



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2017-2018

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2017-2018 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2017-2018](#))

Members:

MR A WALL (Chair)
MS B CODY (Deputy Chair)
MR A COE
MS C LE COUTEUR
MR M PETTERSSON

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 30 JUNE 2017

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Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph 620 50435)

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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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.32 am.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation

Education Directorate

Howson, Ms Natalie, Director-General

Brighton, Ms Meg, Deputy Director-General

Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System Policy and Reform Division

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Deputy Director-General, Business Services Division

Stenhouse, Mr John, Director, Board of Senior Secondary Studies, System Policy and Reform Division

Borton, Mr Jason, Director, Learning and Teaching, School Performance and Improvement

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Director, Student Engagement, School Performance and Improvement

McAlister, Ms Coralie, Director, Strategic Policy and Reform, System Policy and Reform Division

Moysey, Mr Sean, Director, Regulation and Compliance, Early Childhood Policy and Regulation, System Policy and Reform Division

Gotts, Mr Robert, Director, Planning and Analytics, System Policy and Reform Division

Stewart, Mrs Tracy, Director, Governance and Community Liaison, Business Services Division

Hodgson, Mr Chris, Director, People and Performance

Bray, Mr Rodney, Director, Infrastructure and Capital Works, Business Services Division

Hamilton, Ms Judith, Director, School Improvement—North Gungahlin, School Performance and Improvement

THE CHAIR: Welcome to day 11 of the Select Committee on Estimates 2017-2018. Today's proceedings are going to be examining the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Education Directorate in relation to budget statements F. This afternoon we will examine higher education, training and research expenditure proposals and revenue estimates in budget statements B.

If you are taking a question on notice, can you please clearly say, "I will take that question on notice," so that in the minutes it is easy to identify where that question was. Can everyone please acknowledge the pink privilege statement in front of them and state that they understand it and its implications. You have not got one? It has not changed in quite some time, and many of you are seasoned veterans, so it should be okay.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Minister, do you have an opening statement?

Ms Berry: Yes, thank you. I want to begin today by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people; I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture.

Thank you for the chance to provide a statement to the committee today. This is a significant budget for education, with a total investment of \$1.2 billion. The ACT government has a proud track record of investing in education as a fundamental expression of our values. The government is increasingly ensuring that it targets education investments according to need, and the 2017-18 budget continues that work. Schools funding has recently been a high-profile issue because of decisions that have been made by the federal coalition government. I am sure some members would like to take the opportunity in this forum to raise this issue, so I want to assist the committee at the start by providing the following as an update.

The Australian Education Act, which sets out federal school funding arrangements as a commonwealth law, is a matter for the Australian parliament, and the commonwealth government has had very little interest in the views of states and territories as it has progressed along the line with these arrangements. The process has been incredibly frustrating for states and territories, and non-government school managers, who have been provided with very little detail about the actual impact of these changes as arrangements were progressed.

Among the key changes introduced, the new funding model entrenches the existing relative contribution of public funding from different levels of government. State and territory governments contribute a majority share of public funding to government schools. The commonwealth government contributes a majority share of funding to non-government schools. The new model sets a target of public funding split at 80 per cent to 20 per cent of the benchmark funding level, which is called the school resourcing standard. The result of this arrangement is that all schools will receive equal proportions of needs-based public funding from different sources.

Another key change relates to how the school resource standard is calculated. The school resource standard, which was developed by the first Gonski panel, attempts to factor in the financial means of parents of children who attend non-government schools. It does this using an estimated socioeconomic status score that is used to discount the base funding for a school. The socioeconomic status score is derived by matching parental residential postcodes to ABS data. It is an imperfect measure, especially in the ACT, because of the diversity within our suburbs. Government schools are not subject to this process because they provide education free of charge.

Under the old funding model, schools belonging to a system could have an average socioeconomic score declared for all schools in the system. The new funding model will eventually remove the opportunity for an average socioeconomic score to be used. Catholic schools in the ACT have a declared score that means that there is only a small discount applied to their funding. The flaws of the score measure have meant that the commonwealth government has agreed to delay this change in the ACT whilst the review of the measure occurs. I am glad that this will occur. Alongside others,

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I have raised this issue with the commonwealth as details of their proposal have become known.

I can advise the committee that the ACT government already contributes above its target share to both government and non-government schools. The commonwealth government contributes less than its target share to ACT government schools, at around 16 per cent. Over the coming six years, as this share transitions to the targeted 20 per cent, government schools will see a very modest annual increase in commonwealth funding of around \$4 million per year. This small increase needs to be considered in context. I remain concerned that the commonwealth government continues to fail to commit to directly providing long-term funding for universal preschool, which would have an impact on the ACT of around \$7 million per year.

The commonwealth also now has the power to dictate school improvement proposals, and is proposing to shift the burden of monitoring school improvement in non-government schools to the ACT. Both of these issues will impose a currently unquantifiable cost burden and interfere with our focused school improvement agenda.

Regarding non-government school funding, the government understands that the commonwealth will provide \$50 million in 2018 and a further \$7.9 million over 2018 to 2021 in transitional funding as non-government schools are adjusted to the score measure. A review will also be undertaken into the way that the scores are calculated and fed into the school resourcing standard for non-government schools.

I have been consistently measured in my response to the commonwealth government and their changes as they have emerged. It is important, as leaders in our community, that we do not pit school sector against school sector and school against school. I ask that other members also keep that in mind.

I hope that this update allows members to let the committee focus on significant education budget issues that have been delivered by the ACT government. It includes commitments in two new schools, one in east Gungahlin and one in Molonglo, as well as planning works for two Canberra public schools, Narrabundah and Campbell Primary School.

There is \$85 million for public school upgrades, including upgrades and extensions to new and existing classrooms, new gardens and horticultural facilities, equipment upgrades, heating and cooling systems and energy efficient improvements, refurbishment of bathrooms and change rooms, upgraded technology areas and roof replacements, as well as outdoor learning and teaching environments.

There is \$26.2 million to expand schools in Gungahlin, which includes Harrison School, Gold Creek School, Neville Bonner Primary School, and Palmerston District Primary School; design and feasibility work to commence on a new school in east Gungahlin; and two playing fields for use by the new school and the local community in north Gungahlin. And there is \$5.9 million for stage 3 of Belconnen High School modernisation, bringing the total investment in this school over recent years to \$25.8 million.

Significantly, this budget also invests in our schools by making them better places to

work and to learn. The government is providing technology-enabled learning opportunities to students by ensuring that every public high school and college student has access to a device. Teachers will be supported by reducing their administrative load. Funding of \$16 million will provide 66 school assistants, which will enable teachers to focus more of their time on teaching and planning. Student mental health is also prioritised, with \$2.4 million set aside for the first five of 20 new psychologists for public schools.

This budget delivers on many of our election commitments, and officials and I are ready to take questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. For the benefit of committee members and witnesses, let me say that the schedule this morning has us looking at output class 1.1, focusing on early childhood education and development until 10.10, and then, from 10.10 till 10.50, continuing in the same output class looking at primary school education.

Minister, I want to go to universal access to preschools. What level of funding is currently received from the commonwealth for that initiative, and what is the territory contribution?

Ms Berry: I will have Mr Moysey provide you with some detail on that, but it is matched funding, so the commonwealth government provides an amount, and the ACT government provides it, so there is an additional three hours free preschool education. The ACT government provides 12 hours, but the federal government's contribution to that allows us to provide an additional three hours a week, which takes it to a total of 15 hours for early childhood education.

Mr Moysey: Traditionally the ACT has had a strong involvement in preschool education, providing 12 hours prior to the universal access agreement on early childhood. The funding from the commonwealth has been approximately \$700 million per calendar year. In May, Minister Birmingham from the commonwealth announced further funding for a year, an extension of one year, with around \$9 million allocated to the ACT. There are some changes foreshadowed by the commonwealth about how that funding might be accounted for. We have received a verbal briefing, but we are yet to see anything in writing about how that extension will play out.

THE CHAIR: So the funding for 2017-18 is \$9 million for the ACT from the commonwealth?

Mr Moysey: It is on the calendar year for 2017.

THE CHAIR: For 2017?

Mr Moysey: Yes. The way it is paid goes over the financial year, but it is calculated on the years—

THE CHAIR: The school year?

Mr Moysey: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And that is for the current school year?

Mr Moysey: Sorry, it would be for next year.

THE CHAIR: For 2018?

Mr Moysey: I beg your pardon.

THE CHAIR: I was going to say that if they are changing the goalposts midway through the year, that is a hard one to get past.

Mr Moysey: Yes, that is correct.

THE CHAIR: What level of funding does the ACT government provide to the preschool program currently?

Ms Howson: The 12 hours. Do you know, Sean?

Mr Moysey: I am sorry, but I think we will have to take the actual figure on notice.

Ms Howson: Could we just notify the committee of that figure? We just need to get advice on that.

THE CHAIR: Yes, okay. What funding is provided to non-government preschools, both from the commonwealth and from the territory?

Mr Moysey: All preschools, early childhood services, are centre-based services under the national law. That is a fee-based service. Those services can get access to childcare benefits under the commonwealth scheme. Where those preschools are associated with schools, it is dependent on the fee structure of the school.

THE CHAIR: So the commonwealth funding comes through from the childcare rebate as opposed to from education?

Ms Berry: That is the indication that the federal minister for education has made to me. I was extremely lucky to have two very brief conversations on the phone with Mr Birmingham about my concerns for the ACT community that there would be a reduction in free preschool education for families who would be able to then access that education. All the research shows how important those first early years of learning are in a child's education leading on from that. His indication to me was that the government had made changes to the childcare benefit and that that would alleviate pressure on parents so that they could access early childhood education. That would be accessed in a long day care setting, which is a fee-based setting, which the ACT government does not have a lot of control over. What we did have was free public preschool education available for families. The risk now is that three hours of that will be reduced and those children will have less opportunity to have free access to preschool education in the public system.

THE CHAIR: Is there consideration, should the commonwealth funding for the

public preschool system be withdrawn, of the ACT government making up that \$9 million shortfall?

Ms Berry: I do not think we are at that point yet. I have certainly been trying to keep a very close eye on that. I have indicated my concerns to the federal government of the risk of doing that. It will not be just the ACT that is affected by that reduction in funding; in the rest of Australia where they provide preschool access, whether they do that through long day care or through government preschool education, it will affect the learning outcomes for children within those settings.

THE CHAIR: What proportion of children in the ACT is attending preschool prior to enrolling in a primary school for kindergarten?

Ms Berry: About 95 per cent, I believe.

Mr Moysey: In terms of government schools, it is extremely high. It is 95 or 96 per cent for preschool enrolments.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a split on what the enrolment is in government preschools as opposed to private providers?

Mr Moysey: I do not, but we can take that on notice.

Mr Gotts: I have read and understand the privilege statement. In answer to your question, there were 4,567 preschool students in ACT government preschools in 2017. There were 629 preschool students in independent schools and 552 preschool students in Catholic system schools.

THE CHAIR: What about in a long day care setting? Do you have those figures?

Mr Moysey: For early childhood, across the sector there are 16,700 nominal places. The estimate of the service provided is around 31,700.

THE CHAIR: Can you repeat that?

Mr Moysey: If we think of the places available in early childhood, the actual nominal capacity for a full-time equivalent is 16,700. The estimation that we have made of the service, looking at CCB figures et cetera, is 31,700.

THE CHAIR: So 31,000 children are accessing it in either a full-time or a part-time capacity across the territory?

Mr Moysey: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is about the accountability indicators on page 11 of budget statement F. Why are there no actual strategic indicators? For early childhood education, all we actually have is number of enrolments, which obviously is important, but why isn't there anything around particularly identification of vulnerabilities for preschool kids? Why don't we have any indicators or targets apart from those who are turning up? Actually, you do not even have them for those turning up, to be precise. It

is only enrolments. You have to be enrolled.

Ms Howson: Ms Le Couteur, it is a very good question; in fact it is one that the Auditor-General focused on in her recent report into the performance of schools in the ACT. She is encouraging us to look at improving the suite of indicators available. When we strike indicators and targets, we are looking for things that are quantifiable. While enrolments, attendance at school, are fundamentally important to education outcomes, they are not the full story. You are correct in making that assessment. In response to the Auditor-General's report, and particularly as part of our focus on school improvement, we will be reviewing this suite of indicators to examine what we might introduce that actually gives a fuller picture of the performance of ACT schools.

Ms Berry: In addition, Ms Le Couteur, the ACT government made a commitment to develop a strategy around early childhood education. It is the first time that there has been a focus on developing a strategy around early childhood education in the ACT. I will be seeing whether we can work better with the sector, with the levers that we have responsibility for here in the ACT, to provide better opportunities for families to access quality early childhood education.

As I said, the price setting is a little bit harder for us to manage, but we will look at different ways that we might be able to do something around that area, and continue to impress on the federal government that, while ensuring quality in the early childhood sector, wages must be considered as part of that. The federal government can make a contribution to ensuring that workers in that sector are paid a decent wage so that they are able to afford to stay doing the work that they love, which is providing young people with the best start through their early childhood education. Part of the strategy will look at the kinds of indicators that Ms Howson has just referred to, as well as talking with the sector about the sorts of things that we can do in the ACT.

MS LE COUTEUR: What indicators are you looking at?

Ms Howson: In terms of current assessment or in terms of our thinking about the future?

MS LE COUTEUR: In terms of thinking about the future, because currently you only have enrolments.

Ms Berry: It is part of the work that we will be doing as we go forward, in developing a strategy. I would not want to announce any changes at the moment until we have continued the conversation with the broader community, and particularly the early childhood providers, about the best way forward. It is not just about the kinds of accountability measures that the government thinks are appropriate. I would like these kinds of accountability measures to be something that the sector and broader community can see and understand, and that they make sense to them as well.

MS LE COUTEUR: Absolutely, although it could still be discussed at estimates, what you are thinking in this regard.

Ms Berry: We are not in a position, really, to talk too much about that.

Ms Howson: There is some work being done through ACARA. ACARA is the organisation that oversees our NAPLAN implementation. There is an acknowledgement that, in order to tell the full story about what is happening in our schools, we need to be able to report on outcomes that students are achieving in what we call “general capabilities”. That is numeracy and literacy, but it also includes the 21st century skills that are being discussed more generally: students’ ability to collaborate, to problem solve and to be able to express themselves creatively. Those are the things that we are hearing more about in the context of the future workforce, and we want to be confident that our students are making progress in the development of those sorts of skills as well. So outcomes are in that form.

We are also keenly interested in being able to report more confidently on our relationship with our community and on the engagement of parents and other members of the community in supporting learning outcomes for students. These are the things that we will be examining, and, as I said, there is some work being done nationally which will help inform that.

MR COE: Would you please let me know what the plans are for the Franklin school, and whether the government’s commitment to expand it is just in its current model, in effect putting another stream in, or actually going beyond year 2?

Ms Berry: At this stage the commitment is to expand the school in its current model, but to have a conversation with the community, along with the work that we are doing in early childhood education, around the strategy for our early childhood schools—we have six across the city, Franklin being one of them—to make sure that they are providing the outcomes expected from those schools and those school settings, and to make sure that they work within the school communities. At this stage there is a commitment to expand it, and we will have a conversation with the community about what is the best way forward. We have not started that conversation yet, but it will start very soon.

MR COE: How many streams are there currently?

Ms Howson: We will get you that information. We will check.

MR COE: Thank you. What is the number of additional streams that come online in year 3 at Harrison?

Ms Howson: As a result of that flow-through?

MR COE: Yes. I am not sure whether there are additional streams in year 3. I would think there would be. Are you able to get that—

Ms Berry: Do you know, Robert?

Mr Gotts: The easiest thing to say is that the children that are enrolled at Franklin, because there is no PEA for early childhood schools and they can come from, notionally, anywhere in the ACT, do not automatically flow through to Harrison as a school. They may end up there. The school that would be in their priority enrolment area may be a different school.

MR COE: That is right, but obviously there are a lot of students coming from Franklin, and the demographics of the area also support that.

Mr Gotts: Yes.

MR COE: Obviously, there is a bit of an issue with having a whole cohort of students graduating from year 2 and going to—

Mr Gotts: And flowing through.

MR COE: another school. I know that is putting pressure on Harrison and Palmerston in particular. I guess there is a domino effect. I am curious as to what additional capacity there is in Harrison in particular, as well as Palmerston to a lesser extent.

Ms Berry: It might be best to take that on notice, and get you some better detail.

MR COE: Okay, thanks.

MR PETERSSON: Page 12, output class 1, I am looking at the preschool figures. I understand the increased cost in regard to commonwealth funding coming in, but it is the second part of the statement that confuses me:

... increased depreciation associated with the revaluation of the Directorate's assets.

Why does that only affect preschools and not other schools?

Mr Moysey: All centre-based services are covered under the national law, and the national law brings with it particular components that are required for that infrastructure. If we look at all of the early childhood services in the ACT, which would include preschool components, they all comply with the national law. Over the years the building code has been brought in to align with the national law, so that would contribute to that equation.

Ms Berry: It is to do with the space in the centres and making sure it meets the requirements around ratios and the physicality of the centres.

Ms Howson: In other words, there has been an investment in the change to the configuration of preschools as a result of the national law. As a consequence, there is a revaluation of the cost of that asset in terms of its replacement at law.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to primary education and public education more broadly. Minister, there is the announcement in the budget of 20 school psychologists over the next four years. How many psychologists are going to be added each school year between now and the final funding year in the budget of 2021?

Ms Evans: I have read the privilege statement and understand it. The commitment the government has made is to 20 additional school psychologists in the next four years. It will increase with five psychologists in the next school year and five each year

following from that.

THE CHAIR: How many school psychologists are currently employed?

Ms Evans: At the moment we have 62.5 full-time equivalent school psychologists. They are spread across a range of settings. The vast majority of them are school psychologists in each of the schools. We also have our school psychologists in the network student engagements teams and those who work with the child development service, which is collaborative support into assessing small children about to start school. We also have a commitment to our positive behaviour for learning program, and that also has school psychologists in it.

THE CHAIR: Are the psychologists located at certain school campuses or do they rotate around schools on a needs basis?

Ms Evans: The commitment is to provide all schools with some access to school psychologists, and it is based on enrolment numbers and need. Schools indicate to us each year if they have additional needs, and we try to move the resource accordingly. That is why we have the commitment across our long-term programs such as network student engagement teams as well, because that gives us the opportunity to galvanise a number of psychologists to a particular place if it is needed.

THE CHAIR: Has any consideration been given to how effective behavioural management specialists would be as opposed to psychologists?

Ms Evans: Definitely. It is really about skill sets, and the title of the professionals sometimes belies what they can offer. Many of our psychologists are highly trained and have additional qualifications to do with behaviour management or they have attended additional professional learning courses around behaviour management. We have also put quite a lot of time in the past year or 18 months into making sure all of our psychologists are well aware of and well trained in the art of functional behaviour analysis so they understand that the behaviour of a child can be analysed, that we can use data to think about why a child might be exhibiting particular behaviours and then we can set up a program accordingly.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to provide the list of what schools currently have psychologists placed in them and where the new ones look like being placed?

Ms Evans: I can do that. All schools have some access. Do you want me to go through the list?

THE CHAIR: Reading the list off now is probably not going to be effective; if you could provide it on notice that would be appreciated.

Ms Berry: I suggest that the list is a little fluid as well; the information that would be provided would be what was occurring at that moment in time.

Ms Evans: Yes, very much.

THE CHAIR: Happy to treat it as such.

Ms Berry: It needs to be fairly fluid so we can provide those services to students across all the schools. There needs to be some flexibility around that.

THE CHAIR: What is the employment arrangement for the psychologists in schools? Are they employed as teachers or as public servants? I am particularly interested in their working pattern.

Ms Evans: They are employed under the EBA, but they are employed as health professionals with the set of conditions that relate to the work they do in schools.

THE CHAIR: Are they available through periods like school holidays? What is the access for students during those periods to those psychologists?

Ms Evans: The way we have designated our school psychologists is to ensure we have somebody available at all times. In our network student engagement teams we have psychologists available over the stand-down. Our senior practitioners are always available, and that includes the psychologists who are putting the additional time into schools when required.

THE CHAIR: How many referrals have psychologists in schools made through to other services such as the child and adolescent mental health unit or Headspace and the like?

Ms Evans: That information I would not have; it would be on a school-by-school basis. We are looking at the moment at better mental health pathways for students, and that might be a time when we would be able to consider keeping that kind of data. But at the moment referrals are something all our allied health professionals would do in collaboration with a family member. They would talk to the family. If there are additional needs for that student they could make that referral, but we would not keep that information centrally.

Ms Howson: I could say, though, that we have put some effort this year into ensuring that we have better access to referral pathways through the single human service gateway, OneLink.

THE CHAIR: We heard from a number of witnesses from the community groups two weeks ago, particularly the Youth Coalition, around difficulty in accessing mental health services for young people in that school range with school holidays being a particular difficulty. They also highlighted—I understand it is not directly in the Education portfolio's area of responsibility but it certainly has an impact on the function that you administer—the exceptional wait time young people face to get mental health service. In the absence of quick access to specialist support, what is being done at the school face to bridge that gap?

Ms Berry: Importantly, as part of the issues those particular organisations have raised and the government's move to having an office for mental health under the health minister Megan Fitzharris, Education will be working very closely to ensure there is a focus on providing support to students and families inside the school and outside the school gates as well. We will work closely with both Health and mental health to

make sure we can get those services working together so that kids and families can get the support when they need it.

Ms Evans: In addition, in responding to that need we are also looking at a range of early intervention and prevention-type strategies in our schools. It is important to note that the ACT has the highest uptake of KidsMatter and MindMatters, mental health frameworks provided through the Australian government. Some 33 schools have KidsMatter and 82 have MindMatters. These are really important strategies for schools to assist young people with early signs of any kind of mental health distress— anxiety, depression, those kinds of things—and that is fantastic.

We also have a really strong uptake of a number of other mental health strategies. Our new ed is an understanding of how young developing brains work. We have a pilot in 10 schools at the moment who are taking on that new ed information. We have trauma-informed schools. We have the partnership with CAMHS, known as Ur Fab, which is a partnership where two primary schools have additional support through CAMHS looking at early signs of anxiety and helping kids to understand what anxiety feels like and how they can best manage that. We have our STORM program, which is a suicide prevention program in schools that we are trialling at the moment. We are taking a whole range of early intervention and prevention-type approaches to stop that escalation to where a referral is needed and particularly to make sure that young people know they are being heard and that there are opportunities for them to be supported in a school setting.

Ms Berry: In addition there is funding from the ACT government into the safe schools program to assist kids and families who need support as they go through a time of facing prejudice or discrimination or violent behaviour from other students. That program gives schools and school communities the chance to access resources and help them to provide a safe and inclusive environment at their school.

THE CHAIR: What support, if any, is provided by the Education Directorate to students in non-government schools in the school psychologist space by the Education Directorate?

Ms Evans: My understanding from working with the Catholic and independent schools is they have engaged strongly in the space of putting on additional psychologists. Catholic education have an approach around student wellbeing that they are very proud of. Through our schools for all program we have shared a lot of information backwards and forwards about that. Catholic Education have student wellbeing teams, and the Association of Independent Schools very recently shared with us some information about employing additional psychologists into their schools. That is within their own sectors.

THE CHAIR: But no additional funding or support is provided by the ACT government off the back of the schools for all work to assist them in doing that?

Ms Evans: Beyond the funding that we provide all school sectors, no, there is no additional support.

MS LE COUTEUR: There is the increase in school psychologists, which clearly is

great. Are these resources available to preschool children as well?

Ms Evans: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have specialised psychologists for preschool students? I assume it is a very different—

Ms Evans: We have the psychologists across the schools and the preschools are attached to the schools. So it would be the same school psychologist for the preschool to year 6 campus. But, having said that, we do have an additional support for the preschools in our support at preschool program. Some of our more experienced and skilled teachers actually go in when a teacher identifies a concern, spends some time looking at the referral pathways and would then refer to a school psychologist or one of our other allied health professionals if that were required.

MS CHEYNE: I apologise if you covered this. I understood we would be dealing with this later in the day but that is probably user error. Can you talk me through this, and I might be misinterpreting the situation. We have school psychs and you have that increase in the budget. But also there are counsellors and chaplains at different schools as well; is that right? How does that work, how do they all support each other and what are the numbers? Again, I apologise if this has been covered.

Ms Evans: No, it has not been covered this morning. School psychologists and school counsellors are the same terminology.

MS CHEYNE: Good.

Ms Evans: But we do have a range of other support staff in our schools: our youth workers in high schools and in colleges, transitions and careers support officers. In the Catholic schools in particular there are chaplains employed through a commonwealth government scheme. We also have pastoral care coordinators. There is a whole range. Then our network student engagement teams provide specific supports. They have allied health professionals, including speech pathologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists as well as the social workers, psychologists and our senior teachers.

It is quite a range. The idea is that for most children and young people they will usually talk to the person who they feel most comfortable with. That is often their classroom teacher. If their classroom teacher feels there is more needed to support that young person, there is a range of ways that they can seek support: ask and make a referral.

MS CHEYNE: I think this was probably covered as I was walking down from my office. With the new initiative and how it works currently, are psychologists assigned to the specific schools?

Ms Evans: Yes, they are.

MS CHEYNE: Are they full time in one school or across many schools—not across many schools; full time in one school?

