year, and we hope to at least double it and perhaps do a bit better in those numbers for next year in that program.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOZSPOT:** I have a very similar question, but just bear with me while I ask the question on this. Does the ACT government offer children in the ACT who are diagnosed with Asperger's disorder access to the same or equivalent services and support as children with autistic disorder?

**Dr Collis:** The funding is not actually determined based upon the nature of the diagnosis. The diagnosis actually determines whether a disability is present, and then the determination about the educational adjustment required is made from that point. As a general rule, one would suggest that a young person with autistic disorder would probably have significantly more needs, because they would generally fall across access and participation needs much more heavily, for instance, so frequently they would not have necessarily language and so forth.

Asperger's syndrome, of course, runs the gamut young people who, in fact, are of normal to above normal intelligence who have lots of language and lots of interest in being at school but may have social deficits or a particular behavioural deficit. Indeed, some of our Asperger's students may not need any support at all.

I can tell an anecdote of a Asperger's young man who I saw at a school graduation two years ago who was actually picking up the physics and the math prize and who required some support early on, but once he got into the right stream, he required less

support. However, there are some Asperger's students for whom their social deficit is so unique or so severe that perhaps they do have significant needs. So the answer to how we support the needs is not necessarily based upon the disability category; it is based upon the level of educational need that each student will present within a classroom and in the school.

**MR DOSZPOT:** We have received a lot of representations from parents from both categories who feel that there are ways that this could be addressed better. Obviously this is something that we are bringing to your attention and we are obviously looking at what has been done as far as the annual report is concerned. How can parents escalate their concerns to you to the same extent that they have to us? I guess they have tried but—

**Dr Collis:** In terms of escalating concern, if there are complaints, we start at the school and then work through them, because there will be support people all along the line, including my office directly. The system is quite flexible and we can often negotiate what look like difficult barriers and we can work our way around them. Sometimes it is just a matter of education and working through it.

In terms of how families input into ways of better getting our resources to meet the needs of kids in our schools, I would really welcome that they make some kind of representation to me. We have a special education reference group, which this year has largely been the reference group to the special education review. Next year it is moving back into its terrain of working with us about how to better achieve our outcomes for young people with disabilities. That group has representatives from parents and citizens, from the Autism Association and so on. So if people feel they are unrepresented on that, can I suggest that they contact me directly. I would appreciate that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I also understand the Shaddock review would have looked at aspects of this, I should imagine. I do not want to pre-empt what is coming out of there, but I would be interested in the outcome of what is coming out of there. I may be directing some parents to you in regards to this.

**Dr Collis:** Thank you for that.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a question in relation to vocational education and training. It is just in relation to the recommendation through the inquiry into vocational education and training to address skills shortages, about improved data collection to better identify skills shortages and changes in student enrolment. Has the ACT VET management system for better data collection been implemented, and have there been any improvements which have come out of that system?

**Dr Blom:** If we are going to talk about the actual implementation of the second iteration of our VET data management system I might call on our colleague from InTACT to add to the picture there, because the implementation of that program is certainly a collaborative effort between ourselves and InTACT as the technical service provider.

The need to have an improved data management system grows out of our own

increased needs for data reporting both to the commonwealth as a condition of the funding we receive and also, in fact, to be able to do the sort of tracking that we have been talking about today in terms of having a much better picture of exactly what our dollars are buying and what the levels of participation are and so on, and those requirements for effective data management continue to grow.

**THE CHAIR:** So the deployment of that system, has it actually gone towards that recommendation which has been made, and have improvements flowed from that? Are you starting to see them?

**Dr Blom:** Improvements will flow once it is fully operational. We are not quite at that stage yet, but we are confident that once we are, yes, there will be.

**Ms Webster:** The AVMS system has been partially implemented. As a project as itself, we are currently looking at any gap analysis for the requirements of that as a business system. Obviously there have been some changes from DEEWR which have affected the original requirement scoping of that application as a system. Currently we are in a process of rescoping, and we will then have a third iteration of the AVMS system.

**THE CHAIR:** When do you expect that will begin?

**Ms Vasey:** How long is a piece of string?

**THE CHAIR:** Fair enough.

**Ms Webster:** I really would not want to commit to a time line at this point in time until we have fully scoped the remaining requirements.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, so there is no time frame at the moment?

**Ms Vasey:** Not as we speak. We are certainly working very hard to get that scoping done. Once we have got the scoping done, we will have a much better idea of what is actually required in terms of the changes that need to be made.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a final date for the scoping to be completed by?

**Ms Webster:** At the moment we are looking to have the scoping completed within the next six to eight weeks—noting that, of course, we have Christmas shutdown period coming up as well. But it is certainly something that we have started on in the last week.

**THE CHAIR:** So hopefully that is something that next year you will be able to put together.

**Ms Webster:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** While we are talking about that, I wish to ask about the college split system, minister?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** It did seem to come a little bit out of the blue. You may have done a whole heap of ground work prior to making the announcement. Can you inform us what was actually done in preparation before the announcement was made that you would be taking this—

**Mr Barr:** In 2005—just a few months prior to when I entered the Assembly and commenced as Minister for Education and Training—the government commissioned Atelier Learning Solutions to undertake a review of the secondary college system. That review made a number of recommendations. Key to that was a need to review our vocational education and training provision in colleges.

