



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25](#))

Members:

**MR T EMERSON (Chair)
MS C BARRY (Deputy Chair)
MISS L NUTTALL
MS C TOUGH**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2025

**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.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 11.16 am

Appearances:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner
Causon, Ms Barbara PSM, Acting Commissioner

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2024-25. The committee will today hear from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner, the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and the University of Canberra.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people, and wish 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 welcome, of course, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself. Therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and web-streamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used the words, "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome Ms Barbara Causon PSM, Acting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner. Please note that, as we have covered, as a witness you are protected by parliamentary privilege and also bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. Ms Causon, how long have you been acting in this role?

Ms Causon: For exactly five weeks as of today.

THE CHAIR: At the beginning of this year, in annual reports hearings on 19 February, Ms Turnbull-Roberts said: "We are seeing horrific issues of child sexual exploitation in the territory, such as being sexually trafficked from one jurisdiction to another." Are you aware of these issues?

Ms Causon: I am not aware, in my time, of sexual trafficking of our young people, no.

THE CHAIR: How widespread is, or how concerned are you about, child sexual exploitation in the ACT in general?

Ms Causon: I am concerned about many of our young people who may be engaging in sexual activity at quite a young age.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any specific concerns in the child protection system?

Ms Causon: I have a number of concerns in the child protection system.

THE CHAIR: If there are any details you can provide related to sexual exploitation or inappropriate sexual relationships and those sorts of things it would be helpful.

Ms Causon: My concerns for young people who may be engaging in sexual activity at quite a young age is not just restricted to the child protection system.

THE CHAIR: Specific to the child protection system, though, are there any patterns or anything to that effect where you have a concern?

Ms Causon: There is nothing that I can tell you specifically. There are concerns across the community around a number of our young people in residential-care settings and under other sorts of orders. But there are no specifics that I could provide.

THE CHAIR: It has been put to me that there are not any real proactive mechanisms available to interrupt predatory behaviour when it might be identified by child support or child protection workers and even if ACT Policing might want to be involved, if the child is not disclosing, reporting or alleging. It seems like services need to wait until an offence has occurred before they can take any action, and even then it can be difficult. Obviously, a vulnerable child might not feel like they need to make a disclosure or might be confused as to whether this is actually an appropriate relationship as opposed to an inappropriate one. Is that your understanding? Have you had those concerns raised with you?

Ms Causon: I think that we could do more work to ensure that our young people are well informed about consent and that they understand what sexual exploitation actually is, how to report it in a safe manner and where they can report it to. Certainly, young people can come to our office and we will assist them through a process of formally reporting. I think more needs to be done to make it clear out in the community how best our young people can do that.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that you have been in the role for five weeks. Obviously, you have been active in the community for a much longer time than that. But, specifically over the last five weeks, what has kind of jumped out at you as a top priority or the top couple of priorities?

Ms Causon: Certainly the youth justice space is a huge priority, and that is our young people both in detention and not in detention. Aftercare—young people aging out of the out-of-home care system—is a huge priority for us. Family-finding and family connection—making sure that our young people in care are well connected to their family, and that includes siblings who might be in another placement or who might be in another state—is jumping out as a huge priority.

MS BARRY: Ms Causon, what percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait young people in out-of-home care are you currently involved in case managing?

Ms Causon: I would have to take the question on notice in terms of the actual percentage.

MS BARRY: Sure.

Ms Causon: We work with any young person or family that approaches us for assistance.

MS BARRY: Okay, thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested in whether you have identified throughcare as a priority—so young people coming out of Bimberi and needing support. Is that also an area that you think should be a priority for government?

Ms Causon: Yes, I do think that we need to do more around supporting our young people who have been engaged with the youth justice system, and we need to do that as early as possible. What we do not want to see is those young people transitioning across to the AMC.

MS BARRY: Ms Causon, going back to the question Mr Emerson asked about the sex trafficking, earlier on in the year the evidence was that there were concerns about sex trafficking and, when it was clarified, it was clarified that the matter had been reported to police. I just want to confirm that that is not currently what you understand—that there are no sex-trafficking issues that you are currently aware of.

Ms Causon: I am sorry; I cannot comment on that. I do not have any information around whether that matter at that time was reported to police.

MS BARRY: There were no transfer notes? It is quite a significant issue, and I would think that that would be something that would—

Ms Causon: I would absolutely agree with you. I just have not seen anything that indicates to me whether that was reported.

MS BARRY: That is the answer that I was getting to—that there was nothing. I just wanted to clarify that, because I know that there were some concerns in the community about that accusation lingering on. So I just wanted to clarify that there is currently nothing.

Ms Causon: Not that I am aware of, Ms Barry.

MS BARRY: Okay; thank you.

THE CHAIR: I might jump in on the handover notes question. When you came into the office, how did that unfold and how has the handover gone? Have you been able to pick up work that was there waiting for you? Has it been more of a clean slate and trying to engage from the get-go? Can you walk us through a little bit of what that process has looked like from your perspective?

Ms Causon: Sure. I was previously the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

and Young People Advocate in the lead-in to establishing the commissioner's role. So I have some history and knowledge of setting up the office and undertaking some work—and a lot of that continues today. So I was able to pick those aspects up fairly quickly. There was an Aboriginal staff member still in the office who has obviously been doing a lot of work and a lot of case management work; so that work is continuing. I have now engaged another senior caseworker, an Aboriginal senior caseworker, who is picking up the youth justice side of our work. So we are not entirely clean-slated, no.

MS BARRY: Ms Causon, I understand that you have only been in the job for five weeks, and I sympathise with that, but from our perspective this office should be running in its second year now and should be fully established. I just wanted to confirm how many staff you now have in your office.

Ms Causon: At this stage, aside from myself, there are two Aboriginal staff members in the office and we are currently in a recruitment process to attract more staff.

MS BARRY: So you will be fully funded for your FTEs in due course?

Ms Causon: The funding allocation is there to proceed with recruitment, yes.

MS BARRY: Earlier in the year Ms Turnbull-Roberts called for a case management system. I wanted to find out from you where that is up to and if the government has provided that.

Ms Causon: It is still in train. There has been one demonstration of the proposed case management system and another demonstration is currently being organised. We are hopeful that it is not far off to actually get an appropriate case management system in the office.

MS BARRY: Thank you. What is what is the timeline for that? Again, there is a concern that the office should be fully functional by now.

Ms Causon: I agree. We are somewhat reliant on I think it is called Digital Canberra to assist us in implementing a case management system that is compatible and acceptable. I understand they are in the final stages of testing of that system to be able to roll it out to agencies such as this office.

MS BARRY: Do you have a timeline of when that—

Ms Causon: I have not been given an exact timeframe; only to say that it is a relatively short timeframe.

THE CHAIR: I think they are in after lunch. We might be able to ask them directly.

Ms Causon: Yes, please.

MS BARRY: I also note from your website that the last submission from your office was November of 2024, which was 12 months ago. What submissions are you currently working on?

Ms Causon: As I indicated, I have only been in the office for five weeks. We have not yet made any final determinations about what submissions we would want to move forward with in the short term.

MS BARRY: Just going back to Mr Emerson's comments around the handover notes, again, the office should be fully functional in the second year, at least to an extent. Was there anything in there that perhaps warranted moving forward in terms of future workplans? Was there anything in the handover notes or the handover that was provided, if any, that warrants future work?

Ms Causon: I would have to say that I do not actually have handover notes. As I said, there was still a staff member in the office who was continuing to work on a number of matters. We have not yet, as a relatively new team, had the opportunity to determine what the priority areas are for submissions in the immediate future.

MS BARRY: Right. Does that mean that we would not expect your submission into the Jumbunna report and recommendations from that?

Ms Causon: The Jumbunna report is certainly a priority report for the Aboriginal community here in the ACT. It is a report that I am quite familiar with, and I think there is considerable relevance to this office. As I said, we have not yet been in a position to make final decisions about submissions. There is also the youth justice inquiry, and the office's previous submission to that may need to be updated. These are the things that we are working through at the moment.

MS BARRY: What else is on the "working through" list?

Ms Causon: Again, we have not had those sit-down discussions about what else and what the priority or order of those submissions are at the moment.

MISS NUTTALL: On the Jumbunna report, have you identified any particular areas of that report that you think should be a focus for the office were you to have it as one of your priorities?

Ms Causon: The correlation between child protection and youth detention is a clear priority area that has been picked up in that report—it is not a new issue but certainly the Jumbunna report has given that some prominence—as has the lack of throughcare and support for young people who have engaged in the youth justice system and how we support those young people moving forward to ensure that they do not progress to adult detention. They would probably be the two highest priority areas for me coming out of the Jumbunna report.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify: you have you have got some continuity because of the one staff member that was in the office previously and is still in the office now? Is that right—that there was one staff member?

Ms Causon: Yes, and I should point out that she only joined the office in June.

THE CHAIR: Okay, and you started five weeks ago—so the start of October essentially.

Ms Causon: On 9 October.

THE CHAIR: And you do not have access to case files or emails from before that? I understand there has not been a formal handover. What are you missing?

Ms Causon: Given the lack of an appropriate case management system for the office, accessing some of the case records has been quite difficult. We hope that the new case management system will resolve that issue. I also do not have access to any information that might have gone directly to Commissioner Turnbull-Roberts. So there are some gaps or emails that went directly to other staff members that may no longer be in the office. I do not have access to that information.

THE CHAIR: Back to the recruitment, how many FTE staff is the office funded for? Is there a total funding allocation and you recruit based on that? I am interested in how many extra roles there might be.

Ms Causon: The funding allocation allows for four staff, exclusive of the commissioner's position.

THE CHAIR: So you are hoping you can pick up two more in this recruitment round?

Ms Causon: I am very hopeful of getting two more staff in the office.

THE CHAIR: We will make sure we get the word out—though I am sure you would have done so yourself.

