

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

(Reference: budget 2002-2003—service delivery)

Members:

MS K MacDONALD (The Chair)

MR S PRATT

MS R DUNDAS

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

12 MARCH 2002

**Secretary to the committee
Mr D Skinner (Ph: 62050137)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The committee met at 9.51 am.

CLIVE JOHN HAGGAR and

FIONA MacGREGOR were called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearings. The committee's inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

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Mr Haggart: My name is Clive John Haggart. I am the secretary of the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union. We appreciate, again, the opportunity to talk to the standing committee of the Assembly. We believe the work of standing committees in the past has been very important, in informing both the government and the community. We will always take up the opportunity when it is offered.

We have prepared, for the consideration of the committee and for the consideration of the government, a draft budget submission which will have been made available to you. That was done in the context of the increases to education funding that are now targeted through the forward estimates and government policy. That includes both the class size reductions—put in place by the previous government and extended by the current government—and the opportunity for targeted programs for students at risk.

We are obviously very supportive of these initiatives. We see them as going some way to redressing the gradual erosion of the educational funding base since self-government, in comparison to the other states, over the last 12 years.

There are a number of other initiatives that I think will have a very positive impact on education in the territory over the next few years. Certainly the enhanced ministerial council for government schooling is something we strongly support.

We have called for a review of funding to government and non-government schools. We hope that, out of that review, we will see some settlement around the very contentious issues of school funding that have existed in the territory, and nationally, for a long time.

I suggest that Fiona address the specific schools initiatives that we have suggested and then I will talk about the institute of technology proposal.

Ms MacGregor: The budget submission has seven items. In constructing the submission, we have tried to look at the overall needs of our system and, in particular, focus on areas for students at risk. We have also tried to focus on areas that will improve retention. In addition, we have tried to have some other strategic interventions paid for through other budget lines, to support students and families who are particularly vulnerable.

The first proposal is about targeted programs for students at risk. You might be aware that, last year, the department put together a draft strategic plan called *Within reach of us all*. That focused on how to improve outcomes for students at risk. That plan will be finalised within the next few weeks. It will become the guiding plan for the department. A student support services section has been created within the department to further that plan.

One of the things in that plan that are absolutely central to improving outcomes for students at risk is to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. We have created a focus in there, in terms of resourcing to that unit. We also believe that, if that plan is to be implemented effectively, more resources need to be added into that unit. That is very important.

Part of that unit also oversees behaviour management consultants in the system. Certainly from our members' point of view, that is an insufficient resource at this stage. It needs to have considerably more resourcing attached to it. Therefore, that is something we have also focused on. Within that, we have also tried to develop a model that would be effective in the delivery of that service.

We are trying to create more flexibility in terms of the increase in special teacher assistant resources, to support kids and teachers in schools. We also want to improve teachers' skills, through a professional development program about the construction of individual education plans for students with behaviour problems.

In terms of other government budget lines, we would like to see an increase of at least \$700,000 to the schools as communities project. That project has been highly evaluated by the community in which it is currently working. \$700,000 was originally allocated to get the program started. It has operated in only in a few highly targeted areas, particularly the West Belconnen area and southern Canberra. The new money would be to enhance the program so that the services of outreach workers could be spread to other areas.

Another area the union has identified very strongly in other submissions to Legislative Assembly inquiries is the question of support to children and adolescents who have mental health problems. This is a growing issue in our schools. The centralised model of delivery of that service is probably not the most efficient or client-friendly model. I have proposed to develop a pilot for an outreach program that would actually work in schools—with teachers and families. Mental health has been acknowledged as probably one of the most serious growing health issues within the community generally. It certainly is with children and young people.

Turning to curriculum and assessment review and renewal: in quite a number of past submissions to this committee, we have highlighted the fact that, over time, through different budget cuts, the capacity within our department to deliver curriculum support to schools has been vastly diminished. In terms of resources, that section of the department is supported largely by Commonwealth funding for targeted programs. I think it is absolutely clear that we have to get a far greater resource into the central office to support curriculum review and renewal.

In the ACT, we have the unique situation of school-based curriculum development. However, schools do not have the capacity to do that without support. I have put a proposal here, in terms of resourcing, that the department needs to construct a framework for curriculum review and renewal. It then needs to employ four outreach workers, or consultants who work in schools, to support that work. They can guide the school in how to analyse the relevance of its curriculum and assess whether it meets the needs of its students and the community—and also to look at their assessment practices. That would be a considerable resource, but I think it is something our system needs, if we are going to maintain the relevancy and the challenging nature of curriculum.

The next one is support for students with disabilities. Last year, the AEU conducted two research projects into services for students in our schools who have disabilities. One was for special schools and the other for learning support units. Out of those papers, we developed some recommendations.

The department is currently undertaking the development of the educational needs assessment program. That is to develop a tool by which the need for care and education of students with disabilities can be assessed. One of the things that have always been a controlling factor in whether you could fully meet those needs is the availability of overall resourcing. What I am saying is that, if the needs of students with disabilities are going to be met, there has to be an adequate overall resource.

There is one area we have been concerned about in some of our special schools. Some young people—this is particularly about Koomarri school—because of their disabilities, can no longer access effective educational programs, and may need to be in a different sort of setting. If the committee is interested, I can refer to the original research paper from research we undertook at the beginning of last year, which highlighted that need. At Koomarri, students stay at school until they are 20. Some of the kids have presented with serious problems as to how their care needs can be managed, as well as their educational needs.

Another area that has been highlighted in the department's action plan for students at risk is transition programs for students in secondary schools, and the need to ensure that students develop appropriate pathways. The research currently indicates that the development of pathways really needs to be focused on at the beginning of year 9. Points of transition can often be points of crisis for young people, particularly for young people at risk. We are really wanting an enhancement of resourcing in the system, to try to help the high schools and colleges deal with the development of pathways and improve career advice to students.

Proposal No 5 is class sizes in primary schools and the staffing formula. The AEU has been very pleased with the reduction in class sizes program in the early years of schooling. We are monitoring that through survey processes. We will continue to do that until the program is fully implemented. We want to see that there is planning for the future, in terms of how to reduce class sizes in upper primary and in high school. Currently, high school class sizes, particularly in the core learning areas, are about 32.

Regarding preschool support, in last year's budget, additional resources were given to the administration of the preschool service. That has certainly been welcomed by our preschool members. However, as you would be aware, preschool teachers often work in isolated units, without a great deal of support. Their role is complex, in terms of their role with their communities. There is also the maintenance of the school building. We are just asking for a review of that to be carried out, to see if we can get some improvement in supporting preschool teachers in that role.

Mr Hagggar: In relation to the CIT, the CIT now operates at about \$10 million per annum less than it did some six years ago.

The capacity of the organisation to provide for the decasualisation of a large component of the work force is very limited. They are looking, as a result of government policy changes and industrial agreement with us, at just under 100 teachers being able to convert. These are long-term casual teachers, some of whom have been employed as casual teachers for more than a decade. They will be put on contract, with improved conditions, over the next few months.

If the CIT is left to bear that cost alone, it can only be with significantly increased workload pressures on the existing work force and reductions in offerings to students. That would be through increased class sizes, reduced curriculum offerings and the like.

Coming on top of the program of reductions the institute has experienced over the last few years—that \$10 million—this is just, I think, an unacceptable circumstance. However, we strongly support the government's initiative to decasualise a large component of the work force. We have been calling for that for years.

We have put in a costing estimate of about \$1 million, to be phased in over time. That will support the institute as it shifts from a totally unacceptable level of casualisation—it is about 37 per cent at the moment—to one that is more in tune with its need to maintain a quality work force. The institute will be able to provide reasonable conditions and also sustain flexibility. We recognise that it does need a component of casualised staff—often people who have special expertise, who are employed in other areas. That is why that particular proposal is in there.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Our time is up. The 15 minutes has expired, so there is no time for us to ask questions or speak to you about any of your specific proposals. We will look at the paper in detail. If there are any questions, we will be in contact with the AEU.

Mr Hagggar: We would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

HELEN O'BRIEN,

VINCENT PATRICK BALL and

GERALD CRAWFORD

were called.

THE CHAIR: I welcome representatives of JITAC to today's hearing. The committee's inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

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Please briefly introduce yourselves and then get into your submission. We have a tight time frame of 15 minutes per submission.

Ms O'Brien: I am Helen O'Brien, executive officer of the Community Services and Health Industry Training Advisory Board.

Mr Ball: I am Vince Ball from the ACT and Regional Building Construction Industry Training Council.

Mr Crawford: I am Gerald Crawford from the Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services Industry Training Board.

Mr Ball: Helen will be the spokesperson.

Ms O'Brien: Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to meet with you. I have some documents to table that might assist in the process.

We wanted to flag with the committee the role that ITABs play. ITABs are very much a conduit between industry and government and between industry and the national training reform agenda and local training and planning needs. A significant part of that is the strong alignment with and ownership by industry and the reliance on ITAB services to demystify education and training language and systems.

For the ACT economy, the work that ITABs do is aligned very strongly with the planning for our new and emergent industries and is to help upskill our existing economy. I have given you some dot points on the specifics of what ITABs do: they provide advice to industry, they participate in national training agenda activities, they collect advice from industry, they foster VET in the ACT and they support the implementation of access and equity principles.

I should point out that at the moment those with poor literacy and numeracy and disadvantaged groups in general are not addressed in any systemic way. There is no ITAB that systemically addresses those groups of people. So it is important to maintain ITABs that will at least ensure that industry, in reflecting on training needs, will engage with the needs of those groups.

