



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022–2023](#))

Members:

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)
MS N LAWDER (Deputy Chair)**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2023

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K Langham (Ph: 620 75498)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

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Privilege statement

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 11.14 am.

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
Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Canberra Institute of Technology
Lundy, Ms Kate, Chair, CIT Board
Robertson, Ms Christine, Interim Chief Executive Officer
Oldfield, Ms Meghan, Executive Director, Corporate Services
Andersen, Ms Josephine, Executive Director, Education Futures and Students

Major Projects Canberra

Geraghty, Ms Gillian, Chief Projects Officer
Little, Mr Martin, Deputy Chief Projects Officer
Power, Ms Rebecca, Project Director, CIT Woden Project

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearings of the Education and Community Inclusion Committee for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The committee will today examine annual reports of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate; Major Projects Canberra; Canberra Institute of Technology; and ACT Building Construction Industry Training Fund Authority.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard, and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses use these words: "I will take that question on notice."

We now welcome Mr Chris Steel MLA, Minister for Skills, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Could I please get each of you at the table to confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it.

Wonderful. If we have any new witnesses up to the table, I will get them to do the same. I will lead off with questions, and we will make our way down the line. Minister, how is construction progressing on the CIT Woden project, including the

new light rail-ready transport interchange?

Mr Steel: Thank you. The building is starting to come out of the ground, with substantial works on site. We are looking forward to the next milestone, which will be the timber super-structure starting to arrive onsite and then being installed as part of the commitment to have a six-star green energy rated building. That will reduce our carbon footprint, but also provide some benefits in terms of the learning environments. We know that when there is timber in a learning environment, it does improve the environment for students and staff working at the CIT, so it is very exciting to see things starting to move.

There is one crane onsite at the moment. There will be a second crane installed, as well. We have been engaging with the community, particularly some young students, in naming the crane, which is an exciting opportunity for them to get involved in the project and hopefully better understand the construction industry in the future, if they seek to choose that as a pathway. We are looking forward, now that some changes have been made, to the interchange design reflecting some of the community feedback—in particular, making sure that we have improved weather protection in the interchange. And, of course, we have also incorporated public toilets, and the availability of shelters for people who want to store their bicycles in the interchange.

There have been some changes to some of the plantings as well, particularly in terms of the tree species used, and we are looking forward to those works ramping up. I will hand over to Major Projects Canberra to give a bit of an update as well, in addition to the comments that I have made.

Ms Geraghty: Thank you, Minister. I have read and understood and acknowledge the privilege statement. I also have with me Rebecca Power, the project director for the project. I will confirm the minister's statements and note that the project is on track to meet expectations. Rebecca, do you want to give a bit more detail about exactly what is happening onsite?

Ms Power: Yes, I can. I have read and understood the privilege statement. The minister has echoed everything that is currently happening out there on site. For additional detail, our basement structure is complete. The concrete is coming well out of the ground. All of the ground floor slabs for the main building are complete. The cores are progressing up to level 1 at the moment. The mass laminated timber is being manufactured offsite. That is almost fully complete and getting ready to come up to Canberra. We also note that out on the main site of the interchange, the services relocations and new services are progressing well. Stormwater works are currently underway, and preparation for the footings for the shelters are coming along well.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Supplementary questions.

MS LAWDER: What is the intended completion date for the project?

Ms Power: The construction completion date contract is for December of 2024. That is for the main building.

MS LAWDER: Is there a cost overrun, because there was an additional \$31 million

expenditure for the Woden CIT within the MPC annual report. Was that a cost overrun?

Mr Steel: There have been some changes to scope as well, responding to community feedback, particularly around weather protection, but I will hand over to Ms Geraghty to provide some more detail.

Ms Geraghty: I might just refer to the annual report. Are you talking to the table at the back here?

MS LAWDER: Page 41. It says that the estimates committee recommends that the government detail the elements of the \$31 million additional expenditure. This talks on page 20 about MPC Woden, but I am referring to the estimates committee recommendation.

Ms Geraghty: Sorry, just give me a minute. I might just go back to the table we have.

