



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2009-2010](#))

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2010

**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, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Privilege statement

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 2 pm.

Appearances:

Burch, Ms Joy, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Women

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Hehir, Mr Martin, Chief Executive

Duggan, Mr Frank, Executive Director, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Wyles, Mr Paul, Director, Care and Protection, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Reid, Mr Michael, Director, Youth Directorate, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Pappas, Ms Helen, Senior Manager, Early Intervention and Prevention Services, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Director, Finance and Budget, Policy and Organisational Services

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister, for attending this annual reports hearing of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs. I also thank departmental officers from the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. I draw your attention too to the privilege statement, which I am sure you are aware of. It is in front of you. Before we go to questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: I will make a quick statement, and excuse the croaky voice. The Office for Children, Youth and Family Services, through care and protection services and youth justice services, does some of the hardest work in government. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all the office staff, case workers, youth workers, out-of-home care agencies, family and youth support program workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous foster carers, kinship carers and grandparent carers for the work that they do and their commitment to helping young children and young people.

Too often there is attention on the negative aspects of this work and it is important to take a moment to consider how many good stories there are and how many families, children and young people we work with and where we do make a positive difference. The body of work in the annual report demonstrates this.

There have been many highlights and achievements over the last financial year for the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. The development and release of the children's plan and the young people's plan are significant pieces of work and the office will continue to coordinate and oversee the plans in the coming years.

This has been a year of consolidation of the practice accompanying the Children and Young People's Act 2008 in the areas of out-of-home care, care and protection, children's services and youth justice. Over the last year there has been the

development and planning of a range of new and different models of service delivery. In out-of-home care, a first round of procurement has now completed and consultation is also underway with stakeholders about a new service model for youth and family programs.

These new models are designed to ensure the complexity and range of needs of children and young people are met, to further integrate and coordinate services, and to better meet the needs of some of our most vulnerable children and young people. The challenging and often confronting work of care and protection is balanced by the office's focus on early intervention across areas and the innovative programs and partnerships that are happening across all programs, including child and family centres and between government and community agencies.

The Indigenous early childhood partnership work has resulted in the building of a third child and family centre in west Belconnen, which is now underway. The government has continued its commitment to national work, with work progressing on the Indigenous early childhood partnership, the national framework for protecting Australia's children, which includes the national out-of-home care standards and national quality agenda for children and childcare services.

Other highlights of this year have been a continued focus in 2009-10 on improving collaborative service delivery, early intervention and the focus on the rights of children. A charter of rights for children and young people in care was launched. There was the introduction of a very successful case conferencing model in care and protection. The ongoing collaboration between ACT Health and Care and Protection Services focused on assisting families prenatally with maternity services and also focusing on early childhood service delivery.

In September 2009 a project commenced with the adoptions and permanent care unit engaging staff across care and protection services to focus on permanency planning needs of infants aged less than two years who enter out-of-home care. In 2009-10 the ACT has continued its focus on equipping young people in detention at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre with vocational or life skills to enable their successful transition back to the community.

There has also been the ongoing work with the Department of Education and Training to increase awareness of care and protection issues and the needs of children and young people in schools through the Gungahlin 8, or G8 program, and the Tuggeranong T22 program. I think I will leave it there because my voice will completely give out soon.

THE CHAIR: You did well. Thank you, minister. I will go to the first question. It is in relation to the diversionary framework for young people in the system. It is listed on page 13, volume 1 of the annual report. Could you give us an update on the status of the framework for young people in the system and what agencies, including internal or external, have been engaged with the framework? I note that it states you have got the department, Director of Public Prosecutions, Australian Federal Police and the courts. I would be interested to know what other groups have been involved and what the status of the framework is.

Ms Burch: If you will forgive me, I will probably just make a few statements and then hand over.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Burch: The diversionary framework is something that I have a strong interest in, and transition as well. With this, what I am trying to see is partnerships across the different elements of our community—whether it is DHCS, police, law and order systems—about how we can best deal with young people when they get into mischief, for want of a better word. Unless you work across those partnerships, which are the courts, the police, education and all those other activities, we will not be able to make a difference. We will not make a difference unless we break outside of those silos. That work is active and Martin, I think, chairs that roundtable, for want of a better word.

Mr Hehir: This is a piece of work that we commenced when we were talking to the minister about some of the data around juvenile detention nationally and in the ACT. The ACT, notwithstanding a relatively high socioeconomic status broadly across the community, actually has quite high levels of juvenile detention in Bimberi and also community youth justice involvement, to the point where we are between 1.6 and two times the national average, excluding New South Wales, which did not have data available.

That, we thought, was an interesting statistic for us to look at. We thought the best place to start was to look at our system, to talk to the police, talk to the magistrates, the DPP about what was their understanding of the issues and what work were they doing around diversion because there are a number of parts to the system which seek to divert young people out of the criminal justice system.

We did have a meeting with them. We have subsequently done quite a bit of work, particularly in consultation with Justice and Community Safety and also with the AFP around where the different diversions are. We have also had a look mainly nationally but also at some international research, around where good diversion works—where is the best point for diversion? When do you get the most effective results for diversion?

That is something that we are in the process of finalising now for government to think about. We would anticipate that that is something that would benefit from further consultation with the community. It will be an interesting conversation, I suspect. Given that most of the data internationally and nationally reflects that young people involved in the juvenile justice system are more likely to come from the lower socioeconomic groups, it is interesting that we are quite significantly higher than the national average in terms of our young people involved with the system both through community youth justice through formal orders and also through our more formal detention.

At a very quick look, we would say that the number of young people on remand is of concern for us. But also we would have a look at what is an effective order-based regime for young people on community-based orders in terms of diverting them from the system. Again, most of the evidence nationally and internationally will tell you that the earlier and more often that a young person is involved in the criminal justice

system, the harder they are to divert from it. So that probably argues quite heavily towards an earlier intervention framework and trying to keep young people out of it. Really, the piece of work that we have been doing for government is to try and show what is in place at the moment and then have a think about where some options could be with a view to engaging in a broader conversation with the community.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that the percentage is relatively high for the ACT. When you have looked at other states and overseas as well, does the percentage of young people going into detention bear any sort of relationship to the type of diversion programs that are on offer?

Mr Hehir: Looking nationally rather than internationally, you would probably say that Victoria has one of the strongest diversion-based systems. We are about four to five times Victoria's figures; so anecdotally, yes, you would say that where you have got a jurisdiction with a very strong ethos around diversion and quite a strong diversion system, there is a very clear difference in the figures. We have spent a bit of time looking at what models they actually do have in Victoria in terms of how they divert and why it appears to be more successful.

I will note that their figures are starting to come up now. This is something on which I think there is still quite a bit of work and research to do. But their figures are absolutely starting to come back up now. They are still lower than the national average but they are starting to move back up. Certainly, from our perspective, it was worth having a look at a number of initiatives in Victoria.

THE CHAIR: Do members have any follow-up questions on that?

MR HANSON: I do not have a follow-up on that.

MS PORTER: Yes, thank you. How much is restorative justice being practised in the diversion programs in Victoria? I am wondering whether that is significant in your investigation of the programs down there in relation to what we might like to or hope to achieve. I know we are already doing that here but we might be able to get some learning from Victoria in relation to that.

Mr Hehir: If it is all right, minister, I might get Mr Reid to follow on from the start which I will give. Restorative justice can occur at a number of points in the program. That is why I say that the whole system works for diversion. Just about anybody in the system can actually refer someone off to a restorative justice process. That is something which I think is a well-recognised practice within the ACT.

In terms of Victoria, I do not have those actual figures. The programs that seem to work within Victoria are largely about trying to keep people out of the detention system. They have a slightly different system in that they have got what we call a dual-track system. They will have 0 to 17 in a juvenile facility—probably 10 to 17 is closer—but then they have got an 18 to 21 system as well. I think that that recognises some of the brain development issues around young men in particular in terms of their cognitive understanding of risk and consequence.

It is a different system; so we need to be a little cautious around that. But a large

amount of work they do is involved in finding a placement for a young person that does not include placement in a detention centre. I will ask Michael if he has got more detail around restorative practices in Victoria.

Mr Reid: I am sorry, I do not have any detail around Victoria per se, but I do know that we are working very closely with JACS here around trying to increase the number of young people who are referred through the restorative justice process here. That includes working with JACS around referrals for circle sentencing as well.

In relation to the diversion, it links in with a risk assessment tool that we are using within youth justice as well. The tool really looks at the level of re-offending that a young person might engage in, whether that is low, medium or high. The research quite clearly tells us that if we can divert particularly those young people with low levels of possible re-offending away from the justice system then there are better outcomes for them. But it also means that we could certainly target more appropriately those young people with high and medium levels of possible re-offending.

MS HUNTER: With respect to the Australasian juvenile justice administrators, there is talk in the annual report around the meetings that happened and also that the Institute of Criminology was asked to commence putting together a report to look at the performance measure and the limitations of using recidivism and the impact of bail conditions on young people. Where is that report up to? Have any of the recommendations been taken on board and how might it link with the sorts of diversionary aspects you are looking at at the moment?

Mr Reid: The report from the AIC is being finalised at the moment. We have an AJJA meeting in two weeks time, so that is being presented to that meeting with a view to finalising it. There has been quite a lot of engagement with the AIC about this from all jurisdictions. Recidivism at the moment is a key indicator of how well a system is going but it is actually quite a poorly defined indicator. We asked the AIC to look at how well it measures juvenile justice systems because it is a broad measure, really—more than just a juvenile justice system.

They are looking at consistent measures. There are different measures across different jurisdictions. There are measures that track young people into adult systems to look at re-offending as adults. There is what they call pseudo-recidivism as well, which is where a young person is found guilty and then subsequently found guilty on another offence that they committed before their first offence. It is a false measure. So they are looking at teasing out all of those different things and presenting the jurisdictions with some considered comments about a way forward in measuring the effectiveness of juvenile justice systems.

MS HUNTER: At the moment we do not actually track from Bimberi through to who may be turning up in the AMC?

Mr Hehir: No, we do not. To answer the second part of your question, which was around the orders and their impact on young people, this is something that is discussed in some detail in the work that we have been doing. Work was undertaken in New South Wales by some community sector organisations that specialise in

working with young people. They found that young people in the juvenile justice system actually find it really difficult to comply with the orders, and there are a number of reasons for that.

I am not sure whether it is a made-up example or a real one, but it is certainly one that we talk about a bit, which is a young person who gets an order that they have to attend education. The young person also has an order that they cannot go through a particular bus interchange, train station or whatever. That is the only way they can get to school—they breach. An example used in the New South Wales work is that of a young person not allowed in a particular suburb, the young person is allowed to be with an aunt, the aunt resides in the suburb. On the way to the aunt's house—breached.

With respect to the other factors around this that are important, Michael talked about the work that we do in terms of trying to identify the actual criminogenic risk so that there is a real understanding of what the statistical probability is of that young person re-offending. The evidence is that when we do not have a tool we tend to over-assess risk. We tend to say that people are riskier than they really are.

There are a number of other factors that are important when you think about your orders. This is New South Wales data but I suspect you will find that it is quite consistent with data across the country—that is, 45 per cent of the young people in detention in New South Wales have an IQ of 79 or lower, so substantially below the norm. Fourteen per cent have an IQ of 70 or lower, so again, from my understanding, that is about two standard deviations from the norm. So you are starting to talk about quite significantly less capable young people in terms of their understanding, their cognitive ability, their ability to think things through. I go to the 45 per cent figure again—hopefully, I have not mis-teeed it—with respect to young people having significant mental health issues as well. Again, that impacts on their ability to make good decisions on a consistent basis.

Certainly, one of the things that we know the courts have to do is try and make sure that the community is safe. One of the things that we want to think about is how we can work to get orders that the young person can comply with that keep the community safe but actually make sure that the young person is not—

MS HUNTER: Set up to fail.

Mr Hehir: Yes, to start with. I suspect that will be quite a complicated piece of work. We do need to make sure that the community is safe. My belief is that the magistrates all work to that basis. But how we keep the orders simple enough for some of those young people with quite significant cognitive disadvantages is a complicated piece of work. That is also part of the conversation that we are having there.

THE CHAIR: Are there any further supplementaries on that?

MR COE: Broadly with regard to case management—

THE CHAIR: We might go to Mr Hanson and then we will come straight back to you.

MR HANSON: I would like to thank you, minister, and also the members of your department who supported our visit out to the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre on 12 October. There were some faces in the crowd there that I recognised. It was an excellent visit. On behalf of the committee, I would like to say thanks. I think that the service that is being delivered there is very good. So I commend the staff on that.

With respect to the services being provided, there is Gungahlin, there is Tuggeranong, and west Belconnen is coming online. Is that meeting demand, though? It seems that there is a pretty significant requirement for these sorts of services. With respect to whether we are meeting demand at the moment, I would imagine we are not, but would west Belconnen meet that and do we have gaps in the provision of that service, be it in Woden, Weston or elsewhere in Canberra?

Ms Burch: I acknowledge your visit. They are great centres and they do good work. I think part of their success involves the partnerships they create and maintain with other service providers in the area.

Mr Hehir: These centres operate regionally or from a district level. I think there are some obvious gaps. In the 2010 infrastructure plan I know we have identified that we would be looking at one for Woden-Weston Creek in the next five years or so. I think that is our time frame. And we are probably looking at Molonglo within the 10-year time frame.

We, too, think these are excellent services. We need to think about how they are delivered, what is the appropriate framework, what is the context of the community they are operating within. Certainly, we believe they are a really effective way of engaging with families, and we have talked at length about the work that the child and family centres do, so I will not necessarily go into that. But they are very effective in engaging with families in a non-threatening, constructive fashion. The partnerships they build in the community and with the families they work with are exceptional.

We certainly believe that they are there. The government have not agreed to fund them yet but they are willing to look at the infrastructure provision within those five and 10-year frameworks for those other centres. I think for Woden-Weston Creek, we might try and expand our partnership model a bit more and see whether we might have a stronger relationship with some of the existing community service organisations in the region. They are quite well established in the Woden area. So we would certainly be wanting to do that. But that is a piece of work that we still need to do in terms of making sure that we get it right.

You went to Gungahlin, which was our first. Tuggeranong is an evolution from that, so its model is slightly different, which reflects its surroundings. The other one is west Belconnen which, again, has a different focus, particularly given its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus.

THE CHAIR: You talked about establishing the Woden one. Depending on what the model is for that particular area, it would be perhaps about bringing those different services into that centre—or would it be a different sort of model?

Mr Hehir: I think we still need to do the work around that. Certainly, part of the

thinking that we are doing is how we can co-locate services. The real beauty of the model is that it does have the co-location of services within it. If we can expand that co-location of service delivery, that is certainly something that we would like to try. So that is the sort of work that we need to do in developing our next potential one for consideration.

We have really strong partnerships with the community sector. If you go to the Tuggeranong one, the work that they do with Communities@Work is extensive. It works really well. The relationships we are building with both Belconnen Community Services and Uniting Care at Kippax are again building on—

MR HANSON: Is Belconnen on track? I cannot remember when it is due to be delivered.

Mr Hehir: It is due in—

Ms Burch: It started in March, so it is about March 2011.

MS PORTER: It says December on that—

Mr Hehir: Yes, December 2010 was our target but the rain has affected us a little bit. So once we have our rain days, it is pretty much on target. It is lovely to have full dams but it does slow your construction program down. It still is. We do not have the roof on yet, so that will slow it down. I think it has slowed us by about 20 to 30 days—in that sort of area. January is probably our date at the moment but that would just reflect the weather.

MS PORTER: I have a question around the Indigenous programs at west Belconnen. Could you just fill us in—

MS HUNTER: And how the links with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are working, because there was a focus at west Belconnen.

Ms Burch: There was a strong focus, and Helen will go into the detail. But they have been quite active from the get-go in working groups, in how the physical structure will be and in how the programs will be developed and delivered over time. So they have been really strong partners in that development. Ms Pappas, do you want to talk about that?

Ms Pappas: We have a project that involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We call it growing healthy families. That was the title that the community thought reflected how they wanted that work to happen. The work that is happening out at Gungahlin and will move across Gungahlin and west Belconnen will absolutely continue in the format it is continuing in now.

What we are seeing now at Gungahlin is a range of people who are involved in the project and who want to take on a stronger leadership role in the project and are wanting to move in that area, supported by us but very much from behind, not making decisions for them. We absolutely support it and that is exactly how it should be, the community taking responsibility for their programs and leading them. It is a really

good outcome.

At west Belconnen we will go back and do a consultation process just to make sure that the identified needs are relevant to that community and develop programs in relation to those needs. They are the sorts of things.

The families at Gungahlin told us that swimming was really important for their kids and that first aid was really important. So we developed a partnership with the local swim school in the Gungahlin area. She actually closed her centre for us, which was fantastic, and let the kids have very exclusive use of that centre for the six-week period that those boys needed to go there and swim. St John Ambulance did the same for us in relation to first aid.

