



**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**

**FRIDAY, 5 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.

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 9 am.**

Appearances:

University of Canberra

Nixon, Professor Paddy, Vice-Chancellor

Crisp, Professor Geoffrey, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the second public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion into the annual and financial reports for 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 the continuing culture and contribution they make to the life of the city and this region.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed in due course by Hansard, as well as being webstreamed live.

Professor Nixon, can you give the committee an update on how the University of Canberra has been affected by COVID-19?

**Prof Nixon:** Obviously, COVID-19 has affected us all. From the perspective of 2020, what that meant was a range of impacts over a period of time for staff or students being on campus. There were also challenges in terms of international students returning to the university or new students coming. There were a range of other implications from that which flow in terms of the operations of the university. If there are no international students that means there are no students in the accommodation which means, amongst other things, we do not get the revenue that derives from that.

When we did the initial analysis in early March last year—I arrived on 20 March, so it is almost a year to the day—we did some projections, we analysed the performance of the university and said, “There is the worst case, medium case and best case scenarios.” We took the medium case and modelled and managed our operations against that. That was a projected \$30 million deficit for the institution.

As was reported later in September or October of that year, we were starting to track much better than we expected, for a range of reasons that I can explain, if you would like to know. Subsequently, the accounts we have submitted to the Auditor-General—which are still being considered, so I would not like to prejudge the outcome of that—show a surplus for the institution.

Financially, COVID did not have the projected impact that we expected, but it certainly had broader impacts on the staff and the students. Those are where we have spent most of our time, focusing on staff and student wellbeing and supports.

**THE CHAIR:** Has there been any measurable effect or change on students’ academic results throughout this period?

**Prof Crisp:** No, there has not been a significant negative impact. One of the things we

put in place to assist students was a no-disadvantage to their GPA rule. We said to the students they could have the choice—they will still get their results but if it had a negative impact on their GPA then they could ask for that to be negated so it has no impact on their GPA. So they still get their results, but it does not impact on their GPA. We discussed that with our student representative council and various student bodies and that was something they thought was very beneficial to them. But in terms of the overall trends in terms of pass rates and in progression and things like that, it is pretty much the same as it was trending before.

**MR DAVIS:** I am curious to get an update from you on the Educated Life plan that I understand your predecessor launched in 2015. Where is that up to? How has that progressed? Is there a plan to update or reform that body of work?

**Prof Nixon:** The Educated Life was the strategy of my predecessor's predecessor, Professor Stephen Parker. That was followed by Professor Deep Saini's strategy, Distinctive by Design. We are currently in the final two years of that strategy. Each university strategy builds on the previous one, so the fundamental premises of Educated Life still reside within that strategy. In particular, we will be going through a process to launch a new master plan for the university this month and that will be an embodiment of the Educated Life principles, which we will be taking forward in the subsequent strategies. All of the key elements are in there: focus on community, a relationship with the ACT and Canberra, engaging with the Belconnen and broader community and then linking livability with student life. They are still part of what we seek to achieve.

**MR DAVIS:** You said that strategy is being launched in a month. What period of time do you expect that body of work to be operating?

**Prof Nixon:** That is a physical master plan for the campus. We will be showing that to senior officials and politicians before the launch and then we will be engaging over a 10 to 20-year period for that physical development of the campus.

**MR CAIN:** The ATAR for entrance for teacher qualifications is around or less than 50, it would appear—I am happy to be corrected on anything I am presenting here. Given that the main role of the teaching profession is to educate young people to strive for educational excellence, is it reasonable that teacher qualifications have one of the lowest entrance levels?

**Prof Nixon:** I want to correct the ATAR statement. Our ATAR for entry, our bottom, is 60 for the university. Subsequently, what we did for a range of individuals was to take account of social or other contexts to allow them to moderate that particular ATAR. But we also do not solely do entrance based on the ATAR. I will let Geoff explain that.

**Prof Crisp:** There are multiple pathways into the university; ATAR is only one of those. Also, there is a difference between ATAR and the entrance rank. As you are probably aware, under the commonwealth government legislation there is an admission transparency process, so every university in Australia has to publish on their website both the entrance rank and the ATAR.

But as the Vice-Chancellor said, the issue around entry into the university is actually about multiple pathways, and there are two things from the point of view of UC that I would like to emphasise. One is that we do not think an ATAR or a single score that you get at one point in time should determine your whole future. That is quite important for us as a university. We are the university of opportunity, so we want to give people an opportunity at all stages of their life to be able to contribute. We do not want people to be branded with a score and that is it.

The other is that we are very concerned about how our students exit from the university. We are very interested in the standards that we apply. As you are probably aware, with teacher education a number of external standards are put in place; there is the LANTITE test for literacy and numeracy, and a number of other tests are done which are national and external to the university. But the thing that we concentrate more on is the standard of our graduates.

**MR CAIN:** What is the published ATAR for entry from year 12 for teaching?

**Prof Crisp:** Sixty, as the Vice-Chancellor said. But as we said, there is also entrance rank score, which is where you can get bonus points for either disadvantage or other parts of your background.

**MR CAIN:** But the majority of your intake would be assessed according to that 60 score?

**Prof Crisp:** I have the data in front of me: the average ATAR for the Faculty of Education is 75.8 and the average entrance rank is 75. The highest ATAR is 98.

**MR CAIN:** This is for teaching?

**Prof Crisp:** This is just for teaching.

**MR CAIN:** So you are saying there is some misinformation out there that it is 45 or lower than 50?

**Prof Crisp:** There can be a student at UC who could have an ATAR of 45. You are quite right; they could have that.

**MR CAIN:** What percentage of your intake would that be?

**Prof Crisp:** That would be less than five per cent, so—

**MR CAIN:** And how does your ATAR of 60 compare to other universities offering a teaching qualification?

**Prof Crisp:** I would need to take that on notice.

**Prof Nixon:** And to take issue with the question at some level, for a teacher to go into the classroom, they have to be accredited by the professional body. No teacher will be teaching a student in a school that has not been accredited in that way. Our commitment is to ensuring that all teachers we produce are accredited and that the

students in schools are provided with the best education.

**MR CAIN:** The Australian Education Union has called for the ATAR for teaching entrants to be 70. If that were the case, how would that impact on your courses?

**Prof Nixon:** Our average is over 70, so that is a good start.

**MR CAIN:** For teaching?

**Prof Nixon:** Yes, for teaching.

**Prof Crisp:** Yes, the average is over 70.

**MR HANSON:** But the lowest is 60, and you go below that for special circumstances. So how many students would that be?

**Prof Nixon:** We have to take the specifics on notice. But I would say that even if you set the ATAR at 70, you would still be taking into account, for a certain percentage of students, special circumstances, whether social or medical history or a variety of other things. And you would still be giving them recognition for activities they have done outside the ATAR scoring system for entrance into the university. So for those students it probably would not make a significant difference. What it would do is shift the profile for the majority of incoming students.

**MR CAIN:** I applaud the fact that you have a discretionary approach and case-by-case analysis where needed.

**MR HANSON:** How many students would be deemed to have special circumstances, and do you have an ATAR score that, regardless of special circumstances, you do not go below?

**Prof Crisp:** There will be students who enter who have an ATAR but for which that is not the basis of their admission. That is why I mentioned earlier multiple pathways into the university. Just because a student has an ATAR does not mean that is always used as the basis of admission. So we have to be a little bit careful about using what the ATAR might have been because we may have used other evidence about that person to allow entry. That could be a portfolio, their work experience or other things they have done in their life. UC is very much a university that is for people coming back to tertiary education. In fact straight school leavers are not our largest cohort; our largest cohort is an older group.

**MR HANSON:** Page 14 of your annual report refers to the university rising to 193rd globally, from 58 to 34 in the Times Higher Education Young University Rankings, and up 135 places to 84 in another rating. As I understand it, based on the two global rankings, the University of Canberra's rise was the most rapid in the world.

**Prof Nixon:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** That is pretty impressive.

**Prof Nixon:** It absolutely is, and it is not a one-off; it has been a trajectory for the last number of years. Whilst that report says 34th, we are now 18th in the young universities in the world—so in the top 20—and 184th overall for universities. We are 30 years old. There are approximately, at this time, 17,000 universities, so in 30 years we have gone from whatever number you would like to decide on to in the top 20 young universities—all those under 50—and in the top 200 in the world. That is a spectacular achievement for which I will credit my predecessors and the academic and professional staff at the university.

**MR HANSON:** What is the ranking based on? I know you have a high rate of graduates getting employment. Is it based on research or is it a bit of everything?

**Prof Nixon:** Most rankings have a mix of things and there are different ranking schemes, the Times Higher Education one being one of the most prestigious. They use a mixture of research performance, which the university has been building over a steady period, and, as you say, student achievements, infrastructure, spend on students, and overall perceptions of the university. They do surveys of universities and, “How would you rank in reputational terms this university?” A mixture of factors go into that.

We are absolutely delighted with the performance, but rankings are not the reason we do things. We have been focused on the quality of the teaching and building the research reputation. The consequence of that is that we have gone up in the rankings.

One thing I will flag for future hearings is that they change the methodology at certain points in time and they are looking at doing that. We do not know what the outcome of that will be, but obviously they introduce different indices and different metrics and we will then have to work out how we fare on those.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you provide an update on the actions the university has taken as a result of the Australian Human Rights Commission’s report *Change the course*, a report into sexual abuse and harassment on university campuses?

**Prof Crisp:** We had an independent report by Commissioner Broderick and there is a committee we set up which I chair, the Respect Now Always Committee. That has worked through the 30 recommendations of the Broderick review; 27 of those have been implemented and the other three are in the process of being implemented.

We also have significant training processes in place for our students and our staff, in particular those in the residences. That is obviously something we are aware of, so that is mandatory in the residences. Also we have particular training programs for students when they go either on study abroad—when they used to be able to study abroad, and we hope they will be able to do so again—and things like when they go on placements or when they go away for sporting activities. When there are groups of students who go away together, we have mandatory training for all of those students about behaviour.

**THE CHAIR:** What are the three recommendations in progress right now?

**Prof Crisp:** One is around revising our policy, which we are doing, and the other two



are around training.

**MR DAVIS:** During the COVID period where the university, like every business, had to restructure, were any staff made redundant?

**Prof Nixon:** No.

**MR DAVIS:** Has there been any reduction in the number of hours provided to your casual employees during the period?

**Prof Nixon:** Yes. I can give you some numbers. In the context of universities across Australia, one of the things we achieved is we did not have redundancies for our permanent and ongoing staff. I know La Trobe University very sadly today have had to do a second round of redundancies because of their exposure to international students, and I feel for the university and for the staff.

Our fixed-term and ongoing staff from 2019 to 2020 went up by over 45. Our sessional and casual staff went from 12 per cent of the overall in 2019 down to nine per cent, which was a reduction of about 26 or so casual staff hours. But overall we are very proud of the fact that we have been able to navigate 2020 COVID and protect the core of our workforce.

**MR DAVIS:** Was the reduction of hours for those 26 staff concentrated in a particular part of the university?

**Prof Nixon:** No, it was across the board.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for attending today.

Appearances:

Steel, Mr Chris, Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate  
Andersen, Ms Josephine, Executive Branch Manager, Skills Canberra, Economic Development  
Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

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

Canberra Institute of Technology  
Cover, Ms Leanne, Chief Executive  
Whale, Mr Andrew, Executive Director, Education and Training Services  
Ryan, Mr Paul, Executive Director, Industry Engagement and Strategic Relations

Major Projects Canberra  
Ford, Mr Wayne, Executive Group Manager, and Project Director, CIT Woden Campus Development

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, everybody. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed and published by Hansard. We are also being broadcast and webstreamed live.

**MR CAIN:** I refer to page 10 of the financial statement in the ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority report. I am happy to be corrected on anything that I might present to you. This year the operating statement against income increased by \$802,000, approximately. The reason given for this was an increase in the amount of residential and commercial work and other projects in 2019-20. Do you expect this trend to continue?

**Mr Carter:** The expectation of the board is that that trend will continue over the next three to four years. We have reflected that in the ongoing estimates through the statement of intent. Based on the strength of land sales in the last quarter, the simple visual of cranes in the sky and the number of government projects that we anticipate to commence over that period, we see the industry being quite stable and buoyant.

**MR CAIN:** How does this figure reconcile with the increased levy income by about 59 per cent or \$2.2 million?

**Mr Carter:** The variance was based on the original budget for that period being \$3.8 million, which was significantly less than the actual result was for the period.

**MR HANSON:** When you look at the income and the actuals over the last few years, it was \$6 million and before that it had been \$4 million or \$5 million. The budget forecast is \$3.8 million, which is well down. So we have been tracking here and going up and you budgeted way down here, but the actuals continued to go up. Why did you

think you were going to take a \$2 million drop?

**Mr Carter:** Members of the board thought at the time that the surge in the number of apartments being built at some point had to slow down and stop. That was largely what was driving that.

**MR HANSON:** Did the anticipation that you were going to drop by about \$2 million impact on anything in your business and the way you set up for the year? If you are told your budget is going to be \$2 million less, did you then make decisions in terms of staffing or whatever? Would that budgeting cause any problems?

**Mr Carter:** It did not cause us any problems. We have a staff of only three, and that has been stable over the last 20 years. The authority has always had within its reserve account the ability to be able to have six to nine months of levy available. So if there was to be a complete fall through the floor and there was no income, we would always have enough money to continue the operations. That has been gradually built up over a period of 20 years.

It did not change the policy direction because the training plan sets out that we will fund rebates in training. There was anticipation that income would slow down a little bit but, again, we have the capacity with the reserve account to be able to manage that.

**MR HANSON:** Given you have \$2 million above what you anticipated, does that mean you are running at a surplus or have you expended that?

**Mr Carter:** We run a surplus.

**MR HANSON:** What do you do with that money?

**Mr Carter:** That money is placed into the reserve account that the authority manages.

**MR HANSON:** Looking at the results over the last few years, you seem to have been doing better than you expected. How much have you got now in your reserve?

**Mr Carter:** About \$5 million, an average of about 10 months levy.

**MR HANSON:** For this year how many training places did the levy fund?

**Mr Carter:** Last year there were about 11,300 rebates to training individuals that were eligible to apply for rebates for training. We also provided \$1.5 million for entry-level incentives to employers to employ apprentices.

**MR HANSON:** Given the amount of money you are getting in, you do not have any capacity issues?

**Mr Carter:** No.

**MR HANSON:** So it is then a matter of how many places. Is there a shortage of people you can fund? Would you like to fund more if you could?

**Mr Carter:** We can fund everybody that applies who is eligible.

**MR HANSON:** What is the trend on the number of people applying?

**Mr Carter:** Steady over the last three years, but it can also be affected by training programs being made mandatory. Various organisations through government can say, as happened during 2018-19, that working safely with asbestos-containing materials is mandatory for certain trades. The authority has to be in a position to be able to deal with increased surge numbers that will come at a point and be able to fund that adequately.

In relation to the additional income last year, the current policy setting is that all eligible applicants can have returned up to 70 per cent of their training costs. There are a few other minor training programs where that is a set rate across all registered training organisations, and it is about 50 per cent. But last year, as a result of COVID, the board met in around April and we increased that to 90 per cent for all the industry last year. That meant an individual doing a basic scaffolding ticket would pay \$100 whereas it would normally cost them \$1,500.

**MR HANSON:** Do you give the money to the individual or the RTO?

**Mr Carter:** To the individual. There are a number of local RTOs. About 80 per cent of the output of training in the ACT that we fund is funded to individuals that choose ACT-based RTOs. We have agreements with some of those that wish to that they pass on the rebate on our behalf. That negates the ability for an individual to apply directly to us to have it approved; they can simply go to the registered training organisation and, if the course is \$1,500, they pay the gap. At a point in time after that the RTOs invoice the authority with evidence of who they have paid it to. We pay the RTO for passing that on. There is no administration fee or anything added into that. It just makes it easier for people who particularly react to the need to do training tomorrow. So it is a two-minute process on their iPhone if they want to apply directly. It is often easier for companies organising multiple people to do it on that basis.

**MR HANSON:** Do you engage with CIT or is it just commercial RTOs?

**Mr Carter:** No, CIT offer a range of commercial-only programs. Anything that is subsidised by government we do not provide a rebate for, but not all CIT programs are subsidised.

**MR HANSON:** As a percentage is CIT one of your larger providers?

**Mr Carter:** They are the largest provider in the high-risk training across the sector, which is cranes, scaffolding, height safety, that type of thing, but there are others as well. There would be well over 150 local RTOs across the building and construction sector. A lot of them specialise in particular areas; CIT offers everything to everybody. Master Builders offer a wide range of programs as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any emerging trends in training courses being pursued in the ACT?

**Mr Carter:** The renewables area has had steady growth over the last five years. I see that being something that will continue, particularly now with the interest-free loan for that type of thing. That will drive further work in that area. From talking to various stakeholders, there is the possibility that silica dust training may become mandatory at some point in time, which is something we will respond to. We already fund rebates for that training, but if it were made mandatory it would be similar, I would imagine, to 2014 when asbestos awareness training was made mandatory and there were some 14,000 additional training places in the one year. There are a few things that we have our eye on, hence why we like to have a reserve. It is not every year we operate on a surplus basis. For us it is not profit or loss; if we spend more than we bring in, that is a good thing, particularly if you have the capacity to fund it.

**THE CHAIR:** There being no further questions on TFA, we will turn to CIT. Could witnesses acknowledge the pink privilege statement when they first speak?

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, I note that the Australian Education Union have advocated for CIT to be moved to the Education Directorate's governance. They went so far as to ask all candidates and political parties to sign their pledge in the lead-up to the election. Can you explain why this advice has not been taken?

**Mr Steel:** I continue to meet with the Australian Education Union. I think I am meeting with them next week, in fact, to hear their views on a variety of different matters. I understand that was the position that they put forward in the lead-up to the election. It was considered but ultimately not supported in relation to the Chief Minister's decision. It is the Chief Minister's decision to allocate portfolios.

**MR DAVIS:** Have they explained to you why they believe that to be the best outcome?

**Mr Steel:** I think that an argument has been put forward. It is up to them to put that argument forward. I encourage you to speak to them about what their views are.

**MR DAVIS:** Based on your conversations with them, what do you understand to be the justification, from the teaching fraternity, for wanting to see CIT—

**Mr Steel:** I do not intend to speak for the AEU on that matter.

**MR DAVIS:** No? But you have met with them and you do understand their logic for the request. Would it be fair to say you do not agree with the points they have made and that is why the decision was made?

**Mr Steel:** Ultimately, the Chief Minister is responsible for allocating portfolios.

**MR DAVIS:** Okay.

**Mr Steel:** It is not for me to comment on that.

**MR DAVIS:** It is the Chief Minister. Do you know if the Chief Minister has, in that case, met with the Education Union to discuss this issue?

**Mr Steel:** I understand he is aware of their position, yes.

**MR DAVIS:** So in this instance it would be the Chief Minister who does not agree with the Education Union that CIT is best managed in the Education Directorate?

**Mr Steel:** You can put those questions to him, Mr Davis.

**MR DAVIS:** Okay.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, regarding COVID-19, which obviously might be a topic at every session today, what was the COVID budget in the 2020 calendar year and what elements contributed to that budget?