MS LAWDER: On page 41, the estimates committee recommended that the government detail the elements of the \$31 million additional expenditure for Woden CIT major project within the MPC annual report.

Ms Geraghty: Okay, yes. On page 120 of our annual report we have the original project value, the revised project value, prior expenditure and current expenditure. So I would note that we are currently working to a project budget of \$332 million, which relates to the original approved amount of \$322 million, plus the additional \$10 million that was received from the Commonwealth as part of an investment into the youth foyer. We are on track with that \$332 million as a project budget. I will have to come back, because I think the expenditure is on track in terms of being able to deliver the project milestones that Ms Power has outlined.

MS LAWDER: Sorry, Minister, you mentioned that there had been some changes to scope. Could you just—

Mr Steel: Yes. One of the changes that we made was around the shelter. I will hand over to Rebecca Power to talk a little bit about that. This is the main shelter abutting the actual building itself rather than the interchange, but it is next to the interchange.

Ms Power: Thank you, Minister. As part of the design development and listening to the feedback we received from the community, the awning and connection to the main building out into the interchange was extended considerably, so you have quite a prominent one entry to the CIT and to the urban realm and to the Woden Town Centre, but also that covered space out to the edge of the transport interchange to provide additional shelter for the patrons.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned that the shelter was one of the elements. What are the other changes to scope?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Ms Power to talk about changes to scope since the project was originally agreed.

Ms Power: We might take that question on notice if you want every single last change that we have made during the design development plan.

Ms Geraghty: Could we clarify: is that what you are after?

Ms Power: Is that what you are after or just some of the key points that have shifted?

MS LAWDER: There are two people speaking at once.

Ms Power: Could you clarify the question—the extent of what you are after?

MS LAWDER: The minister said that part of the additional funding was for changes to scope, and then he said one of those was additional shelter, so I am asking: what are the others contributing to the change of scope?

Ms Power: Thank you, Ms Lawder. Apologies. There are the additional shelters at each intersection out on the main interchange, the funding for those bicycle shelters that was referred to and the public amenities out in the main interchange space. I am trying to remember exactly what was extra.

Ms Geraghty: Yes, can I ask that we might just come back to that? We will take it on notice and just make sure that we have a detailed answer for you.

MS LAWDER: Sure. Thank you.

MS CLAY: You mentioned the timber sourcing, but you dropped off. You were speaking very softly. What was the timber used?

Ms Power: Apologies for that. So we are using mass laminated timber for the bulk of the structure of the building. That timber is sourced from Victoria. It is sourced from sustainable hardwood forests. It is Australian sustainable hardwood of three different species. It is also being manufactured in Victoria at the Australian Sustainable Hardwoods factory down there in Haywood.

MS CLAY: Great, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: I did want to ask, Minister, about an update on the situation with the CEOs of CIT. Are we still paying two CEOs?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to CIT and Ms Lundy.

Ms Lundy: Thank you for that question. Yes, we have an interim CEO, Christine Robertson, who is here with us today. And the CEO is still on paid leave, as the board has determined that that is the appropriate action to allow procedural fairness to unfold. As we all know, the matter is still with the Integrity Commission.

MS LAWDER: What has been the total cost to date of having two CEOs in place, since there has been two?

Ms Lundy: I would need to take the very specifics of that on notice.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. Do you have any indication of how much longer this will be the case? Just to go completely out there, if the Integrity Commission were looking at this for another 10 years, would you continue to pay two CEOs for 10 years, for example? I know that is a bit hypothetical—

Ms Lundy: I cannot answer that question. I think we are all hopeful that the Integrity Commission is drawing their investigation to a close, and we will hear soon. I am sure the Integrity Commission is very aware of the challenging situation this extended period of time has put the CIT in. That said, we also, in the very first instance, respect completely the Integrity Commission's role in investigating this in the way that they see fit. We are all hoping we will hear from them soon.

MS LAWDER: Does the CIT do an annual staff satisfaction survey?

Ms Robertson: Yes, we do.