MS TOUGH: I think my question probably follows on nicely from that one. Ms Causon, can you tell us more about why the commissioner role is so important to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

Ms Causon: I think I can. I actually chaired the *Our Booris, Our Way* review, which made the recommendation. I do not pretend that that was the start of it, because the ACT Aboriginal community had been calling for such a role for many, many years. There were a number of people out in the community who had been advocating for such a role. The *Our Booris* review gave us the opportunity to formalise that recommendation. I was involved in drafting that recommendation. I was involved in the significant consultation process that occurred across the community in the establishment of that role and in fine-tuning what would be included in legislation. The importance to the community was demonstrated throughout that consultation period.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Can you refresh my mind: when was the *Our Booris, our way* report delivered?

Ms Causon: The final report was delivered to government in December 2019, but it was an iterative report. So we were making recommendations throughout the two-year period.

MS TOUGH: That makes sense. I was just trying to remember exactly when that was. In your office you have two and hopefully four staff members coming online soon plus

yourself. What do you see the next 12 months to two years bringing for the office and for the community?

Ms Causon: I think that one of the most significant things in the legislation for this role is individual advocacy and how important that is to our community here in the ACT. I guess it sets us apart a bit from other jurisdictions in that most commissioners around the country do not have that power in their legislation. But, of course, on the other hand, there is systemic advocacy that needs to occur to address issues.

Although the child protection system and the youth justice systems are clear priority areas, there are a number of other areas, if we look at the education system and the number of our young people who are perhaps not engaging well in education at the moment or who are experiencing racism in the education system. There are a number of other areas—for example, the disability sector—where I would hope that, with a fully operational team, we would be able to address much more broadly than the sort of crisis points of child protection and youth justice.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Your individual advocacy powers are for young people in any of these areas as well, isn't it? I know the focus has been in the youth justice and child protection areas, but that could extend into education and disability and other areas too, couldn't it?

Ms Causon: Yes.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

MS BARRY: Ms Causon, again, I appreciate you have only been in the role for five weeks so you probably have not turned your mind to it, but I would be really interested to hear how you intend to operationalise those powers that you have.

Ms Causon: As I said, when I was previously acting as the advocate obviously I did not have those powers. So I am still getting across how best I can utilise those powers. I have already used those powers to request specific information around individual matters. I think that the power to conduct formal inquiries and the power to compel information from numerous sources are what I would be looking to utilise as much as needed.

MS BARRY: It takes some getting used to; so I appreciate the situation you are in.

MISS NUTTALL: Does your role cover the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Advisory Group?

Ms Causon: Do you mean the advisory group that might be established by this office?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes.

Ms Causon: My understanding is that that has not yet been established. It is certainly something we will be looking at in the near future. But, to date, a youth advisory committee—which, under the legislation, may be established by the commissioner—has not yet been established.

MISS NUTTALL: That is helpful to know. I am assuming that will come out as you do the prioritisation work for the office?

Ms Causon: Yes.

MISS NUTTALL: In that case—and it is probably a bit more in relation to the previous question—how are you going getting access to Bimberi with the powers that you have?

Ms Causon: To date, in the whole five weeks, I have not had any issues in getting access. I have been out there and I have a staff member who is out there weekly. We have a couple of requests in for information at the moment on particular matters. It was a very, very short time ago, so I am reluctant to comment on timeframes for our requests being met. But, to date, we have not encountered issues with access.

MISS NUTTALL: That is really helpful to know; thank you. What is the current timeline for the completion of the website, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Young People Commissioner.com.au? Is that something you are aware of? I note that the useful links and FAQ sections, last we checked, were currently empty. So I am wondering if there is intent to flesh that out in the future?

Ms Causon: Again, I need to get some more staff to be able to spread our focus more broadly. But, yes, websites are important and we do need to do some work on the website.

MISS NUTTALL: In the meantime, I imagine there are enough ways out in the community to find you that young people seeking advocacy would be able to find your office quite easily.

Ms Causon: I certainly wrote to all of the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and other relevant parties on my commencement and gave my contact details along with general office contact information. We have had a number of requests come in already. So, yes, I am confident that people in the community know how to contact us.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Where is your office?

Ms Causon: It is on the fifth floor of Nara House. Please come visit.

THE CHAIR: I might do that, if that is okay. I imagine with the staffing, it can be tricky to have opening hours. How are you managing that?

Ms Causon: The current office accommodation is not public access. You have to have a swipe access. It is not a long-term solution. There is still work going on around sourcing a long-term office accommodation solution.

THE CHAIR: What is the best way for the community to engage with the office? Do

you have a preference for email?

Ms Causon: We do not have a preference. It is phone calls, it is emails, it is a catch-up with one of us in the community, it is talk to one of us at courts. It is any way that works for the individual or the family.

THE CHAIR: Have you had had an opportunity in the last five weeks to engage with the Therapeutic Support Panel.

Ms Causon: I have. The chair of the therapeutic panel and another staff member came and met with us in our office. I also sit on various oversight meetings with representatives of the therapeutic panel.

THE CHAIR: Great. Hopefully I speak for the committee in saying thank you for stepping into the role and best of luck over the next period. I will definitely visit and I am sure others will as well, if that is okay. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. Thanks, Ms Causon.

Ms Causon: Thank you all.

The committee suspended from 11.45 am to 3.22 pm

Appearances:

Orr, Ms Suzanne, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans

Health and Community Services Directorate

Sabellico, Ms Anne Maree, Acting Deputy Director General, Community Services
Kelly, Mr Shaun, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Disability, Seniors, Veterans
and Social Recovery, Strategic Policy

Yates, Ms Brooke, Executive Branch Manager, Housing and Inclusive Policy,
Strategic Policy

Dolan, Ms Fiona, Executive Branch Manager, Commissioning, Policy and Service
Design, Strategic Policy

Bogiatzis, Ms Vasiliki, Acting Executive Group Manager, Inclusion

Connor, Ms Tina, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth, LGBTIQ+
and Multicultural Affairs, Inclusion

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, and officials. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As always, when taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses use the words, “I will take that question on notice,” which will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions.

Minister, in August, you said that a review of the sustainability of the Working With Vulnerable People scheme is underway and will be conducted in partnership with HCSD, Digital Canberra and other relevant government directorates, including Education. “This review” you said, “will consider the scheme’s sustainability and any digital enhancements that may be possible.” Has this review been conducted?

Ms Orr: Thank you for the question. The review has been initiated and progressed. We have also seen a lot of discussion at a national level around the scheme, which has added further considerations in. The review has not been concluded, as it continues to be a developing policy area that we need to respond to, but it is certainly in progress and considerations around the scheme are ongoing. I might get Ms Dolan to run through more information as to where all the different components are up to.

THE CHAIR: That is great; thank you.

Ms Dolan: As the minister mentioned, there is a lot of work underway in reviewing the Working With Vulnerable People scheme here in the ACT. The first priority of that work has been to strengthen the WWVP scheme alongside urgent work that is progressing nationally around the “banned in one, banned in all jurisdictions” approach. This will enable stronger mutual recognition across jurisdictions around people who have been banned from working with children check schemes, and in the ACT that is working with vulnerable people. This means that the ACT needs to urgently work towards implementation by the end of 2025 of this mutual recognition of negative

notices, which requires legislative change. That has been our focus over the last few months in order to prioritise the reforms that enhance child safety, noting that Working With Vulnerable People is one of many safeguards that help to protect children in the ACT.

There will be future work around a range of areas in working with vulnerable people into the future, which will take into consideration the national agenda alongside broader sustainability issues in the ACT, to make sure that we have a holistic review of the Working With Vulnerable People scheme. That work will continue into 2026, and we look forward to updating on that work as it progresses.

THE CHAIR: Given the increasing awareness on this issue nationally but also here in the ACT and noting the ACT is the only jurisdiction without a digital card—an online card number verification process—is there any prospect of that work proceeding at a faster rate than the work that is happening across all jurisdictions?

Ms Orr: Sorry; just to clarify: is this work to have an online verification or check?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Orr: I will let Ms Dolan go to the substance of the question. I would note that all the Working With Vulnerable People schemes are slightly different across all jurisdictions. In working to harmonise them, there are considerations as to what to prioritise to make sure that the harmonisation is in line with the highest priorities as set by the national agreed agenda.

On the digitisation, again, our scheme is a little bit different to the others in that we have a lot more checks and balances and processes within it that means that digitising our process is not as easy as a scheme that does not, say, have continual monitoring or does not have other verifications or checks. But I will get Ms Dolan to run through, as best as she can, the information. It might also be a question for Access Canberra as to the actual process for digitisation and what considerations might need to be in that.

Ms Dolan: Obviously, the focus of the Working With Vulnerable People scheme is to reduce the risk of harm or neglect to vulnerable people by checking the background of people who want to work or volunteer with vulnerable people and registering and monitoring those people who work with vulnerable people. In the ACT, our scheme is broader than other jurisdictions in that it is universal and it covers a range of regulated activities. So we need to consider those settings across all of the services that are regulated across childcare services, community services, justice facilities, services for homeless people, mental health services and any future industries that become regulated through the scheme.

The focus that we want to look at in terms of the review is around all of the areas. There will be legislation and policy; there will be an intergovernmental picture across the national agenda; there will be looking at regulation and information-sharing; and it will be looking at systems and sustainability. All of those things need to be considered so that we keep our priority on the importance of the intent of the scheme, and then we make sure that we have the settings right around protecting vulnerable people, looking at those other safeguards, and then we look at the operational considerations as the

second-order priority. Those things are all within scope of what that work progresses. But, around the operations, in particular, and how Access Canberra manages those operations, that would be a question for Access Canberra.

THE CHAIR: I understand all the harmonisation and everything else, but this is really a question about whether or not if I received a Working With Vulnerable People card from elsewhere, I can quickly check, “Is this valid or not?” If I were living in any other place, I could do that but in the ACT I cannot. I understand the technical question might be for Access Canberra, but I have a policy question which is: is that something that the government is intending to prioritise ahead of the other work that is happening in relation to harmonisation and so on?