Continuing with the dot points, ITABs support the national quality framework through accreditation, they disseminate information and they develop a systemic approach to our interactions. Obviously, this takes money to do. The funding process as it stands—originally the ACT had 11 ITABs; in 1994 the number was reduced to nine—is that approximately \$600,000 of Commonwealth money was given to the Office of Training and Adult Education, OTAE, to support the work of the ITABs.

I have given you a chart and some history on where Commonwealth thinking is going. The Commonwealth has kept to its commitment of \$10.5 million to support ITAB activity throughout Australia and has commissioned a review. The review has come up with something called a rational funding model, which uses criteria such as complexity of industry and size of state.

I probably do not need to remind any of you of what that means for a small state, but the whole issue of economy of scale tends to be forgotten. Places like New South Wales are looking for a greater share; the losers will be places like Tasmania and the ACT. I have indicated that the ACT stands to lose about \$45,000 a year in this new arrangement, which, out of \$600,000, is not inconsiderable.

The key issue, however, is that currently the ACT government does not in any way contribute to the ITAB structure. ANTA and the ministers have agreed that this ought to change. So, somewhere in the budget process there has to be consideration of how the ACT will address the Commonwealth's request. I have used the words from the ANTA document:

... Ministers noted that States/Territories agree to review their funding to State/Territory ITABs with an objective of reaching 50% of the Commonwealth contribution to the State/Territory ITABs, with progress to be reported to the Ministerial Council (MINCO). This target was to be achieved by June 2003.

There is a fairly severe funding issue around that for ACT government budgetary planning. In the table I have given you on page 2 you will note that each state, apart from the ACT, has been working towards fulfilling that obligation.

In this context, however, I thought that I should point out to you that a review is at the moment being commissioned by the VETA board to look at ACT ITAB arrangements, with the concern around funding matched by the concern to review efficiency, effectiveness and how we can do things better. The last review was in 1994, and that is a long time ago. We are, reasonably, very supportive of this process. However, we believe that in undertaking that review there has to be a whole-of-government understanding of the importance of having this interface.

While we interface with OTAE in the planning of training and industry advice, the linkages are less clear between what OTAE do and what Chief Minister's economic area does. Yet, if we are talking about a systemic government approach to industry upskilling and planning, there are some discrepancies there that we would like to bring to your attention. Whether that is a budgetary matter or one of greater co-ordination of budget and greater co-ordination of output request is another issue.

We would like to see some funding, apart from our core funding, put aside for ACT government priorities, so that we can work towards and produce quite explicit and concrete project-type results that would seed future activities in the ACT. We are not averse to understanding that we have to move into a fee-for-service activity, and we are not averse to understanding the need for self-funding—that is part of current life in any enterprise. But we do believe that some efficiency is possible.

We believe that the ACT will require a position to be developed with respect to ITAB arrangements that takes account both of the available resources and ACT input and of the fact that this review is going on, which may be an opportunity to reflect on cross-portfolio co-ordination and/or budgetary arrangements. The review may, indeed, be a good vehicle for discussing some of these issues.

We ourselves have developed a strategic plan as part of our own continuous improvement throughout our overarching association, the Joint Industry Training Advisory Council. It is a three-year plan, and I have attached a copy for you. The point of that is, firstly, to try to quantify and qualify what ITABs do; secondly, to show what our direction is; and, thirdly, to provide a vehicle for consultation with stakeholders so that we really are doing what we believe is important.

In any review process it is easy to say, "Let's lump everyone together; let's do a bit of slash and burn." My colleagues and I would say that each of our industry areas is very different in its constituency, its industrial arrangement, its linkages and even in how one approaches that industry to engage it in education, training and planning debate. I would suggest that the area of construction is quite different from some of my much softer areas in children's services. So, while there is a commonality—which we have tried to reflect in the strategic plan—we are also saying that over and above that the specific activity then has to be put through the filter of the particular type of group one is operating with.

I believe we have given you an understanding that there are these nine ITABs. At the moment they are funded according to complexity: art, sports and recreation gets \$60,000 a year; information technology, \$60,000; building and construction, \$85,000; community services, \$85,000; tourism and hospitality, \$60,000; business, \$85,000; automotive, \$60,000; utilities, \$60,000; and retail and personal services, \$60,000.

In conclusion, there has been some decision-making around that but, overall, what the envelope contains is probably not sufficient to meet our needs in a holistic, systemic, ACT government way. Thank you. Did you want to add anything?

MR PRATT: No.

THE CHAIR: We have got five minutes for questions.

MS DUNDAS: Could you clarify something for me, Helen? You mentioned that there will be a reduction in federal government funding. Will that take effect after the completion of the review, or is it something that is going to take place anyway?

Ms O'Brien: The capping has happened. The next ministerial meeting is in June, as I understand it. The ACT will be asked to report on what arrangements they are making to match Commonwealth dollars.

The review is in the process at the moment of having its terms of reference ratified, the membership of the steering group endorsed and a consultant found. The time line for the review is completion by December this year.

MS DUNDAS: The money has already been reduced federally. Will that have an impact on your budget for the next financial year?

Ms O'Brien: The federal money will be available until the end of this year.

MS DUNDAS: Is that the financial or calendar year?

Ms O'Brien: Calendar year. After that it will still be available, but to what degree the Commonwealth and the states and territories will be having a debate—obviously, the ACT in particular—about this agreement, made in 1997, as I recall, for the states and territories to start matching Commonwealth dollars is another issue. Another issue is whether we will have the usual robust Commonwealth/states discussion—

MR PRATT: We no doubt will.

Ms O'Brien: I am sure that will happen. It really does require a position from the ACT. I read you the wording as it was in the tabled ANTA board paper, and that may be something the committee wishes to explore in more detail with the relevant portfolio department.

MR PRATT: Following up Ms Dundas on this question, there is a cap on it now, but are you also concerned that at the end of this calendar year there may be a realignment of funding?

Ms O'Brien: There will be.

MR PRATT: There is no known reduction at this point, but the fear that it could happen is there.

Ms O'Brien: The reduction has been recommended. I think Coopers and Lybrand were the consultants.

Mr Ball: It was PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Ms O'Brien: Thank you. They came up with this rational funding model, which they predicated on a mix of parameters, including complexity of industry and size of jurisdiction. I am trying to think what the others were, but I do not think I brought the detail with me..

There is a base of 40 per cent—I am happy to table this document if that is helpful—so the ACT base is \$525,000. In regard to size, whereas New South Wales gets \$560,000, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the ACT get nothing—under that part of the rational funding model. In regard to diversity, which accounts for 30 per cent of the overall dollar figure, whereas New South Wales gets \$730,000, Tasmania gets \$248,000 and the ACT gets \$38,000.

MR PRATT: So PricewaterhouseCoopers appear not to have assessed any ACT growth?

Ms O'Brien: Yes.

MR PRATT: They do not predict that, do they? By those figures.

Ms O'Brien: I do not know that growth was necessarily one of their issues; I suspect you are right, Steve. What they actually operate on is pressure from the larger states—

MR PRATT: As opposed to opportunities.

Ms O'Brien: Yes.

MR PRATT: Coming back to the ACT level, is one of your major concerns that the previous government—the current government can perhaps pick up on this and take it on—did not determine what the macro needs of the ACT are in determining ITAB priorities?

Ms O'Brien: That would be one of my issues. For me it is more about a better information sharing process. Whilst we talk with industry and TAE about what we believe the training needs are, based on discussion with our constituencies, I am not sure that the training priorities and the Chief Minister's Department's economic development priorities are always aligned. There sometimes seems not to be a match there, and that may be because of the difference between current industry and new, emergent industry. That is what I am saying.

THE CHAIR: We are actually out of time now, but I will just ask a very quick question. You noted that Tasmania has made some contribution on a state basis.

Ms O'Brien: Yes.

THE CHAIR: That is fairly recent, isn't it? They did not use to.

Ms O'Brien: Yes.

Mr Crawford: I understand we are the only state that does not actually contribute to the funding model.

THE CHAIR: And Tasmania was the other one until recently.

Ms O'Brien: It was, but it now does. I will table this chart, if you like, which gives the details of those dollar figures. I was not sure whether I should suggest you get that from the relevant portfolio department. But if you are comfortable with my tabling it, I will. It is an ANTA board paper. I am sure DECS can assist with that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your time.

BOB NIELD was called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearing. The committee's inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

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Mr Nield: I am Bob Nield, from the ACT secondary principals council.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to begin? We have a fairly tight timeframe, so we are keeping people to 15 minutes. I see you have some papers.

Mr Nield: I have brought some copies of the submissions. I am happy to expand on those in written form if you would like me to.

The three areas of our submission are: teacher supply, quality IT support and students at risk. These address your terms of reference—the adequacy of resources to meet current needs, and gaps in services. Some of them overlap those two terms of reference.

If you asked education practitioners in the territory at the moment what is the single most important, pressing issue, they would say it is the shortage of relief teachers. In the last enterprise bargaining agreement, a decision was taken to bring in a sliding scale of payment for relief staff. That means that a relief teacher at Queanbeyan, for example, gets a significantly greater daily rate than a relief teacher in the ACT.

The impact of that on schools is quite dramatic. As we come into the winter months, teachers traditionally have greater sick leave and so on. I have said there that, at college level, we are already finding that classes are being cancelled because of lack of adequate relief when a teacher is away. This causes concern to teachers, students, and parents. At high school level it can result in classes being split, doubled, or placed under minimal supervision in the library. The education of students is put at risk when this happens. There is a compounding effect of classes not being covered. This leads to stresses on organisations and individuals. The loser is the student in the classroom.