I think there are, from memory, about 15 to 18 recommendations in that report. Between three and five of them were particularly concerned with the non-tertiary stream of education provision in our colleges. The report is available online. I certainly welcome your interest in it.

To paraphrase the report, it identified some structural weaknesses within the college system and some concerns about the quality of vocational education and training courses that we were able to offer. I suppose, to put it in simple terms, given the changing nature of vocational education and training and the fact that we were trying to deliver high quality VET courses off eight different sites, there were some challenges in colleges. We had struggled to get qualified teachers in particular areas and we had struggled to operate on the latest machinery.

Let me give you a very practical example: in automotive, trying to replicate eight fully equipped automotive workshops across each of our secondary colleges to offer students the latest and to be able to work with cars that are produced this century and to have all of the technology that goes with that industry now is very expensive and difficult. It is difficult to replicate across eight different sites. That is just one example. There are many others in each of the vocational fields.

The challenge for our college system going forward is how we seek greater specialisation and also how we seek to maximise relationships with other higher education training providers and industry partnerships.

I will stick with automotive, because it is a useful example. The CIT has recently signed a long-term agreement with the Toyota motor company that sees students at the Fyshwick campus working with the latest equipment provided by Toyota, working on hybrid vehicles. This is clearly an area of new investment in the automotive industry in Australia. This is a skill set that will be required for servicing and working with hybrid engines into the future. We are able to provide that in the ACT but realistically we can only do it on one site.

One of the issues that I am seeking to address, through what I hope will be a detailed and year long conversation through 2010, is how we might best integrate that sort of industry and TAFE partnership with our schools. What appeals to me is the prospect of being able to have students from our college system begin their training in cert I and cert II, and possible even extend into cert III, because if we have accelerated

learning programs in the university stream, I believe we should have them in the vocational stream as well, and be able to work with the CIT and with industry. We want to have students access those program, access that equipment and access the qualified teaching at a site outside of, if you like, their home college. There is a variety of different ways that you can look at delivering those sorts of outcomes. Other jurisdictions are considering this and so in the context of—

**MR HANSON:** So are you bringing together a report or review, or how is it going to be structured?

**Mr Barr:** What got the attention of the *Canberra Times* was a speech I delivered to the Per Capita policy exchange that was held in Canberra in October. In that speech I flagged a similar example and flagged the need to look at this issue in three contexts: one, the college review and all of the issues that go with that; second, the post-Bradley review higher education environment. We will see significant change in higher education in this territory and in this country over the next few years as we move into a deregulated world in 2012. Change is coming from that end. Change is coming from the college review. Thirdly, as we have discussed at some length in this afternoon's hearings, in relation to the learn or earn legislation. So we need to be looking flexibly at how we provide vocational education and training.

What I was seeking to do was to start a year-long debate. We will obviously respond to some of the specific issues that emerge from each of those three strands. We have in place a response—

**MR HANSON:** What was the structure around that debate? Have you called for submissions?

**Mr Barr:** There are a variety of different ways. We have processes in train in relation to an implementation plan on the college review. We are seeking feedback directly on learn or earn through the processes that Dr Watterston has outlined and I was kicking off a public debate in relation to vocational education and training in colleges through that speech that was flagging that 2010 would then see some further discussion.

Of course, I will make some further statements following completion of a couple of those other steps and, of course, some further information will be emerging from the national reform process. I would imagine that, without wanting to commit today to an absolute date, you will hear more from me and from the government in relation to this matter commencing in February of next year. Then there will be some further discussions through the course of 2010.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Doszpot, do you have a comment on that?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Minister, I believe the initial question was: what consultation was done? You mentioned that you had a consultant look into aspects of this. Did that consultant talk to, say, the Australian Education Union?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, certainly, through the college review process, there is extensive consultation.

**MR DOSZPOT:** And secondary schools and independent secondary schools?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it was a very, very extensive process and the reports that I—

**MR DOSZPOT:** They seem rather surprised by the comments that you made.

**Mr Barr:** The report is available online and the government's response and the directions that we outline there. On one level, there is nothing particularly new in what I said in that Per Capita speech.

That said, I think the fact that the Tasmanian Premier was speaking at the press club on that very day and that the journalist in question sought to ask a question of the Premier in relation to league tables and she did not get the answer that she was looking for, she then sought to raise some further issues with the Premier in relation to the Tasmanian reform process, but, yes, I am on the record as indicating that we are looking at. I have never suggested that we were just going to pick up the Tasmanian model and adopt it in the ACT, but their reform experience is worth looking at—good and bad—because I acknowledge that there have been some issues with the union.

