



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2019-2020
and ACT budget 2020-2021](#))

Members:

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)
MR J DAVIS (Deputy Chair)
MR P CAIN**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 1 MARCH 2021

**Secretary to the committee:
Mr D Leary (Ph: 620 50124)**

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.

APPEARANCES

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9 am.

Appearances:

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

Education Directorate

Haire, Ms Katy, Director-General

Matthews, Mr David, Deputy Director-General

Hawkins, Mr Ross, Executive Group Manager, Service Design and Delivery

McKinnon, Ms Margaret, Executive Group Manager, Business Services

McMahon, Ms Kate, Executive Branch Manager, Learning and Wellbeing Policy and Design

Gotts, Mr Robert, Executive Branch Manager, Analytics and Evaluation

Daly, Ms Lynette, Chief Finance Officer, Strategic Finance and Procurement

Parkinson, Mr Andrew, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Capital Works

Watson, Mr Martin, Executive Director, Office of Board of Senior Secondary Studies

THE CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the first public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion into annual and financial reports 2019-20 and estimates for 2020-21. The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region.

The proceedings today will examine the annual reports and budget estimates for the Education Directorate; the Community Services Directorate in relation to child and family centres, child development services, inclusion and participation, and the offices for youth and women; the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate in relation to government policy and reform; the Office for LGBTIQ+ Affairs; sport and recreation; property services; and aquatic facilities management.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed and published by Hansard. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live.

When taking questions on notice, it will be useful if witnesses use these words: "I will take that as a question taken on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

At this point I would like to ask each of the witnesses whether you have read the privilege statement that is in front of you. Could you confirm that for the record?

Mr Matthews: Yes, Chair.

Ms Berry: Yes, I have, Chair.

THE CHAIR: As we are not accepting any opening statements, let us jump straight to questions. Minister, could you tell me about some of the announcements in the budget in relation to schools in Gungahlin?

Ms Berry: Yes. I know that you are interested in schools in Gungahlin, as one of the local members there. There have been quite a number of growth and new school announcements for Gungahlin—one of the fastest-growing areas in Australia. We have had increased capacity across a range of schools, as well as new schools being built every year. We have a new school at Throsby, a new school at Kenny, and more space at Margaret Hendry School.

The Throsby school will be for around 800 students. The Margaret Hendry School will grow by 600. In addition to the primary school, there will be a high school at Taylor, and at Kenny there will be an additional 600 spaces, I think. I think I have got all of those numbers right. There are transportable classrooms as well. I believe there are 17 across the ACT. I am not quite sure of the number in Gungahlin.

Mr Matthews: I can find out for you, Minister. I will look up that information on transportables.

Ms Berry: There are 17 transportables across the city, but a number of those went into expansions in Gungahlin, as well as expansions at Amaroo School for their science and technology area. I think you came along to that announcement.

THE CHAIR: I did. It was very exciting. I have some questions specifically about schools. In terms of the scoping work for Taylor high school, when do we expect Taylor high school to be open to new students?

Ms Berry: In 2023.

THE CHAIR: In terms of Margaret Hendry School, that school opened in 2019, I think. Is there a particular reason that we are expanding a school that just opened?

Ms Berry: Yes, because Gungahlin is continuing to grow. That school was built for expansion in the future, but as the community is growing much faster, we are able to expand that school's capacity sooner than we expected.

Ms Haire: Gungahlin is one of the fastest-growing regions in all of Australia, according to our demography work; hence the rapid growth in school numbers.

THE CHAIR: One of the curious things I read about funding for Kenny high school is that, seemingly, the money that has been allocated is for roadworks. Could someone—

Ms Berry: Which one?

THE CHAIR: Kenny high school. Could someone explain to the committee why the

initial funding for Kenny high school is to do with road infrastructure?

Ms Berry: Because there are a number of constraints out in Kenny with regard to the roads and making sure that they connect appropriately for when a school is built out there. This is the first part of that funding for the Kenny high school.

Ms Haire: In the budget, Mr Pettersson, \$1.5 million was provided to Transport Canberra and City Services to assist with planning, infrastructure studies and concept design for associated roadworks. In addition, there was \$13.41 million for the school itself. I think at the last hearing the committee heard that the site had not yet been finalised. The site was subsequently finalised, which resulted in further scoping work about what was required to ensure that the infrastructure was in place.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell the committee where that school would be located in Kenny?

Ms Berry: I will get a map and show you a picture of it, if that is okay.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful.

MR DAVIS: Minister, I note the statement about the Safe and Supportive Schools program on page 33 of the annual report. Would you mind telling the committee a little bit about the Safe and Supportive Schools initiative?

Ms Berry: I might ask Mr Hawkins to provide a little bit more detail on the Safe and Supportive Schools initiative.

MR DAVIS: It probably will not surprise Mr Hawkins that I have follow-ups on this subject.

Mr Hawkins: I will make myself comfortable! I have read the privilege statement. The Safe and Supportive Schools initiative has been around since 2017. Basically, the Education Directorate funds and works very closely with SHFPACT, which is Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, in order to provide capability supports for our teachers in supporting students who are LGBTIQ+ and those that are transitioning in our schools. It is very much a capability-raising piece with our teachers to ensure that they can support our students, predominantly in our high schools and colleges but also in our primary schools, to make sure that there are sufficient resources and supports in place in helping them to support students that are LGBTIQ youth, and those that are transitioning.

One of the things that we are acutely minded of is the statistics in reports with respect to our LGBTIQ+ students, particularly on issues associated with things like suicide and self-harm. We want to make sure that the appropriate levels of supports are out there in our schools and that, as our schoolteachers want to engage with those supports—I am sure they need more—there is a level of expertise that is available to them in doing that.

MR DAVIS: In how many schools is the Safe and Supportive Schools initiative currently running?

Ms Berry: It is available for all of our schools. School communities and teachers access the supports through SHFPACT, depending on things that might be happening in their schools, as students raise issues or in a more proactive way. A number of our schools also celebrate Purple Day and—

Mr Hawkins: IDAHOBIT.

Ms Berry: Yes, IDAHOBIT Day. That is growing every year. For the last four years since I have been education minister, I have been seeing more and more schools engage with that. A number of students, both LGBTIQ and others, attend that, as well as all of the teachers. It is not just about support for the students but support for teachers as well, who might identify differently and need extra support. It is whole-of-school community support; it is not just focused on one thing.

MR DAVIS: I am glad to hear that it is available in all schools, but I am curious as to whether we keep data on which schools have actually taken from the program and implemented some, if not all, of its initiatives.

Mr Hawkins: The information I have available to me is that, in 2019, it was 24 per cent of our primary schools, 66 per cent of high schools and 40 per cent of colleges.

MR DAVIS: Twenty-four per cent of primary schools?

Mr Hawkins: Yes; 66 per cent of high schools and 44 per cent of colleges. But that is territory-wide, so that would be both public and non-government schools.

MR DAVIS: Do we know from those numbers if they have taken all of the initiatives as part of the program or is it a bit of a shopping list and a matter of saying, “This program works for us; this doesn’t”?

Mr Hawkins: The information I have is that that is engagement with the initiatives. Those numbers would come from SHFPACT themselves. That could be around those that might have run professional learning and those that would have engaged. Sometimes SHFPACT provide quite targeted supports for some teachers and some individual students. It can really vary—the levels of support that are utilised.

Last year’s IDAHOBIT celebration, in 2020, was a little different because of the COVID constraints, but we had a celebration back in 2019 where a significant number of our high schools and colleges came together at the Hedley Beare centre for learning. There was a level of engagement with both teachers and students. I think the minister came along and spoke to it. We know that we have a really high uptake from a number of our high schools and colleges.

MR DAVIS: On LGBTQI people more broadly in our schools, does the directorate have an overarching LGBTQI inclusion statement or policy?

Mr Hawkins: We have our Safe and Supportive Schools policy, which is really clear around the expectations of all of our students within our schools, in terms of creating a safe environment. We are working very closely on various additional supports with

SHFPACT around how to support students, particularly in affirming their gender, because this is an area where students have told us they want a further degree of supports.

We know that there is a great sense of student voice in a number of our high schools and colleges. One thing that you can guarantee in schools is that kids are really great at telling you about what they need and what their requirements are. When it comes to things like how to get support in terms of non-binary toilets, students will often tell us what they are looking for, when they are looking at what supports might look like within their school, and at a different curriculum. They tell us. We can become very responsive to meeting student need. We have resources and guides within the directorate that we can provide to schools. We also have that SHFPACT piece that we can rely on.

MR DAVIS: The overarching inclusion statement or policy that you have is that Safe and Supportive schools initiative?

Mr Hawkins: There is the Safe and Supportive schools policy, which sets the broad—and that covers—

MR DAVIS: So that covers every school?

Mr Hawkins: It covers every school.

MR DAVIS: They are all aware of it?

Mr Hawkins: That is largely around making sure that all students feel safe at school. It covers how to support bullying, if that takes place, all the way through to supporting our LGBTQIA+ youth as well. That is the kind of meta policy frame. Underneath that we are currently working on a guide to help support students to affirm their gender.

MR DAVIS: To summarise, there is the overarching strategy, which all of the schools are governed by, for lack of a better way of looking at it; then you have the statistics you gave me—24 per cent primary, 66 per cent high school and 44 per cent college—regarding the schools that have taken up parts of the program. What strategy does the directorate have to increase those numbers and, ideally, get to full saturation, so that all schools are using the program in some form?

Mr Hawkins: The safe and inclusive schools initiative, which is the part that sits under the policy, is currently up this year. As part of our listening to student voice, we are looking at what students want, and what teachers tell us that they need, in order to look at the configuration of that program into the future—the next iteration of the initiative. SHFPACT have been really great in terms of giving us feedback around what they would like to see more of in future. Again, the stuff that we are working on early this year is in terms of looking at what that contractual arrangement could look like into the future.

MR DAVIS: Is SHFPACT the only external organisation that the directorate has a relationship with to provide supports to LGBTQI students or are there other organisations that you partner with?

Mr Hawkins: Historically, we have worked with A Gender Agenda and the AIDS Action Council. There are a range of other partners that we work with right across the non-government sector.

Ms Berry: Individual schools set up their own alliances and groups as well, of course—

Mr Hawkins: Yes, they do.

Ms Berry: to support each other, and students that might start high school, for example, in year 7. There are those support groups. I know Calwell has one, and maybe Alfred Deakin.

Mr Hawkins: Alfred Deakin does. Gungahlin College does. It is about looking at how we enable those supports to take place. Sometimes it is organic. But when they do start to work through a school, how do we continue to support schools in being able to support their students who are advocating for themselves? It is really quite refreshing to see them tell us what they need, to help them to embrace and connect with their education.

MR DAVIS: It probably helps to flag my concerns so that it can help you to get an answer. I am comfortable that the framework for students who self-identify and put their hand up to say, “We want programs,” or “We want services,” is available. I am curious as to what the directorate is doing so that, for those students who are not self-identifying or for whom, for whatever reason, school does not feel like a safe place and they do not know about the tools they can use, they can say, “I need these services.” How are we making sure that those services are available to them in their schools?

Mr Hawkins: It is probably worth, on that point, stepping back a little bit and looking at what we do in schools more broadly. We have been working through a framework called Positive Behaviour for Learning within our schools. That is a really important program because it starts to identify what the values are that the school will determine. It works closely with the students and the school community.

It sets those base levels of expectation around how we treat each other and how we work in a school environment. A lot of our values would tend to include things like respect and, through respect, there would be conversations within the school around how we treat people and what that needs to look like. Those base levels are really important, in a universal expectation, right across our public schools.

More broadly, we want to make sure that education is for everyone. There are supports within schools, what we call our continuing education supports, around students that may need additional support through their learning, in whatever way that could look like. We have other programs as well. We have talked in this committee before about the Muliyan program that we have put in place across the government for 30 students where, for whatever reason, mainstream schooling has not worked for them. We put a more targeted program in place to make sure that we can cater for and support their educational needs.

Ms Haire: One of the things that we have seen over the last few years with the rollout of Positive Behaviour for Learning, and with the provision of psychologists and other wellbeing staff in schools, is that schools have shifted their approach from a kind of deficit model, where students are in need of help, to a positive culture where wellbeing is the goal.

Students are encouraged to come forward, seek the support that they need from a range of non-stigmatised services that are part of the school wellbeing program and, through that, individual needs can be identified and supported. That is part of the shift that has happened over the last couple of years, particularly through Positive Behaviour for Learning.

MR CAIN: My question relates to the use of temporary buildings in public schools. It is my understanding that a cohort transition model is used to predict school capacity. In relation to that, is the use of mobile learning centres—that is, temporary buildings—part of the usual planning for growth or only for events that are unpredicted by the cohort transition model?

Ms Berry: It would be a combination of both. Every state and territory uses transportable classrooms to manage capacity within schools at times of demographic change in growth. It is not unusual for schools in Australia to manage that through the use of transportable classrooms. Of course, these days the transportable classrooms are of such high quality that their life tends to be longer and they are much more sustainable and user friendly, and they provide a really great teaching and learning place. They are not the transportable classrooms that people might have imagined from the past. They are not like the spare shearing sheds that are used and transported around when the shearing is happening. These are more semi-permanent classrooms that have a significant, long life and can also be moved to other schools where capacity might be changing. Mr Matthews, do you have anything to add?

Mr Matthews: The backdrop is very much that public schooling continues to grow in the territory—about three per cent every year—so we have a growing system. There are some interesting variations around that across the territory. The territory is not growing in a uniform way. Of course, we have already spoken today about Gungahlin and the quite significant levels of population growth in that part of the city.

There are also other factors at play, such as the change in the affiliation rate; that is, whether people are choosing public education or private education, which is available to parents in our community. We are seeing significant growth in the affiliation in choosing public education. That is one of the other factors around planning for need.

To go very specifically to your question, relocatable units are a very important part of planning for school infrastructure. We want a mixture of both fixed and flexible infrastructure across our system so that we can cater appropriately for those bubbles in demand. All of us, as Canberra residents, know that an area suddenly has lots of children, your street is covered by teenagers, and then it tends to gentrify. Different parts of the city are going through that cycle at different times.

The use of relocatable units gives us the capacity to adjust for that, so that we are not

overinvesting in fixed infrastructure where it is not required, and that we have the capacity to make sure that we meet our requirement, under the Education Act, to provide a local school option for every child.

The last point that the minister made, which is a really important one, related to the quality of those relocatable units now. They are very sustainable and very comfortable. In fact, often they are chosen by students as their preferred part of the school, in terms of the facilities and infrastructure. It is not pejorative in any way, having regard to the way that they exist within our school communities. Depending on whether it is primary or high school, people are moving through different parts of the school throughout the day.

We are mindful of all of those issues, but we do think it is an important part of being able to plan for changes in demand over time, and to make sure that we can adjust capacity as required.

MR CAIN: You mentioned students have commented that they prefer the temporary buildings to the permanent. What evidence do you have to support that statement?

Mr Matthews: I will give you the example of Narrabundah College. We are going through a modernisation of Narrabundah College at the moment. As you would be aware, that is one of the older buildings that we have in the territory. We have demolished some of the infrastructure on that side and put in a transportable village on the oval at that school.

The feedback from students, from the principal, and from me after site visits—and I know others have visited as well—has been very favourable about that infrastructure and the sense of community that it has created in that part of the school. That is just one example where—

MR CAIN: Is this feedback a survey that you have conducted of the whole school population?

Mr Matthews: It is not a survey as such, Mr Cain. As I said, I am providing the context that the anecdotal feedback from staff and students is that they have no issues with the relocatable infrastructure. In fact, they feel that it is meeting their education requirements, it has good thermal comfort and the like.

MR CAIN: It would be interesting to see what the school population, students and teachers, do actually think.

Ms Berry: They have told me. I would agree with Mr Matthews on that statement as well. There is agreement that that is a high-quality teaching and learning environment. Whilst it is a transportable environment, the students named it “the village”. Everybody feels completely comfortable there, from what I am hearing from the teachers and students.

MR CAIN: You said earlier, Minister, that all states and the territory—and, I guess, the Northern Territory—use temporary buildings. This might be a question to be taken on notice: do you have an assessment of how the ACT, proportionally, compares to

other jurisdictions on the percentage of temporary versus permanent structures in schools?

Ms Berry: That would be incredibly difficult to nail down, I think. I do not think we could nail that down.

MR CAIN: Perhaps not today?

Ms Berry: It would be a significant amount of work to do that, and we would have to work with other state and territory governments to see if we could find that detail. But I can say that that is the case for other states and territories, and particularly for Victoria. When we order our transportable classrooms for the ACT, we are often competing with the Victorian government's education directorate on getting transportable classrooms delivered from Victoria to here. I know that they are constantly building a significant number of transportable classrooms. I think they are built in Victoria or South Australia. Victoria are using a significant number of those to manage the availability of classes in their schools.

MR CAIN: Will the use of temporary buildings increase?

Ms Berry: If there are more increases across different parts of the ACT, then transportable classrooms are probably one of the most efficient ways to provide good quality teaching and learning environments. As an example, growing up in Holt, in west Belconnen, my old school was one of the schools that was closed down. Holt Primary School had permanent classrooms for a very long time. It had quite a number of transportable classrooms for a while; then the demographics changed again and the transportables were moved on to other schools. That school was closed down when it had very small numbers of students.

It is not a new thing for the ACT to use transportable classrooms. These have been used since before self-government. It is not something new that has just come along as an issue.

MR CAIN: How long has the oldest temporary teaching building been in place in an ACT public school?

Mr Matthews: We would certainly have to take that on notice, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Sure.

MR DAVIS: What is the average energy efficiency rating of the new transportable classrooms that we are procuring?

Ms Berry: We have a brand new transportable classroom that we are piloting at Majura Primary School. It is a new classroom. Somebody else might have to go through the detail because I am not quite clear, but it has water and electricity from solar and battery power. It is a new transportable that we are trialling at Majura Primary School at the moment.

Ms Haire: We might invite Mr Parkinson to speak about this, because it is a matter on

which he can provide the details.

Ms Berry: It is pretty exciting. It is a new one. The rest of them are pretty high-quality, sustainable classrooms. They have double glazing and they are all insulated well. This new one at Majura is one that we are piloting to see how it goes.

Mr Parkinson: The minister is referring to a couple of units that we call Hive units, Hive being the company name. The Hive units that are installed at Majura are being designed so that they can be totally off-grid. They have water storage; they have batteries installed with them. They can operate totally off-grid. Two units are going in at Majura, and a third unit will go in at Yarralumla.

The facilities are very energy efficient. All transportables that go into the schools at the moment are required to meet the National Construction Code, which means they meet the minimum energy requirements. They generally perform better than our older transportables. The older transportables were built in pre-National Construction Code times. The new ones are much more energy efficient. The Hives are another step beyond the other current units that we have installed.

MR DAVIS: I imagine that there is a framework in place to determine whether or not the Hive buildings have been considered to be a success. As this is a pilot project, as the minister said, assuming that it passes all of those checks and balances, is it the directorate's intention to continue to procure these classrooms?

Mr Parkinson: We are looking at energy efficiency across the board. The Hives will go in, and we will see what their performance is like across the course of this year. We will see how much energy they consume relative to the other units. We monitor energy consumption fairly strongly across all of our built form. We will be able to see how they perform.

There are other units around, of similar vintage—the other transportables that we have installed this year, the other 11-odd units from this year. We will be able to compare those, see what sort of efficiencies we get and look at the cost-benefit of those for the future. We will be able to look at our environmental gains from reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

MR DAVIS: Is it fair to say that these Hive units are, on average, more sustainable than established school buildings that we have that are legacy buildings and prior to self-government?

Ms Berry: Absolutely.

MR DAVIS: Given the framework for how schools pay for things—that they are self-managed—I imagine schools are seeing a dividend in being able to reinvest more back into teaching and learning, if the costs of running these buildings are lower than they would be in an established school?

Ms Berry: To be clear, all of our schools are part of a system. They are all funded based on the Gonski funding model, a needs-based model. If schools needed additional funds for something, then the Education Directorate would work with the

school on what those priorities might be.

Every single one of our public schools has solar panels. Obviously, some of the newer schools are zero emission schools, like Margaret Hendry, and the Evelyn Scott School in Denman Prospect. As things develop, and as people pay more attention to the changes that climate change require us to take action on, things are changing in that space. Updating our older classrooms is much more difficult than building it from scratch with our much more sustainable buildings, which we have been doing with our newer schools.

MR DAVIS: In summary, would it be fair to say that these new Hive classrooms are more sustainable, more energy efficient and subsequently more comfortable than the average established classroom across older school buildings?

Ms Berry: That is what we have been told.

Mr Matthews: Mr Davis, it is important to note that they have been there for just a few weeks, from term 1, 2021.

MR DAVIS: Fingers crossed then.

Mr Matthews: Yes, indeed. The directorate is very committed to looking at how it can reduce its footprint and increase its sustainability across our whole portfolio, which is why we try these sorts of initiatives. We are looking at the cost-benefit of all of the different strategies that are available to us, including both fixed and permanent infrastructure. We are really hopeful, and we are really interested to see the results of this particular piece of work out at Majura, to make sure that we can justify the best way of investing in our portfolio for both sustainability and educational purposes.

MR CAIN: Following on from Mr Davis's line of questioning, and touching on something that I said earlier as well, obviously, you have some anecdotal evidence, as you have presented. Would it be possible for you to consider doing a comprehensive survey of the teacher, student and parent cohort in the public school system to see what the level of satisfaction is regarding children being in temporary buildings compared to permanent infrastructure? Anecdotal evidence, obviously, is just what you happen to hear at a particular point in time. It is not terribly objective.

Ms Berry: That would be something that the Education Directorate would need to consider—whether that was the case and whether schools wanted to participate in something like that. Certainly, the anecdotal evidence that we have from conversations with school communities is that they are satisfied with the teaching and learning spaces that are provided through those transportable classrooms.

MR CAIN: Something more objective than anecdotal evidence may be of use to your department. Certainly, it would give comfort, I think, to the community if indeed it is a broadly held view as opposed to things that you have heard from particular students or teachers. I make that as a comment and as a suggestion.

MR HANSON: Is there a total number for the transportable buildings across the ACT? There are 17 in the budget but that is in addition to the existing—

Mr Matthews: 148, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: 148 plus 17; is that right?

Mr Matthews: No, the 148 includes the 17.

MR DAVIS: Can I assume that a parent-teacher-student survey of the Hive buildings will be part of that pilot program's analysis to determine its success? Mr Cain was asking more broadly about transportables, but I would be interested in seeing whether we surveyed just the parents, teachers and students who are using the classrooms in this new pilot program.

Ms Berry: That would probably be something we could do, in one school.

Ms Haire: As part of the evaluation that Mr Parkinson spoke about, ensuring that we have heard from students, teachers and families would be important input into evaluating those buildings.

MR CAIN: Obviously, more broadly, across the public school sector, I am sure that, as a department, you would gain valuable insight and information, not just about a particular set-up.

Mr Matthews: Chair, I can answer the previous questions. Of those 17 relocatable units, two of them were for Gungahlin. The location of the Kenny school is Well Station Drive. The road that will be extended as part of those works is Albatross Crescent.

MR HANSON: Can we unpick the issue of NAPLAN and literacy and numeracy? I have been reading a number of reports that have been released over the last few years. There is one from the ANU, the Grattan Institute, the Australia Institute, the University of Victoria, as well as the Auditor-General's report. I quote the overall conclusions from the Auditor-General:

ACT Public Schools are performing below similar schools in other jurisdictions despite expenditure on a per student basis for public schools being one of the highest in the country. Since 2014 reviews of ACT public schools have consistently identified shortcomings in their analysis of student performance information and their use of data to inform educational practice. These shortcomings indicate a systemic problem.

Reading all of those reports, there has been an issue, seemingly, with literacy and numeracy within the ACT since 2008 and the NAPLAN data. Going through and looking at it, there has been a decline in the results. Also, when compared with like schools in other jurisdictions, the analysis in some of the reports suggests that for year 5 we are testing six months behind where we should be. A number of reports have flowed out from the Auditor-General. I just want to know where we are at in terms of addressing a number of the issues that have been raised in those reports.

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Hanson. I am always happy to talk about NAPLAN and remind everybody that it is a point in time test and really only shows a very limited

picture of a child's learning. The ACT government takes a broader perspective around our students' learning and growth across all of our schools, which is not just a point in time snapshot picture on a very narrow focus. There is an issue around the comparisons as well and whether or not they are effective or fair comparisons for ACT public schools compared to other schools across the country, or like schools, as they are described. It is quite a story that you have asked for in that question.

MR HANSON: It is, yes.

Ms Berry: We are happy to provide you with as much as we can today. Mr Gotts, Mr Matthews, anyone?

Ms Haire: Mr Hanson, maybe the best way to take you through it, firstly, is if Mr Gotts takes you through the data analysis part of it and the matters that the minister has referred to. You specifically mentioned or asked about literacy and numeracy. I might invite Ms Kate McMahon to talk about the specific programs and initiatives that we have undertaken over the last few years around both literacy and numeracy in ACT schools.

Mr Gotts: I have read the statement and understand it. You have asked a broad question. I will try to answer it by saying that there are a few strands to this. First of all, how does the ACT perform just as a general jurisdiction? We perform well. We are always amongst the top performers. The outright performance that we get for our students is extremely good. I will come back to comparisons in just a minute.

You raised the Auditor-General's report, which I think was in 2017. One of the recommendations in that report went to issues of measuring growth, rather than measuring raw scores. We now put a great focus on the rate of learning growth for our children. The raw scores are dependent on a range of other factors, including what we all know is an advantaged society, by and large, in the ACT, but not exclusively, so that tends to give us those high scores.

With regard to interjurisdictional comparisons and the other reports that you mentioned, the minister referred to some questions in relation to that. What I can say is that in the ACT we are very conscious of the interjurisdictional comparisons. We do have some questions as to how they are constructed. Those questions have been put to ACARA and resulted in a project that was agreed by Education Council ministers at the end of 2019, or it might have been March 2020.

We have been working with ACARA over the last 12 months, with the assistance of Victoria University, which you also mentioned. We have been working very closely to explore the way in which interjurisdictional comparisons are undertaken. There have been other jurisdictions as part of that exploration. The results are not quite ready yet, so I am not able to talk about them. When they are, something will go back to education ministers—it is not Education Council anymore—to inform them of the results of that and suggest what might be the next steps.

You also talked about NAPLAN results going down over time.

MR HANSON: Seemingly. Having looked at it, that seems to be the case, but you

might be able to correct me or verify what I am saying.

Mr Gotts: If the first year that people compare it with is 2008, which was the very first year of NAPLAN, then it does look as if results have been going down. That is because the first year, in a sense, was a bit of an anomaly. We tend to look at NAPLAN results over multiple years. There are a few things that operate here. One of them is that each year ACARA run an equating process that balances out the results of NAPLAN with previous years, because they want them to be comparable, and that causes little adjustments to the scores here and there.

Another factor that we have to take into account in the ACT is that we are only 1.65 per cent of the national student population. It is a relatively small amount. Small amounts, in statistical terms, lead to greater levels of volatility. The ACT, the Northern Territory and Tasmania are always a little bit more volatile than New South Wales, Victoria or Queensland, which are much bigger jurisdictions with much bigger populations. We keep a watch on that.

The other thing that we look at is how each jurisdiction is moving over a year. When all the jurisdictions move in the same direction, just by a few points but in the same direction, then we are confident that that is down to slight variations in the testing process and so on. That means that everyone has moved up a few points or down a few points. A few points here or there is not significant in a statistical sense. What we look for more closely is where a jurisdiction has moved in the opposite direction of everyone else. That is more likely to be due to factors that happen in that jurisdiction. It could be all sorts of things.

A good example would be a few years ago when New South Wales introduced, just for one year, a policy that linked year 9 NAPLAN to year 12 certificates. It just operated for that one year. New South Wales had a jump in their year 9 results. I do not know for certain, because it has not been surveyed, but certainly our expectation is that students treated NAPLAN a bit differently for that year because they thought it was linked to their later outcomes. It resulted in a lift upwards in NAPLAN results for New South Wales for that one year. So there can be things that happen at the individual jurisdictional level that lead to a movement in the opposite direction of everyone else. We watch those things.