MS LAWDER: And how have the results of the most recent survey been? Have there been any trends, any changes?

Ms Robertson: I will ask Ms Meghan Oldfield, our Executive Director, Corporate Services, to answer that question in some more detail for you.

Ms Oldfield: Thank you. I have read and understand the privilege statement. With regard to staff surveys, CIT participated this year in the whole-of-government survey, and I would have to take on notice the specifics of the staff results. I would note that we probably did not have the take-up we had been hoping for from staff. So we would like to get greater participation in future years, but I can come back with what the results of that survey were.

MS LAWDER: But when was that most recent survey?

Ms Oldfield: I believe it was in March of this year.

MS LAWDER: I believe that CIT also usually does a student satisfaction survey.

Ms Robertson: CIT is required, under our funding arrangements, to participate in an external student satisfaction survey through the National Centre for Vocational Education Training Research. That data is lag data, so the 2023 student satisfaction rates will be available to us during 2024.

MS LAWDER: I think there was an employer satisfaction survey, as well. Is that the case?

Ms Lundy: Yes, the employer satisfaction survey is one of the surveys we are required to undertake and, again, that data will be reported in our annual report 2023.

MS LAWDER: Okay, thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, CIT only offers one prevocational course at the moment—in plumbing, I understand. I am wondering, is there a lack of demand for prevocational courses?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to CIT to talk about what they offer and then we can perhaps talk about what the future might be in that space.

Ms Robertson: Thank you. I will ask Ms Josephine Andersen, Executive Director, Education Futures and Students, to provide you with more details on our prevocational programs generally, and also plumbing.

Ms Andersen: Thank you very much for the question. I have read and understood the privilege statement. We offer many more than one prevocational course. We have a range of short courses which are enabling or pathway courses—everything from foundation skills, literacy and numeracy, through to certificate II courses that may provide a pathway into an apprenticeship.

MS CLAY: Excellent. So, there are a number of prevocational courses?

Ms Andersen: Absolutely.

MS CLAY: That is good to hear.

Mr Steel: And, sorry, more broadly, both through the fee-free TAFE program but also looking to the future around funding for foundation skills through the national skills agreement, there will be an opportunity to look at potential further support for those types of courses. We have typically funded some of those courses, as well, through our grants programs through Skills Canberra. Various different organisations offer pre-apprenticeship type courses to support people to get the skills that they need to go on and complete full qualifications.

So we are looking and working with industry on what opportunities there might be to provide more of those courses, and we have been engaging with industry—particularly in five key industry areas—to work on actions as part of the development of new industry action skills action plans. There may be opportunities through those to develop those types of courses needed to attract more people into the industry, particularly people that need a little bit of extra support and training to get to the point where they can do that full qualification if needed.

MS CLAY: I am wondering—this might be a good one to take on notice—if I could get a list of which of the trades have prevocational courses through CIT. On notice would be fine. How do you decide when you need to be offering a prevocational course? How do you gauge the demand for that?

Mr Steel: Industry getting in touch with, and engaging with, RTOs directly, but also from Skills Canberra. It is fair to say that some of the lower-level qualifications under the qualification framework also act as that sort of pathway, particularly with the trades, where to be trade-qualified you may need to have undertaken at least a certificate III qualification. Many of the Australian school-based apprentices are doing

qualifications at a lower certificate level, and that effectively is a pathway into them doing the further qualifications, but then they can have some of those skills recognised when they do go on to complete the full qualification.

MS LAWDER: Is that, for example, what happened in the case of BentSpoke Brewing? Did the employer get in touch about the training?

Mr Steel: Yes; the industry will often get in touch directly about that. The BentSpoke situation is a little bit different. The opportunity there is to pilot a program looking at specific units of competency—six particular units at this point in time—and if that is proven to be a success under a sort of apprenticeship-style model, where the training is delivered by an industry expert with a TAE qualification, which is the certificate IV, then they may be able, in the future, to expand out—not just to deliver those six areas of competency, but that full certificate qualification in food production which is particularly focused on artisan fermented products. So that is a slightly different situation, but there are definitely opportunities at the moment to undertake smaller skillsets or units-of-competency types of qualification which can skill people up but do not necessarily mean doing a full qualification.