The Tasmanian Education Union is going through a leadership vote at this point; so I understand there is a lot of local politics associated with their response. But I have seen comments from the president of the Tasmanian AEU saying that they do not have a problem with the model that the Tasmanian government sought to implement. They just have problems with the practical measures that have led to its introduction and the time frame in which it has been introduced. But they are quite open to considering the model, as I believe we should. But it is not the only model that we should look at. It is not the only model that we will look at. However, if I, as minister, cannot even start a conversation and say, "We are flagging that in 2010 we want to discuss these issues", then I am pretty concerned for what sort of public debate we can have in this city. The Per Capita speech is available online. I know that you are very interested in reading everything I have got to say but—

**MR DOSZPOT:** I will be having a closer look at it. Also, in a radio interview you conducted, I recall you saying that we have got to get out of the 70s. But, surprisingly, by getting out of the 70s I would have presumed that we would not be going back to the 60s to have a look at the sort of thing we are looking at. So there is a little bit of an issue here that we are trying to come to grips with.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I will accept that there are elements of what Tasmania has proposed or is an undertaking that have some similarities to education—

**MR DOSZPOT:** They have not come out of the 60s yet.

**Mr Barr:** That had their origins in—

**MR HANSON:** Are you more comfortable in the 60s or the 70s?

**MR DOSZPOT:** I am more comfortable with the 80s.

**Mr Barr:** But that said, I do not think it is fair to say that it is just simply picking up a

1960s model and trying to implant it on 2010.

**MR DOSZPOT:** That sounds very similar.

**Mr Barr:** A lot has changed in that time, but clearly there are issues and challenges that we have to respond to in 2010, some of which are similar to issues and challenges that were around in that time as well. I am sure you would agree, Mr Doszpot, that just because an idea or elements of an idea were thought of in the 1960s does not necessarily mean that you have to immediately rule them out now.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Absolutely correct, Mr Barr, and if we are heading in the right direction, I think there is support. But it does not appear that we are looking at the right directions at the moment. That is not just my opinion. Educators have come to me and there are expressions of concern from the education union, from educators—all the sectors are very, very concerned.

**Mr Barr:** This will be a lively debate.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Looking forward to it.

**Mr Barr:** And so it should be. I would be disappointed if it was not. But the second we close our minds to—

**MR DOSZPOT:** I guess that we are just all concerned about the directions that are taken a la the school closures. When something is mentioned, we sort of get the impression that it is already a fait accompli. Now, if you are looking at discussion, we are all very keen to have a discussion about this.

**Mr Barr:** Obviously, the way the *Canberra Times* chose to report that speech is a matter for the *Canberra Times*. But at no point have I ever said that a firm position has been reached, other than—

**MR DOSZPOT:** You were defending it pretty solidly.

**Mr Barr:** I believe that we should be looking at this reform experience. Why Tasmania? Well, it is similar sized jurisdiction; it has—

**MR DOSZPOT:** They have got Hare-Clark; so it must be good.

**Mr Barr:** No, they have a similar population. They have a college system like we do, and they are trying to address the needs of those students who are not completing year 10 and year 12. They are exactly the same challenges that we are seeking to address. So I think we would be crazy not to look at what they are doing. But at the same time, I am not signing up today to, “Yes, we are bringing the Tasmanian model to the ACT.” We want to look at what is occurring in the UK as well. We want to look at what is occurring elsewhere in Australia, and we will have ideas of our own that are relevant to the ACT context.

**MR DOSZPOT:** And some are regional.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, I think we might move on.

**Dr Watterston:** Can I just add some comments to the minister's remarks, just on one point about you saying that the principals are concerned about this. I have been in the position since 20 July and have spoken three times formally to all principals. Right from the first day in the position, I flagged looking at the secondary system and the college system in particular. So the minister's conversations data is contextualised on that basis. We have been consulting with people widely about the new strategic plan, which we are about to release in two weeks time, and you will see that that conversation is foremost embedded in that plan in terms of directions that we want to go in in the future. The strategic plan does not indicate the final outcome about how this is going to evolve, but certainly that conversations data, albeit that it came through the *Canberra Times*, was contextualised within the conversation that had already been flagged with principals and is flagged as being an ongoing issue that we need to address collaboratively.

On the idea of applied learning being embedded into our college system in a way that provides different pathways and opportunities for young people, I think the minister's comments were certainly in line with the conversation that we had already had with the group of principals. If they have spoken to you in that way—that they are surprised—then I am surprised, because I feel like that conversation had already been flagged as one that we needed to have.

**MS PORTER:** Page 5 talks about our indicators for 2008 and that 85 per cent of graduates were employed after training compared to 80.7 per cent nationally. So we must be doing something right in that regard. Obviously, we need to take that learning, what we are doing right, what is successful, into these conversations. What is it that is giving us those good results?

**Mr Barr:** I would say there are two or three key factors. One is the very strong level of industry partnership and industry buy-in in this area; also the very good collaborative working relationship between the education institutions. I have witnessed some fantastic collaborations from industry, from the CIT, from the department, through things like the Australian school-based apprenticeship program and the target 500 initiatives where the department works very closely with industry to find new placements and find new opportunities in vocational education and training. A really strong direction has been set in a policy sense, and then you are seeing all of the industry players lining up in support in many areas, across a variety of fields, be it in the construction area or more recently in community services or the allied health areas. There are strong industry partnerships.