It is really about delivering services that the community identify that they require and trying not to fit them into a box or have any perception. We do let them lead it and let them tell us what they want us to do and then help them get to a point where they are delivering a program for their own community.

Ms Burch: There are a number of Indigenous-specific programs. I recall Tuggeranong's father-son Indigenous program. That is about tapping into different elements of programs with different lifecycle elements. That is quite successful.

Ms Pappas: We have started the planning process for next year. We have had a consultation with the women at Gungahlin in terms of what they want for next year. We have done the same for the men. At the beginning of next year we will engage with the preschool program out there to capture the new group of families that are coming into that service as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Coe?

MR COE: I have a question with regard to case managers at Bimberi. I was wondering whether you could briefly overview the role of the case managers and what they should do on a daily basis, exactly how many there are and whether there has been any change in the numbers since Bimberi opened.

Ms Burch: I will ask Michael Reid whether he can help.

Mr Reid: The role of case managers at Bimberi is, initially and primarily, around assessment of young people's needs, their accommodation needs, their health and wellbeing needs, possible employment, education needs and liaising with education. We have case managers from forensic mental health that are actually based in the facility as well. Really it is around coordination of and development of the case plan for those young people and then, following that, the implementation of that case plan with the young people, with their families, with the agencies involved both within Bimberi and external to Bimberi.

If they are involved in transitioning, it is around transitioning planning with young people, making appropriate links with the community. One thing we have been really conscious of lately is, when we talk about transitioning, to also talk about transitioning so that, if young people go into Bimberi, those around them, those

service providers, their family, do not necessarily not see them. We want to continue those contacts, continue those relationships, because they are the ones that will be picking up with that young person when they leave.

They liaise with various service providers. I did a count the other day. We have had 799 visits by approximately 50 agencies in Bimberi over the last financial year. We had in excess of 70 visits by five designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. We have also had about 50 visits by our oversight bodies. There is a lot of coming and going between the community and Bimberi.

MR COE: And what about actual numbers?

Mr Reid: There are three case managers and a team leader, a program manager, within Bimberi.

MR COE: And they are full time?

Mr Reid: Yes.

MR COE: What about changes in that area? Have there always been three? Have you had any trouble with accretion or retention?

Mr Reid: For the last couple of years that I have been there, it has been stable with the case managers. We had one case manager who left about six weeks ago. She has gone to live interstate. We are currently doing a recruitment process for that.

MR COE: If you have got three case workers and you are juggling as many agencies as you are, how much time are they actually spending with each resident? How much time can they actually dedicate to liaising with the residents and the relevant agencies?

Mr Reid: I am not too sure that I can break it down to the exact time but they are able to form relationships with young people. The young people reside in units; so they liaise with the units on a daily basis. They liaise with the operational staff around consistent management of the young people. Their primary role is to build up a relationship but also then coordinate and case-manage those services and other providers around the young person.

MR COE: With regard to ensuring that the facilities within Bimberi are appropriately used, what do the case managers do with regard to getting them involved in education programs, getting them involved in the cultural facilities or whatever it might well be?

Mr Reid: They liaise with the education staff. As part of that case management framework, they have developed individual learning plans for the young people around their education. The department of education will be also developing pathway plans, broader plans for those young people as well in terms of their ongoing vocation. The other agency that they liaise with is the CIT around the education and vocation plan.

Ms Burch: Can I comment on the reference to the number of organisations coming

into Bimberi. I hosted an afternoon tea, and a number of those organisations actually welcomed those opportunities to make connections with each other so that they can, external to Bimberi, streamline their own processes and approaches to residents at Bimberi.

Just recently I convened a roundtable to look at Indigenous residents of Bimberi as well. Those groups were quite clear in appreciating the work of the case managers in Bimberi. They also recognised that, as service providers, they also had in many ways a responsibility of knowing who else in the sector is working with these children as well. We do case management but it is also about that communication with the external providers.

I think it could be an annual event now, after that afternoon tea, because they did recognise the benefit of knowing each other's business and how they can add value to the residents, apart from their own input. Why they are all participating in this activity is to make sure that those young folk, when they exit Bimberi, are connected and transition into society.

MR COE: Are you saying that since Bimberi opened only once have all these allied services actually come together?

Ms Burch: Since I was minister. I hosted that afternoon tea. I am not aware of the other connections.

MR COE: There is no other forum, there is no other facility, whereby all these allied services that are providing what seem to be essential services can actually come together and liaise to make sure they are delivering the best possible service for the community?

Mr Duggan: We are talking about case management. For me, there are two different roles we are talking about. There is a programmatic response of bringing all the agency heads together, sharing information. But on an individual basis in case management, it is really about working with the appropriate service providers, about building the appropriate case plan and working with the child as an individual.

Case management is a very coordinated approach. Additional to that, there is a lot of casework that goes on. Casework is the individual work too. It is actually undertaken by the youth workers who are present on site. It is a coordinated, individualised approach to each young person based on their needs. Although there are numbers coming in, you are building the plan around the young person and you are specifically seeking out different—

MR COE: That is a totally separate issue, though. With regard to these essential services, I am amazed that there would not be regular fora whereby they can ensure that they are not duplicating services, that they are actually delivering something in the best, streamlined way. To have a one-off morning tea that might go annual does not seem to me to be adequate.

Mr Reid: If I could add, the team leader of the case management team is also called the programs manager. He holds regular meetings with the various service providers.

I have attended those meetings with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, with the youth centres. So there is a framework already of bringing those people together, talking to them about what they are providing, working on bringing them together. One thing we are really conscious of is not facilitating an overlap or an underlap.

MR COE: That is in contrast to what the minister said. The minister said this was the first time that some of these people had actually met each other.

Ms Burch: It could have been an understatement but it does not mean to say that those organisations have not come across each other. You could gather organisations in a room every six months and there would be different representations from organisations and meeting other folk. Organisations interface and individual workers interface.

MR COE: But it was obviously stark enough for you to mention it when responding to that issue. Obviously it is a prevalent issue and a pressing issue that they had not met each other and they were not aware.

Ms Burch: But as Mr Reid has said, there are other structures where organisations and fora get together. I went to a forum of community providers this morning. That forum could convene every six months and there would be different representatives there that would share and benefit from being part of that discussion. It does not mean to say that the organisation has not met before.

MS HUNTER: If I could follow up with a supplementary—

THE CHAIR: Mrs Dunne has been waiting to ask a question for a while.

MRS DUNNE: Thanks, Madam Chair. Could I clarify a little about case workers. Mr Reid, the case workers are presumably working in the Koori unit. When people first come into Bimberi, that is where they are situated? How do the case workers interact with the youth workers at admission, for want of a better word, and then how do they provide services on an ongoing basis? Do they provide similar services to young people on remand as well as to those who are sentenced as a result of the conclusion of a matter?

Mr Reid: They are not physically located or based in the Koori unit. You may be aware that there is a town square model. They are based around that square near education.

MRS DUNNE: It is not part of the initial assessment as they come into the—

Mr Reid: It is. They will go down there. They are just not based there. The initial assessment is conducted with operational staff. The majority of our admissions are actually after hours, on weekends. Case management staff will be advised the next morning and then start liaising with that young person, with operations, about what is happening, whether or not they are returning to court that day or that morning or whether or not they will be in Bimberi for a longer time.

In terms of whether they work differently with sentenced and remanded young people, the majority of our kids who come in on remand, over 50 per cent, are in there for less than five days. So there are some very—

MRS DUNNE: But some of them are there for very long periods too?

Mr Reid: Yes. There is some planning but not a lot of planning that can happen around that five days. Young people who have been in there for longer than 14 days will have a transition plan developed for them, and case management will start then to coordinate those services. Obviously, the focus with sentenced young people once they have been convicted is around also their criminogenic issues. So case managers will then start. We have a program called CHART, changing habits and reaching targets. It is a cognitive behavioural approach to working with young people. We do not do that with remandees. But they will start then working with young people who are on committal.

Mr Hehir: Michael talked earlier about the transition in. While we will not necessarily develop extensive case plans for the young people who are there for less than five days, we recognise that we need to try and make connections with the services supporting some of those young people who are in there for less than five days to try and make sure that their transition out, and keeping out, is more effective than if they are not supported.

Certainly, while we would not necessarily be doing a significant piece of work around their case management, we would be trying to hook them back up to the services that are supporting them and making sure that those connections are re-established. If they are attending education we would also be trying to get them connected and supported back into wherever their educational attendance has been.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves, did you have a follow-up? I know there was a supplementary. Is this in relation to Bimberi?

MR HARGREAVES: Okay, Madam Chair. My question was related—

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves, is this in relation to Bimberi?

MR HARGREAVES: You can tell me, actually, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MR HARGREAVES: I will just tell you what it is about. It is about Indigenous young people in Bimberi.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is fine.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much. By way of a little bit of background, I have had discussions with a dance group of Indigenous people in Gungahlin. They are not incorporated, but they are all about trying to keep the young people out of Bimberi. That is the background. What I was interested in knowing was how many young Indigenous people are being taken into Bimberi for whom this is the first taste of

incarceration—in other words, they did not go to Quamby. Firstly, have you got that answer or is that one you would want to take away?

Mr Hehir: I would want to take that one away.

MR HARGREAVES: Where I was headed with that was that I also wanted to know whether or not you are using any of the former AMC residents who have changed their lives around as role models and mentors for the young Indigenous people going in and out of Bimberi. Is it a short answer? Does a shake of the head or a flickering of the eyelids denote no? Okay. That did not take long, did it, Madam Chair?

The last one is in terms of what the minister has said about these organisations coming together. Am I right in assuming that what was actually said was that it was about getting those people to discuss what they had to contribute? It was not about what they were contributing to the kids but what they were doing amongst themselves in delivering common services. What I am picking up is that it is a great idea having them come together like that. Why hasn't ACTCOSS done that in the first place because that is the peak group to which they all belong?

Ms Burch: If you are referring to the roundtable—

MR HARGREAVES: Yes.

Ms Burch: just last week, it fell out of that morning tea. It is important for me to meet these organisations as well as the department and the agencies working with them. The commentary around the table last week recognised the dual responsibility of government and Bimberi, but also Aboriginal providers and what role and responsibility they have. There was a level of discussion about them understanding each other's business a little bit better, but also working more broadly.

You can have an individual young person in Bimberi or in youth justice in or out of Bimberi, but if you do not actually work with the family and their broader community, you are only going halfway to changing the opportunities and the outcomes for that individual and families. We spoke at that meeting around the integrated, intensive work we are doing with Aboriginal and vulnerable families. They were really keen to know how they can bring their organisations to add value to that. Case management is a way of doing that, but it is also the sector recognising their own responsibilities around their program place for those families at risk.

MR HARGREAVES: It sounds like a top idea and a great initiative. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter, and then Ms Hunter I think has some follow-ups.

MS PORTER: Thank you, chair. I just read with interest about the horticultural program at Bimberi. It is part of the education program. It is referred to on page 68. It sounds fantastic. They have obviously done a whole lot with that particular program and it sounds really wonderful. I was just wondering about the other education programs of a practical nature that might be running out there. Can you let us know about those?

Ms Burch: There are a range of educational programs out at Bimberi. The horticultural one is good. They have made that connection with OzHarvest, which is good. There is also one on living skills, which is about the importance of living skills and being able to budget, cook and care for yourself. Among the other activities out there are barista and hospitality.

This is about making sure that when these young folk move out they have got a benefit, an additional ticket, so to speak. We are quite strongly behind giving them opportunities to get a white card or a ticket in making coffee, which many may undervalue, but we all know that hospitality, construction work and casual labouring work is a means to an end and is often an opportunity for these young kids to get a job and to get a ticket. Sometimes it is the first ticket many of these young kids have had.

Just recently I was out there looking at the brick and block program run by CIT or CITEA—I hope I do not confuse the organisation that was responsible for it. It is giving a handful of young fellows a taste of bricklaying. That piqued significant interest in a couple of them that saw that as a trade that they could aspire to. I think it is a good thing to go in there without a skill or an aspiration to develop a skill and then come away with some tickets that can get you a job. That is a good thing.

MS PORTER: Obviously the horticultural program is a long-term program. You can see by reading the report how it has developed over time. What about these other programs that you mentioned? You mentioned bricklaying and coffee making. Are they all running at the same time, or do you have programs that come and go?

Ms Burch: I think the bricks and block one is a one-off, but it could become periodic. I am not quite sure. But the barista course is part and parcel of the hospitality training. Michael, you may want to elaborate on the other training.

Mr Reid: We worked quite hard with the Department of Education and Training and the CIT to put a proper framework in there. The idea is not just necessarily to give one-off programs but to link them to learning. The majority of kids who come there come from significantly impoverished backgrounds. They have poor numeracy and literacy skills and poor impulse control. They certainly have trauma backgrounds, so all of this impacts on their ability to learn. They are often disengaged with education.

One of the key things is to get them re-engaged with education, focus on their numeracy and literacy skills then also get them interested in activities where they feel productive and can learn skills they can use in the community. That has been a real key focus that we have had at this time. We are looking at white card training to supplement the normal education term. We are conscious not to disrupt their normal education programming, but we are supplementing and linking in with that programming.

Mr Hehir: Michael did talk about the fact that many of these young people are really quite heavily disconnected from education. Actually getting them to the point where they value education and they can see the relationship that maths and literacy make to the work that they enjoy doing is a key part of the work that we have been undertaking with education.

Particularly with some of the young people within Bimberi it is about trying to find an effective connection back into education in whatever form that might take. These kids are normally very heavily disengaged from education, and what we are trying to do as part of this program is show them there is value in education, there is value in learning how to read and learning how to add up, and it is in the work that they are doing either in the woodwork room or as the barista, in the living skills program or in the bricks and blocks. It is important to know angles, it is important to how to add up, it is important to know how to read instructions.

Certainly, that connection is very important for us in terms of trying to make sure that the programs are structured back into an educational framework. In this case they are structured back into access 10, which is the program that most of our young people at Bimberi are attending.

That is a really important approach that we have got to try and make sure that once they leave, we are trying to support their connection back into educational training as best we can, partly through the experiences they have.

THE CHAIR: Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: I have a couple of questions. One relates back to CHART and that cognitive behavioural approach. You were talking about many young people having low IQs and cognitive issues there, so is CHART appropriate? Is there something else you need to know, because with low IQ or alcohol foetal syndrome or whatever, there are issues there.

My second question is around community organisations and whether Bimberi surveys or has feedback forms from community organisations about how they are finding access, how they are finding the relationship, what sort of improvements could be made and what positive things they are getting out of it.

Mr Reid: When you are working with kids who have low IQs, the CHART program needs to be flexible in terms of its delivery. It will not be suitable for some kids, because they just will not have the cognitive abilities. So we need to look at other ways to work at the offending behaviours and the issues associated with their offending behaviour. That is a problem with the kids with really low IQs.

In terms of feedback, we do not have a structured system in place for that. We do have several meetings et cetera where we hear feedback, take that on board and talk about that, but we do not have a structured program.

MS HUNTER: With those children where CHART is not appropriate, what are your options?

Mr Reid: The options are still looking at some of what is linked with the offending behaviour—drug and alcohol issues or violence issues. We work to resolve some of those issues and some impulse control issues. Structure for some of these young people is extremely helpful. Again, they come from backgrounds where there is not a lot of structure. Sometimes we see kids struggle with that, but then, after time, they actually adapt well to that.

THE CHAIR: I will ask a quick—

MRS DUNNE: Chairman's privilege.

THE CHAIR: Yes, sorry. There is no formal process about engagement with other organisations. Is it something you have considered doing? You said there was no structured process for feedback. I imagine that would be a fairly important part of maintaining contact with young people once they leave Bimberi. It is important to know what happens once they leave. Is it something that you are considering looking at?

Ms Burch: We do it across a number of other areas, and we are quite happy to take it away and think about how we can do it. It goes to my earlier comments about the organisations that come through Bimberi and recognising how useful feedback is to inform them and us around how we as a system—whether it is Bimberi or the community providers—best respond and flatten out that service delivery. So it is a useful notion. Thank you.

MRS DUNNE: This is related to Bimberi but it goes back to the estimates process. I asked some questions at the time of estimates about the incidents where young people got onto the roof. The answer came back that there were four incidents where people got onto the roof, and the dates were given. The answer also included the information that there was no occasion on which young detainees have escaped or attempted to escape lawful custody at Bimberi.

I asked the question at the time because I had been told that there was an incident where somebody had got beyond the perimeter wall. Since then, I have been told by other people that there was an incident where someone had got beyond the perimeter wall. Minister, would you like to reconsider that answer?

Ms Burch: Sorry, Mrs Dunne. I would defer to Michael, because that was my understanding. And I can add that we have fixed the roof problem.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I was going to go onto the energised wires.

Ms Burch: Yes.

Mr Reid: The incidents on the roof have been kids on the roof—they have not been absconding or attempting to escape.