There are a couple of solutions to the problem proposed here. The first is an increase in the daily rate for relief staff. That is one obvious avenue. In addition, the employment of a permanent pool of relief teachers would alleviate the problem. However, given the fact that Canberra and Queanbeyan are part of the same community, I think that, for good practice, the rate for a relief teacher in Queanbeyan should be equivalent to that of a relief teacher in Canberra. Otherwise, our relief staff will just go to Queanbeyan schools and not worry about Canberra schools.

The second point relates to the overall teacher supply and quality issue. The ACT is not alone in facing this issue, as it is a national concern. The reality in the ACT is that over the next five to 10 years, 70 per cent of the current teaching staff will be eligible to retire. That is a huge manpower issue for all jurisdictions to address. Teacher shortages are currently being experienced in specialist areas like information and communication technology, science, maths, technology, languages and vocational education. The important point is that planning needs to be put in place now to address the issue. There are immediate issues to be addressed, and longer-term ones as the teaching service reaches retirement age.

An initial step would be to commission an independent inquiry into the extent of the problem. That would identify short and long-term strategies to address the potential emerging crisis—I do not think the word crisis is too strong—at local and national levels.

Moving on to resources: with regard to IT support, if you asked education practitioners in town, “After relief teachers, what is the next most important issue that you address on a daily basis?”, they would say, “Technical support for ICT in schools.”

Teachers have colleagues who work in the public service and in private business. They are frequently alarmed or frustrated to hear of the level of support for ICT in business and industry standards, as opposed to what teachers face in schools on a daily basis. Yet we all know that, if this is to be the clever capital and a knowledge economy, with the kinds of political ideals that we share, schools are where there need to be massive increases in ICT teaching and learning.

With regard to the current funding level: as I say in the next dot point, funding is not sustainable for the outcomes we are seeking. However, in terms of maintaining infrastructure levels in schools, realistically, every large school needs a full-time computer technical assistant reflecting an accepted industry standard. One budget response to meet this gap would be to allocate a team of computer technical assistants—one per large school and one per cluster of smaller schools. Currently, funding for computer technical assistants is meant to be found out of the APS staffing formula. There are very few qualified technical assistants around. The good ones are snapped up by business and industry. Support is a real issue for ICT delivery in schools.

The next dot point is related to that—the quantum funding issue. Present government funding for ICT in schools provides only a small fraction of costs to schools of hardware infrastructure, network management, maintenance and teacher professional development. The remaining funding is carried by schools. This means that schools with larger budgets are able to have higher quality ICT infrastructure in their schools. The development and sustainability of ICT in schools is at risk because of the current funding model. The keyword there is sustainability.

At the moment, schools are making ends meet. A lot of good work is being done in this area, but for how long this is sustainable with current funding models is open to question. ICT costs have increased rapidly and schools feel they are spending a disproportionate amount of their funds in this area. A large amount of spending on one area of the curriculum is often at the expense of funding for other important school programs.

My members in the secondary principals council believe that government funding for ICT in schools has not kept pace with the needs of students, the demands placed on school programs and the future requirements of the ACT community to remain the clever capital. An initial step would be for the government, in its first year, to boost current and longer-term funding of ICT in ACT schools as an investment in Canberra's economic future.

The third point is students at risk. I think it is fair to say that the secondary principals council welcomes the incoming ACT government's identification of at-risk youth as a priority. Schools are becoming harder to work in, because of the issues of equity and the diverse student population coming into our schools.

Three points are made here to address this issue. One is to do with school counsellors. Many students require additional specialised assistance in order to maximise their educational outcomes. School counsellors provide such assistance when students and their families have personal problems. There may be physical and emotional issues—homelessness, drugs, trauma and abuse.

At the moment, very few schools and colleges in the ACT are funded for a full-time counsellor. Therefore, the typical situation is that you cannot have a crisis in a school on a Tuesday morning because the counsellor is not there. If you are going to have a crisis, you should have it on a Wednesday afternoon when the counsellor is present.

Systematic programs for the recruitment and training of counsellors are urgently needed. I think most counsellors would say there is no real career structure for counsellors in ACT schools. There are inadequate training opportunities for them, so we are losing good counsellors and having difficulty bringing new ones into the system. Their role is becoming more and more critical in a modern education system.

The next point in this section is support for students with special needs. About 20 per cent of students need additional learning support through their high school years. I note that the government is proposing to reduce class sizes up to year 3.

Some of the research—say from Peter Hill in Victoria—indicates that the literacy level of students with high literacy needs, particularly boys, often tails off from year 6 onwards. There is a fanning effect whereby students, at the lower end of the percentile rankings in literacy, often do not improve from year 6 to year 10—throughout the later years of their schooling.

We are saying that provision of an additional three staff per high school and college, to supplement current resources, would give learning centre students a greater level of support. It would enable them to achieve a much higher level of integration throughout their secondary schooling. In addition, we note there the model of "The Island" in Melbourne as being an exemplary model that the ACT may want to look into. That involves tradespeople and teachers working offsite with at-risk young people. For example, we should vigorously explore the use of the Tuggeranong and Gold Creek Homesteads as southern and northern locations to provide alternative pathways for young people at risk of not completing schooling.

Finally, there is a general point about programs for students at risk. It is critical that the money in these programs actually goes to schools, that it goes to delivery on site rather than into management and support structures outside the school. To make a difference to at-risk youth in schools, the money has to be at the school site. It is a concern that a disproportionate amount of money has been allocated to support management structures rather than on-site delivery.

There are two programs quoted there. The quality teaching program is good practice in that it provides professional development for teachers to do things in schools, as do the later phases of the full service schools program. In the earlier phases of the full service schools program, a lot of money was tied up in administration and management. As schools have addressed that program in more recent history, there have been much more successful outcomes, with the money going to the schools.

MR PRATT: Dollars aside, in these three areas, these three groupings, do you see that as being the sequence of your priority focus?

Mr Nield: Yes.

MR PRATT: The issue of teachers is the critical, vulnerable, issue?

Mr Nield: Teacher supply issues, yes—and quality. The all-important one is students at risk. That is critical too.

THE CHAIR: If we have any further questions, we will contact you.

Mr Nield: Thank you very much.

GEOFF JOY and

JOHN BARKER

were called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearing. The committee's inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

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Mr Joy: We provided a document. Do you have that?

THE CHAIR: Yes, we do.

Mr Joy: I will talk to that briefly and then you may want to ask questions about it. That document indicates that we think we've been in education in Australia for a long time—180 years since the first Catholic school in Parramatta in 1820—and we've been in this ACT community since the first Catholic school at St Christopher's in 1928, one year after the first federal parliament opened here in Canberra.

We see ourselves as partners in education. We don't see ourselves as separate, a ghetto group out on the fringe. All schools, we would say, serve the public purpose of education, and we certainly see ourselves as doing that. We'd say that all schools, by the way, serve an individual and private part of education, and that applies to government schools as well. Obviously individual students want to get things out of education. We would see ourselves as partners in education—partners with the government, partners with the government school system. We have lots of joint programs at the moment indicating that.

We'd also say we are a significant section of the ACT schools community. That little graph would show that we've got 16,800 students, and that's 28 per cent of the total, primary and secondary, and 45 per cent of the size of government schools. So it's not an insignificant contribution we're involved in with this Canberra community. We'd see ourselves in and of the community.

We would see ourselves not as elite or super-funded. On our calculations on the ACT budget figures from last year, Catholic schools collectively—23 primary, four secondary in what we call the system and three congregational schools—would be operating on an average of 65 per cent of the recurrent cost usage in the government systems. So we're not coming from the area of being rich and famous.

We've got four areas here where there are significant inequities. We think government has a responsibility for all citizens and as a government ought to be involved with the education of all citizens. We certainly talk about equity and fairness in funding. We're not looking for absolutely the same funding as government schools, but we're looking for a fair distribution of government resources.

The first area is students with disabilities. If you go back 15 years, parents of kiddies with disabilities wouldn't even look to the Catholic school, because we didn't have the resources and we couldn't look after those children, despite the fact that some of them were siblings of children already in our schools. But gradually, with some help from governments, both the Commonwealth and the ACT governments, we've been able to do more, and we've built up an expectation among our parents.

We now have 199 students integrated, and this policy of integration we agree wholeheartedly with. There are limits to it of course because of funding. We don't run special schools like Malkara and so on, which are very costly. The government takes the full responsibility for that. As that graph indicates, for integrated children with disabilities, we are not able to provide the sorts of resources that these special children need. Those little graphs indicate that. Those little graphs are above the base grants. These are the extras in government schools for students with disabilities, and they're the extras we get from the ACT government and the Commonwealth. So we think we're close to \$6,000 behind the eight ball in providing resources for children with disabilities.

We think this is a very special area. This is one area where we think the additional funds ought to be the same for these children, whether they're in government schools or non-government schools. In other words, the additional funds should follow the student. Below the line, we're not asking for equity. We're asking for 25 per cent, as we will see later.

The second area is the area of early childhood initiatives. This was an initiative of the former government last year, and we applaud it—reducing the class sizes in K-1-2. Now the present government is proposing to extend that to year 3. But we think the distribution of ACT government moneys to government schools and to our schools was—I think I have to use the term here—grossly inequitable. As you can see, \$160 per student in government schools was thought necessary to reduce these class sizes, which is educationally desirable, and the contribution in the last budget to Catholic schools was \$18 a student. Really this is base money. It has a targeted program heading, but really once it is in there it's going to be in there forever. There is no way any governments can take this money away and suddenly K-1-3 go back to 30. Our average class sizes are 28 at the moment.

We see this as a very significant area of disadvantage for the boys and girls of Canberra taxpayers who are in the Catholic schools, where it is 11 per cent or 9 per cent. The 18 to 160, I think, is 11 per cent. We would be arguing that on per capita grants, the general grants from the ACT government, it should go to 25 per cent. At the moment it is 16.6 per cent. This is even less than what the government was proposing in the per capita area, which is the biggest area of grants. This really is a general recurrent grant. It's going to be there forever and a day.