I have not had the chance to raise it yet, so I will use this as the opportunity: last year's budget provided funding through DET for 100 additional school-based apprenticeships, and then through the Sport and Recreation portfolio we have got 15 associated with sport and recreation. So we are getting that industry involved as well. We are working very hard across the industry sectors, in partnership, to get better vocational education and training outcomes. It is nice to see that that is reflected in this sort of data.

**MS HUNTER:** So was that related to the \$790,000 over three years that had been

allocated in the last budget?

**Mr Barr:** There are different programs. That is around consultation. There was also direct funding for school-based apprenticeships as well.

**MS HUNTER:** How is that other money rolling out, and is it improving consultation and liaison? I just wanted to get some idea.

**Dr Blom:** I can talk about the budget initiative that provided us with additional support to further extend and enhance the industry and community consultation and engagement that is so necessary to having a well-informed VET sector in the ACT, the work that we do every year in terms of working with both local industry and also the national industry bodies, particularly the industry skills councils, who research across the whole country around national skills needs. It is really important that we feed in an ACT perspective to that. We are a very small player, but it is really important that our part of the picture is not ignored, particularly the role of small business in the ACT.

The additional funding has really improved our capacity to sustain those relationships with those industry skills councils but also with local business and industry. It is that work that feeds into our publication every year of the annual ACT VET priorities, and those have just been released. In fact, all members of this committee would be receiving a hard copy version of that. It would be in the mail, so it is literally on its way. Those VET priorities then are the reference point for all of the funding. When we are funding programs, we are referring back to what are established skills needs in the ACT, what are priorities for ACT government and for ACT business, industry and the community sector as well.

**MS HUNTER:** Page 15 talks about ACT schools collecting data on the 4,500 kindergarten students, in early 2009, as part of the Australian early development index, which is a COAG-supported national survey. This information is obviously collected. What is it used for? Is it put up on a website? I understand that it is.

**Mr Barr:** It is yet to be publicly released but will be very shortly by the commonwealth. It is, I think, one of the most significant data collections that this country has seen, certainly in the education field, for decades. It will certainly inform a large number of policy decisions, both at a local and national level, for some years to come. Ministers received a presentation at the last ministerial council in Adelaide, about three weeks ago, and I understand the commonwealth will release data in two phases. There will be an initial jurisdictional level data release this month, and then a much more detailed community profile early in 2010. So we will get the information a day or two before it goes public and then it will clearly inform debate and resource allocation in early intervention programs for all jurisdictions. It essentially provides data across four or five domains and, where there is an assessment of whether individual students are at risk in one or more of those domains, will be able to guide policy making.

It is going to be particularly relevant for the ACT given the small cohorts that we are dealing with here. It will mean that we will have individual data on those development domains for individual students. So it is going to help us target our early intervention

in a way that we have never been able to do before. It is a very significant piece of work and certainly one that should be ongoing in its application. As I say, it will be a critical tool in guiding policy development. The researchers who presented to the ministerial council were saying that in the context of other countries this is very significant for Australia and something that has not been done elsewhere in the world.

**MS HUNTER:** And is that going to come in a hard copy form? How are you receiving that information? Will that information be available to the general public?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it will be public.

**MS HUNTER:** And how will that be presented?

**Mr Barr:** It is in a series of tables, as I understand it. The ACT has seven or eight regions—Tuggeranong, Gungahlin, north Canberra, south Canberra, Woden, Weston Creek—so it is broken down initially at that level, and then there will be a further data release within each of those categories. I am getting a fuller briefing next week, I understand, but from what I have read already that is the—

**MS HUNTER:** And it will be online?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MS HUNTER:** Is it the case that there is some sort of tutorial that people have to go through in order to get to the data, to explain how that data works and what you can and cannot interpret—

**Mr Barr:** Certainly there is a tutorial for the minister next week!

**MS HUNTER:** That is a good start.

**Ms Melsom:** The website is set up such that you cannot automatically just go straight into the regions or the particular suburbs and extract the information and start comparing one to the other. It actually takes the reader through a process of understanding what the data represents so that you can make good use of the data. It is not that it is a preventative measure as such but, rather, an informative process.

**MS HUNTER:** Exactly. Has there been any talk at COAG about using this sort of approach to the—

**Mr Barr:** My school website?

**MS HUNTER:** Yes, the my school website?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, there certainly has. The contextualised information is pretty critical. A couple of my ministerial colleagues from jurisdictions that do not have an as advanced preschool program or an as advanced early childhood program as we have in the ACT were very keen for that to be noted when looking at the outcomes for their communities. So—

**MS HUNTER:** Minister, is that something you would push on the my school website—that that sort of facility be put in place to ensure that people are not going to misinterpret—

**Mr Barr:** We have already done that, yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** On page 16, under school renewal program, there is a mention of the proposed P-10 school at Kambah and the capacity for 965 students. What are the expected enrolments for 2011?

**Mr Barr:** For 2011, for the first year, that school would operate as a P-7. It will start the same way as Kingsford Smith, Amaroo and all of those new schools have started. The expectation would certainly be that the students at Urambi will move across. Then one would anticipate some interest within the suburb of Kambah for students for year 7 in 2011 who are currently attending either—I think they are largely between three schools at the moment—Wanniassa, Melrose and Stromlo. Do we have an exact figure, at this point, for year 1? No, but we will have, closer to the opening date.

