

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES**

**(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2002-2003)**

**Members:**

**MR G HUMPHRIES (The Chair)**

**MR J HARGREAVES**

**MS R DUNDAS**

**MRS V DUNNE**

**MS K GALLAGHER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 24 JULY 2002**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr D Skinner (Ph: 620 50137)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital territory**

**The committee met at 9.08 am.**

Appearances:

Mr S Corbell, Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Minister for Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations

Department of Education, Youth and Family Services—

Ms F Hinton, Chief Executive

Mr T Wheeler, Executive Director, Corporate; Executive Director, Vocational Education and Training

Mr J Coleborne, Executive Director, School Education

Ms J Farrelly, Acting Executive Director, Children's, Youth and Family Services

Institute of Technology—

Mr P Veenker, Chief Executive and Director

Mr A O'Leary, General Manager, Corporate Services Division

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, Minister, and welcome, officers. Can I go through the usual housekeeping? I remind you that answers to questions on notice, if possible, should be supplied within three days. We'll send the transcript to your officers and your office, Minister, so you can organise to have the answers provided. We ask that the transcript be checked so that any commitments made to provide additional information can be treated as questions on notice.

Members asking questions on notice should be clear that they have asked a question on notice and expect an answer to come back. So there is no doubt about that, indicate that very clearly so it shows up on the *Hansard* record. Give page references if possible.

Proceedings are being broadcast to specified government offices, and the media may record proceedings and take visual footage.

I'll read the advice to witnesses. 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 at this public hearing. It also means you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

We'll now go through the list of items which are on the agenda for today to see if there are any areas for which questions are not expected or required. To accommodate officers of the department, I think we'll start with youth and family services and an overview statement of capital works in that area. Are there any areas where we don't have questions today? Are there questions on CIT, CIT Solutions and vocational education and training?

**MR PRATT:** CIT Solutions, no, but everything else, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Any questions for CIT Solutions?

**MR HARGREAVES:** I've got no questions for CIT.

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**MS DUNDAS:** I have questions for CIT.

**THE CHAIR:** If there are no questions for CIT Solutions, then we can dispense with the services of the officers who have come today for that purpose. Otherwise, we'll need everybody else who might be required today. That's all the housekeeping.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mr Chairman, yesterday when Mr Wood and officers were present, we talked about the Weston Creek community centres issue. There may have been some confusion that I want to clear it up.

I asked some questions regarding the management integrity of the Weston Creek Community Association. I would like the record to show that the concerns that I was expressing were with another organisation of a similar name.

The organisation was the Weston Creek Community Child Care Association. The initials for that association are WCCCA, and the initials for the Western Creek Community Association are WCCA. I would like *Hansard* to record that if anybody takes offence or has any concern about the financial reputation of the Weston Creek Community Association that would be totally incorrect.

I would also state for the record that it takes really good management expertise to get into arrears with a peppercorn rent. I wouldn't like the record to suggest that either. Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, would you like to make an opening statement on youth and family services?

**Mr Corbell:** I have an opening statement which addresses all areas of the department. With your indulgence, I could make that statement now and then we can move on.

**THE CHAIR:** By all means.

**Mr Corbell:** Thank you very much, Mr Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear this morning. As the Treasurer has made clear, this budget has not been an easy budget to frame, but it is a responsible budget. It is a budget which is focused on some difficult decisions but also on honouring the government's election commitments.

I'm very pleased to say that we have met in full one of the government's major commitments from the election, and that is to provide \$27 million more over four years for education than the previous government did.

Around \$19.2 million for new education initiatives is in this year's budget, plus there is a remaining \$7.4 million included in the forward three years which has not been allocated to any specific initiative at this time.

In addition, the budget focuses on youth, with specific initiatives to enable youth to have a voice in policy deliberations, new youth services in the west Belconnen area, a review of career education and the development of pathway plans for students, in particular planning for students facing disadvantage.

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Members of the committee would be aware that the government has also delivered on its commitment to improve services to disabilities with the establishment of a new department—the Department of Disabilities, Housing and Community Services.

Funding from this department—Education, Youth and Family Services—to the new department includes some \$20 million in departmental recurrent funding, capital of just under \$2 million and territorial funding for the payment of concessions of around \$21 million. That's an outline of the transfer of functions from Education, Youth and Family Services to the new department.

As I indicated earlier to members, this budget has been one which has seen some savings initiatives. As well as providing \$2 million for children's, youth and family services initiatives, it has been necessary to redirect some existing funding, just over \$1 million, to make way for these new initiatives. It's important to stress that the government and I took as many steps as possible to try to minimise the impact of these savings measures.

In children's, youth and family services, the \$2 million in new initiatives includes extra funding for four new initiatives.

\$426,000 is being provided over four years to provide for 10 emergency occasional care places. This will assist the most vulnerable in the community and complement other early intervention initiatives for families and children at risk.

The government also considers it important that youth participate as fully as possible in policy deliberations which affect them. In April this year I launched *Youth in the ACT: a social and demographic profile* and provided a statement on the government's future policy directions and priorities for young people in Canberra.

One of the announcements at that time was the establishment of Youth Interact, an initiative for youth participation and consultation. This budget provides \$632,000 to implement that commitment.

Many members would be aware that the service ParentLink has been a very valuable one for the ACT community. ParentLink was initially funded with assistance provided by the NRMA. Unfortunately, the NRMA has chosen to redirect its sponsorship arrangements to other priorities, but I'm pleased to confirm that the budget provides \$100,000 to ensure that this service continues.

As I've already indicated, the budget also provides \$533,000 to provide support services to young people in the west Belconnen area.

In addition to these initiatives, I'd like to draw your attention to the considerable additional funding provided for this part of my portfolio in the additional appropriations last year. This considerable extra funding flows through to the current budget and the forward years—\$4.8 million for SACS award payments to community service providers over the next four years and \$6.4 million for increased substitute care. This funding is now split between this department and the new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

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There is no doubt in my mind that education is a major winner from this budget. The government schooling budget has increased by over \$13 million in 2002-03 after taking into account the usual technical adjustments.

As well as new education initiatives worth \$2.8 million this financial year and \$19.6 million over four years, the budget also maintains full indexation for school education and full funding for all of the education initiatives from the previous administration.

The reduction of year 3 class sizes is a very significant initiative—\$12.3 million over four years plus \$1 million in additional accommodation. That puts an additional 55 teachers into primary schools over the next three years.

New funding of \$2 million over four years for high school development recognises the need for targeted support for these years of schooling. I'm particularly pleased that we were able to redirect funding from the now finished teacher renewal program to the student pathways initiative.

This is a commitment of \$1.7 million over four years—a very important initiative consistent with national agreements to provide for pathway planning for all students—and our focus in the first instance will be on students potentially at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes.

Further, there is support for indigenous students. Indigenous students support will be increased by providing funds of \$800,000 over four years to increase the skill level of staff working with indigenous students.

In the area of information and communication technology, I'm pleased to outline to the committee that the government has provided an additional \$1.7 million over four years to enable up to 30 per cent of all computers for teaching to be laptop computers, and just over \$1 million over the next four years for IT infrastructure upgrades in government schools.

Catholic systemic schools will receive \$1 million for information technology purposes over the next four years, again in fulfilment of our election commitment.

Turning briefly to vocational education and training, I'm pleased to say that we have been able to maintain CIT's funding in real terms with the provision of \$0.7 million in indexation. Overall, CIT's funding will go up by \$2 million.

It's important to add that the ACT government is very disappointed by the Commonwealth government's decision to cease funding state industry training advisory arrangements from next year. These are the funding arrangements for ITABs, industry training advisory boards.

This was a hard blow for the territory. We will lose \$600,000 annually. It came without any consultation and has had a major impact on the funding arrangements for industry training advisory boards not only in the territory but right around Australia.

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The government is currently reviewing the situation in consultation with industry, and we're looking at our options for maintaining an appropriate consultative arrangement. In the meantime, I'm pleased to confirm that today the government has announced that we will provide an additional \$100,000 to keep the industry training advisory boards going until the end of December. This gives these bodies some certainty and ability to plan over the short term whilst review of the current arrangements is completed.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, the budget signals quite comprehensively the government's commitment to education and the wellbeing of young people in our community. This is a commitment mirrored in other portfolios. For example, there are initiatives totalling \$3.8 million in Health and Community Care which have relevance for the Education, Youth and Family Services portfolio. Initiatives such as the indigenous youth alcohol and drug project and the child and adolescent mental health services enhancement package are also of relevance for services delivered by this department.

It's important to make this investment in young people, not only for the wellbeing of the individuals concerned but for our community as a whole. The budget focuses on building the opportunities for all young people in our community to realise their potential. The measures I've outlined this morning demonstrate our commitment to working towards this goal.

Thank you very much. I'm open to taking your questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We'll move, as I suggested, to areas of youth and family services now and come back to broader education issues a little bit later. Could I start with a question about provision of child-care centres? I think there was provision in the last budget, the budget before the one just delivered, for about \$4 million over two years to establish two child-care centres, one in Gungahlin and another to be built after a study established the area in which the need for such a centre would be greatest. The centre in Gungahlin of course is now open. I'm not aware of any action taken to establish the other centre. Has the examination of a suitable centre proceeded and, if so, what's the result of that examination?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Jill Farrelly from this area to provide some more detail on this in a moment, but as I understand it the centre at Gungahlin is not yet open. The previous government provided funding for the establishment of a permanent facility in the Gungahlin Town Centre central area. That process is still under way and has not been completed.

What has been completed in Gungahlin is the government's commitment to provide additional space at the existing centres at both Ngunnawal and Nicholls. We have provided an additional 27 places at each of those centres through the provision of demountable buildings. That was this government's election commitment in relation to child care in Gungahlin. The permanent facility is still being planned. It's expected to open mid-2003 to provide 90 centre-based places. That's at a cost of \$2.1 million.

In relation to the other funding, the government has taken the decision that the best way to get the best possible return for the community in the provision of child-care places is to seek expressions of interest from child-care services operating from ACT government-owned facilities elsewhere in Canberra that are interested and have the ability to expand

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their capacity. The intention is to use that funding, \$1.2 million, to provide for the extension of existing ACT government-owned facilities, to provide additional places in that way.

I'll ask Ms Farrelly if she'd like to elaborate at all on any of those points.

**Ms Farrelly:** The minister has covered the government's activity with regard to expansion of child care. The sector itself is also building new places, with two new centres opening in the central of Canberra, with an additional 171 places, and a further new centre due to open on 22 July in the federal Treasury building.

The centre in Gungahlin is on track. Design work is well under way. The centre is on track to open mid-2003. It will be a 90-place centre. In addition to being a child-care facility, it will also have two community rooms which will provide extra community space for the Gungahlin community.

**THE CHAIR:** And the other facility that was provided for previously is now going to be dispersed among other existing government centres?

**Ms Farrelly:** As the minister mentioned, the additional funding has been used in two ways, just to reiterate—the expansion of the immediate need, which is the two transportables, which have now opened, with the extra 54 places, and then the additional 70 places across centres across Canberra where there is a need. We find in child care that the need isn't evenly spread, so services, in order to be successful in gaining expansion, need to demonstrate that there is a need in terms of waiting lists and so on in their area.

**Ms Hinton:** My recollection of the former government's commitment is that it was to build a centre in Gungahlin and to undertake an investigation in consultation with the community about where the needs applied across the rest of Canberra. That process was what was occurring.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, that's what I indicated when I asked the question. What's the situation with the needs of child-care centres at the moment across the board, government and non-government? I understand there's a problem with attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff. Is that still the situation?

**Mr Corbell:** That certainly is an issue of concern, not only in the ACT but right around the country. Child care is an activity which, because women are the majority in the work force, has often been undervalued. That means the rates of pay have traditionally been very low in the child-care industry, not only here in the ACT but right around Australia. That is now an issue the industry and governments are having to address, because the demand for child care continues to increase along with changing work patterns and family arrangements.

I've taken the decision that we need to undertake a project to examine the barriers to the recruitment and retention of workers in the child-care industry. The government has agreed on a tripartite approach—with government; the union representing child-care workers, the LHMU; and operators in the industry itself, both in the community and private sectors—to work out exactly what the issues are and to provide a report by the

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end of September on measures the government can potentially take to improve recruitment and retention in the industry.

The cost of that project is \$20,000. The project steering committee has been formed. It met for the first time late last month. It is being facilitated by Community and Health Works, which is an ITAB. They have funding to do that work. There certainly are some concerns around the levels of qualified staff. Ms Farrelly might be able to provide you with a bit more information on that .

**Ms Farrelly:** No, I can't do more. That's all.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I'm looking at BP4 with respect to a number of children, youth and family services programs.

**MRS DUNNE:** What page, John?

**MR HARGREAVES:** It doesn't matter which page. There are various books you can go to. I'll hold one up for you.

**Mr Corbell:** Which page are you referring to?

**MR HARGREAVES:** The new book, page 350, or the old book.

**MS DUNDAS:** In the printout version that would be about page 35?

**MR HARGREAVES:** But in the old book it's about 335, 336 or 337.

**MS DUNDAS:** What heading are you looking at, Mr Hargreaves?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Children, youth and family services. It's a general question about a lot of the programs—early intervention, preschool education, support for young people, youth justice, and care and protection. The same question applies to them all. The 2001-02 targets and estimated outcomes aren't there, yet the notes say the target for 2002 has been increased to reflect activity. I've got no idea what the activity is. There has to be a good reason for that.

**Mr Corbell:** There is a very good reason.

**Ms Farrelly:** There is, and they are there.

**Mr Corbell:** Mr Wheeler can provide an answer.

**Mr Wheeler:** The reason for the blanks on some of the performance measures both in the 2001-02 year and in some cases in the 2002-03 year is that the output classes and outputs have been changed, in part because of the move to put some services with the new department and because we've collapsed certain output classes.

**MRS DUNNE:** So comparison is not worth a cracker?

**Mr Wheeler:** It's hard.



**Ms Hinton:** The information is there but what it requires is—

**MRS DUNNE:** Is certain forensic skills.

**Ms Hinton:** Something like that.

**THE CHAIR:** That's the case in any budget, Mrs Dunne.

**Ms Hinton:** In some instances the targets are on a separate page to the estimated outcome, and similarly the estimated outcome is on a different page to the 2002-03 target. But the information is all there.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I've had a bit of an interest in youth justice for some years. I looked at the number of custody days used annually, and for 2002-03 it is 5,500. I would have thought that one at least could have been provided by Quamby and could have been in previous years, but I just use that as an example.

**Ms Hinton:** That information is included in the papers.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Is that somewhere else?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes. Look at page 297 of old Budget Paper 4.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Are you sure I don't go to the other big sheaf of papers we were given before and possibly some other information? I picked up this brand new one. It's hot off the press yesterday, and it's not all in it.

**MRS DUNNE:** And they're still not there, yes.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I might use it as a door stop.

**Ms Hinton:** The old book shows that the estimated 2001-02 outcome in the number of custody days used annually for youth justice was 3,208.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can I ask a quick question about that?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes, and I'll explain something else on that in a moment.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Let's just wait till we finish.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, let Ms Hinton finish.

**Ms Hinton:** The 2002-03 target custody days number is 5,500. The reason for that major differential is that, as you will recall, youth justice was transferred, as part of the administrative arrangements orders following the election, from the department of justice to our department. In our department, the youth justice figures for 2001-02 represented

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that period for which youth justice was with the department, which I think was from November. So it's two-thirds of the year.

**MR HARGREAVES:** So the increase is a full-year effect of that and the previous one?

**Ms Hinton:** That's right.

**MR HARGREAVES:** It's quite a large book. I haven't gone through every page of it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Why not?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Because I didn't want to. I didn't need to, Mrs Dunne, because you've done it for us. You've been shooting your mouth off. I don't need to.

**Mr Wheeler:** Mr Chairman, could I ask for some clarification. The committee secretary this morning indicated that we would use the photocopied version of the new Budget Paper 4, because the new Budget Paper 4 had only just arrived and nobody had it. That's what we're working off. We haven't got the new version.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I think that's fair.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I was using a combination of both.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can we have some agreed consistency here?

**MR PRATT:** Can we use old BP4?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, that's fine.

**MS DUNDAS:** No, because the numbers have changed.

**MR PRATT:** Which one are we going to use?

**THE CHAIR:** We will use the document that was circulated a few days ago, which I've got with me.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So we don't use this?

**THE CHAIR:** It was the earlier version of that, the non-printed version of that.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Let's put this away, shall we?

**Mr Corbell:** Chair, that would certainly assist in providing some timely answers to your questions.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Are we using the old BP4?

**Mr Corbell:** As I understand it, we're using the photocopied document.

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**MR HARGREAVES:** That has clarified that for me. The Assembly put out a report—it was under Kerrie Tucker’s chair—on children at risk. What I’d like to know is how many recommendations in that report have yet to be implemented and what the timetable is for them.

**Mr Corbell:** Mr Chairman, the government has tabled a response to that report. The previous government failed to do so, even though they had the report for some time. Even though it was not a report to this Assembly, this government chose to respond to that report, because we consider issues around children at risk and young people at risk to be very significant issues and ones that deserve proper attention.

So the government has tabled a response to that report. We agreed, I’m fairly sure, with almost all of the recommendations, and we have outlined what steps we’re taking to implement them. I might ask Ms Hinton to provide some further information in relation to your question.

**Ms Hinton:** A very substantial number of the recommendations of the adolescents and young people at risk report were addressed in the 2002-03 budget and partially in the 2001-02 budget.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Were they implemented, Ms Hinton, or was money just provided?

**Ms Hinton:** The money hasn’t been appropriated yet, Mr Hargreaves.

**MR HARGREAVES:** We hope it will be.

**Ms Hinton:** But it has been signalled. I can give you a run-through very quickly. There was an issue in relation to class sizes. That issue has been addressed in the last two budgets. There were issues around high school development and, as the minister said in his opening speech, they have been addressed in this budget.

There was a recommendation about a review of counselling services. The government has made a commitment to that. There were recommendations about indigenous young people, about reviewing the current approach to curriculum, about the capacity of current alternative education programs to meet the needs of students at risk, about the need to assist in inter-agency work, and about the task force on drugs and alcohol in the ACT.

So across the board there’s been a commitment to respond to those recommendations. Some of the work is in train, like the early class sizes, and the task force has been announced. Other action has been initiated through the allocation of funding and the commencement of a process in relation to reviews.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Provided that we get the blessing from the opposition and this budget sails through, will —

**THE CHAIR:** There’ll be our blessing. A lot of people will bless it.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I was talking about the Greens' opposition. I'm sorry, I was in Tasmania for a bit. Is there going to be real-time activity in the next financial year with that, or is the first year going to be largely a planning one to get it going?

**Mr Corbell:** No, there will be a range of activity, both implementation of initiatives and further examinations as requested by the committee report. The committee report asked for certain actions to be taken and certain other areas to be further investigated. For example, there is now \$800,000 over four years to provide additional support for indigenous young people. That's a specific response to a recommendation of the committee. In contrast, the committee says there needs to be another look at counselling services in schools.

**MR HARGREAVES:** That is one of my favourite hobby horses, I must admit.

**Mr Corbell:** There's \$100,000 to do that. I should say that we don't think that this is a "bloody nuisance", unlike Mr Pratt. We think this review is important. It was recommended by the standing committee in its report. That is our very proper response to that recommendation. So it's a mix of activity and further investigation as requested by an Assembly inquiry.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Some parts of youth services will be co-located with the new disability department. I've always been a bit worried about the holistic approach to the provision of services to young people, particularly prevention programs to stop them being at risk in the first place. There will be co-location with some of the SAAP parts. Can you give me some idea of the rationale for the splitting of it?

**Ms Hinton:** The issue of the administrative structures to support the government of the day in the delivery of its functions is always a difficult issue, because so many of the functions of government are interrelated, whether it be education, health, disability services, corrections, housing. There is an inter-relationship between all of those. The challenge is to find the best fix at particular points in time, whilst recognising the need for interagency work to continue, regardless of the organisational arrangements.

The decision in relation to SAAP had regard to the fact that there are synergies and connections between youth SAAP and other youth programs currently within the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services—quite a number of those in the schools area, in the youth area and in the family services area.