MRS DUNNE: There were no incidents, Mr Reid, where anyone got beyond the perimeter wall? There were no incidents where people were found on the outside portico?

Mr Reid: There was one where the young person was on the roof and he was directed to come down onto the portico at the front and then—

MRS DUNNE: So he or she was outside the fence?

Mr Reid: He was not beyond the bounds of Bimberi.

MRS DUNNE: But he or she was outside the fence?

Mr Reid: He was asked to come down, he was directed. Because he did not want to come back down inside, he was asked to come down onto the portico at the front of the centre.

MRS DUNNE: Which is outside the fence.

MR HARGREAVES: So he came down under a controlled environment?

Mr Reid: Yes, and he was not outside the border perimeter. That is my understanding.

MRS DUNNE: But he was outside the fence?

Ms Burch: I think what Mr Reid is saying—

MRS DUNNE: I asked the question in estimates and it was taken on notice. The answer came back that there was no attempt at escape from Bimberi and that no-one had breached the perimeter fence. But if someone is on the front portico, they are outside the fence, is that not the case?

Ms Burch: What we are saying, Mrs Dunne, is that this young fellow was on the roof and we have directed him, in many ways, to go into that area so that he could come back inside and the situation could be managed and controlled.

MR HARGRAVES: Mr Reid, did you direct him to come down from that particular thing because he could not get through a gate?

Mr Reid: Well, it was safer to actually come down that way.

MR HARGRAVES: It was safer for him to come down that way. You were looking after his particular interests getting him down from there then?

Mr Reid: Yes.

MR HARGRAVES: Fine.

MRS DUNNE: What time of day did this happen?

Mr Reid: I am sorry, I cannot recall.

MRS DUNNE: Can you take it on notice, please?

Mr Reid: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: When authorities at Bimberi first discovered this person, what part of the roof were they on when they were first discovered?

Mr Reid: On the roof, I believe, at the Coree unit.

MRS DUNNE: Could you check that and come back to me?

Mr Reid: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Have you got any other questions, Mrs Dunne?

MRS DUNNE: When was the electric fence installed?

Mr Duggan: It was installed and operational on 23 July.

MRS DUNNE: Thanks.

MR COE: I have a question about the facilities at Bimberi and about the education facilities, if I may?

THE CHAIR: I have a question in relation to Bimberi, but I will come to you, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Okay, sure.

THE CHAIR: My question is about how child protection case conferencing relates to Bimberi. On page 81 there is information about the child protection case conferencing. I am wondering how the work that has been done with that pilot will feed into young people that are in Marlow and Bimberi? Has there been any feedback on the pilot and how it has worked? I am particularly interested in how it will relate to young people in Bimberi.

Mr Wyles: We have been really pleased with the case conferencing pilot in child protection. I might just go back and talk a bit about the development of the case contracts in the pilot. In 2009, we were fortunate enough to host two international experts who had done substantial research and had substantial experience in case conferencing and really delivered to us the message that this is best practice in working in care and protection. They were Professor Gail Burfitt from the University of Vermont and Dr Maureen Connolly, the chief social worker from the Ministry of Social Development in New Zealand. Following discussions with them, we piloted three independent chairs convening case conferences across the service system. That began in the first week of November 2009. I think that is stated in the report.

The case conferencing team uses declared care teams under child protection legislation. They will invite families and key stakeholders to attend the conference and will declare a care team which allows easy sharing of information. One of the key learnings we took from our international experts was that the research had shown that often where you are dealing with families at risk one of the cautions with key stakeholders and families is their ability to share freely information, be transparent and work together around shared decision making. So the declaration of care teams really assists in that process.

It is probably worth talking a little about some surveying we did following the case

conferencing pilot. For the period from 2 November until May, 486 professionals and 250 family members, which equals 99 families, attended case conferences. We sent surveys to all the people who attended over that period. And what we found was that the attendance of families at case conferences was about two-thirds, 66 per cent of families, which is really significant because families need to be involved in the decision making and sharing responsibility to move forward.

In terms of young people, probably about a third of the conferences were focused on young people, 12 to 15-year olds. The other key thing in the survey was that over 75 per cent of case conferences were held at venues outside DHCS. We were really keen to have these based in the communities. They are held at places like Bimberi, the prison. A lot are held in various parts of the hospital. Schools is the other care area.

We have had really good feedback from community stakeholders. I mention here particularly the Canberra Hospital. One of the areas that emerged as a real area of need and where they have really taken to case conferencing is pre-natal. The hospital or community health identify risks for women in their pregnancy. They will often refer through our centralised intake system and the case conferencing team will pull together relevant parties, including the mother, and do some planning as they approach birth to ensure those supports are in place.

Case conferencing at Bimberi has largely been around children who are in the care of the chief executive on care orders and have been either remanded or sentenced. There are very good facilities at Bimberi in terms of the visit centre. I think that was mentioned earlier. Where young people are in custody, we are really keen to involve families and the community stakeholders as part of that planning and transition process.

THE CHAIR: Has there been positive feedback from families who have been involved in the process?

Mr Wyles: Absolutely.

Mr Duggan: Seventy-six per cent of the families who were surveyed said that they found it very helpful. And from a professional's point of view, I think about 92 per cent of those surveyed said the action plans and the time frames were a really successful methodology to use. It was a very positive feedback on the evaluation of the pilot, which is now embedded in a program at corrections.

THE CHAIR: Is the pilot likely to continue?

Mr Duggan: We have actually moved it from pilot now to the actual program within the office. This may answer the broader question. We are now using that methodology with our community providers and other providers about getting people trained up in case conferencing. In fact, we have taken out any training module. We have held eight training sessions in the community sector. They were very heavily attended by people wanting to practise the same methodology about how they get families together with professionals, how to empower them and how to make the relevant decisions for better outcomes for children.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any follow-ups on child protection while we have got Mr Wyles here?

MR COE: There might be quite a few more for Mr Wyles, but I have got one final one, hopefully, on Bimberi.

THE CHAIR: Yes, sure.

MR COE: I do not know whether Mr Reid is required.

THE CHAIR: We will get Mr Reid back.

MR COE: With regard to the facilities at Bimberi, in particular the education facilities—whether they be the working facilities, the kitchen or whatever, but hospitality in particular—there are anecdotal reports that they are not being used very often, the kitchen in particular. Would you please advise just how often the kitchen is being used as part of education?

Ms Burch: Michael can give the details. We have got hospitality and the living skills program that utilise the kitchen as well. As to what that equates to day to day, I am sorry—Mr Reid?

Mr Reid: The kitchen facilities are being used. There are three different types of kitchen facilities as well. There are the facilities within education where the kids have done some food preparation. The living skills program commenced with Nutrition Australia around food preparation, hygiene et cetera. There is the general kitchen within the centre. I understand young people have also been involved in preparing food within that kitchen. That is where the barista facilities are located as well. Then, also importantly, there are kitchens within their units.

MR COE: It is particularly the education and the general kitchens that I am interested in. Are both those being used weekly?

Mr Reid: I could not say. I am happy—

Mr Hehir: I can give you some answer. I think that the main kitchen, where the food preparation done for the meals is used by the cook or the chef every day practically, except when they are off sick, is fully utilised. It has been fitted out so that it can be used for high-level training. The young people probably need to complete the living skills program as the first step to that. I am sure you understand that the issue of knives and access to broad kitchen equipment, particularly in a professional kitchen, is something we have to manage very closely. We certainly see it as a potential use and it is utilised.

MR COE: Have any of the people there actually completed the living skills program?

Mr Hehir: No, they have not done it. I think there have been a couple of young people that have been, given their interest in the area, given tightly controlled opportunities. It is probably more envisaged that they will complete the living skills program and then, where there is sufficient interest and they are assessed as suitable,

they would be progressing into that main kitchen.

MR COE: To date it has not been used, pretty much?

Mr Hehir: The main kitchen is, as its primary function, used nearly every day.

MR COE: But it has not been used by residents?

Mr Hehir: My understanding is that the main kitchen has been used minimally by residents.

MR COE: What about the kitchen from the education area?

Mr Hehir: That program has commenced. That will be utilised more frequently, but until then it would have been done on a relatively ad hoc basis, rather than as part of the living skills program.

MR COE: One of the great attractions, it seems, of this style of incarceration is the rehabilitation program, in particular life skills and picking up trades. It seems that, here we are, a considerable time into the operation of Bimberi, what would appear to be critical aspects of the rehabilitation and providing for the future of these young people have been totally unutilised.

Mr Hehir: The living skills program, or an adapted form of it, has actually been delivered within the units for some of the longer term detainees within the centre.

MR COE: But it is not in the kitchens.

Ms Burch: It is the kitchens in the units, as I understand it.

Mr Hehir: Yes, it is the kitchens in the units.

MR COE: What about the woodworking facility? Has that been used at all?

Mr Hehir: Yes, it has.

MRS DUNNE: When? And for what?

Mr Reid: That commenced used last term, I understand, through education.

MR COE: Last term being?

Mr Reid: Term 3.

MR COE: Prior to that?

Mr Reid: No, I do not think it was used.

MR COE: Were there no systems in place, was there no procedure in place, at the time of the opening of Bimberi for that facility to be utilised?

Mr Hehir: When Bimberi was opened, my understanding is that the metalwork room was the one that was being utilised. We did go through a period where we had quite a number of young people who were not assessed as being suitable for utilising tools, in metal or woodwork or the kitchen, for that matter. So that program was stopped at that point, in terms of it not being delivered, because there was no-one able for it to be delivered to.

MR COE: But there were some that would have been assessed as being possible users of that facility?

Mr Hehir: I would need to check. My understanding was that it was very few, if any. But I can check that.

MR COE: Surely you had some idea about who would be residing in this facility prior to construction.

Mr Hehir: Yes.

MR COE: Was that not part of the risk assessment that was done at the time?

Mr Hehir: We had a very good idea of the sorts of young individuals that would be residing in this. The fact that at times there will be very few people who are assessed as being able to utilise tools does not mean that we should not provide the facilities. It is absolutely a risk that we were aware of, that there would be perhaps at times quite extended periods where we did not have young people who were assessed as suitable, as calm enough and as safe enough to utilise the tools. There was a decision taken. That did not mean that they should not have those facilities provided for when they were assessed as being suitable.

MR COE: But if they are provided—and presumably there were one or two or at least some kids that would have been able to use the facility—why did they not use it? Was it inappropriate staffing levels? Was it that there were not procedures in place? What was the actual limiting factor why these facilities, which presumably cost considerable sums, have not been utilised?

Mr Hehir: I will need to check. It is my recollection that it was largely around the assessment of the individuals. There was a metalwork teacher there from CIT. I think it was largely around the assessment of the individuals but I can check that.

MR COE: How many young people have gone through Bimberi?

Mr Hehir: I would need to take that on notice.

MR COE: Would it be over 100, 200, 300?

Mr Reid: A couple of hundred probably, yes.

MR COE: Of the couple of hundred, surely some of those would have been assessed as being able to access and use the woodworking facility. Otherwise, why was it

constructed? And if they were assessed to be able to use the facility, surely some of them would have benefited from using that facility. And that would have benefited the whole community.

Mr Reid: Could I ask—

MR COE: If I might finish?

Mr Reid: Sorry, my apologies.

MR COE: It would have benefited the entire community had they actually been trained and given the trades that Ms Burch spoke about earlier.

Mr Hehir: Yes, there are a number of young people. When we say that a couple of hundred young people would have gone through, it would not have been 200 different individuals who have gone through. There is a much smaller number than that, from my recollection.

MR COE: Will you please take that on notice—those numbers?

Mr Hehir: Yes, absolutely. In terms of the benefit, as Mr Reid talked about earlier, and I hopefully reinforced it, having a program developed that matches back to the education program, a program where they get a recognised certificate or a statement of attainment, is fundamentally important for these young people, particularly in terms of their ability to connect with education, training or employment. It is important that we do that.

MR COE: You are unlikely to get that statement if you cannot access a woodwork room, are you?

Mr Hehir: The important thing was about making sure that the program was done, that it was developed and that it can be mapped back to the access 10. So while there was metalwork undertaken, and in fact we have commenced a woodwork program, there have at times been periods when we have not had young people assessed as being able to utilise those environments. That is always a risk with some of the young people we have got. Some of the young people who have come from the community into a secure environment can be quite agitated.

It is probably also important to recognise that you are more likely to assess someone as being suitable where they have got a longer period there. For a significant period of last year, we were very low in numbers of young people with a committal. That absolutely would have impacted on the risk assessment during that period. Again, I am happy to take on notice whether there were young people assessed and whether they just missed out.

THE CHAIR: We might move on. Ms Hunter and Mrs Dunne had some child protection questions, so we might go to Ms Hunter first and then Mrs Dunne.

MS HUNTER: I have a question around the sibling placement policy. Could you advise on the current sibling placement policy for children in care, especially around

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and whether it is practice that foster families are stopped or not encouraged to take siblings because there is a view that there would be too many children in one family?

Mr Wyles: I will start by talking about the Aboriginal placement principle, which is really a staged principle in terms of its application in policy. In the first instance, we would, ideally, with Indigenous children coming into the care of the chief executive, want to place within the kinship or relative group. Like most jurisdictions, we struggle to get enough kinship carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage in the community. It is something that we continue to work on.

MS HUNTER: I am very familiar with the placement principle. What is your policy? Is it still a draft policy, the sibling placement policy, or has it been finalised? Certainly, I have had a constituent raise an issue with me around a family being broken up because there was a view put to that constituent that there would be too many children in the family. I want to know how that fits with the sibling placement policy.

Mr Hehir: Can I talk broadly, to start with?

MS HUNTER: Yes.

Mr Hehir: The sibling placement principle is one of a number of principles that we have. Unfortunately, for a lot of this work there is no clear, exact answer that you can always give to the question, but I think some of the context is important. Yes, our broad policy is that siblings should be kept together where it is appropriate, and there are times when you might test that boundary. There might be a 17-year-old and a two-year-old from the same family, but they might have incredibly different needs, they may not have had much contact at all and the 17-year-old might pose quite a serious risk. So there would be factors that you would take into account when you were thinking about whether that sibling placement should occur.

Other factors that we need to look at include the sustainability of the placement. What we do know is that, where a placement breaks down, that is yet another trauma for the young person or the child to experience. It is why we actually have, as a measure of the number of placements, two or less, because that sends a really good sign.

When you are talking about some families, it is probably worth recognising that the majority of the children who come into our care will have come from quite complex circumstances. Quite commonly, there is a question about foetal alcohol effect, if not syndrome. There are question marks around attachment; there are question marks around disability. If the children are slightly older, there can be questions around behavioural difficulties.

When you are putting a package together or looking at where the placement should go, and you have a range of complexities, while an individual may cope very well with complexities in terms of being an individual foster carer, it is something we do need to think about. If you have, for example, two, three, four or five, it is not a linear progression in terms of complexity. It can actually be exponential in the relationship. So it is something you need to test and it is something that you need to think about when you are doing the placement.

Also, the level of complexity or behavioural issues adds to the risk of a placement breaking down. You also need to think about whether that foster family has their own children, whether it be one, two, three, four or five, what ages they are and what their capacity to cope is. So it is not really something that you can give an absolutely definitive answer around.

The general principle is to keep them together where it is in their best interests. And that is really the other test that we are trying to balance when it comes to that. I am not sure, with the individual constituent, whether we have got it 100 per cent right or not. In a sense, it is a real judgement question when it comes to those sorts of circumstances. You do have to think about: what has been the contact between these siblings, if any? Do they have established relationships? Is this yet another trauma potentially for one, two, three, four or five, or however many there are, of the children?

MS HUNTER: As you say, Mr Hehir, it is a judgement. So if there is a disagreement about the decision made, is there some sort of appeal, is there some sort of process that someone can go through to put their case or put further information on the table?

Mr Duggan: Yes, absolutely. I am not sure if this is consistent with what you are talking about, but we have to go through normal processes before we can make a judgement, and that will be an assessment of all the individuals concerned. If people are not happy with that, there is a very active appeal process that does make its way to the chief executive, and has done on a range of occasions. And we would be open to that. Depending on the status, if it is through a court process, there is also an opportunity for people to join as parties, which people often do. So we do have an adjudication in the court process as well.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, I think that Ms Hunter and I have had the same representations. I took those representations to you two or three weeks ago and you said that you would obtain a briefing. It has not happened, so can I put on the record that I would like a briefing on that matter.

Ms Burch: I think my office put an email through, getting some dates from you.

MRS DUNNE: No, my office has not heard back. I just checked.

MS HUNTER: I certainly also have written a letter.

Ms Burch: I agreed at the time; I am happy to provide a briefing to both of you.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. It is a complex issue.

THE CHAIR: Are there any follow-up questions on that?

MS HUNTER: Not on that particular issue.

THE CHAIR: We will go to Ms Hunter again and then Mrs Dunne.

MS HUNTER: I want to find out about a few things that you were going through with procurement processes and so forth. One of them was the out-of-home care and family support procurement process. What is the status on where you are up to?