Ms Evans: Yes, it depends on the number in the school. Because our schools are all different sizes, different age ranges and that sort of thing, we work it out on a formula of how many students are enrolled in a school. We also take into account specific need because different communities have different needs. That is worked out every year and schools can come back to us if there is additional need and we will reconsider what the resource looks like.

MS CHEYNE: They can come back to you at any time?

Ms Evans: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: What is that formula?

Ms Evans: It is not a formula as in I can say, “A plus B equals,” but it is a consideration of the number of students in the school—the enrolment numbers—the level of other supports in the school, the particular community needs. We sort of work it out around an equivalent of how many students versus how many full-time equivalents we have available.

MS CHEYNE: You said there are chaplains in Catholic schools. Are there chaplains in other schools as well?

Ms Howson: There are some in—

Ms Evans: I think that under an historic arrangement we have a number of them still in our public schools.

Ms Berry: Are they still funded by the federal government?

MS CHEYNE: Yes, I thought I met one at Hawker College but I get terms confused, as you have just realised. Thanks very much.

MS CODY: I was in a little later this morning; so I apologise if this line of questioning has already been asked. I do have a different line. My mum is a primary school teacher in the ACT public education system and has been for, I think, 35 years. I am really keen to look at how we keep the balance between the need to keep teachers and students safe and the importance of making sure that no child is excluded from the education system. What are we doing about this, particularly in this budget?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS CODY: Is that okay in this area, yes?

Ms Berry: Yes.

Ms Evans: Good morning. Yes, we recognise that need very strongly and we worked last year to develop, in consultation with our schools and with other members of our community, the safe and supportive schools policy. The policy gives schools some guidance and a bit of a framework around how to manage students who have more complex needs or challenging behaviours.

That piece of work came out of the schools for all report. We got 50 recommendations, which included recommendations around managing complex behaviours. The safe and supportive schools policy does provide a framework and it sort of goes through it with schools. Each school personalises that and looks at that for their school community. But it looks at what is required if there is a sense that a child is not safe, a staff member is not safe; what do we need to have in place around our risk management approaches, our behaviour management plans, safety plans and those kind of things?

The school will, of course, call in people beyond the classroom teacher to provide support. That might be the network student engagement team. It might be the school counsellor or psychologist. It just depends on what the need is. We would also engage, if necessary, our workplace health and safety team around supports in that school if safety is an issue.

Ms Howson: I might just add to that.

MS CODY: Please.

Ms Howson: We have 46,000 students, or thereabouts, in our public school system. Every day they are engaging in their learning in a very positive and productive way. We have an expert group of teachers in our system who do marvellous work with all of our students. So in the main I think we are very confident that our staff—our educators and the support staff in our schools—are able to focus on the learning needs of their students.

But we do make it very clear that everyone is entitled to feel safe and be safe in a school environment. That is when, if there are issues arising in a school, we bring in the additional expertise to consider what is happening and to provide additional direction around strategies. More importantly, how do we provide an early intervention around the needs of a student in particular to ensure that they can continue to focus on their learning outcomes and that teachers feel comfortable?

MS CODY: Yes, absolutely. What does the budget in the new financial year provide to assist in those things that you have already pointed out?

Ms Berry: There is the ACT budget's announcement of \$3 million to support students with disabilities. That support can come in lots of different ways. It could be infrastructure support; it could be additional learning support; it could be support with different devices or material to help them learn.

Ms Evans: Participate, yes.

Ms Berry: Yes, help them to be part of the school community. That is very important funding. I think Ms Evans might be able to give you some more detail on that. But also, Ms Evans, it might be useful for the committee to understand the learning support units and how individual students are supported within those in schools, in mainstream schools.

Ms Evans: Thank you, minister.

MS CODY: Yes, go ahead.

Ms Evans: Yes, we do have a really wide range of supports for students. The budget does support students with disability but, of course, it would be wrong to assume that students with disability are always the students who are challenging in our schools. What we do is consider every student as an individual and think about their needs. That might be a specialised setting, as the minister referred to, such as a learning support unit. It could be a completely individualised program for that student. That would be dependent on what their needs are, what the environment is like for them in their classroom or in their school. If a student does need additional supports, we will look at that.

The approach that we take is very much to look at the universal supports within schools. About a third of our schools have engaged with the positive behaviour for learning framework. It is a framework to support students, all students in a school, around behaviour. So we have a number of universal approaches.

We then have a number of selected strategies. They are strategies such as smaller group settings, particular programs for students, withdrawing students at a particular time of the day to give them a different experience of school. Then we have some targeted approaches. They are for the very small number of students, as Ms Howson referred to, who really need that extremely specialised support because their behaviours are quite challenging.

MS CODY: My mum has been involved in some of those education centres. They are fabulous. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are we moving on to—

THE CHAIR: We are still on output class 1.1. The time split is 40 minutes for early childhood education, 40 minutes for primary education and then high school education after the break. But we are taking questions in a broader range.

MS LE COUTEUR: I might go on to primary schools. This really applies to all schools. My question is about the use of school facilities by community groups. It is obviously a question that comes up a lot. What is the government's policy on this?

Ms Berry: The ACT Education Directorate and Active Canberra—so in my role as the Minister for Sport and Recreation as well—have been working very closely together to ensure that sports groups are able to use school facilities when they are not being used during schools hours. We have worked with a number of schools across Canberra to work out ways that they can be accessible outside school hours for sporting clubs and communities so that they can use those facilities. We have opened that up to look at how community groups, community organisations and particularly the multicultural community could have the chance to use those facilities as well.

In this budget we have announced a further \$100,000 to continue that work on looking at ways that we can open up schools. For example, one of the schools, Alfred Deakin, needed a very small change to their security system so that the Woden Dodgers basketball club could call that school hall their home. That is their home training site for that club after they were displaced when the Woden basketball centre closed down.

There is access to the sports fields as well. Recently, in a partnership between Active Canberra and Education, there was a funding commitment of around \$6 million for upgrades to Melrose school's oval and sports area, their basketball rings and their playing fields, as well as their change rooms and canteen area. There is an amazing synthetic pitch that is FIFA standard. There has been very good and very positive feedback to the government about what a great surface it is to play on. There is a partnership between that school and Active Canberra to open that facility up to the broader community. I think that school has a relationship with the school next door to it, Marist, and they share facilities as well. Meredith, did you want to say something about this?

Ms Whitten: Thank you, minister. In addition to what the minister was saying, we have been working with Active Canberra and the office for multicultural affairs on making spaces across all of our schools available to the community. The additional funding that we have been provided in the budget will assist with making other school spaces available for the community to use. We have also funded an upgrade to the gymnasium in the Hedley Beare Centre for Teaching and Learning, which will be made available to community groups as well.

MS LE COUTEUR: What charges do you levy?

Ms Whitten: I would like to take that on notice. Certainly, we do have some charges for the use of our schools. That could include our swimming pools as well. In terms of the details of that, I would need to take it on notice.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. You might not be able to answer this now: what policy do you have on this? I am hoping that in some circumstances where, due to the security changes, there are no staff required on site, the charges would be very low or non-existent?

Ms Whitten: We do have a policy whereby principals can make a decision about the level of charging, including using the facilities for free. So we do have a policy, the details of which we can provide.

Ms Berry: It would depend on the sorts of things that the groups are using. For example, with the Dodgers, there was just an access change; it cost only a few thousand dollars, from memory, to change a security system so that they could have access to the school. Instead of somebody leaving a key in somebody's letterbox down the road, there is a PIN pad. They use the court. There could be groups that use other facilities that are owned by the school; that would change the way that the fees operated. There is a similar case with the Erindale pool and the sports club, and some of the other facilities that they have there.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is community use taken into account in designing new schools?

PROOF

I am particularly thinking of Charles Weston, because I have been told by a number of people that that is already over capacity, from the point of view of community facility use. People have told me that they have tried and not been able to book meeting rooms, in particular. The hall, which is great, possibly is not over capacity. But it is the only meeting place within the new Molonglo development.

Ms Berry: I think the purpose in the design of that school was so that it would be able to be used by the community. Yes, it is taken into account in building new schools, to make sure that there are those facilities available, so that it is actually a community hub and not just a nine to three learning space, that there is actually more to that school environment that we can involve the community in. I will ask Rodney Bray to talk more about what is happening at Charles Weston and the design of our future schools.

Mr Bray: I cannot comment specifically on the Charles Weston booking capacity. Certainly, Charles Weston was designed to allow maximum use by the community of the facilities there. That is the case with all of our new school designs. Security systems, lighting and parking are designed to make the schools available for the community so that they can access halls, the libraries and general learning areas if they are running book clubs or other community activities. We try to make available as many spaces as we can, without requiring after-hours control by the school, typically, staff coming back and locking up afterwards.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is too expensive?

Mr Bray: Yes, that is right.

MS LE COUTEUR: In winter it is very inconvenient as well. Do you have much in the way of meeting spaces, if a group has grown past the size of meeting in someone's living room but is not of a size to need to meet in the school hall? There is quite a lot of interest in that in-between space.

Mr Bray: Yes. The communities can talk to the principal about what space sizes they need. Generally, we have areas like libraries, general learning areas or collaborative learning areas which are not your typical classroom-type environment. They are generally large open spaces, and they are available to be used by the community.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have a policy as to what groups can and cannot use school facilities?

Mr Bray: Generally, there is no limitation on the usage. The usage can even be done by commercial operators. If someone is running a judo club or a yoga class, they are charged at a different rate because they are a business and they are hiring the facility to earn an income. Generally, no, I do not believe there are any limitations on who is allowed to use the facilities.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have to get your own public liability insurance if you are going to use a school facility?

Mr Bray: The organisations that hire them have to have their own insurances, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: It makes it very hard for a small community group because that would cost them a lot of money.

Mr Bray: I would have to take that question on notice.

MS LE COUTEUR: I asked ACT property about this. If you have a group sitting around and talking about something, the major risk is actually the venue. There is not any other risk. People are coming along and sitting on your chairs. The risk is the venue. It is a real barrier for groups if they have to get their own insurance, which will inevitably cost them a lot of money for a risk which they really have nothing to do with, if you know what I mean.

Mr Bray: Yes.

Ms Berry: I think that is a whole-of-government issue. The government, across all directorates, maybe should consider ways that different groups can access or do things in our community so that they do not have that extra expense. They could be a knitting club, a book reading club, a women's support group or something that is not registered or organised: a group of people that come together regularly to support each other in different kinds of ways.

Ms Howson: I think a lot of this comes down to the insights at the local level and groups approaching principals. For example, in Monash primary they have a lovely part of their school which is dedicated to community activity. They invite groups—grandparent groups and other groups—into that school to use that facility throughout the week and on weekends, and they involve students, too, in things like what you are talking about, minister, things like knitting groups. And it adds value to the school. In those circumstances they are not formally organised or structured groups that have a particular status under a piece of legislation, but they are using school facilities to come together, and that community activation is highly valued by schools.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you allow non-incorporated groups, just informal groups; me and my book club, for instance?

Ms Howson: If they have a relationship with the school and the principal makes an assessment that having those people involved with the school will add value to the school community.

MR COE: Would you please let me know what support you provide young teachers in particular but new teachers as well especially in those first few years of—

Ms Berry: First few weeks?

MR COE: The first few years. I am deliberately not talking about the first few weeks. I am more looking at the risk of burnout and the risk of turning over staff after three or four years.

Ms Brighton: Certainly our staff are our richest and most important asset in the directorate. They are the people at the coalface helping our young people learn every

single day. Each year we have a number of new staff and we have in place for those new educators quite a structured introduction to the directorate, with a deep induction that occurs over a number of months. Importantly in their first couple of years of teaching they have a reduced face-to-face teaching load and that is intentionally designed so that they can grow in the profession, they can have coaching and mentoring and time with their in-school mentors as they settle into the work life of a teaching professional. It allows them to participate in broader and deeper professional learning.

That work continues in their first three years of being a beginning teacher. What that looks like in schools varies but the fundamental core about the focus on continued professional development in those early career years is very common. In larger schools where they have a considerable number of newer teachers it might look like those teachers working in groups together under the guardianship of a mentor to coach and develop them. In smaller schools where there might be only one beginning teacher that will look and feel quite differently. But the common thread about support for all is absolute.

Mr Hodgson might be able to go into more detail about what that looks like but I might invite one of our directors for school improvement to the table and she can talk about some practical examples of what our ongoing development of the teaching profession looks like.

Ms Howson: Chris, would you like to make some comments about the general preparation?

Mr Hodgson: I read the statement and understand it. There is probably not a lot more I can add to what Ms Brighton said, except to say that that long-term induction process and the extra support that is given are evidenced in our retention rates. Our turnover rates are about half the national average. We retain in the first five years somewhere in the order of about 97 per cent of early teachers as opposed to the national average which is close to a six per cent turnover rate.

THE CHAIR: How does that retention rate compare to other capital cities specifically? The national figure takes in a lot of rural-regional areas which have always struggled to retain professionals such as teachers, nurses, doctors and the like.

Mr Hodgson: I am sorry I do not have that level of detail with me but I am happy to see if we can source it.

Ms Howson: I think it is safe to say that our turnover rates are lower than even what we would expect in the ACT public service in the context of what we accept as an acceptable benchmark, which is around five per cent to eight per cent. It is an interesting question because there is a lot of, I think, discussion about high turnover rates in our beginning teachers. But as we have looked at it we do not see the evidence for that and we do have, I think, a very constructive way of supporting our beginning teachers here in the ACT, particularly the fact that they are given extra time in their first year of teaching to engage with mentors and do the professional learning that is part of becoming a more competent and confident teacher. But that is what Judith can talk to.

Ms Hamilton: As the Deputy Director-General mentioned, it can vary quite significantly between the number of early educators that you might have at a school. Some of my larger schools in Gungahlin have very formalised, large mentoring programs where early educators meet in a very formal, regular way to develop the essential skills they need in those early years. During my time as a principal I remember very clearly we would mentor and buddy up new beginning teachers with an experienced teacher and they would be together in collaborative teaching spaces. They would be planning together and teaching together and had that regular, ongoing support.

We also have very formal mechanisms which support early educators. We have our professional pathways process and that allows young educators to have very targeted development of their skills in those early years. In that process, which is very much linked to the ACT school standards around the professional practice, we provide regular observations and regular feedback around developing those early skills.

There are lots of layers. There are formal mechanisms for support and then there is that informal mechanism where there is that team-teaching collaboration, professional learning tabs. It is very targeted around supporting our early educators. We are very conscious that they need additional time and they need additional support to develop those early skills.

MR COE: Is that 97 per cent of teachers remaining as teachers as opposed to working elsewhere in the directorate or elsewhere in the ACT government?

Mr Hodgson: That would be individuals who are classified as teachers in the directorate. It is a 2.15 per cent turnover rate per year. As Ms Howson said, it is probably a significantly lower turnover rate than we have in other areas of government but it would be based on teacher classifications within the Education Directorate.

MR COE: Two per cent a year is not 97 per cent after five years though.

Mr Hodgson: I probably did not explain it that well the first time. It is above 97 per cent retention per year.

MR COE: Is this actually an ongoing dataset that gets maintained and reviewed regularly or was this developed as a particular body of work as a one-off?

Mr Hodgson: As part of our ongoing workforce planning we would look at those figures on a regular basis. We are about to enter a more strategic approach to HR as the demand on teachers becomes more increased but we are certainly across those numbers.

MR COE: Ms Brighton, you mentioned the reduced hours that teachers will do in a classroom in the first year or two. How easily is that achieved in a primary school setting as opposed to high school?

Ms Hamilton: From my experience as a principal, I think that there are a couple of

ways that that can be addressed. At times I have had new educators who have worked a four-day week and they have had that additional release time to do some planning and additional observation. They can do observations in other classrooms. That can be managed that way. Another way that it could be managed is that they may have additional professional opportunities to be released from the school to do targeted professional learning or to visit and observe other classrooms. There are a couple of ways that that could be managed in a primary school relatively easily.

MR COE: Is that dependent upon the particular arrangement at that school or does a teacher, in effect, have to go cap in hand saying, “Can I have some more time off so that I can do some professional development?”

Ms Hamilton: I think it would be individual to the setting, given the number of early educators. That might not be possible if you were at a very large school that perhaps had 50 educators in the first three years of schooling and they needed to take a different approach. But certainly in my experience schools have a very deliberate induction program for their early educators. No young teacher would have to go cap in hand. There would be a very deliberate strategy around how that additional support would be provided.

MR COE: But if it is not a formalised process across the board and it is not, in effect, an entrenched arrangement in terms of having some hours out of the classroom, how do you ensure that people do not fall through the cracks and do not experience burnout or a higher degree of pressure?

Ms Brighton: Thank you for the question. The arrangements are deeply embedded not only through our enterprise agreement but through our funding model for schools. There is funding and resourcing to make sure that this happens. A core part of our very deliberate school improvement strategy that we have been strengthening over the past 18 months is about building the capability of the profession, including the beginning teachers.

With regard to beginning teachers, there is a very clear expectation amongst all principals as to what the induction looks like. The expectation of release time, that connection with the experienced teachers, the walkthroughs, the feedback, that policy position of the directorate about a deep induction, the industrial framework which also provides for that, as well as our school funding component and our school improvement, all of those elements work together to make sure that we are not in a position that new teachers are falling through the cracks.

Of course, it is a demanding profession and sometimes our beginning teachers need more time to grow and to strengthen and develop. That is what their coach and their mentor and their principal provide as they come into the profession and they settle into the profession.

MR COE: But how do you actually ensure that people do not fall through the cracks? I understand that you have got these policies and an EBA in place but if you have got a small school that has a different set of circumstances to a larger school how do you actually ensure that you do not have teachers that are struggling for one reason or another?

Ms Brighton: Every school has a new educator support plan, and that plan is what schools are held accountable for. School looks really different from when all of us were at school. The teachers, the teaching profession and my directors of school improvement talk a lot about the de-privatised practice. Gone are the days when teaching was just one teacher with a class and a door that was closed. The level of supervision, observation and feedback is structurally built so that we can help the profession grow and that we can make sure that all kids get the opportunity to be successful every day. I hear your point—

Ms Howson: I was just going to add that one of the features of the ACT system is the level of responsibility and accountability that principals hold. It is a decentralised system, there is a lot of autonomy that sits with the principal. We expect that a principal would be, as Meg says, aware if a teacher on their staff needed more support or if they were not getting access to their mentor, for example. In terms of how we make sure, our expectation is that the principal will be on top of that.

Ms Hamilton: Can I just say one more thing? For every new educator there is a formal probation period, and in that probation period they have a nominated supervisor and a nominated mentor. Through that probation period they meet several times a term as that collective group to talk about that young educator's needs, their growth, what they need next, and then that is linked to the TQI assessment as well. At the end of that year not only have they had a great deal of support and formal support through that process but they have also met a certain standard and are able to move on out of probation and graduate into proficiency. There is quite a formal—and there has to be—requirement on principals to have that in place for every new educator.

MR COE: The final issue in the thread is this: what support is provided to teachers in dealing with parents, especially tricky parents? I imagine, especially if you are straight out of uni and you are 23, and you have someone who is either abusive or has potential to be abusive, that has to be pretty intimidating. What are the support mechanisms in place and what training is given along the way?

Ms Hamilton: Certainly in my experience new educators are always provided with that mentor or supervisor to attend any meetings. On the whole, most of the meetings I have had are fabulous and were great two-way communication. But if, as you say, there are the occasional ones that may have that potential, that young educator could have their supervisor or mentor attend.

For example, this week I know that many of the schools have had parent-teacher nights and parent-teacher interviews. The whole school is doing parent-teacher interviews. Everybody is interviewing at the same time; everybody is scheduled. Executive staff and principals are walking around keeping track—

MR COE: It is probably the unstructured stuff that I am guessing is problematic.

Ms Hamilton: Yes.

MR COE: So in terms of that—the car park-type situation or—

Ms Howson: That is right, yes.

MR COE: coming into the classroom.

Ms Howson: Again, it is around the principals setting the tone of expectation about what is reasonable in terms of parents' interaction with teachers and vice versa. Then following through where there have been identified issues between parents and their communication style with a teacher so that teacher can seek help and support. Then, of course, we have more systemic and formalised arrangements in the context of what you might call levels of harassment from parents and so on. That can essentially activate our work health and safety framework. We can support teachers in that respect and certainly follow up on any impact of negative conversations.

We would offer particular support and direction in relation to dealing with difficult conversations with community members. That is something we are looking at even more so as we are rolling out our new occupational violence management plan—providing training and support for both principals and teaching staff that are dealing with parents or members of the community who are being particularly aggressive. We will offer support and direct training in how to handle those conversations. For that matter, if it is becoming consistent, then we will remove that interaction from that teach or that parent.

MR COE: How regular an occurrence is it that abuse is reported, either physical or verbal?

Ms Howson: That probably moves us into another area. Again, I will come back to Ms Whitten or—

MR COE: I mean from parents.

Ms Howson: From parents in particular? It is very small. I would have to say that—in terms of the size of our system, 46,000 children and their families—in the general run of the mill it is very rare for us to be alerted to a situation like this.

MR COE: I guess that if you look at it in its entirety I am sure that is true. But if there are one or two in particular that are causing trouble for that teacher, it does not feel like an isolated incident.

Ms Howson: No, I understand.

MR COE: So—

Ms Howson: And I am not trying—I am not—

MR COE: I know you are not, but I am just trying to sort of home in on that, yes.

Ms Howson: When it gets to that point, the most important thing is that the teacher is confident to be able to speak up about what is going on. Then we will rally support around that teacher and ensure that they are not isolated in dealing with that issue. But that situation is very rare.

Ms Berry: The focus for the education directorate and the ACT government on occupational violence, particularly in education, is nation-leading. No other government is focusing like we are. The focus is on how we can improve workplace health and safety for teachers in the ACT. That is why there is a significant contribution from the ACT government towards the focus that we are placing on that, including poor parent behaviour as well as the challenges within the classroom and within the school community.

Ms Whitten: In addition to that, minister, the government has, of course, funded three new positions in the directorate as part of this budget in relation to managing occupational violence. Just going back to that initial conversation about the additional support that we can provide schools, we do have a position of director of families and children, which is a centrally-located position. That role is to assist schools and, in particular, if it gets to a teacher relationship with a parent, to refer a matter to that particular role so that that relationship then is between that director, her staff and that individual. That is just another strategy that we use. I can go into more detail about managing occupational violence if you wish.

MR COE: No, that is fine. I am conscious of the time.

MS CODY: I have a supplementary.

THE CHAIR: Is it a quick supp?

MS CODY: Possibly not.

THE CHAIR: If not, we might suspend here for a morning tea break. The committee will resume again at 11.05.

Ms Berry: Just before we do, chair, can I ask how you want to deal with responding to questions taken on notice? Should we provide answers where possible before finishing each section or do you want us to take them all on notice and provide answers later? What is the best way for you to go ahead? We have some corrections and we expect information—

Ms Howson: It is additional information. It was in relation to the funding for preschools, the first question that was asked. So, at the time we were—

THE CHAIR: If you are able to provide the answer now, please do so.

Ms Howson: Our total funding for preschools in 2017-18 is \$33.2 million. Of that, \$24.5 million is the ACT government contribution.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Howson: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We will resume at 11.05.

Hearing suspended from 10.52 to 11.08 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back. In this session we have time allocated to public high school education in output class 1.2 and public secondary college education in output class 1.3. However, I believe most of the officials are still here if there are primary education questions that have not yet been addressed. Mr Pettersson.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, I have seen you about town with lots of high school students recently talking about the future of education.

Ms Berry: Including my own.

MR PETTERSSON: How is the future of the education conversation going?

Ms Berry: Thank you for the question. So far it is going really well. We have had really great and positive feedback from children all the way through our education system from kindergarten all the way up to our college students who are all involved in being part of this conversation. It was important to the government that we made sure every child got a chance to be able to be part of this conversation. When we launched it a couple of months ago with school principals it received a very positive reception from them, and they have been encouraging the conversation in their schools in lots of different ways to meet the needs of their school communities, from the students to the parents and to other people involved in the school. I dropped into after-school care last night and all the after-school care workers were keen to be involved in the conversation as well.

We have tried as much as possible to get many people engaged in this conversation. It is a really big conversation. It has been a long time since we have worked on a strategy around education in the ACT, and lots of people are really keen to put their views forward. We particularly want to get people thinking about equity within our school system. Children may have different things going on in their lives—it could be that they learn differently, they could have things going on at home that we do not know about, they could be from poor families or disadvantaged backgrounds, different CALD communities or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children—and we want to make sure the focus is on ensuring that those children start at an equal place and that they have the supports they need to keep them on an equal footing with every other student so they get a year's learning for a year's attendance at school. We can provide fairly detailed information about how the communication of this is being rolled out across the ACT.

Ms McAlister: It is essentially a long conversation over three phases, and we are in the first phase of opening and capturing views. Those views are being captured by each and every one of our schools. We have visited all of our schools, and every school is having this conversation either using existing mechanisms or trying something new. Importantly, we are reaching beyond our schools and working with the community to seek their views as well. We are seeking views from professional associations, we are inviting community organisations to participate, and our students are also actively participating in this conversation, with the minister's student congress having met twice to this point.

Schools are engaging in a variety of ways. One of our schools is organising cardboard cut-outs of students to go around to different class groups to capture parent input at the drop-off time. Another one of our schools is doing a graffiti wall to capture student input. A third school is integrating key questions about the future of education into their Chromebook program and inviting students to work with their parents or their families at home to give input. We will distil the themes, work up some options and continue the conversation with the community, then that will inform the government's strategic direction for education moving forward.