**Mr Steel:** For CIT?

**MR CAIN:** Yes, for CIT.

**Mr Steel:** I will hand over to Leanne Cover to provide some further detail on the COVID-19 response.

**Ms Cover:** Thanks, Minister. I would like to ask the executive director, Andrew Whale, to assist with some detail in this space. We have not actually finalised attribution specifically to the COVID-19 response from the institute's perspective. You can imagine that during 2020 there was a variety of different budget allocations made to assist students in terms of fee waivers and fee returns. A lot of students, obviously, were disrupted as a result of the COVID situation, so there were some fee reductions there.

We also continued with the ACT government budget implementation of our digitalisation upgrades across campuses. There was an allocation of up to 70 per cent now in progress in that budget to upgrade our Office 365 suite to all staff and very recently to students, which has been fantastic. There were a number of other upgrades across the campuses to enable digital access for students, which was incredibly important during the COVID situation. There were numerous budget initiatives that were specialised and focused throughout 2020. Mr Whale, is there anything you would like to add in terms of resource allocations or focus areas?

**Mr Whale:** We did not put aside a special COVID fund. We used existing resources, but we tried as much as possible to measure some of those impacts where we could. The complexity of our funding model and how we support students and the training we do makes it very difficult to have a definitive amount, but it was managed within existing resources.

The campuses were closed for about three months at the end of term 1, during the height of the COVID restrictions in the ACT, through to the beginning of semester 2 in June. During that period we had, effectively, a week's break prior to Easter where we asked teachers to move their teaching capability to an online model. We have a blended approach, but a lot of our course delivery, as you can imagine, is very practical. Students need access to equipment, teachers and facilities. There is a point where a hairdressing student needs to be able to cut hair.

There was fantastic agility and aptitude shown by our teachers to transition those courses. Some moved a lot of their theoretical delivery into that online model and then waited until campuses reopened at the beginning of semester 2 to start transitioning students back onto the facilities and the equipment they needed. Others used digital capability to work with students in their workplaces or in other places where they could undertake some of the practical studies and assessments that were required.

Again that was done within existing resources, using existing equipment. As Ms Cover mentioned, the upgrading of our IT system was underway prior to COVID, but the timing of that gave great agility for teachers to use online capability to help with that. We are continuing to progress that and are now moving to a more blended approach.

**MR CAIN:** Can I move back to the health aspect of the impact of COVID?

**Mr Whale:** Yes.

**MR CAIN:** Were additional cleaning staff engaged?

**Mr Whale:** Yes. We have five campuses. We have three major ones—one at Reid, one at Bruce and one at Fyshwick—and two smaller campuses at Tuggeranong and Gungahlin. The Tuggeranong and Gungahlin ones were closed quite early in that COVID high period. Then there was a point where we had to close the main three, apart from some very minimal training that we did for nursing staff. To assist ACT Health in their response to COVID, we were trying to get as many nurses through the system as possible, and we put in place arrangements so that they could go onto campus safely. Through that period, and then as the students returned at the beginning of second semester, there was additional cleaning, which is still in place now. Apart from the cleaning they do each evening, there were cleaners onsite during the day wiping down common areas—handrails and that sort of thing.

**MR CAIN:** With those additional cleaners and also, obviously, sanitisers and sanitising stations, was there an allocation of funds for that?

**Mr Whale:** It was again done within existing resources.

**MR CAIN:** Is it intended that the current standard of sanitation will be continued for the foreseeable future or have you got a time line for when that might change, based on ACT Health advice, I guess?

**Mr Whale:** Yes. We are absolutely following—as we have from day one—the advice of ACT Health. I think there is no reason for us not to continue with the hand sanitisers that are in place. I would like to commend our facilities manager, Ivan Radic, who has been with us for over 40 years, on the way he managed to get his team to convert our campuses into a COVID-safe space in line with health regulations. It was not only the health and safety equipment; it was also where a level of close contact was required—for example, nursing students, massage students, hair and beauty students—in terms of having the ability to source masks at a time when masks were quite difficult to obtain. In areas like that we are looking to continue, where

possible.

Restriction on space is the main thing. When we were limited to one person per four square metres it reduced the size of some of our classrooms and workshops and our ability to teach the same number of students on campus. We have had to run additional classes at additional times, which has put further strain on teachers and resources but, again, they have stepped up and managed very effectively.

We are now down to one person per two square metres with the latest regulations, using the CBR check-in app. That has lessened the pressure on those classrooms; we have a lot more classrooms that can get back to capacity. There are still some where we cannot fit them in with that restriction, so we still have some additional classes. That is probably the pressure that we are looking forward most to being eased, when it is safe to do so in the community, and that will have an impact on the number of students we can put through at any single time.

**THE CHAIR:** Just a supplementary on that. What consultation did you have with staff transitioning back to face-to-face teaching?

**Mr Whale:** Over the last three years we have been doing some fundamental transformation across CIT in how we think, approach and respond to challenges and issues and stuff in the ecosystem that is impacting us. We were not planning directly for COVID, but the work we had done was of great benefit. We had our business continuity plan. We had our crisis management team that was meeting initially two days a week and then moved to one day a week. We had a separate consultation committee with the unions and relevant health and safety representatives. Then, as we went further, we opened the COVID committee up to all staff using Webex. Any staff member across CIT could log in every Tuesday morning to hear, see and ask questions about what we were doing.

As we transitioned back to campus, we set up a core group, led by Jayne Miller, who initially mapped highways across the campuses. With the spacing and the 1.5, there was this physical approach to the campuses. They became advisers on how you could work within spaces to create that distancing and then we got local teams involved. Because we have very large campuses, the way in which students and staff operate and use each of those spaces varies considerably. In some, like our English language areas, you have a very social element to the students and how they use those spaces. They have lunch together and all of those sorts of things. In trades—somewhere like electrical—it is much more in and out, and it is about how you have enough spacing for all the trailers and things in the car park. There are a range of criteria.

We put it to the local level. We asked the local teams to work with this transition team that Jayne headed up to come up with local solutions. That was done with full consultation. The unions were consulted as to the process and agreed. We had checklists that were done. The decision as to how a space would be managed with students back on campus was done with the heuristics and guidelines set centrally, supported locally and then decided locally. All staff in those teams had to be consulted before both the students and staff would return to campus. That proved very effective.



As we opened up the doors to the campuses at the beginning of the second semester, on 3 June, I think, we brought on a few in the first couple of weeks in the areas where there was a particular need to get access to equipment and where industry were very strong in saying, “We need these apprentices or these students to continue their study as much as possible for the purposes of those industries and employers.” We tested some of the stuff we put in place, we reviewed and renewed it, and then we gradually got bigger and bigger. Pretty much by the end of third term, all students that needed to be back on campus were back on campus.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned that in some of those consultative committees people were able to Zoom in and watch the proceedings of the committee. Was there a way for people to provide input or was it just a case of watching?

**Mr Whale:** While online Webex discussions in these sorts of forums have restrictions, one of the big advantages is that there is a chat that goes down the side of the screen. Instead of just me talking and people asking me questions, there was a separate chat going on at the same time where people asked questions and other people were answering; so you were getting this dialogue that was going across. In many ways, the ability for people to have input and to ask questions was more open in some of these big forums. I think we are still averaging over 100 people every week in the Thursday meeting around the COVID. Most of that is information, but people can ask questions.

Again, we have unique situations in different areas. I mentioned before that the requirements and challenges of running hair and beauty are very different from those running business and leadership or those running plumbing out at Fyshwick. There are particular questions which we need to make sure we are working through. The unions and the health and safety reps are members, so we have a core membership, but anybody can ask questions or contribute.

**MR HANSON:** I have a question about the JobTrainer Fund.

**Mr Steel:** With regard to CIT?

**MR HANSON:** It will relate to CIT, but it will be talking about RTOs as well. It will be a broad range.

**Mr Steel:** I might invite the team from Skills Canberra to come to the table.

**MR HANSON:** There will be some CIT components to it, potentially. While that change is occurring, referencing the Skills Canberra website, the JobTrainer Fund will fund up to 3,500 training places through three training streams—the Skilled Capital program, delivered through private registered training organisations; the Canberra Institute of Technology; and the Ginninderry SPARK Training and Employment Initiative. This is a fund that the website says is \$16.75 million, which is jointly funded by the commonwealth and the ACT. As late as 4 February, the Chief Minister was putting out a press release saying that the ACT government was contributing \$8.375 million to the JobTrainer program supporting RTOs—this is private RTOs—to deliver fee-free training places in key industries and occupations.

A few days later that program was closed. There was an announcement from Chief

Minister, Treasury and Economic Development saying that they had closed enrolments on JobTrainer courses and they advised that 500 enrolments had been completed. On a broader level, where are we at with JobTrainer, particularly in relation to private RTOs? They were told that this was a program that would remain open until September 2021. They had an expectation that this was an ongoing program. It was on the website. There were press releases put out by the Chief Minister. They were advertising 3,500 positions, not all for private RTOs but certainly more than the 500 that they have completed. This program has been cut for private RTOs. Can you give me an explanation as to why?

**Mr Steel:** This program has not been cut. This is additional funding. This is just one of the responses the ACT government, together with the commonwealth, has been putting forward to support training and support the economy and the recovery out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first thing we did during COVID was to make sure that we funded more Skilled Capital places—that was prior to JobTrainer coming into being—increasing subsidies for apprentices, trainees and other VET students and giving registered training organisations access to a 50 per cent unit payment where a student had commenced a unit of competency but was unable to finalise assessment due to workplace access and social distancing measures.

Training providers were also able to access other ACT government support initiatives as they adjusted, particularly, to social distancing requirements. The ACT government also partnered with the commonwealth to support and train in areas of infection control. That remains ongoing. We made a very substantial contribution with the commonwealth government, through the JobTrainer Fund, a \$16.75 million joint investment, to deliver thousands of training places particularly targeted at jobseekers and young people aged 17 to 24 in the ACT.

That was provided in three streams. It has been incredibly popular since it opened. It is not surprising that a program that delivers free training targeted at those cohorts has been popular. We have been encouraging people to get in early. There have been significant advertising campaigns, run both by the commonwealth government and the ACT government, and also by RTOs, promoting the scheme to potential trainees and people wanting to take up training. We have seen a huge response. It has been incredibly popular, with very significant numbers.

I will hand over to Josephine Andersen and Kareena Arthy to talk through the numbers we have been seeing for this program. This is not the only subsidised training program that the ACT government is funding. We are currently looking at further subsidised training going forward. The suggestion that we have cut funding, when in fact we have massively increased funding into training during this period, is just wrong.

**MR HANSON:** You are misrepresenting what I said, Minister. What I said was that this funding has now been cut for private RTOs. If that is not true, you can let me know. But if it has been cut to private RTOs—

**Mr Steel:** There has been an increase in funding for private RTOs and other RTOs involved in the program.

**MR HANSON:** No; they are no longer able to access this fund. They were advised, as recently as February, that it was open. They were advised it was open until September. They can no longer access it. Therefore, for a private RTO, this program is no longer available to them. It has been cut to them.

**Mr Steel:** It has not been cut. We have massively increased funding through this program so that trainees can take up free training through RTOs throughout Canberra. It has been very popular, but there is only a certain amount of funding that has been provided. It is additional funding that has been provided.

**MR HANSON:** Certainly, the RTOs that have contacted me have used words like that and “axed”, “an axing” of the program. You have given a broader context to it, but for the many hundreds of private RTOs out there, this is the way they are viewing it. At the very least, you have a communication problem. If we can move to some specific questions—

**Mr Steel:** I will just hand over to—

**MR HANSON:** with regard to the 3,500 positions?

**Mr Steel:** Thank you. Before you interrupted, we were going to talk about the numbers for the program and what we have been seeing. It has been incredibly popular.

**Ms Andersen:** Thank you, Minister. I acknowledge the privilege statement. The minister is correct that there has not been any withdrawal of funding. The JobTrainer program was set up along the lines of three streams. There was a stream that CIT would deliver, a stream that the Ginninderry SPARK program would deliver and a stream under our existing Skilled Capital mechanism that private RTOs would deliver. There was funding allocated to each of those streams.

It was made very clear to all the RTOs that elected to deliver courses under JobTrainer how the program would work. Private RTOs were invited to elect to deliver programs under JobTrainer. They were provided with a compliance guide, which clearly sets out the terms of the program. There were different places allocated to different streams and different amounts of funding allocated to different streams. With respect to the Canberra Institute of Technology, the indicative number of training places that we had put against that stream was 2,500.

**MR HANSON:** How many have been completed by CIT to date?

**Ms Andersen:** There are very few completions because, obviously, course delivery takes some time and, while students might have enrolled, they may not have commenced straightaway, given the December-January shutdown period. CIT has enrolled 794 students, possibly more since we collected this data. In relation to the Ginninderry SPARK program, 190 places were allocated against that program. There has already been a course delivered, and 20 students who enrolled in that program have completed that program.

Of the Skilled Capital release, we had suggested an indicative number of 800 training

places. That was based on a notional mix of full qualifications and short courses. Learner demand, however, suggested that there was very little interest in the short courses and most interest in the full qualification. Obviously, if a learner is undertaking a full qualification that is longer in duration, it costs more. The number of enrolments against the Skilled Capital stream of the program is 554.

**MR HANSON:** So you have cut that figure—to use that word—from 800 to 500?

**Ms Andersen:** Not at all. The funding has all been committed. The funding that was put against that stream has been committed. It is just that the learners who undertook training against that Skilled Capital stream elected not to undertake the shorter courses, which were lower cost courses where you might have a set number of funding, but 20 people might be able to do a variety of short courses against that funding. We saw a massively increased uptake of full qualifications, which are longer in duration and more expensive to do.

**MR HANSON:** Did you advise 800 externally or was that an internal working thing?

**Ms Andersen:** That was just our internal figures. We allocated funding. Obviously, the number of places was dependent on learner uptake.

**MR HANSON:** So 790 plus 190 plus 500 is the number that you have had enrolled. How many positions are left? Is it 3,500 or have you reduced that based on the—

**Ms Andersen:** No; we have reduced that based on the enrolments. That is the way we manage the Skilled Capital program as well. There were a number of training places put out against each qualification, and those caps were reduced.

**MR HANSON:** But your website still says 3,500.

**Ms Andersen:** That was the indicative number of training places at the outset of the agreement based on how many places were funded.

**MR HANSON:** No. It says that JobTrainer will fund up to 3,500 places.

**Ms Andersen:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** That is correct as at today.

**Mr Steel:** The key words there are “up to”, Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** That is what it says.

**Mr Steel:** It was always dependent on what types of courses people enrolled in as to how many would be delivered. What we have seen is that people are enrolling in those longer courses that cost more money. The full funding allocation of \$16.75 million is there. We thought that we would deliver up to 3,500 places and what we have seen is people taking on longer courses, so it will be a slightly lower amount than that.

**MR HANSON:** What actually will you deliver? If it is not 3,500, what is your latest expectation?

**Ms Andersen:** Our latest expectation is that there will be over 3,000 training places.

**MR HANSON:** All right. Are you going to update your website to provide that?

**Ms Andersen:** We have already done that.

**MR HANSON:** As at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, you had not on the Skills Canberra website under JobTrainer.

**Ms Andersen:** We will check.

**Mr Steel:** It is still not technically wrong; it is up to 3,500 places.

**MR HANSON:** It could be up to 10,000 places then, couldn't it? You could put a random figure like that and then not deliver on it, that being the point. It is useful to be accurate on that. If you are talking places, of that 16.7 million, what percentage went to RTOs? How much went to Ginninderry SPARK and how much went to CIT?

**Ms Andersen:** CIT have been allocated approximately \$9.5 million to deliver their component of the program. Their component includes full qualifications, boot camps and some short online courses. The Ginninderry stream of the program was allocated \$1.25 million to deliver a number of pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programs, and \$6 million was allocated to the Skilled Capital release.

**MR HANSON:** Is there any intention to provide additional funding or is that it now for the RTO unit?

**Mr Steel:** This is additional funding, Mr Hanson. This is very significant additional funding for training in the ACT.

**MR HANSON:** No. There is no funding left; this has been expended.

**Mr Steel:** That is wrong. I have just said that we are looking at a future Skilled Capital release in terms of subsidised training.

**MR HANSON:** Well, that is the answer then, isn't it?

**Mr Steel:** The JobTrainer program has seen a very significant increase in subsidies for training in the ACT, recognising that we wanted to support people who were being retrenched as a result of the pandemic who perhaps wanted to look at going into a new industry and needed to retrain, or those looking to upskill their current set of skills. It also recognised that this was a very difficult time for young people in particular, particularly school leavers coming into the current economic environment. We wanted to give them the opportunities as well.

**MR HANSON:** When does the program end? Is this a financial year program? When is the end of this program?

**Ms Andersen:** All enrolments must be completed by September this year. That is not to say that the people undertaking the training will have to complete by September, but the cut-off date for enrolments is 30 September.

**MR HANSON:** Given that the RTOs have already completed their enrolments, about 500 or so, and that CIT has only enrolled 790, is there going to be any potential rebalancing within the existing program—not the new ones, Minister, but looking at the JobTrainer program? If the RTOs are now sitting there waiting to train people and CIT has at this stage only enrolled 790, is there an opportunity to say that there is capacity out there for RTOs who are ready to do this right now? If you are putting students through a production line, CIT may have capacity issues; I am not sure. Is any consideration being given to rebalancing?

**Mr Steel:** I am confident, Mr Hanson, that CIT will be able to deliver their stream of the funding. I might invite Leanne Cover from CIT to provide some further detail about how they are delivering the training. The model of training that they are delivering, which is quite different from the funding that has been provided to other streams, in terms of providing wraparound support around people undertaking training, is really critical, particularly in supporting some jobseekers that need extra support to get through their training course and enter the workforce.

**Mr Ryan:** I acknowledge that I have read the privilege statement. Further to what the minister said, CIT is entirely confident of being able to commence 2,500 students in the JobTrainer program before the cut-off date in September. As was previously said, the numbers have slightly increased since that last reporting. CIT now has commenced all 800 places in the full qualifications and has moved its attention to enrolling in the short courses and the boot camps. The reason for that is that the semester start period is when the full qualifications need to start, whereas online courses are continuous enrolments. The pre-employment bootcamps are run over a four-week period. Again, they can be run throughout the year, as opposed to commencing at the start of the semester.

CIT's first milestone was to have all 800 allocated places for the full qualifications commenced at the start of the semester, and we have achieved that. We are now moving our attention to achieving our internal sub-components, being 500 places in the boot camps, which are co-designed with industry. We are getting feedback from industry. We are doing a four-week program where people get exposure to introductory skills and can then go into employment. Also, we are just finalising some enhancement builds to our online offerings, which will also be targeted to the balance, which is 1,200 commencements in the online courses for eligible JobTrainer students.

**MR HANSON:** We heard evidence earlier from the construction authority that there are about 150 RTOs within just the building and construction trade. I am not sure what the number is across Canberra across all trades, but it would be many hundreds. In terms of the courses offered by CIT, does CIT offer every single course that is available out there being offered by RTOs?

**Mr Ryan:** No. If you look at the national register, there are some 1,500 courses. CIT has definitely the largest scope of any RTO in the ACT. A very pleasing feature of the

800 commencements in the JobTrainer program is that they were spread over 32 different qualifications, representing a lot of industries. In not one single instance did we have more than 11 per cent—10½—in one qualification. It proves that the breadth of scope of offerings in CIT has meant that, across 32 different qualifications, there will be JobTrainer graduates going out into many different industries. That breadth will demonstrate the support for upskilling workforces across a variety of industries rather than just having a fixed focus.