Mr Duggan: With the out-of-home care procurement process?

MS HUNTER: And the family support procurement process.

Mr Duggan: I will start with out-of-home care, if that is okay, Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: Yes.

Mr Duggan: The out-of-home care process, as you know, was procured. We were not successful with the range of responses that we requested. We are actually going out again this Saturday for another phase of procurement. We have had an industry discussion and took advice from all those providers who were interested in tendering. We will go out and advertise this Saturday and then we will have an industry consultation that will follow that, and we will procure the new services over the next six weeks.

For the youth and family support process, as you know, we had a discussion document issued in December, followed by a number of stakeholder meetings and forums. We took all the advice that we received from our colleagues in the non-government sector. We developed a summary of responses, which we issued in about June. I then took a number of focus groups, along with a number of colleagues, of relevant providers in the August-September period. Subsequently, we put out a framework document last week. That will be out and I have agreed to another six weeks of consultation, which actually commences this Thursday. I have also been invited to two other meetings with a range of providers to discuss the framework document. We will do that for six weeks and then we will issue our tender documentation in around January.

To date, the response to the framework document has been very positive. People have responded by saying that they think it encapsulates the submissions that they made previously. So what we will do over the next six weeks is just test that and test the detail of the framework document.

MS HUNTER: On the out-of-home care procurement process, you said you went back and talked to the sector and so forth, and you have now put that out. So what is in those specifications?

Mr Duggan: The specifications are for intensive residential care, some foster care. We already have a procurement out for a therapeutic protection facility, which was put out separately because we thought there was too much out simultaneously. That is actually in a procurement process at the moment. The other thing we would like to start to develop more of is that therapeutic foster care and those types of models. We successfully launched that last week with the Australian Childhood Foundation and Barnardos. There has been quite a groundswell amongst foster-care agencies especially to start to work within those frameworks.

MS HUNTER: You are holding back on the tender around the therapeutic facility?

Mr Duggan: No, the therapeutic facility has already been out. It is in procurement. It is actually now being evaluated. We separated that out of the out-of-home care and it went out previously. There was a lot out at the time. We took advice from the provider, who said “Could you put this out separately so that we can take a bit of time?” So we have put it out separately and it is now being evaluated. We should have a decision on that in the next month.

MS HUNTER: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a follow-up question about the tender process. You may have already answered my question, but there is the integrated system in therapeutic services tender process as well.

Mr Duggan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: How is that process being progressed?

Mr Duggan: That process is basically seeking individual providers in our community who can actually offer high-level assessments. That process is in progress as well. We try to get a range of preferred providers who would undertake high-level assessments independent of us around particular cases, especially in the court environment.

We have used those providers more especially about kinship-type processes where the complexity is at such a high level. Quite often the court will request or we will request an independent assessor. These providers are well-respected providers. Usually in this community at this wider phase they would give us that expert advice.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, I missed that last bit. Who would give you that advice?

Mr Duggan: They are independent assessors.

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Mr Duggan: They are all fairly high-level, well-qualified assessors and they—

MRS DUNNE: And they come from?

Mr Duggan: They would be the target—sorry, yes.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, sorry.

Mr Duggan: Sorry, yes, my apologies.

MRS DUNNE: I was having trouble with the accent, Mr Duggan.

Mr Duggan: Sorry, I have got a cold. Actually, I haven't.

MRS DUNNE: While we are on the subject of procurement, where are we at with the

grandparent kinship carers?

Mr Duggan: As you know, we did try to procure those services. One organisation was successful, Marymead.

MRS DUNNE: And they received \$20,000?

Mr Duggan: They received \$40,000 and because of the rollover process that I have talked about in Children, Youth and Family Support, they still have funding from that process there. We have been talking to the Grandparents and Kinship Carers Group about alignment with Marymead.

We are also looking at two other things. One is to look at advice we have received from the national foster carer and kinship carer conference. It basically said that we should be concentrating our efforts on providing counselling services to carers—kinship carers themselves; not their children—because of the trauma and the circumstances they are going through. We are in negotiations with agencies around that. We are also negotiating with one particular Aboriginal agency about some Aboriginal service provision.

MRS DUNNE: Is this a policy change from the policy that was announced in 2008?

Ms Burch: That sits within the broad aim, which was to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, the policy that was announced in 2008 was to provide funding for a non-government organisation for both grandparent and kinship carers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparent and kinship carers. So are we seeing the evolution of policies, because that perhaps was not very well thought out at the time?

Ms Burch: What we are seeing is the department being ongoingly in conversation with the kinship carers and responding under the parameters of that policy initiative. We have got the CLO in place that looks to support kinship carers—

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, I did not hear; CLO?

Mr Hehir: The Carer Liaison Officer.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, is that the \$60,000.

Ms Burch: We have procured Marymead. As Mr Duggan said, we are looking at providers for those other two elements. But in the meantime, we provided direct resourcing to a number of kinship carers so they could get access to some conferences both in Tasmania and Victoria. I have shared a level of frustration that this has taken this length of time but it is a conversation that we will work through with kinship carers to make sure that those dollars go to the supports that need them.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, I asked a question on notice on 23 September—it is question No 1195—in relation to the 2008 policy. I asked that on 23 September. It

still has not been answered. When will I get an answer, because it addresses a whole lot of those issues.

Ms Burch: You can appreciate that I do not have that number in front of me but I will follow it up and find out where it is—

MRS DUNNE: Great, thank you.

Ms Burch: I would have thought that it was on its way to you. I will find that out.

MRS DUNNE: It is well overdue.

THE CHAIR: Ms Hunter, do you have a question? We have only got about 10 minutes. We will go to your question and then Ms Porter will have the final question.

MS HUNTER: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question was around the practice framework project. This is obviously around developing a consistency in quality of practice and so forth across child protection workers. I understand that it was due for introduction in late 2010. I am wondering where that is up to.

Mr Wyles: The practice framework is a project that we are progressing. It is probably not moving at the pace I would like, but what we have introduced is a range of practice tools, some of which we have developed and adapted from the New Zealand practice framework. These are things that really assist practitioners in their daily work.

One of them is a really useful tool for peer discussion and supervision which allows practitioners to talk about very complex cases and make some determinations on risk and whether it is escalating or de-escalating. From there they can put some processes in place around whether they can close the case or transfer the case. That is being used in areas of Care and Protection.

Another piece of work we did for the practice framework was to run some focus groups with staff to really elicit from staff some of the practice, knowledge and wisdom they have in doing their work. That was a really useful exercise because from that we will disseminate some of those questions to develop some information around practice triggers, particularly for new workers if they go out to do, for example, their first home visits or their first assessments. This will give them some ideas about the sorts of questions that are going to assist them in risk assessments of families and assessments more generally of families.

There are a number of tools that we are progressing. Work on the overarching framework is slower than I would have liked, but it is progressing. I hope that early in the new year we will have something.

MS PORTER: Minister, I have a general question relating to page 70 and the young people's plan and the consultation process that you initiated for that. You talk about that and the children and young people's task force?

Ms Burch: The development of the young people's plan was quite a large and

consultative process. The Youth Advisory Council played a role in that. We also have a youth interact process and a website that allows people to make a connection with different initiatives that we do. I think there were surveys and forums. I will ask Mr Reid to go to the detail, but all in all that was quite a significant contribution through schools, online surveys, feedback mechanisms and also through the youth interact conference. I am happy for Mr Reid to give you some more information.

Mr Reid: I suppose the journey or process started quite a while ago back in October 2008 when the Youth Advisory Council surveyed young people about what was important to them. Following on from that survey there was the youth interact conference and Youth Week the following year. We surveyed young people again building on what was important to them to look at their priorities.

Following that, we had additional surveys around the young people's plan itself asking young people questions to get feedback, further information and further ideas. Then we subsequently had 10 consultation forums with a diverse range of young people throughout the community. I also understand that some of the Youth Advisory Council members went down to Wreck Bay to engage with the young people in Wreck Bay around their views and wishes as well. In total we had over 400 people complete surveys. As I say, we also had a number of people at those consultation forums.

MS PORTER: Could I have a little more information about the children and young—

Ms Burch: The task force?

MS PORTER: The children and young people's task force that is supposed to be implementing that?

Ms Burch: There is a task force and we have representatives from the department, YAC and other government agencies on that. It is overseeing the implementation. It is a group that goes through the implementation. The young people's plan is a long-term plan but it also is sliced up into activities over a 12-month period. That was across all government agencies. The task force responsibility is around collating and governing that data and tweaking the implementation as the plan rolls out over the next five years.

Mr Reid: The government task force reports to the sharing responsibility committee, which is an overarching committee. The chief executive chairs that committee. Really, the task force was an opportunity to bring the alignment of the children's plan and the young people's plan closer together. The task force used to be a reference group, I understand, for the children's plan. It was an opportunity to broaden that out and include children and young people.

Underneath that, we have created a government and community advisory committee. It is a committee with young people. It is co-chaired with the Youth Coalition and community reps—non-government reps. The Youth Advisory Council sit on that as well. We have tried to create a bit of a framework for reporting and guiding both the young people's plan and the children's plan.

THE CHAIR: I have one final question. You may not have time for the whole answer. It relates to the efficiency dividend that has been applied across government. Has there has been any examination of where it is going to apply in terms of children, family and youth services?

Mr Hehir: Are you referring to the efficiency dividend for 2010-11 financial year?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Hehir: It has been put in place. There are a number of areas across the department where we intend to make savings. Some of it has been achieved already and relates to a different portfolio. There were a number of services around disability where we took out to tender some services that are being delivered both in-house and with other providers over an extended period of time. We specified a contract price that achieved the saving required for that area. That tender was announced about six weeks ago, I think. They are contracting on the basis of the revised price which reflected the bundling of a range of services. I do not have the details of the others in my head; I will hand over to Mr Hubbard.

THE CHAIR: I know that Mr Hubbard likes to be asked a question.

Mr Hehir: There was one other. Sorry, I was off sick yesterday. I do not know that I am great yet. The other one is that we have identified some voluntary redundancies. They are not to come from the front line. They are meant to come from support areas. Are there eight?

Mr Hubbard: Between eight and nine, depending on how the voluntary nature of it goes.

Mr Hehir: Yes. Is that the majority of the services?

Mr Hubbard: That is the majority. We went through an exercise. Clearly, DHCS is predominantly a front-line service delivery agency. We have got about 90 per cent of our funds going to direct service delivery. We need to have a close look at where we have got some flexibilities through the department. We look at that every year as part of our business planning—where we can get some flexibility—because we get demands in all areas that pop up during the year. That forms the basis of our movement into the budget process.

As part of that process each year we ask the various business units where they may have some flexibility or where they want to do some changing. They are the areas where we predominantly look for savings, whether they need to be delivered up to government or whether we will use those ourselves to redirect resources to services where we want to expand those services or where there is a need.

We usually distribute the efficiency dividend based on GPO as a proportion so that it is equitable across the agency. On the whole that works pretty well because the biggest areas clearly have the biggest budget. Therefore, you would think that one per cent within their 100 per cent is pretty achievable. That is what we go for. As Martin said, it was really about how we look at the delivery of disability services. As

you know, there is a very large non-government agency contracting arrangement there.

We looked at about half a million dollars in there where we could make some efficiencies. Disability has been looking closely at how they are doing their work there. They have gone out to tender for services and I think they will achieve some savings there.

As Martin said, there has been some restructuring within the office generally over the last couple of years coming in from Education. We have managed to, I think, make some savings there on a voluntary basis within the office. That is worth about \$800,000. That is the majority. We are looking for 1.6 over the year, which is one per cent of our budget. That is 1.2 and probably the rest of the savings would come from administrative-type savings across the whole agency. That is what we are looking at.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We are unfortunately out of time. I want to thank the minister and department officials for appearing today before the annual reports committee. We will now break until 4 pm. We will come back with the Minister for Education and Training.

Meeting adjourned from 3.44 to 4.02 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, Training and Youth Affairs

Watterston, Dr Jim, Chief Executive

Johnston, Ms Jayne, Executive Director, School Improvement

Cover, Ms Leanne, Executive Director Tertiary and International Education

Whybrow, Mr Mark, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services

Collis, Dr Mark, Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Student Support

Wilks, Ms Trish, Director, Learning and Teaching

Stewart, Ms Tracy, Director, Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting

Bateman, Mr Michael, Interim Chief Executive, Teacher Quality Institute

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister, for coming to this hearing today on the annual and financial reports. The Minister for Education and Training and departmental officials are here. I will just direct you to the privilege statement, which I am sure you are all familiar with. Before we go to questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Barr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will begin by apologising; my voice may go during the hearing.

MR HANSON: You as well?

Mr Barr: Yes. I will make some brief opening remarks. The 2009-10 financial year has been a period of considerable achievement for the Department of Education and Training, not least in the area of capital works and sustainability. The department has managed a capital works program that, in historical terms, would be around 10 times larger than what has been the tradition of school capital works—\$200 million in round figures.

It has been a very busy time. I think every school in the ACT has been a construction site in part during the financial year covered by the annual report. There has been considerable enhancement of school facilities across the territory as a result of this program, funded, in large part, by the commonwealth but with some significant ACT government funded projects as well.

I am sure committee members would be aware that there has been some commentary at a national level about how various jurisdictions have gone about the implementation of the building the education revolution program. As stated in the audit report, the interim one, the ACT public school system has achieved some fantastic results. It is certainly worth, at the outset, putting on the public record my gratitude to the team within the Department of Education and Training, in the capital works area in particular, for managing this project so well. To get that endorsement at a national level is very pleasing for the ACT department. There are, of course, a number of ongoing capital works projects that we will clearly, I hope, be discussing

this afternoon.

During the annual report period, another major priority has been quality teaching. Of course, something funded in the budget is the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. That is another area of reform that is central to enhancing our education system, and we look forward to some discussion of that this afternoon.

Finally, I will highlight three ongoing areas of reform: high schools and colleges, the tertiary and training environment within the ACT and, of course, leading into next year's enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations and a chance for some fundamental renewal and reform of the teaching profession. I think these are exciting times in education and training both nationally and in the ACT, and there are some tremendous opportunities for worthwhile long-term reform that will make a significant difference to education and training outcomes in the ACT. We are, I think, nation-leading in most areas, but there are opportunities to take that performance to an even higher level.

I commend the department for their work in many areas. There are a lot of ongoing discussions, obviously, in relation to some of these reform projects, but the endeavour is clearly there to get some very good outcomes for the ACT. Having said that, Madam Chair, I will invite questions from the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I will go to the first question. It is not specifically in relation to the annual report but it is around the efficiency dividend and cutbacks. You probably expected that question. Given that the department was alerted to the cutbacks at some time in 2009, the process seems to have been somewhat rushed through in the latter part of the 2010 school year, which has somewhat limited the time for consultation and implementation. On the communication process as well, it does seem that there was some improvement in the communication there. What was the process in actually developing the communication? So there are two questions.

Dr Watterston: Why the process manifested itself later in the cycle is probably because in essence we took a while as a group. We certainly identified the savings and we put them across our budget. So budgets that were handed out in particular cost centres and to each division had those savings in them. It was a process of trying to engage staff. The notion behind it was to allow staff to identify areas where they felt the program had either run its course or where there was a different way of doing things.

I do not mean to identify the language you used but you did say "cutbacks". I have to say I do not view any of the original proposals as cutbacks. This is the first time I have had to implement an efficiency dividend but it really was a chance for us to ask people who were on the ground working within those branches to identify things that they thought we could do differently or better. So bearing in mind that there was a seven per cent increase to the budget, I think it is incumbent upon us to really examine programs about strategies that are in place to see if there are efficiencies to be gained and also to see if the life of those particular strategies has come to a conclusion.

We did that early and we had them identified. I guess it was part of our strategic plan in terms of the identifying of the values. One that I personally put in was about

honesty—not that we would ever be dishonest but it was about transparency. So the transparency came later in the process. Once we had identified what those savings were, I felt it was really important to be completely transparent about that. So I provided the documentation to staff after the fact to reinforce the decisions that had been made. Of course, we know now that that documentation became public. It was not ever meant not to become public, but it was ideally an internal process to ensure that people were comfortable with the strategies that had been designed and then the rest of it took place as was played out in the media and certainly within the department.

In terms of the communication process, which was the second part of your question, I think the communication internally from a department point of view was sound. What we intended to do, as I said before, was to engage staff in the process and not have top-down changes to programs or reorganisation. I think that communication was sound. I think we would all agree now that the way it was communicated at a public level perhaps could have, in retrospect, been handled differently. The fact that we put a paper out just before the school holidays is something that, if I could live over again, we would change. But it certainly was meant to be just confirmation to staff that these were the changes we were going to make. In a sense, it was an innocent mistake; nonetheless it was certainly one that we would change.