MR PETTERSSON: You mentioned the student congress. Is that a new thing?

Ms Berry: No, it is not a new thing; student congress has been going for a number of years now. This was a chance for the government to be able to talk to a group of students across every age group from 10 to 18 to hear their contributions to the conversation. It has been really great having kids talking about it because they have a very different perspective from adults and teachers and school principals. The kinds of comments made by students are not the kinds of things you or I might say about our school experience and how we want to make a difference for other kids in our schools and also thinking about kids who are not even there yet. When you ask that question, they really want to make a difference and make the school experience for children who have not even started yet even better than the experience they might have had. Having their enthusiastic feedback on how they feel about what is going on in their school communities and how it can be even better has been really useful.

I did not mention earlier that just before we made the announcement and started having the conversation with school principals about this I established a group of core community partners. These are people who will help us stay on the path but also provide us with expert advice from the different areas for which they have responsibility. I wanted to make sure in this conversation that it was not the usual group of academics or education experts or curriculum and pedagogy experts; I wanted to make sure that the group had a different kind of perspective around this. They still had expertise in the area but we are really interested in the social justice perspective around the conversation of equity within our schools.

The core group of community partners consists of Susan Helyar, the Director of ACT Council of Social Services, and people will know of Susan's work here in the ACT; Dr John Hattie, professor of education at the University of Melbourne; Dr Chris Sarra, founder and chairperson of the Stronger Smarter Institute and professor of education at the University of Canberra; Cathy Hudson, ACECQA board member, and John Falzon, national CEO of St Vincent de Paul Society. There is quite a broad range of people that I do not think have worked together in this kind of space before who have a number of different perspectives to put forward. They will ensure we stay as focused as we can on our conversation around equity and really improving our already high performing school system in the ACT.

MR PETTERSSON: You mentioned that there were three phases to this conversation. What are the different phases and what are the time frames for them?

Ms McAlister: The first phase is open and capture which is what we are doing right now. At the heart of this conversation is that we hear from people who would not

normally participate or who we might miss in such a process. My hesitation is that we would love that open and capture phase to be completed by mid next term. However, if there are more people we need to hear from, those time lines will be extended to do so. We then distil the key themes from the open and capture phase and work up some options to continue the conversation with the community again. We talk further, and that will take place around our term four period and then leading into the government's strategic direction towards the end of this year.

Ms Berry: There are lots of different ways we are engaging, and Ms McAlister described a few of those that are happening in schools. We have released our first discussion paper. I can provide you with a hard copy but it is available online now. It might be easier for you to just grab a copy online, but I can certainly table a copy of this now. The idea behind this first discussion paper is to stimulate discussion around a number of different questions. People can respond to one question or respond to them all and respond to them in ways that suit them. Some people might want to an in-depth, detailed submission; others might want to respond on the back of a postcard, others might send it via email, Facebook or whatever. We want to make it as easy as possible for everybody to contribute in a way that best suits them. Do you want me to table this?

THE CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

Ms McAlister: A couple of comments from the young people from student congress include, "Everyone is different and they need different things to succeed, and that's never going to change." "We need motivated principals and teachers." This is the voice of our students through our student congress. Another comment was, "The community should make a website to help kids with their work. The community could come in and talk." So all ideas are being accepted in this open and capture phase, and our young people have excellent ideas.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple of supplementaries on the conversation. The funding in the budget for this process is \$546,000 over this financial year and next. How exactly is all of that being spent? What is the breakdown of in-house staff being allocated to that budget line and what is being used for external consultants, advisers and specialists? We will start there, because I have more.

Ms McAlister: The open and capture phase is the first of three phases, so a small team is doing this work. There has been some consultation to design the conversation to make sure it is—

THE CHAIR: How many is a small team?

Ms McAlister: Three.

THE CHAIR: Three FTE?

Ms McAlister: Yes. Some consultation design work has been done around the open and capture and making this conversation as inclusive as possible, but a breakdown of the entire budget I would need to take on notice.

THE CHAIR: That is probably the easiest way to do it.

Ms Berry: There is a bit of flexibility around that. As people ask for different ways to engage we want to be able to respond to that. For example, at Belconnen High School there was a video booth and at Charnwood-Dunlop School there was an ideas igloo where young people or anyone in the school community—I know grandparents did it at Charnwood-Dunlop School—can go in with a friend or a group of people and respond verbally to some of the questions or contribute their ideas through that.

THE CHAIR: What is the objective you are trying to achieve? Is it purely looking at the future in the way the public school system works in the ACT or is it education across the board?

Ms Berry: No, it is the education system, and Catholic and independent schools have been invited to participate in the conversation. A number of schools have begun that work within their school communities. I have written at least twice to the independent schools association and the Catholic schools association to ensure that all the information is getting out to their school communities.

THE CHAIR: What work is being done amongst those schools? All the schools you have mentioned thus far this morning have been ACT government schools.

Ms Berry: I know personally that Merici College have started a conversation, and Daramalan school were getting hold of information so that they could start the work in their schools. The Education Directorate has put together a whole lot of information for all schools to be able to use within their school communities with ideas about how that could happen. But schools are coming up with their own ideas, like the examples Ms McAlister gave earlier around graffiti walls and cardboard cut-outs and that sort of thing. Schools are taking it and it is something they are taking ownership of and doing in a way that suits their school community.

Ms Efthymiades: I have met directly with the heads of both the Association of Independent Schools and the Catholic Education Office, Ross Fox and Andrew Wrigley. We have had great conversations. They are intending to plan heavily around student voice for their school involvement in this. They are not sure about within individual schools or maybe even across individual schools, but they are intending to have student voices as the main vehicle for their contribution to the process.

THE CHAIR: I will look forward to the detail of that coming back on notice.

Ms Berry: So will we.

THE CHAIR: That is the first time someone has been excited to give an answer to a question on notice.

MS ORR: The census results came out last week and Gungahlin is growing rapidly not just compared to the rest of Canberra but all of Australia. You mentioned in your opening statement some of what you are doing for the Gungahlin community so that they have access to good quality public education. Can you elaborate on that and go into the detail?

Ms Howson: Thank you, Ms Orr, for that question. I am going to hand to Mr Bray in a moment; he will be able to outline the details of the government's investment but there is, overall, \$85 million being invested in this budget into augmentation of our capacities in schools and funding for a new school in Gungahlin.

Mr Bray: I can quickly summarise the works that are currently budgeted to assist in increasing capacity of schools in north Gungahlin: Gold Creek School will increase by 200 places; Harrison School will increase by another 100 places on top of what we have just completed; Neville Bonner School will increase by another 300 places; there is additional funding in the 2017-18 budget for an additional 150 places at the new north Gungahlin primary school in the suburb of Taylor bringing that school capacity up to a total of 600 places excluding preschool, and Palmerston district school will increase by another 100 places.

MS ORR: What areas will they service? We have Moncrieff and Casey and other places going in. Where are they fitting into any part of this?

Mr Bray: The schools I listed are just in relation to the north Gungahlin area. If you are interested in the other areas, of course, we are doing the new school down in Molonglo. I cannot remember the size of the Molonglo P-6 school.

Mr Gotts: A new school in Molonglo at Denman Prospect will open in a couple of years. We are still working with other agencies to find the site of the school in east Gungahlin. We are looking at sites and, in fact, next week we are visiting the Ginninderry development to look at potential sites there and a further three sites in Molonglo, starting with Whitlam, have been identified as sites for government schools.

MS ORR: The work that you are starting for the new school in north Gungahlin, can you run through a bit more of the work you are doing on that? Where is it up to?

Mr Bray: We are in the final phases of design development for that new school, and we are working with the preferred tenderer at the moment to finalise that design. Once that design phase is completed we then do a check about any adjustment to the cost. We had a tendered price for the design at the point that we tendered it, and there has been design work post that tender point. Once we complete this next phase of design we then go back and check that the design is still within budget. If that is the case there is every reason to believe we will then progress forward into contract to start construction. We hope we will be starting within the next three months with the intent that the school will be completed and ready to open for the start of 2019.

MS ORR: Is that a high school or a primary school?

Mr Bray: That is a P-6; preschool to year 6 primary school.

MS ORR: Which suburb are you looking at locating that?

Ms Howson: In the suburb of Taylor. In this budget there is also some funding for the early design work getting ready for procurement in relation to a site in East Gungahlin for another school.

MS ORR: What years do you anticipate that will accommodate?

Ms Howson: It will be a primary school.

Mr Bray: Robert might be the best to answer that question.

Mr Gotts: It will certainly start as a primary school. We are watching the high school numbers very closely, so we are looking at a site that will have the capacity to include a high school as well.

MS ORR: Going back to the capacity, Neville Bonner and Gold Creek are getting quite a lot of extra places. What infrastructure are you looking at putting in place with the funding? Is it just extra classrooms?

Mr Bray: At Gold Creek, as I said, it will be 200 additional places for children on the junior campus. We are looking at what we refer to as a modular construction solution there. That is our current position. We have a lot of the design and approach, but that is on the junior campus. At Neville Bonner Primary School the additional 300 places will most likely be transportable buildings at this stage.

MS CODY: You mentioned infrastructure for some new schools in the Molonglo region. You mentioned Denman Prospect; is that correct?

Mr Bray: Yes.

MS CODY: Are there any other infrastructure projects for schools in the Woden-Weston Creek area?

Ms Berry: There is quite a bit of work happening across the ACT on upgrades to public schools. Ms Howson mentioned the \$85 million over four years that has been set aside for a number of different upgrades which we talked about earlier, including new learning spaces, toilets, change rooms, garden and horticultural facilities, heating and cooling upgrades and energy efficiency improvements. At Melrose High School there is a significant piece of work that needs to occur there with regard to heating and cooling.

MS CODY: I have had representations made by a number of students at Melrose high about the fact that it is very cold in their classrooms in winter and very warm in summer. Can you expand on that?

Ms Berry: Melrose high reminds me of my old high school, actually. Things have certainly moved on since then. Melrose school was built at a time which means it does not have the heating and cooling systems that are useful during Canberra's climate, particularly when we have extremely hot weather and very cold weather.

Mr Bray: In relation to the expansion works in the south-Weston network, for the start of 2018 we are looking at an additional 50 places at Arawang Primary School. Garran Primary School will have another 50 places. At Telopea Park School there will be another 38 places. Just to clarify, at Telopea Park School, the places are most likely

to be used by years 7 to 10.

In relation to Melrose High School, without knowing the exact details of the concerns raised by the students, we did have a heating problem there with the equipment, and it dragged on for several days. We have fixed that problem, so I am hoping that they are not experiencing any more cold conditions. I will check on that when I get back. I have not had any more concerns raised with me. We did fix the relevant plant that was not operating correctly. In relation to cooling in summer, that was a significant issue that was raised last summer, in the peak heat days. We have been allocated funds to address that problem, ready for the start of the coming summer season. We have engaged consultants to give us advice about how to approach a solution for the cooling of the three-storey building at Melrose High School.

MS CODY: My niece will be very happy to hear that. I will pass that on to her. You can imagine that she is the worst critic.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have a supplementary about Garran primary. You referred to the expansion, which is great, but I want to refer to a path which goes down to the back. I was wondering whether I would have to get out Google Maps to show you where it is, because it does not have a name, but I think you might know it.

Mr Bray: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: When is work going to be done on that, given that you clearly know about it?

Mr Bray: Work is about to commence. Within weeks it will be commencing. It has been a job that has dragged on for far too long, and we have finally resolved to get it constructed. Construction will be starting within weeks.

Ms Berry: The reason it has taken a bit of time as well is that it requires significant work. It is not just a matter of extending a footpath. It requires more than that. But that work is commencing, so that is good news for Garran.

THE CHAIR: With the infrastructure and school upgrade works, another part of the pre-budget announcement was that a lot of it would be focusing on the upgrade of school bathrooms. Is that simply a refit of the existing bathrooms? What work is being done there?

Mr Bray: We have a list of priority bathrooms to be upgraded, and we have been working on it for several years. In general, we go in and strip the whole space out. We take it back to the substructure. It is a total refit done to a commercial standard. So it is very good quality. It is durable; it withstands the wear and tear of students. When finished, they are very colourful, they are bright and they are odour resistant. We deal with the smells that accumulate in those spaces. We have done pretty good jobs on those. I have never heard anybody complain, post our completion of that work.

THE CHAIR: Is part of that also the introduction of unisex bathrooms in schools?

Mr Bray: We do not have a position at the moment particularly around unisex

bathrooms. We provide unisex disabled bathrooms in schools. That is mandatory under the disabled access act. The directorate is yet to form a policy about how we are going to deal with unisex—

Ms Howson: Isn't it in our new school design?

Mr Bray: Yes, we do. I am sorry; that is correct. We have provision for that in the new school design but we have not retrofitted it back into existing schools yet.

Ms Howson: At the moment, if there was a need in a school, we would address the need.

Mr Bray: Yes.

THE CHAIR: How many schools have been built to the new school design?

Mr Bray: Its full application will be applied to the new school in Taylor. We used Charles Weston as a bit of a learning curve to develop the specification, but its first real application in full is the new school in Taylor.

MS CODY: How many bathrooms have been upgraded?

Mr Bray: I would have to take that on notice.

MS CODY: Okay.

MS CHEYNE: I have a supplementary before my substantive question. First of all, with Ginninderry, how many sites are being considered for that school?

Mr Gotts: The advice we have from the joint venturers is that land sales will be running at around 300 per year. The purpose is to identify enough sites over a planning horizon that will produce enough kids to fill a school. We are also looking for non-government sites. We would look for several sites, and, as the numbers build up, we will clarify exactly which ones would eventually—

Ms Howson: I should intervene to say that question should be answered by a different portfolio. We play a key role in planning, with that portfolio—their decisions around land release.

MS CHEYNE: I did see that it is scheduled for release on the indicative land release program. What do the school upgrades to Aranda primary, Melba Copland and Lake Ginninderra College involve? Not Belconnen High, because I know quite a lot about that one, thanks to Minister Berry's work.

Mr Bray: At Aranda we have agreed with the school principal, the board chair and the president of the P&C that we will be installing a new two-classroom transportable building by the start of 2018. The school has agreed to continue to use the spaces that they currently use, and then, with the growth that we are expecting by the start of 2018, we will be able to accommodate that new transportable building.

PROOF

MS CHEYNE: With Aranda, the school has a projected capacity of 625, according to the *Canberra Times*. You may have different or better figures than that. Will the demountables increase that capacity a little bit, or will it just meet existing numbers? I understand there has been some movement within the school to fit students in?

Mr Bray: Robert Gotts will give you the detail, but I can say that, based on the numbers that Rob has given my branch, the two classrooms are sufficient to accommodate the projected enrolment for 2018. We believe that will address the accommodation problem for 2018.

Mr Gotts: I believe it is an increase. I am just looking for my—

MS CHEYNE: That is fine; I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr Gotts: Thank you; I will.

MS CHEYNE: What about Melba Copland and Lake Ginninderra College?

Mr Bray: There is no expansion work proposed for Melba Copland.

MS CHEYNE: Have I got that wrong?

Ms Berry: There is some work occurring at that school around their administration area and security upgrades, I think.

Mr Bray: I would have to take that question on notice.

MS CHEYNE: Sure.

Mr Bray: I will come back on that one.

MS CHEYNE: Okay, and Lake Ginninderra too?

Mr Bray: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you. Could I go to mental health in schools? One of the responses before was that each year schools can go to the directorate and there is a formula in terms of allocating the support that is needed. Also, throughout the year schools can get back in touch with the directorate and ask for some more support. At the start of the year are all psychologists fully allocated? If a school says, “I need someone not three days a week but four or five days a week,” where does that extra support come from? Is it taken from somewhere else or is there money in the budget to get someone temporarily? I expect other schools would not be willing to give up what they already have. Could you talk me through that?

Ms Evans: Absolutely. There are two parts to that answer. One is that if a school comes back to us—and we would have fully allocated for the year all of our staff—we can seek a short-term contract, and the school will contribute to that additional funding. We will fully put out our staff, and then they might say, “We actually want to purchase more,” and they can do that through their own staffing budget. We will

support that and we will employ that person for them, if that is their need. That involves less than one person across the year, usually. That is maybe one day in one school here and there. More regularly, we use our resource in the network student engagement teams and other members of our senior psychology team. We will allocate them to a particular school when something happens and the school feels they need additional support.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you; that is helpful. Mr Coe was asking before about what is in place to help teachers deal with parents. In particular, I am interested in what is in place to help teachers deal with parents of children who are suffering from moderate to severe mental health issues. I have seen a few news reports that state it can be significant at some levels. Again I appreciate that school is not the school that I went to a decade and a half ago, but I am keen to know, for parents, whether teachers are being trained in something that is not really a traditional teacher skill, in things like family relationships. How children are dealing with relationships at home and their own mental health can have a huge impact on parents, which I appreciate would then come back to the school. That is poorly put; I hope you understand what I mean.

Ms Howson: I think it is a very good question in terms of where the role of the school begins and ends. We understand that, if you are taking a student-centred approach, the next obvious engagement is with the family of the student. So we are conscious of a responsibility and an obligation to support families, particularly with students who are going through difficulties. In fact the school working in isolation from the family is often quite fruitless, anyway.

Jacinta's teams also have social workers attached to them, and they will get directly involved in that family support role. Furthermore, Tracy is our director of family and student support, which we mentioned earlier, where there needs to be a separation of the relationship between the school and the parents, and the parents want to go somewhere else to talk about what is happening in the school. Tracy will hear the cases of those families, and she can tell you more about what she does.

Mrs Stewart: The families and students team has been in place for several years now. Our key role is to support families and students very holistically, and we do that either directly with input from families who contact us seeking support or with support in schools to support families and students as well. Sometimes a school will contact us to provide them with support in terms of their relationship with a family and their support to a family.

We are just in the process of updating a range of resources that we can provide to schools, which includes some short, sharp information about where to go for extra help but also some more detailed information about some other resources they can access in dealing with families, even some simple tips on how to have respectful conversations when it is a difficult or sensitive situation, and just some things really to support them in their day-to-day interactions.

The other thing that we do when we become involved in supporting a family or supporting students is take a very holistic approach and we try to support families by letting them know what other resources are available apart from what Education can support them with and how they might make connections with other resources to

support them, depending on their circumstances. We will let them know about some of the other supports that are available from government and sometimes from non-government organisations as well. We do not take an active role in facilitating that support but we do certainly provide them with information about what is available.

MS CHEYNE: I appreciate there are no statistics on this but, qualitatively or anecdotally, is there an experience in the directorate in the past five or 10 years that that parent engagement with teachers and trying to get that support for mental health problems is increasing and potentially putting some more pressure on teachers to engage in a bit of a different way? In one sense schools are replacing child care and after-school care and that sort of thing. I also wonder if, later in life, the later teen years, the schools are also trying to provide that kind of mental health support, not through necessarily wanting to but because that just becomes the centre of a child's life.

Ms Berry: The issues that are arising and that you are referring to—the number of reports and, certainly, the awareness around some of the issues that you are raising—have increased. This is not unusual for the ACT. This is happening across the country. I talked about it earlier. We are the only state or territory that is actually putting a focus on addressing occupational violence in schools to ensure that our teachers have a safe work environment, taking into account that it is a right for an employee that they are entitled to go to work and get home safely after work, the same as the right for a child to have an education.

We have, over the past few years, done a lot of work on making sure that our schools are inclusive communities for all students, regardless of their abilities. We have to work very closely with the school communities to make sure that our teachers get all the best supports that they can around all the complexities that they deal with every day so that they know more about our children than even we do. We have very high expectations of our teachers but that goes beyond just learning. We need to support them in being able to do everything else that they do in our schools. Did you want to expand on that?

Ms Howson: I think our school communities are simply a reflection of what is going on in society more broadly, and those startling statistics about the incidence of mental health in any individual's life are manifesting in schools. I think the fact that we have safe and supportive schools means that students are engaging with teachers and other support staff and telling us about their issues. Consequently we are responding. Any teacher that you spoke to would tell you that they are seeing more evidence of issues around mental health, whether that be anxiety, depression or something more serious, and they are seeing it very early. It is manifesting in primary school, not just high school.

MS CHEYNE: Is there support—and I suspect there is, and if so I am keen to know what support—for teachers where a student has had a very significant mental health issue or has perhaps attempted to take their own life or perhaps gone further than that? What is available to teachers in that environment?

Ms Howson: Again, being very conscious of these issues being present in school

communities day in, day out, there is a focus on early intervention. As far as teaching staff are concerned, we have some induction training packages that provide some general advice on how to deal with these issues. Some schools take steps, as Jacinta was mentioning earlier, to engage on whole-of-school programs around good, positive mental health. That is also a focus on staff, in that they would take out as much from those programs as the students themselves.

When incidents happen we are very mindful of the need for a rapid and comprehensive response to help staff debrief in those situations, referring them to the supports that are available through our employee assistance program and really encouraging that that happen because these things can be quite distressing. We are very conscious of the need for teachers' own resilience to be cared for. Do you want to add anything, Jacinta?

Ms Evans: Just to say that yes, we galvanise our psychology resources around schools when things like this happen, make sure that we open additional times for students to drop in, for staff to drop in, and make sure that, if a school says that they see this as a more ongoing issue for them, resolving the way students are feeling or staff are feeling, we will absolutely schedule additional time.

We are really mindful, though, that there are a number of organisations in the community sector who link with families and link with staff and are really well skilled in this space. As much as possible, we assume that those supports are the most appropriate and we make sure that they are set up. We might invite somebody in to speak to the school or with the family or with the students, depending on what the need is.

MS CHEYNE: Finally, there have been a lot of news reports—and I appreciate this might go more towards the mental health portfolio, but I am interested in the school environment—about the Netflix series *13 reasons why*. Is there any evidence that that has put extra strain or pressure on the education system or on our schools over the past three months since it aired?

Ms Evans: There is no evidence to suggest that at all and I think that some teenagers are finding it to be an opportunity to talk about some significant issues for them. We did put some information out to our principals to give them support that they could share with their school community if they had concerns about that particular television series but I think the reality is that students are exposed to a whole lot of different inputs all the time. It is about making sure that we really keep the strong relationships with them and allow them to talk when they need to.

MR MILLIGAN: I would like to address a question based on NAPLAN data. Just today there was an article in the *Canberra Times* about NAPLAN data for Indigenous students. The gap is actually widening and not shortening here in the ACT. One example that was reported in the paper was the year 9 writing tests. The difference is almost 20 percentage points away from our non-Indigenous students. If you compare our year 9 Indigenous results with results in other major cities, we are looking at a 20 percentage point difference compared to a 10 percentage point difference in other major cities. What is the government doing to address these differences and actually reduce the gap?

Ms Berry: Thanks for the question. I think the first thing is that we are acknowledging that there is more work to do in that space. Having started the conversation around the future of education and how we talk with the community about resolving equity issues around young people, children and families who might not have the same start to school as other students is our acknowledgement of there being an issue that we need to address as a community, not just within our schools.

Dr Chris Sarra, who is the person who was interviewed during that report, is one of the community partners that I have established to help us through this future of education conversation, to keep us on path and also provide his expert advice. It is great to have somebody like him with the expert knowledge that he has across a number of different areas as part of this conversation that we are having here. I might ask Mr Borton to give you more information about some of the detail that you are after.

Mr Borton: Thanks for your question. We absolutely acknowledge that there is work to do in this space. There is no doubt about that. But there are many things that we are doing about it, particularly working with schools around ensuring that they have strong intervention processes to identify the needs of students. We are talking about all students. But what we also know is that the strong pedagogical practices and curriculum implementation that have impact for students will also impact our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

We have got two big, key pieces of work there which are aimed at building not just the leadership understanding of our principals and school leaders but also that of our classroom teachers. Our great teaching by design framework is absolutely focused on ensuring that every child experiences that quality education in every classroom in every school. Our implementation of the Australian curriculum is embedding that strong practice, which also includes that cross-curriculum perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. I know that raising the profile of that, and absolutely working on projects which build the cultural competency in our schools, is one way in which we can actually help support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

I think that it is important to note that we do have particularly small cohorts, and that that can impact on the percentages. That is not an excuse. That is not a reason not to do something about it. But very small cohorts of students can swing either way very quickly, and that could go some way to describing why it could be 20 per cent above this year and 20 per cent below next year. We are a little cautious around those types of figures to ensure that we acknowledge those smaller cohorts.

But we certainly think there is more work to do, and we are working with schools around that. Their response to interventions and early intervention is important. We are not waiting until year 9 to realise that we have got issues with kids and their learning. We are doing it very early. We are talking about kindergarten and even preschool, looking at what kids are bringing into those schools and ensuring they get what they need very early, particularly around those literacy and numeracy basic skills. Have we landed it where we want to yet? Absolutely not. But are we doing everything possible to improve that? Yes.

Ms Howson: If I can just add that the directorate has been, for the past three years, funding specific action research projects focusing on interventions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in particular and measuring the impact of their effectiveness. A number of those projects have gone directly to numeracy and literacy outcomes. Out of those projects, we are learning more about what works and what does not work.

Further to what Jason said, we have also been redesigning our model of investment of the needs-based allocation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and children and we have been working very closely with the community on what that design would look like. The strong advice back to us was to shift very much from a deficit discourse to one of a strength-based approach and make sure that every school is a safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people culturally but also a school that has high expectations of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can achieve, and to showcase that more consistently and regularly. It is amazing what some of our Aboriginal young people are achieving in our system.