Ms Orr: I am taking your question to be: “Can you apply through a bit more of a digitised process?” as opposed to, “If you already have a card, can a group that you are, say, working for or volunteering in, verify that it is valid?”—which is a slightly different one.

I will get Ms Dolan to run through some of the considerations. This is an issue that we are in discussions about and I think it is fair to say it will definitely be considered as part of the review. It is one from a range of areas that provides challenges to work through. That does not mean they cannot be worked through, but there are considerations that have to be progressed around privacy, the actual infrastructure to do it and the coordination that is required. So, what sounds like quite a straightforward proposition, is not actually in practice. But, again, there is the assurance that it is being considered and looked at as part of this, but I can get Ms Dolan—

THE CHAIR: Just before you do, if you do not mind: my understanding is that, if I wanted to verify a person’s card, I would send an email to Access Canberra and then someone working within Access Canberra would say, “Yes, that is valid,” or, “No, it is not.” So I do not understand the barrier, if that process already exists, to saving the resources you would use for that person’s time and making that something that can be done online. I am struggling to engage with the “it is a bit complex” answer, given everyone else does it.

Ms Orr: The point I was making was to a policy point. We have to also have consideration for privacy and human rights compliance. So, when we are working through policy changes, we need to consider all of those and work through them. That is the complexity. The question you are putting is probably outside of the policy as to, “How does the IT system work?” and that is not a question for us.

THE CHAIR: I have another policy question about notifying employers about cancelled Working With Vulnerable People cards. My understanding is that, currently, we are relying on individuals who hold the card to self-report where they work. Is that accurate?

Ms Dolan: I am going to have to take that on notice to ensure that I have the right detail to hand. I do not have that detail in front of me at this moment.

Ms Orr: Again, as that is more of an operational matter, we would have to also double-check with Access Canberra to get their input to answer it.

THE CHAIR: I understand what you are saying, but just today the *Canberra Times* reported that a convicted child rapist was able to coach, referee and work alongside children after being released from prison, after his sentence. He has come out, having been convicted, which is obviously long after his Working With Vulnerable People registration was suspended. Of course there are failures in the organisation—that is part of that—and the article also made that clear. But it is not entirely clear whether they were actually notified that this person's card had been cancelled.

I understand your point that it is a technical question but, if I was trying to sneak into an organisation, I would get a Working With Vulnerable People card with my current employer and then I would go and get a job somewhere else. Then, if it got cancelled, that somewhere else would never know because they did not self-report. So, to me, that is a huge policy gap.

Ms Orr: I will take it as a question, not a statement, so bear with me while I attempt—

THE CHAIR: Do you agree it is a huge policy gap?

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, as Ms Dolan has already stated, the intention of the Working With Vulnerable People scheme is to be there as one of the checks and balances we have in the safeguarding of vulnerable people within our community. It is not the only one, and we need to look at it in the entirety of the whole scheme. To the example you just raised, there would be a number of avenues to look at and considerations to take in the sense of determining where the failure or the fall-down in that particular case would have occurred. I am hesitant to jump towards saying it is the Working With Vulnerable People scheme or something else has gone wrong, because I think we need to actually look at these instances and understand them properly so that we are responding to the actual issue, as opposed to just responding to something that makes us say we have responded but have missed the opportunity to close that loophole in the future.

THE CHAIR: Okay; but this is one really clear area where the government can respond, and it does not have to be—

Ms Orr: Can I finish my answer?

THE CHAIR: Sorry; I thought you were finished.

Ms Orr: No, I have not finished my answer.

THE CHAIR: If it is not helpful to respond to this specific instance, that is fine.

Ms Orr: In more general terms then, again, the process for cancellation for checking and so forth is not necessarily something that is going to sit with us in practice; it is going to sit with the operation arm, which is Access Canberra. I can see if Ms Dolan wants to add anything; otherwise, we can take the question on notice and seek input from Access Canberra.

Ms Dolan: The only thing I would add is that there are checks and balances within the act already, as you have rightly said, Mr Emerson, around the fact that it is an offence

under the act not to declare a change of circumstances, but that relies on the individual doing so. There is also continuous monitoring in place around people's circumstances. That requires information-sharing across a range of entities and regulatory functions to ensure that we have the right information to hand. Looking at all of the systems to ensure that we provide the best safety net through the Working With Vulnerable People scheme is certainly our intention, and we look forward to continuing that work and strengthening the scheme.

MS CARRICK: I would just like to add to what Mr Emerson was saying. Currently in the ACT you can put your rego number in and within seconds it comes up "registered" or "not registered". I have just done it for my own, and luckily it is registered. That took a matter of seconds. If somebody shows up with a Working With Vulnerable People card, they could put the number in and it would show "registered" or "not registered". The technology is there already and it is very simple. And, as far as privacy goes, you do not have to say who the person is. If they have their card with their face and the number, you would put the number in and see if the number is registered. Perhaps you can check with Access Canberra about how simple it could be to do it.

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, I believe we have already said we will take on notice and check in with Access Canberra around some information. I do not know if they have already appeared. If they have not already appeared it could also be something you raise with them when they are here.

MS BARRY: You mentioned that there are already checks and balances in the legislation. Can you expand more on the information-sharing aspects of those checks and balances you mentioned?

Ms Dolan: Certainly. Under the Working With Vulnerable People legislation there is a range of information-sharing entities where people can access information to ensure that we have the right records in place and to ensure that any information that has been listed to be considered around whether or not a person should or should not have a Working With Vulnerable People card is shared. That includes information-sharing across jurisdictions, with the courts, with police, with the Reportable Conduct Scheme, with regulatory bodies and with other parties that are all sharing information back into the Working With Vulnerable People screening area to ensure that, if somebody has had an activity that should create a flag in the system and consider whether or not they should continue to have a Working With Vulnerable People scheme, that information is actioned accordingly. That is what we mean by continuous monitoring and that is what we mean by information-sharing—so that those records are shared and due action is taken to ensure that a Working With Vulnerable People card is only held by those that should have it.

MS BARRY: How do people feed in? The information that is shared is only as relevant as who is feeding into it. One element of that is that you are relying on the perpetrator to also feed information into it. How do you know that the information that is shared is the most up-to-date information?

Ms Dolan: That is about what information is shared. That is what we mean about the range of safeguards that are also there to ensure we have effective arrangements. Information-sharing from the courts would mean that, if there were an offence, that

information would be shared back through. Information could be shared from a regulatory body. For example, the ECEC regulator would share information around activity that has happened in a particular environment that needs to be considered—so what comes from the regulator. That means that they have taken some action or somebody shared information that needs to be considered. These people understand the information-sharing obligations. They understand what they have seen and what information they should be sharing. That is how we know that it is appropriate, and the team that do that risk assessment have that training to ensure that they action it accordingly.

MS BARRY: Say, for example, a person goes to court. At what time is that information fed into the information-sharing system? Is it at conviction? Is it at charge? At what point does that information go into that information-sharing?

Ms Dolan: I do not have that information to hand. Our area is the policy arm. We are not the operations arm. That sits with Access Canberra. So I do not have that information, but we could look to find that information or have that prepared from Access Canberra.

MS BARRY: Thank you. That would be really useful, because it determines the quality of information that is being shared.

Ms Dolan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: So just to clarify: you are taking on notice that question about information-sharing and then the questions about online portals, which Ms Carrick was following up on, and then also about the reporting to new employers, if there is any mechanism for ensuring that is—

Ms Dolan: Some of those are the responsibilities of Access Canberra as well not us as policy.

MS BARRY: We appreciate that, yes. Minister, are you aware of reports of deaths of people in visitable places not being reported to Official Visitors for many months?

Ms Orr: Sorry; Ms Barry, can you just repeat the question for me?

MS BARRY: Are you aware of reports of deaths of people in visitable places not being reported to Official Visitors for many months? This is in the Official Visitors report.

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, in answering your question, it would seem to me that there is a particular case that you are asking about?

MS BARRY: It is in the Official Visitors report.

Ms Orr: I have responsibility as the Operational Manager. I am also the Disability Minister; so the Disability Official Visitors will report to me. The Disability Official Visitors will meet with me to talk about things within our subject matter area, within the disability field, and they will provide that information to me. The annual report is put forward by the board. I and all other ministers are provided with a copy. We work

through the issues in there. There is a range of matters that will come through to me, predominantly from the disability as the line minister. As the operational minister, I will be working around more systemic issues and operational issues with the board. With the matters that are raised, I seek advice on them and continue to work through them as they go.

Certainly there have been discussions with the Disability OVs since I have been in the portfolio around the number of places to visit and the increasing concern with providers who are also managing plans, particularly for NDIS participants, and the conflicts of interest that might come from that. Certainly discussions around death review functions for people with disability who pass away in care facilities has been one of the larger discussions that we have been having. It has also been raised in the disability royal commission, and we continue to work through that response

I do not necessarily get significant detail on individual matters. It would be more a case of what the Official Visitors are seeing in the broader sense. Having said that, the directorate will also be working with the Official Visitors and the relevant directorate to their responsibility area. That is where a lot more of the individual circumstances and details will be worked through.

Ms Sabellico: I am happy to add something, Minister. I assume that you are reading from page 7 of the Official Visitors report, where it talks about the visitable places for people with disabilities. All of the individual circumstances go to the National Disability Insurance Scheme for their quality and safeguards area. That information would not necessarily, on each individual, come to the ACT government because it sits with the commonwealth as the responsibility for disability services. However, there has been a recommendation to consider looking at a disability death review. That is certainly an area of discussion in terms of looking at that as an issue going forward to address from an ACT government perspective.

MS BARRY: What is the progress of that work?

Ms Sabellico: All I can say at this point is it is in discussions. But I can certainly take that on notice and provide some advice.

MS BARRY: Thank you. That would be really useful.