I guess the final factor that we have to take into account here is that the ACT was an early adopter with regard to NAPLAN online. About 90 per cent of the ACT's schools and students went on NAPLAN online in 2018, and only a tiny handful of schools were not on board. They are now all on board. The equating exercise for those jurisdictions that had only half of their students online was a much more significant process than the normal equating when everyone was on paper.

In another couple of years, I think 2022, all jurisdictions are supposed to be online for everyone. This issue of having to equate between a group of paper scores and a group of online scores will be over. That will eliminate the extent to which that may or may not impact on ACT scores. It is a moving feast with multiple parts, and we try and keep track of all of those.

MR HANSON: Thanks.

MR DAVIS: A supplementary.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Haire: I am sorry, Mr Davis; Mr Hanson, would you also like information on the literacy and numeracy?

MR HANSON: Yes. Obviously, there is NAPLAN in terms of what has happened to it fundamentally. The important issue is how we are travelling with literacy and numeracy. NAPLAN is just a measure of that, so thanks for that. If we could talk about the literacy and numeracy and then maybe come back?

MR DAVIS: I am happy if you want to expand on Mr Hanson's questions.

Mr Gotts: That would be someone else.

MR DAVIS: If you don't mind, I have a question on NAPLAN that I wouldn't mind asking. Noting that there is not community consensus over the efficacy of NAPLAN—there is not even consensus among educators on the efficacy of NAPLAN—what other strategic indicators is the directorate using to track equity and outcomes across students, other than NAPLAN?

Mr Gotts: NAPLAN is great value for us as analysts at the jurisdictional level, and we get a great deal of value out of it for that. But you are right: it is not the only piece of information that is important to us. Let us go to a couple of the other strategic indicators that we use. One of those is student growth and an increase in learning. We use NAPLAN as a mechanism to measure the change in learning growth over time. It is the learning growth that is important, not necessarily the specific score that a student got.

We are able to determine changes between more and less advantaged groups of students over time to see whether the gap between those groups is reducing. The usefulness of NAPLAN in that context is that it gives us—because we would not want to see the equity gap reducing by the top coming down; we want the bottom to go up—a national framework to link to so we can always see how we are going in that sense.

One of the other strategic indicators is student identity, which is really shorthand for student belonging. The model we work with is that the more that students identify with their school and the more the school is important to them in their lives, then it has a positive impact on students' emotional engagement with the school. Students who are more emotionally engaged are more likely to do well, and that is all students. It does not matter which group of students they may fall into; but the more students are engaged, the more likely they are to do well. We track that level of belonging, basically. If that level goes up, it gives us confidence that it will lead to more engaged students et cetera.

MR HANSON: The report that was commissioned by the minister and a number of your colleagues from interstate was published in August and had a number of

recommendations. Are you still working through that? Is there a response that the government can provide to this report?

Ms Berry: No. We are working through those recommendations. The change to the make-up of the council has made it a little bit challenging at the moment in terms of how that is going to work. We are still working through them. Not every state and territory is supportive of some of those recommendations either.

MR HANSON: Will you be responding to this report formally?

Ms Berry: I think that it is going to ACARA first and then after that ministers will work through the next stage.

MR HANSON: Okay.

MR DAVIS: In the event that my wildest political dreams came true and we did not use NAPLAN anymore, what other tools, in addition to student growth and student identity, could the directorate identify that would collect similar or the same data as NAPLAN, but outside of that framework?

Ms Berry: There have been discussions since the beginning of NAPLAN's life in 2008 about whether NAPLAN was useful or beneficial or not in a child's education. Certainly, I have been an advocate for the latter in that I do not know that it does benefit a child's education and learning outcomes. We have a number of tools already in place that Mr Gotts has identified. We do the student satisfaction survey and we have the national school assessment tools. There is the work that we have been doing as part of Education Council around what could a replacement for NAPLAN be, although, as I say, not every state and territory agrees that NAPLAN should be removed. It should be noted that NAPLAN is connected with the funding from the commonwealth government, so you cannot just opt out. It is there and you need to apply it whether you agree with it or not.

My main concern with NAPLAN is about how it is reported online. Schools and students are pitted against each other based on their individual school's NAPLAN results. In the playground as well, we hear of young people telling stories about their NAPLAN results and whether they failed or succeeded in life because of their NAPLAN scores. For me, that has been the main issue that I have tried to pursue with Education Council and education ministers about removing that part of NAPLAN that makes it so harmful, in my view. That is supported by a number of states and territories who joined together to bring forward this report which Education Council has published and is going to ACARA.

There is an option around investigating a formative assessment tool. I know New Zealand got rid of their standardised testing a couple of years ago and are considering another kind of formative assessment. There is PISA, which exists right now, which is an international test. It is not in every single school but sample schools. That provides really good information about how our schools are going; it is not on such a narrow margin and has less harmful results. So that is one way.

Of course, every step of the way through a child's education, teachers are assessing a

student's learning and growth every single day. They do that using a multiple range of tools. The professionals are already doing that work with each individual student and we want to see that continue as well. Simply pulling out of NAPLAN is not a simple solution. If it were, I definitely would have considered it. At the moment we are still making sure that NAPLAN provides benefits to a child's education and, in my view, I do not think that it does. But it does give some data that is useful if it is used appropriately, which I also do not think it is when it is published on My School and provides that whole kind of circus and palaver around a child's education.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

Ms Berry: I do not think that I answered your question. I think I just went on a bit of a rant then.

MR DAVIS: No, I was happy to nod and agree with you.

Ms Berry: Okay.

MR HANSON: If you turn to PISA, that is indicating some similar systemic results to NAPLAN, though, isn't it, in terms of where the ACT is performing? Regardless of what that form of testing is, when you look at the PISA results, they are indicating the same sorts of issues that NAPLAN is having as well. Regardless of your form of standardised testing, they are indicating that in literacy and numeracy and science in the ACT results are declining and the interjurisdictional stuff indicates that we are not performing as well as we should.

Mr Gotts: I have to say that we were quite pleased in the ACT with the 2018 PISA results. They showed that the ACT was moving quite positively relative to other jurisdictions in Australia. What that means is another question altogether. As you know, PISA, each time that it is run, focuses on either literacy or numeracy or science. It does cover the other things, but it has a different focus. It could be that the focus in 2018 favoured the ACT more.

We do very well when it comes to reading in comparison with other jurisdictions. It could be just that the sample that was chosen for 2018 was a bit more favourable for the ACT. We do not do it; we provide advice and then the sample is chosen. We over-sample in the ACT because we are a small jurisdiction. To get the numbers to make it statistically valid, we do a much higher proportion of our schools in the ACT than other jurisdictions do.

MR HANSON: I appreciate that I am probably taking a bit too much time here, Chair, but regardless of how we are performing compared to New South Wales or Victoria, when you look at us comparative to other nations on a scale, we were at number five or six in the world and we are now down to 17 or 18 in terms of literacy and numeracy and science. This is not necessarily an ACT problem; it seems that it is an Australia-wide problem. Is that being looked at by ministers across the board to identify whether we are slipping comparative to the rest of the world?

Ms Berry: There is work being done through ACARA and education ministers around where we need to focus more. Of course, in the ACT we focus very much on

maths and literacy. Kate will talk to you about that in more detail, because we are showing really good signs of growth amongst our students in literacy and numeracy. We also invest heavily in the ACT around STEM. We have our two academies of Future Skills, one on the north side and one on the south side. Those are providing great opportunities for science teachers within our schools to learn more from a chief scientist, if you like, who operates out of those learning centres.

Whilst we are not seeing it yet in PISAs and things that can show the real change, we are seeing within the students' education within the schools that that is making a difference. Teachers are telling us that those kinds of opportunities to really hone their craft by having those additional resources is making a difference to their education. It would be really useful to take you through the early years literacy work—and the difference that that is making across the schools—with literacy expert Christine Topfer from Tasmania. It has been a really great partnership.

Mr Matthews: As Kate McMahon comes up, just going back to Mr Davis's earlier question, the teaching profession tell us that the most valuable thing is measuring children's learning every week, every day and through the course of the year through the assessments that we have against the Australian curriculum. There are achievement standards against the Australian curriculum and that is what teachers are monitoring all day, every day, in terms of being able to measure student progress and also differentiate their teaching and learning. Building on that, the directorate identifies areas where we think we can make a strong impact through additional system-wide interventions. Literacy and numeracy, of course, is one of those areas.

What I would want the committee to be absolutely clear about is that every day teachers are looking at students' learning growth and adjusting their teaching practice around what they think that their students need in order to measure their progress against the national achievement standards. That is the bread and butter of teaching and learning. Things like standardised testing are really critical and important, but the daily work of the teacher and the student is in the classroom, using that framework.

Ms McMahon: I am an ex-principal of a primary school, so I have been able to put all of this into practice. I have read the privilege statement and agree.

I think NAPLAN forms one piece of a puzzle that schools use. Quite often, information is a bit out of date by the time we get it to be able to apply it to students' learning. Certainly, as a school leader and as an assistant leader, you would be looking at the overall results of NAPLAN rather than on an individual student basis. There are lots of other forms of assessments that schools and teachers use to track progress, as Mr Matthews was pointing out. The achievement standards to the Australian curriculum are one of the things that we map against and track.

The Australian curriculum is currently being reviewed to try and declutter it a little bit. I think it comes to the question that you are answering, Minister, about what is happening on the national stage. Some of those achievement standards will be refined and decluttered, just to get rid of everything that does not need to be there. Public review of the work for the Australian curriculum will be commencing in April. That work is due to complete towards the end of the year. That will give us a way to sift through and filter out some of that work.

The directorate has responded to some of the work around literacy and numeracy in a range of different ways. The majority of our schools have a school improvement plan which includes either an improvement in literacy or an improvement in numeracy, or both. To support those schools, we have three major projects that are in play at the moment.

The first one is the early years literacy program, which the minister spoke of. We have worked with 97 per cent of our schools in developing the efficacy of their teachers and their leaders to lead a balanced literacy program within their schools—balanced literacy meaning that we look at all aspects of literacy, not just reading, not just writing, not just one aspect; we put all of that information together and we use the 10 essential literacy practices to be able to support teachers in doing that fulsome work around literacy.

This project started in 2017. We have got one new school, so we will need to be supporting that school in this year, as it comes; but any of that change to teachers' pedagogy, so the way they teach, is going to take some time to imbed. We will start to see some of those results coming through on an annual basis. I am sure that Robert will be able to monitor those for us as we go through; he has already seen some of that work. We look at supporting school leaders in developing their understanding. There are also the supports within the school—pedagogical leaders within those schools—to guide and support the teachers to teach in that way.

The second tier to that, to the literacy approach, is to work with our secondary teachers, noting that the demands of literacy change as we move through schooling. The application of being able to write for a scientist, when you are learning science, or write for a history report is quite different to the foundational learning that you would have had in primary school.

We are teaching our secondary teachers through the scaffolding secondary program. We have worked with a large number of our teachers already and this work is continuing. Dr O'Donoghue—she used to be at the University of Canberra, but I think she is a consultant now—is a pre-eminent person within scaffolding literacy. It is around using authentic texts that are relevant to that discipline to be able to support students in their understanding of literacy and numeracy and really guide our teachers. If you are a science teacher, you may not have learnt the foundations to teaching how to write in your discipline. We are supporting those teachers to develop their understanding of teaching and writing as well. The initial feedback that we have had from teachers is that there has been a really big improvement in their confidence, in their attitude and in their knowledge and skills to explicitly teach literacy within their discipline area. When we put all of that learning together for students, it becomes a much more fulsome approach.

We have realised that maths is probably an area that we have to improve as well. Commencing this year, we have a new program around mathematics to support our teachers in teaching maths. It is very similar to the method that the minister was talking about through the Academy of Future Skills. We are developing our coaches to be able to support teachers and then having coaches in every school, those influential teachers that people come and listen to. It is not necessarily your best

mathematician on your site, but that teacher who has the greatest influence—so dispositional leaders within your school. We will develop a network to be able to support those people and provide high-quality resources and professional learning. We will then back that up with some individual supports for schools and develop an evaluation framework to make sure that we are getting it right.

That goes along a very similar line to the Academy of Future Skills, where you have specialist science teachers in our two settings who work with teachers and students, either in their own schools or at our centres, and really expose and guide those teachers to exemplary practices in science and in science teaching. So you are able to make that change and support that change as it goes along, either as a whole school or as an individual teacher within that school.

MR CAIN: Minister, or one of your support officers: what percentage of ACT year 6 public school students graduate with a year 6 reading level and a year 6 numeracy level? Has that been on the improve or otherwise?

Ms Berry: We would have to take that on notice—

Ms Haire: We would have to take that question on notice, Mr Cain.

Ms Berry: and see if that information is available.

MR HANSON: Thanks for that.

THE CHAIR: I had some questions about the government response and the update in the annual report regarding the inquiry into management and minimisation of bullying and violence. There are a couple of things that are stated as being in progress. Can someone give me an update on the complaint and management system redesign? Where is that up to?

Ms Haire: I will ask Margaret McKinnon to update you on the complaints process, Mr Pettersson.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms McKinnon: I have read the privilege statement. Thank you very much for your question. On day one, term 1 of this year we launched a new model of complaints management within the directorate. We have consulted with the Parents and Citizens Association and we are being guided by them as we develop publicly available material that is more user friendly.

We are in the process of sourcing and improving our client relationship management system, which will allow us to better track data and timeliness of responding to complaints, as well as trends and patterns. We have, within the directorate, committed to, I think, a two-day time frame to move a complaint to what we call a subject matter expert who can then talk to the parent and work with the school to resolve it. That said, most of our complaints are resolved at the school level with the principal or the school leadership.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. The next one that I want to follow up on is sensory spaces in ACT schools. That is listed as being in progress. How many more schools require sensory spaces?

Ms Haire: I will ask Mr Hawkins to answer that question for you.

Mr Hawkins: Thank you, Mr Pettersson. We have sensory spaces in a number of our schools. I will probably take on notice the difference between when the inquiry took place and where we are now. We would look to continue to work with schools around individual student needs. Often, sensory spaces can shift and change, based on the different environments that are available and what different students need. Of course, we have just got a new school that has opened this year and that has been provisioned and supported to ensure that the right supports are in place.

The Education Directorate has a range of occupational therapists that are out working with schools every day to ensure that our young people have the environment that is best suited for their learning. We often find that we will configure or change rooms and space that is available to either support small group programs or support individual students. I would have to take on notice the difference between when we started the work as part of the inquiry and where we are now.

THE CHAIR: That works for me. The third one I want to chase up on relates to the social and emotional learning programs available to ACT schools. Have there been any changes in those programs available?

Mr Hawkins: We have a range of programs available. We have been trying to put those into a clear form or guide for schools to get them a sense of which ones may be better in different circumstances. As you can imagine, there are often other offerings and evidence would show what the benefits of some programs are. We often have our schools working with our broader wellbeing teams to look at what might match that school's particular needs, which can change over time, based on what that school is seeing. We are looking to put together a single framework, if you like, around what those programs are. Then we want to work very closely, through our network support engagement teams, with schools to make sure that they have got the right programs in place for those school communities.

THE CHAIR: Just so I am clear: there are no new programs; you are just trying to better distribute and allocate?

Mr Hawkins: Yes. As new programs come on, we really need to make sure that they are assessed for evidence and efficacy. Our head of clinical psychology is often working on a range of different program offerings that we are seeing available just to make sure that we have the programs based on the most recent evidence.

THE CHAIR: Cool. How many school psychologists do we have now?

Mr Hawkins: Full-time equivalents, 81.6.

THE CHAIR: In the annual report that was for February 2020. Is it still 81.6?

Mr Hawkins: Correct.

THE CHAIR: You have done well to keep that the same.

Mr Hawkins: Whilst it is probably worth acknowledging that the number of school psychologists stayed the same, we have a significant number of people involved in student wellbeing more broadly. It is not just the psychologists; it is the school teachers, youth workers and social workers that are in schools. It is really making sure that we have the right blend of both academic and allied health supports available in our schools to support our students.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. One of the recommendations was to expand the flexible offsite education program for the north side. Any updates?

Mr Hawkins: I have not turned to the page number yet.

Ms Berry: This is the expansion of Muliyan, which I think we committed in the governing agreement to increase. We have increased it already from—

Mr Hawkins: Twenty to 30.

Ms Berry: 20 to 30 students. It is quite an incredible program. To see the change from when a student starts with Muliyan to when they graduate—the journey that they go on, the teachers and the other support workers that are there with them, and their families—is really beautiful. Their lives are completely turned around from where they were when they started there—barely attending school, living with different kinds of mental health illnesses and a range of other complexities. Muliyan is a place where the learning is very focused around the particular student across a range of those issues, and the family as well, and provides supports to the family as well. It really is a game changer for those young people who attend that school.

Mr Hawkins: We have seen the rate of increase. It started with 10 students in October 2018. In January 2020 it went up to 20 students. We have now got up to 30 students and there are currently 29 students attending.

THE CHAIR: Good stuff.

MR DAVIS: Can you tell the committee what the average case load is for a school-based psychologist?

Ms Berry: No, I do not think we could right now.

MR DAVIS: No.

Ms Berry: We could have a look and see if that information is available.

Mr Hawkins: I would say no, because the way that their case load works is that a school psychologist could have an appointment with a student, but they are also out in our schools every day working and interacting with students in quite an iterative way. There would be a broad number of students where a case file would be opened and

there might be repeat interactions, but our school psychologists are out every day in our schools supporting all our students.

Ms Berry: And teachers as well.

MR DAVIS: Okay. There are perhaps two other figures that might be useful. Do we have a ratio of how many school-based psychologists we have to students?

Mr Hawkins: No, we do not. There have been ratios talked about in the past, but they just focus on the school psychology part of the equation; whereas our focus is making sure that students have the right supports, which includes a school psychologist, but it can also include at times a social worker or a youth worker or a teacher. We try and make sure that all of our schools have the appropriate supports in place, of which a school psychologist is part.

One of the other supports that we have been putting in place in our schools is a school youth health nurse that can advise on sleep, sexual health or a range of other issues. We want to make sure that our students are supported in the best way possible, and that is a range of allied health skills.

MR DAVIS: For sure. I would not want to take away from any of those things, but I would still be interested, if you could take it on notice, what ratio there is to school psychologist to students.

Mr Hawkins: I will take that on notice.

MR DAVIS: Does the directorate contract any external providers to provide psychological support or group therapy within schools?

Mr Hawkins: No, there are referral paths. We work very closely with agencies such as MIEACT and our health providers in ACT Health and Canberra Health Services in terms of range of programs that they might run. We run several group programs ourselves within education, based on need. Last year we ran on help-seeking behaviours and we have run programs for parents as well in terms of how to support students.

We will continue to run, where there is need, the appropriate level of program. The great thing is, with the number of psychologists that we have across the system, we have some incredibly well-trained psychologists that can help run those group sessions across our system.

MR DAVIS: Do you have any records of instances where, in the last 12 months, an external provider was required to meet the need that the in-house school psychologist could not meet?

Mr Hawkins: No, our school psychologists will often refer to other providers. So, for example, depending on the need, they could refer to headspace to meet any kind of particular diagnosis or support. There is a very close relationship between what the school psychologist would do in terms of those in-school supports and then broader psychology supports that students might need.

MR DAVIS: Do you keep records of how many referrals go out?

Mr Hawkins: I would have to check, but I will take that on notice.

MR DAVIS: What, if any, counselling and psychology options are available to students through the directorate at times when school is not open? What framework is in place to make sure during holiday periods that students can still have access to those services?

Mr Hawkins: During the Christmas period our staff and teaching staff are on breaks, like teachers are as well. A lot of the time our psychologists who have been working with students will work with them around what self-care might look like over that period or additional supports that they might want to be put in place. Those often take place on an individual level where there is a need that might take place over that period.

What we do have over the standdown period over that Christmas period is supports within the office around our social workers, youth workers and some of our allied health staff, who can often be checking in with the students through that period where there is a need. It really does come down to an individual basis. It could be a mental health issue or it could be a disability diagnosis, and these are things that our school psychologists are involved with on a routine basis.

MR DAVIS: I am sure you would appreciate in that instance that that would be about teachers or people within the school community identifying at-risk students and making sure that they are aware of services that could be available to them over the period. I am talking more in the broader sense about the entire student cohort—students that may not be identified as being at need but who may become at risk in periods where they are not at school. Is there a uniform approach that schools take to informing what out of hours services look like?

Mr Hawkins: Yes. There is a universal approach to broader mental health within schools. There are supports that we put in place for each of our schools through Be You, which is a service run by Beyond Blue. Our teachers look to provide those degrees of support—how to deal with mental health issues as and when they arise in our schools.

Most schools will have details through posters and visual aids of who students can contact if they need support. There are celebration things like the R U Okay? Day. There is that checking on that universal element and making sure that the students are supported through those periods or information about if they feel they have issues who to contact.

We know that some students will talk to teachers, but some prefer to talk to a helpline or their peers. We have been working closely with the Office of Mental Health regarding our YAM program for our year 9 students, which is around helping to uplift their help-seeking behaviours. Ultimately, if our students are feeling they have a mental health issue, we need them to know to reach out and know to talk to their peers. The evidence tells us that students will tend to contact and want to talk to their peers

rather than, necessarily, at the first point, their teacher.

MR DAVIS: But there is no consistent approach across schools? So students in school A will not receive the exact same message about out of school hours care in a way that they would at school B. It is at the school's discretion?

Ms Haire: I will describe what we did at the end of the 2020 school year. We partnered with the Office of Mental Health to develop the communications approach to parents and to schools to ensure that parents and students were both provided with the same information about, firstly, the kinds of risk signals that might indicate that a young person might be in need of support and then what steps to take and what services are available. We did that in conjunction with the Office of Mental Health through a range of universal communication mechanisms so that it was the same across the ACT.

MR DAVIS: Was this in response in particular to the year that was 2020 or is this a new approach that will be consistent, going forward?

Ms Haire: I think the answer to that is both. It was specifically that towards the end of last year I think everybody was thinking about the impact of the year, and obviously our job is the education and wellbeing of young people so that is what we were thinking about. Also the evidence, as Mr Hawkins has said, is that, in order to identify early young people at risk, you need to have the communication happening with the different groups in a young person's life—their peers, their parents—parents are a really important group for them—to be sure about where and who they can go to for help, as well as with the professionals in a young person's life. It is fair to say that I think we would continue to take that approach.

Mr Hawkins: Just as an example, we can look at the way LifeSpan works across the territory. We work very closely with the Office of Mental Health and ACT Health regarding all dimensions of that program. That includes broader data and an evidence base for what clinics are seeing, all the way through to what are we doing in our schools. We have a universal program for all our year 9 students, the YAM program, around help-seeking behaviours, so it is common across all of those groups. It is not just in public schools; this is available to the non-gov schools as well. Therefore, the messaging and the information available is standard right across the piece, and that links into a broader strategy that ACT Health and Canberra Health Services are working on to ensure that we can support the mental health of our young people.

The program the Office of Mental Health has looked at is bringing this out for year 9 to start with, where we continue with them and review the evidence—it is a Black Dog Institute-based program—and then look at what that could like back into those earlier stages of high school as well.

MR CAIN: When a student seeks help from a school psychologist, what is the protocol or procedure for then engaging with the parents of that student in terms of what the student is raising as a concern?

Mr Hawkins: We have permission forms for utilisation between the school psychologist to come onto the case load. Schools and students can speak to

psychologists as and when they see them through school and get a level of interaction; but to be taken on to the formalised case load requires permission by the parents. A lot of the work that our school psychologists do is in the mental health space, but a significant amount is around broader disability supports and diagnosis. So there is actually quite a close relationship that the psychologist will have with the family.

MR CAIN: In unfortunate cases where the student's concern is about the home environment, how is that managed?

Mr Hawkins: That starts to move into more tricky territory in terms of the broader supports that schools can face in supporting those students. Our principals and our schools get the broader training around how to support students where there is a risk of domestic violence or those types of cases are taking place. They are managed very much on an individual basis because of where concerns might be.

Schools are mandatory reporters, and that includes our allied health staff. So where there is a potential risk, a report is made to support that. We are acutely aware of where we have students in our system where that is either a risk factor or an issue has taken place, to make sure that they are getting the appropriate levels of support, not just from the Education Directorate but also more broadly from CSD and from Health.

Ms Berry: That gives me the chance to talk about the education justice partnership with Legal Aid, where we have a professional lawyer/solicitor in our schools and who can provide legal advice. So students who might be having issues at home with family violence can get some advice from a legal professional at their school. That is across our colleges at the moment as a pilot. So far it has been operating really positively, despite the challenges of COVID.

Students are able to self-refer or are referred by teachers to get legal advice. The school community is a mandatory reporter and legal advice is protected, so students can feel safe getting advice from a legal professional without any other concerns that they might have with talking to a teacher. The feedback I have had from students who have accessed that is that it has been very positively received. I know that the teachers are feeling really positive about being able to refer young people to get that legal advice.

Mr Hawkins: It started in September last year in terms of legal liaison officers—that is what the students call them—coming into our colleges to provide that support to students. They provide advice on family violence, tenancy agreements, employment, migration, care and protection orders, personal protection orders, parenting disputes and criminal matters. This is where students can get that advice and support. Some 71 consultations have taken place over that time. We do not do a break down because of privacy and obviously it is privileged information that is shared; but it shows that a number of students want this support and service, and, as the minister said, every bit of feedback we have had is that it has been highly valued by our colleges. We are getting questions from our schools as to whether we could run something at the high ends of high school.

MR CAIN: Does each college have a legal liaison officer?

Mr Hawkins: It is one that rotates through all colleges; so they are available for a period of time.

MR CAIN: On a full-time capacity?

Mr Hawkins: Correct.

MR CAIN: How is that funded?

Mr Hawkins: It is funded through the directorate budget. So we fund Legal Aid ACT, and have an MOU in place with them to support that individual coming in and providing that support to our schools. Whilst that is an individual person, we know Legal Aid ACT also support our colleges more broadly. If colleges want to run a session on issues around gaming or online issues around intimate image abuse and talking to college kids around what their liabilities are, they also run those group-based sessions for us as well.

MR CAIN: Does the student engagement with this officer form a client-lawyer relationship which attracts professional privilege?

Mr Hawkins: Correct, it is privileged information.

MR DAVIS: I note that the ACT government received \$856,000 from the national school chaplaincy program this financial year. What happened with that money now that we do not have chaplains?

Ms Berry: We do not have them in our public schools but they are still available to non-government schools.

MR DAVIS: I see. So all of that money would have been given to non-government schools to fund their chaplains?

Mr Hawkins: Correct. The way that those agreements work with the commonwealth is that it comes in effectively to the directorate. There are no chaplains within our ACT public schools, but we handle the money and the arrangements in place to ensure a level of consistency back to the commonwealth with both the catholics and the independents. So they go through the process of applying for that funding. We help run that process for them and then the funding flows through from the commonwealth through us and out to them. There is no kind of handling margin for us; we do not keep any of that money. That money goes out to the catholics and independents.

MR DAVIS: Is it fair to say that because we got rid of our school chaplaincy program in public schools that ACT non-government schools receive substantially more by way of that chaplaincy program than they would have otherwise?

Mr Hawkins: That is correct. Normally, the funding for chaplains would have been divided by the three different sectors. That funding is available only to schools that offer a chaplain. So on the basis that only the catholics and independents can apply for that, there are effectively more spots available for them to fill.

THE CHAIR: We will adjourn for a short break.

Short suspension.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back.

MR CAIN: My question relates to priority enrolment area, or PEA. I am aware of at least two circumstances within the ACT where there is a strong language stream through a local primary school which is a predominant feeder to the local high school where that language stream is not picked up. Minister, how are the addresses for priority enrolment areas determined?

Ms Berry: Yes, PEAs are regularly assessed and analysed, depending on changes within areas and enrolments within schools within priority enrolment areas. The policy of the Education Directorate and the ACT government is that every child gets a place in their local school, so we will always make sure that there is a school available locally for a child to attend, and that is why the priority enrolment areas are adjusted.

Mr Matthews: As the minister was saying, priority enrolments are essentially an organising principle for public education so that every child can go to their local school. It is determined essentially on a demographic basis and it is relatively stable in most parts of the city but, depending on the enrolment growth and changes in demographic arrangements in parts of the city, they can be adjusted from time to time.

The enrolments process opens every April for the following year and it takes place over several months. We normally give at least 12 months' notice of any changes to the priority enrolment area, so that parents and families can plan ahead and understand what their local priority school is where they can be guaranteed enrolment. Then we have a process for looking at out of area enrolments as well. There are specific reasons and circumstances where people can go to a different school outside of their priority enrolment area, and there is a process for that.