MR MILLIGAN: Are any programs being offered to our teachers who are teaching the students relating to cultural awareness and what is required for our Indigenous community?

Ms Howson: Yes, is the straight answer. The detail of that—

Mr Borton: Yes, definitely. There is cultural competency training. That comes in a number of different forms. There are some online modules around that. But, more importantly, there is some face-to-face professional learning available. That is not just for our school leaders but also for our teachers and also within our directorate.

One of the things we are really working on is to make sure that we have a high level of cultural competence in our workforce, both within the directorate and within schools so that we have that strong level of understanding. That work in the SRA realm has given us lots of direction around the positive impacts of that. We have absolutely committed to that. That is happening.

MR MILLIGAN: It would be great if you could indicate where in these reports I can find this information, if it is listed. I cannot find the NAPLAN attendance, nor the attendance of our Indigenous students in any of the reports. Is that actually documented anywhere?

Ms Howson: I am certain that we put that in our annual report.

Mr Gotts: There are things in our annual report. In here, we do not split some things out. For example, attendance is not split out by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal attendances expected and not differentiated.

Ms Howson: But there is certainly information on that in the Auditor-General's report and we would be happy to provide it.

Mr Gotts: We can do that, yes.

MR COE: With regard to Mr Milligan's earlier question about the difference between Canberra and other metropolitan areas, you outlined some of the things you are doing. But why is there actually a difference? I appreciate what you are doing, but why is it that, as of right now, there is disparity? In Canberra, with all the resources of Canberra and the dollars per student that we spend here, we are still not getting something comparable to other metropolitan regions.

Ms Howson: So that is a very good question. It is a very good question. Why is it happening in our system? I think the minister's focus around our future of education discussion both on excellence and equity is important here. If we look at all of our data right across the board, we can see that there are children who are starting school not completely ready for learning. We can see that we are not getting consistent gain in student learning across the years from 3 to 5 to, say, 7 to 9.

We certainly are seeing growth happening but not consistently in every school at every year level. Of course, we have young people in our schools who come from different backgrounds that have all sorts of things going on in their lives and their capacity to take the most out of their opportunity for learning is being affected. They are the sort of three areas of focus for us.

MR COE: But are not those factors in other metropolitan areas as well? What is actually different here?

Ms Howson: I cannot answer your question authoritatively because there actually is not any research which is definitive which would give us the answer to your question, "What is happening and what is the difference between jurisdictions?" So we really can only hypothesise. I will ask Deb Efthymiades to answer that question. Certainly, I would emphasise that the ACT still remains in the top group of performing jurisdictions, if you use our standardised means test through NAPLAN as a measure. We remain in the top group of performers across—

MR COE: We are talking about Indigenous students here.

Ms Howson: Sorry, you are talking specifically?

MR COE: Yes.

Ms Howson: Excuse me. I was taking it a bit more broadly. You are talking specifically about Indigenous students. Do you want to say something about that?

Ms Efthymiades: It will not be as specific. Let me make a start and see if we can drill down further. I guess one of the hypotheses that we are working on, and we are working in partnership with ACARA to best understand this, is that Canberra as a city state has a different public housing design, for example, to every other metropolitan area in Australia. One of the hypotheses we have is that actually almost all of our schools are catering for the full range of diversity in our system. So with any class and any given school, a teacher is dealing with children and families who have significant trauma in their backgrounds and complicated life settings, and also very aspirational families and students.

That is a huge diversity for every teacher and every school, as opposed to other metropolitan areas where there are different configurations and different combinations where there may be a much greater intensity of high need or a much greater intensity of lower need.

Having taught in the New South Wales system and being a leader in the Northern Territory education system for 15 years, I can say that the ACT configuration is very different, which is how we have come to that hypothesis that we are now working to get underneath and understand. For every teacher and every school to cater for that diversity is a much greater challenge than just some schools in other metropolitan areas having to cater for—

MR COE: Of course, consultation is going to be important; but also scholarly research is going to be required as well. We can talk to the community at large about this sort of thing and that is important. But we also need to have genuine empirical evidence to guide how you are going to tackle this, because—

Ms Berry: That is why we have got those experts on it as our critical friends or community partners, Dr John Hattie and Dr Chris Sarra.

MR COE: I understand that, but I am talking about actual—

Ms Berry: They are actually clever people.

MR COE: I am not doubting that, but I am saying that a body of work actually seems to be required in this space. I am not talking about opinion, albeit expert opinion. I mean actual academic rigour put into a study to actually determine how you deal with these very issues.

Ms Howson: That is certainly why I mentioned our investment over the past three years and these action research projects. They actually have got the rigour around a formal evaluation of the things that we are doing and whether they are having the right impact on students. By and large, the things that have been researched have had a positive impact. We then just have to systematise them.

MR COE: Have any of them touched on this issue?

Ms Howson: Again, you are talking about the reasons for the difference between state and territory jurisdictions, and there is obviously—

MR COE: Just the relative underperformance of the system for Indigenous students.

Ms Howson: Yes, and we would have to draw on a national research project to be able to understand what those comparative differences are. What we can invest in in the ACT is what is working here and what do we know about our students.

So we have high levels of participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in our Koori preschool. They can start preschool at the age of three. We have a very positive migration of those students into our mainstream preschool system.

They are getting that opportunity to start life early. But the government is doing an early childhood strategy piece of work this year which will again look at that particular population cohort. There are things at that level that we need to look at. We are looking at our teaching and learning in our schools.

Mr Borton: If we look at the actual statistics, they show that from 3, 5, 7, 9 right across reading and numeracy, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at or above the national minimum standard is above in every one of those measures. Now, that is not taking into account that other desegregation of data talking about capitals, but that just gives a picture.

MR MILLIGAN: If we compare those results with like for like, then we are actually behind. So we are comparing those results with the whole of the Northern Territory, the whole of WA, the whole of South Australia. But if we compare those results with like for like, city with city, we are actually still behind, and we are actually lagging further and further.

Ms Berry: I think we made the point earlier that this is a focus of the development of our strategy around early childhood education, particularly around our early childhood schools and our Koori preschools, and ensuring that we engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in that conversation. We recognise that it is not always going to be a solution that a clever academic comes up with that is going to work with our community here in the ACT.

That is why the conversation with them is about coming up with a solution that works for those communities and for all those different families, a solution that is student-centred and that can support parents as well in that conversation—parents and carers or whoever is involved in those families—to make sure that we get the best possible outcomes. We acknowledge that there is work to do here and we are getting on with doing that work.

MS ORR: This is all coming from the NAPLAN scores and so forth. But you were also talking about all the other things you were doing. In that context, it seems like NAPLAN does something but it is not a perfect measure. I was wondering what limitations there may be on NAPLAN and how the other work you do sort of feeds into making it a holistic approach.

Mr Borton: It is a once-a-year snapshot in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It assesses basic literacy and numeracy skills. It does not give a full picture of the ongoing progress or the progress that happens within a general year of a classroom or an individual's learning. That is taken once a year and we measure it every two years. It gives us some holistic data, some trend data, some things to particularly look at that we can desegregate around different groups et cetera.

But what is absolutely more important from a school's perspective, having just come out of a school as a principal, is what happens every day in classrooms around the growth and learning of individual students. That is where the traction is. Focusing on that will hopefully have that positive impact on our NAPLAN data when it gets checked into. It is not a perfect science: every two years we just check in, and that is the purpose of it.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I wish to change tack a little. A number of local businesses have written to me with concern regarding the tender package for school cleaning contracts that has gone out this year. Can you give us, in the first instance, an update of where that procurement process is up to?

Ms Whitten: Thank you, Mr Wall. We commenced a procurement process at the beginning of last year, working through the ACT government procurement requirements in relation to the provision of cleaning services. That means going through the Procurement board, then talking with the industry, as we did, and then issuing a request for the tender earlier this year. That closed in about May, I think. We are now in a position where we have identified the preferred tenderers and we have executed contracts with four providers. That decision was made very recently.

THE CHAIR: With four providers?

Ms Whitten: Yes. We moved from 23 contractors down to four. That was a very considered decision in relation to maintaining quality of services at our schools and also in relation to how we pay a vulnerable workforce such as our cleaning workforce.

THE CHAIR: When was the determination on the tender made to award the contracts to the four companies? When was that decision taken—or announced is probably the better—

Ms Whitten: We communicated with those cleaning companies last week.

THE CHAIR: Last week.

Ms Whitten: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Specifically which day last week?

Ms Whitten: It was probably Friday.

Ms Howson: We will check that.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Why was the decision taken to break it down to, what my understanding is, eight packages of work, which it seems have now been shared amongst four companies—

Ms Whitten: Correct.

THE CHAIR: when I think you said before 28—

Ms Whitten: Twenty-three.

THE CHAIR: Twenty-three companies were doing it, but it was over 87 separate sites—

Ms Whitten: Correct.

THE CHAIR: and many of those businesses are small, a couple of employees, a lot of family units that have taken these as a source of extra income and trying to grow a small business. Why was the decision taken then to largely corporatise it and target big commercial contract companies as opposed to small operators?

Ms Howson: The design of the tender was really to address a number of the issues which we found, through the last contract period, were unsatisfactory. So the focus of the tender process was on, as Ms Whitten said, quality service delivery but also ethical provider practice. The criteria of the tender were designed as such. We also wanted the capacity, as a result of our experience in the last contract period, to improve our capacity around compliance of contract management. Those were the key decisions that influenced our design of the tender. As a consequence, the output from that particular process has left us with four suitable providers.

THE CHAIR: Who were the four companies that have been awarded the work?

Ms Whitten: The four companies are ACT Commercial Cleaning—I think that is the correct name—Menzies, both of whom are existing providers. Dimeo and Vivid are two new players.

THE CHAIR: What was the last one?

Ms Whitten: Vivid.

THE CHAIR: Vivid, with a “V”?

Ms Whitten: Yes.

THE CHAIR: ACT government is a signatory to the clean start agreement. Was it a requirement of the procurement process that the prospective companies were also signatories to that agreement?

Ms Whitten: As part of our request for tender, the government had already identified what the personal salary rate was for all the cleaners as well as the production rate. That was in the request for tender. We did not require companies to be part of a particular enterprise agreement arrangement.

THE CHAIR: Okay. It was brought to my attention, and I believe it has also been brought to the Education Directorate’s attention in a letter that was sent on 22 June, that there are significant concerns about unauthorised personnel entering ACT schools as union officials without right of entry permits being issued. There were also concerns raised about union officials saying to employees of current cleaning company contractors that only union members will be given preferential treatment to work on school contracts moving forward. People also raised with the department concern about union officials walking onto sites stating that they knew who had already won the contracts. This letter is dated, as I said, 22 June. They were stating that they were aware of who had won the contracts and that they were inviting staff of existing contractors to come and meet with the new contractors. Again, this is before the date that those companies were advised that they had won the contract. It also

states that those meetings were being held inside work hours, which would class it as industrial action; there was no legal process followed there. What actions or steps did the department take once you became aware of these issues on 22 June?

Ms Whitten: I think there might have been a letter, and there was also a note from United Voice. In relation to the letter, we received that letter via the cleaning company—I am assuming we are talking about the same letter—and we issued an apology that day that we had not notified that particular cleaning company that the union had contacted the directorate to say that they would be attending sites. So we have responded to those particular issues, I believe on that same day.

THE CHAIR: My understanding is that the right of entry permit that the contractor was not advised about was for entry on the Monday of that week, and the union turned up on the Tuesday of that week.

Ms Whitten: I would have to check my records.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Whitten: In relation to the comment that you have made about the cleaning union having issued a notice that they were inviting cleaners to a meeting, and that that would imply that they knew what the outcome of the procurement was, we took that up with the union, because that information was incorrect. The union were not aware of who the contractors were.

THE CHAIR: You spoke about the procurement process being designed to take into consideration that a number of people who work in the cleaning industry are vulnerable people, people who come from not necessarily an English speaking background who, unfortunately, can often be taken advantage of. Why is it, then, that there seems to be little retribution from the directorate for the unions taking advantage of those very same people for their own personal gain?

Ms Berry: I would suggest that that is probably not the case, but—

THE CHAIR: Certainly on the surface of it, minister, it does seem as though you have got unions entering schools at a time—

Ms Berry: What personal gain could a union have in trying to ensure that vulnerable workers are informed of their rights?

THE CHAIR: I do not need to draw the lines for you. Membership equals revenue, which equals influence at Labor conferences—

Ms Berry: Yes, of course, they are rolling in money.

THE CHAIR: which equals influence within your party and the union to which you belong. It is not a hard case to draw. You can understand why there are many in the community very frustrated and very concerned that this type of behaviour is going on in a closed-shop sort of situation and that there is not transparency in the procurement process, there is not transparency in the decisions that are being made, and many

businesses are rapidly losing confidence to do work with this government.

Ms Howson: As to the actual tender process, when it commenced we spent a number of days working with industry to ensure—I think that is correct. Was it days, Meredith, or in the workshop?

Ms Whitten: We had our industry workshop on 22 February, I believe, with most of the current cleaning providers and some potential cleaning providers. We talked with them about the principles by which we were going to be operating. We have also, as part of that request for tender process, consulted with the industry body, the building services cleaning contractors association, and with the Canberra Business Chamber as well as with the union. We provided similar information to each of those organisations, and we also asked them to enter into a confidentiality agreement so that people understood that we were in a particular process. So we have engaged with the relevant stakeholders at an industry level in order to progress our procurement.

In relation to our personal salary rates for cleaners, we have actually stated in our RFT document, which has been translated into our contracts with each of those individual organisations, the salary or the hourly rate for the cleaning staff, which is higher than the current award. That was quite clearly documented in those documents through the RFT phase as well as through the contracts which have just been executed.

Ms Howson: Can I add to that that in terms of transparency we have been following all of the prescribed requirements under our procurement policy and process. We have a probity adviser who is appointed to oversee the process. Furthermore, in terms of engaging with the employees of the industry, we have taken steps to ensure that the outcomes of this tender process can be understood by those employees. We have had that translated into Karen in the context of that being the largest proportion of non-English speaking background workers in that industry. We have engaged with the office of multicultural affairs to assist us in that communication process with those workers. So we have taken steps, I think, to ensure that individual workers do not have to rely on any particular organisation for information about what is happening.

THE CHAIR: Okay. I have a slightly related question but in a different space. Minister, could you inform the committee for what purposes unions would be giving presentations to students in ACT government schools?

Ms Brighton: As part of our transition and careers work, we do quite a bit of work with our students about readiness for work. The work that we do is about preparing students not only about their responsibilities but also about their rights. When our young people go in for either work experience or part-time jobs, we want to ensure that they are going as fully informed young workers. That could be as simple as saying, “If you are sick, you need to call your employer and let them know that you cannot get to work that day,” going right the way through to understanding their work health and safety rights and obligations when they go into the workplace. We have quite a comprehensive program available to students before they participate in work experience and then, in particular, if they are going out into the workforce. I am just looking to Mr Borton to see if he wants to add anything else.

Mr Borton: No, I do not think so.

THE CHAIR: Which unions are doing these presentations in schools? To what year levels and—

Ms Howson: I think we might need to take that on notice.

Ms Brighton: Yes; can I take that on notice. I should say that Unions ACT is a key resource for information, and our staff regularly access information from there as well as from the Fair Work Commission and a range of other places. If I can take that on notice, we will come back.

THE CHAIR: Okay. What conditions or restrictions are placed upon third parties such as a union entering a school to give a presentation about promoting their cause, their organisation and membership of it?

Ms Brighton: We quite regularly have a whole range of business enterprises, entrepreneurs and experts that come into schools to talk about any number of different issues. Usually the party at the school, be it the principal, the leadership team or the teacher who has particularly asked them to come in, gives them quite a briefing as to the scope of the work and makes it very clear that it is not particularly promoting a particular product or orientation; it is about the facts. When we bring in STEM professionals, science, technology, engineering and maths professionals, we usually work through the CSIRO system. Those professionals go through a deep induction about working with young people. It does happen at individual schools as they arrange those—

THE CHAIR: What about promotion of membership to organisations, Ms Brighton?

Ms Brighton: We would not expect that to be happening in schools.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Brighton: Our young people, when they are starting in the workplace and as they understand their rights, will make those individual decisions themselves.

THE CHAIR: It was brought to my attention by a concerned parent on 13 June that a union gave a presentation at Campbell High School to year 10 students, at which they spoke at great length about union membership and joining the union, and also handed out promotional material relating to joining the organisations. Is that or is that not acceptable in public schools?

Ms Brighton: I will have to take that on notice and have a look at what happened.

THE CHAIR: It is a simple question, minister, relating to that type of behaviour. Is it or is it not acceptable for that to be carried out in an ACT school? It is a threshold question of whether it should or should not be occurring.

Ms Howson: With the involvement in that type of program, the actual agenda is quite prescribed and the issues, whether they are union presenters or other presenters, are already authorised. We will need to check that specific example and see if that was

correct.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but I still go to the threshold question of handing out membership paraphernalia by any organisation, be it union or other. Is it acceptable?

Ms Berry: We can provide the program for you, and that might resolve some of the questions that you have. How about we do that? We will provide the program.

THE CHAIR: It still does not answer the threshold question of whether or not that type of behaviour is appropriate. I note also that this is a school where a former ACT education minister was caught handing out ACT Labor membership forms. It raises the question that there are two instances of—

Ms Berry: I do not know why that is relevant here.

THE CHAIR: It certainly is. It is the same school. It is the same type of activity of handing membership forms out to a third-party organisation unrelated to the school. Is that or is that not appropriate?

Ms Howson: I think Ms Brighton has already answered the question about our expectations. If there is a particular incident or complaint, we would be happy to look at it.

THE CHAIR: It does not answer the question. Is it or is it not acceptable?

MR PETTERSSON: I have a supplementary.

Ms Berry: Yes?

THE CHAIR: Okay, Mr Pettersson.

MR PETTERSSON: In terms of organisations coming in, do they charge money to provide those educational programs?

Ms Brighton: I am sorry, Mr Pettersson; I missed the first part of that.

MR PETTERSSON: In terms of organisations coming in to assist in teaching kids, do they ever charge fees to do that?

Ms Howson: That is a very broad question. In some instances they may. It may be that there is a fee associated with the provision of whatever service the school is using. It could be dancing, teaching or something like that where there might be a fee.

MR PETTERSSON: Following on from Mr Wall's line of questioning, when you are talking about workplace rights, do you know the detail of those sessions and whether or not people would be paid to be coming in? Or are they doing it through goodwill?

Ms Howson: Are you talking about in terms of other guest speakers? It would be variable.

Ms Brighton: It is very variable. I would have to take a specific example to look into to give you a correct answer.

MR PETTERSSON: Right; thank you.

MS CODY: A substantive. I note that Ms Brighton talked about STEM, which is an area of very keen interest to me. I was lucky enough to be taken through the Canberra College recently. The principal there was talking about the school and the highlight that they are focusing on STEM. I note that in this year's budget we are really keen to make sure that we are looking after our students and they are able to gain employment and education in the science, technology, engineering and maths, STEM, programs. Can you elaborate on that for me?

Mr Borton: I am sure Meg would like to start off.

Ms Brighton: We are doing a considerable amount of work to help our students become these terrific, capable, future-focused learners. The national STEM strategy is our key point of connectedness with that. We have adopted the national STEM strategy and we have done a lot of work in our own jurisdiction about what that starts to look like in schools, articulating both the importance of strengthening students' understanding of the content of maths, engineering, science and technology and, even more importantly, the skills they need to apply that content.

As an organisation, we are working quite closely with the business sector and the university sector. The government announced in its election platform a coding academy. As we have been working on what that might look like, we have been working with everyone from the ANU to the University of Canberra, the cyber security network, our own teachers and even our own students, so that we can provide advice back to government about what that could look like and what need we think that will service.

The other partnerships we have in place include the work we are doing with the CSIRO, STEM professionals in schools. The CSIRO have invested quite heavily in building up the capability of professionals in the sector so that they can come into schools and share their deep knowledge with students at all levels. Often we think about this as just high school, but this is also going into our primary sector.

It varies school by school, but we have schools that have set up robotics clubs and maker centres where they are using 3D printers to create all sorts of innovations in the classroom, going right the way through to some of our very advanced students who are participating in a deep enrichment program in the science field like what we have got operating at Melrose high. Mr Borton might want to add something further to that.

Mr Borton: Yes. Firstly, the issue around STEM is that it is very complex and broad. What we are really talking about is building those competencies within our students as learners, those general capabilities, and about next practice. We are talking about getting kids ready for jobs that are not even invented yet, that sort of notion of building skills. That STEM architecture is very busy in the ACT. There are lots of stakeholders and lots of players. We are really trying to make sure that every child in our schools has access to those resources and programs that are available. The

architecture we are trying to design is to make sure that it does not matter which school you go to, what connections you might have or whether your parent knows somebody at the CSIRO, for example, but that all parts of Canberra, all kids, have access. That is one of our major goals in this from an equitable position.

It is really exciting. We have this overarching aspiration for Canberra to be a smart city and for kids to be able to come through our school system with the skills that allow the Googles, the Microsofts and the new players in those realms to be looking at them potentially as big players. We are really excited about it.

MS CODY: It is a very exciting field. As I said, I know that Canberra College is active there. I met some amazing students who are partaking in their STEM programs there, blowing my mind. They have a real focus on ensuring that women in particular or young girls—

Mr Borton: Yes.

MS CODY: That it is on their radar as something they can do. I guess that is happening across the board.

Mr Borton: That is a very good point. The advice we have had from many players in this is that the word “STEM” can actually put off some of our girls from engaging in it because of those entrenched mental models around it being about maths. Sometimes we have that from girls: “That is not for me because it is about maths.” We have really got some mindset changes around that. I would definitely agree there are lots of good pockets of excellent practice, but we want to make sure that it does not matter which school you go to; you still have access to those amazing programs.

Ms Howson: Do you mind if I invite John Stenhouse from the BSSS, Board of Senior Secondary Studies, to make some comments on that?

MS CODY: Certainly.

Mr Stenhouse: I am pleased to hear that you visited Canberra College. I used to be principal there.

MS CODY: My son might have been there when you were there; I am not sure.

Mr Stenhouse: I do have some figures on students studying STEM-related subjects in senior secondary colleges from the graduating cohort of 2016. That was our most recent graduating cohort. If we look at the entire cohort, first of all, 92 per cent of students had a course in maths that they completed as part of their senior secondary certificate. Forty-five per cent completed a course in a science, and there is quite a range of sciences. We have the standard Australian curriculum sciences—physics, chemistry, biology, earth and environmental science—but also specialist courses such as flight robotics, mechatronics, integrated science, electronics and oceanography. As well as your standard four sciences, there are what you might call boutique sciences on offer, generally not in every school but maybe in one, two or three different schools.

Another aspect of STEM for the senior secondary certificate is the ANU extension program. The ANU extension program commenced in 2006 as the ANU secondary college. In recent times it has changed its name to the ANU extension program, with substantial federal funding as well as ACT funding to assist with that program. That program offers courses which students can count towards their senior secondary certificate. There are the standard physics, chemistry, conservation and biology courses, but also, more recently, courses in astrophysics and engineering. I believe we have more than 200 students enrolled in those sorts of courses at the ANU. So there is a lot happening in that area.

If I were to look at the percentage of students who are seeking to do further study at university in terms of how many of them are studying STEM courses, the percentage doing maths is 95 per cent. So 95 per cent of all students pursuing university study have completed a course in maths.

MS CODY: Wow.

Mr Stenhouse: Science is 58 per cent. You might ask why it is not 90-something per cent in science, but you have to remember that there is a large smorgasbord of courses on offer in the ACT, much larger than you will find in some other jurisdictions. So there is a lot of competition. There are courses in languages, commerce, health and education. I think we could safely say that STEM in the senior secondary sector—the figures I am giving are cross-sectoral by the way—is alive and well in the ACT.

MS CODY: That is fantastic. I left school 30 years ago, and it certainly has changed a lot since I was there.

Ms Howson: John, can you comment on gender?

Ms Brighton: The gender data.

Mr Stenhouse: The gender data?

MS CODY: As part of the question, I said that I note that Canberra College is doing a lot to support young women to continue to be interested in the STEM-type courses.

Mr Stenhouse: I do have some gender data on performance, but not actually on enrolments.

MS CODY: Okay.

Mr Stenhouse: I am aware that, in the more standard sciences, biology is certainly skewed in favour of females. Chemistry is about fifty-fifty, with slightly more females than males. Physics has more males than females. It is mixed and it is very subject dependent. In terms of performance, in mathematics last year there was a difference between males and females. Males do outperform females, but not by very much; the difference is very small. There is a reverse difference when we look at English, by the way, where females outperform males. It is not the sort of difference in performance that I would see as alarming; it is quite small.

MS CODY: Excellent.

THE CHAIR: It being past 12.30, the committee will suspend for lunch.

Hearing suspended from 12.36 to 2.01 pm.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the afternoon session. In this period we are scheduled to examine output class 1.4, disability education in public schools, and output class 2, non-government education for the ACT. I am guessing there is no additional opening statement, minister. Ms Le Couteur, with a substantive question.

MS LE COUTEUR: I asked questions of Minister Stephen-Smith about special needs transport and I want to follow up on that. This is transport of special needs kids to and from school. There were issues that the NDIS was not funding this in a useful and appropriate way and was expecting people to take individual taxis. Some parents wanted their kids to be treated like a normal school kid. I was just wondering: do you have any role in that?