MS TOUGH: I am interested in how the implementation of the \$10 million community sector funding boost, announced in the last budget, is progressing in the current financial year to date.

Ms Orr: I will get Ms Dolan to run through the detail of that.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

Ms Dolan: The funding boost was obviously allocated \$10 million—but \$5 million over two years—and we have been doing significant work to ensure that that funding flows out to the community sector. We have created a methodology for the funding, which was about determining the right level of funding out of the \$5 million to the organisations that are eligible. There were approximately 140 community sector

organisations who were eligible for that boost.

Based on how much funding they receive from the ACT government, we have created a tiering system for allocating that funding out to organisations. So non-government organisations who are eligible for the funding who receive less than \$20,000 of funding from the ACT government receive a funding boost allocation of \$5,000; organisations that receive base funding of \$21,000 to of \$65,000 would receive a boost of \$10,000; and organisations that receive funding of over \$66,000 would receive a boost of \$37,000.

The majority of organisations sit in that last category, of the \$37,000. At this stage, the funding has been allocated to 134 of those organisations already. With the outstanding organisations, we are just working through the details. Because it is a small number of organisations, it is just down to existing contracting arrangements with those and we are working those through. So soon the money will be all allocated.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Do you have a breakdown of how many were in each tier? I know you said the majority are in that top tier?

Ms Dolan: Yes. There were 128 in the \$37,000 tier; 13 were in the \$10,000 tier; and three were in the \$5,000 tier.

MS TOUGH: So there were not many in that bottom tier?

Ms Dolan: That is right.

MS TOUGH: You said that nearly all have been allocated.

Ms Dolan: Yes.

MS TOUGH: Has the response from the community sector organisations on how the process worked been that it has been well received? Has there been any stakeholder feedback?

Ms Dolan: Yes; there has been a lot of feedback from the community sector, and positive feedback, on reception around receiving this funding. There has been a lot of really positive feedback around a few things—one, the methodology and understanding that it was important to have that tiering and understanding that providing an organisation that receives a small amount of funding to receive a large amount in the boost would be hard for them to manage and so that the methodology of the boost was really sound. The fact that organisations are able to allocate the funding to the range of things that they are able to and that they can make that choice themselves has also been really positively received. Additionally, we have received really positive feedback around the fact that organisations are able to work together and to pool their funding if they want to to work towards joint decision-making. The thing that we are seeing the most is that organisations would like to allocate it towards human resources and to really support their staffing to undertake work that they would not have otherwise been able to do. But, yes, I would say it has been very positively received.

MS TOUGH: So the government did not put any caveats or conditions on what the

funding was to be used for; it was really up to the organisations and where they needed it?

Ms Dolan: We created some categories of what we thought would be helpful for organisations to allocate the funding to, based on work that we had done through the Sector Sustainability Program previously working with the community sector. So we set it towards what we had heard organisations were their key challenges and then we created a short survey for organisations to say, “If you want to allocate it to that, please, let us know and that is fine,” and “If you want to allocate it to something else, let’s have a chat about it and make sure that we are all comfortable with those arrangements.” The team has been meeting with the NGOs to double-check that we are comfortable with the arrangements and supporting what those needs are and that we understand what those challenges are so that we can inform that into our planning.

MS TOUGH: Were there any community organisations that the government funds that missed out? Was everyone that was eligible is able to—

Ms Dolan: Everyone who is eligible is eligible. Obviously, there was the eligibility that it was CSI eligible contracts.

MS TOUGH: Sorry; I know it was worded really badly. Are there any community organisations out there that are getting government funding for whatever reasons that were not then eligible for the boost?

Ms Dolan: I think from the beginning we made it clear that it was CSI eligible contracts. That was made at the announcement of the boost funding. That is why I think organisations were clear who was eligible. Letters of offer were sent to all organisations who were eligible so that they knew those arrangements. There may well be some organisations who did not meet that eligibility by not being on a CSI contract.

MS TOUGH: But you have not had anyone reach out saying, “We thought we were eligible; where is our money?”

Ms Dolan: No, that has not occurred.

MS TOUGH: Awesome.

Ms Orr: I think the other thing to add to that is that, part of the process in looking at the broader sector sustainability work and the reform work that we are progressing, there have been opportunities to build in surveying and feedback that goes to informing some of the pressures groups are seeing to actually start to address some of those in the wider reform. It is actually quite interesting and has been quite useful and I appreciate having the opportunity to raise it. Ms Dolan might want to elaborate a little bit on that for you.

MS TOUGH: Yes, if there is anything else to add about the process.

Ms Dolan: When it comes to this, in particular, it has been really beneficial, because we have heard from a range of organisations around the sustainability challenges that they have had over time. So I think that it has been beneficial that that work that has

been undertaken the community sector has now been addressed through this boost and has been related to that feedback that has been provided to the ACT government previously.

The data shows that 94 per cent of the organisations have seen that human resources is the most significant cost pressure for them, and that has been addressed through this process. Information technology is the secondary pressure and then business development and safeguarding. This information is really helpful to us in understanding what those pressures are and helping us with our policy settings as we take this work forward.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: I am curious about the list of categories. Is that something you are able to provide?

Ms Dolan: Yes. I hope that I have that at hand.

Ms Orr: If I remember correctly, they are quite broad and largely go to administrative functions as opposed to program delivery. While they have a bit more added to them, that is essentially it in a nutshell.

Ms Dolan: Those categories are: human resources, information and technology, safeguarding premises, business development, and fundraising.

MISS NUTTALL: Beautiful. Do you then take the level of detail to the proportion of community organisations that are using the funding boost on core operational funding?

Ms Orr: Sorry—could you say that again?

MISS NUTTALL: What proportion of the organisations opted to use this funding for core operational work?

Ms Dolan: The list I just provided was based on feedback from organisations, so we are categorising it under those categories. That is how it is structured.

MISS NUTTALL: This is obviously a temporary boost at this point in time. It is \$5 million per year over two years. What sorts of learnings is the directorate drawing about the base level of funding that you are providing to community organisations? If they are mostly spending their money on FTE, that indicates that they know that there is work that they need to do and they want to provide it, but they just need the manpower for it.

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, as you have already said, it feeds into the sector sustainability work. I have been very clear through ministerial statements and other commentary on the public record that it is for two years while we work through the other parts and look at broader sector sustainability, so that we are not reliant on measures such as this over a longer period of time. Some of the issues that you have raised are certainly considerations that have been raised in the past and will continue to be raised as part of this discussion.

Going to the points Ms Dolan has made, the feedback to shape this program was that organisations really wanted to look at the more administrative aspects of it. That is where they saw the most acute pressures and that is where they wanted the flexibility. It was not so much around staffing for the programs, which, I guess, is a slightly different question insofar as that is about service provision and the extent to which the service provision in the program goes. That is different to: “We just need to be able to make sure that we have a printer and an IT system that we can use to manage our files.”

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have heard frustrations about limited engagement on longer term community sector funding reform, particularly through the MoG but also in general. What is the plan to start discussions with the sector about sustainable funding options and opportunities?

Ms Orr: While we had hoped to go out as soon as possible, we had mixed feedback from the sector. Some said that they had a bit of fatigue and needed a bit of a pause. Others said that they wanted to start yesterday. So, in finding a balance, we were looking at going out later this year. The MoG has meant that we have had to work through that. Opportunities will come from the MoG, it is fair to say, to progress this work. Starting the consultation may have run into the Christmas and January period, which is not great. By the time we put it all together, we said, “All right, let’s just go out in the new year.”

We have had discussions with peak bodies within the sector to discuss this with them and find the right balance to respond to this, so that the sector’s views are taken on board as we go through it. I think it is fair to say that the feedback that we have is that they do not want to delay forever, but they understand that there are some pressures and are happy to accommodate those in the short term.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: I have a question about LGBTIQ+ affairs. One of the things that can be incredibly difficult for many community sector groups that the government relies on to provide key services to much of the community is funding streams and knowing if they will continue year on year. Specifically regarding one group in the LGBTIQ+ space, I am interested to know how many years in a row Meridian has received funding on a year-to-year basis from the Supporting and Strengthening LGBTIQ+ Communities Program?

Ms Orr: I will ask the directorate in a minute to go into the details of that, but I will preface by saying that I have had meetings with Meridian where they have raised this issue. I have also had meetings with other organisations within the LGBTIQ+ community services sector that have raised similar concerns. We are looking at how we can best address that and work through how we get to something that is a bit more stable, regarding what we put out. We will continue to work through that, knowing that we are still going through all our budgetary processes and considerations. We need to be in line with those. Your question is a bit historic as well. It is not just about what is happening in the future. I can hand to either Vasiliki or Tina—whoever would like to

take the question—to run through the detail.

Ms Bogiatzis: Miss Nuttall, thank you for the question. The Supporting and Strengthening LGBTIQ+ Communities Program is, I acknowledge, a very important program for the community. Meridian has received funding for the delivery of the program for the last two years.

MISS NUTTALL: That has been brought over on a year-on-year basis?

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes. There was an initial deed of grant and then another.

MISS NUTTALL: Was there a previous iteration that funded essentially queer community controlled organisations?

Ms Connor: I am happy to take that question. To add to what Ms Bogiatzis said, the year-on-year funding was from 2024-25, but, previous to that, the first contract ran from 2019 to 2024.

MISS NUTTALL: Ultimately, how much does the funding for the Supporting and Strengthening LGBTIQ+ Communities Program add up to over the years that it has been in place?

Ms Bogiatzis: Ms Connor will look into that. What I can say while she is sourcing that information is that, for the 2024-25 financial year, the total value of the deed of grant for that program was \$224,000. The funded activities included delivery of LGBTIQ+ training for ACT government directorates and community services and peer-led psychosocial support for LGBTIQ+ people and their families. They also operate the CBR Pride Hub and are focused on organisational capacity building to meet the needs of clients who identify as LGBTIQ+ and also live with disability, and they operate the Service User Reference Group. Ms Connor may have the information about the total value of the funding over the years.