From a communication point of view, it is out there. It is certainly clear to people what we intended to do. We did not hide any of it. We engaged in debate. To be honest, the ultimate indicator of it being a good communication process is that we listened. So the community responded. Our staff also wanted to implement a couple of changes. So the fact that a number of the original proposals were then changed I think is a responsiveness that I would like us to be known for.

It was not perfect but I think it was done with the best of intentions. I think the outcomes are good and I think the engagement of our staff in the process is a plus, and that is what we set out to do.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that originally the paper was internal and that was going to be the original intention. Was there an intention in terms of your plans for it to be made public?

Dr Watterston: We had identified the strategy that it was going to be made public. We did not end up needing to make it public in the phase that we were going to because it was a public document already. So that stage of the consultation was just brought forward because it was in the public domain and we were talking about it through the media.

THE CHAIR: I am just trying to get a sense of at what stage it was planned to be made public, after the internal process.

Dr Watterston: As the proposals were confirmed with our staff, and we had agreed that they were the original proposals that we would then run with, we were going to make that public. We had identified and were quite transparent about that being a phase of the communication. Then we would have taken feedback on that. But, as it turned out, the first two phases really turned out to be one phase.

THE CHAIR: Over the next two years, further 1.5 per cent efficiencies are going to have to be applied. What is the plan and the time line in terms of the communication and consultation around that? Obviously, that is a process that is going to capture a lot of interest.

Dr Watterston: We certainly will not release any papers before school holidays. We are planning to identify the savings for next year in January, and we have a process in place for that now. That engagement process will be between January and early in the year with our own staff. Depending on what they are, we do not imagine the cuts—I am using the same language now—or the efficiency dividend will be generated in the same way. So we have some different initiatives that we might be looking at.

At this stage we are not in a position to identify what they are but we are hopeful that the 1.5 per cent next year will not impact on the level of programs that we have looked at this year. As I said, we have a plan in place now to spend some time—I think the dates are set in January—reviewing them, and then we will put the paper out to staff and engage our own staff. Then, as we did before, we plan in the second phase to make those changes public and get feedback in that regard.

THE CHAIR: So once it goes public, would that happen mid-year?

Dr Watterston: No, we would certainly like—

THE CHAIR: Earlier than that?

Dr Watterston: We would certainly like to do that before 30 June. So it would be part of—

THE CHAIR: So it would be around mid-year?

Dr Watterston: Probably March-April.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, do you have some questions on this area?

MR HANSON: I have a couple. Firstly, on the communication of this, when this issue broke I was quite surprised that you were the spokesperson rather than the minister. I would have thought that, with an issue of this significance, clearly this was a difficult issue and there was some bad news in it, essentially. What was the decision process for you to be the spokesperson on ABC Radio and in other media outlets as opposed to the minister? Is that standard practice? Why was that decision taken?

Mr Barr: There are times when chief executives do media; at other times ministers do it and—

MR HANSON: Why is that?

Mr Barr: often it depends on availability or—

MR HANSON: Does it relate to what is good news and what is bad news?

Mr Barr: That is a very cynical view, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: It is a cynical view but it does seem to be consistent with what is occurring.

Mr Barr: It also relates to who is managing a project. The decision over an efficiency dividend was part of the budget process. I fronted the press conference for a couple of hours, together with my colleagues, on budget day around efficiency dividends, and we took questions at that point. But the implementation of those matters sits within the department and it is appropriate for those who are running that process to answer questions on it.

I suppose the threshold issue here is: is the efficiency dividend a negotiable matter? No. The budget has been passed. All agencies are required to meet that target. The implementation of that and how the department goes about meeting that target was a matter that was appropriately being managed by the chief executive in consultation with staff members in the department. That is the business of running the agency. I am not the chief executive of the agency; I am not the employer.

MR HANSON: Well, make sure when it is good news that you are not jumping on board for that.

Dr Watterston: I am not sure if it needs any elaboration, and we have not rehearsed this answer, but I really would like to add to that because, as I said on ABC Radio at the time, my credibility is at stake and I think there needs to be a clear distinction between what is government policy and what is internal workings of the department, and with a complete guarantee that this was a completely internal process. So, in terms of the minister, the actual changes that were made and the programs that were going to be affected were presented to him in a similar way to the way the document got out in public. The minister may have seen it a bit earlier but I can absolutely assure you with full transparency that this was a completely internal department process.

MR HANSON: With the process itself, where are we at in terms of engagement with the community now? Have we got to the position of ruling things in and ruling things out, particularly the disability areas and some Indigenous positions which were under consideration? Are you able to elaborate on where we are at with that process?

Mr Barr: The process is complete. There were changes made and those changes have been publicised and they are on the department's website.

MR HANSON: I have not been on the website to check it, I have to confess. The Indigenous positions, the six positions for literacy, are they in or out?

Ms Wilks: The six literacy and numeracy positions comprise one school leader whose responsibility is for managing the five classroom teachers. This is not a saving; this is about efficiency. The five classroom teacher positions, which account to a staffing pool of 100 points, will be moved directly to the schools and will be used to complement the literacy and numeracy coordinators in schools to work specifically

with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Instead of having one person moving into a school for a term and working across the school and perhaps not ever getting there again, it is more efficient for us to move those resources to where they are most needed, and that is at the school for the school to make the decisions around which students access them. It is not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; it is all of them. It is not those who are just below the benchmark; it is also moving those who are high fliers and getting them to move further up.

We are in the process with Dr Collis of working through the focus schools. “Focus school” is a term designated by the Australian government to. You are a focus school until you get a certain percentage of the population in there. We expect that those schools will get one day a week. We will then put in key performance indicators around that and monitor directly the tracking of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. That is a much more efficient way of operating than having somebody come into a school, not knowing the students and not knowing the teachers and then moving out.

MR HANSON: If it is a more efficient way of doing it, why did we not do that in the first place?

Dr Watterston: I will just talk generically about one of the principles that has been in place since I have been in the role, and the last answer from Ms Wilks is a prime example of it. It is my view, and it certainly fits in with the process of autonomy that is now happening within the ACT, that resources are best based in the schools. We used the efficiency dividend as an opportunity to relocate a number of programs and resources as school-based programs so that we do not have experts in the central office who go to one or two schools or one or two classrooms at a time; we actually embed the resources and give schools the capacity.

Part of our network model is for schools to then collaborate and work together. The grand plan, if you like, is not to push everyone out into the schools, but we want a leaner central office and we want more of those resources available in classrooms in schools where they can sustain some of that progress. Strategies as the one Ms Wilks just described fit the overall strategic direction that we are aiming for and will continue to push for, so that principals have more autonomy in being able to bring about some of those outcomes themselves.

MR HANSON: That certainly seems to makes sense for the larger schools, but the smaller schools that may not have the base, the economies of scales, and do not have access to resources they would have otherwise have got from central office, how do they go about it? If you are a small school and you have only got one or two Indigenous kids, you might not get access to one of these positions. What are they going to do?

Dr Watterston: You may or may not be aware that we have reorganised ourselves into four networks, and there are around 21 schools per network. We have now developed network strategic plans, and schools with similar issues—we have put data together and we have looked at the performance of each school—share that

information. Where we have got similar problems, if there is, for example, one Indigenous child on their own in a particular grade, we pull the schools up together. It is not just about discussing ideas; it is actually sharing staff, sharing resources and developing common strategic plans so that we work across the network. If we need to work across networks, we do that also.

The hallmark of what we are doing is not only about shifting resources to the school level but also collaboration. One of the things that has been missing from the ACT public system in the past has been taking highly accomplished and good practice from one school and seeing if we could scale it up and use some of those learnings in other schools. We are in the midst of a change management process now where principals are almost fully engaged in exploring ways that they can work together, which perhaps has not been part of their collaboration in the past.

MR HANSON: Is there a formal process to that? Do each of the four networks have a lead principal? Is it like a board arrangement where they get rotated as to who is going to be the chair of the network for a period of time? How does that work?

Dr Watterston: We have four school network leaders, and they sit outside schools. All of them have been former principals, so we consider those to be high profile people who have demonstrated capacity in the past. They work exclusively with the 21 schools. Then we also have a network team of current principals who form some form of executive. It is different in each network, but they manage the process.

They also manage some of the resource deployment, so that it is not central office telling them where the resources go. For example, with the efficiency dividend, when we talked about the changing process of school counsellors, part of this is now a network making decisions about where the pressure points are and where some of those resource deployments should be best effective, rather than just using the formula base of “you get your third and you get yours”. It is about devolving decisions and making sure the people at the closest point in the classroom are able to implement decisions that affect issues as they occur here and now.

MR HANSON: Are the networks geographically based or are they based on type of school?

Dr Watterston: No, they are geographically based. There are lots of ways that you could cut that, but the geographic nature of them is ease of travel and making sure that people who are in natural clusters can develop pathways. Early learning centres, primary schools, high schools and colleges can develop pathways that enable languages, for example, to be available to students right the way through their education period. Part of it is what we are calling local area planning, so that they recognise what is happening around their schools, and decisions they make need to be in harmony and synergised with other schools.

MR HANSON: Is that a global trend or a national trend?

Dr Watterston: We are working with an eminent educational thinker, Michael Fullan, who has demonstrated in Ontario over the last six years that considerable success has been attained through this network and collaborative model. It seems to be a common

strategy. I do not know whether I would say it is a worldwide trend, but the jurisdictions that are the highest performing certainly have some form of network model or collaboration, something greater than just having principals talk to each other. This idea that you leverage success within your own environment is just really being explored.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot, we are going to you first because you had questions on efficiency dividend. Ms Hunter has some follow-up questions, too, and then Ms Porter.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, I would like to quote paragraph for you from the chief executive's review within the annual report that parents have wanted to highlight. The strategic purpose—

MS PORTER: What page is this, Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: Page vii, the chief executive's review:

The strategic purpose of *Everyone matters* is to constructively engage our parents and the community in the process of education. Their participation in the education process is an important driver of student success. We continue to work with parents and measure community satisfaction to better inform our progress towards ensuring students are supported and engaged to achieve their full potential.

Nobody can argue with that; they are fine words. What the parents are having a lot of problem with, particularly in the special needs area, is that they feel that the term "everyone matters" excludes them. The fact that the very first cuts that came in affected children in the hearing and the visually impaired areas to such an extent that the angst the parents were put through before there was a reversal of that was something that I would hate to see happen again.

Under the original policy, there were only four teachers working within the visually impaired area, yet one of those four positions was going to be cut when they were already under stress to keep up with the workload. The parents did not understand why they were not consulted. The internal consultation part that you spoke about, Dr Watterston, is understandable to a certain degree, but when it affects parents and when it is a *fait accompli*—as it was given to the parents—parents cannot understand why they were not consulted on this very serious issue.

Dr Watterston: I do not mean to be pedantic, but you said it was a *fait accompli*. That did not turn out to be because we actually changed the decision. But if I just take the hearing—

MR DOSZPOT: Sorry, you changed the decision?

Dr Watterston: That is right.

MR DOSZPOT: That is exactly what I am getting at. The decision had been made.

Dr Watterston: That is right.

MR DOSZPOT: But it is only because of the public pressure that was brought to bear that that decision was reversed.

Dr Watterston: No.

MR DOSZPOT: Would it not be more logical to consult with the parents before those decisions are made?

Dr Watterston: It was not brought about by public pressure, even though the public pressure at the time was recognised. As I have explained, there was an internal process where the proposals were put back to staff. If we just take one example—the hearing—the original basis was that we had four full-time hearing impaired support teachers. Over the last seven years, an excessive number of children needed one-to-one signing, and that is what those teachers were primarily engaged in. Over the years, with cochlear implants and a different technology and the amount of money that we have invested in sound systems in the rooms, the nature of the work changed. The number of people that were engaged in one-to-one signing dropped dramatically and incredibly.

MR DOSZPOT: But Dr Watterston—

Dr Watterston: I am just giving you an example.

MR DOSZPOT: Sorry, before you go too far into that, that is exactly what the parents have been trying to get across.

Dr Watterston: Sure.

DR DOSZPOT: The cochlear implants and technology updates that have happened have been commendable, and the parents are obviously very appreciative of that. But that does not cut out the one-on-one tuition or the assistance that those children need. That is what they have been trying to get across to you and the minister, who, of course, will not listen to them.

Dr Watterston: So the story, as I was continuing, is that when we looked at the way we use our resources in the department, it was initially put up to us that this would be a way that we could change the profile of how we deal with those students with those types of disabilities. As I said before, it is an internal process. Those propositions, once they were considered by the senior executive, were then put back to the staff and a decision was made that that probably would not be the most effective way to make those changes.

In the meantime, the documents had become public and people were upset. As I said on the ABC during the interview, it was disappointing that people had to go through that stress. I have been a principal for 14 years; I understand what parents of students with disabilities have had to go through their whole lives. It was not our wish to put them through more stress. But the process was to examine proposals that were put up from the grassroots level. We did that, and we decided to change. Those changes were made well before parent rallies and other protests were created. I apologised to those parents on the radio station at the time.

The process would have worked itself out exactly as it did anyway. There is a lesson for us about communication, but the process itself was sound. The decision was made. The cuts have not occurred as you have described. While I reiterate that I am sorry that people had to go through that angst, the process worked as far as I am concerned, because our staff decided what the best mechanism was to go forward in terms of providing those resources.

MR DOSZPOT: The second part of that question—and there are a few other issues I would like to take on but I understand we have got to move on—is: can you give any assurance that the department will not use the efficiency dividend process in 2011 in the same areas as you have just tried to make these efficiency dividend cuts in? Will they be protected from any further cut in 2011?

Dr Watterston: Again, I do not mean to be pedantic, but any further cut? There was not a cut.

MR DOSZPOT: There was no—

Dr Watterston: We just need to—

MR DOSZPOT: There was a cut, which was reversed.

Dr Watterston: There was not a cut. We just need to be clear about that.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay.

Dr Watterston: Secondly, I do not want to be categorical but we will not be looking in those areas again because, as I have said before and indicated, the next process, which will be in January, is already targeting efficiencies that we can find in other areas. In terms of those issues that we have just been through, no, we will not be looking at them again.

MR DOSZPOT: Can I go back to the minister on a question—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Hunter has been waiting also.

MR DOSZPOT: One final question on this: minister, why will you not talk to the parents? Why will you not meet with them?

Mr Barr: I did. I met with Mr Halpin at that community cabinet in—

MR DOSZPOT: When?

Mr Barr: In Belconnen on Saturday, 23 October, I think it was. There was a community cabinet on the Saturday. I met with him for about 20 minutes, half an hour.

MR DOSZPOT: There was a meeting of 31 parents—and I was at that meeting—and you had a departmental representative, Ms Joseph, there. But you refused to attend

that meeting. Why will you not meet with the parents?

Mr Barr: No, I do not believe I did refuse to attend. I think it was—

MR DOSZPOT: I have got a letter that was written to you by Mr Halpin. It was copied to all of us here; so I am not divulging any confidentiality. Mr Halpin states in the letter that the invitation was issued to you yet you refused to attend.

Mr Barr: No. I indicated to Mr Halpin—I think the meeting was on a Sunday afternoon—that I had other commitments. That is perhaps not unreasonable on a Sunday afternoon, on less than a week's notice. We all have lives as well and we all have families and other commitments.

MR DOSZPOT: Correct.

Mr Barr: On less than a week's notice, on a Sunday afternoon, I was not able to attend. But having spoken to him on the Saturday morning for a good half an hour around these issues and provided some assurances in terms of future engagement, some assurances in relation to the issues that he had raised with me, a further meeting on that week's notice was not necessary, but if I did feel it was appropriate the department was available. I was in contact with him prior to that meeting to provide further information that he requested. That was made available. Then Ms Joseph did also attend the meeting and obviously reported back to me, I think, the following morning on the nature of the discussion and the outstanding issues from that meeting.

MR DOSZPOT: I am well aware of commitments. I also have personal commitments and family commitments. I was able to meet with the parents. This was not the first time I met with them. The constant refrain from the parents, minister, is that they want to talk to you. You may have met with Mr Halpin. You have not met with the parents. Why will you not meet with the parents? If you could not have met at that time, could you not have arranged another time?

Mr Barr: I meet with parents on a regular basis.

MR DOSZPOT: Not these parents.

Mr Barr: This matter is now resolved. There are no changes in service delivery in this area.

MR DOSZPOT: They still would like to talk to you.

Mr Barr: I will make arrangements to have that conversation in the fullness of time.

MR DOSZPOT: I would love to see that happen and I encourage you to do that.

Mr Barr: Terrific.

THE CHAIR: Ms Hunter, you have some questions?

MS HUNTER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to pick up on one of the issues.

Some parents still seem to have some concerns about the post-school options. There is a proposal that DHCS will pick up and cover some of this. I want to get some information about what DHCS is picking up, how that is going to relate to what the department is doing, how the parents are going to be connected in.

Dr Collis: The post-school options position, as it is in the final paper, was a position initially put in place to skill up special-ed staff that are in the colleges to make connections with community agencies and so forth for students with disabilities for further training and employment options. That position was always a year-by-year proposition. I guess the thing we need to look at here is that the landscape of post-school options and transitions has changed quite dramatically.