**MR DOSZPOT:** There is also mention of an autism unit at this new Kambah school. Are we going to be recruiting new special ed teachers to fulfil the need at Kambah?

**Mr Barr:** We will certainly be recruiting new special ed teachers to meet the need in the education system. Teachers would then be allocated to Kambah, to that site. But, that said, Urambi closes, so teachers who are at Urambi would have the option to move across to the new school buildings, yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** How many special education trained teachers do we have? Is there a shortfall currently in this area?

**Mr Barr:** I would have to get some advice on the number within the system at the moment. Certainly there are recruitment challenges in special education across Australia. It is not just in the ACT; it is across Australia. I think we have a full—

**Ms Ellis:** We have just completed the placement process for our 2010 staffing year. We have our positions filled. As the minister said, special education is one of our recruitment needs and we continue to work with universities in terms of up-skilling our current staff and being able to recruit more teachers with special education skills and explicit training.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I acknowledge the fact that this is a universal problem. What can we do to attract more teachers? How can we do this?

**Ms Ellis:** It is an issue we look at not only in attracting new teachers to our workforce but in looking at our current staff. In some situations, experienced teachers, coming in and upgrading their skills, feel more comfortable with some special education settings. But we have had good results in the last number of years with recruiting new teachers and particularly putting new teachers in special education schools.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Do mainstream classroom teachers currently have the option of having professional development to deal with students with special needs such as

autism spectrum disorders.

**Ms Ellis:** I will defer to my colleague.

**Dr Collis:** There are probably two avenues that we go to. The first is professional learning that happens within the system. I talked about the positive partnerships program. It is like that. There have also been targeted programs with the University of Canberra to have existing staff do the inclusion program at Canberra.

The market for that has plateaued a little. It is an area where all states and jurisdictions are innovating. Most of the those innovations seem to be on developing better partnerships at university with undergraduate students, particularly in relation to the potential for getting undergraduate students placed in a specialist setting during their undergraduate years. That is the general innovation. There is talk generally about exploring that option with the University of Canberra to get more undergraduate students placed in our specialist facilities.

**THE CHAIR:** In relation to the ongoing retention of staff—and this may have already been answered—is the class sizes issue going to have any impact on the number of teachers that need to be recruited or, as you said, will that average out across the school and that tends to balance it out?

**Mr Barr:** There are a few ways to answer that question. Every year we have an ongoing recruitment program. I think we recruited 260 additional teachers this year. That is the normal program plus the 70 extra. Over the years I have been minister, we have had between 900 and 1,300 applicants usually for the normal recruitment program of around 200 new teachers. Going into the field this year seeking 260 has been a bit of an added challenge, but we have been able to achieve it this year.

Could you add 70 teachers a year every year in addition to your normal recruitment into the system? No, probably not. You would start to have challenges to try to recruit that many new ones, simply because, in our education systems across the country, the teacher colleges for each of the universities are not producing that many graduates. If you wanted to keep on with that level of recruitment every year into the future, you would need to look at bringing some people back into the profession.

You are starting to see a little bit of that in a somewhat controversial program that the commonwealth and Victoria are involved in, the teach for Australia program. It is a fairly intensive retraining program that they are trialling in Victoria. I saw a media article this week where, I think, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Victorian minister welcomed the first graduates from that program. I think it would not be speaking out of school to say that there is some scepticism in the education community that that fast-paced program is going to work. We have not engaged in that initially. We are waiting to see how it goes.

We are fortunate that the ACT system is seen as desirable to teach in and that the totality of salary, conditions and the working environment is seen as attractive. The career prospects in the ACT system are, I think, generally seen as better than what you might be able to access, say, in New South Wales. Clearly, there are some schools in New South Wales that people would love to teach at. There are some, in rural and

remote areas, that are much more difficult to staff. We do not suffer from that challenge as much, being a city state. I think it is a geographic reality that Canberra is a reasonably attractive place for people to live.

There are some advantages we have in attracting staff. Salary and conditions are clearly important in that recruitment process. That is why the ACT likes to be at or near the top of the nation in relation to salaries. But that is of course a moving feast. We can get to the top and then find that deals are struck in other jurisdictions that see us move down that pecking order from time to time. If you take a long-run look at salaries and conditions in the ACT, they tend to be the best in the country.

**THE CHAIR:** We are actually out of time. Thank you all very much for your time today. As per usual, a transcript will be sent out to each of you.

We now have the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority. Thank you very much for appearing at the annual reports hearing today. Mr Service and Mr Stowers, I draw attention to the privilege statement which is in front of you. Mr Barr, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Barr:** No, no opening statements. The annual report speaks for itself.

**Mr Service:** I might make one comment. I apologise for the chief executive, Mr Guy. Mr Guy unfortunately was injured by a motor vehicle on his morning constitutional last week and is unable to be here. I do extend his apologies. Ray Stowers, who is the industry liaison officer for the authority, will endeavour to answer some questions. I would ask the committee's indulgence if we need to take some questions on notice. We will endeavour to provide answers as soon as we are able to.