The third area is the ACT per capita grants. In the National Catholic Education Commission there are six state and two territory Catholic education commissions, and we're representing the one from the ACT. Every other state and the Northern Territory has one, and they also have representation on the National Catholic Education Commission, which has a secretariat here in Canberra. It has set as the benchmark for grants from state and territory governments to the Catholic systems at 25 per cent.

New South Wales has achieved it, Western Australia is near it, and we're at 16.6 per cent, so in fact we're well behind the leading states in per capita grants to Catholic schools—these are the system schools—from the territory government. We continue to argue that it ought to be at 25 per cent. We would even argue it ought to be enshrined in legislation as it is in New South Wales. It's been there for about eight or 10 years now. It has to move from the 16.6.

I come to the last area. The last election was the first time we went to government in the ACT with a request for ICT. That is an indication of changing times. I heard the principal here a moment ago talking about the clever capital. The ACT does depend a fair bit on the IT industry. In schools, if we are not up to speed—and it's changing rapidly—then the digital divide will become much wider as we struggle to find funds to provide the infrastructure, the hardware, the software, the professional development for our teachers in using ICT in teaching and learning—our core business is the students' learning—communications and administration.

We were pleased to hear that the Labor government had promised \$1 million. We've talked to the minister and he says that will be delivered. We're not too sure how yet. But in the election campaign we said that to come up to speed we needed \$2.3 million, so we've adjusted our request to the 1.3. If schools are behind in this area, students are disadvantaged in their employment in post-school years.

In summary, we're not in any of these arguments, and the Catholic Education Commission and the Catholic Education Office do not say and have never said we want a transfer of funds from government schools. That's not on. We're on about quality education for all Canberra students, and we're on about equity. What we're saying is that there ought to be more money for education.

We need education. It has become a platitude about investment in the future. But I've been in this business for a long time, in and around schools, and it is true. If we don't invest in education, we'll all pay for the lack of funds. We'll pay for it down the line in the students' disengagement from schools, particularly in the middle secondary, and what follows on from student disengagement in terms of social cost and the individual cost to the person. Also if we don't invest enough then there will be a general lowering of achievements of our students across all schools.

I think our submission is saying the government has a responsibility. There are areas of inequity, and we've pointed particularly to four of them. We'd invite questions from the committee about what we've put here in as simple and as short a form as possible on a very complicated funding issue.

THE CHAIR: What was the range of disabilities among the 199 students with disabilities in 2001?

Mr Joy: It is a Commonwealth definition. We have lots of other students with disadvantage. The Commonwealth has defined them as cognitive (IQ under 75), sensory (permanent hearing loss of 30-plus decibels), sensory visual (permanent vision loss of 6/24), ongoing physical, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and mental health. It talks about level of frequency, duration, intensity and serious effects on their functioning. It does not include ADD or ADHD. It doesn't include what in the old days we used to call remedial—in other words, falling behind in literacy and numeracy. Autism is in there as a language disorder, and they've got scales for that. These are the officially defined ones. In addition to that we've got a whole range of students who have learning difficulties and other difficulties—social difficulties—who are not included in 199.

Mr Barker: The definition for funding purposes is much narrower than in the Disability Discrimination Act which, like other schools, we are required to comply with.

THE CHAIR: Do you have autistic students within the Catholic system?

Mr Joy: Yes. I haven't got the exact range here, but Down syndrome children would be a predominant grouping. There are other physical, hearing and visual impairments. We could provide a list of that 199 and what the disability is.

THE CHAIR: It would be interesting. I would find it useful to know what sorts of disabilities we'd be looking at within that range of 199.

Mr Joy: We can provide both of those. We can provide you with the Commonwealth definition, and a list XYZ ABCD of what the children are who are among that 199.

THE CHAIR: That would be very helpful.

MR PRATT: In your proposed budget for your class reduction program you talk about movement of seven points. Do you have a gross dollar figure on what that might be? What is the extra allocation you'd be seeking to take that component from 18 to 25? A ballpark figure will do.

Mr Barker: The government allocated \$21.8 million to government schools over four years for K-1-2 initiatives. They allocated \$1.2 million over four years for all non-government schools, of which we would receive probably about \$800,000 or \$900,000. On a per student basis we've got 26 per cent of the kids, and we're getting 4.3 per cent of the funding that's available. To bring it up, as a very rough figure on the 2001 figure—

MR PRATT: I won't hold you to it.

Mr Barker: We'd be looking to go from \$18 to \$40 per student in that first—

MR PRATT: From \$18 to \$40?

Mr Barker: Yes. That's 25 per cent of \$160. I don't know what the cost of the Labor government's initiative to extend that to year 3 might be.

MS DUNDAS: Could you provide us with the average fee charged for children to attend Catholic schools?

Mr Barker: Yes. For all Catholic schools the average fee in 2001 was about \$1,173 a year.

Mr Joy: This is the weighted average. When we're making submissions, we take primary and secondary enrolments, multiply the fees primary and secondary by the enrolments, and divide by the total enrolment. So this is the weighted fee. We could give you primary and secondary separately if you wanted that. But that's the weighted enrolment fee, primary and secondary.

MS DUNDAS: Per year?

Mr Barker: Per year, that's right. That by the way is more than the ACT government provides in funding for a student on an average basis.

MR PRATT: Sorry, what was that?

Mr Barker: The fees paid by the parents are more than the ACT government provides in per capita funding.

MR PRATT: And what was that average or that mean?

Mr Barker: \$1,148 was the ACT government's funding per student last year.

Mr Joy: And the fee was \$1,173.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. Thank you for your attendance.

Mr Joy: And we'll provide that other documentation.

THE CHAIR: That would be fantastic.

Resolved:

That, pursuant to standing order 243, the committee authorises the publication of evidence and submissions received by the committee during this hearing, together with any supplementary material arising from the public hearing.

MICHAEL AXELSEN,

ELAINE WALLS and

STEPHANIE JACMON

were called.

THE CHAIR: I welcome witnesses to this part of today's hearing. This committee's inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections, but also responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you say to us today. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

Please briefly introduce yourselves and then get into your submission. We have a tight time frame of 15 minutes per submission.

Mr Axelsen: Thank you. I am Michael Axelsen, a staff member of the CIT Student Association, and my responsibilities are finance and commercial services within the organisation.

We have identified a number of issues that we wish to advise you about today. Given the time frame, we have narrowed them down to a few that we consider imperatives in the student world at CIT. They are ID cards; parking on campus, at Reid in particular; student accommodation; staff casualisation; and the way the appropriation funding works for the CIT and the structural model that it should follow.

We are going to discuss those briefly with you. We are aware of the time constraints. We do have other issues that we may follow up with you at some other time, and we may lodge another document with you in the future. Elaine wanted to start off on ID cards.

Ms Walls: I am Elaine Walls, the student services coordinator for CIT. Our concern with ID cards is that we have been waiting to implement a system-wide ID card at CIT because, under the previous government, we were involved in discussions about a multocard that was to be used system-wide.

It has affected CIT in that we have been waiting about five years now for something to happen, and nothing has happened. We currently have five forms of identification—I have only brought four with me—for a CIT student, which is very time-consuming, very inefficient and, we find, very frustrating in an institute of technology that is very untechnological sometimes.

Funding of \$300,000 was allocated under the previous government, under an e-services budget. We do not know whether that is going to be released, but we really need to address the issue of ID cards for CIT students. We cannot identify anyone on our campus, whether they are students or members of the public.

Mr Axelsen: Currently only full-time students receive a formal CIT ID card on application. This card that is to be produced will have smartcard functions, or that was the proposal, and would replace all those other cards in one fell swoop. Of course, that would then save the institute a lot of money, in terms of time and efficiency in the production of the card. It would save time for students as well, of course, who have to line up to get these cards in a variety of complicated manners.

Ms Walls: One of the biggest problems for us in the student associations is that, under the GST legislation for the educational textbook subsidy scheme, we have to be able to identify a person as a student before we can give that textbook subsidy. Although we can give it to someone who cannot be so identified, it is a very paper-based process and incredibly inefficient, and this affects a range of other services. Students are actually disappointed when they get to CIT and find that we have such an archaic system. It gives a very bad first impression.

We would like to know whether the CIT can be assisted to move that along this year somehow with the release of these funds.

Mr Axelsen: We think the funds are in the Chief Minister's Department, under the e-services banner. We are not sure, but it may have been Urban Services who were looking at producing an ID card or a smartcard, but we believe that the money has been allocated.

Ms Walls: We have been in discussions with Urban Services and interested bodies in the ACT government about a system-wide card for some time now. I do not know whether it is going to happen but, if it is not going to happen, CIT has to do something.

We move onto the next issue. We raised this at our forum—parking. It may not seem as important as you think but, for students, parking at the Reid campus is probably, in some instances, more costly than their fees. Students at CIT have no access to any HECS contributions, so everything that they encounter is an up-front fee. Parking for a full-time student is around \$800 to \$1,000 a year. For a part-time student it is not much less, because the parking system is structured so that it is just as expensive to park for three hours as six.

Last year we had a safety audit on campus, and the parking area at Reid breaches all international safety standards in terms of lighting and surface area. An upgrade would be great but, at \$4.50 a day to park at an institute, the fee is not equitable. They would rather attend another campus. At the University of Canberra, parking is free. We are not asking for free parking. We are asking for a system of parking vouchers for students, whether they be full-time, part-time or low-income students.