When we have made an enrolment decision, if the family and the student are not happy with that decision, there is an appeals process as well. Individual students and families can appeal an enrolment decision and, ultimately, that can be considered by the ACAT if the person is still not happy with that.

The issue you raise around the pathway schools is an important part of our system. Obviously students as cohorts can go from a primary school, a high school and a college in a local area, but there are reasons why people take different pathways, and curriculum choice is one of the areas that you have identified, or it could be other specialist offerings that individual schools have. That is one of the things that we consider when we look at out of area enrolments.

The specific issue you raise about language pathways, Mr Hawkins can provide some further details on, but, clearly, we would prefer for students to be able to study languages through those different phases of their schooling should they choose to do so. That is something that we work towards. National shortages with language teachers affect the ACT and all other states and territories. They are in hot demand, and we actively try to recruit language teachers from within the ACT and elsewhere in

the country. If any of them are listening out there today, they can come and talk to us and we would be happy to give them a job.

The question then is about matching the particular languages with the schools that require particular expertise, whether it be French, Chinese or Indonesian. I think that the examples you might be referring to relate to a particular language. The specific issue is that we have not been able to find the language teachers in those areas of speciality, but we will continue to look at options to make sure that we can offer language either within the schools, within other schools or through community language programs.

MR CAIN: How soon would a year 6 parent know what the local high school is offering? How soon are they given notice and what kind of opportunity are they given to look around to keep that speciality option alive in a student's learning?

Mr Matthews: As mentioned, enrolments open up at the end of April every year normally. Public information nights are held around the territory and parents are very active in going to their local schools and seeing what curriculum offerings are available within those schools. The availability of languages would be generally conveyed as part of that open night process and in the other information that is sent from the school to families about what is available.

Languages is one of the regular questions that parents are asking, as well as other specialty curriculum offerings like music, for example. It is really important that parents and students know the availability of curriculum options in each school to help inform their enrolment application.

MR CAIN: What criteria is the department guided by to say to a parent applying to enrol out of the PEA that that is okay? Some constituent comments I have had is that it is almost like, "No, you can't choose another school. You have to go to that local high school."

Ms Haire: It might be helpful to talk about the category A and category B schools.

Mr Matthews: There is a criterion that varies by sector of schooling as well. We are talking about primary schools, secondary schools and colleges. As I said, for all the reasons the minister has described earlier, the local school option is the one we clearly encourage all our parents to take up. As we also said earlier, many of them are taking that up, which is very positive.

MR CAIN: Encourage or mandate?

Mr Matthews: They have a guaranteed right to go to a local school and then they can apply to go to other schools. The ability for a child to access another school depends on a couple of key considerations. The first is whether a place is available for them. We have what we refer to as category A schools, where there are very significant levels of enrolment at that school and it is approaching its capacity. By its nature, there is less availability to take out of area enrolments into that particular school.

But, saying that, we always consider the individual needs of the child and make sure that we fully understand the individual needs, whether they be welfare, mental health,

or the particular individual circumstances; for example, the child might be in care or there might be split parenting arrangements. There is a lot of individual complexity with individual families that we will take into account.

Essentially all students are guaranteed a place in their local school and if there is an option to offer them a place in another school, we will do that. If the parent and the student cannot go to their preferred school, if it is not their priority enrolment school, we will still look at options for them and still think about another school that might be available to meet their needs, whether that be for curriculum or other needs.

MR CAIN: Obviously the timeliness of any review right that is activated is crucial if it is April at the earliest. A student is going to be in high school in January-February next year. How quickly are dismissed applications processed?

Mr Matthews: That is a very individual question because it depends on our exploration of that individual child's needs. In terms of formal enrolment offers, they are made by schools much later in the year. So where a parent gets sent a letter from their local school congratulating them that their child has been accepted into that school, that is later on in that process. That would be the point at which an appeal would formally commence; but the engagement that occurs with the school happens through the year. It can happen as early as that period of April-May, when the family are looking at their circumstances and inquiring about whether they might be able to get into a different school.

MR CAIN: When in the year is the enrolment confirmed which triggers their appeal right if they are not satisfied?

Mr Matthews: I will check on the exact month so that I have that accurate.

Ms Haire: I think it is August.

MR CAIN: Again, that is not very long for an appeal process to run and a final decision made. They are probably not going to have time to get an answer of any practical assistance.

Mr Hawkins: I think that you are talking about the appeal process, but we need to go way back upstream. If you have a student in a primary school in year 6 and they have been going to those parent information evenings, if the parent wants their child to continue to study a language—say they are at Hawker primary and studying French—and their local high school, which is Belconnen High, does not offer that but Melba Copland does, then Melba Copland would be a B class school. So, on the enrolment form, the parent could say, “I would like my child to go to Melba Copland,” and that would be assessed.

MR CAIN: So how early can that be done?

Mr Hawkins: The conversations are taking place right the way through open evenings as all of our parents are looking at various high schools. The difference is that it is a change to your PEA school based on a cat B school being available and the parents saying, “I want my child to go to a different school than my local PEA based

on curriculum choice.”

MR CAIN: I understand the inquiry can start; but if I understood Mr Matthews correctly, it is only in August after enrolment confirmation that an official appeal right is triggered.

Mr Hawkins: That is when offers are made.

MR CAIN: Yes.

Mr Matthews: That is correct.

MR CAIN: So the formality of saying, “I wish to challenge this decision,” does not start until August of the year 6 year?

Mr Hawkins: That is correct. But in terms of enrolment—

MR CAIN: Unless there is a very strict time frame on dealing with that internally—at least internally—then it seems a pretty fruitless exercise, if I may put it that way.

Mr Hawkins: No, it is actually a very tight process from when those would come in to being looked at. When you look at the number of high school students we have going through the system, the majority will go to their PEAs, and that is a straight through process. There are those then that are treated differently where there is enrolment outside. Where it is a cat B school, the majority of those are accepted.

There are a very small number where we work very closely with the parents when we get down to that process. But, as Mr Matthews said, at that point in late August, early September, it is almost a one-on-one basis of how we work with the parent around where to enrol their student.

Mr Matthews: It might assist the committee if I can just give some data. So, for the 2021 school year, there were 94 enrolment appeals. That is a very small number in the context of the total number of public school enrolments and it supports Mr Hawkins’s comments that as we go through, we have a very specific understanding of all those matters.

I have data as of 24 January, which would have been before the commencement of school. Only six of those cases were unresolved at that point. So out of the total enrolments for the 2021 school year, there was a decision and a finalisation of those arrangements by that point. We understand that it is a very difficult process for students and for families if they have their heart set on a particular school or they feel that they are not going to get a particular need met.

One of the things we want to do is to support them through that process and introduce them to the new school. Often, they might have concerns about going to a particular school for whatever reason, but when they attend on site and meet the principal and the year 7 coordinator, for example, the family and student are assured that it is a place for them and they will get a high-quality education.

There will always be some students—the numbers I talked about give effect to that—where issues cannot be resolved in a way that allows the student to commence school on day one, term 1 of any given year.

MR CAIN: Is there a time frame for the internal review of a dispute?

Mr Matthews: I can give you some information about that process on notice. We understand the importance of getting a decision on that quickly. Generally, of course, we want everybody's enrolment to be sorted out well before Christmas in a given year because we want families to be able to enjoy their summer break and also have the clarity of buying uniforms, consider public transport and all those things necessary for the commencement of school the following year. So we work very, very hard to make sure that we can meet that time frame.

Ms Haire: In relation to perhaps some specific cases you may be talking about for this school year, we are conscious that the enrolment period opened while restrictions were still in place for on-site visits to schools. So it is possible that some of the work that Mr Hawkins referred to—parents would have the opportunity to go to Melba Copland, for example, and meet the French teacher and understand how their child's language needs would be met—was not as available because we had constraints in terms of non-students going on to school properties until much later in the year.

We think it is possible that that may have made some of those choices or discussions, which normally resolve relatively simply, a little bit more difficult without the ability to meet face to face. If there is anything in particular you want to pass onto us, we would be happy to look at that.

THE CHAIR: What is the number of category A and category B schools?

Mr Matthews: I do not have that information in front of me, but we should be able to get that to you before the end of the hearing, if not on notice.

THE CHAIR: Do it on notice, and break it down by the regions in the ACT.

Mr Matthews: Yes.

THE CHAIR: How does a new school determine what language offering it will have when it commences?

Mr Hawkins: It is an important part of considering the broader issue regarding languages and how languages are determined. At the moment, it is a conversation with the principal and the school board and the community regarding the broader reflection of language offerings. That is why some school communities want to offer one or two languages whereas others are sometimes committed to a single language.

It also comes down to the broader complexities of recruitment. As you mentioned earlier, finding language teachers is really tricky right across Australia. We experience that, too, in the ACT. We did a specific language teacher recruitment process last year and got an additional 12 teachers. We are continuing to run specialised recruitment processes now. It really comes down to trying to fit the community expectations,

working closely with the principal and the board chair, and then being able to recruit the right staff to provide support and offering in that language.

The other thing that is often considered—if you look at Evelyn Scott—is what is the offering in the primary schools and then going up into those feeder schools so that there can be a level of consistency between a primary and a high school and potentially onto college. We often look around the broader network around availability to ensure that we can meet those broader language pathways.

MR HANSON: Could you advise me on what the figure is for a current funding of expenditure per student? The ROGS data gives you the breakdown, but that is a year or two old now.

Mr Matthews: That is in the annual report as well. I will find you the page number. It gives you a breakdown by sector per student.

Ms Daly: I have read the privilege statement and understand the responsibilities. The information is in the annual report. It is also in our budget papers. It gives the per student costs, budgeted as well as actuals, for last year by sector. It talks about primary, secondary, high school, mainstream, students with disability and specialist schools. It is in there. We will find that for you.

MR HANSON: Are we looking at the budget, or are we looking at the annual report?

Mr Matthews: It is in both.

MR HANSON: Is that simply the ROGS data figure?

Ms Daly: Page 16 of statements F of the budget papers gives the 2021 targets, the year to date result and the year to date target.

MR HANSON: With the costs?

Ms Daly: The ROGS data is at a lag in time. So that is done a bit later.

MR HANSON: But it is the same data?

Ms Daly: It is the same data, yes.

MR HANSON: The ROGS data has state and territory government recurrent expenditure. It is \$19,029. Is that the average of what you have got there, which is preschool, primary, high, secondary, special—

Mr Matthews: You have found the right page, which is 16 in the budget papers. That is the breakdown of the average per cost student.

MR HANSON: But then what is the average per cost figure? When you are doing comparative analysis Australia-wide and so on—the ROGS data has that \$19,029 figure. Do you know what that average figure is for the latest financial year?

Ms Daly: The ROGS data is compiled 18 months in the lag, so that data has been compiled for the last year only recently. It is not actually finally published yet.

MR HANSON: But you must know what it is. You have provided that data, so you would know what that figure is.

Ms Daly: Yes.

MR HANSON: Can you tell me what that figure is?

Ms Daly: I would have to take that question on notice.

MR HANSON: Could you?

Ms Daly: Yes.

Mr Matthews: Can I clarify that, Mr Hanson? I just want to make sure that we have got the right question. We have broken it down by sector on page 16 in the budget statements. You are looking at it aggregated up per student.

MR HANSON: Yes, I think that is what I'm looking at. Looking at the latest ROGS data, it tells you state and territory government recurrent expenditure of \$19,029. Is that all those figures aggregated, or does it come from somewhere else?

Ms Daly: It will not be an exact—ROGS data has very specific requirements as to what is included and excluded in terms of national reporting, because jurisdictions have different levels of reporting on different elements—superannuation, for example, for us; depreciation; capitalisation; and those sorts of things. So what we report in here versus what we report in ROGS data does differ a little. Again, through a question on notice I can outline those differences for you.

MR HANSON: Can you take that on notice?

Ms Daly: I can, yes.

Ms Haire: This will be the raw input and then it will be dependent on the methodology. ROGS, Report on Government Services, provides a national methodology for all of the data it collects—

MR HANSON: I assume that the figure that you give is the figure that they publish?

Ms Haire: Yes.

Ms Daly: That is right. As Ms Haire has said, it is actually just a completion of the data that is required for national consistency about what is included or excluded out of that ROGS data versus what is included here. All costs are included in our reporting of the student data in the budget and both annual reports.

MR HANSON: Brilliant. I will await that on notice.

Ms Daly: No problem.

THE CHAIR: I have a question about the teacher librarian scholarships. They have newly been funded in the ACT budget. I am hoping someone could explain why. I think we would all be interested.

Ms Berry: Yes, it is interesting. The commitment was made last year by ACT Labor. As part of the agreement we have committed to engaging 25 teacher librarians or providing 25 teacher librarian scholarships. As with schoolteachers who are specialised in languages, there are not teacher librarians waiting around to apply for a job to be a teacher librarian.

The funding for the master's degree that a teacher librarian requires to be a specialist in their trade is a 12-month scholarship on top of the four-year degree that they are required to do as a teacher. So the funding that the ACT government is providing is to address that gap in the specialist teacher librarian workforce and to train people up to take that master's education and then offer them employment with it or, if they are not working with us yet but they are working, to offer them employment with us, and to work with schools in the meantime as well about what their needs are around teacher librarianship.

Mr Hawkins: As the minister said, a number of teachers are already working as librarians in our schools but only a number have that master's degree qualification. So in looking at bringing on more qualified teacher librarians, what you have to recognise is the need to build that capability more broadly. We would easily take this from the marketplace if it existed, but we know that it does not. So this is where, over the next few years, we want to invest 10 scholarship places per year for those teachers that are currently in our system that want to apply to do their master's program. We will fund that for them as that builds into providing more qualified teacher librarians right throughout all of our schools.

THE CHAIR: How many qualified teacher librarians do we have currently?

Mr Hawkins: There are 33 full-time teacher librarians in our schools. That is not to say that there are not other supports within our schools by the part-time teachers, but it is that official level of qualification that we are looking for.

THE CHAIR: How many libraries do we have that would need—

Mr Hawkins: Each school has a school library. You can imagine that the requirement as to what that might look like in a primary school in terms of library supports will be very different to the academic rigour and research skills that are required at the college end of the spectrum.

THE CHAIR: Would the vision be that every single library would have a teacher qualified?

Mr Hawkins: We would be working to ensure that that kind of capability is lifted right across all of those supports. What we find is that some of our schools are supported by really passionate teachers within their libraries who are not teacher

librarians. So part of this work is to help support those teachers around what other kind of supports we can provide and they need, to ensure that we have the right level of coverage across all of our schools.

MR HANSON: I want to try to separate the issue between training and then positions. There are no new positions for teacher librarians as part of this?

Mr Hawkins: Correct.

MR HANSON: So is this about training existing teachers working in that environment, or is it the expectation that classroom teachers might move in? Out of this we might get better qualified teacher librarians, which is great, but we are not going to actually have any more, are we, in terms of the positions in the schools?

Ms Berry: Yes, because we have 33 master's degree trained teacher librarians currently operating in our schools and the intention is that this will be an additional 25 teacher librarians.

MR HANSON: But if you do not fund additional positions, actually additional teachers, then either you are just qualifying better someone that is already in that position or you are going to have to take someone out of a front-line teaching role to put them into that teacher librarian spot. If you are not actually increasing the number of positions, just increasing the training—this actually does not increase the number of teacher librarians in terms of the positions, the FTE.

Ms Berry: I get what you are trying to say but it does increase the number of degree-holding master's—

MR HANSON: No—I am just trying to separate. What we are getting here is that we are going to have better qualified people working in the existing positions, but we are not actually going to increase the number of teacher librarians. Are you going to look to increase the number of teacher librarians? You gave that figure of 33; then you have X number of schools, depending on the nature of the school, that might need someone qualified. Are we going to create more positions for teacher librarians?

Ms Berry: No. There will be 25 teacher librarians. There are currently 33 who are master's qualified. We will be increasing the number of master's degree holding teacher librarians. If you are asking whether that is going to be in addition—say there is somebody who is already working in the library who might be doing it, whether we are then going to put another staff member in—the answer is no, because we are qualifying them.

MR HANSON: There are no additional staff though?

Ms Berry: Yes, an additional qualification.

Ms Haire: As Mr Hawkins has said, every school has a library at the moment, and they have people working in them, often teachers. It is an opportunity for upskilling those who are already part of the school's staffing base. The opportunity is to have a more highly qualified technical specialist occupying that role, as opposed to, as I think

Mr Hawkins said, a passionate classroom teacher. It is an opportunity for that person who is already doing that job to then do it at a higher level of skill and qualification.

Ms Berry: It might be helpful if Mr Hawkins could talk about the difference between a school teacher and what a teacher librarianship means. What sorts of supports does it provide to a school that are different to just the library person that used to shush everyone in the old days? This is not that person.

Mr Hawkins: Maybe they do a bit of shushing. As the minister outlined, the technical and professional skills of a teacher librarian go right the way through. They can help in terms of some of the early-year literacy programs and supports that Ms McMahon outlined earlier today, right through to the quite rigorous evidence-based research skills to help our college students ensure that all of their work is appropriately referenced and managed.

So it goes beyond the person sitting at the desk and saying “Shush” to now being a much more integrated support program for our students. Often we find that our school libraries become kind of the beating heart of the school—that it is a place where there is an immense amount of activity and that students are really proud of that space. Our teacher librarians will work with students to make it a place that is welcoming, that students want to come to and engage with learning. So we often find our teacher librarians getting involved in a range of supports to our students, because we want people to come to that location as a place to learn.

MR DAVIS: I note from page 16 of the budget that the cost per student of mainstreaming a student with a disability is significantly less than that for a student who attends a specialist school. Would you mind talking me through what the perceived benefit is to the student, their family or society more broadly of keeping students in segregated schools?

Ms Berry: The first thing is that we put the student at the centre of all our education priorities. That is one of the goals in our Future of Education Strategy, which was developed through thousands of conversations with students and young people, and parents and teachers as well.

The second thing is that we have already made a commitment to consider education for children who are living with disabilities, making sure that we provide education for them based on what they want and what they need. Whilst some people might prefer a specialist school, and that might suit that particular student and that parent, another family and student and parent might consider that the best way for their child is in a mainstream school environment. The work that we will be doing over the next couple of years is talking with those families and those young people about what it is that meets their needs, not forcing any sort of thing on them which does not actually meet their needs or those of their young person.

Mr Hawkins: The minister is completely right. We look for a model of inclusion in all of our schools. That works from our four specialist schools right the way through to what we have in terms of small group programs within a number of our schools to support students with disability in how they work and integrate within that broader setting, through to individual programs that we have in place for students.

We will look to develop and work with families. We have got to be clear that there is family choice in where they want to see their student go, between what takes place in those four specialist settings, what exists within our primary and high schools in terms of small group programs, and the kinds of supports for inclusion that we would see within those and then, within those, the individual ISP programs we have in place for individual students.

MR DAVIS: My question was specifically about what the perceived benefits are. Minister, you noted that the Future of Education conversations informed what our schools look like now. Is that a publicly available document?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR DAVIS: What do you understand the perceived benefits to be of the four schools that you identified, disability-specific schools, as opposed to students entering mainstream schools? Particularly when the budget shows that there is a significant cost differential—that should not be the only factor, of course—between students with a disability in a mainstream school rather than a specialist school.

Mr Hawkins: What we know is that our schools should reflect society. We want to see an inclusive society, and our schools are inclusive as well in terms of the programs and how they work. In some cases, for some of our students that we support, those specialist settings can provide them with the level of support that they need and the facilities that they need, recognising that student need can vary year on year as diagnoses can change.

MR DAVIS: Can those facilities not be integrated into mainstream schools in that spirit of inclusiveness? It does not seem to be to be particularly inclusive to put students with a disability into a specialist school.

Mr Hawkins: We have both. We have our specialist schools, in terms of the facilities that they offer for some of our students around a diagnosis that will have taken place, to make sure that we can get the appropriate supports in place for them in those schools, versus what we are already doing in a number of our schools regarding what inclusive practice looks like.

At a primary school that I was at recently, they have students with a disability learning within mainstream classrooms. Sometimes they might take a student off to the side and be working individually with them as part of being in that broader class. But there is a sense of how we can get that broader inclusive model operating across our schools. It is important that all of our students are involved and see what inclusive classrooms and society look like, and that effectively their experiences of the work environment of the future should not differ from the experiences they are seeing in their classrooms today.

MR DAVIS: What specifically, though, are students getting in a specialist school that we cannot provide in a mainstream school?

Mr Hawkins: A lot of it comes down to healthcare needs, because they can be pretty

intense in terms of the level of support that is provided. That can also go to the level of care that is provided for individual students. Depending on diagnosis, it could be around making sure that the environments are appropriate for that individual and that age. With some of the diagnoses that we deal with, we can support that student in a better way within a specialist environment rather than in a mainstream environment.

MR DAVIS: Does the directorate collect data on the instances of students moving between specialist schools and mainstream schools?

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

MR DAVIS: Yes, please take it on notice. That would be interesting.

Mr Hawkins: We normally find that there is a transition point, largely at year 6, based on the level of identified need of students that go into high school. We do not find a huge amount of variance between students who have gone down that pathway, between going to a mainstream high school and going to one of our two specialist high schools. There is not much transferring between those two environments, because largely that has been worked through in that year 6 to 7 transition point.

MR DAVIS: What supports, specifically, are offered to students and families who identify at that transition point, or at any other point in their schooling, that they want to transfer out of a specialist school model and into a mainstream school? I am thinking particularly of young people and families who would like the benefit of some of the facilities and services you have outlined that are offered in specialist schools but would like to see the young person integrated into an inclusive environment where they are interacting with many other kids.

Mr Hawkins: Those conversations happen with a range of parents right across the board. As Mr Matthews outlined earlier, when there are open evenings, people go along and visit the school and talk to the school. We want to work very closely with families regarding the best arrangements that we can put in place for all of our students, whether or not it is that they are better supported within a specialist environment. If parents want to go into a mainstream school, we look to work with them and make any appropriate adjustment that would need to be made.

MR DAVIS: Do you have specific examples of what we have specifically done to support a student who has wanted to come out of a specialist school environment into a mainstream school environment?

Ms Berry: There are some physical adjustments that need to be made around infrastructure at a school, making sure that it is more accessible and inclusive for young people. That can be a range of things. It can be ramps, toilets, chairs, lifts—a range of different physical infrastructure. Then, depending on the student, there are other kinds of learning supports that they might need, be it—

Mr Hawkins: We also work with various advocacy groups. I fairly regularly meet with Down Syndrome ACT and they often bring cases to us regarding the best arrangements and supports that we can be putting in place. About a year or 18 months ago, we were talking around more supports for kids going primary school. There was

a rather unsuccessful transition that took place in a non-government school but then we looked to put the supports in place to ensure that when that child came into one of our public schools they were supported, that we had our allied health resources available to support them in making that transition. They were just over the moon about the level of support that they had at the time and we want to replicate that experience across the board. We want to make those work.

We have an obligation that sits with us in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act to make reasonable adjustments for our students, whether in the mainstream setting or within our specialist schools. So we will always look to work with families to make sure that we are sensitive to their needs and the best interests of the child to make sure that we have an environment that works for them.

MR DAVIS: Is it fair to say that we are, in this instance, reactive to parents and young people saying that they want to integrate into a mainstream school environment and then providing the supports? Or would it be fairer to say that we are proactive and actually encourage parents and young people to take on a mainstream environment and give them the services? Which would be more true?

Ms Haire: The minister raised the important point about infrastructure earlier. An important thing to note is that all of our new schools, which we have talked a bit about already this morning, are now being designed to be ready to cater much better to the needs of students with disabilities than the schools of the past. Some of those matters that Mr Hawkins spoke about, such as the size of toilets to enable wheelchairs to enter, ramps and so on, are now built into the design of all of our new schools, which in turn means that, far from being reactive, we are creating an inclusive school community. That then comes to the point of the individual discussions with the families and the students about what their individual needs are. But we are working very hard to have a structural response which is proactive, to be welcoming and inclusive, from the culture and inclusive approach of the school and the teachers through to the physical environment. That is what you will see as we are building our newer schools as well. That is an important shift.

MR DAVIS: Is that the approach we are taking to renovations of older schools as well?

Ms Haire: Yes, it is.

MR DAVIS: Would it be fair to deduce from that that long term our intention is not to have specialist schools, to instead seek to make all of our public schools integrated and accessible?

Ms Berry: Again, this is a conversation that we would have with the families and the young people to find out what suits them best. I would not impose any kind of educational environment, whether it was a specialist school or a mainstream school, on somebody that had a different view on what they need for their child and family.

Mr Hawkins: There are a lot of close working relationships with families, not just in my team but also in the teams within our schools. We are already thinking, for example, this year, about the transitions for year 6 students into year 7 next year—

what that would look like.

We have students who have diagnoses of autism and we have a number of transition days in place for them to go to their year 7 schools. We have a program that is right for that child, because it is not homogenous. There are individual needs right across the board, from how to support families and how to support those students in making sure they are set up for success wherever they are going high school, whether that is in a specialist setting or in one of our mainstream high schools.

MR DAVIS: I appreciate that and I certainly would not intend to impose any model on any student or parent, as just implied. I am asking these questions because representations have been made to me by parents who have made the case that their preference is to see their child in a mainstream, inclusive educational environment but who, because of accessibility or facilities concerns, have felt obligated or restricted into an exclusive school environment which, they have argued to me, is not getting their child the holistic educational outcomes they have perceived. While choice is important, if you feel restricted into a choice, you do not really have choice. That is the point of my questions.

Mr Hawkins: With any of those individual details, please contact us within the directorate, because we are happy to help work with those families on what best meets their needs.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

MR CAIN: Minister, regarding suspension policy—part of the background to this is in an article in the *Canberra Times* in late January this year. How has the new suspension policy been advised and promoted to schools and parents?

Ms Berry: A significant amount of work went into developing this policy as it is right now. While with these kinds of things we can probably have ongoing conversations about whether it is meeting the student's need and whether it is meeting the school's need and about providing supports to a student and a family who may be navigating their way through that policy, there was a couple of years worth of very detailed work.

Ms Haire: Mr Cain, the new suspension policy became current at the end of 2019 and we have been working with principals and schools to support them in how to implement that since that time, which Mr Hawkins can take you through. I note that the case you are referring to that was reported in the paper took place in around mid-2019.

Mr Hawkins: As the minister said, the development of that policy took some time. A vast range of consultation took place, right from speaking with Human Rights, to the Australian Education Union, to our principals associations—

MR CAIN: P&Cs as well?

Mr Hawkins: P&Cs as well. We undertook a significant amount of consultation as part of that process. That led to the formation and finalisation of that policy in 2019. We put it out late in the year and had some professional learning in the early part of

2020. Then, in 2020, the year being what it was meant that information was not at the forefront of everybody's mind during that time. What we have done now, building up from the case that came into ACAT, is to provide information back out to principals regarding what the obligations are when it comes to suspension and what the policy changes were—the shift within the policy to now setting out a mutually agreed leave rather than being about suspension—just to ensure that principals are aware of what their obligations are and that we provide them with a construct through which they can make that decision.

MR CAIN: Did the ACAT decision inform heavily what the policy would be?

Mr Hawkins: No, because the ACAT decision came after, when the policy was developed. In terms of our looking at the ACAT decision, the tribunal, in looking at this, made a different determination based on additional information they had over and above what the individual principal would have had at the time. So they made a different decision, rather than necessarily putting themselves directly in the shoes of the decision-maker with the information they had. We accept that decision. But in terms of providing information back out to our schools, what it has given us is an opportunity to, off the back of that, ensure that we have the right support and guidance for our principals. We know suspension is an incredibly complex area for principals to work through. The obligations are really clear with us, not just in our policy but also actually within the Education Act, which principals must follow. What we want to ensure is that in enacting the legislation and in enacting that policy principals feel confident to do that in a safe way.

MR CAIN: We all recognise the impact of COVID in 2020 on schooling. Are there any indications at all of clearer and more supportable decisions in this space in public schools from last year? Is there any evidence to support that—

Mr Hawkins: We publish, on our website, suspensions information. I have not seen what last year's data is telling us in terms of what we would see. Obviously, through the back end of term 1 and term 2 there was a lot of change in our system as students went to learning from home, so no doubt we will see a blip in our data. But our first instinct is to work proactively to ensure that we have the right information and decision-making frame in there for our principals.