It also had regard to the fact that there are very serious synergies between youth SAAP and adult SAAP in the way in which you deliver the programs. It also had regard to the close relationship between supported accommodation and housing. I believe the committee talked yesterday about the issue the ACT has faced for some time in the transition of people in supported accommodation into more permanent accommodation, that being a serious issue for us to address. The decision was taken, on balance, that the housing matters were better grouped for the delivery of those functions. Prior to this we were working very closely with the Department of Urban Services in work around Ainslie Village, for example, so cross-agency work was occurring in the community housing and SAAP areas. It was for those reasons that the decision was taken.

The rest of youth will stay within Education, Youth and Family Services because of the strong connections between where young people are during the day—which is at school—children and young people who are in need of care and protection, and the services that are supported and funded by government through Education, Youth and Family Services for young people in the community sector. But we will continue to work very closely with the new department of Disability, Housing and Community Services to make certain that the linkages remain.

**MR HARGREAVES:** The Lanyon Youth and Community Centre, as Mr Wheeler would know, has been one of my favourites also. I understand that responsibility for it is to go to the new department. Is that true?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MR HARGREAVES:** If the whole reason for it being created in the first place was to create a solution for young people into which the problem would grow—in other words, if it is all about preventing kids from becoming at risk—where is the mindset that actually changes that? Why can't you take it back? That one is all about making sure the kids don't become at risk in the first place.

**Mr Corbell:** I think it's important to make the distinction that the facility will be the responsibility of the new department. The service provided in the facility, in the building, will continue to be provided by this department.

**MR HARGREAVES:** So the management of the contract to provide the services by the Y will still be administered by the experts in the youth services area?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** This isn't what we heard yesterday from Minister Wood.

**Mr Corbell:** The youth services component will continue to be provided by the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services. Other services in that facility, community services, are provided by the new department, and the facility itself is the responsibility of the new department.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I remember that at the beginning something like \$80,000, \$82,000 or \$84,000 was provided as the running contract for it. That was to provide services by the Y. Is that being administered by your department?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes. As a youth service, it is supported by our department and we manage the contract for it. I visited Lanyon recently.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Terrific, isn't it?

**Ms Hinton:** It is operating extraordinarily well. There are terrific synergies between Lanyon High School and the youth centre. The location of it is very good, because the students from the high school are able to walk across to the youth centre without having to cross a road.

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Small groups of particularly at-risk young people will go across at particular times, and they might do some work around literacy in a different kind of environment. More broadly, the high school is also looking at ways in which they can help the transition of year 10 students through to college by giving them a little bit more independence by using the youth centre. The administration of the youth centre and the high school are working in a very cooperative way for the benefit of the young people.

Certainly the youth service at Lanyon, just as the youth services at Gungahlin, Belconnen or Erindale are, is funded and supported through the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I'm not terribly bothered about the mainstream educational support that the youth centre gets. The high school is quite capable of looking after that itself. What I've always been conscious of is using that youth centre as a suicide prevention model and a drug abuse prevention model. I understand from the people there that that has been their measure of their success. I'm very pleased to hear that that part is also going to remain within your department, Minister. I think that's a great move. Congratulations on a good outcome.

**Mr Corbell:** Thank you.

**MS DUNDAS:** I asked this question of Minister Wood. It is about the decision to split the function of CHADS between DEYFS and the new department. I understand that your department are responsible for specialist preschool education.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Including the autism early intervention units.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you tell us what specific plans you have for coordinating the preschool intervention provided by your department with the school-age services that will be provided by the new department?

**Ms Hinton:** Perhaps I could make some general comments about how it will operate first. As you say, the function of CHADS that remains with the Education, Youth and Family Services is the early intervention specialist preschools and play groups. They have transferred into the children's services branch.

Essentially, what we're talking about in relation to specialised preschools is small groups of children, often four or five, who attend a specialised preschool in a preschool in a preschool setting with a teacher and some support. When they go to school, they attend school in a specialised setting in a small group.

Both groups—a significant number of them but not all—require therapy services. The new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services will be providing those therapy services for children who are in the specialised preschool. They'll be providing them for the children who are in a specialised unit in a kindergarten, in grade 2, grade 3, grade 4, up to age 12, and in special schools. The coordination arrangements we

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currently have with the area of CHADS providing therapy services—we have close connections with them—will continue.

**MS DUNDAS:** The early intervention unit runs across all ages, whenever a student is identified as having a problem?

**Ms Hinton:** We use the term “intervention units” in different ways. It probably is confusing. We have specialised classes for children who need assistance at whatever age. It could be in preschool or it could be in kindergarten.

**MS DUNDAS:** And that’s run by DEYFS?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes, it’s run by DEYFS. Each one of those has a teacher who is responsible for the children, and usually an assistant of some kind as well. But many of the children will require some therapy services, and they will access them through the new department, but we will have close cooperative links with them.

**Ms Farrelly:** The CHADS services, the early intervention programs which are across Canberra for children up to school entry age—those early education programs—as Ms Hinton mentioned, will be run by children’s services branch, working very closely with the preschools that they’re in and with the staff.

**MS DUNDAS:** So early intervention is for—

**Ms Farrelly:** And in that sense early intervention is for three to five-year-olds.

**MS DUNDAS:** For the young early identified, as opposed to the first step of intervention?

**Ms Farrelly:** Yes, early in age.

**Ms Hinton:** That’s right. Perhaps to put it another way, in the ACT children of four years of age are entitled to preschool. But this process enables children with particular needs to access preschool earlier than otherwise.

**Ms Farrelly:** I know you raised yesterday the increased budget for the early childhood service, early special services, and it didn’t fully emerge what that is. There’s actually a total of \$498,000, which is the increase in early childhood services for children with special needs.

Of that, \$304,327 will be to expand the early intervention programs that we’ve spoken about. Some of that expansion will be for the early intervention units, some will be for play groups, and some will be for eight new autism specific early intervention places.

I thought it would be useful to flesh out a conversation we had when we discussed CHADS yesterday.

**MS GALLAGHER:** There's been some discussion about the carve-up or fragmentation of certain areas of the old department into the two new areas. Has there been much concern from the people who use CHADS, the parents for example, about the fact that there is this division now between certain areas of the program?

**Ms Farrelly:** The message we've been given is that it's very much business as usual and that the support they have will continue. People have asked questions about how it will work on the ground. Our view is that it will continue to work as it does. It will work smoothly.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So for the users of the services there isn't any noticeable difference?

**Ms Hinton:** I wouldn't think so. The services are being delivered from the same locations by the same people. If I can give a bit of a plug for the staff of education and Community Services, there was absolute commitment by the staff involved in the transfer arrangements, whether they were going to the new department or staying with DEYFS, that above all else the delivery of services to the parents, families and community of the ACT must be paramount, and transitional structures were set up to ensure that that happened, and communication with the groups as well.

**MS DUNDAS:** The minor new works under children's, youth and family services includes \$60,000 for a fit-out of Youth in the City. The detail is on page 61 of the ownership agreement. Can you tell me what kind of fit-out we're talking about?

**Mr Carmichael:** There were some running maintenance requirements in the Youth in the City building. We're all aware that there's a proposed new building, Griffin Centre, which was discussed yesterday, but to keep the service operational, a range of things needed to be done to maintain the premises in a fit and healthy state until that new building is operational.

The maintenance that was done was done with a view that some of the equipment, like the air-conditioning and heating, can be transferred to other buildings at a later date. But it was really to maintain a holding pattern so that that service could continue to deliver high-quality services from that site.

**MS DUNDAS:** Under minor new works, there's OH&S access and equity money, building refurbishment money and ground upgrades divided between preschools, child-care centres, community and youth centres. Can you give me a more detailed breakdown of how much will be spent in preschools versus community centres? Or has that decision not been made yet?

**Mr Wheeler:** We'll have to take some of that on notice. Probably all the decisions haven't been made, but it won't include the preschools, because they stay with Education, Youth and Family Services.

**MS DUNDAS:** Will there be a new ownership agreement between the Treasurer and the new chief executive?



**Ms Hinton:** Yes, I'm sure there will be, just as in the past we have had administrative arrangements changes when we have had purchase agreements. We redid the purchase agreements.

**MS DUNDAS:** The new ownership agreement will detail the fact that the money that's allocated in this minor new works will go to preschools?

**Mr Wheeler:** Sorry. Can I just clarify that? What I said was incorrect. It does include preschools, but we'll have to get back to you with the breakdown of where that is going. They'll be fairly small jobs.

**MS DUNDAS:** That was page 30 of the ownership agreement. I'll ask about Youth Interact now. I'm not quite sure which output it comes under. There's \$154,000 this year and, as you mentioned earlier this morning, Minister, \$630,000 for four years. Can you please tell me what that money will be for and how many young people will be on the new Ministerial Youth Advisory Council?

**Mr Corbell:** The final decision on the composition of the minister's youth council is yet to be made. The government has received approximately 70 expressions of interest from young people interested in joining the council. That's following a fairly comprehensive advertising process in the *Chronicle* and the *Canberra Times* around youth centres and a range of other measures within schools. I'm not exactly sure what the exact composition of the council will be. I'll ask Mr Carmichael to give you that information in a moment.

To respond to a couple of your other questions in general, the intention is to provide additional support to make the model work. Following the change of government, I met with the former Ministerial Youth Advisory Council, MYAC, and they put forward a model of how they believe youth consultation activities should work in the city. They wanted to broaden the base and broaden the level of engagement by young people in policy-making.

Rather than rely on a fairly small council, their theory was that we need to engage a broader range of young people in decision-making. The idea was to establish and run an annual youth conference of around 100 young people which would talk about issues of concern to youth in the ACT and provide feedback to the government on issues of concern. That needs to be resourced and has a necessary level of administrative support to help that to happen.

It is the intention, following the youth conference, to have a number of issues-based forums, so that across the year there might be two or three issues-based forums where a smaller group of young people come together and talk about specific issues that might come out of the conference. It's more of a focused look at some of those issues. There's also the maintenance and improvement of the Youth Interact website.

**Mr Carmichael:** It'll be an expansion of Pogo for a specific site for the Youth Interact. So it will be a companion site to Pogo.

**Mr Corbell:** All of this requires a necessary level of administrative support to make it happen and to make sure that people know about it and they work well. That's essentially what the resourcing goes towards.

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**Mr Carmichael:** I can talk a little bit about the composition. I guess we were very pleased with the strong response we got. As the minister said, it was broadly canvassed around the ACT to promote the new Youth Interact system that we're putting in place. One of our conundrums now is that we're dealing with a very diverse group, which is good, but we've got strong representations from 12 to 14-year olds. We've got a lot of people around that age. We are interviewing every person who has nominated, so it's a big process. We've done some little workshops for information for all those people so they're fully informed about what the issues will be, about what they can contribute and how they'll be resourced to do that. That has built the enthusiasm even further. Our big issue now is how we get down to a sizeable working group of 15 to 20 people. That's what we're working through.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you're aiming for a size of 15 to 20.

**Mr Carmichael:** Yes. A lot of this was driven by the former Ministerial Youth Advisory Council, as the minister mentioned, in meetings with him. Those members—this is some of the reason why it has been so popular—have gone out and promoted themselves. They've been keenly involved with the process of how we recruit the new people into the new ministerial advisory mechanism, giving their insights into what the issues were for them. That has informed our team. But the team that's helping to select the people have got a range of young people involved with that, not with any conflict of interest. The young Canberran of the year, for example, is involved with the selection process, but he's not going to become a member of Youth Interact in the first instance. We're trying to make sure we've got a diverse group but make sure that each one of those members is well supported so they feel they can fully participate in the process.

**Mr Corbell:** There are a couple of fairly distinct shifts in policy in how we're approaching this. The previous consultative arrangements tended to rely on the traditional representative model. You get a group of people in a room and you say, "You are representative of young people" or "You are representative of the multicultural community" or whatever the case may be.

The strong feedback from MYAC, the previous advisory group, was that that model really doesn't work very well for young people. Young people have a very diverse range of views and perspectives, and that more traditional representative model really doesn't work so well. As Tony has said, the level of ownership of this new model is hopefully going to underpin its success, because it's driven by what young people themselves believe is a better way of engaging them in decision-making and policy-making. That's one of the real strengths of the process.

**MS DUNDAS:** And who will set the agenda for the advisory council meetings and for the youth conference?

**Mr Corbell:** My view in relation to all the advisory groups that report to me is that I'd like them to have a very strong level of independence in building their agendas and reporting to me and to the government on issues of concern to them.

Whilst I'll certainly want to take advantage of their expertise and their views to say, "This is an issue that I'd be quite keen and the government would be quite keen for you to have a look at," I think that most of their work should be driven by their own initiative and their own canvassing of concerns and issues. I think there is going to be a high level of self-direction, but the government will still refer issues to it where we believe it appropriate.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you won't be repeating the mistakes of the national youth round table?

**Mr Corbell:** I think the criticisms of the national youth round table are fairly well known, and they're criticisms I share.

**MS DUNDAS:** That's good to hear.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I've got a question about the additional funding for youth services in northern and western Belconnen. I'd like to know a bit more about it. It's half a million over four years. Is that going to existing services, or are they new programs? Why are those areas getting the money?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Why not Tuggeranong?

**Mr Corbell:** Tuggeranong has got an excellent service in the Lanyon Valley, which we've just heard Mr Hargreaves talk about. The northern and western suburbs of Belconnen are an area where we believe greater attention needs to be paid.

We estimate there's just over 15,000 young people living in the Belconnen area. The western and northern areas of Belconnen have never had any dedicated specific service for young people. The reliance has been on the Belconnen youth centre in the town centre itself.

Belconnen is a very large area geographically, and west Belconnen is a fairly distinct area of Belconnen. The feedback the government has got from teachers, youth workers and a range of other service providers is that there is a need for additional support in this area. So the funding that has been provided will provide a youth outreach service.

**MS DUNDAS:** Where will that be based?

**Mr Corbell:** I might ask my officers to give you a bit more information on that, but the intention is to operate it as an outreach service in that area, employing some workers to go out and work with young people in schools and in that area more generally, to provide the level of support that you traditionally get through a centre-based service, say, at Belconnen.

**Mr Carmichael:** There has been a review of the youth services program, which is the funding body for youth centres. That review identified the need for an outer Belconnen youth service. The model is yet to be determined. That review has just been finalised and is about to be consulted on with the sector. Obviously, with the money there, we need to provide some interim services, because the demand is already obvious and we need to provide something. But we want to make sure we get the model right, that we have the

support of the rest of the sector and that other stakeholders have a very strong vested interest in the service being established.

We're still in the planning stages of what will happen there. But the model will be somewhat determined by some of the in-depth research work that Morgan and Disney have done for us in reviewing the youth services program, and it may be moving away from some of the traditional models of a centre base. That's what the minister was saying. It will be more case management focused and more outreach focused. But it's yet to be worked through.

Traditionally, as at Lanyon, you build a building. That costs \$1 million, and then you've got to put operations on top of that. I guess the sense of the review of the youth services program is that that may not be the most effective way to deliver services to young people or the best use of public moneys or maximising dollars to young people. That's what we're working through as part of the implementation stage of the youth services program review.

**MS DUNDAS:** You said that there was a need to spend money in the interim, because it's an area of huge unmet need. How are you going to be spending money in the interim while you're working out the best model?

**Mr Carmichael:** We're doing some consultation with some of the services in that region to see if there's an interest in setting up some additional capacity while it's worked through. We'll have to go through an open tender process. The Procurement Act lays down the guidelines that money in excess of \$50,000 should be tendered. That's what we're likely to do. It takes some time to set up those processes. In the meantime, we've got the money there and the demand is there, so it's about how we best meet that need and, working with some existing service providers in that region maybe, augment their services as an interim measure while we go out to tender.

**Mr Corbell:** It's quite amazing that this area is expected to have one of the largest rates of growth for young people in the city over the next few years, yet traditionally it's an area where services haven't been provided to the same level that other parts of the city have received. Given that there is a certain percentage of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, there are those additional pressures that come with that. I don't want to seek to stereotype the area, because I think that's unfair, but there are pressures in the area and we do need to be providing these additional levels of support. I find it remarkable that attention hasn't been paid to it sooner.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So in a way this money, in your view, would be a first step towards getting services into that area or towards longer term planning for providing services for youth in that area?

**Mr Corbell:** At a policy level, the government wants to focus further on building on some initiatives that have occurred to date in providing additional support to young people in these sorts of areas. For instance, in the coming year I'm certainly keen to see a stronger focus on, and analysis of, some other activities such as the Schools as Communities project, which has delivered a range of other outreach services based from within schools.

I want to see whether that model works well and is the appropriate model to build on or whether we evolve from that and deliver services in a range of other ways. Certainly areas like West Belconnen have to be areas for priority, because their level of service provision is lower than other established areas in the city.

**Mr Carmichael:** Just to augment that response, the new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services will be looking at a youth SAAP system in that region as well. We're negotiating with a service provider at the moment where there's a high concentration of SAAP services in the Tuggeranong Valley. John probably doesn't want to hear that, but we're looking at—

**MR HARGREAVES:** I do not want to hear that, Mr Carmichael.

**Mr Carmichael:** In the youth SAAP review the year before last, it was seen that there was a strong need for further SAAP provision in the Belconnen area and Gungahlin area, so there will be some augmentation of SAAP services. One provider is providing a medium-term service in the upper Tuggeranong Valley. A high concentration of other SAAP providers are looking to relocate into that region to help support youth service delivery there, and work closely, obviously, with the new youth service that will either—

**MR HARGREAVES:** Did you suggest there was going to be a reduction in Tuggeranong to go to Belconnen, Mr Carmichael? Or was this an additional service to go to Belconnen?

**Mr Corbell:** I think it would be fair to say that a judgment needs to be made about the changing demographics in the city and responding to those demands. It's about meeting demand, Mr Hargreaves. If the demand is there, we seek to meet it. It's not about taking and giving; it's about meeting demand.

**MS DUNDAS:** When can we expect to see some crisis accommodation for young people in Belconnen and Gungahlin? It's a little bit confused with half of the facilities being looked after by—

**Mr Corbell:** The SAAP programs are entirely the province of the new department.

**MS DUNDAS:** But Mr Carmichael was just talking about SAAP today.

**Mr Corbell:** I think he was just drawing the parallel about how services need to adjust to meet demands in particular areas. He was simply saying that in the same way we're doing some analysis of service provision in relation to youth outreach similar activities are also happening in other areas such as SAAP.

**Mr Carmichael:** I was illustrating the partnership that we'll have between the two portfolios.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you can't tell me, as the area responsible for youth, when we can expect to see youth crisis accommodation in Belconnen and Gungahlin?

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**Ms Hinton:** I think it would be appropriate, Mr Chair, not to stray too much into responsibilities that don't rest with this department, when we don't have the chief executive or minister here.

**Ms Corbell:** I'm sure that if Ms Dundas wants to put questions on notice, the responsible minister can answer them.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I have a question about the emergency child-care places in occasional care. Ten is better than none, but it's not a great number of places. My question is more to do with how that is going to be administered. The reality of life is that a parent needing emergency child care will usually just present to a child-care centre saying, "I need help." How is that going to be managed? Are the centres going to carry the burden and then have to apply for funding through your department, or is it going to be allocated to occasional care centres?

**Mr Corbell:** I might ask Jill Farrelly to provide some information.

**Ms Farrelly:** Ten doesn't sound a lot but 20,600 hours does. We've had quite a lot of discussion with the sector over recent months about how the places will be distributed. Ultimately that's where parents front up with their emergencies.

We're hoping to have the emergency places operational by 1 August and have been looking at the model with the service providers. Places are going to be available from currently ACT government-funded occasional care centres. Each of the 14 occasional care services will receive an allocation of hours. So 16,320 of the total pool will go out.

One of the issues when we consulted the sector was that they wanted to have the discretion on their door step so that if someone fronts up they can allocate the place then and there rather than going through any red tape and getting it approved. So they have the discretion.

Initially we won't allocate the remaining hours, because essentially it is quite new dealing with places in this way. We want to have reporting on a monthly basis so we know about the usage and can make adjustments.

The way we aim to distribute the places is that we want families who are essentially the most vulnerable to have access to the places. Those would include people referred from family support services, family services, other respite services and health professionals.

Guidelines we'll use will include where immediate access is needed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child and where there are no other child-care options available—for instance, family members or other respite.