At the moment we have a parking permit from Urban Services, but it is only for students who are on Centrelink benefits. They are definitely a group that we need to cater for, but we would like to see that extended for all students. Students are happy to pay for

a parking permit for a semester, but all students should be given that access as well. It is an issue that impacts heavily on students. A lot of students will arrive after paying their fees, not even realising that they then have a \$22 parking fee each week. They say, "I cannot cope with this."

Mr Axelsen: On average, it costs \$1,260 a year for a person who comes four days a week, in 17-week semesters, and that is a significant impact. From a service delivery point of view, we see that there may be people missing out who want to come to the campus. There are issues for staff as well but, obviously, we are only interested in defining student issues. This matter may also be connected to that of the ID card. It may be that there are shared factors.

Ms Walls: Yes. We were going to deal with accommodation last, because it does not have as high a priority as some of the other issues. One of those involved was another debate we had last year about the casualisation of teachers at CIT. Stephanie raised this last year in relation to our forum, when we were looking at teachers who are not on an email system. We do not have internal access to casual teachers. Students do not have access to casuals, because those teachers are paid only for the hours they attend, so they tend not to spend a lot of time there.

A lot of casuals may, in fact, supplement their income by working elsewhere. There is no guarantee that the good ones will stay. There is no corporate commitment to them: there is no corporate loyalty. Casual teachers are a tremendous source of recent industry experience, but we do not reward them for it.

Mr Axelsen: In this financial year, the CIT is looking to convert around 80 casual teachers to a full-time load of some description, and that is going to be a cost to the institute of an additional \$900,000. That is of concern, because that money will come out of other service delivery areas—resources, equipment for students, updating technology and so forth—and that is a real difficulty. That is the highest priority for CIT this year. We are concerned that those resources will impact on the way the services are delivered to students as well. There appears to be no choice in this matter, either, as it appears that this is the only place from which that money can come.

Ms Walls: We are still waiting for an email system for students. What usually happens, when resources are taken away, is that it is usually the additional student services, which are probably not imperative, that get lost. The ID card goes back on the bottom of the agenda, and whether or not we put all our students on an email system goes back on the bottom of the agenda every time resources are taken away. So students tend to miss out on things that would make them more efficient students. We just hate to see all those agenda items shelved for another 12 months.

Mr Axelsen: CIT's budget, as you are aware, has been going backwards substantially for a number of years now. Student numbers are quite high still and we are assured, as members of the resources board, that CIT is operating on a very lean basis. In fact, at 72c per average contact hour for students, compared to New South Wales we are \$3.65 million underfunded. That information is easily gained through a variety of documents to which I am sure you have access.

At the moment, though, CIT has to go through the Department of Education and Community Services. Both the student organisations and CIT are concerned that, without direct access through to Treasury, there is no link. At the moment the documentation that goes through the education department may or may not be a priority for the education department. Their prime responsibility is really for schools and colleges. The information that is received by Treasury in that documentation may not always be of a primary nature. We think that structural model is flawed and that CIT, as a statutory authority, should have direct access to Treasury.

There have been issues in the past where DECS have asked for information. However, you are asked on a Thursday for documentation to be provided on a Friday, and CIT staff are not always able to maintain that commitment. There is that time constraint on the staff. There is not always a guarantee, as I said, that the information that CIT provides is given the same priority, through education, as it is if CIT had direct access.

Ms Walls: Our understanding is that the TAFE sector sits in no-man's land. It is not part of the higher education scheme, but it is also not part of schools and colleges, so it tends to be moved around. That is when priorities change. It is not consistent. I think this sector previously found that direct access to Treasury for funds for appropriation was satisfactory, because it was a direct link but, through the department of education, it has not had the same information flow. The same priorities have not been given to CIT, because the department of education's main brief is schools and colleges. Their priorities are very different, so there is a conflict there. I am not sure whether a review of that process would consider that CIT might be better placed for access.

This is not a new issue: it has been like this for some time, but we hope that the matter will be reviewed at some stage.

Mr Axelsen: As you know, Karin, I have been around for some time in this sector. Back in 1988, when self-government first came in, CIT had around 10 campuses, and slowly they have been rationalised. We have recently seen the closure of Watson campus. We think that further campus rationalisations are needed. We know that it may well be a controversial issue for CIT itself, and perhaps for the Assembly, but we think there will be a much better delivery of education services through that rationalisation. We should probably be looking at a much longer-term goal.

I am not suggesting the campuses that should be closed, but we have a major campus at Bruce that is not always fully occupied, and we have a campus here at Reid that is getting better and is full more often. However, some of our outlying campuses may or may not be targeted in the future for that sort of activity. As long as we maintain the same budgets, of course, then that money would be much better utilised flowing into the student body.

Ms Walls: We are seeing the resources thinning on all campuses. It is obvious: with library resources, if you spread those library books across the four campuses, you cannot have duplicates. It is very hard for students to find all the resources that they need at one time. I think a lot of our expense is in duplicating staff in various campuses.

Mr Axelsen: Power, water, estate managers, cleaners, a whole lot of other areas: if they can all be focused back into one campus, costs would be reduced. Some of the classrooms might only be used for a few hours a day in one area. They could be better utilised and still be only cleaned by one cleaner at night, for example.

MR PRATT: Infrastructure is extremely expensive, isn't it?

Mr Axelsen: Yes. I am not sure what the CIT's public view is on that, but certainly we hold the view that students would be better serviced if more rationalisation occurs. Stephanie may be able to comment. We can give an example: there was an isolated campus up at Watson, but those students have now come onto a bigger campus at Reid, and they are now able to participate more in the corporate life of the organisation. They have more people to talk to. They have actually made life much more vibrant from our point of view, as well. Their wild graphic design and fashion design students are encouraging a bit of life and a different focus.

Ms Walls: They have access to the library for longer, better food services, a bigger bookshop and more social life.

Miss Jacmon: I am Stephanie Jacmon, chairperson of the CIT Student Association. Those students also have access to other students. Being able to access and liaise with students from different departments allows for cross-faculty work. For instance, I am in the fashion department, and we are now working with photography students, graphic design students and others, doing marketing and promotion, and hairdressing and beauty—joint projects that previously were not possible.

MR PRATT: So co-location means more assets. Yes.

Miss Jacmon: It is good because you also build up a better network among other students.

Mr Axelsen: Part of CIT's focus at the moment is flexible learning delivery. More of those flexible services with, say, computer-based applications, could be focused in say Belconnen or Tuggeranong, and some of the outlying areas—perhaps even Gungahlin in the future—which would allow people who want to do such courses to do them by themselves at a terminal. That would release resources and infrastructure. There are a range of delivery methods, as you are aware, and I think that will continue to expand in the future.

Ms Walls: We have one last quick point. It is not our highest priority, but we wanted to draw the committee's attention to the fact that CIT does not have any residential accommodation. There was talk last year that there would be funding for a residence. I do not know what has happened about that discussion. The matter seems to have disappeared.

This year, we have had a crisis with accommodation in Canberra. We have nothing available for students. The rental market has gone through the roof. Students are being exploited at the bottom of that market, in group houses. I have had phone call after phone call from distressed parents down on the coast about regional students who do not know where to live. They say, "We cannot pay \$340 for a house. We do not know anyone."

This has been the worst year in the 10 years I have worked at CIT, and regional and local students are wondering what they can do. I do not know whether we can tap in. We lost access to Calvary Hospital last year. CIT students used to be at Calvary.

Mr Axelsen: CIT students were at Calvary. I am not sure how many, but it may have been 30 or 40-odd students. However, it was closed due to OH&S issues. There was a small fire there, and then someone did a report that said the accommodation had to close down.

Ms Walls: We have always shared accommodation with other universities, and that is fine if they have spare rooms, but we seem to be the last on the list. We have turned many students away who have not been able to find accommodation in Canberra.

MR PRATT: Well, given that universities want to attract overseas students, you may find that resource drying up as well. Do I have time for one question?

THE CHAIR: A quick one.

MR PRATT: A quick one. Can you give me two ballpark numbers please? You say that, over the last six or so years, CIT funding has gone backwards in terms of its budget allocation.

Ms Walls: CIT has \$18 million less than it had five years ago.

MR PRATT: \$18 million less. What about the student levels now? I know that that is not an absolute or accurate figure, but what sort of ballpark figures do you have?

Ms Walls: For student numbers?

MR PRATT: Versus six years ago.

Ms Walls: Student numbers are about the same.

Mr Axelsen: They have remained about the same, at about 14-15,000.

Ms Walls: Yes.

Mr Axelsen: We have always had a little difficulty trying to correlate student numbers with the money we receive as a student organisation. The public enrolling students pay a fee, but a range of other students tag along who are often included in figures because they do a CIT course, but they do it perhaps through the Department of Defence or the Department of Immigration. They get tagged on as extra numbers sometimes.

The CIT is a very lean organisation. It does not have a lot of room to move. Last year, or the year before, they had less than \$1 million for maintenance for all their buildings. There was a major fault with airconditioning, and basically half of that went straight away. There was no room to move at all: there was no flexibility within that budget.

THE CHAIR: I am going to have to end it there. Thank you for your time.

Ms Wall: Do you wish us to provide written statements on any issues?

MR PRATT: I would like to talk to you later about ITABs, and what role they play in determining courses and priorities.

THE CHAIR: That is an issue about which you might have to speak directly with CIT, rather than with the students association.

MR PRATT: Yes.

Ms Walls: Thank you for your time.

Mr Axelsen: Thank you very much for seeing us.

JOHN LUXTON,

SUSAN WEST and

HEATHER DAWN KARMEL

were called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearing. This committee is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections, but also responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you say to us today. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell us the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

We do have a 15-minute time limit, although obviously we have now run a little bit over time. If we have any extra questions and we run out of time, we will contact you about those questions later.