MR CAIN: You may not be recording when parents send their children to their bedroom.

Mr Matthews: It might be worthwhile briefly adding that, while people of our generation and above see suspensions as being a very punitive sort of punishment-based approach, that is not the way that they are now used in public schooling. Obviously, we want to make sure that the children understand the impact of their actions on others. But often they are used to do a good, successful integration of children back into the school and the learning environment. The support teams are working with the families and with the school community to make that reintegration back into the school really successful and a learning process for each of the students.

It is important that it is seen as part of a whole continuum of supports and interventions that are being provided to our school students and to their families so

that we can model the right behaviours that we are looking for students to have each and every day in their schools. But also we are understanding the impacts and drivers on students behaviours, looking at making those adjustments if we do need to make them, and continuing to monitor and measure the outcome for those individual students. One of the understandings that we need to continue to increase in the community is that punishment is not the objective behind suspensions. It really is about seeing it as a learning exercise for all and for the student concerned but looking at how it can properly support that student to come back within their school.

MR CAIN: We talked a bit earlier today about school psychologists and their role. Under the current policy, if a student is potentially to be suspended, is the consultation with a psychologist a prior step before that final decision?

Mr Matthews: That would be a very individual situation. Mr Hawkins can give a bit more colour to that. I would emphasise generally that there are a range of measures that are tried to support students and to de-escalate behaviour, for example, and a whole team-based approach within schools before a suspension would be exercised. The general rule is to try a range of different things, including getting professional assistance, before that sort of decision is made.

MR CAIN: Hopefully 2021 is a more normal school year and we have more to say about the effectiveness of the policy in 12 months time.

MR HANSON: This is a follow-up from the line of questioning earlier. In the annual report, on page 25, the performance analysis overview, I am looking particularly at strategic objective 2. This is gain in reading, years 3 to 5; in numeracy, 3 to 5; in reading, 7 to 9; and in numeracy, 7 to 9. All of those strategic indicators are quite a bit behind where they should be. I am trying to work out what your source data is for that. Is that just simply transferred over from NAPLAN data, or do you measure that separately for that strategic indicator?

Mr Gotts: The source data comes from NAPLAN. The reason that it moves around in the way that it does is that we are talking about the movement between two numbers. In looking at growth, for example, we start with year 3 NAPLAN. If you look at the figures there for year 3 NAPLAN, you will see that there is a significant increase between the two figures, the 17-19 and 16-18, so there is a big jump in year 3. Then that is compared with year 5, two years later. You can have a situation where year 3 can go up, year 5 can go up, but the apparent learning gap can go down basically. The learning growth can look to be lower, depending on how much those two different numbers move by.

MR HANSON: But the directorate has set targets and has consistently, across all of them, failed to meet those targets. Are you saying that it is some sort of statistical anomaly, as opposed to not actually—

Mr Gotts: What I am saying is that those targets are indicative targets. That is what we would like to see it as, but it is done with the recognition that we have two numbers moving—that you can have a situation where both can go up but the apparent growth can go down.

The other thing that we look at with this is how it relates to learning growth nationally. One of the things about these numbers is that they are consistent with national rates of learning growth. As I was talking about earlier, it can be driven by equating and just general movement between the years. The amounts are not large. If you look at table 5, public school gain from years 3 to 5 in numeracy, you will see that the year 3 figure for 2016-18 is 412 and for 2017-19 it is 421. That is a very big jump between those two year 3s. It also went up in year 5 but by not as much, so that gives an apparent reduction in learning growth of six points. But the reality is that both year 3 and year 5 moved up. So, in effect, it is an artefact of the way these numbers move.

The other thing about it is that these are long-term measures, so looking at a change between one year and the next is useful but it is not as informative as looking at changes over a longer period.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Could someone talk me through the work that the Education Directorate did in managing the COVID-19 crisis in the past year?

Ms Berry: Like every ACT government directorate, the Education Directorate and all our schools pretty much turned themselves inside out to continue education in our public schools, albeit remotely. It was a significant change that was literally done overnight, in the same way we adjusted to COVID more generally across our community. Our teachers do a four-year degree to be professional teachers and they pretty much had to learn overnight how to deliver that education remotely and differently from how they had ever done it before.

It was quite incredible to watch the teachers take on that challenge, with technical support and everything with online delivery. To see them all reimagining how they could deliver the curriculum in more engaging and different ways was quite incredible. The whole teaching profession across the country has learned so much, I would say, from this—it is not really an opportunity; we had to do it—effort.

The education side was just one part of our response to COVID; it was also about how we managed our school systems through the gradual returns and how we might respond if there was an outbreak in any of our schools. Does anyone want to take us through their COVID experience?

Ms Haire: I am happy to give a snapshot of what we did in the immediate period; then we might talk about how the return to school went on. I am sure Mr Matthews will provide some further information.

Let me put a few numbers around some of the elements that the minister has just spoken about. We had more than 5,000 teachers undertake professional learning that was stood up within a week of the decision to move to remote learning. That was the largest professional learning undertaking that has ever happened in the ACT and a great credit to the teachers involved, who wanted to gain those skills immediately so that they could continue to support the education of children. At that time, we were all going into the period without a clear sense of how long it would be and what it would require of us.

I want to acknowledge not just the teachers but also the team in the Education Support

Office who put that professional learning together. Minister, I think you took part in one of those and saw teachers all over the ACT, on their screens, learning together how to deliver their content remotely.

We took the approach that wellbeing and learning had to go hand in hand. One of the other important things that we developed very quickly was using the workforce that we have already talked about a few times today, the allied health and psychologist workforce, and setting up a telehealth service—in some ways this goes to some of the points that Mr Davis raised—so that there was not a risk to students from not being present on the school site and they could still access those important wellbeing and psychological supports. Again, huge credit to the team in the Education Support Office for establishing and standing up that model in an extremely short period of time. We got a lot of feedback that that was an important support for students and their families.

Let me mention a couple of other things. We were very conscious of equity issues and, in particular, ensuring that children had access not only to a device but also to the internet. We supported about 450 families to have internet access so that their children could use their devices to learn. That also provided internet access for the whole family. That meant, for example, that if a parent needed to register for a benefit—JobKeeper, JobSeeker et cetera—they were able to do it. We were taking a whole-family approach to equity.

All our high school and college students already have access to Chromebooks through our technology-enabled learning program. We recycled Chromebooks to provide them to children in years 4 to 6 so that they could use them for their learning.

In addition to the education and support provided by the teachers, empowered by the professional learning, we set up a home learning support portal on our website to assist parents. We were acutely conscious—Mr Cain jokingly referred to it earlier—that for parents being at home with their children, supporting their education is a very different experience from sending your children off to school each day. We were very conscious about the need to provide additional support and materials for parents through our home learning portal, which had an extraordinary reach. Not just in the ACT or Australia but right around the world, families were accessing some of the materials that we put online to support families during that time. In some countries where they are still having remote learning, people would still be accessing those materials.

That is a snapshot to illustrate the approach we took, which saw wellbeing and learning going hand in hand. If children were safe and secure, we were confident that they would be able to learn with the dedicated and professional support of their teachers, which we supported.

I am happy to take questions about how we managed the transition back. We went carefully and in accordance with the advice of the Chief Health Officer about the numbers of people we could have on school premises. We were looking at the youngest children, who went back in the first cohort, as well as our college students going back in the first cohort after the period of remote learning. That was managed carefully so that schools could be safe and ready to receive the students again.

THE CHAIR: Are any students yet to return to the classroom?

Ms Haire: There might be a very small number of students with underlying health conditions.

Mr Matthews: I am not aware of that, Mr Pettersson. It would be very much in negotiation with the family and the student. Obviously, if a student is unwell because of a chronic health condition—cancer, for example—we do a flexible learning program for them in any case. We want them to remain engaged in their education. If a child needed to remain at home and not attend school, we would work with them in a similar way to what we do in those situations.

I am not sure if the committee also wants to hear a bit more about the support we offered from our Education Support Office to schools. During COVID-19 we did a direct financial investment into our schools of around \$29 million in addition. That was recognising some of the additional costs that were incurred and was also to support the broader community and economic activity in Canberra.

There were about \$7.5 million worth of screwdriver-ready projects that took place during the period of remote learning. Whilst schools were shut, they were full of tradespeople undertaking upgrades to libraries, building outdoor pergolas or undertaking additional capital works to improve the amenity of schools for when students returned. That kept people in work during our most difficult time in Canberra.

We also spent \$7.7 million in the education portfolio, under the Jobs for Canberrans program. We employed additional cleaners to undertake hygiene-related work within our schools to keep our environment safe and to build the community's confidence in schools being safe to attend for staff, students and families.

Ms Haire mentioned the wi-fi program. Approximately \$600,000 was spent on ICT connectivity to support that. We also supported a number of our casual and temporary staff to remain employed during the period of COVID. Like commonwealth government programs such as JobKeeper, where people were on short or temporary arrangements, the ACT government extended contracts for people who might have otherwise lost their work. We waived \$2.3 million worth of hiring fees for community organisations who would otherwise have had cashflow issues or had a reduction in revenue, for example, from users.

There were a range of different things that we did not only to support our school communities to operate, but in terms of our staff and our people, understanding the importance of education as part of the broader community and the economy. A lot of these direct investments were made with all those lenders in mind. We found that our communities came together strongly throughout that whole period.

There was some earlier discussion around surveying and the like. For the committee's benefit, in case you are not aware, we do an annual school satisfaction and climate survey. That is something that we do anyway every year. We survey staff, students and the community. It is really significant that, despite all the challenges of 2020, students' sense of belonging to their school increased markedly during 2020. We saw

a bump of up to 10 percentage points in their level of identity and sense of belonging with their school during 2020. That goes down to our teachers and our school-based staff who did everything they could to make students feel connected with their schools and to feel in touch and welcome, to feel they belonged.

We have also surveyed around wellbeing, depression and anxiety. We are seeing very modest levels of increase against schools from 2019 to 2020. We are not suggesting that the year has not had an impact on people—of course it has—but we are encouraged that the measurable result was lower than might otherwise have been the case. That goes down to the work that we have already spoken about today: about how we have continued to support wellbeing and about all the flexibility from our allied health professionals during the period of COVID-19.

We are going to look at the long-lasting impact from COVID as we go through this year and into future years, but we feel as though we are well positioned to continue to support our students, to ensure that they can thrive and build off the experience of 2020, and to work on the strengths that have been formed through our school communities during that very difficult time.

THE CHAIR: You threw a lot of numbers out there. I am not sure if you mentioned it specifically, but in the budget there is \$530,000 for the COVID-19 public health response.

Mr Matthews: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What is that for specifically?

Mr Matthews: The chief finance officer may want to add something, but that is our contribution to the whole-of-government expenses. Last year, many of us spent many hours working on COVID. There was a coordination role at whole-of-government level which ensured that we could work together as a single ACT government during the pandemic. Education, like other directorates, made a contribution to that. Am I talking about the right issue?

Ms Haire: I think it is a different initiative. I think the one the chair is referring to is in this budget, the \$530,000 which is to continue the daytime cleaning that Mr Matthews spoke about. There is four hours of cleaning in each school each day. Previously, schools in the ACT, like schools everywhere, had cleaning after hours. In response to COVID, when students went back to school, we began daytime cleaning, especially to clean high frequency touchpoints and ensure that public areas were clean. That is continuing through this budget and that is what that line item is.

Mr Matthews: Just to clarify, Chair, my comment was about the budget line item “Office of the Coordinator General for the Whole of Government”, which is \$153,000. Thank you, Ms Haire, for clarifying that.

Ms Haire: We have not talked about the senior students last year. Mr Watson from the Board of Senior Secondary Studies is here if you want to hear about how we ensured that the students in their second last and final years of schooling, which are a crucial time in a young person’s life, were not disadvantaged. There was a lot of work

done to make sure that in the ACT those students were not disadvantaged by the period of remote learning.

THE CHAIR: I would love to hear about that.

Ms Haire: Mr Watson can explain how the BSSS ensured that those students were supported.

Mr Watson: I acknowledge the privilege statement. I will talk broadly, and if you have any supplementary questions you would like to ask me, please do. As has already been mentioned, the changes that were happening in education came upon us all very quickly, all the way through. The impacts in senior secondary were much the same in terms of students not being at school for periods of time et cetera. The work of the office of the board was much like the directorate work, to try and respond to the immediate needs of kids and to look after their medium to long-term needs across year 11 and year 12.

In consultation with schools and the board of studies, we put in a number of measures to try and alleviate pressure on kids so that they would not feel too stressed about the situation they were in. For instance, we made major variations in quick time to the flexibility schools had for the assessment of students, to make sure that being away from the school building was not going to disadvantage them and that schools, in consultation with students and families, could vary the assessment regimes they were going to have, such as by reducing the number of assessments, for example, by changing the style of the assessment so that it could be accommodated within a COVID situation.

The other thing we did was try and make sure that schools were even more informed about the flexibilities they had to accommodate kids, no matter what the situation was. That could be in terms of the changes to assessment I have mentioned, but it was also things like looking after the emotional and physical needs of students. Extensions of time and a range of things like that were brought into play. We worked very hard to make sure that all schools knew exactly what they could do in that flexibility. We have a strong and direct relationship with all of the schools in the sector and we were very pleased that they responded magnificently. It tells us something about the ACT school community overall: regardless of the sector, be it public, catholic or independent, there was a very positive working relationship.

We were often asked to look at individual cases for students to try and lend support to schools so that they felt comfortable in the decisions that they were making. We were basically a 24/7 helpdesk for schools. That worked very well. We already had a lot of strong personal relationships in the professional context with schools; we were able to build on that to try and help students independently.

In terms of what happened at the end of the year, we were able to demonstrate that, through the curriculum and the way the assessment was done, we provided no less opportunity at the end of year 12 for the students as a result. Some areas were impacted more than others—in some cases, workplace access around vocational education was impacted—but workplaces and schools responded magnificently to provide extra support to students in those situations so that their pathways beyond

school are not impacted. We are very pleased with the result, and it was because of the partnership with schools and with the sectors. It was a great learning experience for everybody. We showed that the systems we had in place were able to be adapted quite quickly to support students in the situation.

Our system is a little different, as you know. We focus very much on school-based assessment, which is supported by the board of studies, and we have the ACT scaling test, which helps us with comparability across schools. This also took a lot of pressure off. Some of the other states needed to manage a broad range of external functions that were going on. Here, schools were able to focus very much on what was happening within the school and adapt to what the kids needed, which was very positive.

THE CHAIR: Is there any word on whether year 12 results went up or down as a result of the uncertainty?

Mr Watson: In terms of the spread, we can talk about a couple of things. If we talk about ATAR to start with, we were able to demonstrate that there was no less opportunity for ACT students overall in their pathways into university. It is really pleasing that we were able to do that across the year. As I said, it is very much because of the partnerships with the sectors and the schools that we could do that, working together. At the beginning of the year, obviously that is what we were aiming at, but the fact that by the end of the year we were able to establish that was very gratifying indeed.

MR HANSON: I have a specific ATAR question It goes specifically to the issue of ATAR and teacher qualifications. I noticed that the AEU has raised concerns about the ATAR level for acceptance into the teaching degree at ACU and UC. This might be a question for the minister and yourself, but are you concerned about the lower level of ATAR? I think it is 45 and the union says it should be 70.

Mr Watson: We produce the ATARs, but it is not within the remit of what I do on the board. There are others here that can speak to that.

Ms Haire: Are you talking about the ATAR required to enter teaching?

MR HANSON: The ATAR required by the universities for the teaching qualification. That is now 45, whereas in other jurisdictions it is 85 or similar. The AEU has raised some concerns that it is an ever-lowering figure—because they are inexpensive degrees or for whatever reason. That is speculation, but is that a concern that has been raised with you or the minister? Do you have a view?

Ms Berry: There are a couple of things in that whole question about the work that the university sector have done around changing the requirements for their degrees and the commonwealth government's decisions around all of that.

From the ACT's perspective, we have an Affiliated Schools Program with the University of Canberra where we open up our schools to beginning teacher students to experience teaching on the ground before they start teaching in person. That Affiliated Schools Program allows beginning schoolteachers to experiment with their practice, if

you like, and action research discovery in the classrooms, mentored by longer term, more experienced teachers and the University of Canberra. That is about not just what they teach but how they teach—to really hone those skills. So, from our perspective, with regard to how we support teachers once they leave university and come into our system, we support them before they start.

MR HANSON: But going specifically to the ATAR, concerns have been raised that the ATAR being set by the universities is too low. Do you have a view or not have a view?

Mr Hawkins: The university sets the ATAR to what the university wants it to be. The question for us is: are we satisfied with the quality of the educators that are coming through the back end? We work incredibly closely with the UC and the executive dean there on teacher education. As the minister said, through a program that was put in place two years ago, more UC students are spending a longer time within our classrooms, honing their craft before they get to their year 4 prac placements. We have a greater degree of interaction right across our system with those graduates. And we have seen a marked increase in the graduates coming out of the back end joining public education.

In terms of the relationship with UC, it is working incredibly well for both sides. It works in terms of the UC uptake, but for us, they are providing access to master's programs for 30 of our teachers per year. We have now had 90 teachers in various stages of going through a master's program. We do action-based research with UC; we have some small research-based projects currently taking place in our schools to share best practice.

When we see those students going through UC and then they spend three years with us as initial educators, it is about how we get a maximum impact for that seven years that we get to shape and influence a young person—taking that as an outcome, as a life choice to become a teacher, which we want to support them in.

Our focus would be less on the initial bar in terms of the ATAR and more on making sure that they get excellent experience through that first four years and that we are, hopefully, an attractive proposition for them to come into public education at the end.

MR CAIN: For students working at home, being able to take a Chromebook was an advantage. I have a question about the cost recorded in the annual report about the Chromebooks. It appears that the 2,000 Chromebooks provided to students for the COVID response cost just over \$700 each. I believe that some local retailers were able to advertise them at \$400 each. Do you have any comment on that?

Mr Hawkins: I am not quite sure of the numbers there; maybe the 2,000 is a rounding compared to the actual number of devices.

MR CAIN: It is the number from the report.

Mr Hawkins: Let me describe, first of all, what we provided. Then we can get into the contractual commercial arrangements. We provided a number of additional devices to schools at the time. A lot of schools already had devices for our primary

classes, supplied on a year 1 to 3 basis, but we wanted to make sure that the 11,000 students in years 4 to 6 could get access to a device. The procurement that is mentioned within the annual report was an additional procurement of devices on top of what schools already had. Then we issued about 11,000 devices to all our year 4 to 6 students.

MR CAIN: It is just the cost on that line.

Mr Hawkins: I am happy to take it on notice and get you a per unit price.

MR CAIN: Yes, take it on notice.

Mr Hawkins: What we did within the contract was use the previous contract to supply Chromebooks at a preferred market rate to us. We procure Chromebooks on a routine basis now; we do a kind of competitive market tender. It will vary in a slightly different way from what you would be able to buy in JB Hi-fi, because of the way these Chromebooks are set up and configured to ensure that they can be used within a school environment and used across our system. The prices are very comparative to what you can see on a book-to-book basis. I will take on notice the specific cost as it is set out within the annual report.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

MR DAVIS: I note that the budgeted increase to the Moneysmart teaching national partnership from the commonwealth was not met. It seems that we fell \$200,000 short; we got short-changed. Do we know why?

Mr Hawkins: No, we have not been short-changed at all. Some of that money is rolled over a number of years. We employ an officer within my team who works with schools in publicising what Moneysmart provides and the funding that comes through from the commonwealth, to ensure that people are made aware of that great professional learning that ASIC offer, and it is used by the majority of our schools. We know that through the work they have done, and publicising that, the ACT is one of the highest jurisdictions in utilising professional learning through Moneysmart.

MR DAVIS: Is the money that we are currently getting from the commonwealth to run that program in demand?

Mr Hawkins: Yes.

MR DAVIS: More broadly, do we expect that it will continue to meet demand as we go into our phase-out of school banking programs at the end of this financial year?

Mr Hawkins: They are slightly different things. It is currently under a partnership agreement with the commonwealth that comes up for renewal this year. It will be up to the commonwealth as to whether they renew that program or not. But regardless of that renewal, we will focus on the important elements of financial literacy within our schools.

I would say that that is very separate from what we see through school banking.

Through the report, we know that the providers could provide no evidence that school banking was beneficial to good saving habits. Instead, our focus is on ensuring that financial literacy is in place. The best way for us to do that is to make sure that our educators get access to the best professional learning, and that is through ASIC.

The great thing about the Moneysmart website and the facilities it provides is not just professional learning but really useful lesson plans for teachers and guides on how to use them within the classroom. There is a year 4 unit on how to run investigations: “Have you got a scam email?” It tells kids what to look for and how to engage in those conversations. It is geared to the Australian curriculum; it is up and available. We see that playing out within our schools. It is fantastic.

As part of the transition from banking, we want to start talking about what we are seeing in our schools regarding the use of financial literacy. Let’s get our P&Cs talking about that and about what they can do to further help us as we continue to strengthen that rollout through our schools so that, when we do things like school market days and there is a focus on economics and kids with tokens and trading and understanding notions of currency and what that means, we can get some kind of parental involvement in some of those programs. It can give parents who have been working really hard delivering school banking programs a pathway. They can still be involved with their schools and we can transition them out of that into the broader work that schools are doing to promote financial literacy.

MR DAVIS: One of the bits of feedback I heard from the parent community in particular through the plan to transition away from school banking programs was that, while we know that we are running these Moneysmart programs in at least some of our schools, a lot of parents, surprisingly, did not know that. Do we have plans for more parental engagement or to promote this program? And, broader than that, do we have a plan to ensure that this program, the Moneysmart teaching partnership, will be in every single school?

Ms Berry: Mr Hawkins and I had a really good conversation with the P&C council and P&Cs last week, on Tuesday night. That was really informative in being able to understand what parents expected and where they sat on the phasing out of the Dollarmites and the Commonwealth Bank from our schools.

The young people that we have spoken to over the years in developing the Future of Education Strategy have talked to us about the things they want to learn for when they leave school, which is about being an adult. They want to learn things like how they do their tax, how they go and do the grocery shopping, what is a budget, what that looks like, how they apply for rent, and all those more practical things that we learn on the run when we leave school and are on our own. They have told us that they want to learn that more in school. That is the sort of thing that Mr Hawkins was discussing. It was exactly played back to us by the parents and citizens council, and the P&Cs, last Tuesday night.

That gives us a really good direction to go in as to how we phase that in and the kinds of things that young people want to learn and are important to them. But it is also working with school communities about how they engage parents in that. That is the most difficult thing from the school’s perspective, and the P&C perspective: how do

they engage their parent and caring community so that they are volunteering and organising around their schools?

We are going to help them do that. There are a number of ways that we can go about that. But we also need to keep engaging with the P&Cs, and with the students and the school communities, about what exactly they want. For some schools, it will be different. The way that banking program has worked in some schools can be different. In some schools it is used more as parent engagement than in other schools. Each school will have its own culture that it wants to build, and we are going to work with them on that.

MR DAVIS: Do we know how many schools currently are using the Moneysmart program?

Ms Berry: Twenty per cent?

Mr Hawkins: I would have to come back and provide the number of teachers that have engaged with professional learning.

MR DAVIS: That would be great.

Mr Hawkins: Teachers will do that professional learning and then they can move schools. I think that is publicly available information, but I can provide that to you.

MR DAVIS: Do we have a target for how many schools we would like to see using the program?

Mr Hawkins: We would probably come at it from a different angle. We want to see all schools providing that kind of education the minister discussed: financial literacy and awareness for students. We know that that exists through the curriculum. Different schools do it in different year groups to meet what they are teaching through their broader planning within the school.

Financial literacy will flow through from what a student will learn in primary school when it comes down to some of those. There are basics around money and transactions, as the minister said, right the way through to the more complex conversations you are having in high school regarding how to open your account, how to get tax files, what your payslip is, how your payslip works. We know those conversations are taking place right through to college.

MR DAVIS: The question I am most interested in is this. As the minister flagged, there is the future of education plan. We have had those conversations. We know that is what kids want. How are we going to make sure that every single ACT public school pupil has taken part in some form of financial literacy program before their schooling ends? It sounds as though there are plans teachers can tap into and resources they can find, but what accountability measures do we have in place to ensure consistency, to ensure that every schoolkid will get exposed to a financial literacy program?

Mr Hawkins: Every schoolkid is exposed. It currently sits as part of the Australian

curriculum. It sits there within the Australian curriculum regarding financial literacy. For us within the directorate, that is why it is important to draw the distinction between financial literacy and awareness in the way that our programs are developed through all our schools, and school banking. School banking is very separate. It is an adjunct to support schools or school communities. Financial literacy, more broadly, sits within the Australian curriculum, and schools teach that within the broader curriculum offering.

THE CHAIR: The committee will suspend for lunch.

Hearing suspended from 12.12 to 1.16 pm.

Appearances:

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

Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Director General

Sabellico, Ms Anne-Maree, Deputy Director General

Saballa, Ms Melanie, Executive Branch Manager, Strategy and Management

Plater, Ms Janet, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Children and Families

Murray, Ms Christine, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion and Participation

Summerrell, Mrs Jessica, Executive Branch Manager, Social and Community Inclusion, Inclusion and Participation

MR CAIN: Could I clarify with the minister the question on child care. That would have been this morning, would it not?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR CAIN: That is what I thought. Just because of the labelling of the sessions this afternoon, I thought it might fit into both.

THE CHAIR: With that, let us get underway. Please speak one at a time and the first time you speak please acknowledge the pink privilege statement. I think that is all we need to go over. Mr Cain, take it away.

MR CAIN: Minister, my query relates to the shutting down of the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre for seven months. According to the annual report, demand on child and family centres last year was 31 per cent greater than the target, due in part to the pandemic. I am happy to be corrected on any of the assumptions I give. At the same time, the government decided to close the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre for nearly seven months, from July 2020 to January 2021, and turn it into a testing site. Considering this spike in demand, why did the government choose to shut down an existing centre instead of locating the testing clinic somewhere else?

Ms Berry: We can probably answer a little bit of that, but it really is in the Minister for Health's portfolio as far as the testing centre part of it is concerned. But we can talk to you about the supports for families as a result of that closure. Why that site was chosen probably sits with the Minister for Health more than anyone else, but I think there is a pretty good story from our perspective about how families were supported through that period. I ask Ms Saballa to provide some info on that.

Ms Saballa: At the moment I am the Executive Branch Manager, Strategy and Governance. For the period of the annual report I was the Executive Branch Manager, Children and Families, which covers the child and family centres query. Also, the Child Development Service sits under the Children and Families Branch.

Thank you very much for your question. It is an important one. If I can reflect on what happened during that time, of course for us it was about being available and being responsive to requests from ACT Health and being able to stand up quickly and responsively in regard to the COVID testing site that was available to local residents in west Belconnen. Canberra Health Services did contact us and we were able to work quickly to see what a transition plan would be like.

What we needed to do in a tight time frame was look at, first of all, how we would transition our staff. We looked at options for a range of locations. The location that we chose was the Child Development Service, where there was capacity, good working relationships. Central to that decision was how we continue to deliver services to families in the west Belconnen area.

The move was quick. We moved at the end of one week and we were relocated on the Monday of the following week. What the staff of the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre did quickly was to make sure that we engaged the families that we work with. We let them know that there had been a shift. We let them know what services were still available—and there were, and are, a range of services still available to families. We updated some details on our website. We had our phones transferred. All the equipment and the logistics that we needed to hit the ground running was organised.

It was a change of location, but it did not take away from the importance that we placed on making sure that families still received a service. How we did that—of course, you would appreciate it was in COVID—was that we needed to look at other venues to deliver services and we certainly engaged with community sector agencies that we work with. We were able to access space, if we needed space, to operate any services and that included at the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre. We were able to offer supports from that site as well.

To summarise, it was about letting families know what we were doing, it was about setting up quickly and it was about some real benefits, I think, in terms of working with colleagues at the Child Development Service. There was an opportunity to look at some innovative ways to engage.

The second part of your question was around that increase in occasions of service. For the child and family centres, that is our strategic indicator and it is a really important one because it does talk about the work that we do to support families based in the community. What we did see during the COVID period was that families did reach out to us for a range of supports. We may not have been able to provide them in the way that we had previously. If you know about the child and family centres, you know that our work is very face to face in terms of the way that we meet and listen and support families.