Access to emergency child care will give time to look for ongoing child-care arrangements where they are needed. We don't expect it will be ongoing. So it will be very much for emergency.

Another criterion will be that the family has limited capacity to meet the cost of child care. For instance, they may be health care card holders.

If a family who has an emergency and who isn't the most vulnerable turns up to a centre, the centres advise us that mostly those people can be managed and accommodated if there's a cancellation. They can be accommodated within the current resources. So these are really for the most needy families. Does that answer your question?

**MS GALLAGHER:** Yes, it does. And each of those 14 centres will be operating on the same guidelines?

**Ms Farrelly:** Yes.

**MS GALLAGHER:** They'll be issued by the department, and that's what they'll have to justify their usage against?

**Ms Farrelly:** Yes, that's right.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So if Jane Smith got one centre's allocation, it would be picked up from the monthly reporting that she's having a lot of emergency child care?

**Ms Farrelly:** Yes. Because of the way occasional care works, the centres get to know their families really well and they are able to support them. If someone is using it a lot, then we'd be looking at what other support services can help that family. If that crisis continues to occur, what other supports might be needed through other community agencies?

**THE CHAIR:** Can I ask a question on an article in yesterday's *Tuggeranong Chronicle* about a counsellor support program at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre, the messenger program? The person at the centre who looks after that program at the present time has told the *Chronicle* that he was promised funding for the maintenance of that program to the tune of about \$30,000 but the funding was not forthcoming in the budget. Can I understand why that funding wasn't forthcoming, and were any commitments made by officers to provide support for that program?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask officers to provide a bit more information, but what occurred was that there was the potential for some additional funding to be made as a one-off payment to both the messenger service and a number of other services, including the youth service in Gungahlin. An indication was made that that funding may be available, because there had been an underspend on some other activities and therefore there was some one-off funding available. However, following the administrative changes in relation to the new department, it became clear that that funding was not available because of the transfer of allocations between this department and the new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. As a result of that, the funding wasn't forthcoming.

But the initial level of funding that allowed some of these services to be provided was itself one-off funding. It was never meant to be recurrent funding, and it was made clear that it wasn't recurrent funding. One-off funding was provided, and obviously those services were keen to continue those services but they knew that there wasn't any recurrent funding for that activity when funding was provided in the first place. I might ask officers to provide a bit more detail on that.

**Ms Hinton:** The messenger program is a good program. We fund it. It has some component of one-off funding, but mostly it's recurrent. We provide, through the youth area, \$21,000 for the operation of that program on a yearly basis and HealthPact, I understand, are funding it to the tune of \$80,000 as well.

So it is getting some funding. There has been no reduction in funding. It was just unfortunate. It's always unfortunate when we don't have enough funding for areas where the service providers indicate to us that they could provide additional services.

**THE CHAIR:** The issue that was being raised was not just that there wasn't any continuation or there wasn't any step up in funding. Mr Fry from the centre, says that he was promised funding that funding would be forthcoming, that the money was available. It wasn't an "if" or "maybe" but—

**Mr Corbell:** No, no such commitment was made.

**Ms Hinton:** That's right

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, that's the case. There are no officers who might have said to Mr Fry—

**Ms Hinton:** No. There were discussions about the possibility if there was funding and what they would be able to do with it.

**THE CHAIR:** Who was involved in those discussions?

**Ms Hinton:** A range of people, I suppose.

**THE CHAIR:** You're confident that no-one indicated that the money would be forthcoming?

**Ms Hinton:** I'm confident about that, yes, I am.

**MRS DUNNE:** General discussions about what you might do if money was forthcoming isn't considered an indication that money is forthcoming?

**Mr Corbell:** No, it's no commitment.

**MRS DUNNE:** How would it be framed so as to make sure that that was clear?

**Ms Hinton:** It's an issue that needs to be handled carefully. I accept that. We work very closely with the community sector. There are ongoing and frequent discussions between officers of the department and the people in the community sector. Those discussions focus on needs and the response to the services being provided. Those discussions help us in being able to plan where funding should be directed and where the needs are. So often the discussions will take the form: "What are the priorities if there was money? What would you spend it on?" This wouldn't have been the first time that there would have been discussions of that kind.



**MRS DUNNE:** You're confident that the people you're dealing with on the other side of the community are experienced enough to know that this is contingency discussion rather than—

**Ms Hinton:** I believe so.

**MS DUNDAS:** If I want to ask questions about skate parks, do I ask you or do I have to put them on notice?

**Mr Corbell:** I think it's the department of sport and recreation, so ask the minister for sport.

**MS DUNDAS:** If I have a question about the lift in the Belconnen Youth Centre, is that you or is that the new department because it's a combined facility?

**Mr Corbell:** That would be the new department. They're responsible for the physical building.

**MS DUNDAS:** I also have a question about grants to community organisations administered by DEYFS. I understand that the CPI increase on those grants is 1 per cent. Is that correct?

**Mr Corbell:** That's correct.

**MS DUNDAS:** Considering that other departments are giving CPI increases of up to 2.5 per cent, and we had a discussion with the Treasurer last week about CPI being set at 2.9 per cent for the increase in rates, can you explain why you're only giving a 1 per cent increase?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, I can. I signalled this both at the time the budget was released and in my opening statement today. Indexation was one of the areas where the government sought to achieve savings. The department needed to deliver some savings as part of the overall measures for the budget. This is one of the areas where the government chose to achieve those savings in a way that had the least possible impact. The alternative, if we hadn't reduced the CPI funding, would have been to cut funding to services and to reduce service provision.

Whilst a reduction in CPI may have some impact on service provision for some services, it is a better way of managing a reduction in funding than pulling money away from a service altogether. I would have had to take a decision about which service wasn't going to get funding. That's a very difficult and unfair process. This is trying to share that arrangement more fairly. The reduction, I should stress, is a one-off. It does not affect CPI increases for future years.

**MS DUNDAS:** So we can expect, come next financial year, that the organisations you fund will return to a median level of CPI increases?

**Mr Corbell:** They will return to the usual level of CPI funding. That's right.

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**THE CHAIR:** I put it to you, Minister, that reductions in indexation still amount to cuts to services. It's just that the decision is being made by officers of your department lower down the pyramid rather than by you.

**Mr Corbell:** I don't deny that for some services it may have an impact on service provision. I've indicated that in my answer to Ms Dundas. But the issue is that it affects different services differently. Some services may have the capacity to absorb that slight reduction; others won't. It will have a varying result.

We don't walk away from the fact that there is a reduction in funding for a number of services because of this decision. It's one of the necessary decisions we've had to make in seeking to find some savings from the budget, and it is a one-off decision.

**THE CHAIR:** If there are effects on some services and little or no effect on others as you have just indicated, isn't it better that you decide which services exactly should be affected by such a reduction and not simply impose a blanket across the department, with the result that some excellent and efficient services have to sustain cuts and others that might have a little bit more leeway end up wearing less than they ought to?

**Mr Corbell:** Equally, Mr Humphries, if I were to appear before this committee saying that we had cut this particular service, I am sure I would have heard from you and other committee members all the reasons why that service should not have been cut.

**THE CHAIR:** Part of the problem of government is having to make those decisions.

**Mr Corbell:** This is a balancing act. On balance, we believe this is the more appropriate way to go.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's the easy way.

**Mr Corbell:** It's the more appropriate way, in our view.

**THE CHAIR:** It's also the less transparent way, because we can't examine you about where exactly the cuts fall.

**Mr Corbell:** Far from it. In fact, the government has been quite up front on this. I issued a media release on budget day saying we were making these cuts.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, but you haven't told us where.

**Mr Corbell:** If I can just answer your question, I indicated in my media statement exactly where the reduction was. It was a reduction of 1½ per cent, \$350,000, for this financial year in the level of CPI funding available to certain services. Those were identified and it's fairly clear—

**THE CHAIR:** And what are they?

**Mr Corbell:** Which services are they? They're the services listed in the department's annual report, I'm advised.

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**MRS DUNNE:** So it's across the board? There's no discrimination amongst the services you fund?

**Mr Corbell:** No, there's not.

**THE CHAIR:** It's every service?

**MRS DUNNE:** So it's every service?

**Mr Corbell:** It's every service.

**THE CHAIR:** So how can we examine you about the way the services are impacted if every area of the department is wearing some of that cut?

**Mr Corbell:** You said we don't know which services they are. I've just told you we do. They're all the services we fund.

**MRS DUNNE:** They're all the services you fund through grants?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** There's no transparency. We can't ask you how a particular cut will affect a particular area, because, as a minister, you haven't made a decision which areas will face particular cuts, have you?

**Mr Corbell:** No. Each service gets 1½ per cent less CPI funding this year.

**THE CHAIR:** What will that do to individual components? Let's say the office administering non-government schooling in the territory—

**Mr Corbell:** I have to stress, Mr Humphries, that this does not affect in any way schooling areas of the department. This is in relation to children's, youth and family service provision.

**THE CHAIR:** The child and adolescent health services are administered within your department. How will it affect those?

**Mr Corbell:** They are not affected either, Mr Humphries. This is funding to services that are provided by community-based organisations through a contract with the department. They are not services provided directly by the department. They have grant moneys for services provided by community-based organisations under the children's, youth and family services area.

**THE CHAIR:** So are you saying they are or aren't affected by the cut?

**Mr Corbell:** They are. The two areas you raise are not affected by this measure, because it's not relevant to them.

**THE CHAIR:** Tell us about an area that is affected by the measure and how that will impact on the delivery of service.

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**Mr Corbell:** I've indicated to you that all the services that are funded through a grants program as part of children, youth and family services have had their CPI funding reduced from 2.5 to 1 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** That wasn't the question I asked, Minister. The question is: how will that cut affect the delivery of services?

**Mr Corbell:** I'm happy to provide you with information on the specific organisations that are affected by this decision.

**THE CHAIR:** The names of the organisations?

**Mr Corbell:** We can provide you with the names of those organisations.

**MRS DUNNE:** But you can't name them now?

**Mr Corbell:** I can't name them now, no.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you don't know what impact that will have in the community sector, because you don't know what the organisations are and you don't know how a 1½ per cent reduction in funding will affect individual organisations?

**Mr Corbell:** No.

**Ms Hinton:** It's not a 1½ per cent reduction.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's a failure to increase by 1½ per cent, okay?

**Mr Corbell:** Their funding remains, but their CPI funding is 1 per cent instead of 2½ per cent.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you failed to increase it by 1½ per cent?

**THE CHAIR:** So it is a cut, in other words? It's less of an increase.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is it 1 per cent instead of 2.5 per cent?

**Mr Corbell:** It's 1 per cent instead of 2.5 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** Or 2.9 per cent, which is the inflation rate the Treasurer is using.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, which is the rate agreed by Treasury. There's no reduction in their base funding. Their base funding remains the same. Instead of getting a 2½ per cent increase of CPI, they get a 1 per cent increase of CPI. That's the alteration.

I can't tell you what the impact is on individual services, because each service has a high level of discretion in how it delivers its activities. Nor should I be able to tell you the full details of the operation of each of these services. They are community-based organisations. They arrange their affairs and deliver their services in a particular way,

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consistent with the contracts they have with the department. The reduction in funding is a one-off arrangement for this financial year. From the beginning of next financial year, we see CPI funding returning to the level, whatever it is, as determined by the Treasury.

**THE CHAIR:** Unless there's a problem with the budget and you're expected to make another saving somewhere?

**Mr Corbell:** As I've indicated, at this stage we don't believe that this decision will need to be replicated next year.

**MS DUNDAS:** The productivity savings for each department we were given last week show that for this financial year the old department of DECS was meant to save about \$1.2 million but next year is being asked to find \$1.4 million.

**Mr Corbell:** I'm sorry, where are you referring to, Ms Dundas?

**MS DUNDAS:** We received this sheet from Treasury officials. It's entitled "Broad productivity savings as identified in Budget Paper No 4". It lists productivity savings over the next four years for DUS, JACS, DECS and productivity and rationalisation of service savings in the department of health. It was given to us by Treasury, I'm sorry if you don't have the document.

**Mr Corbell:** It is being passed to us.

**MS DUNDAS:** It's a summary of the listing that is on page 16 of the loose-leaf Budget Paper 4, changes to appropriation productivity savings over the next four years, if that's an easier place for you to find it. As you can see, the productivity saving for 2002-03 is \$1.2 million but next year it increases to \$1.4 million and continues by roughly the same amount for the next three years. Can you tell me where you will be finding productivity savings if it won't be impacting on the CPI increases to grants programs?

**Mr Wheeler:** In the productivity savings, there's a small increase which, in the case of a couple of the programs that aren't continuing, have built in to them some CPI. That's why it increases slightly. But the indexation is just a straight reduction for this year. For next year there's no change to the CPI built into the forward estimates. For instance, the initiative that didn't proceed, Reducing Recidivism, will have an inflation factor built into it into the outyears.

**MS DUNDAS:** Because there are some programs finishing at the end of the financial year 2003—

**Mr Wheeler:** They're not proceeding in 2002-03, and their funding in that year has some inflation factor built into it into the outyears. So the number will expand slightly.

**MS DUNDAS:** So in which year are they not proceeding?

**Mr Wheeler:** In 2002-3, this current financial year. That's part of the savings program that the minister has announced.

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**MS DUNDAS:** But how will the savings program work in 2003-04—that is my question—without impacting on CPI for grants?

**Mr Corbell:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but those savings flow through to future years.

**MR HARGREAVES:** They're recurrent savings, aren't they?

**Mr Corbell:** They're made and their impact—

**THE CHAIR:** So they're not one-off, are they?

**Mr Corbell:** In accounting, their impact flows through to future years even though they're made for only one year.

**Mr Wheeler:** There are three types of savings. One is a one-off, which is an indexation reduction this year.

**MS DUNDAS:** And how much are you saving with that increase?

**Mr Wheeler:** That's about \$373,000. The second category is that two programs were reclassified as qualifying for Commonwealth SAAP funding. The third are two previous government initiatives that are not proceeding. They are the ones that have some inflation built into them into the outyears. Once those programs are taken out, so is the CPI attached to them.

**MS DUNDAS:** So it won't make only the \$373,000 which you're saving through indexation, but it makes an extra \$200,000 to meet the \$1.4 million, on top of the programs you've already cut.

**Mr Wheeler:** The CPI reduction is a one year only reduction.

**MS DUNDAS:** I get that. I've been trying to figure out how you're going to meet the future years.

**Mr Wheeler:** The other savings we've announced this year will have some inflation built into them.

**MS DUNDAS:** Which will cover the \$300,000 plus an extra \$200,000.

**Mr Wheeler:** That's got nothing to do with the indexation. The indexation is a separate measure. But there are two initiatives that are not proceeding, and they have some inflation attached to them. That also is taken out. To the extent that there is a gap between what that productivity saving is and what that increased number is in the outyears, we will have to look at our budget again.

**MS DUNDAS:** But you guarantee that there won't be an indexation decrease even though you still—

**Mr Corbell:** It's the government's intention to see the CPI delivered in full next year. That's the plan. That's the proposal at this stage.

**THE CHAIR:** Like the intention was to build the road on time and within budget.

**MRS DUNNE:** When are the committees going to find out about that?

**MS DUNDAS:** Other departments have also been asked to find productivity savings. The Department of Urban Services is looking at \$2 million this financial year. My understanding is that the other departments are still paying indexation at 2.5 per cent. Maybe this is a question more for the minister than for department officials. Can you explain how it appears that other departments are able to make productivity savings without impacting on their grants to community organisations, but Education, Youth and Family Services had to do this?

**Mr Corbell:** The first point that needs to be made is that the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services is in a somewhat different context, in that given the government's commitment to put additional funding into education and to increase the overall level funding to education, funding savings in a very large part of the department's budget, government schooling, is simply not possible. If we are to meet our commitment to spend \$27 million more, we can't do that if at the same time we're taking savings out of government schooling and associated activities.

**MS DUNDAS:** So all of the impact is being felt by youth and family services?

**Mr Corbell:** Sorry, if I can just answer your question. I need to answer this in two parts. So for that reason, a very large part of the department's budget has not been open to savings, if the government is to meet its commitments in relation to funding for schools and preschools

**MS DUNDAS:** And that's a good commitment.

**Mr Corbell:** What that means, though, is that the focus for savings for this agency falls on other parts of the department.

**MS DUNDAS:** Youth and family services.

**Mr Corbell:** Children, youth and family services, youth justice and child protection family services areas were the areas that were paid attention in relation to where it was possible to achieve savings.

The great bulk of the children, youth and family services budget is delivered through grants to community service organisations. We had to look at ways of achieving savings, given that a very large part of the budget is delivered through grants. That's why the grants area was paid attention.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I go back to the question of indexation? I want to clarify something. You're saying that this year's base funding stays the same and the indexation is not increased as much as it should be, and that in the outyears indexation will be at the government-determined level. Does the amount of money that is paid to an organisation this year as an indexation premium become part of the base funding next year?

**Mr Corbell:** Sorry, could you say that again?

**MRS DUNNE:** Say an organisation is being paid \$10,000 this year, plus an indexation premium, which this year is 1 per cent. Does the \$100 that is the indexation get added to the \$10,000 next year to create the base funding?

**Mr Corbell:** I'm advised that the answer to that is yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** So that that means that if we fail to increase by 1.5 per cent that has an ongoing impact through the outyears on those community organisations. You're saying that you're not increasing it this year, on a one off-basis, but because you haven't increased it by 2.5 per cent this year, the failure to do that will have an ongoing impact on organisations into the outyears. Is that right?

**Mr Corbell:** We think you're right, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, you have said, "It is too difficult for me to make a decision I'll just punish everybody the same." That will have an ongoing effect.

**Mr Corbell:** I think you have to put it in some context. The context is that of course contracts are renegotiated on a yearly basis, in most instances. Some are for longer periods, but in many instances contracts are renegotiated on a yearly basis. So the outcomes for those contracts vary. The amount of moneys paid varies from year to year anyway. So it's not entirely accurate to say this has an ongoing impact, because the level of base funding is often renegotiated on a year-by-year basis anyway.

**MRS DUNNE:** But if it isn't, the amount of CPI index this year will affect the funding in the outyears.

**Mr Corbell:** I think if a service provider had a contract ongoing—

**MRS DUNNE:** Let me finish the question.

**Mr Corbell:** My apologies, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** If base funding doesn't change from year to year, for whatever reason—the department is happy with the amount of base funding—that amount of base funding will be affected on an ongoing basis by your failure to fully fund CPI this year.

**Mr Corbell:** Your assumption would be correct only if every service provider had—

**MRS DUNNE:** No—

**Mr Corbell:** Let me answer the question, please. Your assumption would be correct only if every service provider had a contract that was ongoing forever. No service provider has an ongoing arrangement with the department indefinitely. Their contracts are renewed either annually or at a less frequent interval, but their contracts are renewed. The levels of funding are adjusted and changed. So your assumption is not accurate.



**THE CHAIR:** But many organisations, Minister, will receive funding on a yearly basis which is consistent, which is continuous, which isn't negotiated upwards or downwards.

**Mr Corbell:** I'm sorry, I missed the first part of your question, Mr Humphries.

**THE CHAIR:** Many organisations—I'll even venture to suggest most organisations—that your agency funds in this way receive funding on a fairly consistent path. They don't have wild fluctuations in what they receive.

**Mr Corbell:** They do go up and down and they do respond to different outcomes and to different objectives that they and the government have, certainly in terms of service delivery, but Ms Hinton could probably—

**Ms Hinton:** Perhaps by way of example, there would be a number of funded agencies through the former Education and Community Services that didn't receive the full indexation over the last three years. They were decisions taken by the government of the day about the reallocation of funding. Although the total aggregate funding had been indexed, the decision was taken that there were higher priority needs in different areas.

**MRS DUNNE:** But that would have been a decision on a case-by-case or category-by-category basis not to increase, rather than a blanket "I don't want to make a decision so everyone will get treated the same".

**Mr Corbell:** You're shifting your premise, Mrs Dunne. Ms Hinton was answering your question in relation to whether there was an ongoing impact. The point Ms Hinton is making is that that is not a realistic assumption.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Wheeler confirmed my original question. What Ms Hinton said—correct me if I'm wrong, Ms Hinton—is that in previous years decisions had been made on the basis of particular organisations or particular categories of organisations not to index. In previous years has there been a decision across the board not to index or not to index to the full level?