**MR HANSON:** You may not have this information to hand, so it may be required on notice. The private RTOs have been delivering courses that may not be available at CIT. Can you provide me with a list of those courses that are delivered under the JobTrainer program by private RTOs that are not available at CIT? Course X may be pretty popular out there. It is being provided by RTOs and there are people out in the community potentially wanting to do that training through this program but cannot because it is not available at CIT where the funding remains. I am trying to identify potential gaps in training and qualification. Although CIT does a wonderful job—let me not argue with that—it is not actually offering those courses as previously. Can you provide that?

**Ms Andersen:** We can provide that on notice.

**Mr Steel:** Recognising that they have been able to get JobTrainer funding to deliver courses through the Skilled Capital component of JobTrainer. They can also continue to deliver those courses regardless of the JobTrainer program.

**MR HANSON:** Sure.

**Mr Steel:** And the existing funding that is already provided through Skilled Capital. As I have said, we are looking at a future potential release of Skilled Capital as well this financial year. There are subsidies available for training delivery in the ACT that are ongoing for RTOs to be able to access both through Skilled Capital and the User Choice program.

**MR HANSON:** Could you potentially break those down for me on notice as well—the other funding available, specifically for the RTOs? Thank you. I know I am taking a bit of time, Chair, but Ginninderry SPARK is the third strand of this. There is CIT, which I think we understand, and the RTOs. What is Ginninderry SPARK?

**Ms Andersen:** The Ginninderry SPARK program is a pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship program. Under that stream of JobTrainer there are a number of training opportunities for young people or unemployed people. They range from short courses in health, child care, employment readiness, hospitality and a range of different things. There are also some tailored courses that Ginninderry is providing for school leavers to give them a taste of a couple of different industry sectors.

**MR HANSON:** Ginninderry being?

**Ms Andersen:** Ginninderry is the company that—

**MR HANSON:** It is a particular company, is it?

**Ms Andersen:** Yes. They are working on the development of land out past Holt.

**MR HANSON:** Right. Ginninderry the development?

**Ms Andersen:** That is right.

**MR HANSON:** Okay.

**Mr Steel:** They are an RTO too.

**MR HANSON:** Why did they get a specific tranche of this money—\$1.25 million? What was the process—the tender process or the decision-making process—to say, “We’re going to treat this RTO separately and give them a big chunk of money by themselves”?

**Ms Andersen:** Ginninderry are not an RTO; they auspice RTOs to deliver the training. This was an extension of an existing program under the national partnership for the Skilling Australians Fund. There had been fantastic outcomes for the learners who had participated in those programs. Ginninderry have really strong relationships, particularly in construction and civil construction, with employers. What we were seeing under the projects they were involved in under the national partnership for the Skilling Australians Fund was that many of the people who were undertaking those courses were achieving an employment outcome at the end.

**MR HANSON:** Was there a tender process for that money or could other people bid?

**Ms Andersen:** There was not a tender process for that money. It was an agreement by cabinet that that program would be extended.

**MR HANSON:** The decision to allocate that \$16.75 million, where it went, was a cabinet decision, but 9.5 to CIT, 1.25 to Ginninderry, and then the remainder to RTOs. Where is Ginninderry at? It has had 190 enrolments? Is that the figure?

**Ms Andersen:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** What does that mean in terms of that \$1.25 million? Is that the end for them or have they got more capacity?

**Ms Andersen:** Once they have delivered those 190 training places, they will have expended the funding that has been allocated to them.

**MR HANSON:** How many have they had as enrolments?

**Ms Andersen:** So far?

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Ms Andersen:** They are recruiting people to many of their programs. They have already enrolled and completed 20 people at this stage.



**MR HANSON:** Twenty out of 190?

**Ms Andersen:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Are they a bit behind or was it anticipated that there is going to be a surge as it moves forward?

**Ms Andersen:** It was intentional from their perspective, because they have ongoing programs, other programs, that they are running at the moment. The program was designed so that the Skilled Capital release would go out to the market first, so that learners would have access to those courses almost immediately. CIT were well underway in developing their response and their approach to JobTrainer. Ginninderry target unemployed people and post school leavers. They have been doing that over the Christmas shutdown period, working with Jobactive providers and their other contacts.

**MR HANSON:** Each Ginninderry SPARK enrolment has to be through a registered RTO?

**Ms Andersen:** Not necessarily, because Ginninderry is offering a range of training. CIT is delivering some of the training offered, and some of the training that is being offered in the construction space is being delivered by the Master Builders Association.

**MR CAIN:** How many of the Ginninderry SPARK clients, for want of a better word, actually work on that Ginninderry development, the Riverview development?

**Ms Andersen:** As a requirement of JobTrainer, the learners have to be either unemployed or young people aged 17 to 24. Their employment status does not matter. Most of the people that go through Ginninderry programs are unemployed, but they often will be offered an employment opportunity as a result of doing the course and the on-the-job learning they experience.

**MR CAIN:** Where are they doing the work under the Ginninderry SPARK program?

**Ms Andersen:** It depends on the nature of the course.

**MR CAIN:** At Ginninderry itself?

**Ms Andersen:** Yes; there are certainly elements of different courses where—

**MR CAIN:** What proportion, roughly, are doing the labour at Ginninderry?

**Ms Andersen:** I will have to take that question on notice based on the number of enrolments that Ginninderry tracks for those different streams.

**MR CAIN:** Do you have an approximate figure? Do nearly all of them work at Ginninderry?

**Ms Andersen:** It might be 15 per cent.

**MR CAIN:** Who work at Ginninderry?

**Ms Andersen:** Who do their on-the-job learning at Ginninderry, on the construction sites there.

**MR CAIN:** That seems a rather unusual model. It is focused on the west Belconnen development, it would appear, and yet it is a broad Canberra trainer. I am not quite sure why it would be connected specifically to the Ginninderry development.

**Ms Andersen:** Ginninderry runs a range of different programs for people who experience barriers to training and employment. Some of those are construction-related programs; some of them are not.

**MR CAIN:** They are almost taking a management role to use the allocated funds to provide clients with opportunities all around Canberra, not just at that development?

**Ms Andersen:** That is correct.

**MR CAIN:** Is that a typical model?

**Ms Andersen:** I would not say it is typical; it is quite unique, but it is a very successful model.

**MR CAIN:** I am curious about this arrangement. Minister, why would you focus on a particular development in Canberra and say, “We will let that be the focus of something that is going to have application more broadly?”

**Mr Steel:** They have demonstrated that they are interested in supporting social responsibility by investing in these programs. They are award-winning programs. The government took the opportunity to look at what we could do with the JobTrainer fund and saw the opportunity to expand on the great outcomes that we were seeing, particularly for people in a vulnerable cohort, which is exactly the cohort that we were trying to support through the JobTrainer program. We have been able to provide them with support, but also support people in a range of different ways through CIT and the Skilled Capital program.

**MR CAIN:** What is the benefit for the Riverview development? That is the puzzle for me. What is the benefit to them to run Ginninderry SPARK on their facility?

**Mr Steel:** It is part of the social responsibility they have as someone operating in the ACT: they can support vulnerable people to be involved through gaining skills and potentially working on their development.

**MR CAIN:** It just seems a rather unusual way to go about it.

**Mr Steel:** It has been very successful. They have won awards at the training awards. It is a very well-known program, very well regarded.

**THE CHAIR:** I think that line of questioning has come to its end. I have a question

about CIT, so we might need to change witnesses.

### **Short suspension.**

**THE CHAIR:** Looking through the annual report, there was a decrease of 49 FTEs in 2019-20. Could someone expand on why that was?

**Ms Cover:** The staffing profile at the institute varies from term to term, semester to semester and year to year overall, particularly in the teaching workforce, which reflects the demand of the courses in any particular year that students are studying. We heard recently about the flexibility that is required.

You can imagine that across such a variety of courses, both the administration side of the actual teaching and the technical side of the teaching across so many different industries require a very different skill mix, in terms of full-time, contract and temporary staff. The estimate figures that we put forward every year are based on what we anticipate our numbers to be in terms of what that course demand will look like, but then we adjust them up and down as we go, to meet that demand. That explains the variation from year to year in that space.

**THE CHAIR:** Quite specifically, it says there was a decrease due to COVID-19 in 2019-20 and then, as you would expect, an increase of nearly the same number in the following year. It was due to COVID?

**Ms Cover:** Yes. We had to change our staff profile in response to the course changes. We are anticipating that, with the JobTrainer numbers coming on this year, we will have a slight increase in those numbers. I am particularly making reference to the teaching areas there.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it casual teaching staff?

**Ms Cover:** The particular numbers? I have not got the breakdown of that quantum of numbers with me this morning.

**THE CHAIR:** There was a decrease in teaching staff. Was there any attempt to redeploy those workers throughout the organisation?

**Ms Cover:** With the vocational education training sector, teachers require a number of elements around their teaching qualification.

First and foremost, teachers at CIT and across the VET system have to have a baseline qualification of training and assessment, which is a national qualification to be a vocational education and training practitioner.

Second, in many cases—for the licensed trades, for instance, and many other areas—they need to be registered with the industry they are teaching in or be current in the course they are teaching. I often give the example that you cannot take a hairdresser and make them a plumber simply because the hairdressing numbers go down—retrain them in a very quick way.

We have two different enterprise agreements at the institute; we have a teaching enterprise agreement and an administrative enterprise agreement. There is movement between the two areas. Sometimes teachers move into corporate service areas and sometimes the more general staff in the corporate services area train and become teachers in particular areas. There is some movement among the workforce. But the teaching area particularly is quite specialist and technical in the industry area that teachers have come into the institute to train in.

**THE CHAIR:** What support did CIT provide to these people who essentially lost their jobs because of COVID?

**Ms Cover:** Nobody lost their jobs because of COVID. In fact, what we were able to do during COVID, with the ACT government's support, was maintain not only the teachers we had on the workforce but also those we had as sessional teachers or part-time teachers. We were able to maintain our workforce during COVID.

**THE CHAIR:** I am just trying to compute those two things. We had a reduction of 49 FTE, but no-one lost their job?

**Ms Cover:** Yes. Are you talking about page 154?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Cover:** There is a note there in the statement of intent which gives you the specifics of that. I might get Mr Whale to talk specifically about the FTEs. The notes in the statement of intent say:

The decrease of 49 FTE in the 2019-20 ... outcome ... is primarily due to less staff being engaged as teaching activity decreased throughout the year ... largely due to the effects of COVID-19.

Where we did make those adjustments, it would have been where we had casual teachers that we did not have a demand for. We did keep on a large number of teachers to reflect the ACT government's support in trying to maximise jobs in the ACT during COVID. Mr Whale, do you have any specific details that could assist with that question?

**Mr Whale:** Yes; I can paint the picture. We did drop student numbers last year due to COVID, largely around the challenges that students had with their employers or their family life. There was quite a significant drop, including in international students that we teach.

Going to the impact for our staffing, as Ms Cover said, there were no job losses. Going to the amount of hours and work that casuals do, as Ms Cover also pointed out, we are a very flexible workforce in that area; that is the nature of CIT and vocational education. A lot of our casual staff work in the industry; they might have their own landscaping business and come in and teach students at CIT a couple of days a week or one day a week or one day a fortnight. We supported those staff all the way through.

Because of the drop in some of the course numbers and the number of students last year, there was a drop in the number of casuals we used. We continued to support them, but the level of support was not matched by the number of hours they were teaching.

**THE CHAIR:** So there was a reduction in hours worked for some people. Did anyone have their hours ceased entirely?

**Mr Whale:** Not that I am aware of. I would have to go back and check, but not that I am aware of.

**THE CHAIR:** Everyone was still engaged on some level?

**Mr Whale:** One of the measures to support students during COVID was to attempt to contact each student, every student across CIT. There was an attempt by staff, and we used a lot of casual teachers as well, to contact students. As I mentioned before, COVID impacted every student differently. It might be that someone had to look after kids who could not go to school and were having real trouble teaching; it might be that without coming onto campus they did not have access to a computer or equipment; or it might be that they did not understand, without having a teacher standing in a classroom, how to work. We needed to give them a range of supports.

We also did a lot of work with employers and industry. There were challenges where employers were able to keep their business going and there was a demand for some of their employees who were also our students to be on the job for longer hours. That was impacting. We used those staff as well as our permanent staff to make a lot of those contacts. We undertook a lot of different roles last year as part of our response to COVID. We used different approaches.

It is hard to compare year to year, but as Ms Cover said, our forecast this year is that all those numbers will be back up to the same level they were previously, translated from hours into FTE and headcount into FTE.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Cover said there was very limited redeployment. Can you quantify in some way how many teaching staff were redeployed?

**Mr Whale:** As Ms Cover pointed out, we could not make a plumbing teacher into a hairdressing teacher; nor do we have that need.

**THE CHAIR:** But you are talking about an administrative role there.

**Mr Whale:** Yes. We might have got a plumbing teacher—or more likely someone from somewhere else in trade—to ring up electrical students and identify them. I would not have the numbers. It was done at a local level, a team level. Heads of departments and college directors were just looking at what resources were available and contacting people that were able to help. There was a CIT-wide response to contacting students.

**Ms Cover:** When the COVID impact was at its greatest and we were at the maximum of our online delivery, we had teachers working with other teachers. Some teachers

had greater digital capacity than others. In some respects, that was a generic skill that could be transferred between areas. And we had teachers in like areas assisting. For instance, at Fyshwick, at the trade school, there would be some complementary and similar skills that could be shared amongst teachers in teams as opposed to the plumbing and hairdressing areas.

**MR DAVIS:** I want to go to a completely different theme. I want to talk about student support, noting that it has been a particularly rough year. I note from the annual report that CIT trains around 20,000 students. Could you give an outline of what kinds of social and peer support services CIT offered and how they were affected or altered over the past 12 months in particular.

**Ms Cover:** I might give you some broad context around student support and then ask Mr Whale to give some detail around the COVID 2020 year.

The institute has fantastic support for all students. That creates a range of options for students to access, both on campus and off campus.

In terms of administration, enrolling, careers counselling and trying to help students pick the course they are going to be successful in, there are resources available as students enter and select courses. Once students are in courses, there is a range of supports. Perhaps some students are returning to study after some time; they might need some research skills to access resources through the library. There are resources in that space to help with research and allocating resources that students have access to. There are the library services and a variety of staff in that space.

There is also a large variety of student services to do with student welfare and wellbeing. There are counselling services which are specifically located within the institute. Those professionals can refer to other external bodies across the ACT government as students need them. There are digital literacy and numeracy coaches. There are student support people for apprentices specifically at our Fyshwick campus; they are allocated to assist there. In terms of the Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander centre, our Yurauna centre, which is a real centre of excellence, there is support for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander students. There are specific supports there.

Depending on what students need and where they are in their learning journey, there are a variety of supports that they can access. I might ask Mr Whale to specifically talk about some of the supports.

Another support comes indirectly from the institute, through the CIT Student Association. During 2020, in the COVID period, we worked very closely with them. They were able to seek support from the community to recondition computers. Mr Whale spoke about having to assess when we first went off campus. We did our best to contact every student and have conversations about where they were at with their learning journey. Some students needed access to digital devices to keep studying and participate in their learning journey. Working with the CIT Student Association, we were able to get devices out to those students to support them.

**Mr Whale:** In addition to the initiatives outlined by Ms Cover to support students, we were very conscious of the need to support staff, particularly during the period when

the campuses were effectively closed.

The key initiative was that our HR area made sure that every staff member was contacted. Teams were encouraged to continue to meet with Webex and ask how people were going. That was a theme across all meetings.

We also got staff involved in initiatives. As Ms Cover outlined, there was that great initiative that the student association engaged in to help students who needed access to a computer. There was work with our fashion students to create masks that we could sell, using that as a training initiative, as part of their training course. Having staff involved in those sorts of COVID-related initiatives, even if they were doing it remotely—they may have been able to be done on campus by the time they were rolled out—increased people's sense of purpose.

That sounds a bit menial, but when we were all struggling to deal with the challenges that COVID presented, it was putting the students front and centre in how we supported them and coming up with different initiatives that staff could actively get involved in. Even if you had limited teaching hours, you could contact students, ask how they were going, identify their needs and feed that back to other staff. It was almost forcing that contact to make sure that we could monitor people's mental health. Our counselling team rolled out other initiatives to support staff. Links were posted and continually reinforced through those meetings.

We were very conscious of the need to engage with staff. As I mentioned earlier, when we looked at transitioning back, we got all the staff involved. It was done at the local level. Local staff were making decisions about how they would return; how the campus would be shaped and formed; and how students would work, walk and move through areas as they came back. Again, the nature of that work gave them an increased sense of purpose at a time when what they normally did and how they did it were changed and challenged.

**Ms Cover:** I forgot to mention that although our campuses were physically not open to students, all the student services in terms of referrals, advice and support were available online and by telephone during that period. Although physical campuses were not accessible for students, those resources remained available to all students during the pandemic.

**MR DAVIS:** You both mentioned counsellors and psychologists. Can you tell me what the full-time equivalent is across the institute for those staff?

**Ms Cover:** It changes depending on demand. Can I take that on notice in terms of the specific roles?

**MR DAVIS:** Absolutely. I would be interested in exploring if you experienced any changes in the demand for those services throughout the COVID period, anecdotally or if you have any data to support that? I am sure I could assume, but it would be good to know.

**Ms Cover:** Certainly. I can provide that out of session. The anecdotal evidence, as I looked at it week by week, was that we did have an increase in those contact points.

It was also interesting because having those services online and by telephone perhaps increased accessibility, as well as the demand.

**MR DAVIS:** Noting that we are in a different point in the pandemic now, are the psychologists and the counsellors throughout the institute meeting the demand now, would you say?

**Ms Cover:** I think they are. There is a great network across the ecosystem of education and training in Canberra as well. As you can appreciate, we have students ranging from those coming from schools into the institute who are younger and have different needs to more mature age students who are coming into the institute. I am confident that we are able to service the requirements at present.

**Mr Whale:** It is worth pointing out, though, that through JobTrainer, given the nature of the cohort we are targeting in that, there may be some additional supports needed. We have put in additional support to assist with that cohort.

**THE CHAIR:** We will now suspend for a short break.

### **Short suspension.**

**MR HANSON:** I want to go back to CIT. I want an update on your campuses in terms of the movement that is planned over the next few years. How is that progressing? I want to get the time lines for what moves are going to occur where and where we will end up at the at the end state, what courses are going to be delivered in which campus.

**Ms Cover:** The very public major work that we are doing at the moment is on the Reid campus and the Woden CIT precinct and campus developments happening there. Whilst one might say that there is an end to it, in terms of an opening of a building, it is well progressed. It is quite exciting for the institute's future and for vocational education and training, more broadly, across Canberra. It is an exciting time for everybody in Canberra.

Meanwhile there is development across other campuses. In the last couple of years, that has primarily related to digital uplift in technology on campus, but during the last 12 months we have also had a number of upgrades to physical infrastructure, particularly at the Bruce campus, with a refresh on that campus, and the Fyshwick campus.

I might ask Mr Ryan to give a general overview of the campus modernisation program, what is happening with the digital side of things and where things are going to be moved and shuffled around to get the best outcomes for students and industry.

**Mr Ryan:** The emphasis for the campus modernisation project is to have an uplift in facilities across all CIT's campuses.

As Ms Cover just mentioned, there have been some improvements at Bruce, especially around our simulated health facilities. In the last few years, we have commissioned new dental facilities, allied health, and upgrades around fit and well



offerings.