We needed to work quickly to be able to change the way that we delivered; so we stepped into an innovative space. We used Microsoft Teams. We developed workshops that were available online. We delivered group programs online. What we saw, and you will see it in our indicator set, was that the way that we deliver our services shifts depending on community needs.

During that year, the reporting year that included COVID, we heard from the families that contacted us that they needed much more case management support and intake support. That is where we see that increase of around 31 per cent.

MR CAIN: I certainly do understand that COVID had many of us rearranging quickly on many fronts. You are saying that, to save reorganising all the arrangements at the West Belconnen Family Centre, there were no other testing sites that were available?

Ms Berry: I do not know if we could respond to that. It is probably more within the Minister for Health's portfolio about assessment of space.

MR CAIN: Was the decision to reallocate much of the Belconnen site the health minister's decision?

Ms Berry: No. Once that site was chosen by the Minister for Health as a testing clinic then we worked on the relocation of the site.

MR CAIN: That decision was the health minister's decision, rather than to use some other possible venue?

Ms Berry: For the clinic?

MR CAIN: For the testing clinic, yes.

Ms Wood: I had conversations with Health. Perhaps I could add.

Ms Berry: Okay.

Ms Wood: The decision on where the testing sites are was definitely a Health decision. It is under the arrangements for the public health emergency. I had conversations with Health at the time, where they identified this location. They assured me that they had tested every possible option in that Belconnen area. They have certain conditions, which you would need to talk to them about specifically, regarding what they need, but parking and accessibility were very significant. And they really did come to us having explored all other options.

MR CAIN: With the online service that was offered, what about families who just did not have the needed bandwidth with their home network?

Ms Saballa: What the child and family centre staff did quickly was connect with families that we support and understand their ICT and what actual physical infrastructure they had. Did they have laptops? Did they have desktops? Did they have access to the internet? Were they comfortable with us reaching them live via text and calls? We did a bit of—I think audit is not the right word—more connecting directly with families and checking what they had and the best way that we could contact them. There were a small number of families that may not have had that.

One of the things that we did at the peak of COVID, during the lockdown period, was to make it possible still to visit families. We developed a screening checklist so that, before any of our staff went on a visit, we would call and we would go through a set

of questions. That was very important, of course, for the safety and wellbeing of families we were visiting but also staff as well. For any of those checklists which we developed we were able to ask advice from the office of the Chief Health Officer. We were very careful. Why this is important is that it does mean that there were families that may have been vulnerable in their circumstances and not had ICT access when we thought it was really important to still be able to visit. And we were able to do that.

MR CAIN: I have some particular programs I am interested in. What happened to the Strong Women's Group, the Koori Girls Group and the Koori Boys Group? My understanding is they were all run out of the centre, due to this closure.

Ms Saballa: Ensuring that we continued to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children through a range of groups was a priority for us. We predominantly moved to do that online. Again, it was that process of connecting with girls and with boys in the leadership groups, the Koori boys and the Koori girls. We were able to connect in and find out the best way that we could still stay in touch. There was a halt to face-to-face services for a period, as you would be aware, but we continued to engage. When restrictions started to lift—and we followed the directions for the easing of restrictions, the Canberra road map, so that we were in line with the stages of lifting of restrictions—we were able to gradually reinstate face-to-face services, but we definitely continued to still engage.

MR CAIN: Did any groups or programs cease because of the closure or partial closure?

Ms Saballa: I could talk to the types of programs that we provide in the child and family centres and—

MR CAIN: Particularly just the ones that you were not able to run.

Ms Saballa: The one that I would like to go to is a really quite large group that is offered at Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre and that is the multicultural play group. That is a large group with people from the community and their children and it is a very effective and highly subscribed group. With the COVID restrictions that we worked under, it did mean that we needed to look at other ways to engage with those families and young children during the time. That would be one example.

MR CAIN: What happened to the staff that were affected by the closure or partial closure?

Ms Saballa: Certainly, the staff's wellbeing and resilience were a really important focus of all the work that we did. At the beginning of COVID—

MR CAIN: Remuneration, was that affected?

Ms Saballa: No, not that I understand it would have been. I worked with managers of the sites and we needed to workshop what our service offer would be. We needed to understand what our staffing capacity was, to be able to deliver.

Staff had varied circumstances. We had staff that may have been on a working from

home agreement. We had other staff that may have been providing a schooling from home arrangement during the height of COVID. We had staff that had some health vulnerabilities. Our approach was to be very available and provide a tailored set of supports to meet the needs of individual staff.

One of the things that we did was to have work health and safety groups that met regularly. Our response to COVID was very much on that agenda. To support staff, we made sure that our communication was accurate. It was frequent. We brought staff together to update them and for much of the COVID period that could have been via Microsoft Teams.

The other thing that we did was that two of the staff in one of the work health and safety groups actually brought together a mental health, wellbeing and resilience fact sheet. This was a wonderful piece of work because what they did was talk with colleagues and they brought together a set of tips and strategies about working from home, self-care, podcasts to listen to, supports available.

The wellbeing of staff was really front and centre of the work that we did. I do have a copy of that tip sheet that staff developed, if that would be something that you would be interested to look at.

MR CAIN: Thank you. There were some sorts of written questions flowing?

Ms Saballa: Yes, sure.

MR CAIN: We will make sure that is included.

Ms Saballa: Yes.

Ms Berry: Particularly on the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre, I visited twice to have a test myself and there was a change from warm and welcoming. It was still welcoming but not warm in the way that it is when it is set up as a child and family service. To change into this really sort of clinical environment as a testing clinic was quite incredible. Of course, the team that was working there were great.

When the west Belconnen team was able to move back into the centre, they had a bit of a ceremony and a celebration of that move as well, which I think goes to a restart and putting everybody in a positive frame of mind and coming together again to continue their work out there. I felt when I was out there that there was a real kind of a celebration, more than anything, of people coming back to work and ready to get on with it and looking forward to seeing all the families and everybody that they have supported and to be working with each other again.

MR CAIN: Just following on from that, with the interim measures that you put in place, are those more or less continuing or are you going back to what it was pre-COVID?

Ms Saballa: One of the real positives that came out of that intense period of COVID was that we stepped very quickly into this innovative space. As I outlined before, the child and family centres previously were predominantly face-to-face, facilitating

groups, large community events being part of those, case management, outreach, support. What we needed to do was pivot our resources quickly and our staff expertise to deliver in other ways.

What we did find regarding many of those innovative things that we put in place—and it was programs online—was that one of the centres actually set up something like *Play School* and was able to share stories and songs, take videos and share those with families. What we have been able to do is retain the innovation gains that we made during this time, and it does provide choice for families as well.

We did hear feedback from some of the families that we work with that they really appreciated being able to log into a workshop if they had a very young child and they did not need to leave home. We have certainly looked at how we can retain those other ways that we delivered.

MR CAIN: Certainly COVID is teaching us what our new normal will look like. Thank you for your answers.

Ms Saballa: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I was hoping someone could update the committee on the CDS trial of occupational therapy drop-in clinics.

Ms Wood: I ask Ms Plater to come up as a witness for that question.

Ms Plater: I acknowledge the privilege statement as well. For a long time the Child Development Service have been running drop-in centres for speech pathology and for physiotherapy services and last year they started an innovation where they extended that to occupational therapy. Last year, until COVID happened, it was happening at Holder. Basically it was able to invite families who had children with fine-motor developmental issues and so on to come along and get advice. They also work with children who have sensory problems, trouble touching things, do not like being touched and poor grip strength.

The drop-in centres proved to be very successful and this year, in our transition from COVID to normal services, we have decided to expand the occupational therapy drop-in centres to go to the child and family centres. They will be extended and be held in each of the child and family centres on a regular basis as well, which gives families more access to those services. We are very excited about that and the opportunity to provide that service to the community.

THE CHAIR: That is very exciting. You mentioned that it was very successful. By what metric was it successful?

Ms Plater: I have not got the figures on me at the moment, but we certainly had fully booked sessions. We were increasing our numbers of referrals and people were attending on a really regular basis. The referral numbers were increasing.

THE CHAIR: That is good to hear. They made bookings for the drop-in sessions in COVID times?

Ms Plater: Normally it is a drop in-centre, as in you can just turn up. But over COVID we needed to have appointment bookings for drop-ins to make it easier. We have now gone back to making them available in a drop-in sense. Families will turn up, be given the time of the appointment and then be able to return. We will be able to advertise those times. There is a schedule for this term per centre and you can go to the website and see that time and visit.

MR DAVIS: Output class 3, child and family centres, states that the centres provided early intervention and prevention services, including through parenting assistance sessions. I imagine that COVID disrupted some of this. How has early intervention and prevention continued without face-to-face contact?

Ms Wood: I will ask Ms Saballa to return to answer that question. I think generally, broadly, the extension of services online did include some really innovative supports for parents and parenting. Ms Saballa can speak to that in more detail.

Ms Saballa: Just checking your question again? It was around the parenting assistance?

MR DAVIS: That is right, the parenting assistance sessions, the early intervention and prevention services. How were they continued without the face-to-face contact throughout COVID?

Ms Saballa: It does go to what I was explaining previously as well: how we needed to shift the way that we connected and supported parents and carers and children. It was around online support, telephone calls. Occasionally—and we do find that this works too—people appreciated a check-in text and then the opportunity to have a call.

What we see with the indicators set for the child and family centres under output class 3.1 is that, depending on our service offer and demand from the community and how we respond to particular things, there are shifts across those indicators. What you can see in the reporting year is that, whereas we may have been lower in variants on that face-to-face parenting assistance, which is really around group work and a teacher's visit—for example, there is usually a visit to somebody's home to deliver the program—there is this corresponding increase in the occasions of service.

That was why I was talking about that need that we heard from community. It was a time for families where I think there was vulnerability. Families relied on being able to pick up the phone, tap in with their child and family worker. We did see a real increase in the intake of people calling in, asking for support and then the support that we offered.

MR DAVIS: Did you keep records during that period of how many phone calls, texts, Zoom meetings were had to be able to track that increased level of demand?

Ms Saballa: We of course do reporting. At the moment it is through a system which is called ChIPS and child and family workers and staff would be entering into the database any of the communication events and the provision of a service or the occasion of service. There are categories within that database as well. It might be a

telephone call.

I would need to check. It is an interesting question, but I would need to check whether it is sophisticated enough now to include a Microsoft Teams meeting, for example. But our interactions with families are recorded on the ChIPS database and that is the basis of the reporting that you see within the budget statements and also the annual report.

Ms Wood: The headline figure for occasions of service for 2019-20 was 10,822 and that will include a lot of the contacts that Ms Saballa is referencing.

Ms Saballa: It will, yes, particularly around that intake. That intake service is a very well-known service. We have been in place for a number of years and child and family centres are known for that one-stop shop in the community, a range of supports that you can access, if you have got questions about children's development. If you feel that you would like to talk something over about parenting, child and family centres are that one-stop shop that people know about, which is great. We saw this increase of people calling in to our intake, and that is one of our service offers.

The other thing that we saw was this increase in case management. If you think about case management, that is a more targeted support. That is where you have families that have more high and complex needs. The child and family centre staff have real expertise in the way that they work with families. It is their professional qualifications but then it is all the training that they have done, particularly on programs. For a good number of families we were providing more intensive case management support as well.

MR CAIN: I have some questions about the new Mindful Motherhood program. Can the minister briefly explain how the new Mindful Motherhood program operates?

Ms Saballa: I am happy to. I am just going to get some material because we had some media around it and I have a good overview that explains the program. But before I turn to that, Mindful Motherhood is a great example of how we put in place programs that respond to the needs that we are hearing about when we work with families.

That would be the example here that we would have been working through with families. They may have come through our intake service, talking about whether they are maybe feeling isolated, whether they may not have natural supports around them, or whether they are feeling stressed in their role as new parents. We would have heard a range of things from families calling in and then looking to a program that we would be able to put in place, and Mindful Mothering was one of those. But I could share some detail about the program.

MR CAIN: Sure.

Ms Saballa: The thing about this branch is that there are so many different programs that we offer. There is quite a lot of material that goes with that.

THE CHAIR: We are in no rush. Don't worry.

Ms Saballa: I have the detail here now. Mindful Mothering is an eight-week program aiming to support pregnant and new mothers. The sessions are very practical. They combine yoga with a licensed instructor and mindfulness approaches. And the real focus is to increase confidence and skills to cope with stress, promote emotional balances and assist with regulating emotions; increase acceptance of emotions and thoughts; approach experiences with a calm, non-judgmental approach; and assist in responding to baby's thoughts and emotions. I could provide an update about implementation if that would be useful.

MR CAIN: I have probably got a few other particular questions and maybe we will get to that as well. What data led to the decisions to base this program at the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre?

Ms Saballa: I think it would be our staff, whether it was through supervision, talking together as colleagues. We have reflective sessions where there is an opportunity for staff to come together and talk about the issues that are coming through intake, for example. What are the trends? What are we hearing about from families? What are the issues from families? What are the programs that we feel are going to best meet the needs of families? We look at our current suite of services and supports.

What I suggest has happened here is that we have had staff that would be aware of this program and they see that there is a need from community and the people are contacting us. They would have participated in specialist training and then that allows us to implement the program.

MR CAIN: Are you are suggesting that it was staff at the Gungahlin centre that initiated the need for the program?

Ms Wood: Just picking up on what Ms Saballa said, there is a lot of work that happens in the child and family centres that is effectively business intelligence, what we are we seeing in our data and what we are hearing from the clients coming in. The analysis of that, which staff are actively involved in, identifies where might the gap be and what new offering might we be able to implement. I think that is the kind of process Ms Saballa is describing, as sort of an analysis of our own data and an analysis of that qualitative feedback from clients.

MR CAIN: Why did that lead the program to be run from Gungahlin?

Ms Wood: I think that the data from Gungahlin was driving that analysis. There is a gap here. This is what we are hearing from this particular part of the community. That is not to say that that need might not exist elsewhere, but we need to actually test these programs and get people skilled up to run them, to see if they are successful. If there is need elsewhere, we can consider that in the future.

MR CAIN: Do you have any theories why Gungahlin was the area where this need seemed to be more apparent?

Ms Sabellico: The number of younger families in the area, being able to identify what services are not available and identifying the gap where it would be good to actually have some extra support; I think that is what the staff would have heard. It clearly

comes out in our data that we have for younger families growing up in that area as well. There would be different issues that you would look at in terms of looking at the place and then defining what the services are from that.

MR CAIN: Are there plans to extend the program to other centres?

Ms Saballa: Yes. We are looking at training more of our child and family workers to be able to deliver the program. I can update you—

MR CAIN: And the timetable? Is there a timetable yet for this expansion?

Ms Saballa: The program was delivered at the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre in term 3 of last year and then at the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre in term 4 of last year. In 2021 we are going to continue to roll out the program. We are looking to have another one at the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre and then a program at the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre as well. If I could add to what Ms Wood was explaining, in the child and family centres we have a core suite of programs that we deliver but there is always opportunity to look at what is new and innovative and active that suite of programs. This is an example of that.

MR CAIN: Do you have any suggested timing for the expansion of it in Gungahlin and the development of it in Belconnen?

Ms Saballa: The notes that I have are “in 2021” but that is detail that I can provide if I can take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Just a quick supplementary: you do not need to live in Gungahlin to access the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre?

Ms Saballa: No.

THE CHAIR: A substantive question from me: one of the future directions of CDS is to create a digital resource library. Could someone expand for me what will be entailed in that?

Ms Plater: I can also, if I may, follow up on your previous question.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Plater: The OT drop-in centres allow families to see an occupational therapist within weeks of needing a service through the drop-in, when sometimes our waiting list can be up to six months for that service. That was one of the metrics that we really improved. Occupational therapy centres, drop-in centres, are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, depending on the location, weekly on either a Tuesday or a Thursday in each of the centres. That will be followed through.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful.

Ms Plater: Thank you for your question about the digital resource library. It is a really interesting time in the Child Development Service with the provision of therapy services during COVID and what it has taught us. As Ms Saballa said, we have learned a lot about innovation and, with a lot of that work, we want to keep it.

I did bring a prop that is, I think, one of the loveliest things you can see. In the child and family centres we ran groups online. This is a child coming up to the TV and talking to the presenter. That allowed us to have us lots of opportunity to do that. In addition, we provided QR codes that went to videos and to talking so that people could easily, on their mobile phones when they had restricted database, see a story about a rainbow, hear a song about a rainbow and play a game. What this allowed us to do was really deliver services in a different way.

We also ran a group called Developing Kids, where we dropped resources to the gates of families so that they had a snake to paint and different things. They actually had the materials in front of them and then they tuned into the show, to our workers giving therapy advice and so on about what to do. They could follow along and do that at home. It just opened a window for us around different ways to develop resources.

We worked really closely with libraries and with the Chief Information Officer in our area to work out how to present and prepare that digital content. The great thing about it is that it is re-usable. We have a store that we offer different parenting groups and parents can access it whenever they want. Dads can come home and sit down, if they were working, or mums can come home and sit down if they were working, and revisit the information and the content.

What this has allowed us to do is to think of a new way of delivering services and a different service offer. We will not be reverting to the way that we did it before COVID. We will be building a digital resource library and using it and incorporating that into our everyday program so that we can do this. It is really across the whole range of our services. We do intake, we do screening, we do assessments and we do some limited groups as well at the Child Development Service. We will be able to backup what we do with the digital content now that we have become incredibly agile at doing that. It has been a real learning curve for us.

THE CHAIR: In terms of the content you have created, how accessible will it be? Will it be on a website that anyone can have a look at or will you need to be accessing a service and you then will be able to have the login and see?

Ms Plater: Of course, we have very skilled allied health therapists who want the content to be used in different ways. Some of it is about engaging with your child and parenting. It is about reading books and doing those sorts of things. There are plenty of other resources available. Because we need to deliver that service with the skilled advice that our workers have, it has got a specific purpose. We would be doing it largely with the families that we work with. But that is not to say you might not go, as a parent with a child, to a drop-in centre and be given five activities to do at home as soon as you have been pointed in the right direction of what to do, with accompanying information and material to do that work.

MR DAVIS: Many of the ACT government's boards, committees and advisory

bodies are located within CSD, as discussed on pages 30 and 31 of the annual report. Can you tell us about the work that has been done with these committees to support the community through COVID-19?

Ms Wood: Are you talking about the broad range of boards that advise CSD and the minister on children ?

MR DAVIS: Yes, the range of advisory councils that are listed on pages 30 and 31.

Ms Wood: Sure.

MR DAVIS: I guess the crux of my point is to ascertain how many of these resources were used to—

Ms Wood: During COVID?

MR DAVIS: bounce ideas off and get feedback from during our COVID response.

Ms Wood: I can speak to that and Ms Sabellico can extend that. CSD supports a range of ministerial advisory councils and other expert advisory councils that cover the suite of services and policies that we are responsible for. We actively used those councils broadly during COVID to be sources of advice about what was happening in the community, where people saw need, where people saw gaps in service and where people saw emerging vulnerability. That was across the ministerial advisory councils for youth, for multicultural affairs, for disability and for women—so the full range of them.

Those are the councils that represent parts of the community. Then we have specific councils and groups of various kinds where people from the community sector, for example, are involved in particular programs. Some of those groups were directly involved or the members of them came together. We had different ways that we were engaging the community sector at the time. We did particular work with the community sector to design the community support package. I will just see whether Ms Sabellico wants to add to that.

Ms Sabellico: Only to add that we undertook a particular piece of work which was looking at what were the needs of a number of our cohorts and what was the impact of COVID on them. As part of that, we had conversations with a range of the committees that are identified here—as the D-G has just pointed out—young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with disability. We needed to be able to understand not only the impact but also their needs. A lot of our work for the provision of personal protective equipment and stuff like that was informed by those discussions and what was needed there.

The other work that we also did was to work with those groups and other community sector groups to structure our responses under the stimulus package in terms of what was needed, how we would go about undertaking the work and how quickly that needed to get out, depending on what the needs were that were being identified.

MR DAVIS: Does CSD, or the ACT government more broadly, see value in a

COVID-19 community recovery advisory body, either as a new advisory group or a compilation of members from existing groups? I just wonder how much those councils are being used as a resource in our recovery, as well as during the peak of the pandemic.

Ms Wood: We supported the development of the government's community recovery road map, which sets out a pretty high-level initial response but then recognises that recovery is going to take time and it will look different for different people in the community, depending on the impacts. We have continued to engage with the different advisory councils as we move through different kinds of recovery. Obviously, it looks different for representatives from the disability community than it may look for people in the multicultural community.

We have continued to have those conversations. The government has had a particular focus on governance around economic recovery. We are interested in what is the best way to look at the social recovery side, and really integrated with that economic recovery, to ensure that the push on economic recovery brings everyone along as well, so it is a really equitable approach to recovery. We are still working through what else might be required beyond the existing advisory arrangements.

MR CAIN: Minister, my questions relate to infrastructure improvements to child and family centres and the child development centre at Holder. The budget outlook shows that the three child and family centres, plus the Holder child development centre, are receiving improvements this year as part of the Better Infrastructure Fund initiative. That is at page 234 of the budget outlook. Can you please explain what these improvements are for each facility, and also the costing?

Ms Wood: I can start, Mr Cain. The Better Infrastructure Fund initiative is a standing program where funding is allocated each year to the range of properties that CSD is responsible for. We work through what are the priorities and where do we need to invest for particular needs. There is an active process each year to prioritise across all of our sites. I do not have with me the detail of the specifics for each of site. People are shaking their head at me. Minister?

Ms Berry: We might have to take that one on notice.

Ms Wood: Yes, we can take it on notice.

MR CAIN: Take it on notice.

Ms Wood: Yes.

MR CAIN: And also the expenditure.

Ms Wood: Sure.

MR CAIN: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

MR DAVIS: Are we happy to move on to 1.1, inclusion and participation—youth?

THE CHAIR: Do you have another one here, Mr Cain?

MR CAIN: When you say 1.1, do you mean—

MR DAVIS: Inclusion and participation. I am moving on to the next section.

THE CHAIR: Do you have anything left on this?

MR CAIN: I do, yes.

THE CHAIR: Take it away.

MR CAIN: Thank you. The topic I raise now relates to attempts to increase autism assessments. I am not sure who needs to shuffle and where. Anyway, I will begin.

Ms Wood: Yes.

MR CAIN: The annual report notes that CDS has been trying to attract professionals to meet the demand for autism assessments in three ways: procurement of a private psychologist, casual employment of contracted psychologists and a review of trialled telehealth platforms. I think that is on page 94. What have been the impacts of this attempt on waiting times for these assessments?

Ms Wood: Mr Cain, I might just start by saying that the context that we are operating in with the CDS is the national workforce shortage. These skilled professionals are in very high demand nationally, so the ACT is not alone in having some challenges in attracting skilled professionals in these areas. It has been the work that the CDS has been doing to look at different ways that we can bring those skills in and get faster support for families. I can get Ms Plater to talk about what the experience has been of those different models to date.

Ms Plater: We have certainly had some challenges in recruiting qualified professionals to do that. At the moment we have two clinical psychologists at the Child Development Service. Again, because of COVID and some of the challenges, we have done this with a combination of telehealth assessments and also private providers.

I am very pleased to say that as, of 15 February, we had reduced the waiting list down to 71 people waiting for an offer of an assessment. I checked this morning with my staff and we have been able to offer another 15 or so placements. We are actually down to 58 at the moment. This time last year, in February, it was about 120. The service model—and having the combination of services—has certainly improved the waiting times for people waiting for an assessment.

MR CAIN: Thank you. Which of the three approaches seem to have proved most successful?

Ms Plater: It is my understanding that all approaches are effective. Some families have a preference for one or the other. When we ring up, we explain the telehealth option and ask them if they want to do that. If they choose not to, that might mean a

little bit of a longer wait for them. Many families have reported that they are quite happy and comfortable with that. But they are all qualified clinical psychologists and the way that they do that is appropriate.

MR CAIN: Just to confirm: CDS now has a private psychologist; is that correct?

Ms Plater: CDS employs two psychologists on a part-time basis to assist us with the assessments. We also purchase a private psychologist to do individual assessments in a contract situation. We also purchase telehealth services to do autism assessments.

MR CAIN: Do you feel you are now meeting the demand for autism assessments?

Ms Plater: I think there are always waiting lists and we would always love to see the time improve, but we are doing the best that we can and are certainly improving the service offer at the moment.

MR CAIN: Thank you. I have another line of questions, Mr Chair.

THE CHAIR: You are safe, so away you go. You have five whole minutes to yourself.

MR CAIN: It is unusual for me to be left holding the floor, so to speak.

THE CHAIR: Do not make us regret it.

MR CAIN: Culturally safe and inclusive service programs is my topic now. One of the priorities in the budget statements is delivering culturally safe and inclusive services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families through the Child Development Service and child and family centres. I believe that is page 5 of budget statements G. Can the minister please explain specific ways in which the government is achieving this priority?

Ms Berry: Yes. Ms Saballa already went to some of the programs that changed during COVID, particularly out of the west Belconnen centre. Maybe you can go into a bit more detail?

Ms Saballa: I would be happy to; thank you. For the Children and Families Branch, which has the three childhood family centres and the Child Development Service, improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families is a priority. It has been for a number of years and it continues to be. For a number of years now, we have been putting in place a new suite of programs.

Under the banner of Growing Healthy Families we wanted to be really proactive in the way that we engaged with families. We wanted to be able to provide culturally safe and inclusive welcoming environments in terms of the spaces that families come into. But it was also about the programs and supports that we provide as well. Under the Growing Healthy Families banner, there are a range of particular programs that we facilitate and that we have community sector organisations also co-facilitate.

There are programs like the Strong Women's Group that started at West Belconnen

Child and Family Centre and has been in place for a number of years. That provides an opportunity to bring women together, whether it is parents, carers, aunts or grandmothers, and they bring friends. It is an opportunity to connect. They certainly tell us what they would like to be doing. We bring facilitators in. That is a really well-established group.

We have leadership groups for primary school age children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, like Koori girls and Koori boys. Again, we bring facilitators in. They have done a lot of really wonderful work with children of primary school age. We have groups for families with younger children as well.

We have had Growing Healthy Families in place for a number of years now. Initially, when we instigated these programs, we definitely talked with community about what are the types of programs that you would like to see and what are the supports that you would like to access in the child and family centres? What we saw initially was that families were accessing that Growing Healthy Families suite of programs, but over time we saw that families then went on to access a range of other programs and supports within the child and family centres, as well as other services and supports provided by other providers in the child and family centres.

We have done a lot of work to be able to do this well. As I have mentioned, it is a priority for us. We have invested in staff professional development and training. There are the resources that we buy to work with families and share, the books and the props that we have. We make sure that they are contemporary and they reflect the diversity of the community that we seek to serve. It is work that we have progressed over a period of time. We see a consistency in terms of the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children that are accessing our services as well. It is part of, I guess, the profile of families seeking supports at the services.

MR CAIN: Does the service have a connection to an unfortunately high rate of criminal charging and prosecution? Is that something you get involved in?

Ms Saballa: With some of the families that we work with, it is across the spectrum. It is not solely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, of course. Because the child and family centres—and I think that is the success of the model—are such welcoming spaces, it means that families feel they are non-stigmatising, non-judgemental, and they feel comfortable to come and talk to our staff. Can you repeat the question, because it was quite specific?

MR CAIN: I just wondered whether your work has a direct connection with the work, for example, of the DPP or Legal Aid in supporting families who are caught up in criminal accusations or prosecutions.

Ms Saballa: I do not know exactly about that.

Ms Wood: Ms Saballa, can I just add something?

Ms Saballa: Sure.

Ms Wood: Obviously, the workers are working with families on a range of things that

are happening in their lives and there will be a range of stresses for everyone in the community. We have a particular model that is connected with one of those sites where we are providing legal supports to families through the health-justice partnership. That is intended, like many of the supports in the child and family centre, to be an earlier intervention option, before we get into the criminal justice system, enabling parents to access legal support and with a particular emphasis—because we are talking to parents—around domestic and family violence, but not limited to that. I think there is certainly a recognition that the wellbeing of families may involve legal issues being addressed and there are ways that that can happen and be referred.

MR CAIN: I guess I am touching on the possibility of a whole-of-family services approach where all of the issues that might not advance the best interests of the family can be embraced—almost a one-contact point—but I understand that that is a challenge. It is more of a comment, I guess.