**Ms Hinton:** There have been decisions in previous years perhaps that only a couple of agencies might be indexed, so quite broad.

**MRS DUNNE:** But that means that somebody sat down and made a decision about the impacts on particular areas and what they might be.

**Mr Corbell:** Equally, on this occasion, I took the decision that funding would be reduced in this way for these services.

**MRS DUNNE:** To everybody, irrespective of need?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MS GALLAGHER:** We'd be having the same discussion if you'd made a decision to do it as Ms Hinton has said.

**Mr Corbell:** I think this is the point made earlier, Ms Gallagher.

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**MS GALLAGHER:** You've made your point. We've had the discussion.

**Mr Corbell:** We would be having exactly the same discussion if I'd taken a decision to reduce funding altogether for a service.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Exactly.

**THE CHAIR:** Indeed, but at least we'd be able to target the decision that affects that particular service.

**Mr Corbell:** As you have rightly pointed out, on balance the government believes that this allows for the greatest level of service provision to continue to be provided and minimises the impact of the saving measure for this year.

### **Short adjournment**

**THE CHAIR:** We'll resume and return to the issue being discussed before the morning tea break—namely, the productivity savings which are being made by the department. Could I ask for clarification on the programs which, Mr Wheeler, you said were being discontinued. You said one was Reducing Recidivism. What was the other one?

**Mr Corbell:** Building Community Capacity. Part of it, I'm advised.

**THE CHAIR:** Can we have details of what parts of the program are being discontinued?

**Mr Corbell:** Both of these measures generally—for general information, Mr Humphries—are decisions by the government not to proceed with the programs of the previous government. They're not the removal of funding which is already being provided to an organisation or which is being spent in some other way. It's simply a decision not to proceed with proposed expenditure which hadn't occurred.

Again, it's an example of the government seeking to reduce the impact of savings measures in a responsible way by saying, "If there are certain programs that haven't yet been committed, we may be able to utilise that money for savings." Because it hasn't actually been committed to delivery of a service, it doesn't have any impact. That was the intention behind both these measures.

**Ms Hinton:** Essentially the proportion of Building Community Capacity that was in DECS was \$400,000. Of that, \$300,000 will continue, and for the most part that's in some ongoing contracts. But there was a capacity within that \$400,000 for some funding that wasn't committed on a recurrent basis to be retargeted to areas of the new government's needs.

**THE CHAIR:** And that's about \$100,000, is it?

**Ms Hinton:** Around that order, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** What's the saving in cancelling Reducing Recidivism?

**Ms Hinton:** Reducing Recidivism was \$365,000 that year. That program was intended to provide a facility for youth in order to reduce remand admission rates by providing a supervised bail after hours option. That was the process of it. What we had in mind was the establishment of a facility, a house perhaps, where these young people could go and be supervised. The process of finding an appropriate location for that kind of facility was quite difficult and had not been completed by the time of the new government.

In addition, a broader approach was taken and a review of youth with intensive needs was undertaken. The notion about that was looking at youth with intensive needs in a broader context, not just those who might be on bail or in connection with the juvenile justice system, and looking at what kinds of support options they would need. The supervised bail process will become part of that and be revisited when the intensive youth review process is complete.

**THE CHAIR:** I thought you said in your opening statement this morning, Minister, that you're able to delivery on your government's promises in education without reducing or cutting any of the existing programs that you inherited from the former government.

**Mr Corbell:** In government and non-government schooling, that's correct.

**THE CHAIR:** You said in government and non-government schooling, did you?

**Mr Corbell:** In schooling.

**THE CHAIR:** In schooling?

**Mr Corbell:** In schooling provision.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Do some of the organisations that are having a real-terms funding reduction of between 1½ and 2 per cent because of the decision not to pass on indexation pay SACS awards? Would they have received support from the government to deliver additional capacity by virtue of that supplementation to their budget?

**Mr Corbell:** That's a very important point, Mr Humphries. In fact, most, if not all, of these organisation will be receiving additional funding to meet SACS award increases. There's \$1.2 million to address the SACS award pressures. That money is flowing in full through to the organisations, based on their individual circumstances. Some service providers have rates of pay which are significantly lower than they need to be and others are closer to the mark, so the amount of supplementation varies from service to service.

We believe the SACS award increases will almost entirely address any of the pressures in relation to wage increases that would have otherwise had to have been met through the CPI process. To the extent that SACS funding has addressed part of those pressures, that's one less pressure that the CPI funding arrangement would have to meet.

**MS DUNDAS:** The figures you've provided us—\$373,000 for indexation savings, \$100,000 for part of Building Community Capacity and \$365,000 for the other program—come to roughly \$800,000, and the productivity saving for the financial year is meant to be \$1.2 million. Can you tell us where the other \$400,000 is coming from?

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**Mr Corbell:** I'll let Mr Wheeler answer in full, but there are funding savings also as a result of the relocation of some activities to the SAAP program. There are some services which this department was providing funding for in community and youth services programs in relation to supported accommodation which was eligible for SAAP moneys.

**MS DUNDAS:** So they're now getting federal funding?

**Mr Corbell:** They're now being funded through federal arrangements rather than our arrangements. So that has provided the savings.

**MS DUNDAS:** Have those programs now moved to the new department or are they still being run by—

**Ms Hinton:** They've moved to the new department. When the programs were established, there was insufficient money in SAAP for growth in those areas. The men's service was one; Macquarie House for indigenous young people was another.

The view taken at the time was that notwithstanding the fact that the SAAP money was fully utilised these were needs that should be met, so resourcing was found for them elsewhere within community grants. When growth funding came for the SAAP program, given that both of these programs were supported accommodation, it seemed more appropriate to transfer them into the SAAP program.

**MS DUNDAS:** How are savings the department is making from them now being funded through SAAP savings for DEFYS when from 1 July all of those programs would be in the new department so the savings couldn't necessarily be counted in DEFYS?

**Ms Hinton:** All of these factors were taken into account in the determination of the transfer of resources from one department to another.

**MS DUNDAS:** The product savings for DEFYS is the same as for DECS, so can you just explain where you're reaching the rest of the productivity savings?

**Mr Wheeler:** The remaining number is non-CIT training. Vocational educational training will also not receive full indexation. But the CIT gets full indexation. That's about \$176,000. Add it to the \$1.065 million and you've got your \$1.2 million.

**MS DUNDAS:** Minister you said you were announcing today \$100,000 to the ITABs until December. Where is that money coming from?

**Mr Corbell:** That money is coming from money that was made available for the Skills 500 program. The Skills 500 program was launched earlier this year. It's an incentive payment for employers to take on an apprentice or a trainee.

**THE CHAIR:** Relunched.

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**Mr Corbell:** It's a very valuable program, Mr Humphries. Our concern with the program is that the rate of take-up from employers has not been as strong as we would have liked it to be, so there is some money available as a result of that less than full take-up to provide additional funding for the ITABs to the end of this calendar year.

**MS DUNDAS:** Will there be further development of it or better promotion of it—obviously it will not reach full take-up, because the money has been expended—to get a higher pick-up rate of people taking on apprenticeships?

**Mr Corbell:** Our experience with Skills 500 has certainly led me to conclude that we need to take a broader look at how we're delivering this sort of VET activity. I think we need to sharpen our focus on how we are providing assistance to get young people into apprenticeships and traineeships.

The whole area has not been analysed for some time. The whole series of programs have not been substantially looked at and investigated for some time, so the intention is for the government to initiate an internal investigation of how a range of these programs, including Skills 500, are delivered and look at whether we can refocus them to get better outcomes on the ground.

The inquiry being conducted by the Standing Committee on Education will help inform our decision-making on that. There's currently an investigation there into vocational education and training programs. Our experience with Skills 500 has certainly led me to believe that we need to look at some ways of doing it better, especially delivering vocational education and training to young people who are not otherwise staying in school, completing year 12 and going and being able to go through into the work force. That's very much the focus that I want to bring to this re-examination of VET program delivery.

**MS DUNDAS:** Mr Wheeler, is the non-CIT VET indexation saving again only for this year?

**Mr Wheeler:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Can we move now to the outputs? Output class 4.1 is the Office of Child Care.

**MS DUNDAS:** I'm looking at page 33 of the loose-leaf Budget Paper 4. We've seen from the target of the estimated outcome to the target for 2002-03 a decrease in government payments for outputs in the Office of Child Care, a slight increase in the target of total cost and a substantial increase in estimated cost. Can you explain why, first of all, the total cost is up but the government output payment is down?

**Mr Wheeler:** What you see here is a disaggregation of whole-of-department impacts across all of the outputs. One of the major decisions of the government this year in relation to costs is not to require a capital charge to be paid. The capital charge was each agency's share of the interest bill by government, based on your infrastructure holdings. That has been discontinued, which means that the cost is no longer there and neither is the GPO, so that has been reduced. Secondly, in the case of the Office of Child Care, in

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the area of new initiatives, it's got those emergency childcare places, so there's a bit of additional funding there.

**MS DUNDAS:** The bit of additional funding in total cost?

**Mr Wheeler:** There've been increases for the emergency child-care places, \$100,000. The capital charge has ceased, and that particular output share is \$100,000. It has also got the Building Community Capacity \$100,000 that the minister referred to earlier.

**MS DUNDAS:** I'm getting a bit confused. The total cost targeted was \$3.8 million, the estimated outcome was \$3.89 million and the target for this financial year is \$3.817 million. Why was the estimated outcome so much higher than the target for last financial year, and is the only increase between the \$3,815,000 target for 2002 and the \$3,817,000 target the 10 additional emergency child-care places?

**Mr Wheeler:** Yes. There would be some changes because we've got the new emergency care places. The difference from the target to the estimated outcome, I would think, has as much as anything got to do with cost variations during the year. The GPO reduction is basically because the capital charge share is no longer in it.

**MS DUNDAS:** I'm talking about the total cost at the moment, though. I'm just wondering if you can explain why the estimated outcome was—

**Mr Wheeler:** 3.815 to 3.894?

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes. What was the increase?

**Mr Wheeler:** I'll have a look at that—

**Mr Corbell:** We'll take that on notice, Ms Dundas. We'll try to get back to you on that. It's not a large variation.

**Ms Hinton:** It is a small variation in an amount of that size. It's the amalgam of a series of small on and off changes in maybe superannuation adjustments or the provision for long service leave liabilities for staff. All of those sorts of things can make small differences of the order that we're talking about there, which is about \$70,000.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So it's unforeseen expenses almost?

**Mr Corbell:** The target is an estimate. It's the best possible estimate, but circumstances in the year mean the target may vary.

**Ms Hinton:** By way of example, we estimate our employee liabilities at the beginning of the year but during the year it's based on the staff there. Consequently, if you have a change in staff who have increased long service leave entitlements, for example, that will make a difference.

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**Mr Wheeler:** Can I just clarify further? The difference between what we put in the budget and what ends up in the final outcome is also affected once the audit is undertaken. As Ms Hinton said, once the auditors go through, they'll pick up various corrections that we need to make. In this case, that's basically what it was.

**THE CHAIR:** We move on to output 4.2, early intervention programs.

**MRS DUNNE:** I've got a couple of questions. It may be that I should have asked them yesterday, but I had to go and pick up children and therefore couldn't ask them. What is the breakdown between your department and Mr Wood's new department about who provides the CHADS services?

**MS DUNDAS:** We dealt with all that this morning, didn't we?

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry.

**Mr Corbell:** We answered those questions this morning.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay. I'll read the transcript. I'm sorry. It must have been when I was walking from here to there that I missed it.

**MS DUNDAS:** It appears that the cost of a child attending an early intervention program has decreased from about \$4,000 under the old administrative arrangements to \$2,800 under the new administrative arrangements.

**Mr Corbell:** Where are you referring to, Ms Dundas, so we can see it?

**MRS DUNNE:** Page 34 of the loose leaf.

**MS DUNDAS:** I did a lot of this stuff from the new Budget Paper 4 book. You don't have a copy of the Budget Paper 4 book?

**Mr Wheeler:** Page 334 on our loose leaf is output 4.2, early interventions?

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes.

**Mr Wheeler:** And page 341 on our loose leaf is the discontinued output 4.8, CHADS. Is that what you're looking at? The latter one has \$4,203 per appraisal service.

**MS DUNDAS:** And this one has \$2,889. I understand that the average cost per occasion of service for child health and development services is expected to increase, so how are we going to provide additional services with this decrease?

**Ms Farrelly:** My understanding is that the cost has decreased because the children attending play groups have been included for the first time. So although they were in the total budget, they weren't counted in the reporting arrangements.

**MS DUNDAS:** The cost per head is going down because you have more heads per the same budget?

**Ms Farrelly:** Because there are more, that's correct.

**Ms Hinton:** When we have time to reflect on that, it would probably be sensible for us to look at different ways of reporting that, because the costs associated with places in specialised preschools are quite different to the costs associated with places in play groups.

**MS DUNDAS:** So the total cost of the early intervention program hasn't in any way decreased?

**Ms Farrelly:** No.

**Ms Hinton:** No.

**MS DUNDAS:** And we'll still be providing the same service level to those people in the early intervention. We're counting a different group—

**Ms Hinton:** In fact, it has increased.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you explain that increase, Ms Hinton?

**Ms Hinton:** We've got an increase in the budget of \$300,000 for early intervention places. But you are right to draw our attention to those numbers, and we will look at that.

**THE CHAIR:** I move to 4.3, preschool education. This year's figure for the number of children who presumably receive preschool education seems to have declined from about \$3,850 last year to \$3,764. Is that just a reflection of a decline in the school-age population?

**Mr Corbell:** It's certainly consistent with the population trends. It's an actual decrease of 52 students, or 1.3 per cent, in the 12-month period from the 2000 census. It's consistent with demographic change in the city.

**MS DUNDAS:** Could it also be related to the fact that child-care centres offer preschool programs, so the need to attend preschool—

**Mr Corbell:** It's very difficult to determine without knowing the issues for each individual child. But certainly the advice I have is that it's driven more by the overall trend in population growth in the city than by any other factor. That's not to say that that might not be the case for some. I think you're right to identify that issue, Ms Gallagher, because I think there are issues around how we provide preschool education that do need further attention. But this particular figure seems to be more an overall population growth issue.

**MS DUNDAS:** The number of preschools in the old budget papers hasn't transferred over to the new budget papers. Is that a discontinued measure or is it caught up in administrative arrangements?

**Ms Farrelly:** The number of preschools hasn't changed.



**MS DUNDAS:** So we still have 80 preschools?

**Mr Corbell:** We still have 80 preschools.

**Ms Hinton:** Given that we published that information and put out a preschool census each year, we didn't think that, on balance, it was much of a measure of the effectiveness of the preschool education program.

**MS DUNDAS:** I fully accept that. But that decision was made with the new department and not DECS? It was in the Budget Paper 4 that was put out with the budget, but not in the new budget papers after the change in administrative arrangements. I fully accept that it's not necessarily the best way of—

**Mr Corbell:** It is reflected in the ownership agreement, I understand.

**MS DUNDAS:** So it's part of the new arrangements?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**Ms Hinton:** If that's the case, I think probably the answer is that in the new BP4 we picked up that issue and noted that we had been deleting the number of schools—primary schools, high schools, colleges—from BP4 generally, and we had continued to list the number of preschools in BP4. I surmise that when we did the new agreement we just thought we'd make it more consistent.

**MS DUNDAS:** The ACT government preschool strategic plan that came out in June 2001 stated that there was a plan for an 85 to 90 per cent utilisation of staff when developing forward projections annually. Can you explain this measure? What is it an indicator of?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Ms Farrelly to answer that question.

**Ms Farrelly:** We staff government preschools in groups of 25 students with two staff—a teacher and an assistant. As you can imagine, the number of children doesn't fall evenly across Canberra, so you'll find some preschool groups with 25, some of them with 20. It was a measure of how many of those places are used. If the utilisation of staff was 100 per cent in a preschool where there's one teacher and one assistant, that would be 50 children. So across the sector we measure the number of staff—

**MS DUNDAS:** Sorry.

**Ms Hinton:** Two groups of 25 children.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Preschools have two groups.

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes, but does that mean there are four staff in that preschool or two staff?

**Ms Farrelly:** In a preschool that has one full-time teacher and one full-time assistant there will be two groups of 25 students.

**MS DUNDAS:** Running at different times?

**Ms Farrelly:** Yes, in the first half of the week usually, and one in the second half of the week. If there was 100 per cent utilisation in that preschool, 50 children would be attending. We measure across the preschool sector the use of places compared with the number of staff in place.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is this, do you believe, an effective measure?

**Ms Farrelly:** I think it is. I think it's in everyone's interest that we have the best use of staff across Canberra. We're running at about 88 per cent at the moment.

**MS DUNDAS:** That was going to be my next question. Thank you.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, some concern was expressed a month or six weeks ago about insurance for preschools. For me as a preschool parent from time to time it a rather vexed question. You did say during that discussion that part of the problem was that the preschool associations, the parent groups, were insuring for things that were already insured. First of all, can you give an update and—probably this is more a question for Ms Hinton—do you have any idea how long preschools have been double insured?

**Mr Corbell:** I'm very happy to answer your question, Mrs Dunne. I've met with the Canberra Preschool Society twice in the past month to specifically discuss this issue. It is an issue of considerable concern, both for the Preschool Society and for the individual parent associations. We're trying to address several issues. We're trying to make sure that the Preschool Society is able to get the best possible offer from their insurance brokers in relation to the premium that individual preschool associations will have to pay. Currently the average cost increase for each association is \$1,000. We estimate that on average that will increase by \$1,000 to around \$2,000 per association. For larger associations, that is less of a problem, but for smaller preschools and smaller associations it is a significant issue. The ACT Government Insurance Authority is working with the preschool associations to try to get the best possible deal from a range of insurance providers. That has been an ongoing piece of work.

Other issues we have sought to work with the society on include trying to clarify exactly what they cover and what the government already provides cover for. It's important to remember that the government already provides coverage to government preschools, including staff public liability, insurance for volunteers, student accident or injury, and equipment owned by the department. They are all areas where the government already insures.

**MRS DUNNE:** What about the building itself?

**Mr Corbell:** The building itself as well, yes. Equipment owned by the department would include the buildings. That is what we already cover. There are, we believe, some potential areas of overlap. We believe there is potential overlap where individual parent associations are also paying for insurance for children and insurance for volunteers supporting the delivery of programs in preschools.

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As recently as yesterday, I have written to the Preschool Society and asked them to consider whether or not they still believe it's appropriate for them to seek insurance, given that the government already covers those circumstances. That may be another way they can potentially reduce the cost of their premiums.

For example, volunteers supporting the delivery of programs in preschools are already covered. Children, obviously, are already covered. It would seem a strange situation where they are covered both by our insurance and by the individual associations' insurance. Ms Hinton points out these are both insurance in the case of negligence. I don't know how long that has been going on. It seems to be a longstanding practice. Clearly it hasn't been an issue until premiums started increasing to the extent they're starting to increase now.

The government is continuing to talk with the Preschool Society to understand the full extent of potential impacts of the increased price of premiums on individual associations. There are 80 individual associations and 80 individual bank accounts. You need to understand what the exact impact is for each of those individual associations, because their circumstances vary considerably. I understand the Preschool Society was holding a meeting last night with all the executives of their associations to determine some possible ways forward. The other option that is being explored for the longer term—it's not an immediate response, but certainly in the next 12 months—is the possibility of ownership of equipment which has been purchased by parents transferring to the department. The department would then cover it as part of its coverage for equipment we already pay for and install ourselves.

But that is a longer term issue. There is a variety of views in the Preschool Society as to whether or not that's an appropriate thing to do. Equally, the government needs to clarify the situation in relation to maintenance and replacement costs, if that were to occur. But that is another issue which is being explored.

**MRS DUNNE:** When you talk about equipment that is currently owned by the individual preschool associations possibly being transferred to the department, what sort of equipment are we talking about?

**Mr Corbell:** It could be any range of things. It could be playground equipment. For instance, there's a standard provision for playground equipment by the government, but many parents associations choose to supplement that, fund-raise and put in extra playground equipment. It could be books; it could be games; it could be a whole series of things.

**Mr Corbell:** It's the whole box and dice.

**MRS DUNNE:** Basically everything but consumables, possibly?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, I think that's right.