Ms Berry: Ms Evans will be able to provide some information about that.

Ms Evans: Thanks for the question. In fact, we remain involved with special needs transport, although we have a collaborative partnership with Transport Canberra, who provide the actual infrastructure. We have remained involved with the eligibility of our students and whether they meet the Education Directorate's criteria for special needs transport, and we share that information with the NDIS. They are aware of students within our schools who are eligible for bus transport. Nothing has changed in our criteria since the introduction of the NDIS. The NDIS, however, does still fund people who are not eligible for special needs transport for education through other forms of transport. That could be the people who are saying that it is taxis or whatever it is that they are being offered.

MS LE COUTEUR: We have been told by some people that they have been offered taxis to go to school.

Ms Evans: Within the Education Directorate's eligibility we run bus routes as much as possible. As many children as possible would be on a bus route so that they can be with their friends as they travel. However, there are a number of students who cannot be on a bus. It could be that they are outside the regular bus routes. That would particularly be students in specialist schools, if they live in a suburb where there is nobody else in their area being picked up by bus. They could be in a taxi. The other time that happens is when we have trialled bus transport and that student's particular needs are not compatible with being on the bus. That would always be a conversation that we would have with the family about the needs of that student.

MS LE COUTEUR: Has the introduction of the NDIS changed the funding for this? Are they funding any of it or do you still fund it all?

Ms Evans: It remains an in-kind service. It is still being funded by the Education Directorate but the funds are transferred, if you like, to the NDIS as part of our contribution to the scheme.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can I continue and ask about the special assistance, the new school assistance? How many more are you going to be employing? The budget says there is \$14 million for more support for teachers, and that includes increased school assistance, as I understand it.

Ms Berry: That funding is continued funding for the 66 support staff.

MS LE COUTEUR: No new assistants?

Ms Howson: This is a particular program which we have been trialling. It provides for an equivalent of, I think, 66 FTE in additional support for teachers in schools. Are we talking about the same initiative?

MS LE COUTEUR: I thought that the minister just said it was not new.

Ms Howson: It is not new in that we have been trialling it.

MS LE COUTEUR: Sorry, I am confused.

Ms Berry: It had been funded previously and we have continued to fund it.

MS LE COUTEUR: Compared to last year there are no more actual people employed?

Ms Howson: No, but there is continuity. There is continuity about it now being in a recurrent base for the Education Directorate.

MS LE COUTEUR: Appreciably on the ground it looks the same as it did the year before?

Ms Howson: I am looking for some support. I think in the pilots it was absorbed by the education department. There is actually new funding for the continuation of the pilot now into our base. Does that make sense?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. According to this there is more funding going in.

Ms Howson: That is right. The pilot was funded from within existing resources and the government is now providing additional funding for that program.

MS LE COUTEUR: While I appreciate that it is being continued, there is not more than what there was the year before?

Ms Howson: Last year; that is correct.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have done the analysis by doing it, in effect, and there is the need for all those school assistants?

Ms Howson: I might clarify, though, that that program is particularly being directed at ensuring that teachers can spend more time either in the classroom with students or

preparing for their teaching. I am not sure what you are conceptualising but, if you are thinking about that being additional support for students with a disability, that is a different arrangement altogether.

MS LE COUTEUR: That was what I was thinking. I am not sure what the term is. I would have used “school assistant” or “teaching assistant who helps”.

Ms Howson: The learning assistants.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is what I thought you were implying. I was then going to ask you what, if any, qualifications were required for these people. It is obviously someone different than that.

Ms Howson: No. The disability funding that the minister spoke about at the opening of the hearing, the additional \$3 million, is actually to go towards the overall allocation to schools, to help them meet the needs of students with a disability. And within that allocation schools would structure their staffing arrangements, including learning support assistance, around the needs of those students. In effect, yes, we would expect to see further employment, additional employment, of staff in schools to support students with a disability. Does that make sense? Do you want me to—

MS LE COUTEUR: It does make sense. It is not the better schools for our kids on page 91?

Ms Evans: The supporting students with disabilities subset of that.

MS LE COUTEUR: On page 93, sorry. But there will or will not be more people employed as a result of this?

Ms Berry: There are likely to be more because the whole idea of that additional funding for schools to address the needs of children who have different abilities is that some of that will be in infrastructure upgrades or requirements to meet the needs of those individual students. But some of it might mean that there will be extra support services, which could mean additional staff but could also mean other supports from outside the school environment, different kinds of experts supporting those students.

MS LE COUTEUR: “School assistants” is probably the wrong phrase. It should be “teaching assistants”.

Ms Howson: They are learning assistants.

MS LE COUTEUR: Learning assistants.

Ms Howson: Or support assistants, yes. LSAs, if you would like an acronym.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do they have any specific qualifications?

Ms Howson: They are certainly trained for the roles that they play. Jacinta, can you talk to that in particular?

Ms Evans: Yes, certainly. Our LSAs do not have a mandatory requirement but many are either undertaking or have undertaken a range of qualifications. We are working with CIT to deliver a number of components of a certificate IV specifically for LSAs, but also what we find in that particular workforce is that many people come with prior qualifications. They might be people who have changed their career or come into that role a bit later or they are younger people who might be seeking to enter into the workforce through a cert IV in disability education support or education support more generally. We have got a number of allied health assistants as well who have got a cert IV in allied health assistance. There are a range of qualifications available, but the recruitment does not require that they have a particular level of qualification.

Ms Berry: On the LSAs, the learning support assistants, there was a great program partnership between Melba Copland high school and the Canberra Raiders under-20s. Some of those young men—I think there were about three or four—got employment with Melba Copland and did their study to get their qualification, that minimum qualification. They had all planned, if their football career did not work out, to continue their education and become teachers. But they were working with students in those schools that needed extra support. Having a learning support assistant who also was a Canberra Raider in the under-20s squad was a really great thing for those kids and for those young men to be part of too.

MS LE COUTEUR: Given the varied background of the LSAs, do we ever have ones where they are selected for the particular student or before the particular student even has a relationship of some sort with someone and they are specifically recruited?

Ms Evans: Not so much specifically recruited but certainly principals are very, very good at seeing how their students respond to particular people. There is obviously a bit more flexibility with the LSAs. They might work across the whole school. The principal can be aware of a particular LSA that has a great relationship with a particular student in a particular unit or class and they can allocate accordingly. There is that bit more flexibility, rather than the classroom teacher who has that group of students and has to work with that group.

MS CODY: You mentioned, minister, the Copland school and the Canberra Raiders. Obviously the learning support assistants operate across most schools. They do operate across most schools? Do we have any other partnerships or are we looking at forming other partnerships to build on the great success of this?

Ms Berry: Mostly the schools tend to reach out and do that work themselves and form those partnerships, but certainly the Raiders were keen to continue that work. I reckon that there would be other schools that would want to be part of a partnership like that one.

Ms Brighton: A range of schools have community partnerships, be they with sporting organisations who come in and do specific work as mentors to young people, all the way through to working with community service providers who also offer a broader wraparound service for members of the school community as well as students in the school. As the minister said, it is often driven by the individual circumstances of the particular school. The leadership teams work with those organisations that are best suited to their cohort of students.

MS CODY: The learning support assistants support the teachers in the classroom?

Ms Brighton: They actually support the students.

MS CODY: They support the students?

Ms Brighton: And the teacher by doing that.

MS CODY: Can you expand on exactly what their role is so that we get a full picture? I think we all got a little confused there. Ms Le Couteur did.

Ms Berry: Maybe what it looks like in a classroom.

MS CODY: That would be great, if possible. I know Ms Le Couteur started down a path and then I got a bit confused.

Ms Berry: Sure. What is the support and what are the learning support assistants doing?

MS LE COUTEUR: Page 91, not page 93 was what it should have been.

Ms Evans: In our schools, students' needs are determined through a student-centred appraisal of the needs of students with a disability and of students who have other challenges in their life. Principals will have a look at what the resource is that is available for those students and determine the best kind of support. Sometimes that might mean that students will be in a smaller group setting, a learning support unit. The learning support unit has a different ratio of adults to children. That could be a teacher and an LSA or some other configuration, depending on what the needs are in that classroom.

The vast majority of our students with disability are in the mainstream. About 1,900 students with disability, with support, are in the mainstream schools. The support for them would look like they are in their regular classroom with the teacher for most of the day, but they might have somebody extra with them for some part of the day. It might be when they are doing particular subjects; it might be when they are doing particular activities. It just depends. Depending on the child's need, they have more or less additional support from an adult in that classroom and the setting could be different. Is that clearer?

MS CODY: And that particular program is outlined in the supporting students with disability; is that correct?

Ms Evans: That is some of the funding that contributes to those supports, yes.

MS CODY: Going back to Ms Le Couteur's original question about the \$14 million, can you expand on what that program is, if that is possible? That is more support for teachers. It is \$14 million across that. I just want to understand it fully, if that is okay.

Ms Berry: We will get it to you. That goes to support for teachers so that teachers

have time to plan the classes, do individual personal development, do some mentoring or mentor other people and do other things as well. It just gives them time away to deliver the best outcomes for the students in the classroom when they are actually teaching.

Ms Brighton: This initiative underpins our core focus on enabling teachers to perform their core role and that is doing what they are trained to do, which is teaching. This has enabled us to release teachers from a number of administrative tasks that historically they have carried, to enable them to shift their focus back to that core role of teaching. Different schools have used these resources differently, but at the heart of it it is about taking away some of the administrative functions, putting in additional supports, changing the shape of how some teachers have been doing their roles.

The feedback from the initiative thus far has been extraordinary. Teachers with the additional supports have found a lot more time in the day and schools have been able to invest much more heavily in building that expert teaching team which is so essential to student learning. This \$14 million initiative over the next four years will allow us to further and deeply embed the work that we have already done but also scale up some of those initiatives that have been really successful in individual schools across the system and share that learning.

THE CHAIR: I have one quick question on exactly that. There is an offset on that commitment of \$1.928 million for the first year. Where has that offset come from?

Ms Brighton: That offset reflects the funding that was provided in the previous budget that has already flowed into this in the latter six months of this calendar year.

MS ORR: With respect to supporting students with disabilities, you have run through a few things—LSAs, transportation. What other things, apart from that, are you putting in to support students with disabilities in our public schools?

Ms Evans: Every student in the school is unique and students with disability are just as unique, so we take an approach of thinking about what the needs are through that student-centred appraisal of need. The conversations we have with families about the way that their young person or child responds best to education will be a part of that. Every student with disability in our schools has an individual learning program. That program will set out the specific needs for that term, semester or period of it that is being focused on. With that individual learning plan, or ILP, in place, that allows us to determine what kinds of supports are needed.

That is the basic way in which we determine the needs. The additional supports that are then available beyond what I said, which is that human resource of the additional support through a learning support assistant or a different setting—a smaller group setting, for instance—would be things like our allied health professionals, who are part of our network student engagement teams, our school counsellors or our school psychologists. Those additional supports come through assessments when they are needed, program development that is specific for those students, which could be language supports. It could be working with a classroom teacher to differentiate the way that the curriculum materials are available to all the students. They might want to make some changes so that it is much more accessible for that student with their

particular disability.

In addition to that, we partner with the non-government sector and with other government directorates on providing supports for students with disability and with other sorts of complex needs. It just depends on the needs of the student. We will go out, we will find what we need to do and we will work with that family and that school around those needs.

MS ORR: I cannot remember who said it, but there was mention of \$3 million in this budget for additional support for students. Is it going to the school so that you can respond to individual needs? Does that provide flexibility?

Ms Howson: Yes. It is a per student allocation, so it is reflecting the increased number of students with disabilities in our schools. That money is provided to the schools with those students.

MS ORR: And it then depends on the plans and what is needed for the student?

Ms Howson: Yes. That is right.

MS ORR: The schools for all report touched on part of this. I would like an update on how the implementation of the recommendations is going, specifically with regard to disability and supporting students with disability.

Ms Howson: This is a very good story for us, so thank you for the question. We have been making significant inroads into all of the domains of the schools for all program, whether that is better skilled and qualified staff to work with students with a disability, augmenting our allied health professional network of staff to support schools in particular, the general cultural change that is happening around inclusion, supporting broad-based school inclusion and change management agendas.

We have also invested heavily in our school infrastructure to ensure that the needs of different students can be met. In our new school design we are taking advantage of best practice and building that into our school design. So on a number of fronts we are making some excellent inroads to ensure that all children are able to enjoy the benefits and opportunities of the ACT public education system. Further to that, Ms Evans mentioned this morning that we are working very collaboratively across all sectors and sharing our expertise and innovation. Again it is genuinely an outcome for all children in the ACT. In terms of recommendations, Jacinta, do you want to talk about where we are up to?

Ms Evans: Absolutely. The public education system had 49 of the 50 recommendations that we agreed to or agreed to in principle. We have now finalised 36 of those. It has been a rigorous process around schools for all. We had an oversight group who really challenged us on what it meant to finalise any recommendations, so it certainly was not a tick-off sort of approach. We were very fortunate with the level of expertise that that group brought. They encouraged us to look at the way that we finalised each recommendation and to actually put forward what the future of that recommendation would look like and what further work could be done on the back of that. So we have done that for all 36 of the recommendations

that we have completed.

The remaining recommendations are much more complex and have other interdependencies. They might be related to, for instance, the student resource allocation piece of work that the directorate is undertaking. It is not that nothing has happened with those recommendations; quite a significant amount has happened, but we do not feel ready yet to close them.

While initially we were really focused on the fact that we had 50 recommendations and we needed to complete them, as the work has gone on, because of the depth of the report there has been an understanding that it was really about system and culture change, not just about ticking off 50 things. As we have worked our way through that, with schools for all, the work we put into professional learning for our teachers in increasing their skills and qualifications has become increasingly apparent. We are working towards a broad understanding of what inclusion means in our schools, working for our families to have better ways to interact with us. We have developed an intranet site which captures all our wellbeing and inclusion information and we are making that into an internet site so that families have the same access to that sort of information. So we have learned a lot through the report, and I think time is making the value of the recommendations more apparent.

MS ORR: I was going to ask a little bit more about the cultural change that you are seeing. What are some of the benefits that are flowing on to the kids?

Ms Evans: It is probably only about 18 months since we received the report, and cultural change does take a long time. We recently had the opportunity to meet with our deputy principals. The directors of school improvement and I met with the deputy principals and spent half a day talking about inclusion—what it looks like for them—and looking at tools that are available for them to increase their leadership in inclusive practice. It was really well received. All of those little things are building incrementally on the work that we have done. We are doing an evaluation of the program, and that will give us the opportunity to better understand how that cultural change is taking place.

MS ORR: When are you looking at doing the evaluation, or is it still contingent on the other recommendations?

Ms Evans: We have commenced developing the baseline. With the evaluation, some things are quite quick. You can check certain things like numbers, data, but with cultural change I think it will stretch over a number of years. But we will be regularly reporting to the minister on that work.

Ms Berry: If the committee is interested, I have copies of the schools for all program report, which talks about some of the things that you were asking questions about. It has some comments from people about their feelings—how they feel things are going in a school. There are some really great statements from all the school sectors, including the independents, Catholics and our own. I will provide copies of that for the committee.

MR COE: I note that the Woden School has the safe schools program. What

decision-making process has the directorate gone through in adapting the curriculum to be appropriate for that complex learning environment?

Ms Berry: That is a question that you asked my office, and I responded to you with a list of schools—

MR COE: It has gone to Mr Wall.

Ms Berry: That was a list of schools that accessed support from the original safe schools program that has been discontinued now because of a funding change by the federal government. The ACT has put funding in the budget to create a new safe schools program that will be different from the original safe schools program and that better suits the needs of individual schools or individuals, families and parents. I need to be clear, and for the committee to be clear, that when we talk about a safe schools program being operated in a school, it is not so much that a course was delivered but more that a student, a parent, a family member or a teacher had contacted safe schools to get support for a circumstance at a particular time.

There are also programs that are run by SHFPACT, who provide other programs on sexual health and wellbeing, which is different from safe schools. Sometimes there is a bit of confusion between those two. Those programs are also run on a permission basis, so that you opt out if you do not want your kids to attend or you do not want to attend. The safe schools program was more about access for support for individuals or for teachers to support an individual in their school that might be going through a change, deciding on what their gender is or working out how they identify.

Ms Evans: It is important to note that the Australian curriculum provides for schools to talk with children and young people about their developing identity in general. That is not safe schools; that is the Australian curriculum. The Woden School and any other school would be working with their students on sexuality, on relationships and those sorts of things, and it is incredibly important for young people with disability to be exposed to the kind of information that all other children are, because they are growing and developing as well. The basis of any conversation with our young people would be the curriculum material, which is the Australian curriculum, and it is appropriate for the age and stage of that child. Anything that the school wants to engage with in terms of safe schools would be based on an individual circumstance, as the minister said.

MR COE: I certainly appreciate the need for appropriate sexual education and anti-bullying programs. I am interested in how the safe schools elements that have been called upon for the Woden School have been adapted to what is a complex learning environment. What involvement does the directorate have in the formulation of that part of the curriculum?

Ms Evans: Our principals will make a decision on what the need is in their school. As I said, they will be guided by what they can provide their students through the curriculum. If there was an additional need, it would be for a specific circumstance. So it would not necessarily mean that materials about safe schools were gathered and given to the whole school. It would be in a specific circumstance that Black Mountain School, Woden School or any other school would engage with that program.

MR COE: Minister, do you or any of your officials know what the details are regarding this aspect of the safe schools program at the Woden School?

Ms Howson: We would have to take that on notice, Mr Coe. Coming back to what Ms Evans has said, with respect to the way in which the safe schools program is now constructed, they would primarily be advising the teaching staff in the school, who would be following the curriculum and, given that they are teachers in the Woden School, they would already be competent in being able to interpret the resources and advice to make it appropriate for their students. In terms of the actual specifics, we would have to get back to you on that.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ultimately, it is up to the individual teacher or the principal of the school to determine which resources of the safe schools package are utilised or delivered in a classroom?

Ms Howson: The structure of the program is that it is advisory, so it would advise teachers or senior staff in that school on how to approach a particular issue and on what resources might be available to them to be able to address the concerns.

THE CHAIR: Until the commonwealth funding changes, the resources that were prepared by the safe schools coalition and provided through Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT were essentially made available to schools, and they could then essentially cherry-pick which elements of the program they chose to use; is that correct?

Ms Howson: We have been restructuring that program, and the new approach with—

THE CHAIR: Before you go on, Ms Howson, is that how it was previously? Can we address what happened previously, and then—

Ms Evans: There were a range of resources on the web, as you would be aware, Mr Wall. Obviously, we would not know at any given stage who was accessing materials that were available through the Australian government's safe schools coalition website.

MR COE: But how would you know, then, that there are 26 schools that—

Ms Evans: They would be the 26 schools who nominated to be part of the safe schools coalition. However, what level of involvement they had or what engagement they had was on a school-by-school basis.

MR CHAIR: Moving forward, how is that structure regarding which resources are provided to schools and how they are delivered changing under the new model?

Ms Evans: We are expecting in semester 2 that we will be able to move to the new model of safe and inclusive schools materials that will be available. The emphasis will remain on advice and support for schools where they nominate or they ask for that

level of support. It is not a program in the sense that it is a package of materials that every school will have. It is about schools identifying the needs based on the needs of their students and their community.

THE CHAIR: Okay. How does the newly funded and developed program that the government has funded through Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT differ from the previous resources?

Ms Evans: I have not seen the program resources. We have not seen them to clear them or know what is in them, so I cannot respond to exactly how it is different.

THE CHAIR: When is that expected to be—

Ms Evans: In semester 2 of this year.

THE CHAIR: So it will be done through the second semester at some point?

Ms Evans: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned that the delivery of these course materials was on an opt-out basis for students and their parents?

Ms Berry: I said, for the SHFPACT programs, I was at a college that provided a program for young men at that school, and young men could opt out if they did not want to or their families could opt them out if they did not want their children to participate in the program. As far as I was aware, nobody had opted out of that program.

THE CHAIR: If the opt-out option exists, what information is going home to parents to inform them of these types of classes?

Ms Berry: It is a permission note.

THE CHAIR: If it is a permission note, it is typically an opt-in, where the parent has to sign the slip.

Ms Berry: I think it depends on the actual program that is being operated in a school. For example, in primary school there is a program on puberty that is delivered to year 6 students.

Ms Evans: It is not the safe schools material.

Ms Berry: No, not the safe schools material.

Ms Evans: It is part of the Australian curriculum.

Ms Berry: It is part of the Australian curriculum. You get a permission note sent home, well before year 6 begins, to inform parents and communities that there is this program about to be delivered and to ask whether they want their child to attend or not to attend that program.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Berry: I know that, because I have got that letter.

THE CHAIR: Going forward, then, with not just the delivery of sexual health and sexual education programs but also the reincarnation of the safe schools program that is being rolled out from the second semester, will it be an opt-in or an opt-out?

Ms Evans: There is a critical understanding that this is not a program that will be rolled out. If a school contacts us about the program, they might be asking about a particular aspect related to one child within their school and no opt-in or opt-out is necessary. The teacher is asking for that advice and support, some materials perhaps. Unless we understand that, we will get stuck on this “Do they opt in or out?” It is actually advice and support.

THE CHAIR: I can understand that there is no need for that type of permission structure if it is a teacher or principal accessing a resource to help address the needs of one individual student. But when there is content being delivered in either a class-wide or a year group wide fashion, what occurs at that point? If there is a decision taken at the school level that further education on gender issues needs to be explained and taught in the classrooms, at what point may the parent become aware that that is occurring in the classroom?

Ms Evans: Across the school curriculum there are a number of issues that would come up. Through our high school years, you would be looking at there being conversations about that, perhaps in an ethics class. The teacher might want some advice on that, but it is unlikely that they would be asking permission to have those conversations. But the bottom line is that this is not a program that is going to be rolled out so that a permission note goes home to say, “We are presenting that material next week on a Wednesday.”

Ms Berry: In fact, the name is going to change as well, to make it clearer for the ACT community. So that it meets the needs of ACT schools in the ACT community, that it will not be defined as a program, because that implies that you are delivering a class or a program on something. This is a support service, I suppose, more than anything, for teachers and school principals, and parents even, to get in touch, to get advice on how they can support their student but also other students in the school, to ensure that that school is an inclusive environment no matter how you identify or what your sexual identity is. That is the purpose of this new support service, which will have a new name and which will be launched in the second semester of next term.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MR COE: On that point, you said that it is a resource that will be called upon on demand, in effect. But if it is going to be in part called upon to inform other students about what respect is, how do you choose which students are going to receive that support and how do you interact with the parents in that situation?

Ms Howson: I think it is really difficult to answer that question without thinking

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about each of the scenarios that might be available to us, that might present. Essentially, linking it to the work that SHFPACT are doing for us, again, the emphasis is on providing an advisory service to schools. At the end of the day, the responsibility still remains with the school education staff about what is delivered and how it is delivered to students. As the minister has pointed out, where there are sensitivities around materials and topics that are then engaged in, just as we do under the Australian curriculum there would be an appropriate engagement with parents. That would be the expectation.

MR COE: I think that is paramount.

Ms Howson: Yes. If you would like to talk about the curriculum side and how the Australian curriculum supports the engagement on these subjects, I could ask Mr Borton to come up and elaborate on that.

MR COE: In the interests of time, I think perhaps I will leave it there.

Ms Howson: All right; thank you.

MS CODY: I want to go to the new support program.

Ms Berry: I do not know what it is called yet. I was just trying to clear up and clarify that it is not a course that is being developed; it is a support.

MS CODY: That is okay. The new support program will be offered in high school?

Ms Berry: Second semester.

MS CODY: No, in high school?

Ms Evans: The resources are available to any educationalist, any parent, any student who would like to access them, across all our schools, Catholic, independent and public. It is a resource for the territory, and people will engage with that as they see fit.

MS CODY: Fantastic.

THE CHAIR: I have one further question. There were comments in the election campaign and also particularly from the Chief Minister on election night about all schools in the ACT being safe schools. The interpretation of that comment was broader than just ACT government schools. Currently, my understanding is that, through the school registration process, there is a need for schools in the territory to demonstrate that they have some form of program or resource available for gender identity issues. Is there thought to reforming or changing that from the school registration process to mandate the SHFPACT program?

Ms Berry: No.

THE CHAIR: No?

Ms Berry: I think, if I can clarify, that the Chief Minister's comments probably went

to the fact that under the former program you signed up to be a member of safe schools. It was voluntary; you signed up. The school joined up to be a member of the safe schools coalition. In this case, this safe schools support service is available to all schools. You do not need to sign up and be a member or put your name on a page to say that you are a member. It is available to all schools.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MR PETTERSSON: I was wondering if you could expand on the detail of what educational opportunities and services are provided to students with autism spectrum disorder.

Ms Berry: I will get Ms Evans to give you a bit more detail on that. The challenge in schools is identifying the different kinds of needs, the different ways that children learn. They might not necessarily fall under the formal definition of a disability, but it is about identifying that they learn differently and will need additional supports to help them.

Autism has lots of different levels to it as well, so it is about understanding that. That is the work that we want to look at through the future of education conversation: how kids learn differently. It could be that there is an identified disability, one that is not clear, but also there could be something that has happened in a child's life that means that they are not learning in the same way that other kids are. There might be some trauma that they have experienced in their life. They might have English as a second language. They might be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children that need additional support.