The institute had a successful budget bid several years ago to add new teaching spaces out at Fyshwick. The development applications and initial planning are well underway there. That will add much needed workspace and training facilities at our trade skills centre at Fyshwick.

Going to the physical upgrades for our digital infrastructure, CIT has a digitalisation program, where we are rolling out a new Microsoft environment that all staff and students will use. To make sure that that is as effective as possible, it has included physical upgrades to things like wi-fi and wireless routers and access points. That has completed at Fyshwick; it is expected to be completed within the next two weeks at Bruce. That will see both Bruce and Fyshwick upgraded physically for contemporary ICT infrastructure.

We did not do significant upgrades to the Reid infrastructure, noting that the planning is well underway for a new campus at CIT Woden, within the Woden town centre. Current planning and time lines have that facility being occupied in time for semester 1 in 2025.

**MR HANSON:** Just to confirm, you will leave Reid completely?

**Mr Ryan:** The significant presence at CIT Reid will largely move to the new CIT Woden campus. The institute and government are still talking about CIT retaining some presence in the city, but that is at early stages of concept.

**MR HANSON:** Would that be at that site or somewhere else?

**Mr Ryan:** That is unresolved. It is about what would be the best outcome for CIT students.

In answer to your question, CIT currently occupies 14 buildings on that Reid site. CIT will be moving out of all of those and into the new premises at CIT Woden.

**MR HANSON:** That is where the University of New South Wales is going to go?

**Mr Ryan:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Have you had engagement with them about that yet?

**Mr Ryan:** CIT have had engagement and collaboration and a strengthening relationship with UNSW over the last few years and has continued that strong collaboration. We are currently in the final elements of negotiating an MOU between the two institutions which will outline the future collaborations that both institutions wish to have, building on the already strong relationships that CIT has with all the universities in Canberra.

**MR CAIN:** I have a question about the strategic compass 2020 evolving together document. It was initiated in 2016. What has been achieved to date?

**Ms Cover:** It has been a very intense journey since the compass was released in 2016. The compass sits within a much broader context of generational change in the vocational education sector across Australia—and indeed for the institute, as a foundation provider of vocational education and training here in Canberra.

The compass coincided with the establishment of a CIT governing board. Our Board Chair, Mr Craig Sloan, is with us this morning. The board released the strategic compass with four key pillars about setting up the institute for a very long term, successful future to make sure that we are able to meet the skilled workforce needs of the ACT and the region.

The compass is quite broad in its focus. Predominantly there has been a very strong focus on the broadening of our industry connections. One of the key achievements under the strategic compass industry connections is adapting our courses to offer new programs. Future skills we are going to need are around the cybersecurity training area. It has been a real achievement of the staff and the connections we have with industry in that space. CIT is now recognised as a national leader in the vocational education and training sector. We are leading a national TAFE response into cybersecurity training, which has been really, really good.

Mr Ryan mentioned the upgrades to campuses. I will ask him to touch on the cybersecurity training centre at Reid. Then I will come back to it.

**Mr Ryan:** One of the four pillars of the compass is transforming our business, making sure that CIT invests in its business for viability and value. One element of that was to design and commission, with industry co-design, a state-of-the-art cybersecurity training operations centre. That is now fully operational. Without that, we would not be able to train the expanding numbers of students that we have in those qualifications. It is also a centre that is used by industry and used as a collaboration centre for other programs in the ICT area, not just cyber.

That is an indication of where CIT has adapted its offerings to meet contemporary workforce needs of the ACT economy.

**Ms Cover:** There are a variety of examples across the institute in adapting our courses to meet very large changing needs. What we are seeing at the moment, and I think that it will only accelerate, is a real change in all industry areas with the digital disruption that is happening. Even in some of our traditional trades, the introduction of technology is going to require ongoing adaptation.

We are seeing the introduction of technology and innovation through the strategic compass investment that the board made around some technology in our trades for what we call 365 cameras, to allow students to be on the job in their trades area doing their day-to-day work for their employer and then use that to capture assessment evidence and upload it onto a platform and have the teachers assess that. That is just one example of the sort of digital integration we are seeing in some of the traditional trades.

We know that CIT is leading in the renewable energy sector space. Paul Ryan is the chair of our renewable energy board. With our collaboration with the ACT

government, we have some great training outcomes in that space. With the Global Wind Organisation, we have been able to stand up a whole new training program. We talked about the high-risk training this morning.

There are numerous examples of how we have started to adapt our training. A lot of it has been with the board's strategic directions about making sure that the institute is more outward focusing. No longer are we a standalone institution; we are a lot more connected to industry. Cyber and renewable are just two of those examples. We are a lot more responsive to what industry needs, because industry needs are changing quite rapidly. Our connections there are really strong.

In terms of our student outcomes, I am proud of our students and their achievements over the last number of years. CIT was successful in training the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year at the national training awards for the last two years. In that space, CIT, as a large registered training organisation, has been listed as a finalist with three of the top RTOs in Australia in three out of the last four years. That speaks volumes to the transformational work that the institute has been doing to build the adaptive capacity of its staff, particularly in adapting for the new courses that I have spoken about, but also reaching out to industry.

Another big achievement that sits within the strategic compass is around our connection to community. Earlier, I mentioned the work that our Yurauna centre does, our Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander centre. Recently, we have reached out under the compass. We have a fantastic partnership with the Northside Community Service for a bespoke program, supported by the ACT government, to provide child care for our Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander students on campus. When students come onto campus, they are able to have their children cared for whilst they study. We are seeing some great program outcomes there: students are able to progress through their studies not only through the Yurauna centre but in other training areas across the institute.

**MR CAIN:** Could you touch on the CIT's role in the national conversation on increasing skills shortage?

**Ms Cover:** The Skills Canberra body within the ACT government works directly with government on those negotiations. With CIT being such an important provider in Canberra, we work very closely with Skills Canberra in providing advice and data to inform those discussions. We are well informed and work in close collaboration with Skills Canberra to understand where those national directions are going and how the ACT needs to be ready to adapt and adjust to those needs.

JobTrainer is a great example of that, and how quickly the CIT has been able to stand up those training places has been a result of the great collaboration we have with Skills Canberra. As they progress those discussions at a national level, we are able to move and adjust quite quickly into those.

**MR CAIN:** Maybe I am coming from a point of ignorance here, but with Skills Canberra, you have touched on responsibility for the provision of the overall management of vocational education and training in the territory. Are they your reportable body? What relationship do you have with them? How do you run your

own program? Is it always under the supervision of Skills Canberra or are you independent and partners? I am not quite sure how I could describe the relationship.

**Ms Cover:** With the majority of the subsidy programs at CIT that are funded by the ACT government, that relationship in terms of reporting on data to the national body is through Skills Canberra. Skills Canberra are the policy and quality control, if you like, for RTOs in the ACT around funding that is apportioned to the ACT through those national agreements. The CIT, though, is governed by a governing board; it is an independent body. The institute is governed by the CIT Act and the board is the governing board, reporting to government through that mechanism.

In terms of internal policy, procedures, allocation of resources, impacts for students in terms of courses that we are running et cetera, the governing board sets that strategic direction under the strategic compass, and the operationalising of that is done through the board.

With the national programs that stand up like JobTrainer, that is our connection point through to Skills Canberra, but also Skills Canberra has a major role in the governing of the Australian apprenticeship schemes and programs in Canberra. About a third of our students at present are in an Australian apprenticeships sort of program. We have a very tight line of reporting and data transfer for that with Skills Canberra for the national body reports. There is a national system that aggregates the data of every state and territory, and our pipeline through there is Skills Canberra.

**MR CAIN:** How are appointments to the CIT board determined?

**Mr Steel:** I make the appointments to the CIT board, and the board reports to me.

**MR CAIN:** In your capacity as minister for?

**Mr Steel:** Minister for Skills.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful. I was wondering if the committee could get an update on how CIT went at the 2020 Australian Training Awards.

**Ms Cover:** Thank you. It feels like a long time ago—last year. I mentioned earlier the incredible achievement under the Strategic Compass new directions that the board has been leading over the last four years. CIT has been listed as a finalist three times out of the last four years for the large RTO of the year, but we have also done exceptionally well in being recognised with our cybersecurity training, which I touched on briefly, and in 2019 CIT was listed as a finalist for industry connections at the National Training Awards with AustCyber, which was a fantastic result.

I have mentioned the two outstanding Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander student achievements—being named as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year in a very competitive field across incredible, diverse and talented students and fantastic registered training organisations across Australia. I think that speaks volumes of the quality of the training that is happening here in Canberra for all students. All of the categories of awards that are available for students to compete for in 2020 were won by CIT students, which we were very proud of in terms of that representation as

well.

**THE CHAIR:** The year 2020 was a strange year. Were the Training Awards affected at all?

**Ms Cover:** They were. Like everything, the Training Awards in 2020 went virtual and Skills Canberra did a fantastic job in organising a virtual connection for all of our ACT nominations—not just those from CIT, and we had a large amount, as I said. In all of those categories, we had CIT students win. So for the National Training Awards, Skills Canberra brought together a great evening to celebrate, in the absence of being able to get together nationally.

They are the key, premier achievement awards for the sector. It is a really big event on the national portfolio for students for industry and for vocational education and training teachers, so it was great that Skills Canberra could bring about a virtual event for us to celebrate. We were disappointed that we were not the winner of the large RTO of the year, but we were absolutely elated to celebrate our student achievements, virtually and in person, as well as we could under the COVID restrictions.

**THE CHAIR:** I might regret asking, but who was the large RTO winner?

**Ms Cover:** It was another, Victorian TAFE.

**THE CHAIR:** Say no more. All right, thank you.

**MR HANSON:** How many staff are employed in CIT Solutions at the moment—in terms of FTE, but also actual people?

**Ms Cover:** I am just looking through my notes. Could I take that on notice? Just 104 is my recollection, but could I take that on notice just for the specifics of the details?

**MR HANSON:** Yes. The budgets estimated outcome was 105, so that sounds about right.

**Ms Cover:** Yes. Okay, good.

**MR HANSON:** But the 2017-18 number was 133. So we have lost 30-odd staff. Why has that decrease occurred?

**Ms Cover:** Sure. A little bit of context setting: the company is a completely separate entity from the institute and its workforce is predominantly in response to large national and ACT based contracts that the company wins, so they have a different structure in terms of their workforce. They stand up staff for various contracts and to meet that demand.

The institute has been working with the company in terms of its relationship with the company, and the company independently has been going through a restructure that represents some of the earlier comments I was making about the major reform. We have been going through a period in the last 10 years—perhaps the last eight years—of the most major reform of the vocation education and training sector nationally.

Some of those figures have changed to represent the company's change of direction, where it is focused on particular areas. The changes in the staffing numbers reflect those changes so that the company has grown in some areas and reorganised resources in others, where perhaps training contracts have been refreshed or renewed in other areas.

**Mr Ryan:** Further to what Ms Cover just said, in 2020 the CIT Solutions workforce comprised 90 core employees and 214 casual employees. Many of those casual employees deliver on a language training contract with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and a lot of them also deliver professional development short courses, so the hours of those courses are very fluctuating due to demands, and hence would have an effect on the staffing numbers.

**MR HANSON:** Sure. In terms of CIT Solutions, I presume that they give a dividend back to CIT or how does that work?

**Ms Cover:** It is not a dividend, but it is a return on cash, if they are in a position to do that, and that is a decision by the board to reinvest either into the company itself or back to the institute as the owner.

**MR HANSON:** Right, so the board makes that decision. Of late, have there been any returns to CIT or has that money been reinvested? Where are they at financially?

**Ms Cover:** The company has a very long history of providing profitable returns back to the institute for reinvestment into teaching and learning resources and other appropriate resources in the institute. During the last couple of years, with the increase in competition and the major changes that I was talking to in the VET sector, those returns have been less than in previous years, and during the last 12 months it has not been allocated; but I am really pleased to say that the company did exceptionally well under very difficult circumstances in 2020 and we are expecting a return in this upcoming financial year.

**MR HANSON:** Right. Do they operate as an RTO?

**Ms Cover:** They do not. CIT is the RTO and the company runs programs under the RTO licence of the institute, particularly in the public sector management training, which it has had a very strong reputation to deliver over its 30-year history.

**MR HANSON:** You mentioned language courses. Are you finding it difficult to recruit people to teach languages? We heard from the Education Directorate the other day that they are struggling within the secondary school and primary school systems to find language teachers. Are you able to meet demand?

**Ms Cover:** I might just make a couple of general comments around that. That program that Mr Ryan referred to, which the company has, is a program to upskill members of DFAT to go in-country—now, obviously, there is not so much travelling—and to work with a variety of different languages. Mr Ryan, how many languages, generally?

**Mr Ryan:** It goes up and down, but it has been in the vicinity of 50 different

languages. The training is quite bespoke; the majority of it is one on one, as opposed to, say, a school sector, which would be to a whole class. Some of it can be quite short term, so it is very ad hoc work. As you can imagine, the posting rounds for diplomats can depend on whether the people getting posted have language proficiency, so the languages in demand can go up and down. I know that CIT Solutions is actively advertising for tutors, so I think that would give you an indication that they are looking for more.

**MR HANSON:** A few years ago there were some issues with bullying at CIT. They were litigated through committees and publicly. I am just wondering whether those matters are all finalised and whether there has been any adjustment in procedures and practices and so on arising from those issues?

**Ms Cover:** There have been ongoing continuous improvements since those matters that you referred to. The institute has continued to work on its workforce culture, and has some really great achievements in that space. I will take on notice any active or current allegations. I may be able to answer that during the proceedings this morning.

**MR HANSON:** Okay, but certainly nothing comes to mind that is an issue?

**Ms Cover:** No, there is nothing. I will take it on notice in terms of active—

**MR HANSON:** Okay; that is good. I suppose, more broadly, we have talked about languages and CIT Solutions, but are you finding any particular skills shortages within your workforce to meet demand for courses?

**Ms Cover:** Sorry, are you talking about CIT Solutions?

**MR HANSON:** I am talking about CIT, now.

**Ms Cover:** Sorry, can you just ask your question again?

**MR HANSON:** Are you finding any skills shortages in your staff to meet demand for various courses?

**Ms Cover:** Right, okay. We are meeting our skill needs, but one thing I will say is that because of the regulation that is required to become a vocational education and training practitioner, it is not simply a matter of having an interested plumber come and teach. As I mentioned in the hearing earlier, you need to have a training and assessment base-level qualification. CIT provides that for people coming out of industry, which is a fantastic opportunity for people to transition from the industry into teaching, and we work with those practitioners of industry to come in and be adult education and training people.

**MR HANSON:** So if you have a particular skill—let us say hairdressing—and you do not have sufficient people to do that training, but you know that there is a significant demand, do you then contract out to an RTO to deliver that training on your behalf or do you do everything in-house?

**Ms Cover:** We have quite good workforce planning data and we work really closely

with the industry. Hopefully, there is always increasing demand and so it is always going to be a challenge for us to continue to find the staff to match that demand, but we are able to work very closely with industry.

We have a large, really good, flexible arrangement with our casuals. We spoke earlier about the number of staff that we have employed, particularly in the teaching areas. As we see demand increasing, we are able to work with the people who are on the CIT resources already to increase their hours of delivery in particular areas. Then, as we see an increase coming through—with the intelligence that we gather from Skills Canberra and across the national sector as well—we are able to increase the number of casuals. Then those casuals increase their hours, and those hours then can be offered up for places for larger contracts. As that stabilises, those contracts can be offered up or recruited to longer-term contracts and include permanent positions as well. So that is how we build that capacity and respond to that demand.

**MR HANSON:** Okay, thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** How does CIT support women to pursue vocational education?

**Ms Cover:** Thank you. In lots of different ways. We spoke earlier today about JobTrainer. I am really pleased to say that 57 per cent of those 800 students that we have already commenced under the JobTrainer program are female, which is fantastic. The areas that those women are selecting for study are, predominantly, in early childhood education and care, and in education support, business, IT and beauty. We have also had a pleasing increase in the number of women who are coming into the cybersecurity training. In that program 18 per cent of the participants are women, which is fantastic, given—

**MR HANSON:** How many, sorry? Eighteen?

**Ms Cover:** Eighteen per cent. Eighteen per cent of people coming into the cyber program are female. Then there are larger programs that are happening. Yesterday we met with all of our leadership group and it was really pleasing to hear some of the really strong stories about the increase of women in trades. The director of our Women in Trades College at Fyshwick, Fiona Dace-Lynn, heads up a really strong group of leaders, and I am really pleased to say that we have just recently appointed a woman as head of our building and construction for the first time in the institute. We have also had a head of electrical studies who is a woman in that space. So those are just a couple of examples of where, in the traditional trades, we are seeing not only in the institute's workforce an increasing representation of women, but, pleasingly, an increase in women coming into some of those traditional trade areas as well.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned a rising number of women pursuing cybersecurity. Why do you think that is?

**Ms Cover:** I think the sector is becoming open to everybody. I think the digital access perhaps removes some of those barriers for women who could not access training as much. Perhaps they had other duties and responsibilities. I think the online offering that we have been able to stand up in that space removes some of those barriers for women to enter into the training side of things. We are also seeing a real diversity in



what the workforce is after. Cybersecurity is a very diverse sector, but, depending on the sorts of jobs that are being done, we are finding that small businesses in Canberra are quite diverse in what their needs are, as well. So I think there are a few things that are driving that.

We have excellent teachers and support for students at CIT. What we are finding is that women who study at CIT are able to access some of those supports that we spoke about earlier, including the study support, the careers counselling support and the CIT Student Association support, but also a really strong range of supports for disability and disadvantage as well. So I think there are a number of factors that are assisting in that area.

**THE CHAIR:** I think, at the top, you mentioned the gender breakdown for JobTrainer. Do you have the gender breakdown for the student body as a whole?

**Ms Cover:** Not with us.

**Mr Ryan:** Not at hand.

**Ms Cover:** No, not today, but we can take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful. All right.

**MR HANSON:** Just out of curiosity. With some of the programs where you are trying to encourage women into traditionally male occupations, do you do it the other way, and try to encourage men into traditionally female occupations—perhaps some of the health courses and so on?

**Ms Cover:** Terrific. Yes, we are conscious of that. Again, I certainly do not want to stereotype particular trades but, for instance, in some of the community services—childcare and those types of industries—yes, we do make sure that we are supporting, and very conscious of, that mix of gender in the classes.

**MR HANSON:** With the childcare-style courses, are you finding many men participating in that? Certainly, it is an issue with primary school education, where there is a decreasing number of male teachers. Are you seeing that in the childcare sector as well?

**Ms Cover:** I do not know the specifics of the gender breakdown for this year, but I could certainly have a look at that.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, I would be interested.

**Mr Whale:** I can go back to the question about the numbers. For our 2021 student enrolments as at 1 March this year, 44 per cent of our enrolments are female; 1.7 per cent of that cohort chose not to select male or female as a gender choice. For the age profile of our female students, under 18 is 5.2 per cent; 18 to 25, 35 per cent; 26 to 40, 36 per cent; and over 40 is 23 per cent. While we have seen a growth in areas such as trades, in some other areas the programs with the highest female enrolment remain the Diploma of Nursing, the cert III in Early Childhood Education and Care, the cert IV in

Education Support. Community Services and Business Administration are both cert IIIs. With respect to the cybersecurity increase, in 2019 it was 42 women that attended, and now it is up to 83. So it has almost doubled.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, wow. Thank you.