**MRS DUNNE:** There are obviously pros and cons with that. But the message is that you, the insurance corporation and the Preschool Society are working through the whole thing.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. I've treated this issue very seriously. The delivery of preschool education is very much a partnership between the government and the individual parent bodies. The relationship is an important one, and we need to do everything we can to reasonably address the issues they face. I'd much rather see the money going into fundraising activities for preschools than into a cheque for the insurance company.

**MRS DUNNE:** You've probably got agreement on that one. Can we note we've got agreement on something?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, make it a red letter day.

**MS GALLAGHER:** We'll put that in the report.

**Mr Corbell:** Is that a first?

**THE CHAIR:** Must be. Something's wrong here. Let me check this out. We'll deal with you later.

We will proceed now to support for young people. Ms Gallagher mentioned the \$150,000 being spent in the northern and western suburbs of Belconnen this year. You'd be aware of the other decision by the government not to proceed with the building of a skate park at Charnwood and a decision to cancel the tennis courts there. Sorry to steal your thunder, Ms Dundas.

**MS DUNDAS:** If you get to ask about skate parks, then I'm going to raise the question I wanted to ask about skate parks earlier.

**THE CHAIR:** With that \$150,000, what, if anything, are you going to do to address the needs of the sort of people who'd be using a skateboard park and recreational and youth services of that kind?

**Mr Corbell:** The tennis courts were an election commitment of the previous government. They were in no way a budget commitment. They were not funded in last year's budget. There was no provision for that money. They were an election commitment of the Liberal Party. That's it.

**THE CHAIR:** The skateboard park was funded, though.

**Mr Corbell:** The skateboard park was in the budget. We believe that there are better ways of addressing provision for this particular community than that proposal. That is what the youth outreach service is about. We are seeking to use funds in a way that targets as much as possible those young people who have specific disadvantage or specific need in that community. It's about targeting service delivery to those who need it most. That's what the youth outreach service is very much about.

A range of other services are already being provided in the Belconnen area. This proposal supplements those. For example, there is, as members would be aware, the youth centre in the town centre itself—the Warehouse Club operated by the youth centre. Other programs include RecLink, which is provided by the Canberra Police and Citizens Youth Club. It has centre-based programs in a number of locations, including Belconnen.

The YWCA operates a Canberra youth outreach support service for case management services across the city. There's also the access youth health service, also operated by the YWCA. There's a program called Bungee—which I think is a great name—which is a resilience program for young people with mental health issues funded by the ACT department of health and managed by the Belconnen Community Service.

So there is a range of other programs which the youth outreach program builds on, with specific focus on the west and north Belconnen areas.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it possible that a skateboard park could be built if that process identifies a need for one?

**Mr Corbell:** If what process identifies the need for one?

**THE CHAIR:** The youth outreach service exercise. Is funding allocated specifically there already, or is it meant to be generally identifying needs, of which this might be one?

**Mr Corbell:** The focus of this program is providing support services to young people. It's about making available a range of support for young people. Decisions around the provision of infrastructure like a skateboard facility would be taken by the area responsible, which would be the Bureau of Sport and Recreation.

**THE CHAIR:** No, in short?

**Mr Corbell:** It's not the focus for the program we're talking about here. That focus is with the Bureau of Sport and Recreation.

**MS DUNDAS:** The number of youth service contracts administered jumped from a target of 20 to an estimated outcome of 27, and we have a target of 25 for this financial year. Can you explain what happened there?

**Mr Corbell:** It's a minor variation, Ms Dundas. It's not a significant variation.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are we providing more services?

**Mr Carmichael:** Yes, we are.

**Mr Corbell:** The answer is yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** It's a good thing. I just want to know what new services.

**Mr Corbell:** Sorry, next time you have a dorothy dixer you should warn me.

**Mr Carmichael:** In the former government's final budget there was a range of youth initiatives and new programs, and the increased number of contracts reflects that.

**MS DUNDAS:** And we're expecting that to level off at 25, as opposed to staying at 27, or were they one-year contracts?

**Mr Carmichael:** There's another youth service funded in this year. So that would possibly be another contract. I guess the number of contracts reflects additional programs funded. If, for example, Belconnen Community Services were to win a contract, it may be an integrated contract, so you will not see an additional contract. It would be an add-on to an existing contract—another schedule to that.

**MS DUNDAS:** On the quality measures, there's an estimated outcome of 100 per cent satisfaction with the Youth Connection Youth Work Service, which is a very good outcome. Can you explain to me what the Youth Connection Youth Work Service does?

**Mr Carmichael:** It's a case management service that we run directly out of the office.

**MS DUNDAS:** Where is the office?

**Mr Carmichael:** The office is in Manning Clarke. Tuggeranong is our head office, but that service operationally works out of Melrose High School. It's one of our direct services rather than a funded service in the community. It has been through a major reform process over the last year or so, and it has been able to increase its quality assurance because of those reforms.

**MR HARGREAVES:** You said that the number of youth service contracts administered went up to 27. Does that increase explain the achievement of personal goals by the students, or is there a better reason? Sorry I didn't warn you about the Dorothy Dixier?

**Ms Hinton:** No, there's no relationship between the number of contracts and the personal goals achieved by the adolescent day unit. In that particular program young people are working with support staff. As part of that program, they establish a set of goals. The aim is to reintegrate them back into a school system. That's a measure of the individual's success as much as the staff and the unit's success.

**MR HARGREAVES:** What do you put that success down to? When you say individual success or staff success, can you give me a bit more detail on that?

**Mr Carmichael:** A young person is in the program for a week or two before they sit down with the staff and work out some individual goals for their time there. They set a range of targets they want to meet, then the staff work with them to develop strategies about how they will reach those targets over that time. That measures the success of a set of targets agreed between the young person and staff on the program.

**MR HARGREAVES:** What sort of targets would they be?

**Mr Carmichael:** Sometimes it's about going back into the school system. For some young people—we're working with some people with very high and complex needs—coming to the ADU each day could be a major success. It's individually targeted because of the variation of needs of the young people attending that program. Sometimes a successful outcome is finding work or a vocational educational outcome. It's tailored to meet the individual needs of young people.

**Ms Hinton:** The numbers of young people are quite small, so you can get significant variations in the percentages achieving their goals by a small change in who's attending in the particular areas. A couple of young people may well make a difference.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can you give us a run-down on the adolescent day unit program? What is the average time of attendance?

**Mr Carmichael:** Generally it's two school terms. It's tailored to meet the needs of individuals. If somebody is successful within a term, then they might leave the program to go back into school. More often they need the time extended because of the complex needs. These young people often come from families that have a high level of dysfunction. That impacts on their ability to succeed in the program as well. All those things are taken into consideration. But the average is about two school terms.

**MRS DUNNE:** What are the determinants of someone getting into the program?

**Mr Carmichael:** There's a referral system that operates from schools. There are referral forms. They're put to the program manager, and some assessment is done to prioritise those most in need. It's negotiated with the young person and their family that they will come into the program.

Before they come into the program, it is explained to them what the expectations will be while they're in the program so they don't come in and get a shock about what they might be doing or not doing in that program. It's a highly consultative and negotiated with schools, family or carers, and the young persons themselves.

**MRS DUNNE:** You're saying that people have complex needs, but what would be the triggers for someone being referred, presumably from school? Or are they people not attending school?

**Ms Hinton:** Generally, they'll be people attending school. Perhaps I could take a step back and say that when young people with significant needs come to our attention in a variety of ways there are many different options that are possible for them. Some of the work that occurs with schools, the office of youth and the student support area will be in working through—with the young people and families, if they have them—the most appropriate option for those young people.

It might be at an in-school program that's a bit off line. It might be attending a high school support centre. It might be attending the Dairy Flat facility. It might be attending the adolescent day unit. Roughly speaking, I've done that in the order of lesser need to higher need for the young people.

**MR PRATT:** So there could be a magistrate referral, for example?

**Ms Hinton:** It would be a judgment about where the young person is.

**MRS DUNNE:** You're saying that the highest need on the continuum—

**Ms Hinton:** It's a high need one, yes.

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**MRS DUNNE:** They may have been through other avenues before they get there? Is this the end of the road?

**Ms Hinton:** It's not the end of the road, but it's highly likely they would have been involved with some other specialist programs.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Pratt said that there might be a magistrate order, but is attendance determined by the willingness of the adolescent to attend, or is there some level of compulsion or cajoling?

**Mr Carmichael:** No, it's a voluntary service. Mr Pratt is right in saying that quite a number of those young people have been through the youth justice system. Shane Madden is a strong supporter of the program. He's been out many times. He has been impressed about seeing these young people succeeding at something, whereas before he has seen them in his court, often on fairly serious charges. There is a strong relationship between Family Services, the child protection area, youth justice and the criminal justice system generally. But a lot of these young people make successful transitions back into the school system, work or vocational education.

**MRS DUNNE:** The target number of students in the adolescent day unit is 20 students?

**Ms Hinton:** Ten plus 10, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is it 10 plus 10 or is it 20 plus 20?

**Ms Hinton:** No.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is it 20 full time?

**Mr Carmichael:** It's 10 plus 10.

**Ms Hinton:** It's for two terms and 10 for two terms, although they may overlap.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's 10 full-time equivalents over the year?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes.

**Mr Carmichael:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is that figure of nearly \$26,000 for each of the 20?

**Ms Hinton:** That reflects the cost for each of the 20.

**MRS DUNNE:** That's the cost for two terms? I don't want to sound measly. For two terms it's a very large amount of investment of taxpayers' resources. Are you satisfied that you're getting the outcomes that are necessary?

**Ms Hinton:** The way in which we as a community address the needs of the young people with very complex and often multi-pronged needs is a really vexed question. It's why we have embarked upon a review of intensive youth support programs. The adolescent day



unit is a day program. To support these young people we need to look at the variety of their needs. They will include accommodation and therapy interventions of different kinds. Rarely will one attendance at one program solve a young person's issues? We need to look at the way in which we can apply resources from a range of agencies to get the best outcomes for the young people concerned.

**MR PRATT:** Does that include special education needs or programs within schools which may liase or correlate?

**Ms Hinton:** We're not including students with disability, no.

**MR PRATT:** No, I'm talking about—

**Ms Hinton:** Specialist?

**MR PRATT:** Yes.

**Ms Hinton:** No, we're looking at the really high end of needs in this intensive youth support review. They're the needs of young people who perhaps end up in Marlow or who through the family protection scheme spend some time with Marymead. These programs are more expensive than the adolescent day unit. I'm not answering your question directly, because it's not a simple answer.

**MRS DUNNE:** I knew that when I asked the question it wasn't a simple answer, but we're spending nearly \$26,000 on 49 hours a week for two terms. I take your point. There's the other 15 hours of the school week and the weekends. What do you do to have the continuity of support that means that you might break through the barriers. It's very fraught, yes.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Minister, given that it costs about \$60,000 for a person to go to jail, do you think \$25,000 is a good investment?

**Mr Corbell:** I think the answer speaks for itself, Mr Hargreaves. Clearly it's in the community's interest to endeavour to provide as many settings as possible that meet the needs of young people with complex needs so that they don't go into the criminal justice system or, if they've been in it, they don't go back. That's the challenge all governments in the ACT have faced and all governments will continue to face. There's no magic bullet. It's a process of continual improvement in the degree of services to address the very significant problems that some young people face.

Ms Hinton rightly reminds me that currently there's also a proposal to review alternative education settings within schools and outside schools. That is again about focusing on the best possible way of meeting the needs and demands of young people at risk. That is a very specific investigation as a result of the inquiry conducted by Kerrie Tucker and her committee in the last Assembly.

**Ms Hinton:** We hope to look at different models, which goes to the heart of Mrs Dunne's question, and not just review what we do now but as part of that notion of looking at alternative education settings look at the different models in which young people might be supported and see if there are better models that can be used.

**MRS DUNNE:** I presume that this is not a simplistic calculus that if we don't do this they'll end up in jail. If we don't do this, these kids are not going to achieve in a whole range of areas. They're not going to have satisfactory employment outcomes. They're probably going to be adversely affected socially, and that has a whole lot of knock-on effects. It's not just about keeping people out of the criminal justice system.

**MS DUNDAS:** The cost per student has dropped from the 2001-02 target, whilst the actual funding from government has increased. The total cost from the target to the estimate in 2001-02 was quite different. Was that because of the new programs you were talking about earlier?

**Mr Carmichael:** It's because we've also done some reform work in the adolescent day unit, and we're taking more students so the cost per student has decreased.

To follow up Mrs Dunne's question about cost, every young person that comes to that program can always come back and get additional support. That program might be supporting 20 young people who have gone into other settings, but they can always get on the phone or they can always drop in on that service. So there are probably another 20 young people getting ongoing support and sometimes visits from that service as part of the overall quality assurance on the service.

**MRS DUNNE:** So it's not "Your two terms are up, goodbye"?

**Mr Carmichael:** No.

**MS DUNDAS:** Was the total cost difference from the 2001 target to the outcome of \$900,000 because of the new programs you mentioned in youth service contracts administered?

**Mr Wheeler:** The difference between the original budget and the estimated outcome is providing some additional SACS money, the reallocation of some overheads and—I hesitate to raise this—a comparative pricing adjustment to the costs. It's a technical adjustment that reverses some benchmark adjustments made several years ago. In effect, it's a technical adjustment.

**MRS DUNNE:** In whose favour?

**MS DUNDAS:** The department's.

**Mr Wheeler:** It's all within the bucket.

**THE CHAIR:** We now proceed to youth justice.

**MS DUNDAS:** Because youth justice has been in three departments over the last year and has moved around a bit, it's a bit hard to compare the measures. From December to June the number of custody days used annually has an estimated outcome of 3,200, and from July to November of the previous year, 2001, we had an estimated outcome of 3,571. If you simply add them together, that equals over 6,000, when we had a target of

only 5,500. Am I doing my maths right? If I am, why was there such a high increase over the estimated outcome and why haven't we set a higher target?

**Ms Hinton:** The answer lies in your opening statement, Ms Dundas, and that is that youth justice has been in different departments. The 2001-02 targets and estimated outcome for youth justice as shown in our budget papers relate to only seven-twelfths of the full year. The other five-twelfths would be listed in the justice—

**MS DUNDAS:** As I said, I've added those two together. It would have been for July through to June, so for the financial year. The estimated outcome for the number of custody days used annually is 6,779. Can you explain why that number is so high compared to the target that was set and the target that is set for this financial year?

**Ms Hinton:** It is a process of estimating what we think it will be. The number of clients who come into youth justice in custody is not within our control. It required a judgment as to what the courts are going to do in relation to young people in the coming 12 months.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you're making the judgment that the number of custody days used annually will again decrease from the outcome it was over the last full financial year?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes. Mr Duggan can talk about it a bit more in a moment. But we went through a period, an unusual period probably, when we had a very high intake. In fact, Quamby was full for a period of time with 26 residents, whereas we're operating with 10 today.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you have an explanation for that?

**Mr Duggan:** In the first two quarters of this financial year we've seen a marked increase in the number of admissions to Quamby. Since then, however, there's been a significant decrease. I think that was also seen in the adult system, where they peaked and now they're going through the trough. They are very small numbers. The percentages and increases are very much distorted. But as of today there are only eight young people.

**MR HARGREAVES:** What was the sex mix of the people who were in there, the gender mix?

**Mr Duggan:** The gender mix today is zero females. But during that period we had a significant growth in young females as well. That's nationally what we're seeing. Young females are no longer the co-offenders. They're actually the offenders in a particular crime. Therefore the numbers have increased. But significantly, Mr Hargreaves, there were still only about five or six at the time.

**MR HARGREAVES:** What pressures does it put on accommodation when you get up around the 20 mark?

**Mr Duggan:** It puts pressures on how we configure our units and how we supervise young people. We try to meet the needs of each of the client groups and periodically move children around the centre to best meet their needs. We try to keep all females with

the young males in one unit and use the other unit for the older males, because we have a significant proportion of young males in the institution.

**Mr Corbell:** It is an issue of concern for the government, Mr Hargreaves, that we have this situation at Quamby. Whilst it has been through a whole series of upgrades and built on and built on and built on, this issue of segregation between young men and young women is an issue of concern. I notice that Shane Madden also made some comments on the ABC Stateline program a few weeks ago in a similar vein. The government has allocated money for some forward design work for the redesign of Quamby. I can't recall the exact figure—

**Mr Duggan:** \$300,000.

**Mr Corbell:** That is to start looking at a proposal to redesign and reconfigure Quamby, partly to address this issue but also to address a range of other issues, given the age of the facility.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you have any explanation or any understanding of why there was that peak in the first two quarters of this year?

**Mr Duggan:** The peak was mostly related to remand. It's not young people who are going to be sentenced and stay within our facility. The turnarounds were extremely quick, and so were immediate incarceration then release back into the community. A significant number of our admissions are after 5 o'clock through the police. Young people are arrested and they come through the system. They're brought to the court in the next couple of days and in the majority of cases they're discharged.

**MS DUNDAS:** So there was an increase in young people being arrested?

**Mr Duggan:** An increase in young people being charged and remanded, yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you have any understanding of why that could possibly be?

**Mr Duggan:** Significantly, we have peaks and troughs throughout the financial year or throughout a calendar year. There can be a number of young people involved, for example, in one offence. They're co-offenders, so they all end up with us very quickly. The same young person may be continually remanded and brought back while accommodation or suitable options are developed for them.

**Mr Corbell:** The change of statistics is exacerbated by the small numbers of people. As Mr Duggan points out, any variation can result in quite a substantial statistical difference.

**MS DUNDAS:** In light of that statistical anomaly we have in the ACT, there was a report earlier this year that shows that we have the highest per capita rate of young people incarcerated. Statistically it is still quite small.

**Mr Duggan:** On 30 June the Australian Institute of Criminology do a one-night census for all institutions throughout Australia. On 30 June, on that night, we did have the highest figure. We also had the lowest sentenced offender population in the whole of Australia, which for me is a more significant figure, because that's a benchmark you

shoot. We had the lowest number of younger people incarcerated throughout Australia. That for me is a beneficial issue. If they did the census today, we would have the lowest rate in both areas, because today our population number is down to eight. With the small numbers, that's what the variation was.

**MS DUNDAS:** You mentioned today and that report mentioned the alarming statistics—we've just had a discussion about how true these statistics are—relating to young women and their role in crime and their incarceration. Are there any specific programs that you're looking at to try to address specifically young women and criminal activity?

**Mr Duggan:** When young women are admitted to the service, we address whatever needs. We use a very intensive case management service and we follow that process. We've got a health service, a mental health screening service and our own case management service. They have access to all the other programs that the young males have, to education facilities, et cetera. But it's a population that goes up and down, and it's a very small part of what we do. Programs in the community are a different issue.

**MR HARGREAVES:** I remember many years ago the recidivism rate was pretty high. You changed the programs at Quamby and got it down fairly low. I think you got it down to about 5 per cent. What's the recidivism rate at the moment?

**Mr Duggan:** We haven't got a count this year, but in our most significant years we were down to a very small core group of young people who were reoffending, which was quite different to national figures, but we haven't done the figures this year.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Are you going to do the figures?

**Mr Duggan:** We're doing a number of evaluations internally, looking at some of the support services we're offering, so we will be looking at that. We have to look at that as we start to develop our forward design. That will be a component of what we have to look at.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Can you tell me how many officers you've got dedicated to education programs specifically?

**Mr Duggan:** We have five or six staff. We have a teacher. We have some funding from CIT, and we've got two program staff, so we offer about 10 programs per day.

**MR HARGREAVES:** All those positions are filled?

**Mr Duggan:** They're filled temporarily at the moment, yes. We've had two vacancies recently. People have relocated to other jurisdictions.

**MR HARGREAVES:** How long has the recruitment process being going on for those ones—just a couple of weeks?

**Mr Duggan:** At the moment we have to look at our whole educational program and develop a better program. These people were in their jobs for quite a long time, so we're having a look at that presently.

**MR HARGREAVES:** That partly addresses the next question I have. What quality assurance have you got on those education programs? Is there a structured QA process on them?

**Mr Duggan:** They're all under the CAGE model, so they are evaluated by the department of education because they're transferable qualifications. We want to offer programs that young people get in mainstream education. The programs are validated through the Canberra Institute of Technology. It's about validating what the young person has so that they can reintegrate into mainstream education and work opportunities.