Mr Luxton: Thank you very much. I am John Luxton, deputy director of the School of Music, and currently coordinator of the pre-tertiary programs. Susan will begin by giving you a rundown of primary music developments.

Ms West: I am Susan West, the coordinator of the music in primary schools program. I will give you a brief description of our music in primary schools program. This is a diagram to make it clear to you. (A diagram was then shown.) I am just speaking briefly about the left-hand side of the page, which represents the music in schools program.

It consists of two basic programs: a classroom music program called the music education program at Ainslie Primary School, which is centred around singing, coupled with a teacher training and support network called the school singing program. That is 1(b) in the diagram. Both of these feed into 1(c), the hand-in-hand community outreach program.

There are a range of unique elements attached to this program, so much so that it is actually emulated both in the USA and the UK at the moment. First of all, it is designed as universal music education that focuses on the social and community benefits of music, as well as the musical and psychological benefits to the individual. For example, the main focus of the program is using music altruistically in the community for the benefit of others. The children are trained to do this in various ways, including visiting nursing homes and so on.

The hand-in-hand program is described on the document that is attached to the sheets you have there. The idea is that the musical skills that are normally associated with musical training are acquired en route to the main goal of using music altruistically and humanistically in the community.

The second unique feature of the program is that it is being developed as a cost-effective and sustainable development of the arts. It uses a very small number of music specialists who are trained in the unique methods we are offering, to train interested teachers, whatever their level of musical training. It does away with the concept that we need specialist teachers in the primary school, and trains teachers in the particular way of developing music that we are developing at the School of Music.

It is equitable in that it is designed to develop musical skills in all children, from kindergarten onwards but, as befits a program in a music institution such as ours, it lays a solid foundation for future musicians. It focuses on singing as opposed to choral development. It uses the voice as a manifestation of each individual child's musical persona. Our plan is to allow this to lead to what we hope will be the territory-wide development of an ongoing primary school music program that can be maintained, that has a similar humanistic philosophy, that will be offered in a range of primary schools, but that is developed to match each individual school's needs.

We are training or have trained 30 teachers from 27 schools. So far the exit evaluation has indicated that all of those doing the evaluation are very satisfied with the program we are offering. We also have research colleagues in the UK and the USA and at other schools who are studying and emulating this program, particularly in New York state.

We also have quite a few visiting academics who are interested in studying the program. At the moment we are developing an application for an Australian Research Council grant to study the effects of this type of humanistic program on the development of adolescents.

Proposed expansions to the program involve, first of all, the further development of the teacher training program, to allow for continuing support in the schools and to develop a second tier of training for the teachers who have already done level 1. Second, we are interested in developing 1(d) on your sheet, which is a primary enrichment program in line with our secondary enrichment program, MuST. Those children who are part of this program and have a special interest or special talent in this field can continue their musical development within this particular philosophical model.

Mr Luxton: I am looking at the instrumental side of the MuST and type two programs. I want to stress the innovative and exciting nature of what is being produced at the Canberra School of Music. Many of these courses are the only ones of their kind in Australia, and provide an unparalleled musical education for the kids of the ACT.

If you look at the program as having a pyramid shape—and Susan has explained that the primary program is the base of this pyramid—the instrumental side starts with the Colourstrings program, which is recognised worldwide as being of significant value to the training of young musicians. That leads into our instrumental program, where the students are taught right through, from age three up to tertiary level, by some of the most

distinguished musicians and instrumentalists in Australia. They have a unique opportunity in that regard.

I wish to read something from the resume of the MuST program, which describes it very well:

The program has been designed to cater specifically for high school students from within ACT schools who are deemed gifted and talented. The aim of the music for students with talent program is to extend these students beyond what can be achieved within the context of a normal classroom music program. It consists of three fields of study: exploring music, which looks at the more theoretical and historical aspects; creating music, which explores a wide variety of creative aspects; and the third unit, which is the instrumental tuition, which is available to a limited number of students following an audition process.

Again, this follows the pyramid shape, and uses these, our colleagues of distinction. I should say that the MuST program caters for students from years 7 to 10, and there are 70 to 80 students involved every year in this program, from 12 to 15 schools in the territory.

Following on from that is our type 2 program, which is for years 11 and 12. This program offers a specialised music course, professionally oriented, again to develop the skills of these talented young musicians. At the moment, we are working on a review of the pre-tertiary program, looking at linkages, not only within the program, but also with other organisations and structures within the ACT.

Mrs Karmel: I am Heather Karmel, the business manager of the National Institute of the Arts. I will talk about the programs we are running at the moment. In relation to the cost of running those programs, last year we had a shortfall of about \$88,000. This year we are looking at a shortfall of \$106,000, which is a concern, because those are not tertiary but pre-tertiary programs, going right through from early childhood.

Some of those programs include charges but, putting all that on one side, we will still have a major shortfall. It has reached the point now where we will have to look seriously at cutting those programs. We cannot afford to fund them, because at the moment the money to support them comes from the ACT.

On the other hand, the type 2 program, which is for years 11 and 12, was provided a few years ago at no cost to the students involved. There is now a charge. We had to bring that in when we had the major cuts a couple of years ago. Part of our proposal for 2000-2003 is to run that program without having to charge the students, given that it is part of their education program within the colleges. We consider that this should be supported by the ACT, as part of the education of the children who are going through that course.

One of the other initiatives we are looking at is professional development for teachers, which we consider very important for spreading an understanding of the importance of music within the schools.

It is a very popular program and we do want to expand it as well. We have done the costings for that. You may be aware that we did put in a bid. We have put together quite a detailed program, which is based on what we currently run, but also on building on

what we already have, expanding, and reinstating some of that which we lost a couple of years ago.

THE CHAIR: Steve, do have you some questions?

MR PRATT: Not just yet. Go ahead. I had something in my mind but it has slipped past.

MS DUNDAS: I had a quick question. You said that the hand-in-hand program involves 27 schools. Are they public, or public and private?

Ms West: They are all public schools. Not all the 27 schools are yet doing the hand-in-hand program, but only public schools are involved. In fact, this year we have had inquiries from some of the private schools that would like to be part of the schools singing program. However, up until now it has only involved public schools, those that are part of the department of education.

MS DUNDAS: You were talking also, Heather, about the minimal charges included in some of the courses, specifically the type 2 program. Are there charges associated with the teacher training program or the MuST program?

Mrs Karmel: There is a very nominal charge for the MuST program. The funding we get from the ACT supports that program. We have the philosophy that we should not have to charge for them, so we try to keep the prices low. However, the type 2 is actually very expensive for parents, and we have students who cannot do it because they cannot afford to do it. That is not a good thing.

With school-based management, there have been issues with the department, and having to deal with each school separately. That can cause problems too. It is just the way the structures are. We have to deal with each school separately now, whereas it would be easier in some ways if we could have a uniform approach for the programs. That would make it easier for the students and, as you know, they are the bottom line. I think that is a concern.

MS DUNDAS: Do you get funding from the schools of the teachers you train?

Ms West: The teacher training program is offered free to the teachers. The schools have to provide some release to allow teachers to come and observe.

MS DUNDAS: So they have to get relief teachers.

Ms West: Yes. That comes through each individual school and its management.

MS DUNDAS: Sure. How long does the teacher training take?

Ms West: The current program is a year. It is fortnightly, and involves two hours of observation and two hours of professional development. There are also school-based visits, where teachers like myself go the schools and work with the teachers in situ.

One of our hopes for expansion is developing a second year for that program, to allow for the upper level primary teachers. One of the problems we have is that the teachers are doing so well in the schools, particularly with the junior primary students, that they are coming back saying, “We need more skills because our students are developing at such a great rate.” So we would like to add a second tier to that if we can.

MR PRATT: Given the funding subsidies in colleges, do you have a feel for how many students would be able to pick up on music, and would desire to pursue music activities? Do you have an idea of what that figure is going to be as a result of that cut?

Mrs Karmel: Yes, as a result of that cut basically we are looking at 1½ teaching positions to run the MuST program, and that will have a major impact on that program. What we have looked at is actually curtailing the program and trying to keep the students we have, but they would actually receive less. That is the first approach that we would use, and we have looked at it. If you consider the cut in relation to teachers, that is what we are talking about, and it is significant. It would be a major cut.

MS DUNDAS: Can you explain how the MuST and the type 2 programs actually relate to everyday schooling? Are students taken out of school for a day to come to the School of Music, or do you run the whole education spectrum for them? How does it actually operate for the students?

Mr Luxton: For the MuST program, the students come out in an afternoon, and that is all arranged with the various schools. For type 2, it is the same. It is run on a Wednesday and students come out for two hours in the afternoon, plus their instrumental lesson, again in agreement with the colleges. It is deemed to be a music-enhancing program.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for attending and if we have any further questions we will be in contact with you.

ERIC CHALMERS and

JIM COLLINS

were called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearing. The committee's inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections, but also responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you say to us today. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell us the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

We are, as you can tell, already running behind, but we are trying to stick to 15 minute limits as much as possible.

Mr Chalmers: My name is Eric Chalmers. I am the president of the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools. My colleague is Jim Collins. APFACTS represents some 45½ per cent of parents of high school students in years 7 to 10 in the ACT, and 37½ per cent of students overall. A significant number of these parents have, or have had, children in both government and non-government schools. So we are involved with a substantial portion of the education system.

APFACTS does not argue against any of the government's proposals to improve the funding available to government schools. We are in favour of a well funded and run education system for all students. Parents of non-government school children are willing to contribute with after-tax dollars, and are constantly aware of this through both the fees they pay, often with great sacrifice, and the considerable additional efforts they willingly put into their children's schools.