Ms Evans: There are a range of supports for students with autism. Of course, autism is a spectrum disorder, so there is very varied presentation for these students. Some are very capable and very comfortable in a mainstream class, with limited supports. That goes right through to our students who may have an intellectual disability along with that diagnosis of autism and therefore need really significant amounts of support. Again, I come back to that individual approach to what that student's need is. That can be ascertained through the student-centred appraisal of need.

The sorts of supports that we have available are environmental supports: smaller group sizes and sensory spaces in schools. We have invested a significant amount of money in making sure that schools with students who need sensory supports have them. There are a whole range of sensory spaces in our schools. Most recently I was out at Evatt looking at their new sensory space, a beautiful, soft-fall area with water play, sand play and a whole range of things that students will be able to interact with and learning spaces tied into that where students can sit and do outdoor learning. We have those kinds of spaces so that a student can move outside their classroom, get some fresh air and have a bit of a change of space, if that is what they need, going right through to the really structured sorts of supports that might be needed for a student with autism.

The most important thing about it is that every student is considered as an individual. We do not think about the diagnosis as much as we think about the needs, the function, the behaviours they have, and how we can support that student best.

MR PETTERSSON: There has been a lot of media commentary on this issue in recent times. I want to get across how the ACT handles the situation. If there is a family that wants their child to be included in a mainstream class, is that accommodated?

Ms Evans: Yes, absolutely. Parents enrol their student, their child, in a school setting that they feel is appropriate, and then the supports are put in around that, rather than having us pick a place and the family fitting in with it.

MR PETTERSSON: Further to that, if you are in one of those learning support units and you want to transition to a larger classroom, what is that process like for students? Is it done at the end of the year? Is that done halfway through the term?

Ms Evans: It is absolutely variable and based on the individual student. Sometimes a parent might feel more comfortable with their young person being in an autism-specific unit, for instance. They might get two weeks into the term and it becomes really clear that that young person's passion is STEM and that in fact they work really well joining the computer class with the other mainstream students. That can happen from any time, and it regularly does. A lot of our students in units are sharing with their mainstream peers a whole range of different classes. They might be joining for sport or they might be joining for a particular subject matter. They could be half the day in mainstream, and then in the afternoon, when they need that downtime, return to their unit. It is absolutely variable, based on that student's capabilities and also the conversations that our teachers and principals have all the time with the family about what they think might be best.

MR PETTERSSON: That is awesome. Thank you.

MS CODY: I am the mother of a child with autism spectrum disorder who went through our wonderful public schools. I want to double-check—it has been a long time; he is 20 now—that that support is offered right across the spectrum, from preschool right through to secondary level or college—whatever we call it.

Ms Evans: Absolutely; the support is absolutely in place. The preschool years are a little bit different, because we do not tend to have the units the way we do in the school setting. But the lovely thing about the preschool years is that there is so much play-based learning and so much flexibility that usually we can support in that situation. But right across the rest of the schools there are units, additional one-to-one supports, whatever is required in that sense, yes.

Ms Berry: That goes back to the work that schools do in developing those individual learning plans for students that might be on the autism spectrum, including children with all those other kinds of different abilities and needs as well—children with dyslexia, children that have had some trauma in their past that has affected the way they learn. The teachers and the schools work with those individuals and their families on a plan that best suits them and that can be flexible, depending on how comfortable the students and their families are with that.

MS ORR: I was flicking through the inclusion that you kindly tabled and handed out.

PROOF

I have obviously not had time to read it in depth. Can you run me through KidsMatter and MindMatters? It seems quite interesting. I went out to Gold Creek School and I actually saw a class with this in it.

Ms Evans: Thank you for the question. It is a really exciting thing for the ACT to have the support of an evidence-based framework, if you like, for mental health wellbeing in young people. I think I mentioned earlier that we have the highest uptake in the ACT of KidsMatter and MindMatters programs in our schools. A lot of schools use that framework to understand mental health, to think about how we structure our classes and what kind of culture we need in our schools to avoid ongoing mental health issues in children and young people. The uptake for every school is different. The framework is there. The materials are fantastic. It is possible to get online and to click through a range of different things—everything from data and statistics, individual fact sheets on anxiety, for instance, and what can be done about that, and little video clips.

Schools use all those materials in different ways to assist their classes to know more about mental health wellbeing and how they can look after themselves. Some of our schools also engage with things like mindfulness as part of that, because evidence tells us that young, developing brains do really well if we can help them to settle themselves, to focus and to spend a little time on mindfulness every day. There are a number of programs. I think a couple of them that are probably within the report talk about the unique way that schools are using those resources.

MS ORR: The program is essentially about the resources that are available to them and how they can craft it. In the example I saw at Gold Creek School they were doing a meditation class. I must say that the kids looked very peaceful when we poked our heads in, so it seemed to be working. Michael, you were there.

MR PETTERSSON: They were very peaceful. We were not.

MS ORR: Would that be a decision of the school that that is the appropriate thing for them? Am I right in my understanding of that?

Ms Evans: Yes. All of our schools have social-emotional learning programs in place to support students to better regulate their emotions, to interact with their peers, that sort of thing. Then frameworks like KidsMatter and MindMatters support that as well. As I say, they use their resources as they do. Different schools have taken a different focus. It really depends on that school community. Certainly, I think that people are understanding the benefits of mindfulness, not just in schools but corporately and individually. For teachers as well as kids, I think it is lovely to have that moment in the day that is really peaceful.

MS ORR: Apart from doing a meditation class, are you able to run me through some of the other ways that the program is being implemented within the schools?

Ms Evans: Yes, for sure. There are a whole range of ways that schools might like to use it. It can be individual classes on particular aspects—for instance, how to make friends. I was in a class the other day where they were doing rock, paper, scissors. The teacher was teaching them about that. “What if we both want the same toy? How do

we work that out?” It is right down to having really specific classes on “How do I manage those tricky things when my friends do not want to play with me?” The buddy benches are another example within that social-emotional learning space.

MS ORR: What are buddy benches?

Ms Evans: Do you know about the buddy benches?

Ms Berry: Don’t you listen to Kristen and Rod?

MS ORR: Do I listen to what?

Ms Berry: Kristen and Rod—now Wilco—on 106, not that I am advertising their station.

MS ORR: I have to admit I do not.

Ms Evans: This morning was a lovely example. At Monash primary they launched their buddy bench. A buddy bench is a space in the playground where if you cannot find someone to play with, you want to change games or you are just feeling a bit lonely that day—maybe your best friend is not there—you can sit on the buddy bench. The agreed position in the school is that if you see someone on the buddy bench, no matter who it is, you will go and invite them to play. It is about teaching kids, “How do we include everybody? What can I do to make life nicer for everybody in the playground?” So the buddy benches have been a really well taken up opportunity.

MS ORR: We could try that in the Assembly.

Ms Berry: I think you can nominate, but I think you have to be a school, not a—

MS ORR: I might leave it, on that note.

MR PETTERSSON: How many schools have buddy benches?

Ms Evans: It is a lot, but it includes our Catholic and independent schools. I would have to go back and check.

Ms Berry: I was going to include Queanbeyan; they are in the region as well.

Ms Evans: Yes, but I can find out.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I have a few questions about the funding of non-government schools. How is the funding level determined between the ACT government and non-government schools? How is that calculated?

Ms Berry: I mentioned this at the start of my presentation to the committee today. I tried to provide a little bit of an understanding of where it is at currently, given the decisions made by the federal government last week. I will ask Ms Efthymiades to go

into a little more detail.

Ms Efthymiades: The current arrangements, and we know that those are set to change, are all under the national education reform agreement. The ACT government signed a heads of agreement and a bilateral agreement under that. It stipulates the historical level of funding per student, which is the starting point for every school, then the indexation that will be applied, and any additional funding that is there, if a school is below the standard, to help them get towards the standard. The ACT government's commitment is \$1 in \$3 and the commonwealth's is \$2 in \$3 for that extra catch-up funding. Based on all the parameters that were agreed by the ACT government, that is exactly how we pay the funding to non-government schools.

THE CHAIR: Okay. So is the \$1 in \$3 for the catch-up component only?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes; that is right.

THE CHAIR: In that agreement, was it based on a percentile of commonwealth funding? Is it based around the SRS? What was the calculation?

Ms Efthymiades: Both; there are two concepts. There is the funding share. Would you believe that it is a different funding share for every school pretty much in Australia, historically?

THE CHAIR: That has added to the complexity, I think.

Ms Efthymiades: Yes—that funding share and then a different standard for every school in Australia, depending on the relative need. The average ACT government funding share to our non-government schools is between 24 and 25 per cent of the total public funding. Then there is a resourcing standard that says whether that funding should be increasing or gradually decreasing. Both of those elements mean that every school has a different arrangement, effectively, but we just follow the rules, use the spreadsheet and make the payments.

THE CHAIR: What is the arrangement for the federal funding model, then, going forward, since the legislation passed the Senate?

Ms Efthymiades: It is rather complex to try to articulate here, I think, but in essence the declared intent is to minimise the extra deals that have been made in the current arrangements. There are a range of them across the country. There are some that are particular to the ACT. Our non-government sectors have had some specific extra arrangements. The declared intent of the Australian government is to eliminate those over the next 10 years and bring everyone into line as closely as possible with an equal percentage—

THE CHAIR: The window has shrunk from 10 now.

Ms Efthymiades: of their own standard. Yes; that is right.

THE CHAIR: Is there a need to renegotiate with non-government schools over the territory funding contribution or is the formula under the national partnership

agreement going to continue?

Ms Efthymiades: There will be a resetting after 2017; 2018 is an odd year, and I will explain that in a second, but—

THE CHAIR: Because of the transitional funding?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes. There are transitional arrangements for that one year and there are some transitional arrangements that extend for the first four years of the next agreement and then could go on for longer, but that will remain to be seen exactly.

THE CHAIR: How that is allocated is still being determined. That is my understanding.

Ms Efthymiades: The first four years are settled and the first year is settled. So there are three separate funding streams that generate some additional transition funds to ACT non-government schools for those periods. But the overall goal is that all non-government sectors in Australia will transition to a funding share split of 80 per cent from the commonwealth and 20 per cent from the state or territory government. That is the overall goal. Then there is the overall goal for government schools as well, which is the reverse of 80-20.

THE CHAIR: So in the 80-20 split, if it is 80 per cent funding from the commonwealth, 20 from the territory, that is just for the student resource standard?

Ms Efthymiades: That is in the new model, yes.

THE CHAIR: Adjusted for the—

Ms Efthymiades: That is right.

THE CHAIR: SES?

Ms Efthymiades: That is the goal; that is right.

THE CHAIR: The specific school?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes, which means that any school or system that has been receiving funds considerably above the standard is set to—

THE CHAIR: Which is a number in the ACT?

Ms Efthymiades: Yes.

THE CHAIR: A considerable number.

Ms Efthymiades: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I guess the function, then, of parental fees in the non-government sector is largely for capital works or anything over and above the SRS that the school

chooses to provide or—

Ms Efthymiades: And my understanding is that the schools are free to use those funds. As long as they are for educational purposes, the parameters are not limited. There are some special funds that non-government schools set up purely for capital purposes, but they can also use them for other teaching and learning purposes et cetera.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MS LE COUTEUR: An interesting question related to that is: is there any knowledge of how, within the non-government sectors, they allocate their resources? My understanding is that, particularly with the Catholics, it goes as a block grant and then it is allocated within the system. Do you have oversight, as the education authority, as to where the money actually goes?

Ms Efthymiades: There is annual reporting of any funding that goes through a schooling system. As to which schools it actually goes to, that is all available through the my school website on an annual basis. So there is an element of transparency there. As part of the new arrangements intended by the commonwealth, it appears that they are looking to have increased transparency. With the money that goes to an individual independent school, there is no debate; it goes straight there. For any school, though, that is part of a system—and all but three Catholic schools in the ACT are part of the Catholic system—those dollars all come into a collective and need to be distributed. Our understanding at the moment, although the detail will be in the regulation that is yet to be drafted, is that there will be a need for all systems, including non-government systems, to be transparent up front about how they will be distributing the public funds that they receive.

Ms Berry: And administered by state and territory governments.

Ms Efthymiades: Potentially.

Ms Berry: Potentially.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you mean that you and the state or territory government will administer the reporting? Is that what you meant?

Ms Efthymiades: We will not have a monitoring rule.

Ms Berry: From what we understand so far, what I said in my opening statement was that all of this funding conversation comes with some collateral, which includes costs to states and territories, particularly in the ACT. We think the federal government wants state and territory governments to not so much administer the funds but have an oversight role in how the funds are distributed through systems across to schools. That will cost us. I know that independent and Catholic schools are very keen to continue with their independence—being able to run their schools and systems in the way they and their communities see fit—and I am happy for that to continue.

The federal government, under these regulations, will be able to basically make governments do this work as part of this funding agreement. The other things

I alluded to were the universal access funding being cut from the ACT, the effect that that would have, and a number of other things that still have not been clearly articulated by the government. But under this new regulation they will basically be able to tell state and territory governments how to run their schools.

THE CHAIR: I have a follow-on. With the recalculation of the SES for independent schools in the ACT and the adjustment in funding, will that potentially result in a decrease in the territory contribution going to non-government schools?

Ms Efthymiades: That figure will impact on the overall SRS for a given school. They are doing it school by school now. So it will impact on the SRS, and then the funding share, ACT and commonwealth, to meet that SRS will be the 80-20 target.

THE CHAIR: Essentially, for every 80c that the commonwealth is giving, the territory is going to be giving 20c?

Ms Efthymiades: That is the goal. The interesting situation in which we find ourselves in the ACT is that the ACT government currently funds above the 20 per cent target and above the 80 per cent target. Every other state is heading on an upward trajectory. It is yet to be negotiated what the requirements are. It is called maintenance of effort by state and territory governments. It is yet to be negotiated what the requirements will be for the ACT, given that we are already above the standards, and how that will be navigated. That will probably involve a couple of months, if not more, of discussion.

THE CHAIR: While we are on funding, the school that is probably being the hardest hit with funding is the Canberra Islamic School, with its funding being terminated. I understand that that is under review. A number of the issues there relate to the school's affiliation with AFIC. What work has been done, particularly with the use of the building at Weston? I understand they are a sub-tenant of AFIC, who hold the head lease.

Ms Berry: There are a couple of things. The decision by the federal government is being appealed by the school.

THE CHAIR: Lobbying hard for that to be reviewed quickly.

Ms Berry: The ACT government continues to fund and license the school for operation. The school asset is a little bit more complicated.

Ms Howson: Largely, the issue in relation to the school asset is a matter for AFIC and the school to resolve, which is part of the issue for the commonwealth.

THE CHAIR: The question, though, is: knowing that the school's connections with AFIC are the issue, what support or work is being done in the background to try to resolve the property issue and its tenancy issue?

Ms Howson: It is not a matter for the government; it is a matter for AFIC and the school to resolve.

THE CHAIR: If AFIC was willing to essentially surrender the lease on that property, how quickly could the Canberra Islamic School board be appointed as the new lessees of that property?

Ms Howson: I cannot answer that question.

Mrs Stewart: That would be a matter for the ACT property group, who administer the lease.

THE CHAIR: What work is being done, more so with the teaching staff at that school, should it not reopen after the school holidays, to provide employment or employment pathways for the existing teaching staff there?

Ms Howson: We would, with the minister's approval, be very happy to support a transition arrangement for those teachers if we were able to accommodate them. We have not negotiated anything in particular with the Islamic school. At the moment the Islamic school is focused on regaining its support from the federal government.

THE CHAIR: What communications has the department had with the federal department or the minister's office to ensure that this is looked at in an expedient manner?

Ms Berry: I cannot lobby on behalf of the Islamic school, because as the minister I am the regulator. So that puts me in conflict.

Ms Howson: We have a very good relationship with the federal government in terms of sharing information so that we are in a position to be able to support the school community as quickly as possible, if necessary.

THE CHAIR: Has the federal department given an indication as to when its review of funding is likely to be completed?

Ms Howson: No, they are not prepared to give a specific date.

MR COE: On that point, minister, are you actually the regulator? You are not actually the decision-maker, are you?

Ms Berry: Sorry, apparently I am not.

MR COE: I would not have thought so.

Ms Berry: I am the—

MR COE: Not the regulator.

Ms Howson: Registrar.

Ms Berry: Sorry, I am the registrar. I register the schools. Whatever I am, being able to represent puts me in conflict—me personally. The directorate can and has. Thanks for clarifying that.

MS CODY: The provisional registration of home-educated students is completed within 10 school days of receipt of the application. How many home-educated students do we have in the ACT?

Mrs Stewart: Thank you for the question. It is interesting that our numbers of home-educated students are increasing over time. As of the beginning of May we had 286 ACT resident students registered for home education.

MS CODY: A lot higher than I had anticipated. Do they have to follow the same curriculum as if they attended schools?

Mrs Stewart: No, they do not. There are different requirements for home-educated students. The parents are required to ensure that they provide a suitable and high quality education for their child, but it does not specify exactly how that must be met. We do provide a role in monitoring parents to ensure that they are delivering a high quality education for their child.

MS CODY: Because we do not have things like an HSC in Canberra, how do home-educated students get an ATAR, for example? How does that work?

Mrs Stewart: Unfortunately, I do not know the answer to that question. They can participate. Before we go on to ATAR, they can also participate in other elements of the education program that the government offers. They can sit for a NAPLAN assessment, for example, so they can opt in to that. In relation to the ATAR—

Ms Howson: We could ask for that to be detailed by the board of secondary school studies. We can get you the detail of that information, but the students can obtain an ATAR through that program.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have to register within 10 days. After that, how much contact do you have with the parent and the child involved in home schooling?

Mrs Stewart: The role of the Education Directorate is to register the child; we do not have a role under the act in terms of ongoing monitoring or support of the home education process. There is a re-registration process, and at that time we would contact the family, review the program they have been offering and re-register the child.

MS LE COUTEUR: How often is that?

Mrs Stewart: Firstly, there is the initial registration, and we talk about making sure we have registered the child within 10 days. That gives them provisional registration, and then six months after that we fully register the child. My understanding is that it is two years after that that they are re-registered, but I will take that on notice.

MS LE COUTEUR: When you do the re-registration process, do you talk to the child as well as the parents?

Mrs Stewart: Generally the child is present at that meeting. It depends on the

particular circumstances of the family. For example, in some cases the child might be home educated because of illness or something like that, so, where it permits, generally a child would be present at that meeting.

MS LE COUTEUR: But you would not talk to the child individually?

Mrs Stewart: No, we would not.

MS LE COUTEUR: What reasons do parents give? You mentioned one of them—significant sickness of their child—but what other reasons are there?

Mrs Stewart: We are seeing a lot of applications coming through now that are identifying special needs for children, including ASD, ADHD and physical disabilities. Giftedness is one we are seeing quite a few come through for, as well as mental health issues. There are some parents who choose home education for philosophical reasons.

MS LE COUTEUR: At the other end, do you get many children who have been home educated for a period then coming back into your schools? Have you some idea of the numbers, and do they have any specific issues in terms of reintegration?

Mrs Stewart: We have a number that come back into the system throughout schooling. We have some at transition points, particularly into senior secondary, where they will come back into, say, a public school. I have also noticed that they will just come back in at various points for various reasons. It could be if they have special needs and there has been a change in those circumstances a public school setting might be more appropriate, based on the family's interests. I do not have data on how many students would complete their education as a home education student versus how many would come back in at some stage.

Ms Howson: What we would be confident about, however, is that any home-schooled student coming into one of our settings would be supported by the school to make that transition and they would be identified. In taking a student-centred approach, the school would pay attention to the support the child would need to make friendships and integrate into the school community.

MS LE COUTEUR: You re-register every two years. What is the rate of declining registration where, no doubt, the parents started off with good intentions but it just was not working out?

Mrs Stewart: I would have to take that question on notice.

MR PETTERSSON: Going back to the home visits, from my very brief research on this just now, I see home educators are required to keep records about the education they provide to each child. Who do they provide those records to? Is it the liaison unit coming to visit them?

Mrs Stewart: Can I clarify that the meetings are not necessarily home visits; in some cases they might come into our offices, for example. There is no requirement for us to undertake a home visit, so I make that clear. As your research shows, they are

required to provide a report every year and that report is submitted to us, as the registrar for home-educated students. We get an annual report.

MR PETTERSSON: What is that report like? What is it composed of? Is it examples of their work?

Mrs Stewart: It can be, yes. Often the parent will provide a lot of detail about the curriculum they have covered, the basis for the curriculum they have provided to the student, the type of assessment they have done, how they feel the student has progressed throughout the year, and also any issues they might have identified. It will be somewhat like a student report, but it will be in a free-hand type of format, with the parent capturing their experience of the education process over the year.

MR PETTERSSON: Do you do anything with that report? Do you read it and say, “Everything’s going fine here,” or “There’s a problem here”? Is it a two-way conversation?

Mrs Stewart: In general the requirement for us is to ensure that the report has been provided and that no significant issues are identified in the report.

MS CODY: You spoke a lot about the fact that there has to be a report on progress. I am assuming it is generally parents that do the home educating. Do they have to have any formal qualifications in regard to this stuff?

Mrs Stewart: No.

MS LE COUTEUR: I will ask some more about reporting. I previously asked about financial reporting, but are there other areas where non-government schools have different reporting requirements than government schools? I think there have been some issues around critical incidents and suspensions? What are the things the non-government schools do not have to report but the government schools would report?

Ms Howson: In relation to suspensions and critical incidents, I will ask Jacinta to answer that. As part of the schools for all response and in terms of their response to those recommendations we have asked all schools to make information available. The Catholic Education Office have agreed. That is correct, isn’t it, Jacinta?

Ms Evans: The Catholic Education Office were very willing to share their information, but the agreement we made would require legislative change to require that they provide the information. Rather than that, we are making an informal agreement about the information they will provide about suspensions and more specific information. That has been a decision made by the Catholic education system, rather than us.

MS LE COUTEUR: There are other non-government schools in the ACT apart from the Catholics. Do you share information with them?

Ms Evans: The independent schools share information with the minister, as they are required to. However, they are obviously a consortium of individual schools and so

the level of information they provide is their own purview, rather than us requiring it.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you know about suspensions and critical incidents for the Catholic but for the other schools you may or may not have that information?

Ms Evans: We know their high level data, but we do not know the individual aspects of their suspensions and critical incidents.

MS LE COUTEUR: By “high level”, do you mean this is on a systematic basis? For the Catholic schools you will get five per year or something but you will have no idea what school? Is that what you are saying?

Ms Howson: That is correct.

MS LE COUTEUR: And the independent schools basically tell you whatever they feel like telling you, but you have no real oversight.

Ms Evans: Whatever information they are able to provide to the minister, but we do not regulate that.

Ms Howson: We cannot compel them.

Ms Evans: We are not responsible for that.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you cannot compel them and they do not volunteer?

Ms Evans: Yes.

MR COE: I would like to ask about land for non-government schools. I think there was an election commitment about land in Molonglo. Could you please give an update on where that is at?

Ms Berry: During the election we were having a conversation with the Catholic education school principals. I remember having a conversation with them about the issues that the Catholic Education Office had with the way the government was making land available for independent and non-government schools to access. We went through a process. That process I do not think has been finalised yet.

Mr Gotts: Not quite.

Ms Berry: Not quite; so we are nearly there. But to provide a better understanding and a bit more clarity around the provision of land for non-government schools, Robert, do you want to talk about the one at Molonglo?

Mr Gotts: Yes, I can do that. The main responsibility for this comes under another portfolio. The Education portfolio is participating heavily in it, given the nature of the subject. Essentially the model is for an expression of interest followed by a request for tender process for land for non-government schools. The process is getting closer to being ready to start, as in the expression of interest documents are in the process of being prepared now. That will be relatively soon. The piece of land in question is in

north Wright in Molonglo. That is the first one that will be offered for a non-government school. Once the lessons from that process have been learned, then it will be applied for other sites for non-government schools around the ACT, most probably in Ginninderry next.

MR COE: And what about other sites in established areas, especially if it was repurposing of a disused facility? Does the Education Directorate have a role in the process or is that purely a leasing matter?

Mr Gotts: The Education Directorate does have a role. The minister for education has responsibilities under the Education Act to consider the impact of the establishment of a non-government school on other schools in the area. We have a role through that mechanism. The leasing side would be not part of our role but should a site in an established area become available for a community purpose, in this case a non-government school, then the model that we are talking about—an expression of interest and RFT process—would be applied to enable proponents of non-government schools to put in their proposals.

MR COE: That would be a government-owned site you are talking about, as opposed to—

Mr Gotts: That would be a government-owned site. If a proponent of a non-government school acquired a piece of land privately, then they would follow the processes outlined in the Education Act for getting that school registered. It would include things like public consultation, which is a requirement in that act; it would include also an assessment by the directorate of the impact of a school on any other schools in the area.

MR COE: And is that the same if an existing non-government school was to, in effect, change hands to another non-government school? If a particular school or a particular system had schools surplus to what they needed, yet there was another non-government school that was interested in taking up the facility, what would be the directorate's role?

Ms Howson: Our role then would be in the registration of the school for a larger campus. The conditions under our act would apply.

Mr Gotts: And should it be a school that was the subject of the forthcoming expression of interest and RFT process, then there could be no change of ownership of that school without express agreement of the directorate.