**MR HARGREAVES:** And how often are they tested for efficacy?

**Ms Hinton:** There are different approaches. It's somewhat hard to answer in a categorical way, because one of the aims will be to have relatively short-term programs in some instances where the competencies and skills that the young person has gained can be assessed, recognised and formally certificated. That's part of the process of doing that. The general overview in relation to, say, year 10 certificate is overseen by the area of the department that looks at year 10 generally, and similarly with CIT.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Do all of those people have professional or trade qualifications?

**Mr Duggan:** Some have trade qualifications; some have professional qualifications. The trade qualifications suit the CIT. Most CIT teachers are trade qualified. Because of the programs we offer in manual arts, that's the appropriate qualification. We also have the teacher, who's professionally qualified and able to deliver the literacy and numeracy programs.

**MR HARGREAVES:** And those qualifications are mandatory for appointment to those jobs?

**Mr Duggan:** They're professional officer positions, yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you explain how all of this fits in with the community wellbeing program? There's a quantity measure of the number of community clients provided with community wellbeing programs.

**Mr Duggan:** The community wellbeing program has three components. One is the young sex offenders program, which offers therapeutic group work interventions for young sex offenders. Another program is the Mollee Street hostel, which is an indigenous accommodation option that we have developed in conjunction with Aboriginal Hostels. It houses five young indigenous people. Then we have a number of staff who work in an intensive case management capacity where there are most high-risk young people. Those are the three community wellbeing programs.

**MS DUNDAS:** And they are for people who are outside of Quamby?

**Mr Duggan:** Out or in. Obviously the hostel is outside. If a young person is in Quamby because of a sexual offence, we'll take them to the program to receive their counselling. The same with the intensive support program. They'll work fairly strongly with the young person to try to reintegrate them in the community.

**MS DUNDAS:** There is \$300,000 in funding for the design works at Quamby. Will any upgrade be part of the budget bids for next year? There's no capital works money set outside for any outcome?

**Mr Wheeler:** The forward design in one year usually leads to consideration in the next financial year.

**MS DUNDAS:** So we won't expect any upgrades until next financial year.

**Mr Wheeler:** That's right.

**MS DUNDAS:** Has there been any discussion in youth justice about the provision of a specific youth legal service in the ACT?

**Mr Duggan:** We've discussed that with the Youth Coalition most recently. I think they are developing proposals on that.

**MR HARGREAVES:** In the forward design work is the major accent on the reception area?

**Mr Duggan:** Yes. It's a reception and induction area. It's also refurbishing of the areas we have. It's also looking at an indoor gymnasium facility. We're trying to develop a process over this year that'll influence how we do business over the next 10 years. It also has a very significant service redevelopment. We've got to look at how the structural environment can meet young people's needs as much as what we offer operationally.

**MS DUNDAS:** The number of escapes from custody and number of deaths in custody have dropped. I'm glad to see that they're both zero for the last financial year. Can you explain why that measure has been taken out when it's still, as far as I can tell, part of the broader community services measures? Sorry, not community services.

**THE CHAIR:** Which page are you looking at?

**MS DUNDAS:** It was on page 297 of old Budget Paper 4. When it was transferred to DECS, it dropped out.

**Ms Hinton:** I wasn't aware of that, Ms Dundas, but I'm delighted to hear it. I think it would be most inappropriate to have a measure there. Was it under quality or quantity?

**MS DUNDAS:** "Quality effectiveness" was the heading.

**Ms Hinton:** Of the number of deaths in custody?

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**MR HARGREAVES:** It is a very sad reflection on the quality of services provided by the Port Phillip prison to find 13 deaths in 18 months. I found that a particularly valuable quality assurance measure.

**MS DUNDAS:** It's still part of the quality measure in corrective services in the JACS portfolio. I'm wondering why it has dropped out for young people. I'm more interested in escapes from custody. If we have more than zero deaths in custody, we'll all hear about it. But why has it not been considered an effective measure for youth justice?

**Ms Hinton:** I don't know why it has dropped out. This one was put together very quickly, as you would appreciate.

**MS DUNDAS:** It has dropped out in the transfer from JACS to DECS. We're talking of the November administrative arrangements, not the new budget papers.

**Ms Hinton:** My view—I'm sharing this for the first time with Frank, not to mention the minister—is that our quality assurance in relation to youth justice should be focused on much more positive outcomes than deaths in custody. Clearly a death in custody is an appalling outcome and unacceptable, but on the other hand our quality effectiveness measures really should be based around things that are more positive and affect more people on a regular basis.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is this a conversation you're going to have with Minister Quinlan so that we can have some kind of parity between adult corrective services and youth corrective services in the measurement of outcomes?

**Mr Corbell:** This is the first that this been drawn to my attention as well, Ms Dundas. I'm certainly happy to mention it to Mr Quinlan.

**THE CHAIR:** We will now proceed to care and protection services.

**MS DUNDAS:** You expect that notifications of suspected child abuse will drop. You've changed the terminology from "notifications of suspected child abuse" to "reports of suspected child abuse". You are expecting them to drop from 1,100 to 2,000. Can you explain the change in that measure?

**Mr Corbell:** The terminology change reflects the language which is used in the act, to make sure that it is a consistent use of language.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is there a material difference between the two?

**Mr Corbell:** There is some difference.

**Ms Hinton:** The legislation defines any report to us or any contact with us as a report on suspected child abuse. Our administrative processes had made a distinction between reports of suspected child abuse and consultations that a member of the community may have had with us about their concerns about a particular family or child. The end of that discussion and consultation process may not be making what they think of as a formal report of child abuse but as advice of a family or a child that's in need of additional support.



Previously we had used the term “reports of suspected child abuse” to refer to cases where the end of the conversation was a report of suspected child abuse. We distinguished between reports and consultations. On reflection, we feel that it would be better if our reports to the Legislative Assembly reflected the language of the legislation, even though our processes will still differentiate between effective notifications of suspected abuse and consultations about children in need of a bit of extra support.

**THE CHAIR:** Incidental notification?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Does that explain why you think there’ll be a drop in that figure?

**Mr Corbell:** The difference of 100?

**MS DUNDAS:** It is 10 per cent. In the budget papers you have explained other changes as the consequence of ACT prevention strategies, which is a good outcome, but this outcome is not explained. I’m wondering why you suspect that the notification or reporting of suspected child abuse will drop.

**Ms Baikie:** There’s a range of reasons why we would expect it to drop. Firstly, the new legislation that came in 12 months ago had mandatory reporting in it. It took some time for people to get comfortable with what they had to report and what they didn’t report. It also reflects media campaigns and community education programs. The reports come in from the public, so there are a range of reasons that will influence them. We have no control over the reports coming in.

**MS DUNDAS:** We’ve seen a huge increase in the days of substitute care used annually. I think we factored in some more funding for substitute care in Appropriation Bill (No 3) in December. Can you tell me why?

**THE CHAIR:** I think it was Appropriation Bill (No 2). (No 3) was earlier this year.

**MS DUNDAS:** An appropriation bill that was not the budget. Can you explain why the number of substitute care days rose so dramatically?

**Ms Baikie:** This matches a national trend. There have been more children in care right across Australia. There’s a range of reasons why that happens. It could be the more complex needs of children, the influence of drug abuse, the breakdown of the family and the range of supports that have traditionally been there but are no longer there. It follows a national trend.

**Ms Hinton:** Sometimes they are respite days. Families who are undergoing particularly difficult circumstances require some respite and are not able to manage their children on a long-term basis.

**MS DUNDAS:** So is it more awareness of problems that exist?

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**Mr Corbell:** The range of factors are fairly complex. As Ms Baikie has indicated, this is a trend occurring right around the country. Certainly levels of awareness around child abuse and neglect are greater in the community than perhaps they were even three or four years ago. It is giving us a better picture of the level of problem in the community. That's not to say the problem has necessarily increased, but perhaps we're seeing more of it than we did in the past. So there is that factor.

With that, not only here in the ACT but right around the country, changes to legislation, particularly in relation to mandatory reporting, have again—it's a terrible term to use—flushed out and brought into the public arena a better indication of where these problems are in our community and the level of abuse and neglect, suspected or otherwise, in our community.

**MS DUNDAS:** The government payment for outputs estimated outcome 2001-02—I'm looking at old Budget Paper No 4, page 347—was higher than the total cost. Can that be explained by the extra appropriation?

**Mr Wheeler:** No. I mentioned earlier the benchmark—

**MS DUNDAS:** The technical changes.

**Mr Wheeler:** It's that technical change. It gave some output classes a profit. We've reversed that. We've cleaned up the benchmarking arrangements. The only two areas the department would ever benchmark were the CIT and government schooling. But a year or so ago we spread the impact of that benchmarking across all outputs. We've now reversed it.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have some questions about substitute care. If you can't answer them now, take them on notice. I'm interested in the number of children in substitute care in the ACT and their age range. Do we in the ACT do kinship foster homes?

**Ms Baikie:** Yes, we do provide for kinship parenting substitute.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is the level of support for kinship care the same as it would be for a foster care arrangement in the ACT?

**Ms Baikie:** No, it's provided in a different way.

**MS DUNDAS:** But are the levels of scrutiny, training and monitoring the same for both kinship and foster?

**Ms Baikie:** Yes. We're working towards bringing them together in the training. That hasn't been there. We want to ensure that wherever the child is placed, whether it's in kinship care or in foster care, it gets the support it needs.

**MS DUNDAS:** You're working to bring them together at the moment. How long do you expect that melding to take?

**Ms Baikie:** When I say bringing them together, I mean bringing the standards together.

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**MS DUNDAS:** Yes.

**Ms Baikie:** The same standards, not in the melding sense.

**MS DUNDAS:** When do you expect the standards to be on par?

**Ms Baikie:** I expect over the next 12 months we will be developing that.

**Ms Hinton:** You asked, Ms Dundas, about numbers in substitute care.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you provide that or are there privacy issues?

**Ms Hinton:** Not with numbers. It's a bit like youth justice. It's a point in time. You can talk about the number of children in substitute care on any one day or you can talk about the number of people who are in permanent substitute long-term care. There are different issues.

**Ms Baikie:** I can't give you the exact numbers in care at the moment. At the end of last year we had the actual days. As Ms Hinton said, it changes over time. I can't give the figures at the moment. I need to bring them back.

**MS DUNDAS:** The number of days of substitute care annually has increased significantly. Is that more kids or is it the same number of kids having more service, or is it a bit of both?

**Ms Baikie:** It's the same number of children requiring more services.

**MS DUNDAS:** More children haven't come into the substitute care program? Those children already there have higher usage of substitute care?

**Ms Baikie:** Of the services, yes.

**Mr Corbell:** There is one last area in children, youth and family services—family and support.

**THE CHAIR:** It's not on our agenda.

**MS DUNDAS:** It's one of those lovely bits of the department that have been moved around a number of times, so maybe it got lost.

**Mr Corbell:** My apologies. It is now mostly activity which is in the new department.

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes, there is an output relating to contacts—

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mr Chairman, I suggest that any members who have questions put them on notice and then it can be determined the appropriate minister to direct them to.

**THE CHAIR:** I assume that child health development services are also in the new department.

**Ms Hinton:** That's in the new department, but family support services are in ours.

**Resolved:**

That the committee receive the documents presented so far this day and that pursuant to standing order 243 the oral evidence and documents received in the public hearing so far this day be authorised for publication.

**Luncheon adjournment**

**THE CHAIR:** We will resume on output classes 1 and 2 in education. We'll start with general questions and an overview of the capital works program and proceed with the specific output classes, but we'll cut in at 4 o'clock to deal with output class 3 and the CIT and CIT Solutions.

Before we go on to education I might mention a couple of things to do with questions on notice which we need to clarify. I'm aware that some answers to questions have been received by the relevant member who has asked the question but not necessarily the chair of the committee or the secretariat of the committee. Other answers have been provided directly to me or to my office without being put through the secretariat. Can I ask your department, Minister, to make sure that any answers to questions on notice go to the secretariat at first instance so that they can be circulated to the appropriate parties through the secretariat.

I'm also advised that there are some answers outstanding for more than three days since the questions were asked. I don't think there are any in your area, but I note that in case there are questions in health which have not yet been answered.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Minister, could you please explain in a little more detail how the \$27 million in additional funding for education has been provided?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, I'm very happy to. Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. The budget, as I indicated in my opening statement, addresses in full our commitment to appropriate an extra \$27 million to the education budget. This year's budget commits \$19.2 million of the \$27 million. It will be spent on six new initiatives and three reviews.

The initiatives are the reduction in year 3 class sizes, enhanced support for indigenous students, a program for high school development, the laptops for teachers program, an upgrade in IT infrastructure in government schools, and a provision for IT support in Catholic systemic schools.

The three reviews relate to the provision of careers advice in schools, the counselling services which we discussed this morning, and the inquiry into education funding, the Lyndsay Connors inquiry. The total funding for these reviews amounts to \$4.3 million this year, \$4.6 million next financial year, \$5.1 million and then \$5.2 million. It's a total of \$19.2 million over the next four years.

In addition to this, approximately \$7.4 million has been appropriated but not yet allocated to any particular initiative. This makes up the remainder of the \$27 million.

The reason for this appropriation is to demonstrate clearly that the government has set aside the full amount of the \$27 million for education. We don't want any suggestions that that money has disappeared and gone somewhere else. It has gone to education. The reason it has not yet been allocated is that the government intends to seek the advice of both the Government School Education Council and the advisory body for non-government schooling and also to be in a position to be able to respond to the recommendations from the Connors inquiry into education funding in Canberra.

We believe it's prudent to set that money aside so that we can have immediate capacity to respond to issues that arise. There's not much point, we believe, in seeking advice, say, from the Government School Education Council in relation to priorities for funding if we don't have any immediate capacity to respond.

That said, clearly there will continue to emerge a range of other pressures and demands, as always, in both government and non-government schooling. For that reason I'll certainly be, as will every minister, going through the budget process next year and onwards to seek further appropriations for projects and initiatives which are deemed appropriate to support.

The point I'm seeking to make is that the \$27 million is not the end, necessarily, of the government's expenditure on schooling. I'm simply making the point that that \$27 million is not the amount of money I have to have a huge argument with the Treasurer and my colleagues about in budget cabinet. The option is open to me, though, to seek further funding through the normal budget process.

In addition to the investment I've outlined of \$19.2 million, a further \$1.9 million is being provided from within existing resources to undertake a range of other initiatives. This includes the student pathways initiative, again something we discussed briefly this morning, and a review of school reporting, as well as funding for the operations of the Government School Education Council. This money has come from the cessation of the previous government's teacher renewal program. That, Mr Hargreaves, is how the \$27 million breaks up.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we might go on to a general discussion about the \$27 million now, since it has been raised. You said that there was \$19 million over the first four years. What is the amount in the present financial year?

**Mr Corbell:** \$4.3 million.

**THE CHAIR:** How does that sit with the amount you mentioned this morning? I thought you said that there was an extra \$13 million to be spent in education this financial year. How does that figure marry with the \$4.3 million?

**Mr Corbell:** That's funding across the portfolio. Again, I'm advised it's a technical adjustment issue about how the figures compare year to year. Correction: it's not coming across the portfolio. That \$30 million is in education, and it's primarily a presentation issue around the budget documents which Mr Wheeler can explain.

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**Mr Wheeler:** The budget documentation for the department as a whole shows a \$17.3 million reduction, a large share of that coming in the children's, youth and family services area. Across the department there's a \$14.5 million actual increase in cash. It's being masked by the transfer out of resources for the new department and the remaining resources for sport and recreation as well as a bit over \$10 million for the capital charge that's no longer being funded. The \$13.1 million the minister has mentioned is the government schooling share of that actual cash increase.

**THE CHAIR:** And the other \$1 million is what?

**Mr Wheeler:** It's the net effect of the spread of the other parts of the department, including VET.

**MRS DUNNE:** This morning the minister said there was \$13 million extra, but there isn't really \$13 million extra. It's an accounting treatment.

**Mr Wheeler:** The accounting treatment makes it look as though it's not there, but it is there. If you add in the new initiatives, some additional money for the enterprise bargaining agreement and indexation, which is the largest single piece, you have—I hesitate to say—a real increase. It's a real cash increase of about \$13 million in education.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's actual money? It's actually there?

**Mr Wheeler:** It's actual money. It's actually there.

**Mr Corbell:** The \$4.3 million is part of the \$27 million commitment.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, but is the \$4.3 million part of the \$13 million?

**Mr Corbell:** It also contributes to that total, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** What's the other \$9 million?

**Ms Hinton:** By way of example, the teachers EBA increases, their salary increases that flow through from previous budgets. The additional amount coming in the current financial year, the additional cash coming into the budget to cover those salary increases, is close to \$3 million. There's in excess of \$5 million in indexation, which again is additional cash coming into the department, and some small actual cash increases flowing from previous initiatives.

**THE CHAIR:** You're not counting indexation or salary increases from previous decisions as part of the \$27 million extra to education?

**Ms Hinton:** No.

**Mr Corbell:** No, we're not.

**THE CHAIR:** But you are counting the cost of inquiries, are you not?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. Those are new initiatives.

**THE CHAIR:** I wonder how those fit with the commitment to make sure that the \$27 million would be spent inside the school gate.

**Mr Corbell:** They fit very well.

**THE CHAIR:** If teachers' salaries are not inside the school gate and inquiries are, I'm a bit confused about what falls inside and what falls outside that definition.

**Mr Corbell:** The initiatives are very much about improving services in schools. Those reviews are about improving services in schools. For example, the review into careers advice is about developing a better framework for the delivery of careers advice for young people in our schools. It's well overdue. It's work that needs to be done. We're not going to be able to deliver better services in relation to careers advice if we don't do that work.

Members will recall the discussion this morning in relation to the review of counselling services. That's a very specific recommendation of the standing committee report from the last Assembly which said improvements needed to be made and a review needed to be undertaken of counselling services which would lead to an improvement in counselling services in schools. Equally, we believe that that is an investment in improving services within the schools.

The inquiry into education funding is about establishing a sustainable but fair framework for funding which addresses need and equity in the schooling system overall. We believe in all those instances the investment in the reviews and the inquiry is a direct investment in improving outcomes for students in schools.

**THE CHAIR:** I'd agree with that, but the question here is whether or not it really is counted as spending inside the school gate. Using the logic you've just used—

**Mr Corbell:** If it's of direct benefit to schools, then it's directly being spent inside the school gate.

**THE CHAIR:** You could argue that administrative expenses in increasing the budget of the central office of the department of education in Tuggeranong equally is spending inside the school gate because it has some flow-down effect to the quality of education in schools.

**Mr Corbell:** Indeed, and some of those initiatives—

**THE CHAIR:** So spending inside the school gates can be in head office or it can be in an inquiry. Presumably it could even be outside the territory, if you contribute towards a national research project on education and things like that.

**Mr Corbell:** Potentially, yes. The point that the government sought to make before the election and has made since the election is about providing resourcing to directly improve the outcomes of students. That's what this funding does.

**MRS DUNNE:** That seems to be a bit of a redefinition of “inside the school gate”.

**Mr Corbell:** I don’t believe so.

**MR PRATT:** I would have thought that the definition of expenditure inside the school gate was the implementation of programs and outcomes which directly affect the running of schools day to day. That’s how the community would read the definition of inside the school gate.

**Mr Corbell:** It’s about improving the outcomes for students. That’s what parents want to see. They want to see continued improved outcomes for their children, and these are the ways we set about doing that.

**MR PRATT:** How did you arrive at the breakdown of the \$19.2 million committed? How did you prioritise activities? Could you explain to me why you decided to commit only \$1 million of that \$19.2 million to the non-government school sector?

**Mr Corbell:** As Mr Humphries would be aware, the government receives a range of proposals from agencies about possible budget initiatives. Government ministers themselves tend to inject some things into the mix. They go through a budget cabinet process, and a much shorter list emerges at the other end. The process is also informed by the comments and the views of Assembly committees that choose to report on what they believe should be in the budget. That was also a factor, as were the comments from stakeholder groups in the consultation process on the budget. All of these things are part of the mix, and these are the subjects we ended up on.

We needed to make sure we were implementing specific election commitments in relation to expenditure. The spending on the extension of smaller class sizes to year 3 was a specific election commitment. Equally, the provision for IT infrastructure was a fairly specific election commitment. Those were programs I was very keen to make sure were implemented in our first budget, and that has been the case.