In relation to the Disability ACT provision, Disability ACT and DET now meet on a regular basis, as you would be aware, and we ensure that we coordinate our efforts. One of those coordinations has been Disability ACT letting a tender at the start of this year to the House With No Steps, which is in the order of, I believe, \$400,000 worth of funding. The purpose behind that is for workers from the House With No Steps to work with families in schools in years 11 and 12 in order to both plan and broker experiences to prepare young people for transition into adult life.

MS HUNTER: Has Disability ACT made contact or has the Department of Education and Training facilitated contact between Disability ACT and the parents as to their plans, such as this House With No Steps initiative? Is that direct contact being facilitated by Education and Training?

Dr Collis: Yes. There are a number of families, I think already around 30 families, who are being served by this program and in the New Year we are expecting that to move to around 60 families. We are going to be working in that area. Those are real meetings that have happened with real families and real plans for the young people.

The nature of schooling generally, but disability schooling in particular at the senior years, is that we have to be more embedded in the community. There is a much more enmeshed relationship between schooling and the community and this is where we are in that transition. That is what I mean by saying that the terrain is quite different than it was when the post-school options position was put in place some three or four years ago. Included in that, in those three to four years, the provision of actual staffing into colleges has increased.

There are disability education staff in colleges, in places like the Canberra college, with the futures program, for example. We have a learning support unit at Melba-Copland senior school. We have similar programs in Dickson college. These things are things that have developed over recent years.

In regard to this, as I said, we are coordinating our work better. The plan for the House With No Steps and Disability ACT is in fact for them to move that program down to years 9, 10, 11 and 12. We have a tender out, which will be able to be announced in the near future by the Department of Education and Training. We are looking at work experience, social placements for years 9 and 10. So we have coordinated our efforts so that Disability ACT are becoming more involved at the end, where the young people are getting older and moving on to a post-school life, which

will require community-based support solely. The education department are looking at the post-school options from years 9 and 10 to prepare them for that.

In terms of thinking about the post-school options and transitions as a cut, if you like, it is actually not a cut. We have substantially increased the investment in that area of disability education. Furthermore, we intend to continue to invest in that area as we address some of the outcomes from the inquiry, as well as other things around having actual employment outcomes being measured for our young people with disability. That is going to be an ongoing trend and that was a trend that was clearly evident in the Shaddock review and is being reflected in our strategy plan.

MR DOSZPOT: Madam Chair, I have got a supplementary on House With No Steps.

THE CHAIR: Yes, and then I do need to go to Ms Porter, because she has been waiting.

MR DOSZPOT: Dr Collis, can you expand on the role of the House With No Steps in providing post-school options for students with disabilities?

Dr Collis: Yes. I do not want to answer for Disability ACT but my understanding is, and my belief is, that they work with the families around planning the opportunities and the programs that will be necessary for the young people to move into, to broker services that will allow them to gain employment skills and autonomy skills, to work with the school. This is the other aspect. These young people are at school. This informs the work that we do in our schools around preparing young people for that next step. And that is a key element.

MR DOSZPOT: How many staff would the House With No Steps have available for this service?

Dr Collis: I cannot answer that. I could take that on notice, to get to that level.

MR DOSZPOT: What type of procurement was used to get these services? Was it a public tender?

Dr Collis: For Disability ACT, the House With No Steps or the year 11-12 program? Again, I could get you that information. I believe it was a public tender but I was not involved with that. The year 9-10 program that I talked about then was a public tender, yes, with the House With No Steps.

MR DOSZPOT: Is there a contract in place with the House With No Steps?

Dr Collis: You will have to ask Disability ACT.

MR DOSZPOT: So this is Disability ACT?

Dr Collis: This is Disability ACT.

THE CHAIR: So you will need to ask DHCS.

MR DOSZPOT: What sorts of discussions have been held between education and DHCS in shifting the relevant services to that agency? When did this shift take place?

Dr Collis: Sorry? I do not understand.

MR DOSZPOT: When did the shift from education to DHCS of these relevant services take place?

Dr Collis: This is a changing landscape. We have been working together now for probably 18 months, two years. The Disability ACT and Department of Education and Training high school transitions group, which has a broader representation of providers, parents and so forth on board, has been involved in this planning for quite a while.

The other thing to be aware of, I suppose, is that this is an outcome of the strategic directions that Disability ACT identified in the extensive community consultation around their strategy plan towards challenge 2014. This is not a surprise. This was a very clear message from families and community that they wanted this kind of direct service in terms of moving the young people with disabilities into post-school life. That was one of the major, I guess, priorities that came out of that strategy plan.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Hunter?

MS HUNTER: Thank you. I know that, at page 17, your annual report talks about the essential skills for teaching students with a disability, which is a professional learning package for ACT public school teachers around the engagement of students with a disability. I am wondering how many teachers have been trained in this package.

Dr Collis: It is a moving feast. It is of the order of 50 or 60 but I could find the precise numbers. We had training just recently. As you would appreciate, this training is in fact initially targeted at the learning support units and classes. It is feedback from families, our disability education reference group and our teachers that is becoming stronger pedagogically in our teaching methods within units and classes. That was really a priority.

We had already rolled out, with new educators for all teachers, the essential skills in classroom teaching. With the assistance of Tony Shaddock and his advice from his review, we looked at putting together a similar package for learning support unit teachers. It has been incredibly successful in terms of its pick-up from our disability education teachers. We have got a strong demand, which we are trying to find a way of delivering, for teachers of mainstream classes as well. Yes, that is the basis of that.

MS HUNTER: So it is intended to roll it out further?

Dr Collis: Yes.

MS HUNTER: Do you have a target or any number of programs you are running each year?

Dr Collis: Our initial target is that we would roll it out to all disability education settings, so all teachers. We are picking up now teachers who are showing an interest from the mainstream classes to come in and take that on. We are now considering whether, in fact, we need to look at that program and have a wider application to it. Our initial focus was to, I guess, quality assure the pedagogy of those units and classes which parents and teachers were saying there was a real need for us to work on.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, in your introductory remarks you mentioned the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. You said you had hoped that we could discuss this at some stage. It is mentioned at page 22 and it talks about some national standards. I was just wondering if you could fill us in on the institute and also tell us how we are working to implement the national standards and what significance they have for us.

Mr Barr: Thank you. In a minute I will get Michael Bateman to give the committee a bit of an update on the process for the ACT institute and, at a national level, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, which Dr Watterston is actively engaged with. He may care to comment in a moment. He has been working on national professional standards for teachers. That project will come to the ministerial council for final sign off, I understand, at our December meeting.

The agenda for AITSL in 2011 is “national professional standards for principals”. Establishing these national professional standards is very important in the context of reform within the teaching profession and, I think, essential in making the transition from our current IR arrangements for teachers into a more flexible system, where there is a benchmark—and it is a national benchmark—that you can assess a teacher’s skill against. These national professional standards really align across four key areas—beginning, intermediate, advanced and exemplary teachers. The category titles may change in the final version, but that is essentially it.

Having that in place will enable us to achieve a long-held goal of mine and that is to be able to reward our best classroom teachers with significant salary increases and finally put an end to this dilemma that we face in the teaching profession that once you reach the salary ceiling, which at the moment is just short of \$80,000, in order to get paid any more you are taken further and further away from the classroom.

I think that has created some problems for education in Australia. It is not just in the ACT. This is a situation that other jurisdictions face as well and other jurisdictions are seeking to respond to, hence the national collaborative work on these national professional standards. I think they are critical to our ongoing reform agenda, the national reform agenda. Dr Watterston, as I have said, is actively involved in AITSL. He may care to give a couple of brief updates on that and then Mr Bateman on the ACT Teacher Quality Institute.

MS PORTER: Thank you, minister.

Dr Watterston: Thanks, minister. If I can just add a little bit more to that. The ACT

is the only jurisdiction of the eight in Australia that does not have a quality teacher institute at the moment. In terms of registration of teachers, we do that in-house. In addition to being a board member of AITSL, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, as of tomorrow I am the national chair for national consistency in teacher registration. All of the jurisdictions are coming together. I suppose it is poignant that someone from the ACT is the national chair because we have the opportunity, through the legislation that we are now about to enact, to have the most desirable registration in Australia because we have come late to the process.

Things like accreditation and the quality of practice, teachers' standards, as the minister referred to, the way we check teachers in terms of their fitness—criminal checks and health—to teach, and the professional learning, pre-service accreditation standards for courses that our trainee teachers go through—each of those elements will be nationally consistent through this process of working together. For some other states, it is about changing legislation and bringing themselves into line. But in the end it will enable teachers to cross jurisdictions with complete faith knowing that the standards are rigorous and meet a certain benchmark and that we can cut out a lot of the red tape that we currently have in terms of attracting people.

For the ACT, that will be quite a bonus, but it will also guarantee the depth and quality of the staff that we already have. We will be able to demonstrate not only that we have quality staff but that we are certainly working with them to up-skill them and maintain that quality. I might just throw to Mr Bateman, who is currently acting as the CEO of the interim Teacher Quality Institute, to talk a little bit about our progress.

Mr Bateman: Just to update you on where we are up to, the legislation will go to cabinet on Monday, 15 November and be tabled in the Assembly on the 18th and then hopefully, if all goes well, it will make its way out of the Assembly in December and be fully operational in 2011. It has always been a tight schedule of getting things to that particular point, but I think we will make it. Then we have got the task of working our way through registering the expected 7,500 to 8,000 teachers that work in the ACT.

MS PORTER: Are you saying that there are people waiting to be registered?

Mr Bateman: From next year on, anyone who works in an ACT school will be expected to be an approved teacher, whether they are registered or provisionally registered or have a permit to teach. So there will be those levels of approval that we will work our way through, depending on qualifications, experience and so on.

The standards that were spoken about will not necessarily be ready right at the beginning. Within the legislation, we have left the facility in there to pick up the national standards as soon as they are ready. As the minister said, there are four levels in the standards. The teachers coming to us in future from any university in Australia will have met the graduate level standards just by the fact that they have graduated from a university where the course has been approved against those standards.

So the institute's involvement at that point will be in approving the course at university, not necessarily testing the individual students who are at that level of standard. Once they come to us with that level of standard from the universities, we

will then go through a process of provisional registration and then assess them against the next level of standard, which is currently called the proficient standard, and so on.

They are the mandatory standards which they must be assessed against right across Australia once it is all in place. The levels that the minister wants us to get to in terms of salary reward and those sorts of things are not mandatory. Not every teacher has to go to an assessment against those particular ones. For those who do, it will be up to the employers to work out what the reward or recognition is around those standards.

The institute will work in partnership with the employers, the trainers, the universities and, I guess, in an industrial sense, in some ways with the unions, but they will be independent from all of those players. We will not be interfering in the employment side of things, the industrial side of things or the training side of things, other than to make sure the standards are met.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson, do you have a follow-up on this?

MR HANSON: I do. I am interested in this concept of performance pay. How do you actually assess what a good teacher is and is not because to an extent it is subjective, isn't it? I suppose it is an award for certain qualifications you might gain but, ultimately, if you are teaching in a classroom, you cannot judge it necessarily on your students' performance because that is very much dependent on the kids. If it is simply the headmaster or the department head assessing the teacher and making the evaluation, it is somewhat subjective. How do you actually quantify a good teacher? How is that done?

Mr Barr: These have been the challenges that I think have stalled the reform in this area over a number of years—a failure to be able to adequately answer that question. To a certain extent, in any public sector arrangement there are a series of checks and balances that are necessary around anyone's promotion.

What I am advocating, in terms of structural change for the teaching profession, is to align it more with other public sector practices. If you are a public servant, say an ASO5 or an ASO6, you apply for a promotion. You do not automatically get advanced to become a SOGC or an SES level officer; you go through a job application process. You are assessed by a panel against a set of criteria. Your qualifications, if it is in a technical area, are assessed as well.

To the extent that the national professional standards will provide the answer in a technical space, there is then a question of what sort of panel approach, in terms of an interview, is necessary. We have promotional positions within the ACT education department already, so there is that—

MR HANSON: Yes, but you are not necessarily applying for a performance upgrade, are you? You are talking about a classroom teacher who—

Mr Barr: Yes. The distinction I want to draw is that I think people have misunderstood performance pay with a change to the complete structure of the teaching profession. This is the point of difference in terms of what we are proposing here. It is not that you get all these classroom teachers and one of them will go, "Oh,

Fred and Wilma are good, but the other two aren't." It is changing the entire career structure, which we are seeking to do.

MR HANSON: So for a classroom teacher there might be now five bands, from what I understand.

Mr Barr: There are nine, effectively, and it is based on length of service and no other methodology.

MR HANSON: You are saying now that to go up from band 1 to the next band, you—

Mr Barr: There would be hard barriers between those.

MR HANSON: There is not an automatic "keep breathing" type of arrangement—

Mr Barr: Not an automatic one, exactly.

MR HANSON: as I think you described it—or some words like that.

Mr Barr: That is right. You need to move beyond this concept of just automatic incremental advancement and actually have promotional positions. There could be tiers within that, within each band, as there is within the public service.

MR HANSON: So there is no new money in this, essentially; it is just changing the—

Mr Barr: I would not necessarily say that. Clearly, there will be a significant boost to the total budget for teacher salaries, as there is in any EBA. It is tens of millions of dollars. Fifty per cent of the territory budget is salaries. It is 75 per cent of the education budget.

MR HANSON: Sure. But there is a certain pull, unless you are talking about a massive increase to the education budget. You are talking about reasonable incremental changes. I cannot imagine that you are talking about massive new money to pay teachers a lot more money.

Mr Barr: There is not going to be hundreds of millions of dollars of new money, obviously, no.

MR HANSON: No.

Mr Barr: But there is the capacity within that structure, and noting the turnover of staff, to create accelerated career progression so that you can move through those levels of classroom teaching at a faster rate than one year one increment at a time for nine years and then you hit the ceiling and are stuck there—unless you get a leadership position, and then you are taken away from the classroom.

THE CHAIR: Are there any follow-up questions on that particular issue?

MR DOSZPOT: Yes, I have got a couple.

THE CHAIR: On that particular issue?

MR DOSZPOT: On that particular issue, yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: You mentioned at the outset that you see the Teacher Quality Institute as playing a part in this whole process you have just described. Can you elaborate on how you see the institute playing a part in this?

Mr Barr: The national professional standards will be important because you can then have that objective assessment against those standards that will provide that reference point, and I describe it as those technical issues around proficiency in teaching.

MR DOSZPOT: So the institute sets the standards?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: But the principals will—

Mr Barr: Yes, and then registers teachers against those standards. But the actual selection process for promotion would be similar to our current selection process for—

MR DOSZPOT: So it is still a selection process, not an application process? You mentioned that professional—

Mr Barr: Both. People apply currently for promotion, but you—

MR DOSZPOT: Teachers?

Mr Barr: Yes, absolutely.

MR HANSON: But surely they go up the pay increment; at the moment they do not?

Mr Barr: No, currently they cannot within the increments but they can to be a school leader C. We want to extend that philosophy around advancement to the career structure of the classroom teacher.

MR DOSZPOT: Will there be a cost incurred by the teachers to become members or to be registered by the institute?

Mr Bateman: As part of any registration process, there is a cost for people to get registered. In the budget bid that was approved to establish the institute, the government has agreed to fund the cost of the registration for the first two years for existing teachers. But in the long run, yes, there will be a registration cost.

MR HANSON: How much is that, roughly?

Mr Bateman: We will keep it at a similar level to New South Wales, given our proximity to New South Wales, which makes it around the \$100 mark per annum.

MR DOSZPOT: Per annum?

Mr Bateman: Yes.

MR DOSZPOT: How will the teachers interact with the institute?

Mr Bateman: In terms of a lot of the registration things, we are trying to keep it as online as possible. It will depend on how the institute develops. To assess people against the standards that will eventually be there, there will be a different level of interaction and online application.

The standards are, and will be, national standards so that each jurisdiction will use the same process. We are currently working through all of that. The standards have been out for validation and the next stage will be to look at how to assess people against those. There will be a considerable amount of training, moderation, against all those assessments. So the level of interaction, once you get into that part of it, will be fairly intense in terms of one-on-one. But for general registration we will try and keep that as online as possible.

MR DOSZPOT: Will the actual national standards apply to the cost for the teachers as well?

Mr Bateman: For the proficient-level standard, we are not anticipating any additional cost because that is a mandatory standard to be assessed against as part of your registration. However, for assessment against what is currently called the highly accomplished standard or the lead teachers standard, there would be a cost to the individual in terms of that. And that is common across all the jurisdictions.

MR DOSZPOT: With respect to the cost that I am asking about, in becoming part of the national institute criteria or standards, will the charges applying to the teachers be uniform around the country as well?