Ms Connor: Unfortunately not. We will have to take that question on notice. I can confirm that, as Ms Bogiatzis said, the total value of the 2024-25 deed is \$224,000, but we will have to take on notice any prior funding.

MISS NUTTALL: You said it was \$224,000. That is maybe two or three FTEs, based on the level at which you employ people. Is that enough people, absent all of the infrastructure that you would need to deliver programs like that, to actually deliver all the programs that you have listed? They all seem excellent and worthy. Forgive me, but that does not seem to be much money to deliver that broad suite of programs. How is that—

Ms Connor: My answer to that is that this is not Meridian's only source of funding from the ACT government. They also get funding from the health stream under a couple of contracts. One is the STI/BBV funding and another is from the LGBTIQ+ health policy team. I do not have the figures on those particular contracts with me, but Meridian will essentially pool those resources to employ FTE to deliver the programs. We work really closely with them to negotiate what is realistic for them to deliver within the funding envelope. The ones that are in their deed are things that they have agreed

are achievable to deliver within the funding envelope.

MISS NUTTALL: More broadly, noting that often LGBTIQ+ or queer community organisations also do community-building work, above and beyond service provision, if they are essentially on year-to-year contracts—appreciating that there have been some five-year contracts in the mix too—it is difficult to be sustainable and actually do the important work of building community development. Does that form part of your ongoing discussions about funding? Does that fit into the sector’s sustainability work?

Ms Connor: Yes.

Ms Orr: In a broader sense, yes. Is there anything else—

Ms Bogiatzis: That is right, Minister. Yes; of course it does. Sector sustainability, as you heard from Ms Dolan, is an important consideration in our contract management. I repeat what Ms Connor said, that we work closely with Meridian to understand the needs of the community, but also how they are acquitting against their contractual arrangements.

MISS NUTTALL: Are you looking into alternative models to provide more funding stability for Meridian and other queer organisations?

Ms Bogiatzis: We can consider that—yes.

MISS NUTTALL: Are you currently considering it or is it that you will take that on board going forward?

Ms Bogiatzis: We will take that on board.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: My question is about carers policy. There was a motion in the Assembly in May that called on the government to provide an assessment, by the last sitting day of 2025, of the adequacy of respite care services in the ACT, the potential impact of the closure of Burrangiri and the government’s plan to ensure service adequacy. I am wondering what you have learned from doing this work and whether it has informed your policy to supplement commonwealth funded respite services to meet local needs.

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, the health minister is the one who is responding to that motion and has been doing the work. The health minister is the one progressing the work that you have indicated in your question.

MS CARRICK: Does that work inform a paper? There was a short-term options paper done late last year and it said that there would be a longer term paper.

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, if it is to do with the motion and Burrangiri, that is all through the health directorate.

MS CARRICK: No—that one was not to do with the motion. That was just an FOI

during the Burrangiri—

Ms Orr: Yes, but I think this is with regard to Burrangiri, so it sits with the health minister.

MS CARRICK: No—this is just carers policy. Burrangiri is part of the whole carers thing, but I am just asking about carers policy. Assumably, some of this work will inform policy and your longer term policy about carers. What evidence do you use to guide your carers policy? And when does your policy need to be updated, given that we have the change to the commonwealth aged-care funding arrangements?

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, the carers policy that sits with me and that I have responsibility for is guided by the Carers Strategy which has action plans associated with it. We have been working through the first action plan, and we will look to the second action plan in due course. The Carers Strategy has been developed in partnership with Carers ACT, who provide, I think it is fair to say, very strong advocacy from the carers community that will go to a range of issues and considerations, including factors on respite and support. There are other things as well. It is quite broad-ranging. We will also have input from foster and kinship carers into that strategy—anyone who is an informal carer.

That is the work that sits with me—the work that we coordinate and guide. It is a whole-of-government implementation, so it goes to other areas across the public service. It is about embedding carers' perspective within business as usual, as well as other initiatives that government is implementing, to make sure that we have that perspective over all the work that we are doing. That is our focus within this policy area. I do not know if Ms Dolan has anything she would like to add.

Ms Dolan: As the minister mentioned, the ACT Carers Strategy, which is a 10-year strategy from 2018 to 2028, was developed as a deliberative process with carers in the ACT and in partnership with Carers ACT. It was a foundational strategy and it continues to guide our policy settings in the ACT. Alongside that work, we have been working in collaboration with the commonwealth on their recently launched national strategy, which aligns with the main policy goals of the ACT. It is helpful to understand how much the work under our ACT Carers Strategy aligns with the National Carer Strategy and the national action plan which goes to 2027.

Our current focus in the ACT is under the commitments that the government has made to carers. It is focused on exploring the feasibility of a carers recognition card so that carers can more easily access services and supports. I explore the feasibility of a mentoring program for young carers and work with Carers ACT and other advocates to continue to progress the Carers Strategy, as I have just described. In addition to that, the respite work is also important in collaboration with our health colleagues.

MS CARRICK: There is a strategy, the 2018 to 2021 action plan and the results of that. What has happened since then? Do we have a 2024 plan? I think it was extended rather than creating a new action plan, but there is no outcome of that action plan since 2021. Is that right?

Ms Dolan: Every year, we report through the Assembly on carers. We always provide that annual reporting. There is also reporting in the annual report around our

commitment to carers and all our actions. Alongside that work, we are working with Carers ACT on the development of the next action plan.

MS CARRICK: When is that due?

Ms Dolan: It is a process within this financial year. We intend to have that finalised before June next year.

MS CARRICK: Regarding the carers that you consult with, do you go more broadly than Carers ACT? Carers ACT are a deliverer for carers. They have their cottages. Potentially, they have a vested interest in this. How are you ensuring that their interests are not pervasive through your strategy and that it is a fair look at the needs of carers across the board?

Ms Dolan: It is really important that we understand how many people are carers in the ACT. We understand, through the census, that there are 58,000 carers. Carers are a diverse community, as you mentioned. It is really important that we have an understanding of all the characteristics of carers, because having a care relationship is only part of a person's identity. You can be a young carer, you can be an aged carer or you can be a foster-kinship carer. Under the Carer Recognition Act, we have the responsibility to ensure that we are always engaging with carers who are impacted by policy, so we ensure that we advocate strongly. Throughout the public service, there are many areas of service delivery that impact carers. We have the obligation to consult widely with carers, not just Carers ACT.

MS BARRY: Can you provide an update on the carers card?

Ms Dolan: Absolutely. We have been doing some really important policy work around the Carer Recognition Card. The key work that we have been doing is to prepare the policy paper to guide the work around options. That has required us to look at what we have already heard in our local community from carers through consultation, but also look at options that are in other jurisdictions, because other recognition activity occurs across the country. There are the positives, benefits and opportunities that we can learn from jurisdictional scanning to inform options for government to consider in future.

Ms Orr: I can add to that. Some of the strongest initial feedback we have had is that the focus should not be on, say, discounts, benefits and so forth; it should actually be on verifying that a carer is a carer, so that, when they are in various settings—it might be a service setting, a medical area or somewhere else where they are undertaking their carer responsibilities—instead of having to, in every instance, put their case as to why they are a carer and to provide the support that they are providing or to help the person that they are helping, they can just show the card and it is done. The recognition they are looking for is verification that they are an unpaid carer. There are the rights that come with that, as well as the obligations of the service provider.

MS BARRY: In your policy options paper, are you also considering, for example, parental responsibilities? Say, there is a court order and a carer has parental responsibilities, are you considering that as part of the checks you do?

Ms Orr: The paper has not come to me yet, so I could not say. Ms Barry, pre-empting

what the directorate might put to me, I think that it is fair to say that the focus will be on linking the cards to the Carer Recognition Act—the provisions and the principles that are outlined in that, and the obligations and responsibilities that come with recognising unpaid carers.

MS BARRY: Sorry—I did not hear you.

Ms Orr: The Carers Recognition Act—the recognition that is provided by the act.

MS BARRY: What is the timeframe on that?

Ms Dolan: Obviously, we need to finalise our policy, but we have not been able to provide an update to the minister on that. That should happen in coming weeks, to inform the minister on next steps.

MS BARRY: Who would be leading the implementation of the card?

Ms Orr: Those are discussions that will come.

MS BARRY: Which directorate?

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, those are decisions that have not been taken yet. We are at the point of putting out a discussion paper to inform the scoping of what this project could look like. All the questions as to operationalising that will flow from the initial consultation.

THE CHAIR: Minister Orr, have you had any involvement in discussions regarding access to specialist disability accommodation in public housing in the ACT?

Ms Orr: The short answer is yes, I have had discussions. The longer answer is probably of more interest to you than a one-word answer. If your question is about the sorts of discussions, this primarily sits with the minister for housing, Minister Berry. Minister Berry has provided me with advice. I think this refers to ACT public housing. They are removed from the STA scheme. I think this is what your question goes to.

THE CHAIR: Yes. She delivered a statement in response to a question from Ms Tough on Monday and tabled the letter to the Auditor-General.

Ms Orr: Yes. Certainly, I have received advice. Relevant information has come to hand. I have been advised, such as that ACT Housing will need to pull out of this service. I was provided advice that this would be happening, so that I was not caught unaware. But I have not been a decision-maker in this. This is implemented by Housing ACT.

THE CHAIR: In the disability portfolio, are you tracking how many people living in public housing in the ACT have STA funding in their packages?

Ms Orr: Again, this is probably a question that is best placed to Housing ACT, as they are ones who would be implementing it.

THE CHAIR: They do not know, so I wondered if you might.

Ms Yates: The ACT government's role, being a partner of the NDIS, would not routinely capture the housing status of NDIS participants.

THE CHAIR: So it is not just the STA funding. That was going to be my next question: do we know how many NDIS participants are in a Housing ACT residence? I will move on.