MS CLAY: I am wondering if you could also tell me, possibly on notice, how many people have enrolled in the plumbing prevocational training over the last three years, say, in each of the years over the last three years?

Mr Steel: I think CIT can take that one because I think they are the only RTO that provides that in the ACT.

MS CLAY: Great. Have you just taken those two questions on notice? We usually get a verbal—

Mr Steel: I will let them confirm.

Ms Robertson: Yes, we can take those questions on notice.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. As mentioned, there was a recent announcement with BentSpoke. I was hoping you could update the committee on what this partnership actually entails.

Mr Steel: It is funded under a grant, under the Skill to Succeed Innovation grants. It is an \$80,000 commitment from the ACT government but there is also a contribution from the Institute of Technology and from the industry itself, recognising that there is not currently accredited training available to support the industry. There is a course available that is delivered in New South Wales. At the moment, I understand there is quite a long waiting list in Sydney for brewers wanting to get those skills. That is the full certificate IV course.

But with our emerging industry of six breweries, we have certainly recognised that industry has a need to have workers trained here, and that that might benefit the broader industry in fermented food products—wine-making, in particular, but

potentially other products as well. The pilot will help inform whether there is demand for this type of full training course to be delivered, and also prove the model of upskilling someone who is working in the industry—one of the expert brewers from BentSpoke—and then delivering the courses not just to BentSpoke staff. I think there may only be one or two BentSpoke staff that undertake the training next year out of the 12, but there are also other breweries. They have been quite collaborative in wanting to work and support the broader industry and not just one particular employer.

It is an opportunity to test a new model of delivery. It is not that this is a full apprenticeship—I should clarify that—but it is an apprenticeship-style model. It potentially provides a way of funding training to a smaller group of students in an industry setting where there are students who are actually employed. I think that that is a really exciting initiative. If it works in this particular industry it might be applicable to others where accredited training is not currently available. I will hand over to CIT, because they have been undertaking the work with BentSpoke on this project.

Ms Robertson: Thank you. Certainly the initiative at BentSpoke is one of the innovation initiatives we have had in terms of industry-focused and workplace delivery of the development of skill sets that are in demand. Similarly, more recently we graduated a small number of students through our cybersecurity initiative. That was developed in collaboration with the Canberra Cyber Hub, the University of New South Wales and Future Skills Organisation, which is one of the new national Jobs and Skills Australia industry skills groups that are determining new qualifications.

There has been, I guess, some criticism of the national VET systems being slow to respond to emerging training needs. Under the National Skills Agreement and the new VET reform initiatives that the Commonwealth government has put in place, there is an expectation that we will work more closely as a large training provider with Jobs and Skills Councils and with our industry, and codesign opportunities for students to quickly upskill in a way that allows them to develop skills more quickly in areas of significant skill shortage. Ms Andersen can talk a little bit about BentSpoke, but also the cybersecurity initiative which has been very, very successful.

Ms Andersen: Thank you, Ms Robertson. The partnership with BentSpoke is breaking new ground in some ways for CIT because it is truly industry led, and we are responding to a local need. As the minister has said, we are going to start with a small pilot program, a short course model, and work that up and develop that over time in response to workforce needs and employers' needs.

It was really interesting to note that 0.7 per cent of our labour force in the ACT works in the beer production industry, which is more than double that of Western Australia and Victoria. So it is something that will contribute to the local and regional economy, and as the minister has also said, there is scope to expand the offer to winemakers and distillers. I am not an expert at all in any of those processes, but I understand many of the processes are similar.

So we will be starting with a small group of 12 students as a pilot program, and we will see how that goes. Another really exciting aspect of the pilot is that CIT does not necessarily have to have all of the facilities on one of our campuses; we can work

very productively with our industry partners to deliver training in the workplace. That is another really exciting aspect of this pilot.