Ms Saballa: Thank you. Certainly, our approach in the child and family centres is holistic in terms of understanding what families come to us and what those needs and supports are that we can put in place. As Ms Wood was saying, that justice partnership with us has been a really fantastic initiative. We have had a solicitor in situ. That has meant she has been able to be a visible face for participating groups and be a face that families get to know. That is a really warm and non-threatening way of coming and having a chat about some concerns that they may have, and it could be around a range of issues.

Ms Berry: It is similar to the education-justice partnership.

MR CAIN: You mentioned that this morning. Thank you.

Ms Saballa: Mr Cain, could I go back to a question that you asked before?

MR CAIN: Which one?

Ms Saballa: You asked lots of questions and this was the one about whether we ceased any of our child and family centre programs during COVID. I gave the example of the multicultural play group. I wanted to provide some additional information. While we did not meet in the form that we did previously, all of those participants would have received some one-on-one support. It was not that the group was not there and then there was no support for them. The other thing is that, as the restrictions started to lift, we looked at other venues where there was more space, some local large parks in the Tuggeranong area, which meant that families could still come together.

MR CAIN: Thank you for that clarification. Thank you, Chair.

Short suspension.

THE CHAIR: We are back with questions relating to inclusion and participation, youth. I will get us started and we will make our way down the line. Can someone give us an update on Youth Week this year?

Ms Berry: Youth Week? Do you want to have a crack at it?

Ms Murray: I might just do a quick introduction and then throw over to Jess for some of the details. Thank you so much for the question. I acknowledge the privilege statement. We are really looking forward to Youth Week. We have an amazing Youth Advisory Council who are working with us and are champing at the bit, having not done Youth Week last year due to COVID. We have quite a large number of things that we are looking to roll out in this space and a lot of engagement with the youth sector, who I think are very excited as we step out of the COVID space and are doing more things face to face. Jess, did you want to go into some greater detail there?

Mrs Summerrell: Sure. I acknowledge the privilege statement. As Christine mentioned, we are very excited about Youth Week this year. It is running from 25 March until 1 April. It is an important part of our calendar this year in particular because of the impacts of COVID on young people and the impact that that had on Youth Week last year. We are really keen to support our youth community to run a range of events across the city for Youth Week.

We run a grant process that supports young people to develop events in the community that have an impact and a benefit for young people. We work through a process to make sure that those events are represented across the whole of the city so that we can ensure the inclusion and participation of youth across all parts of our city. We hope to announce more information around the youth grants shortly, but at this stage they are still in the assessment process.

THE CHAIR: What got cancelled last year and did anything go ahead?

Mrs Summerrell: Last year we worked with successful grant recipients to try and modify the events that they were having to still meet the COVID requirements where possible. Where we could do that, we did. As COVID restrictions eased, we supported a range of events to proceed with the new restrictions. There were some events that just were not able to go ahead, but for all of our grant processes we really did want to work with the recipients to try and run events, where possible, particularly given the important connection that those events have for our young people.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you.

MR DAVIS: In relation to the Youth Advisory Council that you mention in the annual report on page 31, what do they identify as the key priorities for government, as you understand them?

Ms Berry: They are not too dissimilar to the priorities that were published by, I think, Mission Australia, when they did their survey of young people across Australia: equity and discrimination, mental health, COVID and the environment. I think the top three for the ACT were equality and discrimination, COVID and mental health. I think I have got that right.

Mrs Summerrell: Yes. The environment was in the top three for the ACT and mental health was in the top three for the national figures.

Ms Berry: It is good that it is consistent. That is what we are also hearing from young people in our schools, through our student congresses as well. There are no surprises with the issues that they are highlighting.

Mrs Summerrell: I can add to that that the council's work plan for 2019-20 had a particular focus on youth employment rights, environment, planning and sustainability and healthy relationships.

MR DAVIS: Great. That leads to my supplementary, Mrs Summerrell, thank you very much. On page 65 you reference the healthy relationships education. How does the advisory council believe that should happen? I am curious about it, from your perspective, and I would like a bit of an update on it. Page 65 of the annual report says that the Youth Advisory Council identifies the need for greater healthy relationships education. I am curious as to how we are responding to that.

Ms Berry: In our schools?

Ms Murray: If I may? Certainly, working with the Youth Advisory Council is such an exciting conversation because they are very passionate and very in touch with the broader community. We have had some lively conversations around the appropriate implementation of this. There is an acknowledgement of some of the amazing work that has already been in existence in ACT schools that we are working through as part of the work plan and how that group would like to advise the minister and the government on how they would encourage us to implement that particular program. There is an acknowledgement of what has happened before and what is continuing to go on now. There is also a great desire to step it up in future. I did not go to the last Youth Advisory Council meeting, but I do not think that was necessarily progressed in terms of the direction that they are looking to encourage us to go in that space.

MR DAVIS: Have they given any indication about when they might have ratified a position and given some advice? I am just interested in, if not definitive dates, at least a time frame in which we might see an expansion of healthy relationships education, not just in schools but in the community more broadly.

Ms Berry: I have had one meeting with the Youth Advisory Council online. I do not think I could get to their most recent one, which I think might have been last week. I think I have only half-tried to really get in touch with them and find out what is the work plan and get some advice from them. As soon as the next meeting is available, I think I will be going along to that so that I can understand better where they want to go with this stuff.

Ms Murray: Mr Davis, the Youth Advisory Council did a lot of work last year, obviously in addition to their work plan, on responding to COVID and being in touch with what were the needs in the community around COVID. That probably has shaped the time frames for some of their advice.

MR DAVIS: Of course.

Ms Murray: I think they are now at a point where they can reset and refocus for this year. They will get back to the substantive issues. We have a meeting coming up very

shortly. I am happy to, I suppose, not take it on notice but raise it with the advisory council next time we meet.

MR DAVIS: Leave it in their very capable hands.

Ms Murray: The beauty is that it is in their capable hands but it is also supported by such a broad infrastructure across multiple directorates. I think the answer to a lot of the questions posed today is that it is a small group but it is leveraging off a large government who is passionate about supporting this.

MR DAVIS: Can I ask a follow-up? It is possibly a question that could be asked in the annual reports, but it is something that is coming up while we are having the conversation. How much, if at all, is the Youth Advisory Council resourced by government to do outreach in its work to ensure that the advice it is giving to government is not necessarily just representative of the young people in the room but so that it is actually encouraged and adequately resourced to get out into its communities and source ideas?

Ms Murray: I will hand over to Mrs Summerrell for some detail in just a sec, but I think that that is an area that we are really working hard on at the moment. We have a lot of incredibly impressive people in the room and the conversation that we have had on a regular basis is: how do we ensure that the voices of all Canberrans within the particular age cohort are heard at the table? That will be in different forms.

We are supported somewhat through the Youth Advisory Council and the Student Congress. We are actively seeking to engage people who might be in our juvenile detention facilities, people who might be on alternative school programs and people who used to have a label, when I was in education, about risk—people who do not necessarily have that capacity to engage.

It is not necessarily about a focused budget of the council, although Mrs Summerrell can provide some broader details. It is about how can we leverage the capacity that we have across the whole of the ACT government to support those conversations, whether it be through sporting organisations, educational opportunities or our justice system, so that we can actually reach and then support, with the sector, those people to engage in the conversation—to have the voice heard that would not necessarily be at the table through the Youth Advisory Council. They are a very representative group, but there is always more that you can do, which is what I think the point of the question is: how do we actually reach in?

MR DAVIS: Has the office of youth affairs—however you want to describe them—had any conversations with the office of mental health? I am just percolating or having the conversation they presented to the health committee earlier in the week, when they spoke about a new platform that they are hopefully looking to roll out that provides mental health supports, amongst other things, that young people have asked for. They spoke to the health committee about the possibility of being able to ask questions and solicit some data from young people through the use of that new platform. Has a conversation happened between youth affairs and the mental health office to see where there might be overlaps and synergies there?

Ms Murray: We work very hard and the relationship has only got closer between inclusion, participation and health particularly. The mental health promotion in Dr Moore's space over the COVID period was to make sure that we were speaking with a collective voice. Mrs Summerrell will be able to talk about any particular meetings, but there is a constant dialogue between that office and our office.

Mrs Summerrell: What Ms Murray has explained is absolutely correct. We have a very collaborative relationship across government, particularly on issues such as this. We saw, particularly during COVID, a real collaboration in terms of wellbeing for young people. I cannot answer specifically if there has been a conversation exactly as you describe, but I would say that the relationship is very collaborative.

I will just mention that, in relation to the respectful relationships that you were referring to earlier, one of the focus areas for the Youth Assembly also related to this. Unfortunately, the Youth Assembly was postponed because of COVID and we could not hold it in a face-to-face capacity. The Youth Advisory Council did a lot of work in preparing for that session and it is anticipated that that will be a continuing conversation as we plan for the next Youth Assembly with the minister. It is definitely something that is at the forefront of their minds as well. They have done a substantial amount of work in trying to understand those issues better and reaching out into the sector to understand what those issues are.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

Ms Murray: I might just jump in there and say that it sounds very Youth Advisory Council and government sector focused, but we draw hugely on some amazing work that is in the community sector in this space—people who are working on the ground with vulnerable young Canberrans, young Canberrans at risk, with PCYC. Where we can work best is when we bring all of the triangles of information together and roll it out. I do not want to leave the impression that we just have a Youth Advisory Council and government; the sector is really important in terms of achieving what we need to achieve in this space.

MR DAVIS: Great. Thank you.

MR CAIN: My question relates to something that has already been touched on, the 2020 Youth Week grants. Minister, as noted in the annual report at page 198—my reference—14 organisations were chosen to receive Youth Week grants last year, then Youth Week events were cancelled, for obvious reasons. Have these organisations been allowed to retain their grants for this year's Youth Week?

Mrs Summerrell: I do not have all of that detail in front of me, Mr Cain. However, where possible, we did work with organisations to allow them to repurpose the funding to run an event or an activity that still met the objectives of that grant process, which was to bring young people together in an activity that benefited the youth community. Wherever possible, once restrictions eased, we did really encourage young people to continue to hold events to continue that social cohesion.

MR CAIN: I hope I understand this correctly. You are saying that, despite the COVID restrictions, you encouraged them to use the money from last year's grants

for other activities that were permitted within the restrictions?

Mrs Summerrell: Within the COVID restrictions, if there were other ways that they could achieve their objectives that they had applied for under the grant then we did work with them to try and meet those objectives. Otherwise, when restrictions eased and restrictions changed, if they were then able to hold an event—or whatever it was that they were trying to achieve through the restrictions that were in place at the time—we worked with them to achieve that.

MR CAIN: In terms of the expenditure of the original money granted, I am assuming you kept track of that expenditure. Was there any that needed to be returned?

Mrs Summerrell: I do not have that detail in front of me. I would have to come back to you on that.

Ms Murray: We will take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Thank you. A supplementary on that. Have new grants for Youth Week been distributed this year?

Ms Berry: We are just starting the process now.

Mrs Summerrell: Yes.

MR CAIN: Thank you. That is all I have on that line of questioning.

THE CHAIR: What does the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year win? What is the prize?

Ms Berry: They get the Young Citizen of the Year—

THE CHAIR: Trophy? Gift voucher? Cash? Events? Functions?

Ms Murray: There is an award event where certificates are provided. Often, at times, there will be a trophy. The trophy might vary from year to year, or the acknowledgement might vary from year to year. I have participated in awards where it has been from a lovely local glasswork through to a local Aboriginal artist undertaking a painting. There is usually a certificate and a trophy.

In relation to other opportunities that come forward, the young Canberran of the year is often invited to participate in conversations and representation. If I can slightly move ahead and use the women's awards as an example? The awardees from that will speak and represent at the award ceremony for this year. There is not a cash prize—it is not a car or a luxury holiday—but it is the acknowledgement.

Ms Berry: In previous years, when I was Minister for Multicultural and Youth Affairs, I used to invite the young Canberra citizens of the year to come and present at citizenship ceremonies. Those were the kinds of things that those individuals at that time wanted; they wanted to get more experience in public speaking and delivering to a diverse audience. That has not happened for a while now. Those are the kinds of

things that some young citizens of the year might be keen on.

There are probably other opportunities that are untapped that we have not had the chance to explore, either, for them to be more creative around. That is something I am keen to do with the YAC, understanding that most of the people who are on the Youth Advisory Committee or in any of those categories of the young citizens of the year are incredibly busy and are working, studying and being amazing as well. Their time is very limited in what other opportunities they can have as well.

THE CHAIR: You have gone to the crux of where I wanted to go with this questioning. People that won last year, in 2020—did they miss out on anything as a result of winning in 2020?

Ms Berry: Probably. As for the rest of the community, with COVID everything changed. It is a good question. I think we can check back in with them and see if there is something we can do with them. That is good; very thoughtful.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful.

MR DAVIS: I refer to pages 188 and 189 of the annual report, which describe the 2019-20 Back to School Appeal that was run by CDS. What was the purpose of conducting this as an appeal to the public rather than just as a government service?

Ms Wood: This is part of CSD's giving program. As part of our organisational values we really prioritise giving back to the community. We have worked to ensure that we have a considered approach to that during the year, because obviously we get approached by many charities to support them. We have a particular focus on giving that does support children and families, because that is such a huge part of our core business. In this Back to School Appeal we partnered with GIVIT, in collaboration with the Education Directorate. It was focused on resources, back to school packs, for the most disadvantaged families and kids. It really was an opportunity for people within the directorate to contribute to that. It is part of our broader giving program.

MR DAVIS: Okay.

Ms Berry: I would say that that supplements what the ACT Education Directorate provides. The free Chromebooks, with the textbooks of today, are the bursaries that are now available through primary, high school and college for students and families who need additional support for these kinds of things. This just supplements everything that is provided anyway at the school level.

MR DAVIS: What, if any, staffing allocation was there to run that appeal through CDS?

Ms Wood: I think I will have to take that one on notice, unless you are aware, Chris?

Ms Murray: As Jo has indicated, a really core part of the CSD value statement is giving back, actually being part of the community and walking alongside the community. Certainly, as someone who is often involved in this as well, a reasonable amount of time is given in work time but a lot of people are just happy to support

outside of work time. Going into my people management space, people predominantly work in CSD because they have a passion for the people that we serve and the people in Canberra.

There is quite a willingness to step up and support where we can. Sometimes it is simply a matter of organising bins near the turnstile for people to put school supplies in on the way through or an email which goes out to encourage people to participate in providing an end-of-year donation to a chosen charity. It is something that pervades the culture within CSD that we do what we can to give back, if I could term it that way. I think Mrs Summerrell might have not a car but a cash figure in terms of the prize for the previous question.

THE CHAIR: There is cash.

Mrs Summerrell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I had a feeling.

Ms Murray: There is cold hard cash.

Mrs Summerrell: Yes. The winner does actually receive a monetary prize. That is donated by the sponsors. I understand it is around \$1,000. It is to support that person to undertake speaking events and to participate in things that allow them to utilise the benefits and the platform of what they have achieved. The prize money does come from the sponsors. I think it is probably contingent on what sponsorship is provided by those sponsors. Last year, I believe it was \$1,000 for the winner.

I would just add that the people that win these awards are incredibly committed to their community and they are being recognised for the enormous work that they do. They have something to say and they really do have an amazing way of communicating what it is that they are setting out to achieve. That money does allow them the opportunity to get that platform that they may not otherwise have been able to receive.

THE CHAIR: Indeed. No-one is doing it for the money. You do not have anything?

MR DAVIS: I do not have anything.

THE CHAIR: I think we are all done here.

Ms Berry: Early mark; early mark.

MR CAIN: No, I have one, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Is that a joke or is that serious?

MR CAIN: No, it is serious.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Take it away.

MR CAIN: Page 29 of the budget outlook uses the December data to make a point that youth employment, which was most affected by the pandemic, is “showing a particularly strong recovery”. Again, I am happy to be corrected on any assumptions that are implicit in any of my questions, but it appears to me that ABS data for January shows that the number of young people employed in the ACT, following the spike in seasonal Christmas employment, is actually lower than it was in March, June, August, September, October, November and December last year. I would understand you having to take this on notice, but are you aware of this drop in the number of young Canberrans who are employed?

Ms Wood: We are very aware, through the various surveys of the qualitative information regarding young people, about young people’s employment being one of the most impacted groups because of, obviously, the industries that they work in and the type of employment they are in, which is often casual. We are very aware of the broad impacts on young people’s employment through COVID. We are very happy to take on notice the specifics about those months.

MR CAIN: Okay. There will be a few supplementaries following from that which I will make sure are in writing.

Ms Wood: Sure.

MR CAIN: Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Done. All right. It is afternoon teatime. We have got a little bit of an early mark. Minister, officials, thank you for coming.

Hearing suspended from 2.42 to 3.00 pm.

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Mehrton, Mr Andrew, Executive Branch Manager, Social Policy Branch, Policy and Cabinet

THE CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. Please acknowledge the privilege statement when you first speak. Chief Minister, can you give the committee an update on the ACT government's LGBTIQ action plan?

Mr Barr: Yes. The action plan for the first part of the LGBTIQ strategy covers a range of different areas, principally in law, data and policies. The legal process work has included an audit of the statute book to deal with any remaining areas of discriminatory language or intent. The data areas come to getting a better handle on the community's needs because data collection has not been the strong point of government agencies either federally or locally, although we are doing better locally. The policy framework comes to both whole of government and access to ACT government services through different government agencies, then a broader outreach into contracted, procured services delivered by NGOs on behalf of government and, more broadly, into the corporate sector.

The strategy has a rolling program of action plans that, broadly speaking, are 12 to 24 months in their cycles. The next big phase of work goes to the preparation of some omnibus legislative reforms on the legislation and the legal side. There are some specific projects in Health, in particular in terms of access to health services, and then there is effectively a biannual round of priority setting, in partnership with the LGBTIQ Ministerial Advisory Council. There has been a particular focus on transgender and intersex issues, both legislative and policy and program, that have been prioritised. That is the high-level overview. I will ask Andrew to go into further detail.

Mr Mehrton: To add to what the Chief Minister said, the first action plan is currently underway, but we have extended that from ending in December until the middle of July due to a few disruptions with COVID and a number of the other actions we have been doing. All of the actions, with a few exceptions, are either completed or substantively underway. A few of the big ones were the banning of conversion practices last year, and we are making significant progress at the moment on the work to create protections for intersex children from medical interventions. Those are two of the big ones.

As the Chief Minister mentioned, we are in the process of having discussions with our ministerial advisory council around prioritisation for the next action plan, which should launch around the middle of the year and at which time we can do a full public reconciliation of the first action plan. There will be a process for engaging with the community on what goes into that second action plan, as we did with the first one.

MR CAIN: I noticed the Capital of Equality strategy has a vision for Canberra to be the most LGBTIQ welcoming and inclusive city in Australia. Where do you think Canberra currently sits in comparison with other cities in this regard?

Mr Barr: I would say, on the legal side, probably at the top of the class but with some areas that we need to address. In culture and service provision within the public sector, we are improving and possibly on par with Victoria and Melbourne. Culturally in non-government areas, I think it would be fair to say that Sydney and Melbourne, as larger, more cosmopolitan cities, are probably more advanced, although there is an argument that that would depend on geographically where within those cities you might make that overarching cultural observation, in that they have larger LGBTIQ communities with more identified geography. Perhaps Canberra is a little more homogenised in the context that our community tends to not just be inner-city focused and is spread out across the entirety of the city. That perhaps reflects the nature of urban and suburban life in Canberra as opposed to Sydney and Melbourne.

These are differences at the margin—which is not to say that they are massive or insurmountable in terms of where we might sit. But it is clear that Sydney and Melbourne have had a longer runway in terms of this policy objective at a social and cultural end. From a government and legal perspective, that would be my assessment. Others will undoubtedly have their own views on that, but where you can reasonably objectively measure—and those who do this have done so—there is generally a lot of praise for what the ACT government and parliament have achieved. The social journey and construct is another part of the evolution of policy development and then cultural change within society. That can be a little bit harder to measure and is very much more about the lived experience of individuals.

MR CAIN: One of the medium-term objectives in the strategy is to undertake services improvements to deliver more inclusive and accessible services. There might be a typo on page 16 of budget paper B. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr Barr: Where is the typo? The printed one is somewhat different. I will come back to you on whether that is a typo or not.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

Mr Barr: A number of streams of work are occurring within the ACT government that are related both to us as an employer and to the government as a service provider. Some of the practical elements of that go to engagement with our LGBTIQ staff, who ensure that the rich diversity of workplaces within the ACT public sector are also welcoming.

Our cultural surveys have demonstrated that there is a spectrum of inclusiveness across the ACT government that is generally higher than other state public services and the commonwealth, but there are still some areas where it is challenging for people to feel that this is a place where they would want to work. We are finding that it is not just an issue for LGBTI Canberrans in so much as there are some parts of our workforce that do not reflect the diversity of the community they serve.

Our objective across a number of different sectors of recruitment and of engagement

with the community is to see that that changes over time. We have some workforces that are very much dominated by one gender and a particular age cohort. I think some more workplace diversity work can be undertaken across different areas of ACT government.

As a service provider, the area of particular focus has been in health services. There have also been some very good programs that have run in the ACT education system and across community service partners as well. We can provide further details of those programs for the committee if there is interest in that. Some of them have had a great degree of public attention, it would be fair to say, in recent times, both in their local implementation and, indeed, in other jurisdictions.

MR DAVIS: Can you outline specifically how you intend on evaluating the Capital of Equality strategy? Importantly, what involvement do you expect the community to have in the evaluation?

Mr Barr: There will be a number of different ways to evaluate the strategy and the implementation of the first action plan. Some of that is relatively straightforward—whether a task has been completed or not. In other instances when you are effectively seeking to measure community inclusion or acceptance or understanding that undoubtedly involves engagement with stakeholders and in some instances broader surveying of the general community in order to get a sense of whether the programs and initiatives that have been enacted are starting to make some of the differences that the government and, I am sure, the community would hope.

The different measures have different elements. There are some KPIs around legislative reform, and some of those have already been achieved and passed through the Assembly in the previous parliament. Obviously, further legislation will be introduced to address what I would describe as some historic anomalies or bits and pieces that were missed in the various omnibus bills that have passed through the Assembly, dating back to about 2001 even.

The fairly comprehensive audit that was undertaken highlighted a number of different areas, from what I would call administrative tidy-up through to some more substantive policy decisions and considerations that the parliament will need to give in a number of areas that are not necessarily straightforward—attitudes to surrogacy laws, for example. The ACT has arguably not a very modern set of laws in that regard, but it has been considered in the past two decades by the Assembly and they fixed on a particular view at that time. It may still be the prevailing view of legislators in relation to, for example, commercial surrogacy.

A variety of issues, in a black letter reading of the law, might be considered still somewhat discriminatory and not as advanced as other jurisdictions. But if your perspective is a feminist one then you may not necessarily have a positive predisposition towards commercial surrogacy, for example. These areas are legitimately contested public policy and will need some further thought and engagement.

MR DAVIS: In terms of how this first action plan of the Capital of Equality will be evaluated, when I say community I mean specifically the LGBTQI community. What

tools of evaluation have already been identified and will be used as part of the LGBTIQI evaluation of what is their equality plan? Will there be a survey, as you have mentioned? What else is already committed to as part of that evaluation.

Mr Barr: There are obviously a range of ways of engagement, including and not limited to the advisory council and outreach activities associated with major events, that would give a reasonable snapshot of LGBTI community use. But then we also have the capacity to utilise the government's Your Say panel. We do not ask people to declare their sexuality in relation to membership of that panel, but they may wish to participate in surveys that relate to those sorts of issues, either from the perspective of a community member or a parent or a friend. There are a variety of different ways we can do that.

I think it would be unlikely that we would undertake telephone surveying, but we would certainly seek to get the broadest possible feedback through many of the existing mechanisms. I think they are principally going to be face to face, through the advisory council, through some event surveying and then online. So that can include social media promotion in order to garner feedback.

MR DAVIS: Do you have a time frame to have completed evaluation work after the conclusion of the first action plan?

Mr Barr: We have not had that discussion in terms of a hard date. The intersection of policy questions will be how quickly we move into the second action plan and do we wait for a full evaluation of the first or do we begin engagement on what should be in the second. There is an engaged group who would be very keen for us to move quickly to a second action plan and then there are others who are interested but perhaps not following the process quite as closely. I will need to reflect on and talk to the advisory council about it but also give some thought to whether there is a sweet spot between a reasonably speedy move to the second action plan whilst also getting some initial feedback around the first.

Mind you, we have obviously been getting feedback progressively along the way on specific initiatives that have been delivered or commenced within the first action plan. People are very quick to tell you if they are unhappy with something; a little bit slower to tell you that they are happy with what you are doing. That has been my experience.

MR DAVIS: Do you believe the Office for LGBTIQ+ Affairs has the capacity to evaluate the first action plan and commence work on developing the second action plan at the same time? Could things happen concurrently?

Mr Barr: Yes, they could, with a little bit of assistance from other areas of government whose principal focus might be around community engagement or report writing and/or legislation drafting. It is not that a small team carry everything themselves; they have a coordinating role as well as a capacity to collaborate with other areas of the ACT public service.

MR DAVIS: Has any resourcing or funding been put aside specifically for the development and implementation of the second action plan?

Mr Barr: Contained within the base funding of the team there is obviously capacity there. If specific projects or other work needs to be undertaken then we have some capacity to commission that.

MR DAVIS: How does the staffing of the Office for LGBTIQ+ Affairs compare to similar offices such as the Office for Women or the Office for Disability?

Mr Barr: Much smaller, considerably smaller. I would not compare them directly with those other offices. They all fall within the broader social inclusion remit, but some of those other offices are, in fact, located in other directorates and have a direct service delivery responsibility in addition to just policy work. The office undertakes policy work and also manages some grants programs and has whole-of-government input on certain policy submissions that would come to cabinet that would have a direct policy implication for LGBTIQ+ Canberrans.

MR DAVIS: Do you see the Office for LGBTIQ+ Affairs as having the capacity to expand if a review of the first action plan identifies there is a place for government to deliver some specific services?

Mr Barr: It would depend on what sorts of services. Then it would be a question of whether that would be better delivered by the line agency rather than the central agency. I would not propose to have a shadow team within that office trying to deliver health services or programs in schools or otherwise. But there may be some areas where you might want to have some in-house capability within the team. It really will depend on a couple of policy decisions and then some questions ultimately around the parliament's appetite to consider multiple pieces of legislation in relatively short time frames.

An example of where work is distributed that comes within the broad remit of the action plan and the strategy is the work that Minister Cheyne is leading as Minister for Human Rights in relation to a review of the Discrimination Act. That is broader than just LGBTIQ issues, but it is certainly very pertinent in that regard. I did not bring that into the office; I have left that with the human rights area because it is a broader remit. But the office will be involved in providing both policy advice to me and also engagement with some of the legal issues that will no doubt arise from that process.

When you look at that legislative reform, the omnibus reforms and then some specific ones that relate to intersex, transgender, potentially issues like surrogacy and otherwise, that is a pretty broad legislative reform agenda for this parliamentary term.

MR DAVIS: Can you provide an update on the intersex policy options work that is happening as part of that strategy and when you expect it to be completed?

Mr Barr: A fair amount of work is underway—I will get Andrew to talk about it in a minute—but we have been consulting at the national level, with other jurisdictions and with advocacy bodies on behalf of intersex communities but also more broadly with groups like Equality Australia. That process is ongoing.

I could perhaps give a short summary, to say that there are some issues that are

relatively straightforward, it would seem, and not heavily contested either within the community or by the medical profession; there are others that will require a more tricky and balanced approach. We may find ourselves in a position where there will not be unanimous agreement on every single nuance of a reform package and some decisions will need to be made, particularly as they relate to the intersection of medical expertise, parental rights and a view of the best interests of the child.

MR DAVIS: You said all this work that is happening at a national level is consultation that we are a part of. Is it your intention to see that work through and try and see a national consensus to policy reform in this space? And if that cannot be achieved, do you see space for the ACT to go it alone?

Mr Barr: The short answer is that that might be very difficult. Whilst it would be desirable to have a consistency of approach across the federation, whether you could get that both in policy intent and in agreed time frames might be ambitious. That would not prevent the ACT from moving first or moving in partnership with another state or territory on this question.