MS BARRY: Minister, I have a question around the \$11 Working with Vulnerable People fee. What advice did you provide to the minister before or after the announcement of the \$11 fee?

Ms Orr: The \$11 fee was an initiative taken forward by Minister Cheyne in her capacity as Minister for City and Government Services. It was focused on operational considerations for the scheme. Through the budget process, the directorate provided input to Access Canberra from a policy point of view, which is the part that sits with us. I can ask Ms Dolan to go through any further detail. Advice was also provided to me through that process, with my directorate sending information to me as to what they had advised, so that I was aware of the information that had gone into the process. I will hand to Ms Dolan.

Ms Dolan: That is right. As the minister mentioned, that was a financial decision for the budget. Following stakeholder feedback, the ACT government then made the decision not to introduce the \$11 fee, which means that the current position is that there are no fees for volunteers under the Working with Vulnerable People scheme. The intent of the proposed fee was to offset costs associated with administering the scheme, because it has significantly increased since the original projections in 2017. Those sustainability challenges need to be considered. That is important work for government. But, at this time, there is no fee for volunteers.

MS BARRY: Thank you for that update. My question was: what advice did the minister provide to the minister making the decision before the decision was made and after the decision was made?

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, the advice that was provided went through briefings between the directorates. The directorate was asked for input by Access Canberra. That is what we provided.

MS BARRY: Then why did my FOI request come back with: "No input was provided by the minister's office to the minister on this issue"? I put in an FOI request, asking for any advice that was provided by your office, and the response that came back was: "No advice was provided, either before the decision was made or afterwards."

Ms Orr: Again, Ms Barry, when we are talking about advice and taking it in the broadest term, HCSD provided advice through Access Canberra and then provided advice to me. Without having read exactly what you are referring to, it would be that some of the advice was perhaps—are you asking if I had a discussion with the other minister? Is that what the question is?

MS BARRY: What advice did you provide to the minister before and after the decision

was made to impose the \$11 fee? It may be a conversation or whatever. If the answer is no, it is no.

Ms Orr: Obviously, there is a budget process and a cabinet process. I am not going to give away deliberations of cabinet. Again, I would point you to my directorate, which acts on my behalf. It provided information into the considerations that Access Canberra had, noting that they are the ones who took this forward.

MS BARRY: So there was directorate to directorate advice, but no advice came to you to approve from your office?

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, I have already said that my directorate then briefed me, usually in advisory—

MS BARRY: That is not what you said.

Ms Orr: I actually said that earlier in the conversation. I said that, after the directorate met with Access Canberra, advice would usually come to me in the form of an advisory note as to what they had said to Access Canberra.

MS BARRY: Regarding the advice that you were briefed on, was that before or after?

Ms Orr: It is throughout a longer period of time. It is not one or the other. I get advice on a continual basis, Ms Barry.

MS BARRY: Are you willing to provide the committee with that advice? Again, the FOI response was: “There was no advice.” If there is advice now, are you willing to provide it to the committee?

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, I am going to take that on notice and look at the FOI and what has been provided to you. If there is advice that you believe has not been provided, I dare say it is because of cabinet-in-confidence.

MS BARRY: Would it be cabinet-in-confidence if it is advice after the decision was made? It would not be cabinet-in-confidence advice if the decision had already been made.

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, I will take the question on notice and I will see if there is any further information I can provide you.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: I am interested in the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Act that started earlier this year and the role that the directorate played in helping the other directorates understand responsibility under the act.

Ms Orr: Mr Kelly would happily take you through the detail of the many chats and discussions they have been having on this.

Mr Kelly: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. The Disability

Inclusion Act is a really important piece of legislation because it enshrines the social model of disability in the ACT. That social model of disability acknowledges that it is not people with disability who need to change to be included in society; society needs to change. The act sets out a range of responsibilities for government. I will tell you some of the things that we have done to support that implementation.

The act sets out requirements for the development of disability inclusion strategies, which are 10-year plans that focus on the priority inclusion areas that are identified in Australia's disability strategy, so that we have consistency with the commonwealth across our legislation. It also sets out the requirement for ACT government entities—that is, directorates and other organisations—to have disability inclusion plans and set up the Disability Advisory Council, which will continue to advise matters on that. The implementation of the act has been supported by the Health and Community Services Directorate with a range of measures. Firstly, there are regular conversations at director-general level about the implications of the act and its implementation. We have also alerted all chief operating officers regarding the commencement of the act, and requirements were discussed at chief operating officers meetings in March.

Importantly, we have established the Disability Inclusion Act guidance hub, which is a single point of truth for what is required under the act. That includes fact sheets and information templates on the act's strategies to support the development of disability inclusion plans. We have also organised and conducted a range of training opportunities with other directorates and continue to do those training sessions throughout the course of this year. The Office for Disability staff are also available to provide support as required, acknowledging that it is the responsibility of individual directorates to develop their own disability inclusion plan.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Thank you. As much as I could keep asking questions, in the interest of time, I will let you go to Miss Nuttall.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you, Ms Tough. My question is about the workforce and how many people in the ACT public service have disability. I understand that number is currently three per cent, or 965 employees. Considering how broad the general term is, do you have any further data on the breakdown of that number—for example, the percentage of those people who have physical disabilities or intellectual disabilities?

Mr Kelly: Miss Nuttall, thanks for the question. It is probably a question that is better directed towards our Chief Minister's colleagues, in terms of their responsibility around the entire public service.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you collect much of that data within the Office for Disability?

Mr Kelly: No. That is a Chief Minister and Economic Development Directorate responsibility.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you ever essentially monitor it to make sure that it is being implemented properly?

Mr Kelly: In terms of the target, yes. That is a whole-of-government target. Our role is not necessarily to direct directorates on how to employ people with disability. It is the

Chief Minister's responsibility.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you very much. In that case, would you mind if I try a different line? This may open a can of worms, but I want to clarify a quick note about foundational supports. A note in the Health and Community Services Directorate annual report, on page 113, mentions foundational supports in the context of support services connected to Auslan. Could I clarify whether deaf adults would be potentially covered by foundational supports or is this still specifically with regard to children under nine?

Ms Orr: It says:

The ACT government fund access to support technology for ACT Deaf residents, aged over 65.

There are Auslan courses. We are talking about recommendation 23. Mr Kelly can correct me if I interpret any of this incorrectly. It says:

The ACT Government continues to engage with the NDIA and Department of Health, Disability and Ageing regarding the needs of the Deaf community, including Auslan courses for families of Deaf children, within the context of reforms to the NDIS and design of Foundational Supports.

I think it is fair to say that we certainly continue to discuss the reforms of the NDIS and the design of foundational support. The considerations raised in this recommendation are certainly not outside of the scope for those, given that they remain in negotiation. I cannot say exactly where they will land at this point in time.

What I would add to that is that the provision of Auslan courses is probably not dependent solely on foundational supports or NDIS reforms; it is a discussion that has been continuing. I have met with advocates from the deaf and hard-of-hearing community to address the ongoing concerns around the provision of Auslan courses and the training courses, particularly in the context of CID Foundation and the removal of CIT Solutions—the shut-down of that particular course. There are still courses available. They are available online. The feedback that we have from the community is that they would very much welcome an option that is not just online. That is where the discussion continues.

So there is still the opportunity for people to do the courses, albeit online for the time being, and we will continue to work with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community as to how we can address their wish for other service offerings, given some of the other factors that are outside of our control. In breaking it down, it not just about foundational supports and NDIS reform; we are looking at this issue on a broader scale as well.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MS BARRY: On the question around disability employment and the proportion of people living with disability who are employed across the public service, I know that a target is set. What percentage does your office contribute to that percentage?

Mr Kelly: I would need to take that on notice, Ms Barry.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

Mr Kelly: Mr Emerson, with your permission, may I give an update on the question that Ms Sabellico took on notice about the disability deaths review scheme?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Kelly: I will be quick. The ACT government accepted the royal commission recommendation in principle to establish a disability deaths review program. That essentially means that we agree to the concept but need to work through what that looks like in delivery. We know that this is a priority for the disability community, because any death of a person with a disability in a care situation is a tragedy and we need to understand the drivers of those circumstances. Accepting that recommendation in principle sets out two things for us. One is the framework to understand the drivers of how these terrible situations occur, but, more importantly, it will give us a really strong evidence base around prevention measures. That is the key target of the disability deaths review scheme: how do we actually prevent deaths in these situations?

We are in the initial scoping stages of that deaths review scheme. That includes us considering issues around information sharing, particularly between the ACT government, the NDIS and the Quality and Safeguards Commission. I cannot pre-empt decisions taken by the government, but we would expect an action around exploring that review scheme further would be considered in upcoming disability action plans. That is again a decision taken by government. That would be the timeframe that we are looking at.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for your attendance today. If any questions were taken on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. Thank you.

Short suspension

Appearances:

University of Canberra

Drummond, Mr Geoff, Interim Chief Operating Officer
Shorten, The Hon Bill, Vice-Chancellor and President

THE CHAIR: We welcome representatives of the University of Canberra. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

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

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. I want to start with a question about the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature and how work is progressing for the University of Canberra to support that centre.

Mr Shorten: The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature is an incredible asset to UC, the academic community, education students and, indeed, the broader Canberra community. At the moment they are housed at the bottom of the library. The university invests north of \$100,000 in support for them. That includes things like the utilities. We insure the collection. We pay for the insurance of the collection, which is at approximately \$12 million.

Our librarians provide support for the honorary committee who look after the collection, and we also provide support for students who are seeking to do research there. I do not know the number of visitors it has, but we regard it as an asset.

In the future, we are looking to see how we can improve the relationship and give it more sustainability and certainty. My view, having met with the committee of volunteers who run the national Children's Literature Collection, is that they are doing good work. We view it as a complete plus for the university, regardless of the outlays that we spend on it at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Have you made a commitment to them, or are you making some kind of commitment that—

Mr Shorten: We are in discussions with them about the future, but I start from the position that is not a deficit position; rather, it is value creation position. I have personally had several meetings with them since I became Vice-Chancellor, and I have learned about their work. I know that our in-house university lawyers and our advancement team are in discussions about the future of the collection and how best to preserve it so that it is available for an even wider group of users in the future.