**Mr Whale:** There was an earlier question, while I am here, in regard to bullying and harassment. Again, in 2020 we had four cases of bullying and harassment across CIT. Three of those have been resolved, and one is still ongoing. Since the matters you referred to earlier, which were in 2012, we have introduced a number of changes to our policies and programs and our support. We have worked with the higher education sector on the report that TEQSA did on sexual assault and sexual harassment. Even though we were not obliged because we are a TAFE, we followed the guidelines that they put out, and introduced a whole range of new policies, training—met high standard support training with our student association; induction videos; videos for staff on how to deal with sexual harassment and sexual assault if it was to occur on campus.

So there is a whole plethora of reforms and initiatives that we have put in place to support our staff and we continue to review and develop that, particularly with those support teams that we have on campus to support those staff and students through our HR areas or our student support areas, where there is also specialist clinical support in areas of disability and mental health as well.

**MR HANSON:** Apprenticeships in the ACT: it seems that there has been a trend downwards over the years, probably nationally, in terms of the number of people taking up apprenticeships. What specific programs has the ACT government got to support—particularly young people, I guess—anyone entering apprenticeships?

**Mr Steel:** I invite the staff from Skills Canberra and CMTEDD to the table to provide some further detail. Predominantly through the User Choice program, apprenticeships are supported. During the pandemic we saw quite a significant impact, initially, both on commencements of apprenticeships and on completions; and there were some suspensions and cancellations as well. Some industries were worse affected than others in terms of apprenticeships, but because apprenticeships are usually linked to a host employer, that has meant that some employers, whilst they experienced significant challenges during the pandemic, have been unable to support apprentices. So there was movement, often, of apprentices between different host employers to accommodate them.

Skills Canberra has been working very hard to make sure that apprentices are supported during the period where there was disruption to their apprenticeships. I will hand over to Ms Andersen to provide some further detail there.

**Ms Andersen:** Thank you, Minister. As the minister said, there was obviously some initial disruption to apprentices when COVID-19 hit early last year. From March 2020 to January this year, compared to the same period in the previous year, we have seen a 17 per cent reduction in the number of commencements but only an eight per cent reduction in the number of approvals. So there is a bit of a technicality there; the eight per cent number is probably more reliable.

There has been a 13 per cent increase in the number of suspensions. That has chiefly been in the areas of travel and tourism. That does not mean that those apprentices or trainees have lost their jobs; it means that their training is currently suspended. But we have seen a 34 per cent reduction in the number of cancellations. The upshot of all of that is that our numbers have actually stabilised. In December 2020, they were in the high six thousands—I think we were tracking at about 6,800 apprentices and trainees—and this was actually higher than numbers in December 2019, when we saw about 6,200 apprentices and trainees in training, and even higher than the previous year in 2018, when the numbers were about 5,500 apprentices and trainees.

**MR HANSON:** So that number is trending up?

**Ms Andersen:** That is right. The ACT, for a number years, has been bucking the national trend around apprentices and traineeships.

**MR HANSON:** Is there a particular trade, or set of trades, where you are seeing that increase?

**Ms Andersen:** It is across the board.

**MR HANSON:** If someone does take on a position as an apprentice, how do you know that they have done that? Do they have to register?

**Ms Andersen:** If they become an apprentice or a trainee, they have to enter into a training contract. So the apprentice network provider, who is contracted by the Australian government, works with the apprentice or trainee—and their parents if they are under 18—and the employer, and they have to sign up to a training contract.

**MR HANSON:** Right.

**Ms Andersen:** Then it is part of our role as the state training authority to approve that training contract for the training to commence.

**MR HANSON:** Right. For an apprentice—they register and so on—is there then a subsidy that is paid to the employer? How does that work, and does that vary depending on the trade?

**Ms Andersen:** Yes, absolutely. The User Choice program is the funded program for Australian apprenticeships. The subsidy is paid to the training organisation to deliver the training.

**MR HANSON:** Okay. That is the commonwealth initiative?

**Ms Andersen:** We distribute the funding, or the government sets the subsidies and we manage the funding allocations to—

**MR HANSON:** So it is an ACT government-funded initiative?

**Mr Steel:** I think there is some contribution by the commonwealth to support our

training initiatives as well, but we are the majority funder of VET in the ACT.

**MR HANSON:** Sure. For the apprenticeship program, the 6,800, do you have a breakdown of what the bill is for that, then what is ACT funded and what is federally funded?

**Ms Andersen:** It is not disaggregated in that way. It becomes one bucket of money.

**MR HANSON:** Sure, but someone has to appropriate that money in the budget somewhere. So there would be an appropriation by the ACT government, and then there would be an amount coming from the feds, surely?

**Ms Andersen:** There is an amount coming from the federal government.

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Ms Andersen:** In this financial year it is \$26.1 million. In the previous financial year it was \$25.5 million.

**MR HANSON:** Right, and what is the ACT government commitment?

**Mr Steel:** To what?

**MR HANSON:** To the apprenticeships. You said that \$26 million comes from the feds to support that.

**Ms Andersen:** That money is divided up. The money that comes from the Australian government is divided up for government-funded VET. So, if we are looking at the funding bucket overall, there is an amount of money provided to the public provider, CIT. There is an amount of money attributed to the Australian apprenticeships program, to the Skilled Capital program and to VET in schools.

**MR HANSON:** Right, but what I was trying to get to is, is the ACT government actually appropriating any money out of its budget for that? The federal money that is coming down, you are involved in managing and so on, but is the ACT government actually funding any of it? Does any of the money come from our budget as opposed to the feds?

**Mr Steel:** Yes, of course. We are the majority funder of VET in the ACT.

**MR HANSON:** How much is that?

**Mr Steel:** Are you asking how much is in the User Choice program? Is that what you are asking?

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Mr Steel:** We can provide that on notice.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, in the support of those 6,800 apprentices.

**Ms Andersen:** The 2019-20 budget for the User Choice program was \$14,250,582.

**MR HANSON:** That was \$14.250 million, and the federal amount was \$26 million, but you are saying that you are the majority—

**Mr Steel:** To fund the entire VET system.

**MR HANSON:** No, I get that. I am just trying to get to the support for these 6,800 apprentices, which is User Choice, and what is \$26 million from the feds and \$14 million from the ACT.

**Ms Andersen:** So the budget for User Choice is just over \$14 million.

**MR HANSON:** Right.

**Ms Andersen:** The funding is considered, I suppose, as one bucket and distributed according to the priorities.

**MR HANSON:** Okay, so there is a \$14 million budget to fund 6,800 apprenticeships. What I am asking is: of that \$14 million, how much is ACT money and how much is federal money?

**Ms Andersen:** It would probably be a question for the Treasury as to how that funding is distributed.

**MR HANSON:** Could you take that on notice so that you could identify where that money comes from? I am just trying to get my head across where the money is coming from to support that.

**Ms Andersen:** Yes.

**Mr Steel:** I think what you are after is a hypothetical apportionment of the funding for the User Choice program.

**MR HANSON:** Well, not hypothetical. I mean, that money—

**Mr Steel:** We have appropriated the funding for that \$14 million program from the ACT budget. So it is wholly appropriated from the ACT.

**MR HANSON:** It is wholly appropriated from the ACT budget.

**Mr Steel:** What you want is a hypothetical apportionment to the commonwealth funding overall. So we can look at that and look at that figure, but it would be a hypothetical apportionment, because it is just not broken down in the way that you are suggesting.

**MR HANSON:** Right, okay. With apprenticeships, you said that there was a variant in how much they were paid, depending on the apprenticeship. What are you doing to try and steer apprenticeships towards skill shortage?

**Ms Andersen:** Every year Skills Canberra leads a skills needs consultation and we derive some data and some preliminary lists from our forecasting of industry needs and entitlement model. We then use that data to consult with industry. If we look at JobTrainer as an example of how that works in practice, we generated the list of occupations using the fine model and consulted with industry around whether those occupations resonated with their sense of where there were skills needs and where there were likely employment outcomes. We then matched those occupations with the VET qualifications, and then subsidised accordingly. So with the User Choice and Skill Capital programs, there are a number of subsidy bands, depending on the level of skills needed.

**MR HANSON:** Is that figure of 6,800 apprentices capped? So, basically, is there a position for everybody who wants to put their hand up—it is not capped?

**Ms Andersen:** That is correct, yes.

**MR HANSON:** Right.

**Ms Andersen:** It is a demand-driven program.

**MR HANSON:** It seems to be quite successful in that the number is increasing, which is good, but have you got programs out there to try and encourage people to take up apprenticeships?

**Ms Andersen:** Absolutely. We have a Future Skills for Future Jobs grants program. The ACT government is a signatory to the National Partnership on the Skilling Australians Fund Agreement, and that national partnership is all around driving increased commencements in apprenticeships and traineeships. Under the auspices of that there are a number of different programs. Probably the flagship program is the Future Skills for Future Jobs grants program, which was \$2 million in the first year of its establishment, and it was \$1 million last year, \$1 million this year, and another million dollars next year. That program is all geared around providing people with opportunities, either for an apprenticeship pathway, or to become an apprentice or a trainee.

**MR HANSON:** With students that are coming into the ACT from regional areas, particularly for CIT—there might be a course offered by CIT that is not offered regionally—one of the issues, obviously, would be accommodation. Universities support or provide accommodation, but for students who are coming in from the regions to do a course here—it might be a shorter course, probably, given the nature of the courses offered for a few weeks—does CIT or the government provide any support for student accommodation? I imagine that that would be an impediment to regional students wanting to come to the ACT, given the shortage and the cost of accommodation?

**Ms Andersen:** There is no accommodation provision under the User Choice or Skilled Capital programs. However, if students who do not live in the ACT want to sign up to an apprenticeship or a traineeship, if their employer is based in the ACT, there is no barrier to that happening. In relation to the Skilled Capital program, that

person would have to be living or working in the ACT to access government funding.

**MR HANSON:** Right.

**Mr Steel:** Mr Whale can speak to the CIT side.

**Mr Whale:** At CIT, we have a range of supports for students, including accommodation on our Bruce campus, and we also have some apartments that we use here in Civic for students—primarily for international students, the numbers of which at the moment have dropped; but we do provide support for our international students who come and also for some from interstate. We also provide a range through our support services, where there is access to funding or grants—locally, federally, or through the New South Wales state government if they are coming from New South Wales. We offer those supports.

A lot of the training from interstate is for areas such as horticulture, where the investment we have in our facilities out at Bruce makes it very difficult for any other local RTO to have that same level. So we do get quite a few that come up from the coast or from local areas to attend. A lot of them do not need the accommodation; they are just travelling up for courses and they may stay one or two nights or whatever. Apart from our accommodation, it is really focusing on the student support services that we have on campus to assist them and help them, at least in identifying options.

**MR HANSON:** In terms of international students, have you found that accommodation is a bit of an issue with regard to students and their inability to find suitable accommodation?

**Mr Whale:** The nature of the CIT international student cohort, in contrast to universities, is that most of them are already in the ACT. You do not have the same numbers as at university, but a lot of them are already in the ACT or the surrounding areas, so the accommodation is not as big an issue. So, no, in most years we find the accommodation that we have available through those two facilities is able to cope with the demand from our student cohort. Again, wherever possible, we provide advice and support for access to services, facilities, grants, or the sorts of things that may be available.

**Mr Steel:** At the CIT Woden campus project it is intended that a youth foyer be included as part of the project scope. This would have the direct goal of supporting young people between the ages of 16 and 24 with accommodation, with the objective of increasing the number of young people completing education qualifications, whether that is through CIT or through nearby institutions like Canberra College, for example.

**MR HANSON:** Is that something that would facilitate accommodation by trying to identify places or is it somewhere where you would actually have a residence—

**Mr Steel:** There is a physical residence.

**MR HANSON:** A physical residence in Woden?

**Mr Steel:** Yes. That is proposed as part of the CIT Woden project.

**MR HANSON:** You might not know off the top of your head what the scope is, but at this stage, what has been planned in terms of how many—

**Mr Steel:** I might invite up Wayne Ford, director of the project from Major Projects Canberra.

**MR HANSON:** I am just trying to get the scale of it.

**Mr Ford:** The question is in relation to the youth foyer. We are providing 20 apartments within the youth foyer. This is to allow accommodation for potential students, but for youths between the ages of 16 and 25.

**MR HANSON:** Okay. That was easy, was it not? A good way to finish.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful. Minister Steel, I thank you and your officials for your attendance today. The committee will now adjourn for a five-minute break.

**Short suspension.**



Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Community Services Directorate

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

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, everybody, and welcome back. We will now hear from Minister Cheyne. I will lead off with questions. Minister, could you explain the decision-making process in cancelling the Multicultural Festival when other events, like Enlighten, have been going on?

**Ms Cheyne:** I confirm that I have read the privilege statement. The Multicultural Festival is our biggest festival in the ACT, regularly seeing crowds of over 200,000 people. We were hopeful that in late November, going into the summer, that we might be able to have a multicultural festival. You will recall that the announcement was that the Multicultural Festival would not be held in February. That would be too soon. But we were hopeful that we might be able to have something in the final quarter of this year, in October or November.

The summer was not the summer that we hoped for, I have to say. We saw the borders opening and shutting. There were retrospective decisions about where people had been. In addition, there were new variants of the virus. We got a much better understanding towards the end of January and into February about what the rollout would be of the COVID-19 vaccines and the timing for that, which will still be a really big effort, with the numbers of people that need to be vaccinated every day. The advice that the federal government has come out with is that that will be done by the end of October.

All of those things combined, together with the health advice that, operationally, it would be impossible to hold the festival, and to prepare for it adequately in that time frame, meant that we made the very reluctant decision to not hold a festival in 2021 but to hold it in February 2022. We believe that by that time almost everyone will have been vaccinated. We believe that will also give some time for there to be greater confidence in the community about bigger festivals.

Going to your point about the Enlighten Festival, Enlighten is the very first festival that we have been able to hold in the ACT since the pandemic. As you have seen, we have been delighted with the response to it; but the way we are doing it has been very different. While many of the events are free, including tonight's Lights! Canberra! Action!, Symphony in the Park on Sunday and the Balloon Spectacular, these have been ticketed events. Even with that, the footprint of Enlighten is much larger.

**MRS JONES:** Huge.

**Ms Cheyne:** It is much larger. One of the things that I will point to is that Lights!

Canberra! Action! is usually held in the Senate rose gardens, but to avoid going over the limits that the Chief Health Officer has given us in the parliamentary triangle, this year it will instead be held at Stage 88. We are lucky that people are used to Enlighten having that bigger footprint, but I hope that points to how it is quite different.

Members of the committee would appreciate that the National Multicultural Festival is something quite special and quite different. One of the beautiful things about the National Multicultural Festival is its density—that you can take a few steps and experience another culture, then take a few steps more and there is another one, and so on. That is what we are really not trying to lose here with this festival. Particularly given that the next festival that we hold will be the 25th, we want to make that very special. Given all of the events over the summer, it just did not seem that we would be able to give it what it deserved.

**THE CHAIR:** When will planning and work start for the 2022 festival?

**Ms Cheyne:** It is pretty much underway. It necessarily has to be. We want the 25th anniversary to be better than ever. The Multicultural Festival is fantastic, but we want to make sure that this will be something that is very special and that it has the same spirit that everyone has come to know and love. Work has started. Mrs Summerrell might have something to add.

**Mrs Summerrell:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. As the minister pointed out, yes, planning is underway. It is a very large event that logistically takes quite a while to plan. Yes, we are very much underway.

**MRS JONES:** With the funding allocation that we had for this year's festival that will not be spent—essentially, the part that is not for staffing—I know that it is a fundraising event, but is the money that was allocated being rolled over or is there any chance of that funding actually being given to the groups who would have made money through the festival? The biggest issue that I am hearing about is that fundraising capacity. One of the reasons that the festival started in the first place was to give people that stage to make money for language schools, services in the home and English courses that individual groups are running with each other—that type of really important social cohesion stuff.

**Ms Cheyne:** I certainly take your point, Mrs Jones. The decision has not yet been made. The festival next year, I think, would benefit from more funding, and that perhaps could be coming from this year's funding pool adding to next year's funding pool, to make sure that those usual community groups, and particularly the very small ones who really benefit from how the festival works and runs, are able to participate in that way—those groups who might not normally be able to fundraise otherwise.

**MRS JONES:** Can I suggest that you consider a pool of the funds that you are hoping to roll over being grants given to groups who have previously been at the festival? I am not asking for a decision now; I am asking for you to consider that. It is already late in the year to try and make up that money; they were waiting for the end of the year and hoping to be able to make it. That would probably go a long way to helping some of the smaller groups to survive.

In the planning for the next one, can I ask that some consideration be given to making sure that the commercial side of it is not necessarily the biggest side—because over the years that has become a bit of a balancing act—and that the community fundraising side be given prominence in the planning for it?

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** Related to Mrs Jones's last point, as a contingency, in case next year's is cancelled, and we do trust that it is not—

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain!

**MR CAIN:** Well, it is the world we are in—and hopefully not.

**Ms Cheyne:** Are you not confident about the vaccine rollout?

**MRS JONES:** I think he asks the questions.

**MR CAIN:** It is the world we are in. I am asking the question; thank you. Do you have some contingency plans just in case there is an unfortunate occurrence next year?

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not want to say this was a benefit, because this was such a reluctant decision, but by announcing it now for February, giving us that year's lead time does allow us in our planning to build in contingencies—and not just one. I think what I would be expecting to see in the planning is a range of different things, depending on what the rollout looks like and things like that. Because it is a year away and because we know that a good amount of people will have been vaccinated by midyear, that will also give us the best sense about what February will look like.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, I note that you met twice with the Multicultural Advisory Council to discuss the impacts of COVID, including racism and the translation of information. I am curious as to what concerns were brought up by the council in these two meetings.

**Ms Cheyne:** I think I have had one meeting with the advisory council and one meeting with the chair of the council, but I can double-check that. We discussed a wide range of things, because that was my introductory meeting with the council. I cannot recall if there were any particular concerns raised about racism. I think we spoke about the general feeling in the community and whether, particularly in light of the past year, anything has come to light that might be different or involving people behaving differently.

In terms of translation of material, that is something on which there has been engagement over quite a period of time, simply to make sure that the material, especially regarding COVID, is easily understood. We have engaged with SBS on that, because SBS has very high quality translation resources.

**MR DAVIS:** I ask the racism question in the context of the Lowy Institute's survey, which found, of course, that one of the more sinister impacts of the pandemic socially

has been the increased instances of racism against Asian Australians. I was wondering whether the office had heard that that has been a particular issue in the last 12 to 18 months in our community and, if so, whether we had a plan to address it specifically.

**Ms Cheyne:** We have been advocating, I believe, for a national anti-racism strategy, which we would like to see led by the commonwealth; but there is work that we might be able to do in the ACT as well.

With respect to the previous minister, Minister Steel, I do recall that near the start of the pandemic there was a mini-campaign, simply reminding people that we are all Canberrans and we are all in it together. I think that came about based on some feedback that we had in the community about how people were treating one another. It is my intention to have a chat with the Human Rights Commission in my next catch-up with them, just to get an understanding from them about whether they have had any increase in reports in that area as well.

**MR DAVIS:** Have we had any conversations with the ANU in particular? I am cognisant of areas of our community where there is a high density of Asian Australians or people from Asian backgrounds. If you have had any feedback from the ANU, has this been an issue on campus or amongst their community in the last 12 months?