**THE CHAIR:** We hope he is okay.

**Mr Service:** He will be all right, yes—just superficial injuries.

**THE CHAIR:** I have got a question in relation to the access and equity program funding on page 16 of the annual report. I appreciate it if you need to take this on notice. There was an increase in funding of \$67,943 over that of the previous financial year. It was \$30,158 in 2007-08 against \$98,101 in 2008-09. I was wondering whether the increase in funding has resulted in any outcomes, particularly, as has been noted, for Indigenous women or disadvantaged people getting into training. Has that actually had an impact? It is quite a significant increase in funding.

**Mr Service:** I might provide just a couple of comments; then Mr Stowers might be able to provide some detail. I think I have said on a number of occasions—I think this is my ninth or my 10th appearance here for this authority—that one of the things that have been challenging us for many years is spending enough of our budget on access and equity, both in the Indigenous area and the women in construction area.

We launched last year very successfully, which the minister attended, a program called women in trades. That was about broadening the appeal of the construction industry. The apprentice of the year was a woman in plumbing. I think, in a broad sense, we have had good success in that area.

It would be wrong to say that we are not still challenged by some Indigenous issues. It is still difficult to get long-term Indigenous trainees. It is not in any sense from a lack of trying but there are long-term issues about that. We have made some progress. Mr Stowers might be able to give actual numbers. My comment is: we are very pleased with the step progress, certainly from last financial year to this year that the report covers.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you think that additional funding has assisted towards—

**Mr Service:** Yes, it has. We have certainly seen an increase in inquiries. The information on our website and inquiries about opportunities for women in trades have grown. Just the number of female apprentices in construction who are winning awards is a testament. In fact, there are good opportunities.

The other thing it says is that the industry is a lot different from perhaps what it was even five years ago. It is more attractive. It is substantially more comfortable for both genders to work in. I think that is a credit to the industry itself. From the authority's point of view and its stakeholders, it is a credit to the information they provide and the fact that we have actually been able to act on it. In terms of numbers, Ray, you might be able to help.

**Mr Stowers:** As far as numbers are concerned, females in trades, official trades, only represent about 1.4 per cent. We are hoping to increase that to 2.4 per cent within two years. It is a large number, given the small numbers we have currently, but we are certainly targeting all the schools. ACT schools and colleges have been provided with DVDs. We have got our own dedicated website, tradeswomen in construction, tradeswomen.com.au, and we have rolled out the campaign over 12 months. We are just in stage 2 of the campaign this month.

**THE CHAIR:** What was that percentage you said you wanted to increase it to?

**Mr Stowers:** From 1.4 to a target of 2.4 within two years. That is what we are looking at. It is a rolling campaign and it is a big challenge for some of the authorities we have been looking at for some time. That is the main increase for our budget for this year.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of people who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, do you look at that in your numbers as well? Has that increased?

**Mr Stowers:** The numbers have been stable for those disadvantaged groups. We offer additional training incentives for females in trades, for people with disabilities and Indigenous Australians. There are additional incentives for all employers, apart from the commonwealth incentives as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have numbers on the people with disabilities?

**Mr Stowers:** I do not have those numbers with me, no, but we will take it on notice.

**Mr Service:** I might add that, with one of my hats, I am also chairman of Koomarri. It is an interesting challenge. The one great problem with construction sites is that, even

for those with mild disabilities, whether that is a walking or a hand or arm disability, it is very difficult to provide a completely safe working environment. Activity on site is always a difficult thing but, where there are opportunities to put people with disabilities into the office environment and into offsite facilities, yes, we are certainly looking at those things. But I would doubt that you would see much of an increase in physical representations on sites.

**THE CHAIR:** But across the disability spectrum; there are a number of different disabilities?

**Mr Service:** Yes, sure.

**THE CHAIR:** They might be physically able but there could be other reasons for a disability.

**Mr Service:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Have you had a look at the learn or earn, that is the phrasing that we use—

**MR DOSZPOT:** Mark Latham talked about originally, did he not? Is that the one?

**Mr Barr:** Someone claimed that he got it off someone else. It very neatly characterises what we are talking about, though. Everyone knows what we are talking about.

**MR HANSON:** Indeed. It will keep people in school longer. I guess that is the premise.

**Mr Barr:** School, training or work.

**MR HANSON:** School, training or work, or will make sure that they are out there in industry. Will that have an impact on what you are doing? Have you done any modelling to see that it is going to either diminish the number of people that are accessing schemes or increase the number because people are then looking for more vocational work because they are not employed? Have you seen what the impact may be?

**Mr Service:** We have not ourselves done that modelling. As you will have read from the report, we fund a number of programs through the school trades but we have not ourselves done any modelling on that, no.

**Mr Barr:** The department will, yes.

**MR HANSON:** It is going to do it?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. As we have heard earlier, they are looking at that mapping exercise. Then also we talked about the engagement of industry players. The authority has clearly got a very strong role to play there.

**Mr Service:** The authority would react in two senses. It would react to advice on what the department might do and where we could logically and sensibly fit that into future training programs. It would also react to advice it had from its stakeholders.