THE CHAIR: Are you aware of any desire on their part to be formally recognised as a national institution? I believe they may have provided a submission to an inquiry.

Mr Shorten: I am not aware of who else they may have spoken to. As far as I am

concerned, I regard them as a national collection. Since I have arrived, they would say—that is up to them—that they have received a renewed level of interest from the university—which has always been okay, but I think they are an underutilised asset, and I think the collection they have is very valuable, and the insurance premium we pay reflects the value. I think they are in the process of valuing the collection again.

MS BARRY: Thank you, Mr Shorten, for attending today. In light of the SDA conversations that we have been having, are you aware of any students at UC who live in public housing or who have not been able to get reasonable adjustments to their homes because of Housing ACT's inability to work effectively with the NDIS specialist disability accommodation funding?

Mr Shorten: No, I am not. I would have to take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Noting your previous role and your interest, do you have any views on the challenges that some of your students may be facing?

Mr Shorten: I think the university can do more for its inclusion and accessibility. We make provision in our capital works budget. That is one of the overlays we have—how to make the campus more accessible. I have personally met with a range of the students with disability. We have an inclusion team. I have personally met with students to see their lived experience in the campus, and that has been useful.

Our inclusion team is pretty good, I have to say; they take their job very seriously. At this university—and I have been there now for 10 months; I started on 20 January, as you recall—I have been impressed by our wellbeing team generally.

In terms of other initiatives for disability, we were very fortunate that the Snow Foundation has provided a nation-leading philanthropic arrangement with us to provide scholarships worth approximately \$30,000 annually to at least probably 16 students every year, of which some will be specifically chosen from a category including disability. We start that next year, the first intake. The interviews happen in December. We had lots of applications from a range of equity groups, including people with disability. I think that will be a nice flagship program to see how we can encourage students with disability to study at the campus.

MS BARRY: There are no comments from you on the SDA? The question was: what challenges could your students be facing because of the inability to access SDA?

Mr Shorten: I am sorry; I thought you were talking about disability in the university. That is more in my old role. I would answer from my previous experience, not necessarily my V-C experience.

MS BARRY: Yes.

Mr Shorten: The challenge with SDA is getting appropriate housing and then getting appropriate care teams in. The history of the scheme has seen some developers come into it, looking for a quick dollar and, dare I say it, cookie-cutter accommodation provisions. I also think one of the challenges of SDA—and that is the capital package as opposed to the SIL package, the support—is that a lot of the states and territories

gave legacy stock to the scheme when they were bulking it up, and some of that housing was not appropriate when the states and territories gave it to us. I am not speaking particularly about the ACT, although it could include that. What has happened is SDA and its SIL packages have been factored around the design of inappropriate housing. If you like, sometimes some of the problem is housing that is not fit-for-purpose, so we end up spending more money as a scheme on the SDA than we otherwise should.

I think there has to be more regulation around who can call themselves SDA providers. Many of them are very good, but there is a long tail of opportunistic behaviour. I also think, with some of the people who invest in SDA, it is like having accountants and financial planners: some of them treat SDA as a financial product. It is great to invest in it, and we want that investment as a nation. But I think people get encouraged into it, looking for particular returns or as a financial instrument; then, when it does not work out, everyone is disappointed. An area of productive discussion is the regulation of people proposing SDA investments.

You then have the whole issue of SIL; you cannot really talk about SDA without supported independent living. I wonder whether there is a perception of a promise that everyone can have one-to-one care for the rest of their lives, which is not a promise that I think can be sustained. For some people, they might need more than one-to-one care, but not everyone can have one-to-one care. That is not a realistic promise. Anyway, they are observations, but that is not for me as the V-C.

THE CHAIR: You have been more forthcoming outside your remit than any other minister we have had!

MS BARRY: Again, just speaking from your experience, you mentioned that some of the stock that was handed over—

Mr Shorten: As a generalisation.

MS BARRY: as a generalisation, was old stock.

Mr Shorten: Yes.

MS BARRY: Do you see a benefit in the ACT, for example—if there is old stock, if the ACT is part of that scheme—being able to access SDA, and being able to upgrade that stock for the people who need it?

Mr Shorten: Effectively, I am not the state minister, the territory minister or the federal minister, so I sit in the cheap seats, where life makes it easy to comment. Sometimes with that old stock, I thought it would be quicker to bulldoze it. With modular accommodation and smart housing, you could put up new housing which would actually be cheaper and require less care packages. People with disability do not necessarily want around-the-clock carers in their face. With smart housing—by “smart” I do not just mean energy efficient but smart houses using digital tech—I do wonder sometimes if it would not be better just to call in the bulldozers and knock down this inappropriate stock which is dictating care and costs. What you can do with modular housing now, built offsite and craned in, is remarkable, as is what you can do with digital housing and seven-star energy. Again, I am in the cheap seats. That is for you,

the elected people, to—

MS TOUGH: I am interested in some of the partnerships that UC does to enhance students' opportunities in different spaces. Last week there was one announced with McDonald's. I am curious as to what that actually involves.

Mr Shorten: Since I have been here, my aim in the first 12 months was not only to stabilise—less change; one V-C for 12 months, and longer—but also to consolidate our finances. It has been a difficult time for the university. They had got to a point where their operating costs were well in excess of their operating revenue. 171 people have been made redundant or have left. Our financial year, as you are aware, is a calendar year. But the trend is our friend. I think we are doing well to reduce the gap between outlays and revenue. Other than the one-off cost of redundancies, I think we have done remarkably, and that has been a whole UC community effort.

I have also been setting out the direction for the next couple of years. We have a 10-year plan in place that was already there, so rather than just rip it all up and say, "It's all new again," I want to keep our decadal plan but reconsider how we roll out the growth of the university in the next two to three years.

Coming to your point, we see several strategies. We call our plan Reconnected. It is a practical road map. Our 10-year plan is the horizon, and our Reconnected plan is the road map—how we get there. In the road map, some of the features include what we call tertiary harmonisation. That is an unlovely bureaucratic term for recognising that we have a VET sector and a uni sector, which is a bit absurd. We should try and articulate—and I am not the first person to say that. The feds are into it. People have been into it. That means we want to speak to people who have TAFE quals and say, "Hey, rather than pretend when you apply to uni that you know nothing, let's give that diploma of TAFE an academic value in a uni context."

Essentially, we are able to work out of six of CIT's diplomas. It is a little more complicated than this, but essentially the story is that they get their first year at university free, because we recognise they have learned. That has a tremendous saving when it comes to student debt, as TAFE is cheaper, and it speeds up the ability of people to move through uni. We are not just doing tertiary harmonisation; we want to look at recognition of prior learning, and we want industry partnerships, so that is where we get to McDonald's.

Most Australians know someone who has worked at McDonald's, if they have not worked there themselves, and their in-house training is pretty good. A number of universities around Australia, of which we were one—there are 10—have worked out, if you like, that story I have told you about CIT and TAFE recognition, or the registered training organisation training at McDonald's—their crew chiefs, the managers, the people who are the shift managers. Essentially, if you have done a range of McDonald's in-house college training units, that can stack up, depending on how many you have done, to the equivalent of a first year of a business degree.

That is the story. I went down to Belconnen Maccas, in the heart of Belco, and announced a national initiative. All the other unis announced it; we just got the coverage.

MS TOUGH: Well done. Does it start next year?

Mr Shorten: Yes, it starts in February.

MS TOUGH: My next question was about CIT, and you have covered that. Is UC working with colleges, year 11 and 12 students, as well?

Mr Shorten: Yes, with our Accelerated Pathways. Again, as a newcomer to Canberra—I live here now—I am quite impressed by your Board of Senior Secondary Studies. You have divvied up year 11 and 12, and it gets its own focus from the directorate and the board. We offer what are called H courses. ANU has decided not to have them. We offer them in five disciplines. I attended their graduation last week—a busy week, last week. It is fantastic; at least 130 year 11 and 12 students have done things like health, politics, creative writing and movement. By graduating, they have a uni subject already, while at school. I would not have minded if that had been around when I was studying.

It is a great course, and we want to get more into it. I am aware that it happens in other states, but it took me moving to this job and being in Canberra. And I think it is gold. It gives kids the chance to think about, “Do I want to do this at uni? Do I want to go to uni?” Building that familiarity, especially from families who might not necessarily be familiar with uni, is awesome acclimatisation. It is “try before you buy”. For these kids, they have had to do the extra work.

The other thing which I find attractive about it is that I think being a gen Z or a teenager now—gen Alpha—is way different to a generation ago. We need to get with that program. One of the big things in this social media world is isolation. For these kids, they are meeting kids from other schools. They are meeting kids who are interested in the same subjects. I think it is really important for teenagers to find their group, to find their people. I think it is as close to educational magic as I have seen. As you can tell, I am a disciple of it now. I think it is great.

MS TOUGH: Yes, it sounds great. How long does the course credit last for? Say someone does it in year 11; they do year 12, and they take a gap year. Is there—

Mr Shorten: It will last for that time. I do not know how long it will last for. I do not know whether these kids, in 10 years, want to go to uni.

MS TOUGH: Yes, but as long as it allows—

Mr Shorten: It is a good question. I actually did not think to ask.

Mr Drummond: I want to say for the foreseeable future.

MS TOUGH: Yes, as long as they can have that gap year and whatever.

MISS NUTTALL: As a proud graduate of a couple of H courses, I can definitely speak to the merit.

Mr Shorten: Great.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, they are pretty epic.

Mr Shorten: Did they get you to speak to any of the classes? They should.

MISS NUTTALL: They could.