THE CHAIR: What role, then, does the Education Directorate play in determining where land should become available for non-government schools and how does that relate to the modelling that you do for government school enrolment numbers as well?

Mr Gotts: We start with the modelling. We look at the population changes across the ACT, we look at the land release programs, and we look at changes in the affiliation rate between government and non-government and get a sense of what is coming in terms of the numbers of kids over the next few years. Then we work with the other directorates, the LDA—I think I can still call them the LDA till the end of today. That

is useful, because I am not sure I have got the new names locked in my head yet. We work with them and the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, EPPSD, and economic development, and with the joint developers.

I will give Ginninderry as an example. In that situation there is a joint development arrangement. We work with the joint developers. We indicate, based on their advice to us on the potential number of properties to be sold, what the number of children will be. We consider the affiliation rate and so on. If there are going to be, say, 5,000 children over 15 years, we think: "A proportion of those will go to government schools and a proportion will go to non-government schools. We think we will need this many sites over this period and another number of sites will be needed for non-government schools."

We then work with the joint venturers, and that is what we will be doing next Thursday, for example, to then have a look at the actual site. We go with the capital works vehicle from Education and physically have a look. How flat is it? What is it near? What are the transport plans for it? Where is the most appropriate location to put the school? Then we argue that we would like a school here or here, wherever. That is the process, basically.

THE CHAIR: What always surprises me is that one of the steepest government school sites is Black Mountain. It is a specialist school. It always has confused most of us. Is there a ratio that you try to keep of public enrolment to non-government enrolment?

Mr Gotts: Not in a formal sense. I have regular discussions with the Independent Schools Association and Catholic schools. For example, we have a joint meeting with all three of us planned for 26 July, when we are going to talk about what we see generally over the next few years. We keep a watch on changes in affiliation. That has been changing over the last four or five years. The ratio between the different sectors has been changing. We keep a watch on that and estimate what we think it will be.

THE CHAIR: Do you take into consideration waiting lists for non-government schools as part of that? It has been put to me that whilst there has been a gradual retraction in the number of enrolments in non-government schools across the territory, it is largely a result of situations like in my electorate of Tuggeranong. It was nappy valley but it has grown up and the kids have moved on. The enrolment numbers are trailing there. There is a good mix of Catholic, independent and government schools, whereas in other areas, particularly Gungahlin and Molonglo as they have come on line, that same mix does not exist and parents are left with, in most cases, one option.

Mr Gotts: I keep a model of the changing numbers in non-government schools. I cannot speak for the waiting lists. I have asked a number of times. Certainly a number of times it would be very nice to have waiting lists, but I am advised that they are commercially sensitive and are not released to anyone. I do not know what the waiting lists are for non-government schools. I know what their enrolments are and I know what their enrolments are over time. For suburbs that go through the development path, it takes around 17 years for the numbers of students to increase and then flatten out. Then it levels out to a different—

THE CHAIR: A long-term average and then—

Mr Gotts: That is right. I am conscious that students from non-government schools travel from many different places. Something like 12 or 13 per cent of students in non-government schools come from across the border, from New South Wales. There is a mix.

THE CHAIR: I have a final question before we have a brief break. You just mentioned that the non-government school students are travelling across the border into the ACT. What is the funding arrangement for those students that do come across the border? Who bears the cost of the territory or the state level of contribution to that education, regardless of which sector they are in?

Ms Howson: The ACT government bears the cost.

THE CHAIR: What numbers do we have at the moment for those that are coming across the border?

Mr Gotts: It is for non-government schools. I can get you the precise number, but it is slightly over 3,000, I believe, for non-government schools and it is about 1,780 or 1,790 for ACT public schools. It is 3,500, give or take. But I can get you the precise number.

Ms Berry: But families that have students in education in ACT schools, that come to the ACT, are not in priority enrolment areas. Students in the ACT are considered first for enrolment and then students who come from other regions.

THE CHAIR: Coming from across the border?

Mr Gotts: That is right.

Ms Berry: Through the MOU that was signed with the New South Wales government, that is something that the ACT should be discussing with the New South Wales government, given the plans for increasing populations around our region.

THE CHAIR: If those specific numbers could be taken on notice, that would be appreciated.

Mr Gotts: And there are about 200 ACT students who are at schools in New South Wales.

THE CHAIR: About 200 go the other way?

Mr Gotts: So the New South Wales government tells me.

THE CHAIR: We will suspend now.

Hearing suspended from 3.32 to 3.47 pm.

Appearances:

Fitzharris, Ms Meegan, Minister for Health, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Enterprise Canberra
Keogh, Mr Geoff, Director, Strategy and Policy, Innovate Canberra
Miller, Mr David, Director, Skills Canberra, Enterprise Canberra

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority
Service, Mr James, Chairman
Carter, Mr Glenn, Chief Executive Officer

Canberra Institute of Technology
Cover, Ms Leanne, Chief Executive Officer
Sloan, Mr Craig, Chair, Canberra Institute of Technology Board
Maslen, Ms Sue, General Manager, Student and Academic Services

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the final session of our full days of estimates hearings. First up, we have the ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority here, along with the Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research. Then we will head into higher education, which is part of economic development, and the CIT statement of intent. Minister, do you have an opening statement?

Ms Fitzharris: Thank you, Mr Chair. If the committee could indulge me, I would just like the opportunity to talk broadly about this portfolio for a couple of minutes.

THE CHAIR: Over to you.

MS CODY: Sure.

Ms Fitzharris: Thank you again to the committee for the opportunity to speak about this very exciting portfolio. As the committee knows, the government is committed to a strong economic development relationship with our higher education, training and research sector. As the minister responsible, my role is to be the sector's champion in its engagement with the ACT government and the community more broadly.

While the Chief Minister retains overall responsibility for economic development, my brief in this portfolio is to focus on meeting our commitment to grow the higher education and research sector, maximising the value of our investments in the sector, investing taxpayers' money in skilling initiatives that benefit our community and our economy, and marshalling and supporting a team Canberra approach to the sector so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

I was very pleased to be able to announce further commitments to support this booming sector in last month's budget. This includes \$3 million to continue the study Canberra program and \$1 million to support women into traditional trades and mature-age workers to re-skill or upskill into new roles. In addition to targeted

funding, we achieve our objectives by working closely with the sector, principally through the ACT vice-chancellors forum, which is chaired by the Chief Minister and which also provides the high level oversight necessary for us to undertake this key objective.

I would like to provide a couple of examples of how we are working with the sector. At the recent April vice-chancellors forum, members agreed that a number of capability areas presented major opportunities for investment attraction into the ACT. Opportunities over the next six to 12 months include cybersecurity, space technologies and renewable energy. In the three to five-year horizon, opportunities include agriculture and plant sciences, healthy ageing and active living, and education pathways. While the research institutions will have primary responsibility for the delivery of these opportunities, the ACT government will work closely with them to overcome regulatory barriers to the growth of these sectors as well as working with other agencies such as Austrade to promote investment opportunities in these sectors.

At the July 2016 forum, members signed off on our international education strategy, “Canberra: Australia’s education capital”. The strategy commits the government to work with the sector to continue the growth in international education exports by focusing on areas such as the student experience. Very excitingly, recently released figures show that last year international education exports injected \$579 million into Canberra’s economy, up 14 per cent from the previous year. This is a record and means that per capita we export more educational services than any other jurisdiction in Australia. As the responsible minister, I will be championing these opportunities across government and doing all I can to facilitate the growth of Canberra’s education, training and research sector.

The other major policy area for this portfolio is skills development. The decision to move skills responsibility alongside Innovate Canberra in the economic development directorate reflects our view that skills development is closely linked to our economic development objectives. I am committed to ensuring that our VET system is producing the skills that our 21st century economy is demanding.

CIT is the sole public provider of VET in the ACT, continues to train the majority of the ACT’s skilled workers, has a reputation for innovation and quality, and enjoys the trust and respect of the ACT community. Under the guidance of the newly established CIT board, CIT is evolving its products, services and campuses to be future ready, with modern learning spaces and facilities specifically designed to meet the needs of contemporary learners and the broader community.

The strong quality framework we have in place also gives us confidence in the small but vibrant private training provider market, able to deliver government supported training through our contestable training initiatives, the Australian apprenticeships program and skilled capital.

As the minister for transport and health and wellbeing, I also see terrific synergies between these two very citizen-facing portfolios and my responsibilities with this portfolio. I think I am well placed to see what collaborations and contributions are possible in the future. For example, data analytics has a big role to play in the future of preventive health, and some of the nation’s best data analytics capabilities in both

the health and transport domain are here in Canberra.

The ACT government also has a significant applied health research funding relationship with our two major universities, ANU and the University of Canberra, which has grown somewhat organically over successive governments. Now is a good time to understand and unpack that some more and make sure we are getting it right for our community and the economy as we move into the future.

We are fully committed to leveraging Canberra's existing talented community of skilled workers and world-class education and research institutions to diversify and grow Canberra's economy into the future. We will continue to seek opportunities for future investment and talent attraction to become a destination city for Australia and the world's innovators. We are very happy to take questions from the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. It was remiss of me to omit the typical housekeeping measures. Could you give us an indication that you have made yourself familiar with the pink privilege statement in front of you and you are aware of its implications?

Mr Service: Certainly, chair. I am well aware of the statement, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Carter: I do not have a pink card in front of me.

THE CHAIR: We will get one for you.

Ms Fitzharris: He has done this before.

Mr Carter: I was not going to say it, but, yes, and I acknowledge the statement.

THE CHAIR: We should change it one day and just see what happens.

Mr Carter: I actually did read it.

MR PETTERSSON: There has been a large focus on work health and safety training with regard to asbestos over the past couple of years. Is that focus continuing? Is it starting to wind down? Are you seeing that play out?

Mr Carter: It continues. The authority provides rebates for training that is completed by registered training organisations in asbestos awareness and a range of other asbestos removal skills and subsets of trades. Back in 2014, when it was regulated, the whole industry was required to be trained within a three-month period. That was a large spike. It has plateaued since then, but there are still new people entering the industry, people coming from out of town to work here in the ACT that are required to do the training. Approximately 27,000 people have been funded rebates since the asbestos awareness training program was regulated in 2014.

MR PETTERSSON: On a broad point, what are the current priorities for training programs? What is the emphasis on at the moment?

Mr Carter: The authority relies upon the applications that we get from industry in respect of what training they wish to do. We do not set any priorities for industry to follow in that respect. There certainly has been increased training in the last 12 months in vegetation management, obviously associated with the removal and control of trees and that type of thing. A lot of the training in that area is in chainsaws, height safety and things along those lines. There are increases in training applications and completions with respect to solar PV grid and battery storage capacity and training for electricians. They would be the two main areas, I would have thought.

MS LAWDER: I have some questions relating to page 6 of your statement of intent. On page 6, objectives 2 and 3 in that table talk about the funding going down from 3.58 to 2.85, and ongoing funding for entry-level apprentices, the third one, from 350 to 325. On what do you base those figures? Is it about building? Are you expecting a decline or a downturn in the building industry?

Mr Carter: They are based on advice we receive and based on the fact that obviously the largest project we have had come on board is the construction of stage 1 light rail, which is due to complete around that time in 2018-19.

Ms Lawder: And you are not expecting anything else to start?

Mr Carter: If I knew of others that would start, I would anticipate that. But at this stage—

Mr Service: In terms of prospects for light rail stage 2, the government has obviously committed in the budget substantial money for the analysis of that. I guess that, as that progresses, we will revisit those forward estimates in terms of expenditure in various programs. Perhaps going into 2019-20 also there would be a modest recognition that the vast majority of people still in construction would have completed most of the safety training. Unless there are new initiatives such as the asbestos awareness program in some other sector, we would like to see some modest fall-off.

As we have in all the years the authority has been in existence, looking forward each year we will adjust, based on any new programs we are aware of, any particular demands in the industry, any changes in construction rates. If construction massively increases, we would grow the program. If we foresaw an industry downturn, we might reduce some programs, simply because the demand would not necessarily be there.

MS LAWDER: Are you saying that you think most people would have completed the asbestos awareness training?

Mr Service: I think they will. Looking back at that, that initiative created a huge demand. That demand had a few years to be met. If there was some other initiative such as that where government and industry decided there was a completely new set of programs required for some other particular issue, whether that was back to changes in height safety, whether that was back to changes in the way scaffold was assembled or whatever it was, and that required a great proportion needing to be retrained, we would fund that. The authority has had a policy since it came into existence of always ensuring that it had sufficient funds to do such things as we did to

fund the asbestos awareness program. In other circumstances, where our longevity was not as good and our capacity to make sure we put forward a plan was not as good, it would have been more difficult for us to fund some of those programs as quickly as we otherwise have been able to in the last 16 years.

MS LAWDER: What proportion of the work, for example, is the asbestos safety training?

Mr Service: Safety program is probably a better description; asbestos is one.

Mr Carter: Yes. Occupational health and safety probably would be about 30 per cent of the training base.

MS LAWDER: Occupational health and safety as a whole?

Mr Carter: Across all of the areas and all of the sectors that rely on that training.

MS LAWDER: Did your funding increase a couple of years ago with the asbestos awareness?

Mr Carter: Yes.

MS LAWDER: So now are you going back towards more historical sorts of levels?

Mr Carter: Yes.

MS LAWDER: So it is not about expecting a downturn in the building and construction industry?

Mr Carter: No.

MS LAWDER: More just a return to general business.

Mr Carter: Yes.

Mr Service: I have said to this committee on a number of occasions that there are, naturally, dips in the industry. Some will argue that there might well be a dip in medium density to high density residential in the coming years. We have not yet seen that, but that is a prospect. That then occasionally provides opportunities for retraining. We might see some increase in land servicing, depending on demand. We might see some increase in commercial construction. We are about to see a very large building built out here. There is another one just starting on the other side of the city. If commonwealth demand grew, there would be more commercial construction. The market has always been a little fluid in the territory, certainly in my 30-odd years in property and construction. There is always a bit of fluidity, and we plan as best we can for that.

MS LAWDER: Just continuing on the table that I am referring to, on page 7, in the last part of the table, on the ratio of the budget and forward years, the current ratio is greater than 8.8 to 1, and it changes to 9.3 to 1. Can you explain to me what that ratio

is and what you are basing the change on?

Mr Carter: The ratio is a liquidity ratio, so it determines an entity's ability to pay its short-term obligations at the end of a financial year. Where there would be amounts accrued into the next financial year which relate to the previous financial year, that is the adjustment in the relationship between them. On those ratios, based on what we would anticipate in a normal year, being this year, if that declined, the ratio may increase, depending on the balance between what our liabilities are against our total assets.

THE CHAIR: Who sets the levy for the training fund?

Mr Service: It is established by legislation.

THE CHAIR: And any adjustment to the legislation, is that a decision from the board, through government?

Mr Service: No, it is entirely a matter for the government. We are not a policy organisation. Our legislation is very narrow in terms of our capacity to do things. We do not advise government on policy; it is a matter for government.

THE CHAIR: Is the levy set at the right amount at the moment, or is there any evaluation or assessment done on changing either the levy itself or the breadth of construction work that attracts the levy?

Ms Fitzharris: I have not had any advice to me one way or the other that it should change. My understanding is that it is set at the right level and has not changed since inception. I would always be open to that, if there is a good reason to do that. Certainly in my experience it is a very responsive program that, as Mr Service said, can respond to the changing needs of the sector. It is very reliant on input from the sector itself to both inform it of its priorities for the coming year and then provide feedback at the end of each year as well.

It is a very good relationship with the sector, through the board and the CEO, on where the priorities are. The range of representation on the board gives a very good indication of not only where things are at now with the sector but looking towards the future and the pipeline of work and the changing nature of the projects that can be funded through the levy and through the work of the authority.

Mr Service: If you look at the financial results of the authority and its capacity to spend the levy, I say publicly that we want to spend every dollar we get each year. It would be fair to say that the levy has been set at a level which has given us the capacity to add to our reserve account each year. Is there greater demand for an increase in the levy? I think the answer in the current environment is no. There are only so many workers in the industry you can train, and there are only so many workers who can spend a certain amount of time out of their job as well.

I think the balance has worked very well. I think we have seen a great improvement in quality and in safety. Safety will never be perfect, but I think people's understanding of safety has improved. The broad safety in the industry is certainly much better than

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it was 10 or 15 years ago, and we have people with much better skills. Those skills, most importantly, are transportable from project to project, from city to city. We are actually training people to be more important to and more useful in our community. That was a long answer, but I think it is about the right number. Even though we do not write policy, I think successive governments have maintained it at the right level.

THE CHAIR: It is one of those unusual scenarios where if you have more money you can always find a way to spend it, but bearing in mind that industry is paying it—

Mr Service: We probably could not find a lot more ways to spend it. The success of the authority is that we have quite a narrow policy capacity. Our ability to do things is confined to training, and that has meant we have been very focused. The authority does exactly what it can do under its legislation. It does not, very sensibly, have any capacity to stray outside the boundaries. There is nothing grey about what we can do, and that is why industry has been a great supporter of the authority.

MR COE: I have a question about the cash at bank. Have you just got that accruing at a couple of per cent?

Mr Service: We have it on deposit consistent with the government's banking arrangements. I think it is with Westpac. The authority's policy has been to never have less in its reserve account than six months' capacity to operate the authority and pay all of the training programs funded. That has been a very successful policy. We adopted that from the model in South Australia. They have a much bigger bank balance than us, but it ensures that we can fund with security and people can apply for training with security.

MR COE: By way of legislation, do you have to have a separate bank account or could you seek to transfer some of your cash at bank to another area of the treasury for better investment?

Mr Service: My understanding is it has to stay with the authority. But I will take that question on notice to verify. I am almost certain it has to stay with the authority. We are not using government funds in that sense; we are using industry funds. We are custodians of that. The success of the authority and its support has been its independence from government and the bureaucracy, with great respect to the bureaucracy.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, gentlemen. We will suspend for a few minutes.

Short suspension.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back, minister. We now welcome higher education and economic development officials, as well as representatives from CIT. Is there a further opening statement for this section?

Ms Fitzharris: No, thank you. I am covered.

MS CODY: Minister, I was lucky enough to come with you to a pre-budget announcement about women in trades. I was wondering if someone could give me a

bit more information about where that is at and what we are doing.

Ms Fitzharris: I can hand over to Ms Arthy and Mr Miller shortly, but I was very pleased, as I mentioned in my opening statement, to make a commitment last year to deliver extra support for two key groups of people in the community. One is for more women to enter into traditional trades, and the other is for mature age workers to upskill and reskill when they find themselves at a turning point in their professional lives. At the moment we are undertaking a range of consultations with a variety of different groups and individuals. We are also doing a scan of what other jurisdictions have done to support a growth in training in both those two key areas. That work is underway. Perhaps we could provide a few examples of the types of things that we are looking at. We are hopeful of having that initial work done over the next couple of months.

Mr Miller: As the minister said, we are still at the early stage of looking at the different options that are being tried in a range of other jurisdictions and across the country, really. This is one of those areas that provide a constant challenge, particularly when you are looking at the construction industry, for example, as one of those areas of traditional trade, in terms of getting more women involved and sustaining their involvement. It is really important to look at what sorts of things are already out there. The training fund authority, for example, which was here earlier, provides little incentives and things to encourage women in trade. We neither want to duplicate existing activities that are underway nor look to apply or undertake activities that have been proven to not be very successful in the past.

As the minister said, we have done a number of initial consultations. It is amazing, once some budget announcements get made, how many people approach you with some fantastic ideas. But it has been a really good process to start having some of those conversations and to understand where some of the priorities are, particularly when you think about the two aspects of the commitment, because it is not just about women in those sorts of non-traditional areas but also about upskilling mature age workers.

We have had some consultations with the Council of the Ageing, for example, and have heard some of their thoughts. We are also getting stuck into a lot of the research that has occurred in the area. VET, for example, have done some really extensive research relatively recently into the electrical trade and the sorts of things that have worked in trying to support young women in particular to get into the electrical trade. Looking at some of the research that has been undertaken is also really informing some of our thinking. We are establishing an implementation plan for the remainder of the year that really determines that there will be some more deliberate consultations that occur over the next few months, and then we start identifying which of the things are most likely to work.

MS CODY: Do we have a start date, for want of a better word?

Mr Miller: Not at this stage. The plan will define that over the next couple of months. I would expect in the early part of the next calendar year elements of the program will be rolling out. What do I expect? I expect to see a lot of different components to a program. Part of it is about creating the idea of women going into those sorts of trades

at a very young age and looking at what we can do in the school sector, as well as making sure that in those areas there are not any other perceptions of challenges that are either real or imagined that might be influencing people to make choices out of those industries. We do know that if you look at construction the number of women is somewhere around the three per cent mark. It is extremely low. I think there are obviously real benefits, and the reason for the initiative is to try to increase the level of gender diversity in that type of workforce.

MS CODY: You touched on upskilling mature age workers. Is that across the sector or is that again looking at non-traditional—

Ms Fitzharris: That could be in any particular area. For example, it could be people who have been involved in quite physical work. Once they reach a period where they no longer want to do that or are not quite as physically able as they previously were, they are maybe looking to get different professional skills, managerial skills, open their own small business. They get some small business training. It could be a whole range of different ways, but we know that there are organisations out there that are working.

We know that COTA, Council on the Ageing, have a real interest in supporting their very large membership base to be productive in the workforce for as long as possible. We are talking to them about the sorts of ideas that they might have. Again, as Mr Miller said, there has been no shortage of ideas coming to us and people wanting to engage in this across a whole range of different industry sectors in Canberra. It is terrific.

THE CHAIR: What is happening on the other side of that equation to get men into fields of training that are typically female dominated? Child care springs to mind, hairdressing.

Ms Fitzharris: Nursing.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps even nursing.

Ms Fitzharris: CIT can probably speak to that. I will just say as a comment, probably more with my Health hat on, that there is often discussion about male nurses. Someone who is a bloke and a nurse said to me, “I am a nurse. I am not a male nurse.” If we can all remember not to refer to male nurses! But that is probably one area in my portfolios where I know that the numbers have remained static for a long time. CIT has a role in a lot of allied health areas in particular. I could not comment on teaching.

Ms Cover: I would like to mention that we have just opened a new barbering course and there is a very high uptake of gentlemen in that course. That is fantastic, responding to that demand in the industry at the moment.

MS CODY: I saw them in action. They were doing amazing work, the new barbers that have just come into that program. I was getting my hair done a little while ago and they were doing incredible work. The barbers there are really, really enthusiastic.

Ms Fitzharris: Could I make a broader comment on what I have observed in this portfolio, and maybe others can comment. Part of the work that I think we will do through the specific initiative on women in traditional trades will be in relation to the three per cent of women in traditional trades, which is about the lowest percentage that you will get in terms of gender mix. Even nurses that are male have remained static at around 10 per cent for quite some time. I understand that teachers who are male are actually higher than that. Three per cent of women in traditional trades is a very low percentage.

But what we are also hoping to do, I think more broadly across the whole portfolio as well as in these specific initiatives, is increase the profile of vocational training, because we have seen nationally massive damage to the reputation of vocational institutions right across the country for a range of different reasons. On the couple of occasions I have had a chance to meet with colleagues from other jurisdictions, it has been very clear that there has been enormous damage, a gutting of particular sectors in some of the other states, where it has meant huge damage to the reputation of both public and particularly private sector training organisations. It has meant that kids at school, parents of kids at school, are probably a bit more reluctant and have been affected by the damage to the reputation of the sector.

We hope that, as a sidebar to the specific, targeted work and all of the work that CIT is doing to renew and refresh itself, we really do play a role in increasing awareness of the incredibly high quality vocational training you can get in Canberra, particularly at CIT but also with many of our other registered training organisations here. Our sector here has fared very well, unlike other sectors across the country.

Ms Arthy: Coming back to your question on males in traditionally female industries, I think it is also important to look at the changing nature of the industry and to look to the future industries in Canberra. The things that we would need to look at are around defence and cyber and particularly gearing up around the NDIS and a few other key things that are traditionally serviced in the VET sector. It is perfectly placed to do it. For me, it is also a matter of looking at the future needs and trying to gear up for that as well. And that is where there are a lot of opportunities for Canberra, because we are incredibly well placed, with the great relationship between CIT and the universities, to do very, very well.

MS LE COUTEUR: Talking about supporting women in non-traditional trades, does this include transgender women?

Ms Fitzharris: Yes, it would.

MS LE COUTEUR: Good. I am interested in the CIT's expansion or contraction plans. As you would be aware, there is still a tiny bit of CIT at Woden. There is now a presence in Tuggeranong. Yesterday, or the day before, we heard from the library service. I know that at the Woden library they are moving the heritage library out, and they said they were talking to CIT about possibly doing some stuff in the Woden library, on the second floor. I do not really know what is happening on the north side. My question is: what are your plans? Where are your campuses planned to be?

Mr Sloan: Thank you for the question. It probably goes to the heart of the campus

modernisation strategy that the CIT board has endorsed, and we have run that through cabinet. That is a plan that is looking across all our facilities to work out whether they are fit for purpose for today and into the future. Remember that a lot of the buildings are 1960s or 1970s-type classroom facilities that are not what our students and our teachers need going forward. This whole program is looking at all of our campuses and working through each of them to see what is required and what we need to do to get them fit for purpose. That includes the digital element as well. Specifically, with sites like Woden, we have looked at that. We have moved a few classes, a few students, off that site already. Music remains the—

MS LE COUTEUR: Is it the only one?