**Ms Cheyne:** I have not had a direct conversation with the ANU. Is there any advice from the campus?

**Mrs Summerrell:** We do work closely with a range of members of the community. I am aware that there were some issues in the ANU towards the beginning of the pandemic. Through CSD and JACS, we did work with them. I cannot recall the exact details, but with respect to how we support international students more broadly, we have certainly had multiple conversations with the universities around what campuses are looking like for them, what support we can provide, how the general feel is, and what we can do in support. Yes, we are very much aware of those issues. As the minister said, a national anti-racism strategy is certainly at the forefront of our minds.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, my question relates to the commitment to spend \$21 million on a new 10,000 square metre venue at EPIC.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, this is a matter for Major Projects Canberra. Depending on your question, it may be better to direct your question there.

**MR CAIN:** It probably is more about—

**MRS JONES:** Maybe I can ask a supplementary, then?

**THE CHAIR:** Why don't we hear what the question is before we all jump to conclusions? Minister Cheyne can then let us know if it is in her portfolio.

**MR CAIN:** My understanding is that it will have a commercial community kitchen, allowing for self-catered events. My interest is in confirming what facilities will be

available in the new centre and when the project will be delivered.

**Ms Cheyne:** That does fall with Major Projects Canberra. We can say that while they will be taking the lead on that, of course, the Office for Multicultural Affairs will be engaging with them.

**MRS JONES:** As the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, do you know if this project is going to have self-catering facilities?

**Ms Cheyne:** I would have to review the commitment, but I believe that is the intention.

**MRS JONES:** Can you take that on notice? It is quite important.

**Ms Cheyne:** I can, I think.

**MRS JONES:** Thank you. We are not asking about time lines of the planning process for it, which is the internal work at Major Projects, but presumably you do know basically what is being delivered?

**Ms Cheyne:** I have not yet had a sit-down briefing with Major Projects Canberra about it. I look forward to that, when that planning work has taken place on it. There was triparty agreement for this facility. I think all parties announced an election commitment for it.

**MRS JONES:** They were slightly different facilities, but that is really not the question. The question is about what is going to be in it and when is it going to be there. I am not asking for detailed project management answers, but, as the minister, I would think you would know basically what is being delivered and in what general time frame. Can you give us any indications?

**Ms Cheyne:** Not at this stage.

**MR CAIN:** I have a supplementary, Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** There are a lot of supplementaries on a question that the minister cannot answer. Take it away, Mr Cain.

**MRS JONES:** It is actually very important to the multicultural community, as a matter of fact.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mrs Jones, if I may—

**MR CAIN:** Sorry, but I have—

**Ms Cheyne:** Mrs Jones, if I may, this is not—

**THE CHAIR:** We will let the minister speak.

**Ms Cheyne:** This is not a reflection that it is not an important project. It is a really

important project. This is a really big project, and we do want to make sure that it meets the needs of the multicultural community.

**MRS JONES:** Absolutely, and you have now been the minister for however long, but you have not yet had a briefing on what is being done on it. If you want to have a conversation about that, we can.

**Ms Cheyne:** Election commitments are delivered over a four-year time frame.

**MRS JONES:** Absolutely, but for how long have you been Minister for Multicultural Affairs?

**Ms Cheyne:** I have been the minister for four months.

**MRS JONES:** Four months, and you have not yet had a briefing on the single biggest project in multicultural affairs?

**Ms Cheyne:** One of the biggest projects in multicultural affairs would be the multicultural recognition act, actually.

**MRS JONES:** So the people on the ground who are saying to me, and have been saying for a number of years, “Gosh, we need a facility that’s big enough to have our actual get-togethers in,” are not as high a priority for you as changing the law on the multicultural recognition act?

**Ms Cheyne:** They are both high priorities, but there is one—

**MRS JONES:** Yes, but I am surprised that there has not been a briefing in four months on this thing that has been asked for in the community for years.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Jones, this is turning into a back and forth as opposed to questions. Do you have a supplementary, Mr Cain?

**MR CAIN:** I do have a supplementary. In terms of imagining a completed project, how will you arrange for the various competing opportunities for that facility? Given its location near the farmers market, trade shows, business events, Summernats and the Folk Festival, what priority will be given to the multicultural community for that facility?

**Ms Cheyne:** I am not sure that I understand the question, Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** What priority will be given to the multicultural community?

**Ms Cheyne:** It will be a facility for the multicultural community, so how would it be competing with what is around it?

**MR CAIN:** In the context of competing needs.

**Ms Cheyne:** How would it be competing with what is around it? I am not sure that I understand.

**MR CAIN:** Are other groups able to use and access this facility? If there are bids for its use at a particular time, for example, is there prioritising as to who will receive the benefit of it?

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not think that a decision has been made.

**MR CAIN:** You have not made a decision about—

**MRS JONES:** No idea.

**MR CAIN:** a multicultural facility and who has priority for the opportunity to use that?

**Ms Cheyne:** I think it is obvious who would have priority to use it.

**MRS JONES:** Is it?

**MR CAIN:** Is it obvious? That is what I am asking.

**MRS JONES:** How will it be guaranteed, for example?

**Ms Cheyne:** These are questions that we will work through. I think you are directing them to the wrong minister.

**MRS JONES:** You are the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

**Ms Cheyne:** I am the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

**MRS JONES:** This is the biggest promise from the election campaign in multicultural affairs.

**Ms Cheyne:** Pardon?

**MRS JONES:** This was the biggest promise in the campaign for multicultural affairs, and you cannot say how you are going to prioritise the use of the centre for multicultural groups over other groups that may—

**Ms Cheyne:** This is something on which we will work with Major Projects Canberra.

**MRS JONES:** I think this whole situation is astounding—absolutely astounding.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mrs Jones, if you would like to talk to me about it further, I am happy to do so.

**MRS JONES:** No doubt there will need to be—

**THE CHAIR:** I feel that we have reached a conclusion on that.

**MRS JONES:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Jones, do you have a substantive question?

**MRS JONES:** Yes. Regarding strategic indicator 4, the proportion of Canberrans who agree that Canberra as a community accepts people from different cultures, there was a deficit recorded of 10 per cent, not achieving our target of above 90. By your own standards, what exactly are you doing to reverse this decline?

**Ms Cheyne:** By my own standards?

**MRS JONES:** Yes. These are the standards from strategic indicator 4—your departmental standards. What are you doing in your work to reverse this decline?

**Ms Cheyne:** This is a good opportunity to talk about the multicultural recognition act. I appreciate that there might be different views on it, but this is something that is a priority for me. The multicultural recognition act will do a range of things, including raising the prominence of our multicultural communities. There will be a multicultural charter through which we will be looking for directorates to engage, and the broader community. It will also legislate for the ministerial advisory council. The work on that has started. Having that conversation with the community will be a really important piece of work, and I hope it will provide some greater prominence, generally, regarding this indicator and the context of it. Something that I have said consistently about the multicultural recognition act is that this is not just something that I see as being owned by multicultural communities; it is something that the entire community needs to own and be proud of.

**MRS JONES:** What precisely is it that this act actually intends to change or resolve?

**Ms Cheyne:** The key thing that it will do is raise the prominence of multicultural communities and how important it is for us to be an inclusive and diverse society.

**MRS JONES:** Do you think that the multicultural communities of Canberra currently do not have enough prominence?

**Ms Cheyne:** I think they have a good deal of prominence but we can always do more.

**MRS JONES:** How will the act raise their prominence? Because it is part of a conversation or because there is actual action that will take place that will change their prominence or—

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, exactly. I think that the starting point of the act will be the consultation on the act, and that necessarily brings with it extra prominence. Then there is what the act could potentially achieve, particularly in terms of what we might look for the multicultural charter to contain, and whether there might be further obligations on directorates. It remains to be seen, once we have completed that consultation, but I think that could go a long way. There might be further work going on in the directorate about improving this figure.

**Mrs Summerrell:** Yes. There are a number of other pieces of work that are happening in relation to this. The Welcoming Cities framework is another really



important piece of work that we are involved in and signed up to. That goes to making sure that there is a whole community approach to this. The work of the ministerial advisory council is really key in understanding and making sure we are connected with how the multicultural community is feeling and whether what we are doing is having a productive response for them as well. That is a really great way for us to check these things.

**MRS JONES:** In previous governments—let us look at some years ago—when new communities were being established in Canberra, because of our management of poker machines and things way back in the day, there was this capacity for the emerging communities to build clubs. There are two things that I hear about in the community that people have a desire for. Whether you hear it on the ministerial advisory council I do not know, because I am not there. I refer to facilities in which they can teach language to the next generation and facilities in which to get together. So it is not just about the big facility that has been promised; it is about having other get-togethers—and, as well, places of religious worship.

We know, for example, that it has taken well over a decade to get the facility started in Gungahlin for which Mr Krishna Nadimpalli has been lobbying for their religious group. Do you have a plan, as part of this conversation, discussion, change or profile raising, to address physical buildings for different multicultural groups to get together in, the ability for them to pass culture on to their children, and religious buildings? My experience of this government, ever since I have been here, which is more than eight years, is that it is very slow, and there is not as much desperation to see people have their own places. As the minister, do you have an actual intention, or would you be interested in an intention, to see that change and improve?

**Ms Cheyne:** I think this is something that is a challenge that we are aware of.

**MRS JONES:** I think one of the challenges has been documents sitting in cabinet for six months or more to approve land when there have been applications for it.

**Ms Cheyne:** Okay. I cannot speak regarding cabinet or—

**MRS JONES:** Yes, I know. It was before your time.

**Ms Cheyne:** about things that were, indeed, before my time. I do appreciate that particularly something that we have been discussing is community language schools and being able to find consistent places for that important work to take place.

**MRS JONES:** If you are a Greek or an Italian, they had their clubs, especially for the first couple of generations. That sort of thing is not happening for the new and emerging groups. I am interested to hear whether you have thought about that and what we can do to address the deficit. It seems unfair at heart that the original groups were given this opportunity and there was basically a system set up to help them to achieve a club, a building and a place to go and be. That is aside from the massive events. We are just talking about Saturday morning get-togethers and the—

**Ms Cheyne:** It is something that we are aware of and, where there are opportunities to raise this, we will do so.

**THE CHAIR:** I thank the minister and officials. The committee will now suspend for lunch.

**Hearing suspended from 12.19 to 1.20 pm.**

Appearances:

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs,  
Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health

Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Director-General

Charles, Ms Lisa, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Policy, Office for  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon, everybody. I ask that you acknowledge the privilege statement.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I acknowledge the privilege statement.

**Ms Wood:** I acknowledge the privilege statement.

**Ms Charles:** I acknowledge the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** The government has committed \$20 million over 10 years to a new healing and reconciliation fund. There is a budget line of \$175,000 in 2021-22 towards this commitment. What is this fund designed to do and where will this money be directed?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** This is a really significant commitment and it is designed to work in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, with a focus on self-determination to address some of the priorities that have been identified by the community. The funding committed in this budget is to work towards a governance model and a model of management of the \$20 million fund over 10 years.

There is also some funding committed in this budget as a first tranche of funding for a treaty process, to get that underway, essentially to appoint a facilitator to start a conversation with and by the traditional custodian community, the Ngunnawal people, on what treaty will mean to them and if and how they would want to progress a treaty process.

We know from other jurisdictions that treaty is a long and complicated process and can mean different things to different people, particularly at the start. For us as a small jurisdiction with one identified traditional owner group but with potential differences of view within that traditional owner group about how things should progress, that is going to be different conversation than it is in other jurisdictions where there are multiple traditional custodian groups who may in some ways have more established structures but then a different form of negotiation and conversation needs to occur. For example, Victoria has moved to an assembly model. We probably would not need something like that because we only have the one traditional custodian group in the small geographic area we are dealing with.

**Ms Charles:** We have started the recruitment process to get on board some more resources to start working through the administration of that fund and then having

initial conversations with the chair of the Elected Body about the approach to governance.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is \$20 million over 10 years. I know budget papers only go out so many years. Do you have any thoughts as to the time line of that cashflow?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** We did some costings for the election process. Our expectation is that the funding will be provisioned over that period of time, then there will be a process—that is part of the governance work being done—to determine when that moves from being provisioned to being committed and spent.

Some of the things we will look at through the governance and management administration process are: do we just want some provision funding in the ACT budget that we determine how to spend over a period of time through an Aboriginal-led governance process or do we want to set up a structure that will facilitate and enable more philanthropic support to partner with the government funding that will be in the healing and reconciliation fund and how we would set up such a process. Those are the kinds of issues we will be working through.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, you mentioned the funding you actually brought forward into the election. The Chief Minister requested the Treasury cost for this commitment and he listed the implementation date of the proposal as 1 July 2020. It also shows the funding as: 2021-22, \$1 million; 2022-23, \$1.5 million; and 2023-24, \$3 million.

That is a huge difference to what the annual report is saying. This is the original plan for funding you committed before the election. Why did you make such a huge commitment of \$1 million then \$1.5 million and then \$3 million but, in effect, you are underdelivering what you proposed before the election?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I do not have the Treasury costings in front me, but I think I understood you to say that the \$1 million for the first year was in 2021-22?

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is correct.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** That is the next budget year. So you can expect that the next budget will be the budget where we do some further provisioning of funds for the healing and reconciliation fund. In some ways, the funding we brought forward for treaty is bringing funding forward into the 2020-21 year.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Can you explain what the \$317,000 in the budget outlook will go towards? How much of that funding will be going towards the treaty process?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I do not have the commitment in front of me, but Ms Charles will be able to break that down for you. It is being used in the way we were just discussing.

**Ms Charles:** In 2020-21, \$144,000 is for a SOGC position to establish the governance. In 2021-22, \$173,000 is to go towards the facilitator to undertake those conversations.

**MRS KIKKERT:** You mentioned that the conversations will be with the Elected

Body. Will any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations also be consulted?

**Ms Charles:** In terms of the governance, yes. We always start with the Elected Body, as the representative body of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. From that discussion about an approach on how we go out to the community, we then open it up to everybody.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So will Winnunga and Gugan Gulwan be involved in this process? Will you give them an invitation?

**Ms Charles:** Absolutely, yes. They are important and significant Aboriginal community-controlled organisations within the ACT and have a very important role in terms of the future direction of Aboriginal affairs.

**MR DAVIS:** Could you provide more detail on the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Co-Design Network that is mentioned on page 75 of the annual report?

**Ms Wood:** The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Co-Design Network emerged from some work that CSD was doing with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It included the conversation about the adoptions policy, and a range of stakeholders came together to have that conversation. A range of people then expressed interest in having an ongoing mechanism to work with the directorate and government around matters largely around the child protection response but the support for children and families more generally.

The group of people that have come together to form that network are people with lived experience of the system. They are not an elected representative group like the Elected Body. They are not a group of traditional owners, but it can involve people who are traditional owners. It is a group of people who have lived experience through the child protection system and other parts of the service system.

They are offering, in a range of issues the directorate deals with, their experience of what that is like for children and families and young people. We work with that group to test some of our operational policies about how they would work and how we communicate. It is just making sure that we have the voice of people who may be directly impacted by the system in some of the design work we are doing. It has been a really positive way to engage and they have really appreciated the opportunity to have that kind of influence. It is not always influence on big picture issues; it is influence on how we deliver services.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** We have had this project underway for some time that we called Early Support—Changing Systems Changing Lives and that has been one of the early, really good outcomes from that. That project is around how we provide support earlier for vulnerable families before they reach crisis. This was identified as really needing to hear the voices of those families who are not accessing the service and why they are not doing that.

The directorate worked with an Aboriginal consultant who had really strong links into

the community and a high level of community trust to identify those vulnerable families who had not been accessing services and get to the root of why that had not been happening, so that we could address those issues. It has been a really amazing piece of work and it has now built some trust with that group to be an ongoing relationship with that network, rather than just a once-off consultation.

**MR DAVIS:** How regularly does the network meet?

**Ms Wood:** The network has been impacted by COVID but was generally meeting fortnightly or sometimes monthly. It will depend on the issues that the network wants to look at but also the pieces of work the directorate is progressing that would benefit from that input. Whether that is still the right schedule is something we will talk to the network about, post the shutdown end of COVID, when there might be some more capacity for them to come together.

**MR DAVIS:** How many people are currently on the network?

**Ms Wood:** That is an excellent question and I do not think I have the answer in front of me. I will take that on notice.

**MR DAVIS:** Does the network receive any specific funding?

**Ms Wood:** The members of the network are remunerated under our participation policy. It is similar to the arrangements we have for remunerating other people of expertise we have on government boards and committees.

**MR DAVIS:** In terms of membership of this group, are they people identified by the department as thinking their contribution will be useful or do they self-identify? Do you have more people wanting to be on the group than you can accommodate?

**Ms Wood:** They emerged through, as the minister said, the early support work coming out of this community. They self-identified that they wanted to have an ongoing contribution. The group have been together and doing work together now for 18 months, so it becomes a trusted space for them and they of know and trust each other. But the conversation we are having, which the network itself has identified we need to have, is how we continue to bring other people into that conversation. That is the active conversation at the moment.

**MR DAVIS:** Does the network have any decision-making authority or are they purely an advisory group?

**Ms Wood:** Purely advisory.

**MRS KIKKERT:** The topics the network discuss, are they purely by their own intuition or are they given to them by CSD?

**Ms Wood:** It is a mix of issues that the network have identified that they would like to consider and provide advice on, and then where the directorate is doing work where we might be looking to improve in a particular area, we might take that topic to them.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Can the minister provide the network's evaluation of family group conferences for Child and Youth Protection Services?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I do not know that the network would have done a formal evaluation. They might have been involved in the evaluation, but it is not the kind of group that would have undertaken a formal evaluation of a particular program.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So their evaluation of and advice on things is informal?

**Ms Wood:** It is their feedback, based on their experience and their connections in the community. So they provide advice which is based on their lived experience, but they are not the people that would undertake the formal evaluation. Their contribution would be important to evaluating that kind of model, but they would not solely undertake an evaluation.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** If we are undertaking an evaluation of family group conferencing, some of the primary people we would be engaging in that process would be the families and children and young people who have been through that process themselves.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What is the age bracket with the network that you currently have?

**Ms Wood:** We have a diverse mix of people. I do not have the specifics with me, but it is diverse.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How were they selected?

**Ms Wood:** As the minister mentioned, they came out of engagement we did with the community on the early support work to look at how we shifted the responses we have with children and families to provide earlier support rather than support in a crisis. It was people that came together to contribute to that work who identified that they would like to continue to contribute and had the capacity to continue to contribute. It was identification from those individuals that they wanted to continue to play that kind of role. That is how they joined in the first place, and that has continued over 18 months.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Are you aware of whether there is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander member in this network?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** It is a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

**Ms Wood:** They are all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you have a young person?

**Ms Wood:** I understand there is quite a diverse age range, but we can take that on notice.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It would be really good to get their feedback as well.

**Ms Wood:** Yes.

**MR CAIN:** Budget statements G lists as a priority the delivery of family group conferencing and support to Gugan Gulwan and OzChild to deliver functional family therapy. Please correct me on anything I might be saying that is not right. How long is the government's current funding commitment for each?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** The funding is ongoing for both family group conferencing and functional family therapy child welfare.

**MR CAIN:** Is there a time frame on that?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** It is ongoing.

**MR CAIN:** How much is being spent by the ACT government on family group conferencing this year and across the forward estimates?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** In terms of the budget papers, it is probably folded into other programs now. We could look back at the budget papers in previous years, when it was originally funded, and find the funding that was allocated to this financial year. That would be the funding that is allocated to this financial year, and then there is a possibility, of course, that we would use some additional funding out of Child and Youth Protection Services.