Mr Bateman: I would expect they would be reasonably standard. With all of these things, it really depends on what negotiations go on outside the institute as to who pays, what percentage is paid and how it is recouped. But that particular expense would have to be cost recovery.

MR HANSON: Does this model work in another jurisdiction that you can point to, where there is performance promotion for teachers?

Mr Barr: New South Wales are going down this path at the moment.

MR HANSON: Is there anyone that has actually implemented it and it is running as a successful model?

Mr Barr: Most other education systems in the world have more flexible IR arrangements than are in place in Australian jurisdictions.

MR HANSON: I assume that everyone that is currently on a certain pay level will stay on that pay level; you will not be looking at reducing—

Mr Barr: Of course, no-one goes backwards. You will appreciate that there is a turnover within the teaching profession as people retire and new teachers come in. So it will be a number of years before a structural change like this would be fully implemented. I imagine it would take a number of EBAs to complete such a task. It is a decade-long reform, frankly, to get to the point even where you could equate the teaching profession with where other elements of the ACT public service are at, and the ACT public service is not necessarily at the forefront of IR reform in a national sense either. There are going to be changes in the nature of work, I imagine, over the next 10 or 20 years, and the workplace will be somewhat different from what it is now, in 2010, just as it was different in 1990 than it is now.

We are seeking to apply some of the ACT public sector principles that are in place in other agencies, in other areas where there are specialist services delivered, to the teaching profession, to address this issue that everyone agrees is a major problem—that is, classroom teachers hit a salary ceiling after nine years and their capacity to advance inside that nine years is very difficult.

MS HUNTER: I want to go back to something said earlier around sharing of learning and so forth within school networks. It relates to the principals who have gone over to the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the United States. Obviously, there was quite a cost, I am assuming, for that to occur. So I am wondering what will be happening with respect to those principals sharing that learning and ensuring that other principals can share in their newfound knowledge.

Dr Watterston: I will get Ms Johnston to answer in full, but can I just say that we also sent some principals in a delegation to Ontario to work with Michael Fullan and a range of highly accomplished, renowned people. So it is part of a process. You are right: there is some cost, and with everything we do we weigh up the cost-benefit analysis. Particular principals that have been selected this year are new ones, people that we are encouraging to take a more contemporary approach and to set some standards and a level of innovation that we are hoping will permeate through the whole system.

So far, in the very short term, our expectations have been exceeded. So we have asked those principals in the first instance to address and talk, from a presentation point of view, to all principals. We just had our second principal forum last Thursday and two of the principals who went to Ontario talked about the learnings they were able to elicit from that visit. Previously, the principals from Harvard last term spoke to the whole group. That has created a bit of a thirst for some of the knowledge that they have brought back. That has been continued offline in terms of the principal forum scenario.

All principals that have been to Ontario and Harvard have come back and said that they have learnt, but they have also been able to confirm that trends and developments in terms of enhanced learning capacity that are occurring in other jurisdictions that are high performing are no different from the ACT. It has created a greater level of

confidence and belief in the strategies that we have in place. That has been a side benefit, I suppose, that we did not initially plan on. But the recognition that we are in sync with the highest performing jurisdictions in the world has certainly been reinforced by those people. Jayne might talk a little more specifically about those visits.

Ms Johnston: The principals that went to Harvard were the principals of our two new schools, Kambah and Gungahlin. As well as speaking at the principals forum that Dr Watterston just spoke about, they have provided input to network meetings. The networks that we talked about previously have regular meetings of their school leadership group from the schools in each network. Those principals have presented at each of those, and really workshopped some of the key ideas that they found most interesting and that they had brought back and started to use in their planning.

Significantly, we are seeing for both of those schools that the work that the principals have done this year in planning for the start of next year, and really setting the scene and setting the vision for those schools, has been influenced by the intensity of the professional learning that they were able to undertake. They now also have international networks that they use.

I was on the delegation that went to Ontario. In fact, Professor Fullan will be here in the ACT on Thursday and Friday, working with us and with all of our principals on Friday, as well as other school leaders from their schools. As Dr Watterston said, the opportunity to place our improvement strategy in a national and international context was really affirming, but I think it also gave us a great deal of clarity about the core pieces of work that we were undertaking. The delegation comprised myself, one of our school network leaders and two recently appointed principals. So having that range of perspective was terrific. We were also able to visit some schools and see the impact of the work that had been happening in Ontario. Certainly, the principals have been talking about that with their colleagues in their networks to share those ideas. We will have a point on our website as well where we will put some reports.

Dr Watterston: Part of your question referred to the cost. That was certainly done on a minimal existence, but we do have a professional learning fund that constitutes one per cent of principal salaries. So that funding is available and we have been able to use it to enable those principals to become leaders of their colleagues, I guess, in that sense.

Ms Johnston mentioned the two new schools. I think we are all going to be amazed when Kambah and Gungahlin open. Not only are the schools 21st century in terms of the investment from a capital nature, but the quality and innovation that all three principals have come back and invested into those schools will make them very different from anything that we currently have in the ACT. I think the level of thinking that has certainly developed since both visits, in addition to other collaborations that those principals have had, will prove to be worth much more than the money that we invested in sending them over.

MR DOSZPOT: Were there three principals who went to Harvard or two?

Ms Johnston: Three.

MR DOSZPOT: You mentioned two schools.

Ms Johnston: Yes, we have two principals at Kambah.

MR DOSZPOT: With the Ontario visit, how were the principals selected for that?

Ms Johnston: They were our two most recently appointed principals.

MR DOSZPOT: Do principals have the ability to apply for such an opportunity?

Ms Johnston: They have, until now, through the principals association, some funding from the professional learning funds that Dr Watterston just spoke about; that is provided in a grant. Moving forward, we are working with the principals association to have a pool that will allow our principals to apply to take up fellowships, study leave and so on.

THE CHAIR: On pages 8 and 9 of the annual report, there is some information and data there about student satisfaction and parent satisfaction in a number of areas. The overall student satisfaction rate with the quality of education is about 80 per cent across all sectors. But it does advise that due to a change in the survey methodology it cannot compare the rate with 2008. The parents and carers satisfaction rate is also part of that. Can you talk about the new methodology and why that change has been made?

Ms Stewart: We actually had some feedback from the ACT Auditor-General's Office about the methodology that we were using several years ago. What had previously happened on the old five-point scale was: two elements for disagree, two elements for agree and an element in the middle which was neither agree nor disagree. The previous methodology had really worked out the proportion of students, parents or staff who did not disagree. What we have done now is just compiled it on the basis of those who agreed with the question. Effectively, one of those five-point scales is no longer included. That means that has dropped those rates down.

There have been some other changes made to the surveys as well from last year, the first year that we included all schools every year in our surveys. Previously, we had only surveyed a third of schools each year. I think it is fair to say that we would like to continue to make some improvements to the way that we collect satisfaction data from our key stakeholder groups. However, we are aware that the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, ACARA, has been charged by the Australian government with collecting nationally consistent satisfaction data. So we are waiting to see what is going to happen on that front before we invest too heavily in making changes locally to our satisfaction survey data.

THE CHAIR: If I have got it right, before you go ahead with any further changes you will be waiting for that ACARA process. Will that create any difficulties in terms of comparing year to year in the next couple of years?

Ms Stewart: Not from an ACT perspective. I have to be honest and say that we have already lost some of our comparison with earlier years with our current data. As I said,

I think there are a number of other improvements we could make to our data. I am confident that, for us, the national data would be a step forward in improving our own data.

THE CHAIR: On page 9 there is information about staff retention rates. There is a statement that the staff retention rate is 93 per cent. There is a statement that indicates staff satisfaction with management and the commitment to corporate goals. Is that something that staff were actually surveyed on or was it just a conclusion reached based on the percentage of teachers who were satisfied across the system?

Ms Stewart: That particular statement was a conclusion based on the fairly healthy retention rates and turnover rates in the department. However, we do run staff climate surveys. We ran the last one in 2008. We are planning to run another one this year and will continue to run those staff client surveys on a regular basis. One of the things we want to do is align those more closely with our other stakeholder satisfaction surveys with students, school-based staff and parents, to make sure that we are asking similar sorts of questions and getting some alignment across all the stakeholder groups of the department.

THE CHAIR: I take your point that there is a high retention rate. That may indicate something but it also may be indicative of other factors within the education system rather than that teachers are satisfied overall. That is something you need to develop. I imagine it would not be productive in the long term to be making assumptions around that when you are looking at the management processes within schools.

Ms Stewart: Yes, absolutely. That is why we are really keen to get this up and running this year, yes.

MS HUNTER: Madam Chair, can I have a supplementary?

THE CHAIR: Yes, certainly.

MS HUNTER: You just mentioned ACARA taking up some national satisfaction surveys. Are you aware, or is the minister aware, whether those will be published on the My School website?

Mr Barr: Yes, they will be, but it is not being updated for this year, not until there is this nationally comparative data.

MS HUNTER: Some nationally comparative ones?

Mr Barr: And once they are in, yes, they will.

MS HUNTER: I want to follow up on something from estimates. Minister, you talked about the review of the index of community socio-educational advantage that was going to be reviewed by ACARA. Have you any later information on that?

Mr Barr: Yes, it has been reviewed, changed. I think they were calling it CO2.0 in text speak. But yes, it has changed. There is more information now on parental education, background, employment, some extra data. Tracey?

Ms Stewart: Yes, it has been reviewed for this year. It will be one of the changes that we will see or perhaps to a certain extent not see in this year's version of the My School website. We were aware that the previous methodology of using the area in which the student lived to determine their socioeconomic status was not ideal. It was a way of doing it but perhaps we were looking for some alternatives to that.

This year, where possible, we will be using the actual circumstances of the student, being their parents' education and their parents' occupation, as a measure of their socioeconomic status. We have already done an analysis, and ACARA have done some analysis, that shows that in fact it does give better results than the previous methodology.

It is not available in all cases, not for all schools across Australia, because some schools just do not have that information available but it is available for a large number of schools and most of the ACT schools. As I said, it has been shown to provide a better measure of socioeconomic status for students.

MS HUNTER: It is interesting that it is not available for all schools. Does that mean that they do not appear in those comparison charts on the website?

Ms Stewart: No. What it means is that the previous methodology will be applied for those schools. My understanding is that all jurisdictions are working towards improving the level of that data. There are some pretty significant issues, particularly around schools in the Northern Territory, in terms of collecting that data from some very remote schools. But that is not to say that efforts will not be made right across the board, including in the ACT, to improve that data.

MS HUNTER: You have run through some scenarios or done some testing to be able to say that it looks as though it is a more accurate reflection of the ACT, to be compared with certain schools? I know, in the first cut, there were some pretty strange comparisons being made between some of our schools and other schools interstate.

Mr Barr: The observation I make is that the terminology has changed now to reflect schools with similar students rather than similar schools. I think that is an important distinction. It is looking at the individual students not—

MR DOSZPOT: Is this the My School testing?

Mr Barr: Under My School, yes.

Dr Watterson: If I can add, we think the change in the ACT will show our schools in their true light, because previously, in a high-density metropolitan catchment, they were being compared to elite private schools which collected kids from the same area. What it will do for the ACT is show up complexity within high socioeconomic areas. Without giving a blanket answer, we expect our schools to look much better now in comparison with statistically similar schools or schools with similar students, as it is being referred to. It will certainly be a much better measure for ACT schools in terms of any comparison, which probably was a little unfair last year.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Thank you, Chair. My question is also around the indicators. On page 27, the graph or chart at the bottom shows the proportion of 19-year-olds with year 12 equivalent attainment. I believe it is very high in terms of the nation. Obviously we are doing very well in that area. I was just wondering how we could make sure that none of our young people going forward from that will slip through the cracks. Will we always be able to make sure that 100 per cent of those students are either learning or earning, as you want to put it?

Mr Barr: Indeed. This is another area of important national work where the ACT is in a partnership with the commonwealth government around the youth transition attainment area. We have committed to and made a significant commitment to individual pathways plans for every ACT student.

It has been an important exercise, done in collaboration with all school sectors, business, training providers. The Youth Coalition of the ACT are getting involved. I have seen a mock-up of what the individual pathways plan document looks like. It has a much greater level of accountability for the education and training system as a whole to provide the support and assistance that each individual student needs.

I think it is one of the more important projects that have been completed under this national partnership. We commence rollout next year for years 10 and 11 students and then, over four years, every ACT student will have this individual pathways plan.

Dr Watterston: I will add a little to the end. One of the quieter achievements, I think, that have gone unheralded in the Department of Education and Training over this year has been the transition we have made to increase the compulsory years of school. We will see those results in terms of retention rate escalate over future years.

To obviously now require students, if they are not earning, to be at school for a year longer or two years longer requires a significant change in pedagogy in a significant way as we manage students and cater for their needs and create pathways. We now have a number of students in our schools in 2010 who otherwise would not have been there. To have that happen without any blip on the radar, I guess, has been a credit not only to the department but to individual schools to adapt, create and enable pathways to be developed that perhaps would not previously have suited those students.

I would like to pass to Ms Cover who can talk a little about the youth commitment strategy and what we are doing to make sure that students do not fall through the cracks, because it is easy to legislate, it is easy to make students stay at school. But engaging them when they would not have otherwise been engaged and giving them credible pathways and enabling them to have choices in life in the future that would not have otherwise existed has taken a lot of planning, development and strategic initiatives underneath.

I think it has been fantastic work. We are only in the infancy of it but it is starting to bear fruit already by not having students drop out of education as they would have otherwise done.

Ms Cover: In terms of the pathways plans the minister and Dr Watterston referred to, I have a copy here that I am happy to table if you would like to have a look. It is a great initiative that will allow students to have some really rich conversations with the school in terms of the careers advisors, the teachers, parents and the various agencies that support young people whilst they are at school in helping them make those decisions around what pathway they may choose to take. I am happy to table that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

MR DOSZPOT: A supplementary on that.

THE CHAIR: I actually have a supplementary first.

MR DOSZPOT: I can wait.

THE CHAIR: Has there been any impact on the schools and colleges from the changes which came into effect around the earn or learn policy?

Ms Cover: In terms of what?

THE CHAIR: You have already said there has been a change in the level of students who are now in schools. Has that had an impact at all on the overall needs?

Ms Stewart: I was just looking at some figures. For example, one of the indicators in the annual report is on the number of year 10 students that continue on to public colleges. We saw a fairly significant increase over and above the target this year in that respect. We are seeing our retention rates going up as well, but this is only the first year of that strategy.

THE CHAIR: So it will be a bit of time to tell that.

Dr Watterston: The point that I was making previously was that because the impact has not been pronounced and public from a negative point of view, that has enabled this to go unheralded. The transition that schools and the department have had to make rapidly to support that legislation is indicated by the lack of issues that now exist from a community perspective. Credit goes to schools and colleges for the way they have been able to adapt and create alternative pathways, as I was talking about. We have seen changes within schools. There has been furious work—furious in terms of the pace—to make sure that those accommodations were in place.

THE CHAIR: There were some concerns about that there might be some level of noncompliance, but from what you are saying, that has not been a problem?

Dr Watterston: No, the number of exemptions in terms of students is very low. We do have those figures, and we can supply them for you. They are much lower than we ever considered.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Cover, on page 27—it is the same graph we were looking at—

the annual report states that the rate of 19-year-olds with year 12 qualifications decreased by eight per cent last year. Can you comment on that?

Ms Cover: I might get Tracy to comment on the statistics.

Ms Stewart: Can you point me to the figure that you are quoting? I know it is on page 27.

MR DOSZPOT: The year 12 qualification decreased to 80 per cent in 2009 from 88 per cent in 2008.

Ms Stewart: My understanding is that that data comes from the ABS survey of education and work. One of the issues associated with that survey is it is a very small survey for the ACT. Only several hundred people participated in that particular collection. The standard errors and confidence intervals are quite high associated with that. That change is actually within confidence intervals of the sample, being that, in effect, there is no statistically significant change associated with that number. It is a very small—

MR DOSZPOT: What was the total number of the survey?

Ms Stewart: There were only a couple of hundred in the ACT.

MR DOSZPOT: Two hundred?

Ms Stewart: I would have to get you the number. It is of the nature of hundreds, so it is a very small sample.

MR DOSZPOT: Retention rates have gone up for mainstream students. Why have we cut the opportunity for special needs students by two years?

Mr Barr: We have not.

MR DOSZPOT: The school at Black Mountain is being told that children have to leave at 18 rather than being able to go on to 20.

Mr Barr: They are the same arrangements as for all schools, Mr Doszpot. There is a possibility for educational reasons to complete year 13, but it is standardised across all schools.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, up until now, students with special needs were allowed to go on for two additional years.

Mr Barr: “Could”, yes. They did not have to.

MR DOSZPOT: I understand they did not have to, but the education department gave the opportunity for those students and their parents for that to happen. I am saying we are encouraging retention rates in the mainstream. Why are we discouraging—

Mr Barr: We are not discouraging.