The others—indigenous support, high school development, a range of investigations—are again about responding to those needs that I believed were of the highest priority in getting a response.

These are matters for judgment by individual governments and individual ministers, but certainly from my perspective, as endorsed by cabinet, they are the priorities that we saw for this year’s budget.

You were interested in Catholic systemic schools.

**THE CHAIR:** He asked for a breakdown of the \$19 million.

**Mr Corbell:** I’m happy to do that. I don’t have that in front of me, but I’m sure the—

**MR PRATT:** I think we’ve already got that.

**Mr Corbell:** For this financial year the reduction of year 3 class sizes is a total of \$4.287 million. That’s all the initiatives.



**THE CHAIR:** In which years is that?

**Mr Corbell:** That's for this financial year, 2002-03.

**THE CHAIR:** Which years of schooling does that affect? Already in the budget base there was spending—

**Mr Corbell:** No, this is this year's expenditure.

**THE CHAIR:** Which years of schooling does it affect. There was already funding in the budget base to provide for reduction of class sizes in years K to 2.

**Mr Corbell:** The \$4.287 million is all the new initiatives this year. The funding is for year 3. It's not for the earlier years. That was already in the budget

**Mr Pratt:** The \$4.2 million is for year 3?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I didn't say that. The \$4.2 million is all the initiatives for this budget. In relation to the reduction in year 3 class sizes, there is an operating cost of \$1.22 million. There is a capital cost, mostly for the provision of additional transportables, of \$1 million. High school development costs \$0.5 million this year. The laptops for teachers program is \$420,000 this year. The capital cost of the schools IT capacity upgrade is \$355,000. The review of counselling services is \$100,000. The IT grant to the Catholic systemic schools is \$0.25 million. The enhanced indigenous support program is \$190,000. The inquiry into ACT education funding is \$150,000. The review into careers advice for schools is \$100,000.

**THE CHAIR:** Demountables are a capital item, effectively. I'm not sure how they're treated in the books, but they're effectively a capital item.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Because you spend it only once, however long they last. I would have thought people would've assumed that \$27 million was going to go onto the budget base of education. I take it that in the case of at least that much of the spending that's not the case; that some of that \$27 million will flush out of the system once this four-year period is over. Put it another way. If you spend all the money on transportables, then the effect would disappear at the end of the four years, because you would've spent the money once and you wouldn't spend it again.

**Mr Corbell:** The commitment was to spend an extra \$27 million over four years.

**THE CHAIR:** So what ongoing effect is that meant to have? What's the out years effect?

**Mr Corbell:** Some of it will have an ongoing effect; some of it will not.

**THE CHAIR:** So it's one-off, in effect?

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**Mr Corbell:** Yes. The commitment was to spend an extra \$27 million over four years. That's what this budget does.

**MRS DUNNE:** And you don't see that you need to distinguish between capital and recurrent?

**Mr Corbell:** The previous government spent money on smaller class sizes, and I don't think the distinction was made then either between capital and recurrent.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, I'm talking about the policy undertaking at the election. It was a dollar specific amount.

**Mr Corbell:** The \$27 million does not make a distinction between capital and recurrent. It simply makes the point that we will spend that much more in schooling. That's what we're doing.

**THE CHAIR:** The other question Mr Pratt asked was about why the emphasis on government rather than non-government schooling.

**Mr Corbell:** I guess there are two reasons. First of all, there is funding for the Catholic systemic schools in relation to IT support. That is an explicit implementation of the election commitment.

**THE CHAIR:** That's \$250,000 this year.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, over the next four years. It is \$250,000 per year over the next four years—\$1 million over four years. That's that commitment. There is a slight increase in the amount of funding for the non-government school sector because of enrolment change. That's reflected in the budget. The total amount of funding the non-government school sector gets, if I recall correctly, from both Commonwealth and ACT government sources is \$109.6 million. The ACT government spends about \$290 million per annum on government schooling.

I think it's important to inject those figures into the debate, because when you look at the amount of funding for government and non-government schooling, overall the amount of funding available to non-government schools from both Commonwealth and ACT sources is just over a third of what all ACT government schools get.

The purpose of the inquiry into ACT education funding is to address the system issues around equity and need in schools in Canberra, whether they are public schools or non-government schools. The decision that was taken in this budget was that it would be appropriate to await the findings of that investigation before making any specific decisions in relation to changing the funding mix for the non-government sector.

**Mr PRATT:** Given that the \$109 million incorporates a Commonwealth funding factor, I guess it raises the question: is there a Commonwealth component going to government schools? Is that a factor that should also be considered in this forum? And what is that?

**Mr Corbell:** It's in that figure, Mr Pratt, I'm advised. It's in the \$290 million.

**MR PRATT:** Can you tell me what that figure might be, please?

**Mr Corbell:** It's about \$21 million.

**MRS DUNNE:** And what's the breakdown of the \$109 million?

**Mr Corbell:** Of the \$109 million, the Commonwealth provides \$78.1 million for non-government schools, and approximately \$31 million comes from the ACT.

**MR PRATT:** So it's true to say, when you look at the Commonwealth funding factors in that particular model, that the signal being sent by the government, in terms of supporting the non-government sector, is hardly a positive one?

**Mr Corbell:** Overall, ACT government funding for non-government schools went up by \$1.6 million this year.

**MR PRATT:** It may have.

**THE CHAIR:** That's because of increased enrolments as well, isn't it? That's hardly a real increase, is it?

**Mr Corbell:** It's based on a formula. Mr Wheeler makes the point to me that there's also an inbuilt level of indexation that we're funding from the ACT as well. But the total amount of funding for non-government schools, from both Commonwealth and ACT sources, rose by \$6.2 million this year. That is more than the total of increase this year for government schooling from our sources. In relation to the \$27 million commitment—

**THE CHAIR:** Isn't that an apples-and-oranges comparison? As far as non-government schooling is concerned—

**Mr Corbell:** I think that the only point—

**THE CHAIR:** If I could finish my question first.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, sure.

**THE CHAIR:** As far as non-government schools are concerned, you're taking Commonwealth funds into account. There has been some increase in Commonwealth funding for non-government schools in recent years, as I recall. If the ACT takes money out of the back door that the Commonwealth is putting in the front door for non-government schools, then isn't that the same kind of cost shifting that you complained about earlier today with respect to the ITABs?

**Mr Corbell:** Not at all. I'm just recognising quite reasonably that in the ACT, as in every state and territory around Australia, the bulk of funding for non-government schools comes from the Commonwealth.

**MRS DUNNE:** And so you're going to wash your hands of the non-government school sector?

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**Mr Corbell:** Not at all. As I have indicated, funding for non-government schools in the ACT from ACT revenue rose this year.

**MRS DUNNE:** Over the next four years the new money is \$19.2 million, of which \$1 million is for non-government schools, so roughly one-twentieth of the money goes to non-government schools for 36 per cent of students. So it is 5 per cent of the money for 36 per cent of the kids.

**Mr Corbell:** In relation to the \$27 million?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, that's correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** And you don't feel abashed about that?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I don't. The reason I don't is that, when you look at the level of funding from all sources—that's the only reasonable way to do it, and that's the way I do it for both the government and the non-government sectors—there is a significant increase in the total amount of funding available for non-government schools this financial year.

**THE CHAIR:** So why shouldn't the Commonwealth then say, "Mr Corbell is picking up the money that we've taken out of ITABs, so ITABs are still getting the same amount of money, at least for part of this financial year, so all is sweet in the garden and there is no need to worry about pulling out Commonwealth money, because the ACT government is picking up the tab"?

**Mr Corbell:** I don't understand the point you're trying to make, Mr Humphries.

**THE CHAIR:** You said earlier today you were having to put extra money into ITABs, at least for part of this financial year, because the Commonwealth is pulling out funding.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And you condemned that practice. Isn't this in a sense the same thing, in respect of non-government education? They're putting extra money in, but you're using that as a pretext to take a share of new money out of the non-government sector?

**Mr Corbell:** Mr Humphries, we've made no reduction in funding for non-government schools.

**THE CHAIR:** But proportionately this process means you have, because there's extra money—

**Mr Corbell:** I think that's stretching the argument, Mr Humphries. The bottom line is that I challenge you to go through those budget documents and find any line that indicates a reduction in funding for non-government schools.

**THE CHAIR:** I didn't say there was a reduction.

**Mr Corbell:** You won't find one.

**MRS DUNNE:** No-one says there was.

**THE CHAIR:** I didn't say there was a reduction. What I said was—

**Mr Corbell:** There's no reduction, nor is the ACT government taking any money out of the non-government school sector.

**THE CHAIR:** I didn't say there was a reduction or that you were taking money out. I said that you had promised an extra \$27 million for education, and you didn't send any signal whatever that that would be almost entirely for government education. In fact, many in the non-government sector took the comments that were made by you and other representatives of the Labor Party during the last election to mean that a reasonable share, a fair share, of that money would be coming to non-government education, not 5 per cent.

**Mr Corbell:** And that is the purpose of the Connors inquiry. It is to establish a clearer funding arrangement which focuses on equity and need. The reality is that in both the government and the non-government sectors there are some schools that have greater needs than others, and there are some schools that have greater capacity than others to meet that need.

The purpose of the Connors inquiry is to get a better handle on exactly how we can focus our dollars in a strategic way to target those unmet needs, particularly for those students, those children, who face the greatest level of disadvantage. That's the intention of that piece of work.

I draw members' attention to the fact that the budget proposes to appropriate \$7.2 million to give the government capacity to respond to those issues. We will use that to respond to both government and non-government sectors as is appropriate, based on the advice received through those investigations and the advice of both the Government School Education Council and the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Non-Government Schooling.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, at the end of the inquiry into educational funding, even if every cent of the \$7.4 million which you've held back in what I think you would have called, as happened last year, a slush fund—

**MRS DUNNE:** I think we can call it a slush fund this year.

**THE CHAIR:** If every cent of that \$7.4 million from the slush fund went into non-government education, there would still be disproportionately less going into non-government education, as a proportionate of the number of students enrolled in that sector, than goes into government education.

How can you argue that that is a fair break-up? You're presupposing that this inquiry is not going to recommend any substantial shift. You're assuming it's going to recommend a substantial shift towards government education. Otherwise, you've substantially

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weighted that extra funding in favour of government education, and you can't correct that even with the final \$7.4 million.

**Mr Corbell:** Let's go back to some first principles. If you look at the key initiatives which are funded from the \$27 million initiative, where is the biggest whack of money in one hit?

**THE CHAIR:** Government education.

**Mr Corbell:** Why? Look at the just over \$12 million it costs to extend smaller class sizes to year 3. Close to half of the full \$27 million is already committed, and was already committed by the government before the election, when we said we would spend the money on smaller class sizes in year 3 in government schools. Working from that premise, you then have to—

**THE CHAIR:** It's your premise.

**Mr Corbell:** No, it's not my premise. It's a premise that was made publicly known before the election. Indeed, you as the government of the day, if you'd done any serious analysis, would have understood what that commitment would cost. You were doing all sorts of costings of our policies. I'm sure you did the costing of that one. You would have known that the cost of that initiative was around this figure. You would have known that that \$12 million was going to be coming out of the \$27 million. I believe the government has been very—

**THE CHAIR:** What's your point?

**Mr Corbell:** The point I'm making is that before the election it was already clear that close to half of the \$27 million commitment was going to be spent in government schools. If you're going to make the argument that there's a disproportionate balance, you have to recognise that there was already a significant level of pre-commitment for that expenditure in relation to the year 3 class sizes and in relation to the IT commitments.

**THE CHAIR:** That's not logical, Minister, with respect.

**Mr Corbell:** No, it's entirely logical.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you tell us how many government students and non-government students were using the free school buses? Can you give us a breakdown of how many government versus non-government students were using the free school buses?

**Mr Corbell:** We'd have to ask ACTION that. I can't tell you off the top of my head.

**MS DUNDAS:** So that was money that ACTION was administering, not the department of education?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. That's right.

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**MS DUNDAS:** So the point is that there's now more money being spent in education, which is a good thing.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, \$27 million more, Ms Dundas.

**MS DUNDAS:** A great thing.

**MRS DUNNE:** So long as it's equitably distributed.

**MS DUNDAS:** At least it's there.

**THE CHAIR:** We're not having a debate across the table; we're asking the minister questions.

**Mr Corbell:** If we're dealing with relativities, perhaps I can inject this into the discussion as well: roughly one-third of all students in the ACT are in the non-government school sector.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thirty-six per cent.

**MR PRATT:** Thirty-eight per cent.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's not one-third. It's considerably more than one-third.

**Mr Corbell:** Approximately one-third, give or take. The point I'm seeking to make—

**MR PRATT:** There's a bloody big difference between 38 and 33.

**Mr Corbell:** If I can just finish my point. When the Liberal Party was in government, did you spend one-third of the education budget, or even 38 per cent of the education budget, on non-government schools?

**MR PRATT:** Probably not. And who's the cause of that?

**Mr Corbell:** Let me tell you how much you did spend, Mr Pratt. You spent 17 per cent. So if you're serious about an argument about relativities, look at your record. That's the only point I want to make.

**THE CHAIR:** But you're going to lower that expenditure.

**Mr Corbell:** But we're not interested in a discussion entirely about relativities. This government is interested in a discussion about need and equity. That's what this government's interested in, not straight relativities. Straight relativities are grossly unfair when it comes to talking about carving up the education budget.

**MR PRATT:** We are not arguing to spend 38 per cent of the \$27 million—

**Mr Corbell:** But you're telling me that the relativity is inequitable. Your relativity was inequitable too, on your argument.

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**MR PRATT:** We are saying that that list of activities which you have put funding to is fine, but we're also saying that you could have sent a more positive signal if you had found just a little bit more money to allocate to the non-government sector, particularly for children at risk in non-government schools. Surely another million or two, perhaps even a doubling of the IT, would have been a fairer allocation of that funding.

**Mr Corbell:** You can make that argument about almost any initiative in any portfolio. But the bottom line is that there is just over \$7 million of that commitment yet to be specifically allocated.

**MR PRATT:** That's not the question, Mr Chair.

**Mr Corbell:** The government has put in place a process to determine where the equity issues are, where the need issues are, in our school system—not just the government system, our school system overall. We will consider the outcomes of those inquiries very seriously. All sectors have responded very positively to the opportunity to make their case about where the demands are in their systems.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's their future. They would.

**Mr Corbell:** Indeed. I think the only person who hasn't treated it seriously is Mr Pratt.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, I don't think anyone is arguing that the money should flow directly in proportion to the number of students in the system. Some people do argue that, but I don't think we're arguing that today.

**Mr Corbell:** You're making an argument on relativities. I'm just trying to highlight some of the weaknesses of your argument.

**THE CHAIR:** But isn't it true that both major parties went to the last election arguing that there was a case for greater support for non-government education? I was at meetings where your party acknowledged that point and made the point that the review into funding of education that you were about to undertake would be a chance to address that.

**Mr Corbell:** Indeed, and that's what I've just said. That's why there's \$7.2 million unallocated.

**THE CHAIR:** But if you've already allocated \$18 million of the \$19 million towards government education, you make it almost impossible for any substantial shift in favour of non-government education to be achieved with that remaining \$7.4 million.

**Mr Corbell:** I don't think anyone would claim that \$7.2 million is a small amount of money.

**THE CHAIR:** It is relative to the size of the education budget.

**Mr Corbell:** Well, \$27 million is small compared to the size of the education budget.

**THE CHAIR:** I think you're playing games, Minister.



**Mr Corbell:** You are too, Mr Humphries.

**THE CHAIR:** I'm asking you some serious questions. You say this is about need. What's the average size of classes in the government sector at the moment?

**Mr Corbell:** In high school or primary school?

**THE CHAIR:** Primary school.

**Mr Corbell:** It would vary if you're going outside of years 1, 2 or 3.

**THE CHAIR:** That's why I'm talking about an average across primary school.

**Ms Hinton:** It's a very complex question, because they vary throughout the course of the day. Classes are smaller for literacy than they are for other activities during the rest of the day. They vary significantly from school to school.

**THE CHAIR:** I acknowledge that. Could I put another proposition to you then? Would it not be true to say that class sizes in government primary schools at the present time are smaller than class sizes in non-government primary schools?

**Mr Corbell:** No, not necessarily.

**THE CHAIR:** Not true? On average?

**Mr Corbell:** I don't know whether on average, but you have to appreciate that just as in the government system, where we have both very large schools and very small schools, the same occurs in the non-government sector.

**THE CHAIR:** I realise that, but I've heard it put by the non-government sector that, on average, class sizes are higher, especially in Catholic systemic schools. I've been to both sorts of schools, and I can say that from my first observation is that that is absolutely true. If it's proven to be the case—and that's what the Catholic systemic system argues—then wouldn't an analysis of need suggest that non-government schools should be getting a reasonable share of that funding for reduced class sizes, looking at need?

**Mr Corbell:** It may well do. I'll await the outcome of the review before the government makes any decisions about that.

**THE CHAIR:** But you can't fix that with the remaining \$7.4 million?

**Mr Corbell:** Non-government schools are non-government schools for a reason. They are non-government schools because they desire the autonomy to make particular decisions about how they provide education to the communities and the children and families they seek to serve. They seek the autonomy for religious reasons or for other philosophical reasons about how education should be delivered. That being the case, a decision about the size of classes is inevitably a decision for those schools and those systems. It is not a decision for government.

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**THE CHAIR:** It's a product of funding, though, isn't it? They've got less funding. They can't provide smaller class sizes.

**MS DUNDAS:** But they also charge fees.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, but they're entitled to a share. If we're looking at need, they're entitled to some—

**Mr Corbell:** Again, there is no reduction in funding for the non-government school sector. In fact, as I've indicated, overall the non-government school sector got from all sources an additional \$6.3 million this year.

**THE CHAIR:** You're taking credit for Commonwealth initiatives, aren't you?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I'm not. I said from all sources, Mr Humphries. I can assure you that the non-government sector assert their right to run their schools the way they believe it's appropriate to run their schools. I respect their right to do that.

But at the same time that does not imply that there is an immediate responsibility on government to implement initiatives in the non-government sector in the same way as we initiate them in the sector which we are responsible for, the sector that close to two-thirds of all children in Canberra attend.

**THE CHAIR:** So the issue is not need?

**MRS DUNNE:** So what you've said, Minister, is that you're the minister for government schools?

**Mr Corbell:** No.

**MS GALLAGHER:** He didn't say that.

**MR HARGREAVES:** For God's sake, grow up. Come on, Gary, control the lady, will you?

**THE CHAIR:** I'm sorry. It's a perfectly fair question.

**MR HARGREAVES:** It's not. It's a comment. That was a dumb comment, and you know it.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, no.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Chairman, I think the only person out of control here is Mr Hargreaves. He should go and take a powder.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mrs Dunne, you ain't seen nothing yet if you're going to start slinging things across the chamber.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Hargreaves, please, there's enough slinging going on on both sides of the table today.

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**MR PRATT:** Meanwhile, may I ask a question?

**THE CHAIR:** No, Mrs Dunne is asking a question.

**MS DUNDAS:** How about me? Can I ask a question?

**MRS DUNNE:** I've got a question before the minister at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne is in the middle of asking a question.

**MS GALLAGHER:** We'll all take a ticket.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay, but mine has got No 1 on it.

**MS GALLAGHER:** What a surprise.

**MRS DUNNE:** The question is, Minister, when I have your attention—

**Mr Corbell:** I can hear you, Mrs Dunne. I can walk and chew gum at the same time.

**MRS DUNNE:** Oh, you can?

**Mr Corbell:** I can.

**MRS DUNNE:** All right. There has been a discussion about that.

**THE CHAIR:** Question, please.

**MRS DUNNE:** The question is: do you consider that you are the minister for government schools or the minister for education? Do you consider that you have responsibility for the education of all of the children who attend schools in the ACT, or do you consider that you are responsible only for the children who attend government schools?

**Mr Corbell:** I am responsible for schooling in the ACT, and the levels of responsibility vary. In the government sector, I am ultimately responsible for the provision of government school education in every facet. Ultimately, I am responsible for every facet of government education in nearly 100 schools run by the government in the ACT and the 80 preschools run by the government in the ACT.