Mr Mehrton: We have been engaging with Victoria on this issue. There is also work underway in the Australian Human Rights Commission, which has been underway for some time, and we have been in contact with them. But it is not clear at the moment when that work will be completed. There is a bit of a question mark as to the timing of slotting in behind a national approach, if that was what we wanted to do.

To the timing of the work we are doing, I think the ACT probably is a bit of a leader in this space nationally. We have been engaging directly with a lot of the relevant stakeholders throughout 2020, trying to be mindful of the pressures that the health stakeholders in particular have been under during that period.

We have released a discussion paper to a fairly targeted group of stakeholders. That went out in December and we have had a number of responses from not only the health stakeholders but intersex individuals and advocacy groups, as well as legal and human rights practitioners. We are working through that at the moment and we have had a lot of good responses, including from Equality Australia, on that piece of work.

As the Chief Minister mentioned, the trick now is to work through some of the very technical specifics in advance of having another discussion about a potential model that we might take forward. Our time frame that we are hoping to work to at the moment is to have some advice to government around the middle of this year, but it is highly dependent on those engagements with the various stakeholders and recognising that the issues are fairly sensitive and technical.

MR CAIN: My question is more on sort of the organisational side of the office. What is the annual budget for the office?

Mr Mehrton: It is \$802,000, and change, this financial year.

MR CAIN: How many staff in the unit?

Mr Mehrton: There are two permanent full-time equivalent staff and we currently

have a part-time non-ongoing person in the office working on intersex protection specifically.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, you touched on the advisory council. How were its members selected?

Mr Barr: There was an expression of interest process, and then members get a brief and I take that to cabinet and that is cabinet endorsed.

MR CAIN: How many members are on the council?

Mr Mehrton: I think at the moment we are at 12. A couple of vacancies have just come up.

MR CAIN: What is the term of an appointment?

Mr Barr: Normally two to three years. We try and stagger them so that not everyone's term expires at the same time and so that there is a bit of a succession plan with the chair and the deputy chair and the usual sorts of good governance arrangements for—

MR CAIN: Well, we all love committees, don't we?

Mr Barr: Yes, indeed.

MR CAIN: Are council members in receipt of fees or other payment?

Mr Barr: The chair receives a remuneration approved per diem.

MR DAVIS: Can you give a quick update on where we are up to on removing the discrimination against sexually active gay men donating blood and where the ACT sits on that work?

Mr Barr: I understand that the TGA provided some advice that reduced the waiting period but still requires abstinence. So it is not quite there yet in terms of a risk-based outcome. Let me take it on notice and I can get a little bit more detail on exactly where it is at. There was a small amount of progress but not what I would consider a substantive change in TGA policy.

I touched on data earlier. The 2021 census will ask a range of questions that will, for the first time, allow for a non-binary gender answer and will provide a little bit more information in terms of the diversity of our community. That will be a useful dataset for the territory, which presumably will arrive sometime in early 2022, after the August census, provided it goes ahead online in an effective way, unlike 2016.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Minister and official.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

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

Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Director-General

Murray, Ms Christine, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion and Participation

Summerrell, Mrs Jessica, Executive Branch Manager, Social and Community Inclusion, Inclusion and Participation

THE CHAIR: Welcome back. We are joined by Minister Berry as we go through CSD inclusion and participation, focusing on women.

MR DAVIS: On page 188 we talk about the ACT Women’s Plan, the second action plan of 2020-22. Does the action plan have any specific funding attached to it for the coming financial year?

Ms Wood: Yes, it has some funding attached to it for the coming financial year. There was a budget commitment that started in last year’s budget for some resourcing for activities under the second action plan, and that has been continued through the slightly strange 2021 budget process, using the supply bill mechanism. Some \$328,000 is committed for 2021.

MR DAVIS: What is the plan to evaluate the second action plan once it wraps up?

Ms Wood: We are still in the relatively early implementation phase. A range of things will be clear deliverables under the plan where we can clearly say, “Yes, it has been delivered.” Because there are such a diverse range of initiatives, some of them will lend themselves to specific evaluation and some of them may be at the more qualitative end. But we will look, and always are looking, to see what the broad indicators are of gender equality in the ACT and whether we can see the impact in some of the broader metrics.

Ms Murray: I think I start every conversation by saying I am really quite excited, but I think you are starting to get the measure that I am quite excited about my portfolio. Across government, within CSD we have worked very hard to establish an evaluation group, a governance committee that really is focused on evaluation. We are taking baby steps, but we are really focusing on the evaluation of impact. And that is why we are all here—to ensure that the work we are doing is making the correct impact in the community.

As Ms Wood indicated, some will be evaluated through a broader set of metrics that sits outside of the things we can necessarily control and they will be assessed through those metrics such as we identify already exist. But other things we will need to work on are looking to see what is out there in terms of those assessments—what data does the ABS collect, what data do other surveys give us? We know that when we

continually survey people, we end up with survey fatigue. Frankly, the last thing I need is someone else asking me, as a woman, what—

Ms Wood: How do you feel as a woman?

Ms Murray: I am just about surviving. If I could go to the detail, it is about how do we get both the qualitative and the quantitative stories that we need to address that impact? We have established a governance group which is really focused on doing that. I am really quite excited to see the women's second action plan as it rolls through. We are really at that early implementation stage, but we have that long mindset as to how we evaluate for the impact at the other end.

Ms Berry: There is the year 1 reporting against the second action plan, which is available online. I do not know if hard copies are available. It is available online and you can see through that report which I tabled last Assembly the status of the action plans, the outcomes so far and the work that has happened in delivering those outcomes or actions. That partly goes to: how is it working and are we doing what we said we would do in the delivery of the plan?

Ms Murray: Absolutely. We have those constant checkpoints in terms of delivery. A cornerstone is: are we delivering what we said we were going to deliver on? But then the next component is that broader evaluation.

MS LAWDER: Are there any objectives in the plan that have been more impacted than others by the coronavirus, for example? How is progress going against your objectives?

Ms Berry: There is some debate about whether women and girls have been impacted with regard to work during COVID last year. Some people will say that women's work was not affected, but it clearly was when you consider all of the work that women do outside of formal work—that unpaid, unrecognised work at home. The industries that were affected—retail, hospitality—were more female-dominated workforces. There was also the impact on women in early childhood education and care, not as far as their employment was concerned but in how they were valued during the response to COVID last year.

The COVID recovery plan has been around infrastructure and building, and all those trades are generally male dominated. So how we work towards making sure that more women and girls can get into those trades and be part of the COVID recovery plan is something that was identified last year. We are certainly doing some work on that. With the action plan we already were doing some work, and there is an action in the report on that issue. Yes, that was definitely identified last year as one of the challenges we need to face.

Ms Murray: I strongly believe that there was a disproportionate impact on women from COVID, with the casualised workforce and the impact on that. We know statistically that women do the bulk of the unpaid work at home, whether that be child care or other things, and that was exacerbated through the working from home pressures. The frontline workers in hospitals were working longer hours—the nurses, the school cleaners and community services.

We saw the ACT government stepping up and having a look at what those things were and how we could provide support, whether that be on an individual level or on a more global level in terms of increasing support. I am sure the minister could talk at length about the support for school cleaners and the impact that has had on women in the workforce, particularly in lower paid professions.

We saw an impact on housing. I am sure that, as Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, the minister will also be able to talk about where the ACT government stepped in with additional housing support. Minister Davidson will, I am sure, talk about the disproportionate effect of food security in this space and how we stepped up. Foodbank reports indicated that there was a far greater impact on women in households. I sat on phone lines trying to find feminine hygiene products. When no-one else could find toilet paper, equally we could not find feminine hygiene products and we stepped up to support that and get those into the community.

The minister would be able to talk about the two-thirds of women who experienced sexual and family violence as an increasing issue over the COVID period and the steps we have taken in that space. But also, women have reported, through a variety of surveys, a significant decrease in personal wellbeing. So we have stepped up in relation to not only the second action plan but also in terms of how we have responded broadly to the needs of women during what has been an incredibly difficult period. I do not want to diminish it; this has been a difficult period for many people. However, if we are talking about statistics and data, we can absolutely go into how it has disproportionately affected women and, equally, how we have tried to rise to those challenges and meet them head on to support women in a long-term way.

Ms Wood: Where we have seen the most impacts on women in COVID show that the priorities of the second action plan are still the right priorities: mental health, housing security, safety, employment and participation, and particularly with participation and construction as we use that as a stimulus to rebuild the economy. I think it is still a really good framework for our COVID recovery; they were the right priorities going in and they are still the right priorities.

Mrs Summerrell: It is not available online just yet; it is about to go up. It will go up very shortly.

MR CAIN: I am referring now to strategic indicator 5 in the annual report, I believe on page 51, “Women feeling safe at night”. Why is the target for the proportion of women who feel safe walking by themselves at night in Canberra at just 40 per cent?

Ms Berry: We have been here before.

Ms Murray: When I first stepped into this role, that was one of those things—having sat in the committee room and listened to, “Why are we at 40 per cent?” This is internationally one of the biggest issues I think we have in the women’s space: that women are not feeling safe in public spaces and women are not feeling safe in their homes, at a disproportionate rate.

There is some recent testing that has been done by the writer of *The Macho Paradox*.

He sets people up in a room, puts a line down the board and says to all of the men in the room, "So what do you do to prepare yourself to be safe at night when you go out?" and the same to the women in the room. Time and again we are taught, from a very young age, that as women you must do these 60 things to protect yourself. I have boys; we do not teach them, "These are the preventative measures that you have to have before you go out at night."

So I think it has to be seen as not just a women's issue but a whole societal issue that we need to respond to, to make sure that we are teaching all people and that we are taking steps to make sure that we are not victim blaming in this or putting all of the onus and responsibility on women for this measure. What are we doing to respond to that? What are the practical steps that we could find internationally that are making a difference in terms of that survey?

Some of the simplest things, like programs to increase the lighting of dark areas, have been rolled out and are continuing to roll out. I will use the example of Summernats. Summernats is not my cup of tea, but yay for everyone who loves Summernats. They had a not great reputation in relation to women's safety. But they have worked actively with the ACT government in relation to women's safety action audits and action plans for their event, and that saw a 70 per cent decrease in issues.

If we could get that engagement across the board, if we could make sure that people were doing targeted action plans to make sure that our events, our culture and our community are actively working on making sure that women are safer at events, we would start to make some inroads. A 70 per cent reduction at Summernats is quite remarkable. They have made an ongoing commitment; they are going to continue to work to this. So, sorry, 40 per cent is not acceptable.

MR CAIN: Is it your target, Minister?

Ms Berry: It is the original target. It is recognised based on surveys conducted by the AFP, so it is a target we use, and we have not been able to have any influence on the survey questions that the AFP ask to come to that target.

MR CAIN: That is a Canberra survey?

Ms Murray: No, it is a national survey.

MR CAIN: So this is based on a national survey, not a Canberra survey?

Ms Berry: This comes to what I was going to add to what Ms Murray said. The Women's Centre for Health Matters has been conducting surveys of women in the ACT to identify particular places in the ACT where they feel unsafe. Late last year the ACT government was able to get funding from the federal government of \$900,000 to do improved lighting and safety across those spaces in the ACT.

For example, Haigh Park had some lighting upgrades. That was one of the places most recognised as where people felt unsafe. Things like having no sight, no fences, and lights that were so low that you could not see were real problems. Those were identified and there was \$900,000 in commonwealth government funding to improve

that lighting.

That is continuous work that the Women's Centre for Health Matters does in identifying sites across the ACT, encouraging women to go online and publicly identify those sites and then working with Transport Canberra and City Services to improve lighting to make it safer for people. No, we do not have a local survey to identify a target.

Ms Wood: The survey is national and we do get ACT-level data. The target is set based on the baseline that we have, and the baseline from that survey shows that women feel much less safe in their neighbourhoods at night than they do during the day. That is nationally, including the ACT. The ACT's result of 40 per cent, which meets the target, is something that we are aiming to improve over time with the types of initiatives that the minister was talking about.

Chair, I would like to correct an earlier answer where I got my numbers slightly flipped. For the women's action plan, I said there was \$328,000 this financial year. It is \$238,000.

MR DAVIS: In a very simple extrapolation of the data, I am always struck by the reality that men are disproportionately the source of women's problems and yet women are disproportionately responsible for the burden of fixing women's problems. What work is being done by the Office for Women to collaborate with specific men's organisations to encourage them to take on more leadership roles in this conversation, particularly around women's safety, and place the burden where it belongs—on men's organisations and a community of men more broadly—when we talk about women's safety? What links exist there at the Office for Women, and what work is being done?

Ms Murray: We do work with a number of men's organisations that are titled as men specific. A lot of the work that we were talking about at a previous session in terms of those relationships—I do not want to use the words "respectful relationships" because it has a separate connotation—and that gender inequity conversation has been driven by the Youth Advisory Council, and I am the same person sitting at the table talking about it. It is about starting those conversations early to make sure that we are setting the expectations of roles differently to those we have traditionally potentially laid. I absolutely do take your point. I think that it is a lot about education and it is a lot about building from the ground up, not accepting an ongoing situation. The figures speak for themselves: the examples, the literature, all indicators.

We had quite a bit of conversation in our broader community groups on that issue that I raised before of the disproportionate burden of unpaid labour in the home. Research is showing across Australia that—speaking in general terms—as soon as women were working from home, there was an almost an automatic reversion to cooking meals, doing child care and cleaning houses. We saw that that number quite exploded in terms of the amount of home-based unpaid work women were doing. So we need to start a conversation, and we have started to have a conversation, around what those roles are. What are those expectations? What are those unwritten assumptions that we are bringing to bear and bringing to the table? It goes along the whole breadth of social inclusion.

It is those unwritten narratives that we need to rewrite and challenge. We need to be active and vocal about challenging them, not pitting people against people but actually saying, “This is not okay.” Look at some more recent public examples of bringing your own family members in, like “I’m a father of daughters, and therefore I come here...” It is actually, “I am a person and therefore this is unacceptable.” It is that slight leap that I think that we all need to make.

Ms Wood: The things that Ms Murray has talked about are consistent with the Our Watch framework for reducing violence against women and with the national primary prevention framework. The ACT is an active member of Our Watch and we use their resources to inform the work that happens in our women’s plan, in family safety and in the work that schools do on respectful relationships. That framework tells us that we have to, as Ms Murray said, go right back to the beginning. It is about really embedding respect and also breaking down rigid gender stereotypes from the very beginning. That is how we get to a different point. Mrs Summerrell looks like she has a lot to say.

Mrs Summerrell: I must have a really bad poker face. It is a really good question and I absolutely agree with the sentiments. There are a range of things that we are doing under the second action plan to specifically address some of those issues. In particular, there is an action in relation to delivering school-based programs, with a focus particularly on prevention and early support for students who demonstrate at-risk behaviours, such as anger management and violence. That is really about starting the conversation early and having an early intervention approach and process in a supportive environment, and using education prevention around gender-based violence as a tool in that space.

We also have a grants program specifically designed for women’s safety that we have available for organisations who wish to do things to improve women’s safety across the city. Similarly, under the second action plan there are a range of other actions in relation to gender-sensitive design principles, which includes the development of public urban spaces and transport and a whole range of things that go to addressing the issue of safety across the city.

Ms Murray: To pick up on the women’s safety grants, an example of the grants that were given is one for the PCYC, focusing on those healthy relationships. So we do try to right some of the imbalance that I think you were alluding to.

MS LAWDER: I thought Ms Murray said earlier that the surveys may have shown that women felt less safe during the COVID period?

Ms Murray: What I was indicating was that, in the research, as it relates to people who have come forward and indicated that they are experiencing violence, we have seen an increase in that. It is in that space.

MS LAWDER: My question relates to the outyears and the estimates in the budget from strategic objective 5. This is about women feeling safe at night in their neighbourhood, walking in their neighbourhood. The estimate is improving marginally each year, including an estimate for 2021-22 of 42. What specifically has taken place? Do you think you are still on track for that improvement to take place?

Ms Berry: I think we are. The work that the second women's plan identifies goes towards making those improvements so that women and girls do feel safe in their neighbourhoods. The work that has been identified by the Women's Centre for Health Matters gets down to what an individual woman feels, not what everybody else thinks they might feel. So we will be talking with the Women's Centre for Health Matters about how we can expand the whole survey that they are doing, how we can help promote it and then work with the community on where those places are that need to have lighting improved. You have identified spaces at Tuggeranong, in the car park out there. If we can get more and more women identifying these spaces across the city and we can prioritise that then you will see an improvement, I think, in women feeling safer, at least with regard to that.

We have a whole lot of other complex issues that we are dealing with. Domestic and family violence—yes, the number of people seeking support increased and the complexity and the nature of the domestic and family violence that occurred last year was extraordinary. So we have clearly got a bigger problem with regard to domestic and family violence and gender issues. But if, at the start of it, is a general thing of women being able to feel safe in their own neighbourhood and lighting contributes to that then that should be relatively easy.

MS LAWDER: What is the feedback loop? If someone writes about a lighting issue, does your area get notified or vice versa? Should there not be one of those processes, given what the Women's Centre for Health Matters said? Fewer people around, bad lighting, litter and graffiti—those are areas where women feel less safe. Should there not be a bit more of a consultative process?

Ms Berry: Probably, yes. If that was one of the recommendations that this committee came to, I think it would be worth investigating a bit more of a joined-up approach around all of that. We certainly see that being the case around our schools and sports fields. When you put in lighting, when you have murals, when it is clean and tidy and there is more activity, there is less likelihood of bad behaviour around the place. So it makes sense. And, yes, a more coordinated approach might help with that.

MS LAWDER: What are you going to do to achieve the 42 per cent next year that is estimated? What is going to be different to help women feel more safe?

Ms Berry: We will do what we have said we are going to do and implement the second action plan to meet those objectives and, as I have said, work with the Women's Centre for Health Matters about how we can promote their survey work to get more people to identify it and then we can fix it.

That issue of the 40 per cent, though, has been a problem. We have talked about this before and I cannot remember where we got to with it and why we cannot just do our own. I think it is because it is a national report and everybody else bases it on that national report. But it does not effectively show the right picture for here in the ACT.

Ms Wood: We are always careful about changing the basis of these indicators, because if we change them too often you cannot look back and compare how we are going, so—

Ms Berry: Maybe we need to start looking—

Ms Wood: It is something that can be looked at.

MR CAIN: It might assist if there were a note in the report that explained where that 40 per cent came from. Sorry—that is just a comment.

Ms Berry: You are right. Nicole has been here before, so—

MS LAWDER: Is there a particular government policy or guideline in place for ACT schools, public or private or both, about reducing period poverty?

Ms Berry: All our public schools provide tampons and sanitary items. In addition to that, they provide soaps and deodorants, because they are also expensive, particularly for young women and girls. They tend to have a pink tax and it costs more for women's products than men's products in shopping centres. So all of that is available at our schools. Different schools have them available in different places, depending on the age cohort of the students, but they are all available. And we have been trialling across, I think, five schools the machines—I have forgotten the name; I will find out what they are called—which count the number of items that go out each day so that you can see exactly the needs within that particular school community.

MS LAWDER: Would you know about private schools?

Ms Berry: I can ask, but I do not know.

Ms Murray: We are slightly diverting, but I did cover it off in something I said earlier. With the Canberra Relief Network, we have been providing hygiene packs as well, free of charge, to people who need them, no matter what age group, so there certainly is the potential that that particular response has been able to support people over the last—

Ms Berry: On the machines, we are not doing it; we are just thinking about doing it. But we are talking to young women about what they want in their schools, how they want it presented and where they want it to be accessible.

MS LAWDER: Is it a policy? How do you know it is in place at every school?

Ms Berry: Every year the schools are reminded that they need to have these items available for mostly girls, but if boys need deodorant and soaps they can access them as well. Every year, we remind the schools; that is the case. I guess it is policy. I do not know if it is written down anywhere. I have said it. Does that count?

MS LAWDER: It is at the individual school's expense? They purchase the products and—

Ms Berry: If they need extra funding to provide the products then we provide it. But usually it would come out of their school budget.

MR DAVIS: Is the period policy specifically for girls or is the policy specifically for people who menstruate, in the interest of making sure that we are inclusive for trans and non-binary students?

Ms Berry: The products are there for anybody who needs them. That is why it is inclusive of deodorants and soaps and things as well.

MR DAVIS: I asked the question in the context of knowing that a lot of trans and non-binary young people already face a number of barriers, including perceptions in terms of accessing some of those products. So I am making sure that the policy is expressly clear.

Ms Berry: It is supposed to be accessible in such a way that it is not difficult to get hold of these products when you need them. It is differently available in primary schools than it is in high schools and colleges, where young people have higher maturity around these kinds of products. In primary schools it is accessible in different places, whatever the school community decides is best for them.

Short suspension

Appearances:

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Strachan, Mr Shaun, Deputy Under Treasurer, Commercial Services and Infrastructure Group

Edghill, Mr Duncan, Chief Projects Officer, Major Projects Canberra

Kelley, Ms Rebecca, Executive Branch Manager, Sport and Recreation, Economic Development

THE CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone, to the final session of the day. As we have new guests, I would just like to remind everyone of some housekeeping. We do have room limits, so if you could keep an eye on those that would be wonderful. Please make sure you have checked in with the Check-In CBR app. The first time you speak, please acknowledge the pink privilege statement.

I will lead off with questions, and we will make our way down because we have a few visitors. Minister, can you provide us with an update on Gungahlin pool?

Ms Berry: Thank you. What an unexpected question! Yes, I can. Most of you, apart from Mr Cain, will have received a letter from me about lunchtime today after I was advised by the directorate that an agreement had been reached with the pool builder. I was able to advise members who had an interest in the Gungahlin pool where it was up in moving forward as a result of that arrangement. We have been seeking to engage a contractor—that has been happening over the last couple of weeks and will go into the next few weeks—to start work on the repairs to the Gungahlin pool, with a view to having it open before the end of the year so that people can enjoy summer at the Gungahlin pool again.

As I have said in the past, and I know everybody here will feel the same way, it has been incredibly frustrating in relation to the length of time that it has taken for the repairs that are required at the pool, but we can now say that we have reached a point where we know what repairs are required and we can get to work with procuring the contract for a builder and then start work on those repairs, probably, as soon as possible.

THE CHAIR: When do you think Gungahlin residents will be able to use the pool again?

Ms Berry: Probably by the end of the year. At least for summer is what we are aiming for.

THE CHAIR: I noticed that there were commercial negotiations with the original builder. Is the original builder going to be the person rectifying the work?

Ms Berry: No.

THE CHAIR: With regard to the time line, the pool closed for COVID.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: It is my understanding that the problems were identified in June 2020.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Why was the pool identified as a problem in June 2020, when people were not using the pool at that time?

Ms Berry: I might ask Mr Edghill to take you through some of the time frame of what occurred from March, when the pool was closed, and during COVID, and then when issues arose and we ended up where we are today.

Mr Edghill: Major Projects Canberra is the ACT government directorate that works closely with other directorates on their infrastructure projects, including ACT Property Group. With the closure of the pool for COVID-19 it enabled us to have a greater look at the pool without people there. When the tiling issues emerged in the middle of 2020, there were issues on the northern face of the pool. With the pool closed for COVID-19, as part of the process of looking at the tiles, we were able to get in and find that there were issues with some of the flooring tiles as well.

As to the basic time line between mid-2020 and where we are today, when the issue with the tiles became apparent, it was not immediately apparent what caused the issues with the tiles. Of course, that was overlayed by the contractual, legal position with the original constructor. Once the issues had been identified in mid-2020, in conjunction with the Property Group, as well as considering the technical elements associated with the tiling problems, there was advice that was sought from the GSO. The GSO then engaged technical experts to look into what may have been the cause of the problems at the pool.

Of course, there is some time which is taken to engage experts to come and do what they need to do. There was the process where the pool was drained in July 2020. That enabled the experts to undertake their assessments and produce a report and that was given to the GSO late in 2020. That enabled us to progress those legal, commercial conversations with the original builder of the pool, which has culminated in our finalising arrangements with the original builder of the pool, which in turn will enable us, as the minister had mentioned, to get onto what is our main focus, which is fixing the pool as quickly and as appropriately as we can.

We now expect, with the arrangements with the original builder having concluded, that we can, in the coming very few weeks, finalise the procurement arrangements with another party to come in and undertake the tile replacement process. Then we can look at the time frames, moving forward. They need to mobilise. They will need to have a number of subcontractors on board.

The works will involve stripping back the tiling across the entirety of the pool and

installing a new pooling system. Then, of course, the pool needs to be refilled. Just the refilling process, getting the temperatures right, is an incremental process which by itself will take, as I understand it, the better part of a month. Of course, we will do it as quickly and as appropriately as we possibly can, as the minister has mentioned, with a view to having the pool reopened in this calendar year.

THE CHAIR: Can you explain to the committee what is wrong with the pool?

Mr Edghill: That is a very good question, and it is the obvious question that we asked as well. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer as to what exactly caused the issues at the pool, which I know sounds a little bit funny, given that with pool tiles how complicated can they be? As the technical experts have looked at what has happened there, if you take a step back, there are a whole raft of reasons as to what could have caused the issue. There could have been issues which co-contributed to causing the issue—everything from problems with the adhesive that was used to attach the tiles in the first place to the way in which the tiles were applied.

Other issues that the technical experts considered were around the design and construction of movement joints in the pool. The question was asked as to whether there was a structural movement of the pool, which may have caused the issue. The question was asked as to whether there were potential issues associated with the amount of time that the concrete cured underneath the tiles in the first instance.

The way that the pool environment was operated was a question that was looked at also. Certainly, when you have changing temperatures in the pool and in the water the concrete and the tiles can move at different rates. That is a very long-winded way of saying that there may have been multiple causes. Unfortunately, we do not know and the experts are not able to pinpoint exactly what the cause was, as a single cause. It may have been multiple factors working in conjunction with each other.

THE CHAIR: What was the purpose and outcome of the negotiations with the original builder?

Mr Edghill: There were a few reasons for having the discussions with the original builder. The first question which arose was: should they be repaired or replaced? Certainly, there was a contractual element around who bears responsibility for it and what was the cause of the failure. As I discussed, there may have been more than one cause of the failure. In terms of the arrangements that were resolved with the original builder, the other factor in play was looking to move into the repair phase as quickly as we could. The idea behind the negotiations with the original builder was to come to a satisfactory resolution as quickly as possible so that we could actually focus on fixing and reopening the pool.

THE CHAIR: What was that outcome?

Mr Edghill: There was a commercial settlement which was reached with the original builder of the pool, which will see them paying an amount to the ACT government. That allows us to get onto the next phase, which is actually fixing the issue and reopening the pool.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell us the amount?

Mr Edghill: I understand that that is in the public domain. It is \$400,000.

MS CASTLEY: I understand you said that there is a contractor you are ready to engage. How long will that process take?

Ms Berry: We have just got a tender; we do not have a new contractor yet.

MS CASTLEY: No?

Ms Berry: No. You will recall that the budget had an allocation but had not identified the amount because we have to tender for a contractor to do the repairs.

MS CASTLEY: So a month, two?

Mr Edghill: Hopefully measured in weeks.

MS CASTLEY: Weeks.

Mr Edghill: The way that we have been looking at bringing a new tender on board is to utilise a panel that the ACT government has, a project management agreement panel, which will allow us to move quickly towards getting the works undertaken. That project manager will also need to undertake the usual sub-procurement arrangements for various consultants and other people. We have done preparatory work before today, so we are not starting from scratch. We would expect that it would be within the coming weeks, definitely in March.

MS CASTLEY: Has the settlement money—the 400K—covered the costs so far, or what costs have there been for the experts to be looking at this since June?

Mr Edghill: I would have to take on notice the exact costs that have been borne through the GSO. In terms of reaching that agreement with the original builder, it is, of course, a balancing act. It is not just the costs that we have incurred or may incur. It is a balancing act, taking into account issues of causation—what or who caused the failure in the first place—but also taking into account the very strong desire of the ACT government to get the pool back open and operational as quickly as possible.

MS CASTLEY: The information I have is that in March 2019 tiles had also fallen off. Why did we wait from March through to the following June?

Mr Edghill: My understanding is that in March 2019 there was an issue with tiles on the southern wall of the pool. The pool was drained and underwent planned maintenance at that point. The best estimation which occurred at that point was that there was a faulty adhesive that was used just on the tiles of the southern portion of the pool. When they were replaced, that rectified the issue then. My understanding is that, when that issue became apparent at that point, it was not clear that there may have been a broader issue with the tiling across the whole pool.