**MR CAIN:** So it is not separately identified?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** It is not less than what it would have been in the budget papers when it was announced.

**MR CAIN:** So it is not going to be separately identified, going forward?

**Ms Wood:** It is a separate function in terms of the way we plan it and the way we deliver it within the directorate. It is a dedicated function where we have a dedicated amount that covers the staffing and other costs for functional family therapy. As the minister said, when it was originally funded it would have been a specific amount in the budget papers. I am not sure if it is reported separately as a line item, but we will take that on notice and give you the specifics.

**MR CAIN:** And a similar question regarding the functional therapy child welfare project: how much is being spent this year and across the forward estimates, or has that also been wrapped up into another pool?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** No, that would not be because it is funding external organisations—Gugan Gulwan and OzChild—to deliver that service. We would be able to tell you exactly what funding is being spent on that. We may not be able to do it at this moment, but we will definitely be able to do that. If we cannot find that, we will take it on notice.

**MR CAIN:** The annual report notes that family group conferencing has diverted



53 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from statutory care and that functional family therapy has diverted another 82. In light of these successes, are the programs expanding their reach, going forwards, and, if not, why not?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I think there was some funding to expand family group conferencing as part of the response to Our Booris, Our Way in this budget. There was a commitment of almost \$4.9 million to the response to Our Booris, Our Way and that has a slight expansion of family group conferencing incorporated within that funding.

We are also undertaking a trial of functional family therapy youth justice as part of our response to work to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Within the work that ACT Together does—so within the contract with our out of home care provider, the ACT Together consortium—OzChild is expanding the availability of functional family therapy child welfare, specifically focusing on the restoration of children to their birth families after they have been removed.

The previous focus has been on early support to prevent the removal of children from their families and to intervene and support the family to keep their children at home. The focus of the OzChild functional family therapy program, through ACT Together, is on restoration. That also has a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, though it is not entirely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Not entirely? So it is for everyone?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Yes, it is part of our ACT Together offering, but it will have a focus on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families within that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How much is OzChild currently receiving or will it receive to deliver that expansion of service?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** That is within the ACT Together existing contract. OzChild is a member of the ACT Together consortium. That is an internal matter for Barnardos and OzChild to work together on, in terms of what proportion of the funding we provide to ACT Together will go to that service response.

Part of the reason we established the program through A Step Up for Our Kids, with ACT Together and a consortium of providers and a flat fee for children and young people in out of home care, was to enable some more innovation in the service system so that they could choose to put the funding into the things they thought would better support the case management of their families.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Are you confident that they have enough funding to deliver that service in the next year or so, when they are implementing it? If not, are they open to having discussions with you to increase the funding they need to deliver the service you want them to?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** We have just gone through a really significant renegotiation of the contract with Barnardos in relation to ACT Together. You will be aware that the ACT Together contract has been extended to the end of June 2022. There was a lot of

conversation with them about the funding requirement for the extended contract. They have come to an agreement that the funding under that extension is sufficient for them to provide the services they have committed to.

**MRS KIKKERT:** The government has committed to delivering a \$10 million purpose-built facility for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, but this budget includes only \$425,000 across two years for a concept design. I understand that seven years ago the government agreed to a motion moved by Andrew Wall to explore how to provide Gugan Gulwan with the additional space it desperately needed then, but it is still in the same cramped facility. When will the construction of Gugan Gulwan's new facility begin and end?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** The purpose of the \$425,00 that has been committed in this budget is to get this process through to the point of development application. That is obviously work that needs to happen before we then can commit construction funding. But it is an election commitment; we will deliver a new building for Gugan Gulwan.

This is a standard budget process where we first fund the design and development to get it right, through to the point where we can be very clear about the capital cost of the project and then we commit the capital funding.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So you are currently doing the development application?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** This funding will work to the point where the design is well enough developed to submit a development application and to go through that development application process.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Have you sent out an expression of interest for people to apply to do the design, or has that all been done? Have you got a contractor already doing the design work?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Yes.

**Ms Charles:** We have undertaken a tender process to select the appropriate architects and things. The assessment is concluded and the report is now with the delegate for final sign-off.

**MRS KIKKERT:** To decide who the contractor will be?

**Ms Charles:** The normal process is that you go out to tender, people put their tenders in and we assess them. That needs to go through all the clearance processes before we can award the contract.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What is the clearing process? I am interested.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** It is a standard tender process to identify an architect.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So that is where we are at the moment?

**Ms Charles:** Yes. That assessment has concluded and a contract will be coming

shortly, once it has been signed off by the relevant delegates.

**MRS KIKKERT:** When do you think that will happen?

**Ms Charles:** I would anticipate next week.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you have a deadline for them to finish the design for the facility?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I think it is really important to recognise that this is detailed design development. There has already been quite a lot of work with Gugan Gulwan, through a process to identify whether a redevelopment on their own site or an alternative site was going to be a more appropriate process.

Through looking at the options for their own site, a basic piece of design development work has been done. This is a more detailed design development we are talking about at this stage, just for clarity in terms of the process. We are expecting to be able to submit a development application in the second half of this year and to be in a position to know what the capital costs are likely to be in time for the next budget.

**MRS KIKKERT:** You mentioned, Minister, that you had discussions with Gugan Gulwan about the design of this facility?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Yes, the directorate has been working with Gugan Gulwan for a couple of years to develop, initially, their options for consideration, and that includes what a new build would look like on their site, how much space they would need, what activities they would want to do there, how the indoor and outdoor spaces would work, and the consideration of the site constraints.

There are some constraints on the site in relation to easements for utilities and that kind of thing that we would need to take into consideration in any redevelopment of the site. All those constraints on the existing site have been explored—the zoning for the site, what the constraints would be in terms of height and use and that kind of thing to make sure that we are all okay to redevelop on that site within the existing zoning for that site.

We have been working with Gugan to understand how much space they need for offices, counselling spaces, community spaces and any other activities they need to undertake on the site. All of that work has already been done and we are now in the detailed design development stage.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Will Gugan Gulwan continue to have a say in that detailed design process?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Yes, and the budget update provided funding for Gugan Gulwan to have a staff member to be the project officer to work with the directorate on this project. They have specific funding for them to employ someone to work with the directorate on this project.

**Ms Wood:** Chair, I have the funding amounts requested in an earlier question. For

this financial year 2020-21, \$1,030,000 is committed to functional family therapy.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister Stephen-Smith, for being here, and the officials as well.

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

Davidson, Ms Emma, Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services,  
Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health

Community Services Directorate

Charles, Ms Amanda, Senior Manager, Office for Disability

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

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

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome back, everybody. Thank you, Minister Davidson, for joining us. Minister, I was hoping to get an update on the companion card scheme. How are we going with affiliates?

**Ms Davidson:** I will pass to Jo to talk some more about that.

**Ms Wood:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. Minister, I am going to ask Ms Murray to answer that one.

**Ms Murray:** Excellent. I was going to ask Mrs Summerrell to answer that question. I apologise; I thought you might want a very sharp, short answer rather than a Christine Murray wander through the—

**THE CHAIR:** I will take whatever you want to give me.

**Mrs Summerrell:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. Can I just clarify? Do you mean the companion card in the disability space or for seniors?

**THE CHAIR:** In the disability space.

**Ms Murray:** I am so sorry; I thought it was the companion card in the seniors' space.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Just for everyone's clarity, my plan was that we will deal with seniors and veterans in the back half of this session.

**Mrs Summerrell:** I will remove myself.

**Ms Murray:** Okay. Could I ask for the question again, and I will settle myself and then respond, if that is okay, Mr Pettersson.

**THE CHAIR:** How are we going with the implementation of the companion card program? How many affiliates have we got?

**Ms Murray:** We have 88 affiliates and we are just working through some of that now. We are looking forward to continuing this work, but we are really excited about the 88 affiliates.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. The footnotes in the budget say there were some problems with COVID-19 in the ability to sign up. Can you expand on what they were?

**Ms Murray:** Part of the difficulty has always been in the COVID-19 space, actually. This work is often best done face to face and with a relationship approach. Our capacity to do that has been impacted in the COVID-19 space. I think 88 is a really good start in that space, but it is very difficult when it is impacted by the limited participation in what we were able to do, through the social restrictions that we had.

**THE CHAIR:** So how grand are the ambitions here? If we have 88 at the moment, are we talking about a couple of hundred more affiliates or are we talking potentially in the thousands of people being affiliated across the ACT?

**Ms Murray:** If we look at how the seniors card has grown over time, I think it is another opportunity for us to continue to invest and to grow the program over time. I think five more each year is probably what we are working on, and just to continue to grow, year on year.

**THE CHAIR:** Wonderful.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, the government had its Connect and Participate Expo, if I am not mistaken, in late 2019. I was wondering if you could update the committee on how the review process of the expo is going. Have you got any key findings or takeaways so far?

**Ms Davidson:** Yes; I will pass that back to Christine.

**Ms Murray:** Thank you so much for the question. Last time the Connect and Participate Expo ran, some of the feedback was that it was of limited benefit to the sector that it was initially designed for, and that it had grown in a slightly different direction. So it was important for us to stop, have a look at it, pause, and see what we should do. The expo, in itself, is not necessarily what the sector has been asking us to achieve—that connection and participation. We have had some conversations with the sector about whether an expo is the way to do it or if there is another model that we should be looking at.

So pre COVID we were doing a lot of design work—internally and with some critical partners—on what that would look like in terms of the better usage of the small bucket of money that we have for this, to ensure that we are supporting that greater connection and participation for people in the community. We work with places like Lighthouse Business Solutions, who have been assisting us in that space. We are hopeful, now that we are returning to that new normal, that we will be able to restart that engagement on what the participation and connection program might look like. It might not look like an expo, a one-off.

**MR DAVIS:** Maybe it is a better normal, Ms Murray.

**Ms Murray:** Is that a thing? I am hoping it is a better normal.

**MR DAVIS:** No, it is not a thing. Can I dive into that a little bit more? In terms of the feedback you got about, I guess, lack of connection, was it the peer-to-peer connection that people felt was lacking? Was it the fact that there were not the

link-ups between the organisations to share information in a way that they wanted? Who was it who wanted to connect more with them?

**Ms Murray:** The expo, by its very nature, is like a normal expo. You have stalls and you walk around. You participate by wondering around and looking at different offerings that people might have. If I can reflect, it strikes me as a relatively normal approach for people who have no accessibility issues and no issues in terms of transport et cetera, to go to a place and actually connect that way. We have, in the ACT—from a service user, to someone who participates at this level in the conversations—some amazing organisations within the ACT community who work actively every day on supporting that social inclusion and supporting that connection.

The work that they do every single day, day in and day out, is really important work that we need to centre on. Maybe we can look at it a different way, rather than running a one-off expo. What we know is that people do look for services, but they do not look for services in the traditional way. People are moving further and further away from those traditional types of approaches to connecting the services, post COVID. So when you say “new normal” or “better normal”, I think that there are some real opportunities for us to think a bit differently and to really bring people to the table who actually do amazing work every day in our community in this space. I hope that answers the question.

**MR DAVIS:** It absolutely does. Thank you, very much.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, I want to ask about the Taxi Subsidy Scheme. I wonder whether there are any proposals to include Uber and other ride-share alternatives.

**Ms Davidson:** Yes. I will pass to Christine again to talk about the Taxi Subsidy Scheme, but I am very aware that we do have some real accessibility issues with transport in this city and making sure that everyone can get around safely. There is a lot of work to be done in a lot of different areas—not just in ride-share and taxis, but also in making sure that public transport is accessible and that our footpaths and pathways are also accessible and safe for people.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you.

**Ms Murray:** I almost went straight into the universal design conversation; it is something that we are very passionate about. Accessibility is a critical thing. My friends at the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate are probably in a better position to answer specific questions around the Taxi Subsidy Scheme; however, we do continue to advocate very strongly for accessibility for people with a disability. It is not on the agenda, from an Office for Disability perspective, to be advocating for that to transition.

**MR CAIN:** But should it be?

**Ms Murray:** I am certainly happy to take on board any input and put that on the table.

**Ms Davidson:** In terms of looking at what we do in the future, I would be very interested to have the conversation with you, but it is really important, when we are

looking at transport options for people with disability in our city, that we also think about how we support the community transport sector within Canberra, which is largely run by community sector organisations, and also to think about how we make sure that forms of transport like light rail and buses are accessible to everyone.

It might be a situation where someone who is used to using public transport in our city has an accident and suddenly finds that they need to be able to get around using transport forms that they are already comfortable with and know well. They need to make sure that that is accessible to them. So having something like an access committee that can provide advice and input into urban planning and transport at a really early stage in planning would really go a long way to help with that.

**MR CAIN:** And obviously guide dogs would be another scenario that would demand to be on your agenda for improvements in greater accessibility.

**Ms Davidson:** Thank you. Yes. I will take that on.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you, Chair.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I would like to talk a little bit about the Integrated Service Response Program. How much were they funded in 2018-19?

**Ms Davidson:** I will pass to Jo to talk in more detail about the funding amount. It is a really important program that we have. The ISRP is operating in Canberra to support people who might otherwise not be able to have all their needs supported through things like the NDIS.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes.

**Ms Wood:** Thank you, Minister. Mrs Kikkert, we will have to take on notice—and we may be able to even get it in this session—what the funding was in 2018-19.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thanks.

**Ms Wood:** There was, as you know, a commitment in the 2021 budget. That was \$180,000 additional in this year's budget.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Okay. In 2019-20, \$180,000, did you say?

**Ms Wood:** No, in 2020-21, \$180,000. In 2021-22, \$437,000.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Can I ask specifically what the \$180,000 will fund?

**Ms Davidson:** I will ask Ms Murray to explain how the program works and what the resources are.

**Ms Murray:** Mrs Kikkert, we have a very small team of people who provide those case services. There is a staffing component within that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Two positions, I understand?



**Ms Murray:** Yes. We find that there are peaks and troughs in this space, so whilst we fully utilise the two positions in this space, often a senior director will be pulled in. We make sure that the resources are going to the people who need them, so we maintain that flexibility.

There are a breadth of things that we provide. That could be emergency respite, therapeutic services, tenancy management, disability supports for people not eligible for NDIS due to residency issues, and also board and lodging for younger people who cannot live in their family home due to disability. That is part of the emergency funding pool that we provide.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I am just reading the submission from NDS and they said that in the budget in 2019-20 there was “a significant reduction in the allocation of emergency funding for the provision of services where no other supports are available for a person with disability in crisis, albeit with unfunded commitments that additional funding would be made available to ensure that people’s eligible emergency needs will be met”. They are concerned about the ongoing capacity of the ISRP to meet the potential increase in demand for supports over the coming years. Is the \$180,000 in funding over 2020-21 an increase from 2019-20?

**Ms Murray:** That is a maintenance of the current arrangements.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Okay. So they would still be under pressure to deliver this service if they were actually concerned about it back then.

**Ms Murray:** We make sure that we allocate the resources that we need to, Mrs Kikkert, from inside the larger pool, to make sure that we can support people through the ISRP program. As I indicated, that might mean that we move some extra staffing resources around to make sure that people are supported. It is a very important program.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It is very important, and they said:

The need for the Integrated Service Response Program is not going to diminish until both NDIS—

they are talking about their response—

and the ACT Government support systems are able to demonstrate that they have the capacity to ensure people with disability will not fall through the gaps between service systems. As this will not happen until the backlog of implementation issues with the NDIS are remedied in the coming years, the disability community in the ACT would welcome a commitment from the ACT Government to funding for the program over the 4-year forward estimates.

Can I ask if the ACT government is actually committed to sitting down with NDS and speaking about the concern in their submission about the ISRP, because they are the frontline workers and they are actually starving for more support, more commitment from the ACT government.

**Ms Davidson:** I think I can probably answer that question.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes, please.

**Ms Davidson:** I have already met with the NDS, and I will continue to meet with them and discuss how we can make sure that people with disabilities are able to access the supports and services that they need to achieve their objectives in Canberra. One of the key objectives of the ISRP program has been to resolve crises for people who have really intensive support needs and experience really highly complex situations. Being one of the jurisdictions that have been first to get involved in the NDIS, we have learned a lot about how that program works and where there can be issues.

One of the difficulties that we have is that when someone has really complex needs and needs intensive support, the NDIS does not always have the flexibility to address all of those needs quickly. That is why we have needed the ISRP. If we can get the NDIS to a point where it is able to achieve its original intent to provide choice, control and continuity for people with disabilities to be able to make decisions about how they plan and put in place the supports and services to achieve their objectives, then that will greatly reduce the pressure on the ACT government, I think.

**MRS KIKKERT:** And, I think, vice versa. These people are not eligible to receive NDIS, or they are waiting for a confirmation from NDIS. That is when the ACT government steps in to give them the necessary critical support that they need—

**Ms Davidson:** Absolutely.

**MRS KIKKERT:** because these are valued members of our community and we cannot let them fall through the cracks. If this frontliner, the Integrated Service Response Program, is struggling to meet the needs of these people, it is very important for the ACT government to deliver the extra staff or whatever service they need.

**Ms Davidson:** That is right. That is why I meet with National Disability Services regularly to discuss needs and how we can best address those. It is really important to note that the ACT government did actually hand over quite a lot of money to NDIS in order to make this partnership work; it is therefore really important that we advocate strongly for ensuring that that money is spent in a way that enables everyone to access the supports that they need. That is what we are doing, while also still having the ISRP program to address those really complex intensive needs.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Okay, thank you.

**Ms Murray:** I was just going to say that I am very proud to be working so closely with the team that works in my division, Mrs Kikkert. They work incredibly passionately and incredibly hard. It is working hard, but probably not to that point of struggling, if that makes sense. The other thing that we do in that space is to work across all of the other directorates as well. So we work incredibly closely with mental health and we work incredibly closely with our education system. Building that support network is a really critical component of what we do. It is much broader than

the people in the ISRP program.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes. You mentioned mental health. I am glad you did, because one area of feedback I get from the disability advocates is that within the departments there is not enough training for the staff to understand people with disability who have mental health issues. Have you heard about that feedback, and what is currently happening to address that within the ACT staff?

**Ms Davidson:** I think if you are getting feedback about any individual situations, I would really appreciate you putting—

**MRS KIKKERT:** It is actually quite broad. It is a group that advocate for disability people and deal with ACT government directorates, and their concern is that the staff are not trained on mental health issues with people with disability.

**Ms Davidson:** The staff at what kind of service? Is it in services generally, or in health services?

**MRS KIKKERT:** ACT government staff. When they are dealing with them and they are not getting the needs that they want, they go to an ACT disability advocate group, who advocates on their behalf.

**Ms Davidson:** Right. I see.

**MRS KIKKERT:** And the feedback from the advocate group, in their submission, is that there needs to be better mental health training for people within the ACT government staff to understand people with disability.

**Ms Davidson:** I can probably pass to Jo to talk about what training is offered to ACT government staff in understanding mental health and how to provide good service to people.

**Ms Wood:** Thank you, Minister. I will also flag that the ACT government supports funding to advocacy groups specifically to ensure that there is capacity to advocate to government and to any service where there may need to be an improvement in the services offered. We obviously work through the Office for Disability and through CSD as a whole. We work really closely with the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, which is leading a whole range of work to improve understanding of mental health issues across government, but across the community as well. They have had a particular focus on the capacity to respond to mental health responses for children and young people, over the last period. They have the lead on strengthening the whole-of-system response for mental health in the ACT.