Mr Shorten: We will pass that back. The guy runs a motivated unit. They would love to hear from you. The other nice thing is that the teachers in your secondary system are often the lecturers there. Watching the teachers call out their names was very impressive. It is not just uni staff; it is secondary teachers in the system around the schools who present. It is great.

MISS NUTTALL: I have a question about student housing—specifically, more about the occupancy agreement side. When we have chatted to students, there have been some pretty concerning stories about student housing across the ACT—flooding, lack of hot water, general lack of maintenance for weeks and weeks at a time, and so on. Can I clarify: what is the complaints process for a student who is unhappy with the conditions of their occupation?

Mr Drummond: There is an escalation path. It depends on who the operator is, but all the comments and complaints are captured. There are weekly meetings that take place at an accommodation level. I am interested, with your observation regarding incidences of lack of water, and sewerage issues, in whether it is ours or not. I would be confident that we are addressing any maintenance backlogs for all our student accommodation.

MISS NUTTALL: When you refer to weekly meetings at accommodation level, is that between UC staff and accommodation providers?

Mr Drummond: Yes.

MISS NUTTALL: Does that rely on accommodation providers essentially self-reporting if there are issues being raised?

Mr Drummond: It would. There would also be avenues by which students can raise it directly with the university and the accommodation team.

MISS NUTTALL: What does that look like for a student? Do they just hop online?

Mr Drummond: It would be a portal. Our representatives are visible and known, and contact details are available. Perhaps I need to take that on notice, to make sure that I am not mistaken in any way, but there would be a portal by which they would be able to report.

Mr Shorten: On the student housing, I have been on a learning curve about how all the aspects of the university work. Rachel Overton runs our student accommodation for the uni. She is that link. She wears her heart on her sleeve. I have been very impressed. What we will do is get whatever complaints data, and the various mechanisms. UniLodge run our student accommodation. We have 90 per cent occupancy

everywhere, except for campus west, where there is lower occupancy. I think that is because the stock is old and it needs to be reinvested in.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you have any oversight of standardising pricing for student accommodation, across rooms? Are there any mechanisms? Obviously, we have the Residential Tenancies Act, which caps rent increases per year. Is the same kind of thing happening in student accommodation?

Mr Drummond: I will not call it market dependent, but it does depend upon the type of accommodation that is offered—probably, its standard, its age and the facilities that are available. There are rental affordability schemes that we are subject to, that provide effectively a subsidy on the accommodation. Again, I will take on notice the applicability of the tenancy act to student accommodation.

Mr Shorten: I have a couple of qualitative data points. We provide an accommodation guarantee for all our first-year students. We have approximately 2½ thousand beds available on campus and in Belconnen. Our most popular options are in our single-room lodges on campus, in Belconnen, and our one- to two-bedroom suites on campus. I do not have all our room rates, but our room rates start as low as \$210, and that is inclusive of utilities for multishare apartments.

The rate increases for next year are 0.36 per cent to 0.91 per cent. That is not bad. Our conversion rate, as of the end of October—last month—that is, current occupant renewal, is 78 per cent. That is the highest conversion rate we have had in five years.

MISS NUTTALL: That is encouraging to hear. I have heard rumblings that accessible rooms cost more than other rooms. Can you confirm whether that is the case?

Mr Shorten: I do not know whether that is the case, but we can find out.

Mr Drummond: When you say accessible, do you mean for people with disabilities?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes; for someone who is using a mobility aid, like a wheelchair.

Mr Shorten: That is a good point. I had not thought about that.

THE CHAIR: That is being taken on notice?

Mr Shorten: Yes.

MISS NUTTALL: More broadly, in looking at housing accommodation, what do you see as the positives and negatives of occupancy agreements at UC, whether that is from the perspective of the uni or from what you have heard from students?

Mr Shorten: The positive and negative of what, exactly?

MISS NUTTALL: Occupancy agreements. Essentially, rather than having a private rental, which is governed under the Residential Tendencies Act, students enter into an occupancy agreement with the housing provider, which has different laws governing it.

Mr Drummond: With the occupancy agreements, there would absolutely be more services, escalation points, and probably a degree of control and feedback, for a student occupying our student accommodation than for someone within the private market. It is accommodation that is being developed and managed to provide and support the student experience. Certainly, my belief would be that student accommodation under one of these agreements would suit a student more than the private market.

THE CHAIR: We learned recently about underpayment of staff. The casual professional staff at UC were underpaid by \$1½ million over six years. What has been done since then to ensure that this does not happen again?

Mr Shorten: When I came to the uni, initially, people said that we have a much smaller proportion of casuals, so underpayment is not quite the issue that it is at other universities. A couple of months ago, I got a different report. The problem is not terrible, but there has been underpayment.

We informed the Fair Work Ombudsman. We also needed to verify the problem and the scale of the problem. It should not have happened, and I have apologised to our casual staff. As I said, historically, we have had less casual staff, so I think the extent of the problem is of a scale that is less. But people should get paid properly; it is a basic proposition which I have always believed in.

I am pleased to say that, for our casual professional staff, once we had outlined what the problems were and the scale of it, we immediately had a meeting of all our staff, and I addressed them all. We were able to remediate them, the existing staff, on the day that I told them about the problem. We have already paid back several hundred of our staff—Geoff will give the actual numbers—half a million dollars.

To be honest, no staff member had really raised the issue with us, apparently, over the last six years. Our staff genuinely were a bit surprised that they were getting some money, so it was not all bad. We are now trying to track down the non-existing staff. I will ask Geoff to take you through the measures, because we want to fix this problem as best we can.

Mr Drummond: Originally, we identified \$1.6 million in potential underpayments to casual professional staff. That has now decreased to \$1.4 million, on the basis of validating the data. Of that, we have paid \$583,000 to 736 staff. That is to current staff. We now have a project team in place to contact and validate data for former staff. We believe that about \$700,000 is potentially owed. There are exceptions that apply to whether we do need to remediate; we have to validate those with former staff members.

THE CHAIR: Have steps been taken to prevent this—

Mr Drummond: We have put in place some system improvements within our payroll system, which is called Ascender. We have put in place a system called interpretive timesheets, which capture all the necessary data to ensure, for casual professional staff, that the errors that were identified do not occur again.

We are undergoing a validation process to assess academic staff, as to whether there is any potential underpayment there. We will put in place a framework for ongoing

assurance. The Vice-Chancellor has to provide a statement in our annual financial report that system processes have been put in place to satisfy ourselves that all staff are being paid correctly. To do that, it will be a process of assurance, internal audits and validation.

Mr Shorten: Going to the heart of why it has happened, and how you prevent it from happening again, initially, I was perplexed that this could happen. I have watched other universities before I got here, and I was perplexed as to how institutions with payroll teams make mistakes.

I am absolutely satisfied that it is not an intentional proposition. I think there are a couple of factors. One is that the modern workplace depends on casuals and the use of them, and universities are no exception. In my experience, over a long period of time, not just the last 10 months, with the best will in the world, casuals do not get the same attention as permanents. What we are talking about with our HR team is putting on a dedicated resource just to make sure everything casual is treated like everything permanent, in terms of focus.

The other thing is that the industrial relations arrangements in universities are unusual. They are valid, but they are unusual, in my experience. You have people on salaries. You have people on hourly rates, plus penalty rates. You have casuals; then we have piece rates—people coming in to mark essays. There are good reasons for why it happens, but you have several systems in one. That is not an excuse, but it is complicated.

What happens is that faculties sometimes manage the time sheets of people. There were two issues for the casuals. One was people not getting paid casual but getting paid penalty on penalty. Without boring you, that means a casual gets a loading, and you can also get a penalty rate on top of that, depending on weekend work. Under the industrial instruments governing our uni and others, what happens is that there are exceptions. If someone has a primary job elsewhere, you do not necessarily trigger the penalty on penalty. Someone might have asked for extra work on a weekend. It has been a case of decoding and deciphering that.

The trick is to get the data put in correctly to begin with; then you cannot make mistakes. It should not all be put onto an individual employee to know the time sheets. We are not saying, in our remedial process, “Make sure that it doesn’t happen again.” It is a matter of training people not to make mistakes, because that is not enough of an explanation. I think it is about the prioritisation of casuals.

We have reordered our internal audit work. I have asked that one of the four areas that our internal auditors look at next year is our payroll systems, just to make sure that mistakes are not being made. But we will put more resources into our casuals. We will also be reporting to our council on payroll remediation—how it is going forward.

I must say that the payroll team at UC have worked incredibly hard. They are very conscientious. They have tried to do the right thing. The trick is getting the right information to begin with, and that is why some of these software systems will be better.

THE CHAIR: Would you be able to take on notice, in relation to this, the total numbers

and proportions of academics and professional staff at UC who have been employed respectively on a casual basis, temporary basis and ongoing basis—say, year on year, over the last five years?

Mr Shorten: We can give you a little bit of that. To give you an example, without boring you, there has been over \$800 million paid in payroll to staff over the last six years. With the casuals—they are a portion of the payroll—there has been, I think, a genuine mistake of about \$1.4 million over six years, which is probably somewhere south of \$400 across six years. But it is still people's money. With casuals, we have some numbers. Rather than delay this committee now, we will do the breakdown. We are below the sector average on employment of casuals.

THE CHAIR: Are you happy to take that on notice?

Mr Shorten: Yes.

MS TOUGH: You said that included the non-ongoing—fixed term. Is that in your list?

Mr Shorten: Yes. We will look at the question, and we will make sure we give you the—

Mr Drummond: The full breakdown.

THE CHAIR: Make sure that non-ongoing is one of the areas.

Mr Shorten: I might know some of the numbers off by heart, but I would rather not give you a wrong number and have to correct it.

MS TOUGH: Fair enough.

Mr Shorten: But it is under 20 per cent.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your attendance today. For the questions taken on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank our witnesses who have assisted us through their experience and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard for their support and, of course, the secretariat. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible, and no later than five business days from today. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 5.10 pm.