Mr Sloan: It is the single one that is still there. The board believes that big site we have at the moment is too big and it is probably surplus to what we believe our needs are at the moment. We are going through a bit of an analysis to say, “What does that mean and what does that look like?” We have not done anything further than, as a board, simply say that we believe it is surplus. We are looking at what our future footprint needs are, moving forward.

We are doing similar reviews across Bruce of all the land and our facilities there. We are looking at Reid. We are looking at Fyshwick, where we need more parking space for our trades centre of excellence as well. Every piece of it will be part of this broader strategy. There is a subcommittee that reports to the board that is working through that detailed plan at the moment. It will look at an analysis of those sites, the time line for what we think we need and do not need, and a funding model that would be attached to that. Once we have got that all together and our initial thoughts done, we will certainly run that past the minister for approval. But we have not as a board put through anything to the minister at this point for a decision.

MS LE COUTEUR: Clearly, you are sitting on some valuable real estate, and, from what you are saying, you will not be using all of it in the future—Woden, for instance. What is the funding model likely to be? I do not know what the site is worth, but it must be worth a significant amount of money.

Mr Sloan: I hope so.

MS LE COUTEUR: One would hope so.

MR COE: Not if it is community facility zoned.

MS LE COUTEUR: Will that go back into CIT or is it generally the government’s money? How does that work?

Mr Sloan: It is certainly not the intention that it will all go back into CIT. The funding model will probably be modelled off the public housing funding model.

MS LE COUTEUR: You will have to explain a bit more than that.

Ms Fitzharris: Certainly. Since appointing the board in 2015, the reason for establishing the board and allowing the board to guide and lead CIT into the future

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was to make sure it is principally meeting the needs of the students, and, as an institution, meeting the needs of the local economy in terms of training. It is clear that, as Mr Sloan was saying, the campuses as they currently exist do not meet the needs of the institution, principally because they do not meet the needs of students in the way students are interacting with vocational training now and into the future.

The government has not made any further decisions on the specific funding model for the campus modernisation program. The board appointed a subcommittee earlier this year, I believe, and the subcommittee, through the board, is doing some work on that at the moment. As Mr Sloan said, the government currently has one model, the public housing renewal task force, in terms of enabling any sale of assets, any renewal of an existing asset or a reinvestment. The principal purpose of CIT is as a training organisation servicing the ACT community. Campus modernisation is still a work in progress. Last year, at the launch of the statement of intent, the board of CIT spoke about the centres of excellence for each of the campuses. It might be helpful to remind the committee of that work that was launched last year on the centres of excellence.

MS LE COUTEUR: I thought the public housing model was fairly different. What has been sold along Northbourne Avenue is not going to public housing; it is going to light rail. That is why I was surprised when you gave that as a funding model.

Ms Fitzharris: To the extent that all the money is fundable, it becomes—

MS LE COUTEUR: All the money is fundable, of course.

Ms Fitzharris: The broad principle is that any asset that is currently managed by CIT will be reinvested principally in CIT and the training sector.

Mr Sloan: Also, the Under Treasurer sits as a member of the subcommittee.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you looked at the north-south divide? We are now in the ugly situation that south Canberra has the CIT in Tuggeranong, and that is it, as far as higher education goes. Compared to what is in north Canberra, it is still—

THE CHAIR: A limited course offering.

MS LE COUTEUR: Limited, yes. Is this one of your considerations?

Mr Sloan: No, to be perfectly blunt. That is probably going more to the heart of the fact that, as a board, we are trying to structure an organisation that will be sustainable into the future and meet the specific needs of our students and the broader community. That really is around, as the minister said, these centres of excellence. You can look at our trade centre in Fyshwick and the like. No-one questions why the University of Canberra or ANU are not out at Tuggeranong or Woden, so I do not know why they keep coming to CIT and saying we should be opening up everywhere as well. To try to run an efficient business, we need to decide what is best, and look at how we create these big centres of excellence where you can really do some deep, hard training, rather than trying to be generalists scattered in every town centre in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: To be frank, we are keen to see a university in Tuggeranong as well.

Ms Fitzharris: More broadly, on the south side, do not forget the CIT campus in Fyshwick.

MS LE COUTEUR: It is not actually on the south side.

MS CODY: Technically, it is.

Ms Fitzharris: I thought it was. It seems to me that Fyshwick is not north. On the north-south divide, we are in a city that is easy to move around. There are all sorts of arguments one way or the other around that. As we have said recently, Woden Valley and the Woden town centre are where the ACT government probably has its most significant employment base. We have just moved 750 ACT Health staff. We have the community health centre, Access Canberra, the library, and we also have thousands of staff working at the Canberra Hospital. There are swings and roundabouts in terms of what is north and what is south, what is east and what is west.

As Mr Sloan said, CIT really needs to embrace the future. Its relationship with the university sector is now tremendously good. I think it is a real credit to the board and particularly to the new CEO with respect to engaging with that sector. It is now a member of the vice-chancellors forum, and it is really showing the more traditional higher education institutions what CIT has to offer them and their students in terms of collaborations. There is a lot of exciting opportunity to meet the needs of the students and the broader needs of the ACT economy.

MS LE COUTEUR: How much is more virtual delivery of training influencing all of this?

Ms Cover: The minister and Craig Sloan both made reference to the strategic compass that the board released last year. One of the key new commitment projects which the government has funded is a digital strategy, because we recognise how quickly that digital aspect is impacting on every industry. We know that our learners need to access education in different ways. We want a system so that they can study where they want, how they want and when they want. A lot of that is to do with a digital platform. We have really good systems in place, but we know that we have to increase our flexibility and access for students, and digital is very much a part of that. I might ask Sue to talk about the progress we have made with the digital strategy and the customer journey experience project.

Ms Maslen: There are three key projects that are looking at how we develop more flexible learning. The digital strategy will include a component on developing our online learning system so that it is more intuitive and simpler for students and teachers to use. We also have an innovative learning resources project which I am leading at the moment. It aims by the end of the year to have an online presence for the majority of the CIT courses, which will then support more flexible delivery. We will be working with teachers through the evolving teacher project to support teachers to think about how they might be able to deliver courses. The long-term vision will be to deliver courses which traditionally have been delivered face to face through a variety of different methods to anyone anywhere around Australia.

MS CODY: Ms Cover, you held up that wonderful brochure. I have read it several times and I have a copy in my office. Would it be possible to table a copy for the committee, please?

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I have a follow-up question around the centres of excellence strategy. Is that largely seen as a consolidation and a reinvestment in Bruce, Reid and Fyshwick, and, with the satellite at Tuggeranong, those are the four sites for CIT going forward?

Mr Sloan: Yes, that is correct.

THE CHAIR: What sort of redevelopment or reinvestment is likely over the three ageing campuses?

Mr Sloan: Do you mean the magnitude of investment?

THE CHAIR: Yes, reinvestment in facilities, particularly at Reid, Bruce and Fyshwick.

Ms Cover: As Mr Sloan said, we are still in the very early stages of working out what that investment will need to look like. What I can say is that the ACT government has already heavily invested in both the Reid and Bruce campus in order to make sure those facilities are really contemporary. A number of you might have had the opportunity to have a look at the Bruce campus and the new allied health facility that we have there now. We have moved all of our allied health offerings to Bruce to complement the partnerships with the University of Canberra and that whole health precinct—the AIS, the University of Canberra and Calvary hospital. Our nursing, aged care, child care and community services courses are all now collocated at Bruce campus.

Reid campus is shaping up to make sure that we are meeting the needs of the small business sector located in the city, while also leveraging off the existing beauty therapy, hair and hotel management facilities that are already there—making sure they are contemporary and modern as well. At Fyshwick, as Mr Sloan said, there is a very big focus on traditional trades, while also making sure that renewable energy is integrated into trades, across all trades. This is in addition to the renewable energy centre that we have already established at the Bruce campus, which also complements our horticulture centre at Bruce, which is fantastic as well. With Tuggeranong, we have purposely built that to make sure it is cutting edge in terms of technology. We know that we need to keep developing our other campuses with respect to access to online availability. Tuggeranong is a showcase to assist teachers to work digitally and differently in that space as well.

Mr Sloan: One of the big components of the campus modernisation strategy is looking at how we use the facilities so that they become not just educational institutions but also community assets. It is about having engagement with the community right through this process and looking at how we bring these pieces of infrastructure into the community more. Looking at how they are used outside teaching is a big focus of that subcommittee as well.

MR COE: I would like to go back to the discussion earlier about the sites and the potential for both the ones that will continue to be utilised and those that might become redundant. What risk is there that there could be a two-tier property market? Potentially, what happened with the University of Canberra could happen here, if it is not handled properly, where you have, in effect, private property that is subjected to a lease variation charge and all the other taxes and perhaps preferential land just up the road that may not be subjected to the same fees and charges. How do you overcome that so that you do not undermine existing investment and potential future investment from these sites?

Ms Fitzharris: I think there is minimal risk.

MR COE: Not for the government, but I am talking about for everyone else.

Ms Fitzharris: No, around the ownership of the site in the first place. At the moment they are ACT government sites and we would expect them to be treated the same as any other land around the territory.

MR COE: So you are not envisaging that—

Ms Fitzharris: No. I know where you are going, Mr Coe, and I am not envisaging that at the moment.

MR COE: For instance, with the Bruce campus, there are no plans to have residential on the site there that is a mixture of private and public?

Ms Fitzharris: There are currently no plans for that. I think you are asking questions about a different planning regime; is that right?

MR COE: Either a different planning regime not dissimilar to UC or, in effect, giving up parcels of land under a community title or something along those lines that involves the CIT as a partner in that.

Ms Fitzharris: That is not currently on our radar.

MR COE: On a similar note, with the precinct development projects that are listed in the budget, is that exclusively related to what we have just been talking about or is there additional work relating to this, especially in the University of Canberra? If you look, for instance, at page 42 of the Chief Minister's budget statement, budget statements B, in table 44, accountability indicator (b), precinct development projects, is there any relevance? Is there any overlap there or not?

Ms Fitzharris: No. We had a specific discussion around this. This specifically related to the key capability areas. It is not "precinct" as in a planning definition of "precinct" here. We had a discussion about that. As note 6 says, it relates specifically to the key capability area fund—cyber, defence et cetera.

MR PETERSSON: I have a question about one of the 2017-18 priorities on page 170—"establishing new local, national and international markets". Could you go through each of them? What international markets are you looking at? What are the

national markets you are looking at, and locally how are you looking to expand?

Ms Cover: In terms of establishing new local, national and international markets to increase contestable revenue, the board has been looking at a number of different areas to continue to expand the existing capability of the institute or to go into new areas. One of those areas is cybersecurity. The institute has a really strong capacity, based on our relationship with the AFP over many years, for forensic science and crime scene investigation. A lot of that workforce has links in to some of the work that is emerging on the cyber side of things. Also, the data capability of our ICT programs lends itself to that capability.

We are working with the university sector and the Canberra cyber network, in partnership with that group across Canberra, in the public sector and the private sector. The ACT government is also supporting that, to look at what new training initiatives we could put forward to be funded to develop some of those cyber training qualifications. In fact, we have been discussing this morning with Skills Canberra different options so that we could bring together some of the skills and put them forward in apprenticeship training for cyber, for instance. That might be the way to go there.

We are also developing training in new technologies for renewable energies—solar, battery and wind turbine energy. Later this year a group of students will go to Europe to have a look at some of the wind turbine technology and solar farms there, and they will be looking to bring back some skills as well. The delegations of students who travel overseas on those programs develop some relationships for us to leverage off internationally as well.

More broadly than those two specific examples of growth areas that the board have identified, we have anywhere between 700 and 1,000 international students annually that come to Canberra, to the CIT, from around 80 different countries, which makes Canberra a strong contributor to the diverse ACT economy of international students that is continuing to grow. Those students study across a broad range of CIT courses that we offer in that space.

Ms Fitzharris: Specifically on cybersecurity, which relates to CIT but more broadly is relevant to this portfolio and the economic development portfolio, earlier this year the ACT became the first operational node of the Australian cybersecurity growth network. That was quite a significant moment for us in one of these key capability areas. We are very well placed, with the collaboration between CIT and our higher education institutions, and, of course, with the existing capacity through the Australian government here in Canberra, with defence industries, national security and intelligence agencies and increased investment from the federal government. We have really seized that opportunity.

Even today, there are more discussions on cybersecurity and the lack of skills that many organisations have at lots of different levels in cybersecurity. So we are extremely well placed now, being the first operational node of that network, to really take advantage, as the leading jurisdiction, of what will become a huge demand for training in this particular industry.

Ms Cover: If I could add one more plug for CIT, it is the first vocational education and training provider to have developed a graduate certificate in network and cybersecurity in that space. So we have a really good base to leverage off.

MR PETTERSSON: In terms of expanding our presence, is it mainly to do with offering a new program that international markets are interested in, as opposed to expanding some of the more traditional programs that we already run?

Ms Cover: No. I was talking about a couple of new areas that the board is focusing on. Those 700 to 1,000 international students annually that, on average, come to us do a whole variety of programs. With any of those programs, we are constantly looking at partners internationally. With respect to Singapore, for instance, we have been looking at Temasek Polytechnic there to expand our offerings into Singapore. We have been to India in the last couple of years, looking at our forensic science program and our relationship with the Gujarat Forensic Sciences University there. They are a couple of examples of existing programs that we could expand.

Ms Fitzharris: The opportunities for us in cybersecurity are not simply in training. They are also in research, and particularly in the innovation networks we have across the city. Of course, CIT, the ACT government and the higher education institutions are founding partners of the CBR Innovation Network. There are opportunities in the broad sector of cybersecurity, and that includes research and training. There are significant business opportunities for local firms, small and large.

MS CODY: Minister, with what you and Ms Cover have outlined, is that part of the study Canberra initiative?

Ms Fitzharris: That is a little bit different, but connected.

MS CODY: Could you expand on study Canberra?

Ms Fitzharris: Yes, we can. Study Canberra has been an initiative of the government for a number of years. This year we are funding it over the next four years again—\$750,000 per year. As I mentioned at the outset, the vice-chancellors forum plays a key role in guiding the expenditure of that funding. One of the things that the vice-chancellors forum is particularly interested in at the moment, noting our growing sector, with a growing number of students coming here from not only around the country but around the world, is the importance of the student experience. You would have heard a lot from ANU recently and the University of Canberra about the importance of the student experience on campus and in the city. Study Canberra has a range of programs that will be refined through this new funding. That includes a range of ambassadors from each of the institutions that work with us, as well as a whole range of other programs.

Ms Arthy: Minister, I think you have covered quite a lot. The commitment is \$3 million over four years. As the minister said, the main focus is on how we really enhance the student experience so that Canberra is a very attractive destination for international students. Some of the things that that program does are simple things like going out to the airport and welcoming students in February.

There are a lot of different plans. Canberra is hosting the Council of International Students Australia conference next week, at which I will be the MC and the minister will speak. It shows that we are fairly well regarded when it comes to how we help international students. Mr Keogh, do you have anything else you would like to add about more specific plans for the next financial year?

Mr Keogh: The student experience is the important part. We know that word of mouth is very important in attracting international students and that people who have a good student experience here will pass that on to other students. Earlier this year Professor Brian Schmidt was interviewed about international students and he said—maybe I am not quoting him completely accurately—that the great thing that the ACT government does is make students happy, and happy students make other students happy.

With respect to the activities that study Canberra undertakes, as was mentioned, there are welcome desks at Canberra Airport. We have a student ambassador program. We take the student ambassadors and provide them with information and opportunities to spread the word about Canberra. That goes back to the communities that they come from. We run social media. When we are at the airport, there are information packs so that when students arrive they can pick up an information pack that tells them about the culture of Canberra, where they can get food, where they can get food that comes from their country—all of that sort of information that makes a student feel welcome in Canberra.

Ms Fitzharris: It has a dedicated web page, too, listing a lot of activities and newsletters. It has a pretty good social media profile and following, which, as you know, has very good reach with current and future students right around the world.

THE CHAIR: A question that follows on from there is about the numbers of international students that come to the ACT, to attend both CIT and other tertiary institutions. Are you able to provide some detail as to what those numbers are at the moment, minister?

Ms Fitzharris: I can. In fact, there were some really good numbers that I was able to share earlier today showing the value of those exports: 14,000 international students are currently choosing to study here in Canberra. That is up, I believe, by around 14 per cent on last year's numbers.

MS CODY: Is that across the board, all institutions, or is that CIT?

Ms Fitzharris: No, across the board.

THE CHAIR: What is the international student enrolment at CIT?

Ms Cover: It was 715 as of the end of May, but we are about to move into second semester.

Ms Fitzharris: That is increasing, too, isn't it?

Ms Cover: Yes.

MR COE: How many were residents prior to studying, as opposed to travelling here to study?

Ms Cover: From the CIT's perspective, I do not have that information with me right now. The majority of our international students travel here to study and undertake a specific CIT program.

MR COE: I imagine there would also be a lot of people that would be here already, perhaps on some sort of family visa and, whilst here, they then decide to study. Both are great for the economy, but there is a different impact, of course.

Ms Fitzharris: We will take that on notice and see if we can delve into those figures a bit more.

THE CHAIR: How does the fee structure work for an international student compared to a domestic student? Is there a substantial difference?

Ms Cover: It is separate. Obviously, the majority of the CIT courses are subsidised by the ACT government, as opposed to international fees, which are fee-for-service, if you like. There is no average fee. It depends on the course. The information is available to students on the website. It depends on how long they are studying, what they are actually studying and the course materials et cetera that go with that particular program.

THE CHAIR: How do the fees that CIT charges international students for these sorts of courses compare not just to other TAFE-based institutes around the country but also internationally, essentially for a like-for-like qualification?

Ms Cover: Very competitive. We have found that students come to Canberra for different reasons, as opposed to going to, say, Sydney or Melbourne, and we know that we have to pitch our product into the market at a competitive price. We are consciously looking at and looking for those comparisons, because you are absolutely right; it is not just against other TAFE institutions. There are 4½ thousand registered RTOs in Australia. They are not all attracting international students, of course, but many of them are. So we have to make sure constantly that our rates are competitive across the board.

Ms Fitzharris: One very important element in all of this is the quality of the course. What I alluded to earlier was that we have heard horror stories, particularly for students that may already be disadvantaged in one way or another through the VET FEE-HELP scheme—undertaking courses that appear to be very cheap on the face of it and either getting a very poor quality qualification or, in the end, not getting any training whatsoever towards that qualification. I would say that CIT not only is competitive on its fees but is highly competitive and probably leading the pack in terms of its quality.

Ms Cover: I will give an example of what the minister is talking about. There is a baseline qualification that you have to have in order to be a vocational education and training teacher, which is at the certificate IV level. There were 500 RTOs—

registered training organisations—that were scoped to deliver that qualification for teachers across Australia. They have changed the requirements for that, and all RTOs who had that on their scope had to go through a review process. CIT is one of only 15 of those RTOs in Australia that is able to run that new course, and we are in the top 10 in actually getting the provision to run that certificate. I think that is a great indicator of CIT's quality that is recognised nationally.

THE CHAIR: On enrolments more broadly, the accountability indicators in the budget papers show that there has been a decline for this year in the estimated student enrolments. I think the target was 13,600, and the estimated outcome is 12,200. What is the established wisdom on why there has been a decline and what do the outyears look like?

Ms Cover: It needs to be remembered that it is a demand-driven system, so we train people who come through the door, and that demand fluctuates from year to year. It depends on what courses students want to do, and it also depends on the product that is available for us to deliver. The training packages which are nationally accredited vary from year to year, in terms of how many hours or electives are in them, and students choose a variety of different programs and electives associated with that as well. That tends to make the numbers go up and down. So student choice is the first indicator of that.

There is also the full-time/part-time mix. We know that is changing as well. People are very busy and they are trying to fit their study in around the rest of their life. We are seeing the changing nature of the way people are engaging with us in that regard. If they are doing more part time, the chances are they are doing fewer hours in that space. So we need more students to get the numbers up.

THE CHAIR: Are those figures for full-time equivalents or are they individuals enrolled?

Ms Cover: No, they are actual individual nominal hours that the students are enrolled in.

MS CODY: I was looking at some of the fantastic results from your VET graduate outcomes for 2016. The graph on page 173 of budget statements B shows that the CIT is achieving very high results compared to TAFE and other government providers around Australia. Is this an averaged result?

Ms Cover: There are a couple of things about these results. All RTOs have to provide these results to the national research centre on an annual basis. The results are a collective of not just the public sector but the private sector providers in this space as well. You can see on page 173 that CIT's performance is above the national average in comparison to other TAFEs.

This is just one of the measures that the national statistics collect. They have been collected for about nine years. CIT's results continue to be either above or at the national average, particularly for employer satisfaction, student satisfaction and engagement, which again goes to the quality of the offerings and how pleased students are with the quality of what they are getting at CIT. Also, employers are

particularly satisfied with the standard of apprenticeship training. It has been a partnership between them as an employer, us as an RTO and the student who has undertaken that training as well.

MS CODY: The middle part of the graph shows the figures for “employed or in further study after training”. I was lucky enough to attend a graduation ceremony a couple of weeks ago for a return to work for women at the CIT at Tuggeranong. Some of the statistics that I was provided with for that particular course were probably a little bit higher than that, which was fantastic. Are we seeing that a lot in the courses that CIT offers—that students are regularly coming back to CIT and regularly gaining employment?

Ms Cover: We are. We know that there is confidence in that particular program, for instance. I also had the pleasure of being there and listening to those fantastic student outcomes—not only in building up the confidence in the skills that the individuals had but also the actual job outcomes. I know a number of them have already been placed; it was a really high percentage. The table on this page relates to all students that are sampled on an annual basis. That particular program has very good results.

It goes to the quality of the teachers. I think it also goes to the connections that our teachers have with industry. We know that we are producing job-ready graduates, but we also have great connections and networks, which you saw that day, that connect students. Many of the students’ future employers are people they meet at CIT whilst they are studying, through a work placement or on an on-the-job training experience that they get. Overall, our student graduate outcomes are right up there, in terms of the national average—at the average or above the average.

MS CODY: I am a proud product of CIT myself, so it is good to keep it going, I say.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is for the minister. What is the relationship at present between the ACT government and the University of Canberra? I assume we can talk about that in the higher education area. Is there an ongoing relationship?

Ms Fitzharris: Legislation passed by the Assembly established the university. It is different, for example, from the other universities in the city. There are some responsibilities that I have explicitly under the University of Canberra Act. For example, members of the University of Canberra Council are appointed by the Chief Minister. I have legislative responsibility for the University of Canberra Act, but this portfolio is principally supporting the sector as a whole and it does not have any other specific relationship with the University of Canberra beyond the legislation that establishes the University of Canberra.

MS LE COUTEUR: I was going to ask some more detailed questions about joint ventures and things, but it sounds like I am asking those in the wrong place.

Ms Fitzharris: Yes, that is right. There was a question that came up in the annual reports hearings; I believe I recently wrote to Mr Pettersson, as the chair of the education committee, about that. There is a requirement to table the University of Canberra annual report in the Assembly but there has never been a requirement for the University of Canberra to be subject to scrutiny by the Assembly.

MS LE COUTEUR: I did realise that. I just thought you would be the person who would know about ongoing joint ventures, activities et cetera, but clearly the answer is no.

Ms Fitzharris: In terms of this portfolio, no, there are no specific responsibilities. There are a range of projects. It goes to the question Mr Coe asked earlier about precincts. As Ms Cover said, we are seeing the establishment of a very significant health and allied health precinct in Bruce with Calvary, Bruce and ACT Health assets that are adjacent to that site—CIT, the University of Canberra itself and the University of Canberra public hospital. There are a range of partnerships and collaborations that go on right across government. But there is nothing specific in this portfolio.

MR COE: Are you able to either state now or provide to the committee what areas were looked at by the internal audit committee in the last financial year and what is in the schedule for the coming year?

Mr Sloan: For CIT? I do not know whether we have the audit schedule with us today, but we can certainly take that on notice.

MR COE: That would be good, thank you. Does CIT use Shared Services for the provision of IT and other—

Mr Sloan: Yes.

MR COE: Is there an internal charge within the government for those services?

Mr Sloan: Correct.

MR COE: Are you able to provide to the committee the cost of the services from Shared Services and what that includes?

Mr Sloan: We will take that one on notice as well.

Ms Fitzharris: Could I mention one thing that I know the Assembly had a discussion about in the last sitting, which was the commonwealth funding. We passed a motion to write to the federal minister that ceasing funding was going to have a major impact. We were pleased to see the commonwealth provide some funding in the budget. The nature of that funding is through the foreign worker levy, so it is subject to that legislation passing the commonwealth parliament, which is no mean feat at the moment. I wanted to put on the record that, given the Assembly had quite a debate about it, it is welcome and we will engage in that process—pending, of course, the actual funding being available following the passage of the foreign worker levy.

MR COE: I must have missed that media release in which the ACT government commended the federal government.

Ms Fitzharris: I have had a meeting with the relevant commonwealth minister and also a ministerial council meeting, and at both I thanked the commonwealth for that—

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noting that, of course, it is subject to a significant piece of legislation getting through the commonwealth parliament, which is not certain.

THE CHAIR: We will adjourn today's hearings, following 11 days of public hearings. For any questions that have been taken on notice, we ask that they be returned to the committee secretary within five days, with day one normally being the next working day. So Monday would be day one.

The committee adjourned at 5.10 pm.