THE CHAIR: So what does “pilot” mean? Does that mean there will be one cohort and then you will assess whether it was worthwhile?

Ms Andersen: We will see how the initial couple of units of that course goes. We might find that we have such demand that we will start another cohort partway through the first cohort. We are also looking to upskill some of our teachers in delivering that course. As the minister said, we are working with one of the BentSpoke employees who has delivered training at CIT in the past—a few years ago. We are upskilling him in the required qualification, but we also need to look at the other aspects of our workforce and make sure that we have capacity to expand the scope of the program.

MS LAWDER: It is a very interesting sort of pilot. Is there scope, do you think, in other areas? You have probably heard of endangered skills and trades—coopers, farriers, saddlers, blacksmiths, sword makers—and there are small businesses who can no longer take on apprentices in that kind of a role. Do you think there could be scope, if this is a successful pilot, for something to help endangered skills and trades?

Mr Steel: CIT might be able to comment on that.

Ms Andersen: Ms Lawder, I think there absolutely is scope, but obviously a critical mass of students is really important. But potentially under the new National Skills Agreement, with a more networked TAFE system, and working closely with Jobs and Skills Councils we might be able to work across the TAFE network to address some of those very bespoke skills needs.

MS LAWDER: It has been put to me that there are many common skills like workplace health and safety, admin, HR, finance and those kinds of things, and then you there are trade-specific skills, which the business partner may be able to assist with, because we are talking about very small numbers. Otherwise, those skills and trades will die out because of a lack of training. Would it be possible to look at those common foundational skills for those sorts of trades and then separate on-the-job, trade-specific training?

Ms Andersen: Absolutely. I think that qualifications reform is also part of the national reform agenda, looking at common units. That is something that we do at CIT anyway. We look at where common units are present in qualifications and opportunities for mixing up our student cohorts and cross skilling our teachers.

MS LAWDER: Okay, thanks.

THE CHAIR: Supplementary questions.

MS LAWDER: Looking at page 133, it says that participation rates have dropped for VET, and on page 136 it says that it is a national trend, but this does not appear to be the case for private training providers in the ACT who, according to the NCVER, continue to show an overall increase in enrolments and commencements. Why would

that be happening at CIT but not reflected in private providers?

Ms Robertson: Thank you for that question. Private training providers have a focus, often, in very different areas and very specific areas, and will focus their training on where there is demand. You will be aware that at CIT we work very closely with Skills Canberra to respond to the demand that we are presented with. We have also seen a steady increase this year as a result of investment in training through fee-free TAFE.

We are also aware that we work in a full-employment environment, and also in a community where there is significant financial stress for students who may need to work rather than learn. We certainly make opportunities for students to undertake programs in ways that are flexible and convenient but recognise that people may choose to work in an environment where they can get full employment as opposed to study.

We continue to be alert to the market, respond to student demand and work very closely with Skills Canberra around the training needs and, again, work very closely with industry to look at what we can do to work with people in their workplaces so that we continue to upskill in areas of key demand, specific demand. So we believe that our trends are reflective of the national training system generally.

MS LAWDER: What else are you doing to try to reverse that trend and increase the numbers?

Ms Robertson: We recently had a very successful open day at CIT. We were strongly involved in our community, engaging in our community. Again, Ms Andersen can talk to you about that significant effort and the outcomes of that activity.

Ms Andersen: Thank you, Ms Robertson. As Ms Robertson said, we held our very successful open day last Friday, 17 November. We adopted a different approach from last year, in that we opened our three large campuses at Reid, Bruce and Fyshwick to the public and to prospective students. We really wanted to demonstrate the scope of what CIT offers. We have over 200 courses on offer, and we have a lot to offer to school leavers, to mid-career professionals and to people who are looking to upskill.

We featured demonstrations and tours. The tours were very popular. And we had information booths and, most importantly, access to our expert teachers and support staff across the three campuses. At open day and since, we have seen a very strong surge of applications for a range of courses, including around 170 applications for fee-free TAFE places.

MS LAWDER: Given that the private training providers seem to be going quite well, is there any scope to reassess the way that their places are funded so that the government can support those who learn in the private system as well?