However, we do take the government to task when it is not fair, balanced and equitable in the distribution of its funding of education between these two main sectors of the school system. The government spoke in its election campaign, and since then, about its desire to fund education based on need. Our first point today is that the government should be fair dinkum. If need is a basis of funding then this criterion should be applied to all students at all schools, regardless of the system in which they are included.

APFACTS notes that the ACT government has indicated that it wants the ACT government school system to be the most highly funded per student in Australia. However, it appears to be quite happy for ACT funding for the other half of students in non-government schools to be among the lowest in Australia. APFACTS notes that while ACT funding per student for government schools is 6.7 per cent above the national average, ACT funding per student for non-government schools is 6 per cent below the national average. Also 53 per cent of students from high income families, with incomes

over \$104,000 in 1996, attend government schools—about the same percentage of parents that send their children to government high schools. It thus seems that the differences between the two systems are not to do with income but to do with other reasons.

We have still not seen the government's terms of reference for its proposed review of school funding, but we remain very concerned that it may not represent a fair and balanced review. Our concerns are highlighted by the government's drive to use up its promised reallocation of \$27 million from the abolition of the free bus scheme mostly into the government schools system, even before the review of funding commences. Where and how does the government then intend to achieve any sense of balance and fairness with the non-government sector based on need? Of the \$27 million, we understand that all but \$11 million has been provided either to reduce class sizes in government schools in year 3, or to provide additional IT support to government and Catholic schools—about \$2 million of that.

Until now the non-government sector has received recurrent funding, which represented, excluding special education, on a per capita basis about 16½ per cent of the per student funding provided to the government sector compared to a similar sort of target in New South Wales of 25 per cent. To maintain the 16½ per cent ratio the non-government sector should receive about \$4.45 million of the \$27 million.

APFACTS is concerned by comments by the ACT minister for education that suggest that even the remaining \$11 million will be distributed before the so-called comprehensive review. If the non-government sector has to wait until the review occurs before it gets extra funding, it might be facing an empty cupboard. The majority of the \$27 million cannot be saved through the abolition of the free bus scheme itself. It will have to be found from elsewhere before any real consideration is given to the needs of non-government schools.

The non-government sector—and especially students in the non-systemic sector, which are non-Catholic system schools, which represents 44 per cent of students attending non-government schools—may well miss out altogether on extra funding. This will be particularly harsh on students who attend non-government schools and who have disabilities, or come from families with low income parents. The present minister for education claims to distribute funding in a way that is fair. However, APFACTS is concerned that his definition of what is fair seems to be different from that implied by the Chief Minister prior to the election.

Of the remaining \$40.5 million to be spent over four years, the current government has promised so far to spend \$1.2 million on early childhood support, \$889,000 on literacy and numeracy assessment, \$1 million on recurrent funding, and about \$1.2 million on interest subsidy. Of the \$40 million, the amount promised for non-government schools thus represents only about 10.9 per cent of the total.

Within the context that I have just been through, there are some specific and urgent issues that we believe require consideration in the current budget. The first is children with disabilities. We have argued strongly for some time that the developments over the last two or so years in particular are creating a potentially mounting crisis in this area. Urgent action is needed to correct the dysfunctional funding structures being created as

families quite rightly exercise their choice for their children with special needs to attend non-government schools of their choice. Today other parents in the new school are largely footing the extra costs associated with addressing the special needs, with no say at all in the issue.

The second area is reduction in class sizes. The increasing focus that this initiative will push onto providing funding for changes only in government schools now forces non-government schools to compete with smaller class sizes as well. But this will be on an even more unfair basis. The costs, both capital and recurrent, must yet again come almost entirely from parents' own funds and after-tax dollars.

The third is the allocation of IT funds. We are at a loss to understand the government's reasoning for the exclusion of the over 25 per cent of high school students going to non-Catholic non-government schools from any additional IT support. How does this equate with the government's promise of allocation based on need?

Non-government schools achieve three key things for society. The first is increased choice for all, including parents who choose to send their children to government schools. The second is reduced cost of education to government overall because of the very substantial additional contribution by families in the non-government sector. The third is improved educational quality overall through competition and competitive innovation that occurs in both the government and non-government sectors as a result.

APFACTS represents the nearly half of parents who send their children at some time or other to non-government schools. These are not the rich kids or the schools with all the funding and all the resources. The government says it wants the government education system to be the best and best funded, and to allocate funds based on needs. We believe this budget needs to support this, but across the whole education system, not just the government school piece of the system. Parents with children at non-government schools expect a fair and balanced allocation of funding, as well as a strongly funded system as a whole. Thank you.

MS DUNDAS: Can I just get some background on the association.

Mr Chalmers: APFACTS represents most of the non-government schools, both the Catholic systemic schools and the non-systemic schools.

Mr Collins: It is the non-government equivalent of the Council of P&Cs.

Mr Chalmers: The two together represent all the school parents.

MR PRATT: What degree of integration is there with the systemic Catholic sector?

Mr Chalmers: Numbers of schools are members of APFACTS. Of course, they would be the majority of the schools. APFACTS looks at issues for the whole of the sector. We have a number of subcommittees within APFACTS, and one of them deals with Catholic issues and talks to the Catholic Education Office and the Catholic schools system particularly.

Mr Collins: We are meeting with Geoff Joy this afternoon.

Mr Chalmers: I get back to the point that almost half of the total school system is in that group of parents at some time or another.

MR PRATT: Sure.

Mr Chalmers: We come and talk to people like yourselves quite regularly about these issues. They are very fundamental.

Mr Collins: We are very concerned about children with disabilities. We notice that even the Democrats in their education policy claim that extra funds should be allocated in a first instance proportionally between government and non-government schools to provide assistance to children requiring remedial and basic skills, and to cater for the integration of children with disabilities.

We met one time with Jon Stanhope and he suggested that he saw no reason why children with disabilities in government and non-government schools should not be treated equally. Parents find it very difficult to swallow the fact that if they have got one child in a government school and one child in a non-government school, the child in a non-government school somewhere or other is seen to be less worthy of government support. To some extent that grates a lot with parents because they see that it is their right to choose a school which best meets their child's need.

It is not uncommon to have children at some time in a government school or a non-government school, depending on what the needs of the child are. Yet the funding tends to almost say that if you send a child to a non-government school you are a traitor because you have actually taken your child out of the government school system. I do not think that is the way a lot of parents think. They are trying to choose a school which best meets their children's needs. The choice is between schools. It is not that they have particularly opted out of the government school system, because they never were in it.

New parents have a choice, and they make a choice as to which school their child goes to. You find that they swap around with a lot of children, particularly children with disabilities. Some kids with great problems have been to a whole range of schools during their school life in the ACT. So parents are wanting to find the best school for their children's needs. It is a bit unfortunate I think that since 1983 there has been no survey of what parents really want in this town. So government has no idea really in some objective way of what the parents in the ACT really need.

MS DUNDAS: You mentioned a number of times in your submission the fact that you as parents pay after-tax dollars. Have you noticed an increase in the amount that you are paying, and do you see where that money is going in terms of a non-government—

Mr Chalmers: Yes, we see a continuing substantial increase because the needs for education are going up, of course. But I think importantly for parents, the relative balance between the provision of funds into the public system and the provision of funds for the non-government sector is continually tipping.

We mentioned the figure of 16 per cent. You will notice—and it is happening again now—that of the extra money that is going into the lowering of class sizes, substantially less than that 16 per cent goes to the non-government sector. We are not complaining about the money the government is putting into the government schools sector. Everything that is put in to improve education of children we totally agree with. But every time it puts relatively more into that and pushes the relative funding of the non-government sector down even further, whether it be in general recurrent funding or a particular program, it is tipping those scales further the other way, putting more and more pressure on the parents that have children in the non-government schools, and this makes the whole system less stable.

This is why we keep saying—and this is the whole point that we try and get across—that there needs to be some proper fairness and equity. If the government, as it has said, is intent on focusing its new money where need is, well then let us look at need properly, and look at need in all the schools and for all the students, not just some pieces of that.

MR PRATT: Jim, could I just go back and clarify: did you say that, as far as you can recall, there has not been an ACT-wide survey on—

Mr Collins: There was a survey called “Parents have their say” back in 1983 where the Commonwealth funded a study of parents’ expectations—

MR PRATT: Of families’ needs?

Mr Collins: Of what parents wanted in terms of education. What I am saying is that if the government was going to be realistic and be consultative, well maybe you should undertake a survey of the parents. You can listen to Eric or Ian Morgan as to where the things ought to go. But you should go out and actually ask the parents. I think you have to be far more objective than having to also listen to lobby groups all the time. From time to time you need to go out and see what the grass roots really want, and do that in some objective way.

I know that there have been lots of reviews and lots of complaints about a number of reviews undertaken in this town of recent times, but I think there would be great benefit in someone somewhere along the line going out to parents with a properly constructed study to see what parents really want. I think to some extent you could have a situation where someone’s ideology is being forced on people, and maybe this is what parents want. The number of children going to non-government schools increased even though governments have been trying to so-call change that. But why try and change that? That is not really what parents want.

MS DUNDAS: Why do you think parents are sending their kids to non-government schools?

Mr Collins: I think there are a great variety of reasons. I think it has been said at times that people try to push individual parents up against the back wall and say, “Why aren’t you sending your child to a government school?” I think that by and large parents have a great range of reasons. There is no one specific reason. Parents try to send their children to a school that they see best meets their children’s need. It may also depend on their financial circumstances. A lot of parents in years 11 and 12 send their children back

into the government system because they cannot afford the high fees. They might have all their children at school, and there are pressures.