MR DOSZPOT: But we are telling the parents that they cannot maintain students in those schools beyond 18 years. So we are discouraging—

Mr Barr: Following completion of year 12. There are the opportunities for educational reasons to complete year 13.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, you know very well what I am asking you. You are playing with words here. What I am asking is: who made the decision, and why was the decision taken to cut that back?

Mr Barr: The political point you are attempting to make belies the—

MR DOSZPOT: It is not a political point; it is a point of need, minister.

Mr Barr: No, I think it belies all of the reviews that have been undertaken by Professor Shaddock and by this committee in terms of standardising.

MR DOSZPOT: So Professor Shaddock recommended that special needs children do not need special education?

Mr Barr: No, you are misinterpreting what I am saying, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: I cannot believe you are saying it.

Mr Barr: No, I am not saying that, Mr Doszpot. What I am saying is that there is a series of recommendations, a series of thinking over a number of years, around aligning special education in terms of the number of years and the same education criteria extending beyond year 12 to be consistent across all schools. So the opportunity to complete year 13 for educational reasons is there for all students, as it is for students at the Black Mountain school. If there are valid educational reasons—if year 12 proficiency has not been reached—then a student can come back for what is notionally termed year 13 to complete further education.

MR DOSZPOT: And 14, which was the—

Mr Barr: Year 14 has never been available in a mainstream education setting.

MR DOSZPOT: I am not talking about the mainstream—

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot, I will just remind you that you need to direct questions through the chair. We have limited time and other committee members would like to ask questions as well.

MR DOSZPOT: I apologise, Madam Chair. I just want some clarification. If you are not in a position to give me that clarification now, we would need some clarification later.

Mr Barr: We have been through this about four times, I think.

Dr Collis: Just to clarify one thing: this is about aligning the leaving practice for young people at Black Mountain school with all other senior school students in the ACT. This was a practice at Black Mountain school; it was not a practice uniformly across all ACT schools. We can go into the history of the practice, but the reality of the situation is that the disability discrimination act and the disability standards in education are fairly clear that our responsibilities are to provide an education for young people with disabilities as for any other student and aligning the philosophy and practices that exist for all other students.

I know there is a point of view that some people hold—and I respect that point of view—that for disabled students we should have something other than education that exists for students as they reach the age of completion of year 12 and, as the minister said, potentially year 13. The philosophy of this is saying that students with disabilities are entitled to the same provisions as all other students. We are working with Disability ACT to provide those opportunities in adult-like settings, not in school-based settings.

The alignment of the practices for students with disabilities at Black Mountain school—I repeat, that alignment was there for all other places like, for instance colleges and the futures program and so forth—that existed was about educational and life opportunities; it was not about denial of services.

MR DOSZPOT: One final question on this. I take your point about parity and educational standards. But are talking about special needs children, where special arrangements were made to enable them to stay on for two additional years. If there was a post-school option for these young men and young women, there would be a logical opportunity for them to move out of the school, but there is no post-school option for them. Indeed, the education offered to the students at Black Mountain has been cut back by two years. That is the only question I am posing, and it is the question that parents are asking. I am afraid they are not getting adequate answers.

Dr Watterston: Could I just help with that? The original opportunity for kids to stay longer—for two years—was based on a school-based decision. It was not something that was systemic. Again, it is not comparable. You could say that students that are unemployed could stay at school until they are employed. I think your issue is a different one. I think your issue is about what post-school options have we got for students rather than keeping them longer at school.

Schools are about educating students. When they have completed year 12, we give them an opportunity—all students an opportunity; not just special needs students—to do year 13 if they have not done it within the required time. So we make allowances for people that take longer. But there can be no justification for staying another year, whether you are special needs, learning challenged or have any other complexity that prevents your having a mainstream pathway through society.

There are a number of students who would benefit by being sort of protected by the school environment. I think the issue is about making sure there are opportunities and resources available for people when they leave school. Keeping them in the school is just delaying the inevitable. They have to go into society and we have to transition

them into that different mode. The justification for us as an education department in keeping them there longer really cannot be promulgated.

MR DOSZPOT: My question—

THE CHAIR: No, Mr Doszpot. We have to move on. We are running out of time. I have a question I would like to ask and Mr Hanson does as well.

MR DOSZPOT: I will put another question in writing then.

MR HANSON: Minister, can you tell me where we are at with the funding arrangements for the Shepherd Centre for Noah's Ark?

Mr Barr: I understand those tender processes have been completed—

Mr Collis: Those tender processes have been completed. There are final contractual negotiations which should see those contracts signed within a week—weeks.

MR HANSON: The bridging funding that we would put in is covered to the point whereby that contract would start.

Mr Collis: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter, I will go to you and then I will ask a question.

MS PORTER: Minister, the report, on page 17, talks about a tertiary task force. Could you give us an explanation of this policy and issue and tell us about what kind of reforms you are looking for in that area?

Mr Barr: Sure. Chair, you may or may not be aware that we released a discussion paper on creating a connected tertiary education environment. That is a process that has been running throughout this year. It has looked at a number of important issues—collaboration, for example, between the CIT and the University of Canberra. It has looked at issues around industry regulation, collaboration and responding to the national reform agenda in this area.

Noting Denise Bradley's work and, I suppose, the effective removal of the cap on places for higher education institutions from 2012, this means a dramatically changed landscape for tertiary education in Australia. It will be a much more competitive model from then on. There will be tremendous incentives for universities to attract more students. That creates a whole range of interesting supply-side challenges for the territory government to work with the universities around facilitating growth in student numbers. So the more recent decisions I have made in another portfolio—planning—regarding—

MR HANSON: To kill Walter Burley Griffin, wasn't it?

Mr Barr: No, not Walter. That is a debate for another day. It was in relation to more student accommodation at the ANU. Those sorts of issues and growth in the tertiary education sector have been considered as well as the interaction with our schooling

system. There are a number of important agendas that are running in parallel here. In a minute we will hear from Ms Cover in terms of the detail of that. I am anticipating a report from the group towards the end of this year and then the capacity for government to respond early in 2011.

Ms Cover: The task force has been meeting since June this year. There are some 90 separate groups that have been involved in that engagement through that consultation process. As the minister said, the report actually identified a number of areas. The task force determined the best way to actually get that engagement was to break up into some subgroups loosely formed around the pathways that the minister talked about—how does the tertiary sector integrate with the school sector, the VET sector and the higher education sector? That has been a key feature of one of the subgroups.

The other one was the industry engagement and how does industry engage better with school students in terms of getting career advice, work placements and work-based learning opportunities for both the VET and higher education sectors. This has been a feature. Also, positioning the ACT to drive economic development with education as an export has been a key feature that industry has been very involved in.

The third subgroup we are looking at is connections. The minister talked about integration between the sectors—aligning the work. An example is VET in schools. How does the work and programs that are offered in the year 11 and 12 programs intersect with the vocational offerings from someone like TAFE or private providers in the ACT and how does that create pathways through to higher education as well?

Other areas that members have been keen to input ideas around include the idea of a communication portal so that from any user's or student's point of view, people can navigate through the various pathways in the VET sector, the higher education sector and offerings in the school sector as well. Some sort of a central communication portal has been raised as an idea. There is the idea of a strategic council that would provide vocational and higher education advice to government around where those priorities should be, around funding and also around training programs.

There is also the careers advice, which we touched on earlier—how that is done in schools, how does the industry get better involved in careers advice, how do we really combine the efforts of all the sectors in careers advice and make sure that we are doing that as best we can from the students' perspective?

THE CHAIR: I have a question in relation to issues which have been identified through the review of special education by Professor Shaddock. One of the things that was discussed through his inquiry related to the transitioning processes between different year levels and between preschool to primary school and primary school to high school. That has been identified as a priority by the Department of Education and Training and I think also through the hearings. Is it correct, particularly in relation to transitioning in primary school, that last year's SCAN meetings were not held and that there has also been a directive not to have transition meetings the following year?

Dr Collis: No, the practice on having SCAN meetings is the same this year as it was last year and the year before. There is no difference.

THE CHAIR: What about transition meetings?

Dr Collis: And transitions. No, there has been no directive for them not to have transitions. Quite the reverse, we are actually making this a priority. As part of our cross-sector disability education reference group, one of the transitions that has been identified as particularly important is the transition in between sectors—independent, Catholic and public sectors. There is quite a deal of transition. Probably the feedback we had where there was the greatest room for improvement was actually the transitioning across sectors.

One of the key pieces of work out of that group is to develop guidelines and practices to make transition between sectors much easier and more seamless. For example, we are looking at the capacity to be able to release Department of Education and Training staff to move into other sector schools for the purpose of a young person who might be going to an independent school and so forth. We are looking at those guidelines. So I am surprised that there is information about a directive—

THE CHAIR: We have had concerns raised with us around that process, but that has not been the case? The meetings have been continuing; there has been no directive from any sector?

Dr Collis: No.

THE CHAIR: So that is fine.

Dr Collis: No, that is quite right. Our inclusive learning program teachers are instrumental in that. This is a key element of their work, particularly for young people in preschool but also in year 6 or wherever that transition is happening. This is a key aspect. You will notice that what will happen in terms of our individual learning planning process is that as a consequence of the Shaddock review as of next year we are requiring that all our individual learning plans have a transition goal associated with them.

So the mindset for the parents, the teachers and the support staff should always be not only what is happening now but how is that preparing the person for the next move—whether that move be to post-school life or whether that move be to a secondary setting. Indeed, there are some important transitions even internally within schools. The answer is no. We are certainly looking at that being a priority.

THE CHAIR: That is good to hear. This question is not related to that but there have been obviously a number of changes through the Education Act. They are outlined on page 128. One of the changes that has been made relates to the suspension support team pilot. That has been one of the measures that has been trialled to assist in integrating suspended students into schools. I am wondering whether there has been any assessment made of that trial? Are all suspended students attending the programs that are associated with the team? Has there been a high take-up rate of the program?

Dr Collis: The suspension support team is a pilot of what we call a multi-systemic and multi-disciplinary approach whereby young people who are suspended for four or more days or, in fact, are suspended on the third occasion in a calendar year are

referred. We have worked that across the Melba Copland cluster of schools. We have been monitoring that very closely as to its impact. First of all, we have had significant take-up by families, not always in the first instance the student. On many occasions the student has come on board after the family has been impacted. This team comprises a psychologist, a social worker and a behaviour management teacher, essentially. We are working both with the school and with the family.

I have the semester 1 results. The semester 1 results indicate, in comparison to 2009, that within the Melba Copland pilot cluster area there has been a 38 per cent reduction in the number of suspensions—that is, the actual number of suspensions—and that is actually a third less of students being suspended. That is interesting. We are seeing young people not going back and being suspended again as often. That is not to say everyone is successful in this program.

We have been looking very closely at not only the quantitative data but also the qualitative data around this. Some very interesting things have come out of here. One is that we seem to have had some effect in influencing processes and practices in schools through this. It seems to be making a difference—that is, people looking at options other than suspension as a way of responding to particular behaviours.

I think I said in a previous setting that this was a pretty exciting trial. We did a search to find out whether there was any research or data about such a team. Whilst we know that they do exist elsewhere, there had been no real data and research evidence about them. We found some curious things. One of the things that the team ask the family, when there is a suspension and they are involved with the family, is to rate the quality of the relationship and communication with the school. They identify the key people in the school and they ask the same thing of the school.

One of the curious findings we seem to be striking is that there is a very big mismatch between the two. The families seem to be saying things like, “Actually, we admire the school for putting up with Tim or Jane or whatever. They’ve got it really hard, but we don’t know how to help. We feel helpless about this, but we admire what’s going on and we support the school.” When we ask the school, the school is saying, “Well, we don’t think the parents, the families, are on side.” In terms of those we are dealing with—that is, repeat suspended families—we believe it is critical to correct this cycle of miscommunication early. The results are exciting.

THE CHAIR: You may have answered this question, but I did not quite catch the answer. Did you say all students who were suspended went through the program?

Dr Collis: No.

THE CHAIR: Or they were selected to go in?

Dr Collis: No. In the Melba Copland area, and we have since incorporated Kingsford Smith and associated schools as well—so we have increased the grasp—the suspension support team is referred to for every student who is suspended for four or more days. So if they get a suspension that is four or more days—

THE CHAIR: So it is four or more days, yes.

Dr Collis: Or it is on the third occasion that they are suspended. So if they have even had one day and they have been suspended twice, on the third occasion they are referred to the team.

THE CHAIR: Are there plans to continue the trial and expand it to other areas in the ACT?

Dr Collis: I think we are taking it under consideration at this point in time. Certainly, I think we have had some really powerful learnings out of this and we would want to incorporate them in some way. That is where we are at now. We are preparing the full-year assessment of the program. We will then be providing the results through to the senior executive and the minister on how we want to move forward.

THE CHAIR: Is that going into the next budget process?

Mr Barr: Time will tell.

Dr Collis: Time will tell, yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes, time will tell. Excellent. Mr Hanson, do you have a question?

MR HANSON: A quick one, on CCTV. What is the policy within schools, and have you had applications from schools wanting to put CCTV systems within their schools?

Mr Whybrow: I have some information on it. Within our schools, there are two types of CCTV that operate. Mostly within our primary schools there is coverage on the sick bay, but it is not recording. Within the Erindale college, so the active leisure centre, there are two cameras at that site around the active leisure centre where there is recording of CCTV. That was set up prior to it being brought into the department of education, so it actually goes back a number of years.

Really, there is a cost element for us at the moment in relation to managing the security of our schools. We have found very successful the installation of security fences around issues of vandalism and that has been our current approach. I am not aware in recent months, say in the last six months, of any request from particular schools for CCTV, although there have been probably one or two in the past 24 months and we have provided them that sort of information. There has been a bang for our buck element at this moment about—

MR HANSON: So it is a cost-driven decision, rather than a specific policy that you do not want to have CCTV in schools?

Mr Barr: Obviously there are some significant policy and privacy issues that go with filming of that nature on school grounds, but if there is a more effective way of dealing with the issue of vandalism and property damage we would choose that, and we have.

MR HANSON: Yes, but if there is an appropriate area where CCTV could be placed,

you have no philosophical problem with it—or you do?

Mr Barr: I think you would need to look very carefully at the guidelines around its use. I think schools are very different from other parts of a city in terms of the sort of surveillance that you would have. I think most people with common sense would say that there is a massive difference between a school ground and, say, a nightclub spot in the middle of the city. There is a world of difference in terms of a risk profile. I would think that, certainly in the first instance, if the problem you are seeking to address is property damage then there are many more effective ways to address that, and that is what the department is doing.

THE CHAIR: Mr Doszpot, a final question. It will have to be a quick question because we have got about four minutes.

MR DOSZPOT: You are picking on me, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: No, I am not—not at all.

MR DOSZPOT: On CCTV—how many applications for closed circuit TV have been received by the government from schools?

Mr Whybrow: From what particular time frame? In the last six months I am not aware of any.

MR DOSZPOT: Within the last 18 months?

Mr Whybrow: In the last 18 to 24 months I think it was either one or two, but I can clarify that.

MR DOSZPOT: Do you remember which ones?

Mr Whybrow: I would hate to guess. There is a school name in my mind, but I would hate to get it wrong.

MR DOSZPOT: I have got a couple of names, but I am not sure if they are accurate, though.

Mr Whybrow: I would be guessing.

MR DOSZPOT: I believe their applications were rejected. Can you tell us why their applications were rejected?

Mr Whybrow: As the minister has already identified, there are some privacy issues within our schools which are around policy concerns. The cameras that are in existence are in open spaces. The only others that are planned are at the new Gungahlin college and, again, they are in open spaces. The issue of us working with the particular schools is about trying to solve the problem, not jumping to the end conclusion of what is the best method to solving that problem.

MR DOSZPOT: If we are trying to give more autonomy to principals and they

decide that they would like to go with closed circuit TV, why would you reject it at the departmental level?

Mr Whybrow: There are, I guess, those two issues. One is that we have got a broader policy issue about the use of CCTV cameras in a school environment, which has not been resolved, and that is a larger policy issue about the privacy of the students. The issue that we have been trying to deal with with schools is about the protection of their infrastructure, particularly around vandalism.

MR DOSZPOT: Have you looked at international trends to see how this issue is being addressed overseas?

Mr Whybrow: We have looked at trends around Australia in terms of the most significant—as I was saying earlier—and best bang for our buck in terms of cost. A security camera by itself does not do a lot for you. You simply go around the corner where the security camera is and attack that side of the school. It is a large investment, particularly given the size of some of our schools. You need a series and then you need the monitoring and control of those, and then of course you have got the large privacy issues.

MR DOSZPOT: I understand that in the UK it is actually proving to be quite effective, both from a privacy point of view and from the point of view of looking at bullying and safety issues.

Mr Whybrow: I guess that is a debate that we have not had as yet.

MR DOSZPOT: Sure.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We are just out of time. Thank you, minister, for appearing today. I also thank the departmental officials for coming here. This meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 5.58 pm.