Mr Steel: There are various programs—the Australian Apprenticeships User Choice program—where subsidies are provided for a range of different RTOs that want to deliver that type of workplace—

MS LAWDER: Is that federal apprenticeships or—

Mr Steel: It is funded by both the ACT government and the Australian government. The National Skills Agreement is obviously part of that, and that program typically funds the type of arrangement where there is a host employer employing an apprentice or trainee who is undertaking training, whether that is at CIT or at a registered training organisation. It is a demand-driven program, so the funding will follow anyone who wants to take up one of the eligible qualifications. It requires host employers to be involved and be able to take on those apprentices, but there have been subsidies from the government, in particular, to encourage them to do that.

MS LAWDER: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Supplementary questions. Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Minister, between the circular economy and electrifying everything there is quite a lot of change happening in our building space and there is also still quite a lot of construction and demolition waste that we are producing; we are developing quite fast. What work is going on to make sure that we have the skills, training and qualifications we need for the skill sets in circular economy and smart building and scope 3 embedded-emissions type building techniques?

Mr Steel: Yes; it is part of the circular economy action plan and recognising that there is a need for skills development in this space. But it is also part of the discussion that we have been having with industry as part of the development of a new skills industry action plan to look at whether there are gaps in the qualifications that are currently offered and whether we need to develop new training courses all together or to deliver ones that are currently on the books but not currently delivered by an RTO in the ACT.

We are looking at what we need to do here in the ACT in relation to the use of those resources and whether it is done elsewhere. We are trying to get clarity on what we do here in the ACT so that we can then tailor the skills needed. And then in relation to sustainable building more broadly, which is part of the discussion that we are having around the circular economy principle, that leads us to think about how we design and build buildings in the first place that avoid the use of the problematic materials. There has been a big focus on making sure that we have the right sort of mix of skills there, as well. I will hand over to Skills Canberra to talk about where the action plan is up to, but sustainable building is a big focus of that.

Ms Arthy: Thank you. We have consulted with industry over the last 12 months, in both the renewable and sustainable industries as well as the building and construction industry. As the minister referenced, there are a number of trends that are impacting on the building and construction industry, including the introduction of sustainable building practices and products, as well as, I guess, other trends that impact on efficiency for building. We have also been discussing across government, with the transition that is expected, what are the future trends in terms of the occupations and qualifications where there can be an uplift or a change so that they can transition or move between industries.

Plumbers and electricians are good examples where those skills will still be needed

but potentially applied differently into the future. There will probably be the impact of a surge period where there is going to be those trades required as buildings transition into new technologies and new practices, but there is still continued maintenance of the existing. So, we are also working in another part of our directorate, and through a range of portfolios, on what the workforce attraction requirements are. That would also go, for example, to our skilled migration opportunities as well as how we attract people to the ACT or to the sector through marketing campaigns and what have you. I am not sure if you want to talk through that aspect of it.

MS CLAY: I might nail down on a specific aspect. I am really pleased to hear that there is industry consultation going on. I am interested to know who you are consulting with, because there are lots of different players, and some of the more innovative ones are quite small. For instance, out at Molonglo Group they are doing some quite interesting things with rammed earth building techniques, and I would be interested in knowing if they are in your building and construction consult list. And there is a whole lot of people working in the recycled plastics space that would fit into that space. So, when you say you are consulting with industry, who are you consulting with?

Ms Arthy: On the skills website there is a listening report that talks about the outcomes of the consultation that we took. But what I might do is take on notice the attendees of that roundtable.

MS CLAY: It would be excellent if you could take that on notice. If I see or hear of gaps, I will let you know.

Ms Arthy: Yes. I will say that that is one avenue of consultation. There is broader consultation that occurs across Skills Canberra as well as CIT, with industry, which would be quite extensive. And in respect of the renewables I know that EPSDD have undertaken significant work, as well, with industry to identify what occupations are needed in the future, so they would be another source of information.