We do, as you will again have seen either in this report or perhaps in our previous training plan, consultation models through the utilities group and through the Industry Training Council. They also liaise quite closely with the department. That would feed into us. It is not normally a function for the authority to actually create that research or to undertake the modelling. Because we are effectively an instrumentality that farms the money out—for want of a better description—because of the resources and wanting to commit maximum funds, we rely very heavily on information provided by others.

**MR HANSON:** In relation to the GFC, have you noticed any slowdown in industry that has had an impact on what you are looking at?

**Mr Service:** I think I said last year to this committee, Mr Hanson, that I was quite concerned that there could be a very substantial slowdown in construction. I am happy to say that, in a number of areas, I have been proved quite wrong. I think a lot of commentators have. I have been pleasantly surprised by the resilience of the Canberra economy and, I think, the Australian economy.

Overall, despite the fact that there have been some asset value issues, construction in Canberra has held up relatively well. I think we have a pretty good land release program now. There is still an underlying demand for housing. We have not seen a great reduction in the number of DAs for general house renovations and house extensions going in. We have seen—perhaps it will not be seen so much next year but certainly this year and the year before—a continual good number of development applications being submitted and approved, which has kept the levy income up reasonably well. I think we were down 300-odd thousand—I cannot remember the exact number—for the year, or perhaps a little bit more than that.

All in all, I have been quite pleasantly surprised, both in terms of what the authority has been doing in regard to the levy income we have generated and just in terms of the things I do in my own business, about the quality and the continuity of work. It has been quite surprising.

**MR HANSON:** Where are the skill shortages at the moment?

**Mr Stowers:** Generally across the board, in most trades, but in the trade areas that we cover, which are mainly building and construction and electro technology, there is still a skill shortage across all of those trade areas.

**MR HANSON:** Is it less of a problem or is it still the same sort of problem that we had last year?

**Mr Stowers:** Basically it has not changed much, no. There is still the demand for work. Although the authority took about \$470,000 less in funding this year, there is still a substantial amount of building work being carried out now, which leads, again, to a skill shortage.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of the building activity outlook for 2009-10, is the stimulus spending going to have an impact on that?

**Mr Service:** I am not sure I am a commentator who is qualified to answer that.

**THE CHAIR:** It has increased in terms of housing and schools. Particularly in housing, there is quite a significant rollout of funding that has to go through. I am just wondering if that will have—

**Mr Service:** I am not an economist; nor do I profess to have any great skill in economics, but I think there is still a level of “wait and see” in terms of what will happen with interest rates in the new year. The unemployment level has clearly remained quite low, by commentators’ expectations. I do not have a view as to whether the stimulus package still has much to come through or not. I am not really clear on that. I think it has clearly had some great successes in certain areas. Whether that provides a different effect going into 2010-11 remains to be seen.

**THE CHAIR:** I would presume it would increase activity, particularly in the housing sector.

**Mr Service:** I think it has probably maintained some activity levels.

**THE CHAIR:** It has probably more maintained than increased.

**Mr Service:** Which has fundamentally been good. I guess that is the important threshold. We could have had a much greater drop if we did not have, at state, territory and federal levels, good capacity and quick reaction. We have to say that some of those things have worked very well in a broad sense across the economy.

Whether people agree or disagree with the way they were done, I do not think is as important as the fact that there has been a good effect. That has clearly helped employment, and there is no doubt in my mind that, at entry level and for youth in construction, that has been positive. We have seen very few building and construction companies go bad. We have seen very few business failures in that area. I think that has been a good thing. It has kept employment levels reasonably good.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I do recall your comments and concerns last year about what would happen with the way the economy was heading. Having had all of the stimulus funding that has come in, are there expectations of being able to maintain the current level of interest and opportunities for young people?

**Mr Service:** At this point in the year, we certainly have not seen any marked reduction in applications and in interest, Mr Doszpot. I would not be inclined to speculate on what will happen going into 2010. I think there are other factors that are larger than what might happen individually in the ACT. I do not know whether Ray has a different view, but we have not yet seen any obvious reduction in applications over what really happened in the first 12 months of the GFC. So we have been broadly comfortable with the outcome so far.

**MR DOSZPOT:** We were asking about skill shortages. With the changes that are happening in the construction industry, I should imagine there is a lot more wiring going in, and ensuring the IT-related activities with buildings, security and so forth. Is this offering new opportunities for students? Are there enough people taking up these new opportunities with, say, the electro technology that you mentioned, and IT-related construction opportunities?

**Mr Service:** In terms of figures, I would probably take that on notice. If you ask me to express a broad view, we did see a reduction last year in entry-level applications. That is not something that we have control over; it is simply something that the group training companies and the employers drive. That was more, I suspect—but this is only suspicion—a view about where large-scale commercial construction might go through 2010-11, and not so much related to the domestic or the residential field.

Are there enough opportunities? I suspect there probably are. Combined with what the various group training companies do—and then the balance, of course, is available through organisations like CIT—I think there probably are enough places available. There is still—and I think we have said this a couple of times at these hearings in previous years—that difference of view regarding people coming into year 11 and then going into year 12 about whether they want to go into construction, whether they want to go to university or go on to some courses at UC about IT.