Mr Chalmers: On the other hand, however, there are people with students at government schools who make the conscious choice that “We’ll spend whatever spare money we have for some other purpose”. I can only speak from the experience of my own family where I have a son who has been to the public system, the non-government system and the Catholic system. At different times in his school life we felt that what he was needing was best satisfied by the different systems. It is not necessarily to do with income, as I think we have shown earlier. It is a whole series of other things that families consider from time to time.

THE CHAIR: I am sorry but I am going to have to cut you off there.

Mr Chalmers: That’s all right, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance today. If we do have any further questions, the committee will be in contact with you.

JOYCE HILL was called.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearing. The committee's inquiry is part of the budget consultation process. The committee will examine the evidence before it and make recommendations to the government. The committee does not make decisions about budget matters.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections, but also responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say to us today. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell us the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

You are the last person attending here today. We are keeping to a 15-minute limit and we are already running out of time.

Ms Hill: I am quite happy to keep this short, as my car is on a parking meter! My name is Joyce Hill. I am the executive director of the association of independent schools of the ACT. The association is the peak organisation for the independent schools sector here in the ACT. The independent schools come from varied ethos and educational approaches.

We have certain educational approaches. For example, the Steiner approach to education has been around in Europe for hundreds of years. We have those which are from church or religious backgrounds—Anglican, Catholic, Uniting, Presbyterian and so on.

A significant proportion of students attend non-government schools. Overall, this is 37 per cent. APFACTS has already explained to you the percentages. Sixteen to 17 per cent of all students attend the independent schools sector. By 'independent' I mean those schools that are stand-alone, autonomous, organisations which are not part of a system.

Aside from the government sector, there is one other system in the ACT. That is the Catholic system. Those schools are run by the Catholic Education Office. The association does not run any of the independent schools. It is the peak organisation for those schools, but they are incorporated and they have a board. They are subject to the legal framework that is in place in the ACT and in this country.

In high school years, many more attend the independent schools. There are some 28 per cent in the independent schools sector. I must update some of my percentages. These are from about 2000, but it has not dropped at all in that time. The association is concerned that the significance of the students attending non-government schools and independent schools becomes a reality in the long-term thinking of governments.

We believe there is a need for a bipartisan approach to funding—and approaches to non-government schools. Choice is a fundamental right under the UN convention, and the standards in independent schools are maintained through the registration process, which is legislated under the ACT Education Act.

The association is looking for equitable outcomes and equitable access for students in independent schools. We believe that the size of the ACT and the homogenous demographics should allow for a better coordinated approach.

ABS statistics show that a similar proportion of families with certain incomes send their children to either government or non-government schools. In other words, not just the wealthy send their children to independent schools, the wealthy also send their children to government schools. In the same way, those who are not well off send their children to independent schools, not just government schools.

So there is quite an equitable distribution of families with certain incomes attending both sectors, but funding is disproportionately distributed between the sectors. In percentage terms, the recurrent grants from the ACT government are the lowest across Australia—and we are concerned with that—and yet the educational costs in the ACT are second to the Northern Territory.

The association believes there should be provision for long-term predictability for funding of schools and therefore long-term predictability for parents. The upcoming review in school funding is of concern because we see that, as part of the terms of reference, this should be a fundamental issue.

The association also believes that independent schools should be able to exercise their rights and responsibilities to determine their approach to schooling. That is currently in place. It also believes that they should not be discouraged or penalised because private effort—that is, private investment in school education—is somehow not worthy of consideration.

APFACTS has already reported about the after-tax dollars that parents from independent schools invest in school education. I think that needs to be recognised by government.

In respect of other disproportionate distribution between the sectors, I turn your attention to funding for students with disabilities. The ACT government currently provides some \$133,000 to support students with disabilities in the non-Catholic independent schools sector. There is a separation there between Catholic schools and non-Catholic schools. Given the number of students with disabilities attending these schools, that allows, on average, \$1,500 per student with a disability. Were they attending government schools, their support level would be at least 12 times that amount. I do not make that statement to say funding should be reduced in the government schools sector—by no means. I do not think there is enough funding available for students with disabilities, but the disproportion is quite significant in this area.

The pressure and cost to parents and independent schools, therefore, to provide an appropriate level of educational program—and resource support—is quite significant and very inequitable. The association believes the same level of funding support should be provided to students with disabilities, irrespective of the school they attend.

In respect of funding for years catered to, the funding initiative to reduce class sizes in the early years of schooling is provided to non-government schools, but only at 10.7 per cent of the funds provided to students in government schools. The association believes

that this very important initiative should be available at, at least, 25 per cent of that provided to the government sector. That would be fair.

Currently, capital support is provided to the non-government school sector via an intra-subsidy scheme. This allows schools to meet their capital loan interest liabilities. The scheme provides some \$2.8 million to assist these schools, and this results in approximately \$56 million worth of building projects. It is therefore a valuable boost to the ACT economy. We believe this should continue to be supported by government. However, we also believe it should be adjusted more appropriately each year to take into consideration increased building costs, insurance demands, and the demands of maintaining and refurbishing old building stock.

The association is concerned. All parties in the ACT—government included—have extolled the importance of information technology. The ACT government has committed considerable funds to the ACT government schools sector, but, unfortunately, there is virtually no support for the non-government schools sector. Again, the association is looking for an equitable approach in these important areas. We believe this sort of approach is divisive, resulting in two classes of students—those who are supported by funding and those who are not.

I end my submission there, thank you.

MR PRATT: What percentage of children in independent schools are disabled? What is the size of the obligation that you have?

Ms Hill: I do not have the exact numbers with me, but can provide you with those. Rather than mislead you and give a percentage that is not correct, could I get back to you on that?

MR PRATT: Yes, please. I would be willing to accept a rough ballpark figure now, which I will not hold you to.

Ms Hill: My problem is that it is a growing percentage, and I need to have another look at it. Each year, there is a significant demand.

We are very careful with the money we receive from the ACT government, in that we try to prioritise disabled students with the most urgent and highest of needs. I have that percentage in mind as well. I am a bit concerned about giving that to you without actually checking my facts.

MR PRATT: I appreciate that. Is the figure growing annually?

Ms Hill: It is growing, yes. More parents of students with disabilities are looking to make those choices, so they too can choose independent schools—or schools with a particular ethos or educational form that they wish to pursue.

MR PRATT: Do schools in your sector tend to follow an integration approach? Do they have a disability unit approach, or is there a mixture?

Ms Hill: There is a mixture of the two. They prefer an integration approach. However, the stresses then placed on classroom teachers are enormous, especially when we cannot fund school assistance support in that classroom. Fifteen hundred dollars for a student with an extraordinary need is not sufficient to pay the salary of a school support staff person.

MR PRATT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Would you provide the information to David Skinner, our secretary?

Ms Hill: I will do that.

MS DUNDAS: Were you suggesting that you would prefer to see students with disabilities funded under a voucher scheme?

Ms Hill: I do not know whether a voucher scheme would be appropriate, because the range of needs of students with disabilities is quite wide. There are students with high physical needs who can easily follow a curriculum program. Then there are students who have very high intellectual disabilities—they have different needs.

Therefore, a voucher system where there is a single dollar amount attached to a student with a disability may not deliver the amount of funds actually required. I believe the department has different formulas in place for different assessments and different needs. That may be a more appropriate pathway to follow.

MS DUNDAS: Is that assessment not currently provided to disabled students in non-government schools?

Ms Hill: The assessment of the level of disability of students in independent schools is separately assessed. There are standard assessment procedures to do that, but the amount of dollars attached to that assessment is not available to us. We are aware, however, that a student in the government sector with a particular need can attract a certain amount of dollars. From the information I have available, a student who has a visual impairment, for instance, can attract \$22,000 for assistance. In the independent sector, that would be only \$1,500. That is all we have available.

MS DUNDAS: So students with disabilities go through the same assessment process, whether they are in a government or non-government school? Is each individually assessed?

Ms Hill: They are not undertaken by the same area—the same psychologist or anything—but there are standard assessment procedures that apply.

THE CHAIR: But you are outside the school system. Yes or no?

Ms Hill: In order to bring out a report, we use those who are recognised, in the field, as being able to deliver the assessments. These are recognised people. If a student transfers from the government sector to an independent school, the records come as well. So we are aware of the assessments that those students may have undergone in the government schools sector, or even in the Catholic system, for instance—and the other way around.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR PRATT: Would you care to make a comment about vocational education training? Where does that figure in the strategy, in terms of priority, in the independent schools sector?

Ms Hill: It is a growing issue for independent schools. Some independent schools do not have years 11 and 12. Therefore vocational programs are not a priority for them. However, schools with years 11 and 12 are part of the same 11 and 12 system and come under the auspices of the board of senior secondary studies. Each of their courses are approved.

Independent schools which undertake these programs undergo exactly the same quality assurance registration process for their VET programs. The process is exactly the same whether it be government, Catholic system or independent school. Some of the schools have taken up more of a vocational program than other schools. It depends on student choice in a school—whether or not that is the pathway they want to follow.

MR PRATT: And whether that particular school has an orientation towards that—or is it standard?

Ms Hill: Often it is because of what is available, and whether or not economies of scale allow for those VET programs to be delivered. There are additional costs involved in delivering VET programs. There is Commonwealth money available. That is all that is available to assist schools to go down that pathway, but the Commonwealth dollars come with a lot of criteria attached.

It is more to do with providing for school-based traineeships and apprenticeships than trying to expand the number of VET programs available in schools. Therefore, that does not actually assist schools in trying to expand the programs they have available.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time now. If we have any further questions, we will contact you.

Ms Hill: I would be happy to provide them. Thank you for the opportunity.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance today.

The committee adjourned at 12.24 pm.