MS CLAY: That is great. We are further advanced in our renewables, and I think we have a clear idea of who to talk to and what questions to ask than we are in our circular economy so I suspect the gap would be in the recyclers and people working in sustainable construction techniques. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Can the committee get an update on this year's fee-free TAFE program, including the number of enrolments and the most popular courses?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to CIT shortly. We have signed up with the federal government for a new three-year agreement to deliver 3,600 places. We had 2,500 that we have just delivered. In fact, we have gone beyond the target in terms of the number of commencements, which is fantastic. This longer-term agreement will give certainty to CIT but, more broadly, for students looking to undertake fee-free training there is a range of different qualifications available. We have been working with CIT on what those are. They are in areas, obviously, of high demand in terms of skills.

We have seen a higher take-up in a couple of particular qualifications. Cybersecurity actually had the highest take-up. I think 10 years ago you probably would not have

expected that qualification to be at the top of this type of list, but that has been really great to see, and it obviously meets a growing and emerging industry demand in the ACT.

And then there is early childhood, which is, I guess, a more traditional area of study that obviously is in high demand. There continues to be a shortage of early childhood educators and so the certificate III was a close second there. But there is no doubt that the fee-free nature of this program is making a difference in terms of reducing the barriers to taking up training.

I have spoken to a range of different people undertaking this program. In fact, we had a group of mature-age workers that went up and met the Prime Minister just recently. They who were looking to transition into a completely different industry and would not have undertaken this training but for the fact that it was fee-free, which is excellent. And then we have a large cohort of younger people. Again, it makes a real difference to their cost of living to be able to have fee-free training and to be able to undertake that at CIT. So, it is making a big difference, but I will hand over to CIT to talk through some of the specific numbers that we are seeing thus far.

Ms Robertson: Thank you, minister, and thank you for that question. The fee-free TAFE initiative has been a very successful one. As a new initiative we at CIT monitored it very closely and on a weekly basis we looked at our data and looked at the trends, and adapted where needed. Ms Andersen has all the details of our performance across eligibility criteria, programs in demand and how we have achieved those 2,530 fee-free TAFE places in 2023.

Ms Andersen: Thank you, Ms Robertson. So, we absolutely met our commitment in delivering those 2,530 places. We actually have commenced with slightly more students than that, which is fantastic. We had, overall, 155 enrolments in pre-apprenticeship programs; 187 enrolments in other short courses; 90 enrolments were specific to the care industry and an additional 90 in aged care qualifications; over 2,000 enrolments in full qualifications and over 100 enrolments in foundation skills courses.

Around six per cent of our students were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; eight per cent were unpaid carers; 17 per cent were women experiencing financial hardship; 30 per cent were job seekers; 37 per cent were young people aged between 17 and 24; five per cent of our students identified as living with a disability. We had 25 women who enrolled in courses in non-traditional fields; 55 humanitarian visa holders and 30 veterans enrolled in those courses. Note that some of those categories are not mutual exclusive.

In terms of courses where we saw the highest enrolments, our top six courses are the certificate IV in cybersecurity, as the minister said; the certificate III in early childhood education and care, then the certificate III in business; the certificate IV in community services; the certificate IV in mental health; and the diploma in project management. So, we are very satisfied that the first tranche of fee-free TAFE has hit the mark.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Are there any expected changes in the course offering for

next year?

Ms Andersen: The course list is slightly narrower to start with for the next tranche of fee-free TAFE, which will commence in 2024. We have 23 short courses, and many of those, as we spoke about before, are enabling courses or pathway courses to full qualifications, and 35 full qualifications. But we will continue to monitor the uptake of those courses and, where there is unmet demand, we will manage that program accordingly, noting that we are absolutely committed to prioritising enrolments for people who meet one of those priority cohort criteria.

THE CHAIR: In the last minute, are there any supplementary questions? There is none; we will all get a one-minute early mark. On behalf of the committee, thank you, Minister, and all officials, for your attendance today. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answer to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliament portal as soon as practical and no later than five business days after the hearing. Thank you, everybody.

The committee adjourned at 11.59 am.