There is still some differentiation. Some students who finish school decide quite late. But in terms of IT, the demand for IT tends at times to be driven by whether the government sector in the ACT, particularly, is making large-scale changes to its IT use and its own IT facilities. I suspect there are some peaks and troughs, but I would suspect that it is a reasonable thing.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I am talking about my own background in IT, and I am surprised at the lack of interest by students and people leaving school in coming into the IT sector. We have got to recruit from overseas in a lot of these areas. I am wondering whether this impacts also on the construction industry, with respect to the flow-on of the specialised skill, which all of these kids are learning more of. Are we able to recruit them into these areas? That is my question.

**Mr Service:** I do not think we are fundamentally short of recruits. The shortage in trades will always be related to skills. It will not necessarily be related to entry-level training. We are not generally short of people making applications, though. There is always, of course, a fine balance between the number of places and the number of applications. You will have seen from the annual report that there was in fact a drop-off in entry-level training expenditure last year. That is simply as a result of demand. Assuming that confidence continues to grow, I fully expect that that demand will turn around, from the ructions last year through this year and going into next year. But we have yet to see that finally wash out.

**THE CHAIR:** We have talked previously about some of the money that has gone into consulting with industry and business around vocational education and training. Obviously that crosses over into your area. The consultation process was also mentioned with respect to the skills and industry training councils that are very involved in the process. Has that had any noticeable impact on the number of people

who might be applying for particular positions? I know that the federal government has put quite a bit of resourcing into those training councils as well, around particular areas where there were skills shortages. Has that started to have a flow-on impact?

**Mr Service:** We have been working with the construction industry training council since the authority was first created. In fact, in developing and presenting our training plan to the minister and then to the Assembly for approval, we very much rely on what the industry training council tells us that the industry is looking for. It expresses views about where we should be rebalancing our funding and our funding allocations.

I think the short answer is that, yes, it does, almost every year. We take advice. The consultation we go through is at the coalface, for want of a better description. It is about those businesses saying, "We've looked at our forward workload. We believe that in these three or four areas this is where we're going to be short 30 or 40 trades people." That is just a number plucked out of the air rather than a real number.

We very much then tailor the training plan in the year or we make decisions mid-year to apply special grants to people making applications. I refer, for instance, to plastering. Last year, it was tiling, plastering and cabinet making. The consultation had not identified those as being critical, but as the year progressed we noticed that we were advised in the consultation of the shortages, so we made some changes.

In terms of our fiscal position, we plan to make sure that we can fund everything that we have, and also we run a fairly solid reserve account. We do that for two reasons. One is to cover more difficult times when we need to provide more money, such as for particular shortages, and the other is so that we can maintain longer term funding for particular programs. So the answer is that, in my view, it does, and it does every year, because we do that every year. Rather than having a grand two or three-year plan, it is updated every year. I think that has been the success of that process.

**THE CHAIR:** So that has been successful?

**Mr Service:** Absolutely. We could not do it without that input. We would not do it ourselves, nor in fact is it part of our charter to make policy decisions about where the training money should go. We are very much inextricably tied, and want to be tied, to having that advice and that consultation from outside the authority. It then allows for good, well-based and well-founded judgements about how to spend the stakeholders' money.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Hanson?

**MR HANSON:** I do not have any further questions.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a question related to what Ms Bresnan was asking. With respect to funded training courses, are there certain directions that you would like to put some more money into training courses that currently you are either not in a position to fund or you have got planned for later years? Is there anything in the background waiting to be done?

**Mr Service:** Not at the moment, Mr Doszpot. The current training plan for 2010 is

now in place. That is as a result of the consultation with industry for this year. I think that training plan is a good reflection of what industry have told us they would like us to fund and where they would like it to be directed. The authority's members tend to seek informed commentary on that from others about every quarter. So we make changes where we see other things.

We are flexible enough in terms of the way we allocate our funds to each program to have some contingency in there to fund new courses. Occupational health and safety is probably the best example. There are regular developments in occupation health and safety. There are things like height safety. There are various debates about how often you should replenish your skills. We have a view about timing on that which the industry is telling us is quite sensible. We are generally always able to modify or to fund new things when they are brought to us. There is nothing at the moment that we are funding that we have been told we should not be looking at.

**MR DOSZPOT:** My final question is related to where you are getting your client base, if I can put it in those terms. Are the opportunities that you present for local students? What happens if people want to come from interstate? Are they able to take advantage of some of your offers?

**Mr Service:** Only through a registered training organisation. We only fund through RTOs.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I understand that.

**Mr Service:** If you are an interstate student and you come to live in Canberra, you can seek funding through an RTO. We do not fund interstate places.

**MR DOSZPOT:** But if I were an interstate student and I gained employment here in Canberra—

**Mr Service:** If you are employed here, yes, you certainly can. Again, it is the same process—through an RTO. We do fund interstate RTOs that have businesses here. There are a number of RTOs which might be Sydney based but have a branch here. We certainly fund those to do training in the ACT.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I do not have any further questions.

**MR HANSON:** Do you have any comments that you wish to add?

**Mr Service:** No, I do not wish to add anything.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time, Mr Service and Mr Stowers, and thank you, minister. The hearing is adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 5.25 pm.**