**Ms Murray:** We also, in the ISRP program, participate and work with a community of practice around mental health. We have identified that that area has always been complex but is becoming increasingly complex, so those really strong connections through that community of practice are really important. We are very excited about the progress that we have made in relation to the training for the Disability Justice Strategy. I think that that is probably a really good step forward in this space so that we can help share some of the understanding and the learning that we have gained and

some of the better practice models rolling out support, particularly in the complex mental health space.

It is an area where you stop learning and you stop refreshing at your own peril. It is an area in which you need to keep striving for a better understanding of mental health, a better understanding of the interactions between mental health and disability, and where that complexity sits. I absolutely take the point on board that there is always going to be more work in this space. We know that that is an area that we need to work on, and we are working on it through communities of practice, but we are hoping to roll out the Disability Justice Strategy training, which we hope will be a first step into this space.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Okay, thank you.

**Ms Murray:** We are also working with the Office of the Senior Practitioner. I am looking at Sally down the back there. I should have mentioned that earlier; I am sorry, Mrs Kikkert.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is all good; thank you.

**Ms Wood:** Chair, I have an answer to an earlier question. Mrs Kikkert asked about the amount of funding for the ISRP in 2018-19. That was \$1.598 million in the 2018-19 budget. That was obviously at a point where we were unclear what the level of demand would be. This has been something that we have been working on over time. As the minister said, we are continuing to work with the NDIS to ensure that the gap that the ISRP needs to fill is as small as possible. That funding has enabled us to meet the demand. In some years we have had more funding than required, so we have re-profiled into next year. We are now, I think, getting to a point where the level of demand that we would have for ISRP in the immediate term is a bit clearer, so we will be able consider longer term arrangements.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Great; thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I was wondering if the committee could get an update on the Disability Justice Strategy and how the first action plan is rolling out?

**Ms Davidson:** Yes. I will hand over to Jo, who can talk in more detail about how we are progressing on the action plan. There was a Disability Justice Strategy annual report that was tabled on, I think, 11 February. It was the Thursday. You will see quite a lot of information in there as well. I am particularly pleased to see the appointment of disability liaison officers in places like Legal Aid and the Alexander Maconachie Centre to support that cultural change and build capability and capacity in those organisations.

**Ms Wood:** I am happy to lead off, Ms Murray, for a bit. The Disability Justice Strategy was launched in August 2019 and really has a focus on ensuring that people with disability in the ACT have equal access to justice. It has been a really great collaboration across the justice and disability sectors, so there is very good engagement and ownership across all the agencies that have a role to play in the Disability Justice Strategy. We know that people with disability experience the

highest rate of intersection with the justice system, so that just underscores the importance of it. As the minister said, that first annual report does call out some of the achievements in the first year and the appointment of the disability liaison officers at Legal Aid, as a first one, was a really important achievement.

Having had the opportunity to participate in the disability justice governance group for the strategy, I can say that when the liaison officer from Legal Aid came and presented some case studies to that overarching group, the impact of that work was really powerful and immediate in terms of assisting people in really concrete and practical ways. I think that has been one of the highlights, but I might pass to Ms Murray to expand further.

**Ms Murray:** I wonder if I could have the indulgence to have Amanda Charles, who has been one of the architects of this, to come up and talk in some more detail, if that is okay?

**THE CHAIR:** That sounds great.

**Ms Charles:** Thank you. I am currently the lead on the Disability Justice Strategy for CSD. I think it would be worth referencing, in terms of our cross-government collaboration, that ACT Corrections and the minister launched, on International Day of People with Disability, the first disability action inclusion plan, which is at AMC, and which was fantastic. It is quite a comprehensive piece of work. It was impacted by COVID in terms of the uptake. I think three additional positions are currently being recruited to. The police have just closed their advertising period. CYPS, I think, is still open. The courts and tribunals position, I believe, is still open. So we have a whole range of disability liaison officers who are coming on board to progress the work.

The launch of the legal capacity handbook and guidelines happened quite recently also. That was about advice around how legal professionals can support people who have difficulty with decision making and experience some types of disadvantage, like disability, in that space. The work has been very collaborative across agencies. Justice agencies have been fantastic in demonstrating their goodwill in making changes in this space and really engaging with the disability liaison officers, as well as the Disability Justice Strategy team, to create real change and opportunities within their organisations. So we are at the very beginning of a very significant cultural shift in how we do this, which is a really exciting opportunity.

**Ms Davidson:** One of the things that really impressed me about that action and inclusion plan was the involvement of the disability reference group in informing how that was developed. There was some really great work there, with the voices of people with disability driving what needed to go into it.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned a couple things that have been completed. In terms of this action plan, what are some items still to come?

**Ms Charles:** Gosh, there is so much happening in that space. One of the commitments through the first action plan was cross-government disability action inclusion plan commitments. ACT Health Directorate are in the process of developing,

I guess, a gap analysis on how to start their disability action inclusion plan. That is a really significant part of the rollout, and once the first one happened people were very keen to get on board. That is a really great piece of work.

Looking at supported decision-making projects, the ACT has run a whole range of supported decision-making projects over a period of time. We are just poised to step into our next phase of supported decision-making. It is about how we ensure that we move to a cultural shift, where we are moving away from substitute decision-making for people into a supported decision-making paradigm. That has been a bit of a journey, but we are quite far down that.

We are also looking at a third person independent advocate trial. We are just shaping that with the community sector at the moment. That will happen shortly, also. We are doing some great work on developing a police handbook. A whole range of our justice agencies work on fairly definitive: "Do this and don't do this." That is part of the beauty of the justice sector. We are working with the police and the ANU to develop a police handbook, which is kind of exciting as well.

The framework for the evaluation is about to become real, which I think is quite exciting also. There are so many pieces of work that are happening. The first action plan is laying the foundations for the 10 years of the plan. We are one-and-a-half years in, and we have had some really great achievements, but there are a whole range of pieces of work where we have dipped our toe into the water. We might be ankle deep, but we are certainly not hip deep yet. Does that make sense?

**THE CHAIR:** It does. Thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** The proportion of funded services visited by a relationship manager during the financial year was only 38 per cent and not the target of 75 per cent. Would you talk me through what efforts were made to establish virtual contact with those services and if they were successful?

**Ms Wood:** Mr Davis, can you give us a page? Is this from the annual report?

**MR DAVIS:** It is, and if I had it in front of me, I would, because I aim to be helpful.

**Ms Wood:** We can take the question broadly anyway. Obviously, the reduction in the number of visits was because of COVID limitations and the inability to physically go out and visit. We brought funded services together in the COVID response in a range of ways. We had a range of different subsector groups that had particular focus areas across children and young people, housing and the women's sector. We brought those funded services together to help us design the right response for COVID for people in the community and also understand the supports and additional resourcing that those services needed themselves. We worked with them through online, virtual meetings. We also developed a range of communications for the sector on a regular basis. Ms Murray may add something.

**Ms Murray:** I would say that whilst COVID was in the space, we did not physically go and visit, but we certainly were in contact. As soon as we went back into the service visit model, we commenced that. The feedback we have had from the sector is

that they would like to keep some of the things we were doing in a slightly innovative way over the COVID period.

A regular combined briefing chaired by the deputy director-general in relation to cross-sector issues has been incredibly valuable for all of us tuning in and also in creating that connection. It is really great to see some of the synergies of work programs align. We have been asked by the sector to maintain that, going forward. Whilst the physical sitting down and spending time in situ did reduce, the conversations and the connection continued, particularly as we supported people to get through the COVID period, as critical sector organisations.

**MR DAVIS:** Nothing is going to replace an in-person connection, but I wonder if there were not efficiencies—because of the sheer logistics of travel time and getting across the city—in being able to speak to more people in less time, using some of the new technologies and some of that innovation you spoke about.

**Ms Murray:** Yes. You are quite right about that connection being important. Twelve months ago, it was not unusual for us to be sitting at a desk in an office with one of those big boxes on the table and being pretty much bound to that. At the Canberra Relief Network, I have had one of my senior managers running one of the offices but also working remotely and working with the sector on a variety of matters, just popping in and out.

The flexibility that has been provided through the ramp-up of the technology is an opportunity for us to spend more time more immersed in the sector, rather than necessarily being held by the bounds of a desk in a workplace. More and more, as we step that up, it can create that greater connection between government and the public service and the sector. We are all one service delivery unit. That is what we are looking at, going forward. I have not lost sight of the importance of that human-to-human connection. As someone who has been at home for a long period, seeing this many humans on a regular basis this week has been almost overwhelming but fantastic.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I have a question on disability employment. What is the target the ACT government has for disability employment within the public service?

**Ms Wood:** That target is led by the Chief Minister's directorate, so we do not have data on that with us.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you make sure that that target is reached or is it the Chief Minister's role?

**Ms Wood:** They are ultimately responsible. We have a strong focus on achieving the target within our own workforce: growing the opportunities for people with disability in the CSD workforce and looking at innovative ways that we can do that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is just within CSD, though?

**Ms Wood:** Yes. They lead for the whole public service.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you know how many public servants with disability you have currently working within the directorate?

**Ms Wood:** I do. I just need a moment to find it.

**Ms Murray:** While Ms Wood is looking, I cannot help putting on my old people management hat to say that one of the difficulties we have had is the self-disclosure nature of people. You can understand. When you look at the number of people who require reasonable adjustments who we support and the number of people who identify as people who are living with a disability, the numbers do not necessarily correlate. There are probably people who are supported with a reasonable adjustment in the workplace, but—

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is understandable, but do you have a certain target within the directorate for how many employees you have with disability?

**Ms Murray:** I always say there are never enough, but we do not specifically have a target.

**Ms Wood:** I can report on the numbers of people we have. Of our total staff in CSD, 5.8 per cent disclose that they have a disability. There may be more staff who have a disability who either do not feel comfortable disclosing or do not feel it necessary to disclose.

As well as looking to ensure that when we are recruiting we are going out in a range of ways to attract people with disability into our workforce, we also work on ensuring that we are making it a really safe environment for people to disclose that they have a disability and feel that it is something they can do. We work on both those fronts.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I have spoken to a number of constituents who are carers of young adults who have a disability. They would like to be offered work experience within directorates. How do you go about advertising that or raising awareness for people with disability within the community—that you have work experience available for them to take up, so that they could have office environment experience and, hopefully, be offered a full-time, part-time or casual job. Most of them want casual because it depends on how many hours they can cope with. How do you go about offering work experience for people with disability within the community?

**Ms Wood:** There are some programs that Chief Minister's lead for the whole public service that provide opportunities in entry-level roles and also internships and short-term work experience. CSD participates in those programs. We find placements within CSD for those. But CMTEDD lead all that work in terms of how you promote that out to the community.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How do you do it? How do you raise the awareness?

**Ms Wood:** The programs are run by the Chief Minister's directorate. They lead that work to promote them in the community. When those programs have been run, CSD participates by providing opportunities for people to come into our organisation, but the promotion of it is led by Chief Minister's.



**MRS KIKKERT:** Would you consider that Carers ACT would be a good organisation to make aware of this promotion?

**Ms Wood:** We are happy to share those programs with carers.

**MRS KIKKERT:** And ACT Together as well? Do you share that information with them—they are under your directorate—or do you just leave everything to the Chief Minister to do?

**Ms Wood:** We provide advice to Chief Minister's about how to connect with stakeholders.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I have a question on Women with Disabilities. They have had a significant increase in their activities, and they have requested an additional \$50,000 per year to sustain the quality of their work whilst meeting their engagement demands. Has the ACT government committed to providing Women with Disabilities with the additional funding requested for them to meet their needs in serving the ACT community?

**Ms Davidson:** I might hand over to Jo to talk about that and about commissioning for social outcomes.

**Ms Wood:** Ms Murray might have some specifics before I get into that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Just a yes or no will be fine.

**Ms Murray:** We work very closely with all the advocacy groups. We have worked very closely with a number of the groups, and on specific programs, over the last 12 months, and provided some additional funding out of the COVID stimulus package.

I cannot go into advice about going forward—no-one can predict; no-one can talk about what will happen in the future budget—but we do have ongoing conversations with advocacy groups about the priorities and those pressure points. As I said, unfortunately I am not in a position to be able to commit, but I want to stress that we work very hard and acknowledge the women in the room who do a huge amount of that work—Amanda, Wendy and Ellen—in the Office for Disability. I am not sure if there is anything I can add in that space.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is perfectly understandable. It is good to know that you are having conversations with Women with Disabilities. Is that correct, Ms Charles?

**Ms Charles:** Absolutely. They are one of the four peak bodies that we are funding currently. We have regular engagement with the previous CEO and chair of the board, the current CEO, the current chair of the board et cetera. We have very strong engagement with their work and support them whenever we can. It is excellent work they are doing.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It is great that you are funding them, but the message I get from them is that there is core funding but their demand increases every year—that is

understandable—and they are not receiving extra funding to meet the extra demands they are receiving every year. They feel pressured to deliver the services they like to do. It is great that you are doing the core funding, but they are asking for a small increase of \$50,000 per year. It is not a lot of money.

**Ms Davidson:** May I help you out a bit there. The Minister for Families and Community Services is doing some really good work at the moment on commissioning for social outcomes—working with our community sector organisations on how we fund those organisations for the work they are doing, going forward, in the long term. That might go some way to addressing those issues, not just for that organisation but for others as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Is phase 2 of the ACT COVID-19 Disability Strategy out?

**Ms Murray:** We worked very hard on delivering phase 1 of that program and got some good activities out in the sector. That was very much led by what the sector had told us they required in this space. With the second phase, a lot of work has been co-designed with the sector. We are very hopeful that we will be able to press send on that very shortly; it is just about getting it right before we press send on that.

**THE CHAIR:** What are some of the things that phase 2 is trying to address?

**Ms Murray:** We have a variety of programs there. As I said, it is a lot of the things that have been identified by the community. We have provided individual advocacy for people who need it most through ADACAS and Advocacy for Inclusion. We have supported the disability sector through some support with NDS. In particular, some great workforce work was done in that space, to support us to know what our workforce needs might be if we were to have a lockdown or a shutdown. It was quite a good program that we worked with them on. It was also about communication with the community. There is building the market to better support people through positive behaviour support and supporting people at risk of social isolation through a targeted communication approach which we developed with our community partners.

There is a section on disability support providers assistance and access to infection control training for their staff. It is one of the only times we have provided a stockpile of PPE-type equipment directly to the sector, where they could access it. But it is not enough just to provide the equipment; it is about supporting people to learn how to appropriately use that PPE and then manage infection control. The community has spoken to us in relation to some respite services in that space. There are a number of programs; that is not the whole picture. It was important to us to be led by the community and the sector in relation to the needs.

**MR CAIN:** I have a question about the senior community in the ACT. Minister, can you advise what sorts of initiatives were put in place to keep seniors informed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Ms Davidson:** Yes. I will hand over to Jessica in a minute to talk in more detail about that, but I want to acknowledge the great work that has been done by COTA ACT in engaging with seniors in our community and making sure that they are well informed. It gives real understanding of the ways in which older Canberrans want to receive

information; I appreciate their advice and their feedback, as well as feedback from members of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing.

**Ms Murray:** Minister, I wonder if I could jump in before Jess starts. One reflection we had early on was a great need to support our senior community, but we found that the level of resilience and support provided by older Canberrans was quite extraordinary. One of the best programs we ran during that period was connecting young Canberrans with older Canberrans, to create a feedback loop, with support, conversation and connection from young people to older Canberrans. We saw an amazing leverage off the resilience and experience of the older Canberrans, and that has flowed back through to younger Canberrans.

We had a beautiful campaign with some of our aged-care facilities. People in nursing homes would say, “I am such and such. I am 80 years old and if I give you one tip of the day, it is this.” My favourite was: “Dance every day and always wear lipstick.” I clearly have not followed that. There was a lovely connection. Some great connections were created between school groups and some of the older Canberrans living in aged-care facilities. I want to reflect that our assumptions, going in, were assumptions about support, but the resilience and the leadership shown by older Canberrans has been quite a thing.

**MR CAIN:** One observation I would make—particularly from moving around the electorate of Ginninderra, particularly the western part of Ginninderra—is that it is not unusual for members of the senior community to comment that they do not use the internet, they do not have Facebook and they do not have email. They just want to write letters and get a phone call. Putting that in as an assumption within my question, how is that part of the senior community serviced?

**Ms Davidson:** I absolutely understand what you are talking about there. When this COVID pandemic started, I was in New York City. The city had just gone into lockdown and people were being told to avoid large gatherings and that sort of thing. I popped into a little local Baptist church in Harlem on Sunday for the service and an older woman there was talking about being given a hard time by her family and friends because she was still insisting on going out to church. They were saying, “No; they are livestreaming it on Facebook. You should be watching it there.” The difficulty she had was that she did not have a Facebook account and she did not understand how to set all of that up.

When I came back to Canberra at the end of that month, I was very happy to see that we were addressing it through programs such as the support we were delivering through COTA ACT. I will let Jessica talk in more detail about it.

**Mrs Summerrell:** Yes; this was really important for us during COVID—how we support our seniors community. Our seniors community and our older Canberrans were more likely to self-isolate and were less likely to then come back into eased restrictions, as we saw with other parts of society. We were very keen to make sure we did support them.

Interestingly, the *Living well in the ACT Region: exploring the wellbeing of ACT residents* report identified that older people were more likely than average to find it

easier to keep in touch with friends and family who did not live with them. We found that they have a real resilience and do not necessarily rely so much on that digital connection. They were more inclined to write a letter or pick up the phone and have a conversation and a chat. That was interesting.

To go to your specific question around the things we did to support them, the ACT government provided assistance through the economic survival package. There was a bolstering of existing rebates and subsidies available for older people, which included a \$200 rebate for a utilities concession, available to Centrelink pensioner and concession card holders.

In addition to that, COTA, the Council on the Ageing, received some funding to support a seniors pop-up technology hub which was specifically designed to support older people's confidence in the use of technology. There was also funding provided to the Canberra Seniors Centre to purchase information technology equipment and accessories for their digital door project to support participation in health and education communities at home.

We also had the Red Cross wellbeing call service, which was particularly designed for wellbeing calls to people over the age of 65. We encouraged people having contact with older Canberrans to encourage them to receive a wellbeing call. That was just someone on the end of the phone to have a chat with, to reach out with and say, "I haven't got the milk. My son or daughter was going to bring it and they did not." It was just that connection and that ability to keep our older Canberrans connected in the community.

**MR CAIN:** As we move more and more into what we can call post COVID and produce the new normal for us all, are you planning to seek feedback from the senior community about how effectively they were communicated with and supported?

**Mrs Summerrell:** Yes.

**Ms Davidson:** I can probably go some way to answering that one for you. We are engaging regularly with a range of organisations that work with older Canberrans to make sure that we are hearing their feedback about future directions, what we have learned from 2020 and how we can apply that into the future. There is also a technology upgrade fund that was announced in the February budget, which recognises that there is still need in the community for improvements in how we engage with each other online and people's ability to do that. That is recognising that there is still a need for more support. We will be working to do that, and taking advice and feedback from the community in that process.

**MR CAIN:** I look forward to seeing how that goes.

**Mrs Summerrell:** Can I just add to that? We did receive some feedback initially in relation to communication methods for older Canberrans. That has now been implemented in ongoing COVID communications.

**THE CHAIR:** Unfortunately, we are out of time. The committee hearing for today is now adjourned. On behalf of the committee, I thank the ministers and witnesses who

appeared 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 they please get the answers to the committee secretary within five working days of 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 of today's hearing.

**The committee adjourned at 2.51 pm.**