MS CASTLEY: Is that the only other time that tiles have fallen off since the pool

was opened?

Mr Edghill: That may be a Property Group question. My understanding is that it is not uncommon for tiles to be dislodged in a swimming pool from time to time and undergo ad hoc repairs. From a Major Projects perspective, I understand that that was our first awareness of there being a significant problem. If there were more minor issues, I am not sure if the Property Group has anything to add?

MS CASTLEY: I know there are many reasons why this might have happened, but if we do not have a clear answer, what is the guarantee that we will not be back here again in 12 months time?

Mr Edghill: That is a very good question, and it is also one that we have been working through with the team. Our understanding, from the technical assessment that has been undertaken so far, is that it is not a structural issue with the pool. So that would tend to suggest it is something to do with the tiles or the adhesive or the way that they were attached. The way that we are maximising the chance that we are not going to be back here again—because none of us want to be back here again on this—is that we are not simply patching up the job that was done in the first place. We are going to take all the tiles off and sandblast all of the concrete. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that we are putting in a new tiling system. It will not be done the same way it was done the first time. There will be different layering and a different technical approach to what happens underneath the tile itself. As the minister mentioned before, we will not be using the original company. We will be using a different company to do the work and one that will have done this work before. As well as the contractors, there will be different designers. In terms of the way that the pool is operated, we will, of course, ensure that it is being operated properly. That is the best that we can do to give ourselves as much comfort that we are not going to find ourselves in this position again.

MS CASTLEY: What compensation will the pool members receive? I know that at the moment they pay their membership fees for the gym and the pool, but then they have to go to the Canberra city pool and pay to use that pool. What consideration has been given to that?

Ms Berry: We are definitely considering some compensation or some free membership—not free membership, but free periods—once the pool is operational. I am definitely considering a length of time for that.

MS CASTLEY: Right. Just for the new kid, what is GSO?

Ms Berry: The Government Solicitor's office.

MR BRADDOCK: I am just wondering why the government is having to pay for these repairs. You have mentioned the original contractor has agreed to \$400,000 as part of its liabilities. Why is the government fixing the rest of the bill?

Mr Edghill: The short answer is that we want to ensure that we have it right and that the pool is opened as quickly as possible. I think the alternative—and this is where

that question of balance comes into play—of potentially going through protracted litigation and at the same time leaving the pool fallow so that experts on either side can get in there and kind of argue about it is not particularly palatable in terms of how long that potentially would leave the pool not open. So the desirability of getting the pool back open as quickly as possible is certainly one of the factors that has played into the decision making.

MR BRADDOCK: Has this construction company done any other works here in the ACT for the ACT government?

Mr Edghill: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: Are we concerned about any of those works done to the same standard?

Mr Edghill: No.

MR BRADDOCK: So there are no concerns about the Stromlo Leisure Centre, which just opened last year?

Mr Edghill: The Stromlo Leisure Centre was done by a different company again. The Stromlo Leisure Centre was built to current standards. It had a different contractor, a different design team. I think a key difference between Gungahlin and Stromlo was that Stromlo uses a different tiling system—something more akin to what we are now proposing to put into Gungahlin, as opposed to what was done in Gungahlin. When we were building the Stromlo pool we were very, very mindful that we did not want the pool to leak and did not want there to be problems with the tiling.

We pay extra special care across all of our projects, but we paid extra, extra special care through the build of the Stromlo Leisure Centre to the extent that, even through the construction process, an even more conservative approach was taken, where the concrete was allowed an even longer period than is necessary for it to cure and to settle before tiling works were undertaken. We had an external consultant in with Stromlo to test the tiles. And right at the outset, we filled the pool, we emptied the pool, and then we filled it again before it became operational. As part of the maintenance program, the external consultant who was brought in to test during the build phase will also be part of our operation and maintenance care program. So Stromlo pool happened in a different way to Gungahlin pool.

MR BRADDOCK: Have there been any lessons learned about the contractual warranties that were included in the Gungahlin pool and how they might have been better phrased or improved, going forward, for future ACT contracts?

Mr Edghill: I was not the one providing legal advice on the pool, but I think the core challenge with the pool was not so much the form of contract that we used. We used a reasonably standard form of contract that is used by other jurisdictions as well as us. The core challenge was what actually caused the tiles to fail in the first place; it was really a technical issue that was the real challenge here.

MR BRADDOCK: So how are we ensuring that we are maintaining our pools to a

standard that does not require this large-scale rectification work after six years?

Mr Edghill: The answer to the question before about what we are doing here is to ensure that it is different to the way it was originally built and, as we just discussed, what has happened with pools subsequently. With the Stromlo pool, for example, we have undertaken that in a different way.

MR BRADDOCK: So for older pools like Dickson, Manuka and so forth, that is not an issue?

Mr Edghill: They are older pools, and older pools come with their own particular issues, which the Property Group might be in a better position to talk to. But certainly there is a different construction methodology and different operating environment for those older pools.

Mr Strachan: I acknowledge the privilege statement. In relation to the maintenance regime, there are six pools and three key operators. We have spent quite a bit of time working with the operators in relation to their annual maintenance programs and their refresh, their capital equipment and their key processes, if you like, in relation to the way that they go about maintaining the pools, the chlorine levels, and a range of other issues. There is also a lot of work going into occupation health and safety and work health and safety in relation to the premises.

So, as my colleague has said, we spend a lot of time working with the operators about how we can improve and steady the maintenance, and also plan the refresh of some of the core equipment. Part of the process that we are working through at the moment across all of our portfolio is: what does three or five to 10 years look like in relation to the active maintenance of a lot of the equipment that is there, to essentially balance those interests out? So, again, we work and will continue to work very closely with the operators in relation to that. We are also responsible for funding the maintenance. As you will appreciate, it is really important that we have a look at what the high, the medium and the low profiles look like in relation to the strategic asset maintenance framework.

MR BRADDOCK: What I am interested in is: have the lessons learned from this sorry exercise been applied to the management of pools across the ACT?

Mr Strachan: I think it is fair to say that we learn every day and we take good feedback from the operators in relation to the constant feedback and the dialogue that we have with them. From my point of view, we encourage the operators to be very proactive about how they see the challenge of maintaining the government assets that they look after. But, at the same time, we look at the feedback from the consumers and the patrons. That extends beyond the pool itself; it moves into the public spaces, the car parking and a range of other things. So one of the key issues that we have in relation to feeding back to the minister, and the challenge that have in looking after these assets, is to maintain that really proactive stance. We will continue that focus and, again, we look forward to any key feedback that we get from the operators or the public.

Ms Berry: We have also learned that we first expected that it was just a case of

delamination in the pool—that it was just a matter of the tiles falling off and needing to be re-grouted or glued. That was not the case and it was much more complicated than that.

MR BRADDOCK: My concern is we have not been able to track it down to one single cause.

Ms Berry: No.

MR BRADDOCK: Hence, what is to prevent such a situation happening again either in Gungahlin or in another pool? Great, we are doing wholesale rectification to the Gungahlin pool, but how are we ensuring that we are not going to be back here in 12 months time with another pool?

Mr Edghill: Certainly, as mentioned before, as we have seen with the approach taken with Stromlo pool with the expert onboard, external to the constructor, during the build process and then through the maintenance process, the fact that we are using not only a different constructor but a different tiling system, gives us a degree of comfort that we are doing the best that we can to manage the risk and not find ourselves in the position again.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MS CASTLEY: I have a follow-up question on the Stromlo pool, if that is okay.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MS CASTLEY: When was it built and opened?

Ms Berry: Last year it was opened.

Mr Edghill: Yes, correct.

MS CASTLEY: Mr Edghill, you mentioned that you took extra special care to make sure that the tiling and all of that was done properly. Why is that? Did you already have a heads-up about the Gungahlin pool?

Ms Berry: No.

MS CASTLEY: Why such particular care?

Mr Edghill: There was the tiling issue that you mentioned previously—the adhesive problem. That was fixed in 2019. It is also eight years on from when we originally built the Gungahlin pool, so in that time the way that we progress our build processes has continued to evolve.

MR CAIN: I have a supplementary. The rectification costs—what is an estimate of the total of that?

Ms Berry: The first part of the answer to Ms Castley’s question was that we are going

out for a tender process, so we are not disclosing a price until we have completed that process.

MR CAIN: In settling with the builder for \$400,000, you must have had a picture of what the approximate rectification costs would be.

Ms Berry: We are not going to pre-empt the cost before we go through the tender process.

MR CAIN: In terms of negotiating with the previous builder, could rectification have been undertaken anyway—for example, you might have been litigating it?

Ms Berry: I think the challenge, which Mr Edghill went to, is that if we had gone through a process of litigation the pool would have remained closed for an indefinite period of time whilst we went through that process. At least, that is the advice from the Government Solicitor's office.

MR BRADDOCK: So, essentially, construction companies have us over a barrel, where they know that we are not going to be able to take them through the litigation pathway if we make a decision that we cannot afford to have the facility closed for an extended period of time?

Mr Edghill: I would not categorise it that way. The swimming pool is a unique sort of asset and there is the broader picture about who we might choose in the future to build other assets—swimming pools and whatnot. So I would not categorise it as the ACT government taking a blanket decision where we will take one approach or another if construction issues arise. That is very much dealt with on a case-by-case basis. In this particular case, for the reasons articulated, the advice that was provided was that it would be appropriate to resolve the legal commercial issues with the original builder and move as quickly as we can into actually fixing and reopening the pool.

THE CHAIR: How would our procurement processes consider this situation for the builder, moving forward?

Mr Edghill: I do not want to get too far into the specifics of the original builder, but of course all of our tender processes look not only at the availability of relevant experts to undertake the works and an understanding of the design scope but also at the past performance on different projects. We do take references from within the ACT government and elsewhere. So without pre-empting any future procurement processes, obviously the past performance of all contractors is something that we take into account.

MR DAVIS: Is it not, under the circumstances, appropriate to preclude this contractor from ever winning a government contract again, given the nature of the rectification works required and the massive expense to the taxpayers to remedy it? Surely this contractor, by all the evidence we have so far, should be blacklisted.

Mr Edghill: I am not sure that we maintain a kind of hate list of contractors or anything but—

MR DAVIS: No, and I did not use the term “hate book”.

THE CHAIR: Hate list.

MR DAVIS: I did not use the word “hate list” or “dirt book”. I will not be verbally; those were not my words.

Ms Berry: Blackballed.

MR DAVIS: There is a substantial cost differential on the ratepayers and a substantial amount of time that they have been without a pool. Surely we can rule out ever employing this particular contractor again to build government assets?

Mr Edghill: I would not want to step into a future procurement process, but I think we are well aware of the process that we have been through here with the Gungahlin pool.

MR DAVIS: Do we know how many other government assets this contractor has been responsible for building, in part or in their totality?

Mr Edghill: We can take that on notice. I note that swimming pools are reasonably unique sorts of beasts, so an issue with a swimming pool does not necessarily point to there being an issue with other works that the company may have undertaken for us.

MR DAVIS: All right. There are a few things in my career before here which prepare me uniquely, Mr Edghill, and that would include being pessimistic about the track records of particular developers. That leads me to my next question. What work, if any, has been done to investigate any works that may need to be required in other projects that contractor has been responsible for?

Mr Edghill: Again, I would have to take on notice the exact list of other works. This contractor certainly has not undertaken any other swimming pools for us. No, definitely not. To that extent we do not have to investigate other swimming pool works that they undertook because they did not undertake anything else.

MR DAVIS: No, I would not suggest that. In our other committee we had WorkSafe in here previously, so we have been having these discussions throughout estimates. Whether it be a swimming pool, a tennis court or a townhouse, there is obviously a substandard to building and construction by this particular builder. So whether or not they have been responsible for building a pool, if we own anything else that they have been responsible for building, would we not have an obligation to at least assess their suitability and if they have met safety requirements?

Mr Edghill: I certainly could not talk to the quality of works that the original constructor may have undertaken elsewhere. Just because there is an issue at the swimming pool, does not necessarily mean that there are issues with other works that may have been undertaken. We will certainly take on notice a review of what other works, if any, this contractor may have undertaken with us, and we are happy to review whether there have been any issues that have arisen through those build processes.

MR DAVIS: That would be great.

MR CAIN: There must have been a series of inspections of the work being done by this builder. It would appear that that is also a failed regime or a failed practice. Would you like to comment on that?

Ms Berry: I think it goes back to the original response to what actually caused this problem, and that is unclear. So—

MR CAIN: Still?

Ms Berry: Yes.

Mr Edghill: Yes.

MR CAIN: That is remarkable.

MS CASTLEY: So if this company has not built another pool in the ACT, why did they win the role? What made them outstanding, I suppose? Why them when we have had quite an issue?

Mr Edghill: The procurement was undertaken a little bit before my time, but I understand that they bid in a competitive procurement process and their construction design team were found, at the time, by the evaluation panel, to be suitably qualified to undertake the works, and they had undertaken previous works elsewhere. Just to reiterate the minister's comments and the point that we made before, even though it sounds simple, there are potentially a number of different factors which could have caused the issue or contributed to the issue. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly what the issue is. I am a little bit reluctant to cast aspersions upon the original constructor for that reason, but also because the asset that we are talking about here is somewhat unique and different to other assets.

MS CASTLEY: Has anyone looked into whether any of their other pools that they have built have also had these issues?

Ms Berry: Not in the ACT, no.

Mr Edghill: Yes, my understanding is that they have not constructed other pools like this in the ACT.

Ms Berry: Mr Cain said that it was remarkable that we had not actually been able to identify the issue. He is right; it is incredibly frustrating not to be able to pinpoint exactly what happened here, but there have been three technical expert organisations doing investigations into the pool over a period of time to understand the issues and none of them could identify the particular thing. So there were multiple issues and a more complicated process than we would have liked.

There is no excusing the frustration that everybody will feel about this—I understand that—but there is nothing to hide here. There is nothing good about it. There is no

good picture to draw on this one, but it is how it has turned out. The public service has done its best to negotiate the best possible outcome with the original builder, under the advice of the Government Solicitor's office, and we are just now raring to go to get the pool back on as soon as we possibly can.

MR DAVIS: That review panel or whatever the group was who eventually determined whether or not the contractor would be successful for the tender—did that group know if this contractor had actually been responsible for the construction of any other swimming pools? Do we know that? Had they built a pool before?

Mr Edghill: I was not on the evaluation panel, but my understanding is that, yes, they had built other pools before, and that was taken into account by the evaluation panel back at the time.

MR DAVIS: Do we know how many other pools they had built?

Ms Berry: In Australia?

MR DAVIS: Yes, in Australia.

Mr Edghill: Unfortunately, I would have to take that on notice and go back to the original procurement documents.

MR DAVIS: Okay. I do not think it is a particularly irrelevant question, given the circumstances.

MS CASTLEY: No, it is good.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Any last supplementary questions before we move on?

Ms Berry: None of the questions are inappropriate or whatever. There are just so many questions about this. I understand all of that, so we are trying to be as transparent as we possibly can. So, yes, any question is not inappropriate around this.

MR CAIN: Minister, when do you think you will have an estimate or an actual of the cost of rectification?

Ms Berry: I am hoping that will be in the next couple of weeks.

Mr Edghill: Indeed. And then we will go through the ordinary procurement processes of putting contracts up on registers and so forth. I note, as we mentioned before, that we are not looking simply to patch the existing tiles. For certainty and to address the point that was made before, we are undertaking extensive works to entirely retiling the swimming pool.

THE CHAIR: We have a tender out at the moment. How many construction companies are in the field of work of building swimming pools? Is that a large field?

Mr Edghill: Would you like me to take that? As you could appreciate, with respect to building large public swimming pools, there is not a lot of it that happens every day of the week; it is not like building a commercial building or laying asphalt on a road. Finding construction companies that have built large public pools is not as common a tick on the CV as it might be with other building types. There is a small pool of people who have done it before.

THE CHAIR: So why are we so confident that that tender is going to come back so quickly?

Mr Edghill: Just to clarify, there is a project management agreement panel which was competitively tendered in the first place. It is one of our procurement methodologies so that, for a company which has pre-agreed and pre-tendered their rates, it allows us to have a conversation with that company and move towards a contract. Then there would be sub-procurement activities which are undertaken once that project manager is put onboard. So, with a view to getting things going as quickly as we possibly can, we have been engaged in parallel negotiations with an existing party on the project management agreement panel while the issues with the original builder are being resolved, just so that we are not losing time and we can get the thing done as quickly as possible.

There have been parallel conversations with a party which has done works for the ACT government previously. Now that the original builder issue has been resolved, we can move pretty quickly over the next week or two to put that arrangement in place. Once that arrangement is in place, though, there is, as I mentioned before, a whole raft of things that need to happen before we can actually open the pool. They need to mobilise. They need to order supplies. They need to get their subcontractors in place. We need to demolish what is in there at the moment. We need to sandblast back the concrete. We then need to do the new layers of the tiling system, lay the tiles, and then incrementally refill and reheat the pool because if we do it too quickly, there is the chance, because the tiles move at a different rate to the concrete, that you can cause problems. So it is a slowly, slowly process of refilling the pool. That is what will take us through, but it will be done with a view, as the minister mentioned, to opening in this calendar year.

THE CHAIR: When did we start those parallel negotiations?

Ms Berry: At the start, remember, I said that it was a couple of weeks ago and into the next couple of weeks.

THE CHAIR: Right.

Ms Berry: So they were already on the panel of builders who have done work for us before.

THE CHAIR: Yes. We started talking to them a couple of weeks ago and we think it will be done in a few weeks?

Mr Edghill: Exactly as the minister said: once it became clear to us that the approach that we wanted to take was not to have the original builder patch the existing tiles but

to make sure that there was a new system in place to avoid any problems in the future, the Major Projects team began the process of looking at who was in the panel and who might be appropriate for us to work with to install the new system. So we have been trying not to lose time. That was all depending upon finalising the arrangements with the original builder, which has now happened. But all that was happening with a view to just getting the pool open as quickly as we can.

THE CHAIR: Can I just take a stab in the dark? Is this company the people that built Stromlo pool?

Mr Edghill: I think we will let the procurement process run, if that is okay, before announcing pricing and so forth.

THE CHAIR: That is quite right; I understand. Are there any further supplementaries?

MR CAIN: What was the original cost of the pool?

Mr Edghill: That is a good question.

MS CASTLEY: \$28.7 million.

MR BRADDOCK: I can answer that: \$28.7 million.

MR CAIN: Do you have an idea or an estimate of how far into the expenditure the project was before work was stopped? How much had already been expended up to the point of stopping construction?

Mr Edghill: Gungahlin pool was completed in 2014 and—

MR CAIN: Completed in its entirety?

MR BRADDOCK: The completion date was 30 April 2014.

MR CAIN: Sorry. This is possibly my first detailed examination of this issue.

Mr Edghill: That is okay. The issue arose at some point after construction.

MR CAIN: Right; thank you.

Mr Edghill: That is one of the issues.

MR DAVIS: Minister, in the 2019-20 budget, the government committed to waive hire fees for ACT sportsgrounds for six months through to the end of March 2021. Would the government consider removing sportsground hire fees entirely for volunteer-run organisations in the future?

Ms Berry: I am just going to wait for a change of officials.

MR DAVIS: That is fair.

Ms Berry: That question is on sportsgrounds?

MR DAVIS: Yes.

Ms Berry: That will be on Wednesday.

MR DAVIS: Gosh, I have been chopped around a few times. I thought this was 3.3: community sports infrastructure and sports and recreation?

Ms Berry: Yes, but your question goes to sportsgrounds, which is Transport Canberra and City Services. It is us, but it is maintained by TCCS.

MR DAVIS: Who administers the money collected for their use?

Ms Berry: It is TCCS.

MR DAVIS: Who is in charge of the policy of whether or not the fees are charged at all?

Ms Berry: Us.

MR DAVIS: Then I do think this would be for you, because my question is about whether the government would consider removing sportsground hire fees into the future.

Ms Berry: I suppose we can have a crack.

MR DAVIS: I may have got it wrong, but if I just heard you correctly, if Sports and Recreation is in charge of the policy for costs, this would be for you guys.

Ms Berry: Yes; it is okay.

MR DAVIS: I guess I am just flagging that there is a precedent for this. I assume that, like many things, in response to COVID these were waived in the 2019-20 budget for the six months through to the end of March 2021. No doubt, as we are trying to build a more healthy and active city, we want more people engaged in volunteer sport. Volunteers, by the nature of being volunteers, do not have a lot of cash, and a lot of these sports clubs spend a substantial amount of the money that they collect on the hire fees. So is getting rid of them entirely and giving free access to our sports fields something we have considered?

Ms Berry: The sportsground hire fees are a very small part of the bill for irrigation and maintenance of our sports fields. The amount that is paid in those fees is around 15 or 16 per cent of the entire cost. So it is subsidised by around 85 or 86 per cent, while the government pays for the general cost of the upkeep of all of our sports fields. So, yes, during the year people could not fundraise and could not do their barbecues.

Whilst most clubs still maintained their registration fees, not all of them did. So some clubs probably survived in a stronger position at the start of the end of COVID

compared to others. What it meant was that the sportsground fee waiver took into account and reduced the pressure that clubs had from not having registrations or from having people pull out of their registrations—although for most clubs that was pretty strong, even though they could not play the sport. The second part was that they could not fundraise; they could not do their sausage sizzles and could not do whatever else they do to fundraise. I do not think we would consider waiving the fees into the future.

Ms Kelley: I acknowledge the privilege statement. In addition to what the minister said with respect to the funding model in and around sports, which was impacted during COVID, we are hearing from the sports anecdotally that they are starting to return to normal practices and, in many cases, have increased participation in registrations. Basketball, for example, has an additional 50 teams registered for the upcoming season, and cricket certainly experienced similar growth. In order to understand this a little better, we will be going to the sports with a survey in the coming fortnight, in the same way that we did at this time last year, to understand what the likely impacts on sport were going to be. That then informed the COVID support package that government rolled out, inclusive of the \$700,000 direct funding, the early grants program, and the waivers package right across sportsgrounds, schools, Stromlo Forest Park, and club lane hire at pools.

So we are hopeful, through this next survey, that we will get a bit of a status update from the sports as to where they are up to. Whilst they may talk about ongoing challenges, there are a number of good case studies that are coming out of COVID as well. We are hopeful that the survey will capture the good and the bad and will inform the decisions, moving forward, in terms of any additional assistance that the sports require.

MR DAVIS: Will the survey have any specific questions about how clubs account for the cost of utilising sportsgrounds and if that has proven to be a barrier for entry for them or participants?

Ms Kelley: Not specifically. However, we can certainly review the questions, following your questions here. It is more around the financial challenges of meeting the loss of sponsorships that might have occurred over COVID. There is a level of assumption, based on what the sports are telling us so far, that their registration fees are fulfilling their usual costs of sportsground hire, insurance fees, national body levies, and their list of general expenses.

MR DAVIS: Were you aware of any feedback from sports clubs pre-COVID that the cost of hiring sports facilities was proving a barrier for them?

Ms Kelley: To be honest, it is a question that is raised annually at these hearings and to government frequently.

MR DAVIS: At the risk of repeating myself, I am new, so I may be asking some old questions.

Ms Kelley: But to the minister's point, government does subsidise sportsground fees heavily—in the order of 86 per cent. Our colleagues at TCCS, on Wednesday, can confirm that further. We are aware that the cost of sportsgrounds is only one

component that sports generally talk to us about in terms of the barriers to participation. It is not just cost; it is also time, access and all of those other things that go along with it.

We have also looked at work in terms of the sportsground fees and we break that down to the number of participants—that is, a junior football field costs X amount. When you break that down to having 24-plus participants on it the costs are fairly marginal when they fit into a broader cost model for sporting participation. A piece of work that we put on hold last year was to explore the cost of participation with our major participation sports. Unfortunately, due to COVID we determined that it was not appropriate to proceed with that, but that is a piece of work that we will be picking up in due course.

MR DAVIS: Can that bit of work about exploring the costs be rolled into the survey you are launching out in a fortnight?

Ms Berry: I was going to say, I think we can probably predict the answer. But we can probably ask some questions around the cost that different sports have.

THE CHAIR: We are running very short of time. Last question.

MR DAVIS: This is the last one. To be fair, given the fact that, as you say, Minister, the answer is predictable, it probably leads to the obvious conclusion. On what basis does the government still feel that it needs to collect the 15 to 16 per cent difference between the cost of operating the fields and what is contributed? It seems to be a pretty negligible amount of money for the government to contribute, but it is a substantial amount of money for these volunteer sports organisations. Relatively, it does not seem like too much of an extra cost for us to bear.

Ms Berry: One of the things that we are considering—and this goes to the cost as well—is how we adapt to climate change, as far as our sports fields are concerned. Irrigation is the major cost and, regardless of how often we need to irrigate, depending on the changes in weather, that cost is not passed on to clubs. That is the 86 per cent for which we take responsibility. If there are other repairs to sports fields, over and above what we would normally charge clubs, that does not change. They still only pay the amount that they pay, which, as Rebecca says, when you share it out amongst each individual, is quite a small cost compared to the registration and other costs for different clubs.

We will do that work on the comparisons that we were going to do last year. We will kick that off again this year. We are also working on a climate change strategy with all of our sports, about how we adapt to the heatwave conditions that we experienced last year, and smoke, because that also had an impact on sports in the ACT and their ability or inability to conduct matches and play games. A very important thing is the new sports strategy. We are working with the sports community to develop a new sports strategy for the ACT, to build on Active 2020, which we finished.

MR DAVIS: Will the results of the survey be made public when it is concluded?

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton has been waiting for an hour to ask a question.

MR PARTON: Minister, I am sure you would be aware of the petition and related correspondence from a number of local football clubs earlier this year which called upon Capital Football and the ACT government to move towards safer and higher quality football fields, specifically for the Capital Football women's state league competition. I understand that there has been a response from Capital Football. When we go through this petition and the related correspondence, the Belsouth women's coordinator said the fact that Capital Football deemed it to be acceptable for women's games to be played on such fields was insulting to the women's game. Minister, do you think these concerns are legitimate and what is being done to address them?

Ms Berry: I have not spoken with Capital Football particularly about this issue and about the petition. I am aware of it, but I have not had the chance to meet with Capital Football about that issue around the inequity that the women who have signed that petition see in the fields that they are allocated for play.

MR PARTON: It was specifically about the cluster fields—Calwell, Mawson, Wanniasa and Waramanga. Is it your understanding, as the minister responsible, that these fields are up to standard? If not, what can we do to improve them?

Ms Kelley: This might be a matter for sportsgrounds at Wednesday's hearing.

Ms Berry: On the quality of the sportsgrounds, as you say.

Ms Kelley: The maintenance regime across those fields—they will talk about this—is fairly diligent and robust. Certainly, the usage patterns of the ovals, particularly by high-use sports such as football and the other football codes, is something that is monitored, and it gives importance to the renovation programs that TCCS has in place. I believe that Capital Football did look at the process around their scheduling. They have worked with their clubs to ensure that there is no perceived bias towards male versus female teams.

MR PARTON: Clearly, there is, isn't there? I am sorry to interrupt you, but I want to get in one supp before we go home.

Ms Berry: Before you ask your supplementary, I will follow up with Capital Football on that work that they say they have done around that. If there is still a perception, real or otherwise, that women are feeling that they are not being treated equally, I will work with Capital Football to see that that can be addressed. On the fields that you mentioned, with some of those fields I cannot say that they are not good quality. I think that they are fine, but we will double-check.

MR PARTON: You think that they are fine?

Ms Berry: It is not those fields; it is the way that the women are being allocated the higher level playing fields, so that they play at Calwell enclosed instead of the open fields—the cluster fields, which is how you described them.

MR PARTON: In closing, Minister, as a government minister who has been extremely passionate about this space, I want to ask you: why is it that our female players have to play on substandard pitches that the corresponding grade of men simply do not have to negotiate?

Ms Berry: Thank you for your advocacy on behalf of these women, Mr Parton. I have said that I will follow up and investigate it, and I will do that.

THE CHAIR: Minister Berry, I thank you and your officials for your attendance today. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone that has been a part of the hearing today. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing when it is available. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today, could you please get those answers to the committee secretary within five working days of the receipt of the proof transcript of today's hearing. If members wish to lodge questions on notice, please get those to the committee secretary within five working days. The hearing is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 5.06 pm.