I am also responsible for administering policy in respect of some aspects of non-government schooling. But our community for a long time has had a settlement, which I think has been tested a bit recently, about how, as a community overall, we fund schooling.

The decision was taken some decades ago now that the Commonwealth government would take the lion's share of responsibility for funding non-government schooling. My responsibility is to make sure that with those funds which are generated for the purposes of the ACT government's activities the interests of the sector for which I am fully

responsible are protected and that the policy issues that potentially affect non-government schools are addressed.

I am a proud advocate of public education, and I will not walk away from that for one moment. I believe in public education. I believe in the great good it does for our community. But I also respect those parents and families who choose a non-government school for whatever reason.

But let me make it very clear. Revenue from Commonwealth taxes—my taxes, your taxes—that is paid out by the Commonwealth for schooling in Canberra is broken up this way: \$78 million goes to non-government schools; \$21 million goes to government schools. In the ACT the overwhelming responsibility for funding our government school system is the ACT government's. I won't walk away from providing appropriate funding to it.

The short answer, Mrs Dunne, is that I am the Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, and I have responsibility for maintaining a strong public education system and making sure that appropriate levels of resourcing are provided to the non-government sector, cognisant of the level of funding that's already provided by the Commonwealth to that sector.

**MR PRATT:** But you do respect the rich balance between government and non-government schooling? Do you understand the burden that the non-government sector carries and which, if it is incapable of carrying it, will possibly pass across to the government sector?

**Mr Corbell:** I think the Commonwealth has recognised that, and as a community we recognise that in the funding arrangement. That's why the Commonwealth government provides the overwhelming majority of funding to non-government schools. That is the compact that our society has reached.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I've got a couple of questions on the high school development program and the \$2 million that has been put into that. What does that mean for the high schools? How's that going to be used in the high schools? Can you also give some details on how the initiatives in the indigenous support program are going to be implemented?

**Mr Corbell:** Thanks, Ms Gallagher. I'll get back to the task at hand. The first thing I should say is that the high school development program is a very important program. High schools are a point of pressure, I believe, for the ACT government in the system. Where we are weakest is in enrolment share at high schools, where we have just over 50 per cent of all students. That is an area of pressure, and we need to address it. The high school development program was meant to continue the process of doing that. It's half a million per year over four years, so \$2 million over four years.

The intention is to continue a range of activities that are already in place and provide additional support to teachers in high schools to develop more challenging, relevant and engaging curricula for students in those years. I might ask Jim Coleborne to provide a little more information on that.

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**Mr Coleborne:** There's \$500,000 outlined in the government initiative for high school development, and there are four elements to that initiative to cover further work in the high school sector, acknowledging that it's a very important sector where a great deal of positive work has been done to date but recognising that further things can be done to improve the engagement of students in their learning.

This program identifies four elements. The first is a school improvement team which is designed to have a teacher level 3 and two teacher level 2s work intensively with particular high schools on aspects of organisational and cultural change in order to bring about necessary gains in student engagement and student learning and to work, over the period of the budget initiative, over the four-year period, in three other areas as well.

The first is the further extension of the exhibitions project that is under way in high schools. That's to involve and engage year 9 students in further real-life research and presenting the outcomes of that research to the community. A great deal of effective learning and involvement of young people in the high school years have been undertaken already, but we believe that that exhibitions project needs to be extended and expanded so that more students in year 9 can be engaged in it, and possibly beyond into other years.

There are two other projects from the \$500,000 per year. The third is a middle school project involving research, consultation and planning directed at years 5 to 8 so that we can look at middle schooling and do some preliminary pilot work in improving the engagement of students from the upper primary years to the early secondary years, in years 5, 6, 7 and 8.

The fourth is a vocational learning and training project to explore options for expanding vocational education for years 9 and 10 and to look at the possibility of introducing certificate 1 vocational courses for students in high school years to further focus on preparing them for additional studies in years 11 and 12, their general engagement, and offering them a level of skill in certain training areas that will allow for further development in the subsequent years, years 11 and 12.

So there are four elements to the high school development project, but there are other matters that we are also pursuing in the high school years that lie outside the budget initiative. We could expand on that if you'd like us to.

**MS GALLAGHER:** You said you're focusing on a couple of high schools that need support. Is that support in their infrastructure as a school or support for the children who attend that school? Have those schools been chosen?

**Mr Corbell:** The general concept is not necessarily providing support to all schools whether they need it or not, but to look at those schools that might need additional support, to use a targeting model. We don't target schools; we target the use of resources to improve, change, organisational structure and learning outcomes in specific schools. We've done that in primary years, particularly with developing a program called Promoting Positive Behaviours. We would seek to do something similar in the high school years. We have not identified specific high schools that we would want to work in. But we know that there will be schools that will self-nominate and that would need that support. It's a combination of wanting schools to come forward and knowing that

there are some that would need more specific targeted assistance through the use of these additional resources, particularly through the use of the high school improvement team.

**MS GALLAGHER:** My other question was on the enhanced indigenous support program. What does that mean to a young indigenous person attending school?

**Mr Corbell:** This is fundamentally about recognising the responsibilities that home school liaison officers working with indigenous students already have. We've had a real problem in retaining good home school liaison officers. They've previously been at a school assistant 2 level, which is quite a low level in terms of pay and other conditions. It has been very difficult to retain good people for this program.

Feedback from the Indigenous Consultative Education Board, which is the government's key consultative mechanism with the indigenous community in Canberra, has highlighted this as an area which needs recognition to upgrade the status of those officers so that we can retain them and retain the skills and experience they have. There's also some additional recruitment.

**Mr Coleborne:** Those ASO 2 positions are being upgraded to ASO 4, and the positions are being increased from nine to 11. But the critical factor is that the engagement with the parents and the home school liaison component are currently undertaken by the ASO 4s. But these 11 positions would be taking over some of the current duties that are performed by the ASO 4s, and those positions would be upgraded to ASO 5. But the net effect will be much closer liaison with the parents and the community, to resolve any difficulties between the home environment and the school and, through working in literacy and numeracy, to try to close the gap between the outcomes of indigenous students and non-indigenous students, which we're rapidly diminishing in the ACT.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I don't know how long this program has been around, but regardless of the classification of the staff have there been positive outcomes in bridging the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes. The indigenous education unit has operated very successfully for some years. We report to the Assembly every six months on outcomes in indigenous education. The data shows that we've achieved very substantial gains in attendance. When we first started working with indigenous children and reporting in this way, we were not at all happy with the attendance rates of indigenous young people. They have improved, and that's been a lot of the work of the home school liaison people.

Similarly, the results of indigenous children in years 3 and 5 literacy and numeracy against benchmarks were significantly below those of the general student cohort. A great deal of work has occurred in that area, and the performance of indigenous children in years 3 and 5 has improved.

I have some reservations about saying that, because this is another area where the numbers are relatively small, and we have to be a bit cautious in leaping to early decisions about the effectiveness of particular gains. I think we need to see a bit more trend data to be absolutely confident that that is occurring.

The other issue that we have to bear in mind in relation to indigenous education is that the population is relatively more transient than some other parts of the population. We have indigenous students, as well as others, who come into the school system, perhaps in late primary school, who aren't here in the early years. A student in year 5 hasn't necessarily been in our school system for three or four years.

**MRS DUNNE:** What you're saying, Ms Hinton, is that with small numbers spectacularly good results in one area or spectacularly bad results in one area will skew the whole—

**Ms Hinton:** That's right, Mrs Dunne. We have to watch it over a number of years to be confident of the gains we're making. But so far we're really pleased, particularly with attendance, because that sort of issue is fundamental to achieving literacy and numeracy. If the kids aren't there, we're not going to make those sorts of gains.

**MRS DUNNE:** That's right.

**MR PRATT:** I have a question about Stirling College. Perhaps this is not the case, but is it true that closure of Stirling College is being considered?

**Mr Corbell:** Canberra College, Weston campus, yes. It was Stirling College when I was there.

**MS GALLAGHER:** And when I was there.

**Mr Corbell:** And when Ms Gallagher was there also. It's now called Canberra College, Weston campus.

**MR PRATT:** What are the criteria for college closures? What have you got in mind?

**Mr Corbell:** There are no plans at this time to close the Weston campus of Canberra College. The government's policy is that decisions about closure of schools are fundamentally a matter for the school community. They have to be driven by the school community. They have to be accepted by the school community.

Certainly there is an issue with attendance at the Weston campus of Canberra College. The Weston campus is one of two campuses for Canberra College, along with the Woden or Phillip campus. The great majority of students at Canberra College are now electing to do most of their courses, most of their units, at the Woden campus.

That means that the number of students who are full time on the Weston campus is quite small. I don't have the figures immediately to hand. That presents some pressures for that school in how it manages its staffing. The fact that it has staffing spread over two campuses is an issue that the college board and the college principal are continuing to monitor, but at this stage there are no plans to close the Weston campus.

**THE CHAIR:** It's not his intention to close the school, in other words, Mr Pratt.

**Mr Corbell:** The government has no plans to close the school, as I've indicated. These are decisions which are driven by the school community.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I ask you about the philosophy of the government being faced with the possibility of school closures.

**Mr Corbell:** I thought you'd want to stay away from this subject, Mr Humphries.

**THE CHAIR:** It has been avoided for a long time, but it's going to have to be faced up to at some point in the future if the school-age population continues to decline and the needs of areas of growth like Gungahlin are going to be met. You may well face the situation your predecessors faced of having unsustainable school enrolments.

Whether the school faces up to that or not is perhaps beside the point. We saw former Griffith Primary School dwindle to something like 50 students before the community made the decision that it would do something about that and asked for the school to be closed.

Is there a philosophy or approach by this government which is designed to assist schools in making rational and foresighted decisions about what happens to their school in the event of declining enrolments?

**Mr Corbell:** Again, we recognise that school closures are an issue which the community feels very strongly about and individual neighbourhoods feel very strongly about. That's why we maintain the policy that those things occur only in instances where the school community and the broader community that that school services recognise that that is the most appropriate thing to do.

The policy setting is the policy setting which your government had in place. There were, I guess you could say, incentives to allow school communities to see the benefits of closure and amalgamation in some circumstances.

The operating costs which were saved from the closure of one school would be put into the operation of the school that took over responsibility for that area for a period of two years. That's a very distinct policy setting, and one that I support, because it shows the school community the benefits, where you have two very small schools, of what you can achieve in the overall resourcing available to that school community if you amalgamate campuses. But fundamentally these are questions for those school communities.

This is an interesting issue. It was discussed at the meeting of education ministers I attended last week. It was raised by the New Zealand minister in particular. New Zealand have a declining population, and they have quite a number of small schools. In New Zealand, they are aiming to realise not only savings from operational costs but also savings from capital from the sale of sites. I don't believe that that is a factor here in the ACT. Even when a school has closed in the past, it has been fairly rare that the site has been converted into some other higher value use in dollar terms, such as residential development. Page is an example. It was converted to residential use but on the whole, and quite rightly, communities have said, "If we don't have our school, we still want to see the land retained for community use." I certainly recognise and support that view.



That's what drove our decision in relation to the Griffith Primary School site. Your government believed that some of that site could be realised for housing. That was a view, as you know, that attracted a fair degree of opposition in that community. We certainly recognised that and sought to respond to that. We won't be changing the land use policy for that site. It might not be a school, but the land will still be there for community use. I think in the longer term that's an appropriate response.

**MRS DUNNE:** Do you mean community use or community land use? I think there is a distinction.

**Mr Corbell:** Use consistent with community facility land use policy.

**MS DUNDAS:** I don't want to have a debate about the bus money again, but I have one question left over from it. You mentioned that you have \$7 million yet to be allocated and you'll be getting input from a range of people, including the education advisory committee. Will you also be consulting with the student network that you established this year and the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council?

**Mr Corbell:** In relation to expenditure in schools?

**MS DUNDAS:** The expenditure of that money.

**Mr Corbell:** I wasn't proposing to consult the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council. I think their role is somewhat different. On the Government School Education Council there are student representatives from the student network, so I would tend to take the view that that's where I'll get that input from.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you explain to me the resourcing for the student network? Will there be adequate facilities for those two reps to coordinate consultation with the rest of the network?

**Ms Hinton:** We provide significant support for the student network. We provide training for the young people who are part of that network. That's ongoing, because the people change. We have secretariat support for the network as well as training for the individuals who are on it. We assist them with transport costs when that's necessary to attend training and to attend meetings. When they come to the government school council meetings, sometimes they don't need assistance with transport, but sometimes we provide assistance with transport. A fair degree of support is provided to them, particularly through the secretariat for the student network.

**MS DUNDAS:** And how often does the student network meet?

**Ms Hinton:** About three times a term—10 to 12 times a year.

**MS DUNDAS:** I also have some questions on the reviews.

**THE CHAIR:** I've got some questions since you've opened the issue up of the bus money, but if you want to ask about reviews—

**MS DUNDAS:** I had a follow up question. You had the debate and I just wanted to—

**THE CHAIR:** The cat's out of the bag, Ms Dundas. It's too late now.

**Mr Corbell:** Don't let them crowd you out, Ms Dundas. Don't let them push you around.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can I ask some questions about the reviews?

**THE CHAIR:** You can ask away. I'll come back afterwards.

**MS DUNDAS:** Something like \$420,000 is allocated for reviews in education this financial year. Are you in danger of overemphasising reviews at the expense of augmenting programs and building capacity?

**Mr Corbell:** Not if you look in straight proportional terms at the amount of expenditure we've committed this year. We've just had a discussion about all this money being spent on initiatives in government schooling—\$19.2 million worth of initiatives overall, for both government and non-government schooling, out of the \$27 million commitment.

**MS DUNDAS:** Which does include all that money for reviews?

**Mr Corbell:** Just under half a million of that is being spent on the review process this year. Overall, I don't believe it's disproportionate. The issue for the government, and one I take very seriously, is that we need to make sure that we are considered in what we do and don't simply rely on some anecdotal assumption about what is the best way to deliver a particular service.

A great example is the release today of an interim report on boys education. Before the last election, the previous government was saying, "We're going to seriously consider a boys school and boys only classes." What that review says is that that's not the way to go. If you want to improve educational outcomes for boys, boys only schools or boys only classes aren't the way to go. That's an example of why you need to make sure you've got some considered basis in relation to fairly complex issues.

For example, the review of counselling services is a very complex area. You're dealing with students who often have very challenging behaviours. These are students who are increasingly at the margins in terms of whether or not they stay in school and whether or not they successfully complete year 10 or year 12.

We need to make sure that we have a framework that provides the necessary support in counselling and guidance for those young people. I don't think it's appropriate for government to make decisions about committing funding in those areas without understanding fully the basis on which we are committing funding to do that. To do that you need to do this sort of work.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is the counselling review going to be an internal review, or are you going to contract somebody to do it, and what's the time frame you've put on it?

**Ms Hinton:** It won't be an internal review. We intend to get an external perspective on that. We're working on terms of reference at the moment. We'll be consulting with all key stakeholders on draft terms of reference by the end of August. Then we'll use a tender process to select an appropriate consultant. The terms of reference will seek an analysis of the kinds of support that students with special needs require and not simply—

**MS DUNDAS:** Is it just students with special needs, or is it all students? At the end of high school, in college everybody—

**Ms Hinton:** I didn't mean students with disabilities, sorry. I meant students who have particular needs of one kind or another. Our view would be that most young people are at risk at some point in their adolescent years, and they might need some support at a particular time. Yes, it covers a wide range of students within the school system. An example of where that comes to the fore is with the unfortunate death of a student. If a student dies in a school context, then all of the student body is affected by that experience, and counselling services swing into gear from all sorts of other areas and other schools to provide support. But we need to look at the different kinds of welfare that are required, particularly closer links with other agencies who also provide assistance to students and their families. That was one of the indications that came from the Assembly committee in this area.

**MR PRATT:** Students as communities?

**Ms Hinton:** Some of that. We've had feedback that there are times when students would prefer to seek assistance and advice from someone outside the school. So we need to take a step back from the model we're used to and has been in place for probably decades and say, "What are the needs of students today? What are the different ways in which they can be met? What are the different models, given that different students will respond better to different approaches?" Then we need to look at how best we can craft a service model to meet those needs.

**MS DUNDAS:** And the time frame for the review?

**Ms Hinton:** Early next year.

**MS DUNDAS:** So we can expect funding for any outcomes as part of the next budget?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. I want to be in a position to have the outcome of that clear so that that can inform thinking around the next budget. Can I just quickly add to Ms Hinton's answer. It may be the case that we need to focus on providing a greater level of youth workers working with young people in schools as well as the formal school counsellor.

Youth workers I talk to say often that the relationship between the youth worker and the young person is different and is seen to be more discreet than the relationship between the young person and the school counsellor. The school counsellor is perceived, rightly or wrongly, as working for the department of education and as a teacher. The youth worker is seen as someone from outside of that formal setting. Those are just some of the issues that I want to get a better handle on. They are examples of the sorts of issue I'm keen to see explored.

**MS DUNDAS:** Ms Hinton, you said that you expect all students to be at risk at some point over their school life. Can you explain the current state of counselling services in the ACT? I understand from the DECS website that counsellors' attendance at schools ranges between half a day per week and five days per week. Can you explain to me how many counsellors are working at each level of attendance? How many counsellors are in the school five days a week, and how many counsellors would be at one school only half a day?

**Ms Hinton:** It depends a bit on the size of the schools. Our school population varies from about 100 students to not far off 1,000. So the number of days a counsellor might work in a school will be related quite closely to the numbers of students who are in that school. Essentially, we work on one counsellor to around 730 students. That means that in a college which has in excess of 700 students you'd expect them to be there full time. In smaller primary schools, they would be there on a part-time basis.

But there's considerable flexibility in the way in which the counsellors work. They work as a team. When there is a critical incident, a crisis—I talked about a death—that is unrelated to the school but may affect the student body, then they will swing into gear and will spend a lot of time in supporting the students from that school.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can you tell me how many counsellors you have working at the moment?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes. The equivalent full time load is close to 52, including part time.

**MS DUNDAS:** Will the review of the counselling service take into account what is happening in the department of health with the mental illness education program and youth education and literacy?

**Ms Hinton:** Absolutely. There are a lot of activities on which we want to and do work closely with Health. The child and adolescent mental health services budget initiative will be a particularly important initiative for school students as well as youth.

The mental illness education literacy program will operate in schools, helping teachers and students to understand better the issues associated with mental illness. There is also the indigenous youth alcohol and drug project. All of these are ways we work together.

The department of health has funded us partially for some assistance with the health promoting school model which we're implementing in schools, also some assistance with implementation of a program which I think is called Mind Matters, which again is an issue about student wellbeing. So there is quite an integrated approach around these areas. In addition we've got five youth workers from the youth connection area working in schools. Schools as Communities also employs seven outreach officers who are working in particular areas, providing assistance to students and their families.

**MS DUNDAS:** Maybe this is something that will come out in a review, but because of the funding from Health to destigmatise mental illness, do you anticipate a greater need for counsellors as people—and it's a fluctuating thing—become more aware and stigma breaks down within each year group?

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**Mr Corbell:** I think if we've got an effective framework for counselling we'll be reaching those young people who need counselling and support. It's a very difficult thing to quantify, Ms Dundas, but the bottom line is to make sure we've got a contemporary relevant framework that provides support of this kind to young people.

**MS DUNDAS:** But will the review be looking at any increase in demand that may arise as stigmatisation breaks down?

**Mr Corbell:** Certainly the assessment will look at the current situation and what has occurred since counselling services were last reviewed, which, as Ms Hinton indicated, was some decades ago. Current trends and potential future trends will certainly be taken into account.

**Mr PRATT:** The \$100,000 committed last financial year to the Connors inquiry and the \$440,000 make about \$540,000. I would like to follow up Ms Dundas's point about the number of inquiries being run. I would have thought that was a hell of a lot of money to spend on inquiries which will take a fair amount of time. Did the ALP, coming into government, already have in mind initiatives that it may be able to implement?

**Ms Gallagher:** Like painting the grass green?

**MR PRATT:** Surely, a new minister would need a couple of hundred thousand just to get things working with inquiries. Could you not have spent some of the money allocated to inquiries on urgent initiatives, particularly in the teacher shortages area and the children at risk area to remove the burden from stressed teachers? Could these things not have been looked at?

**Mr Corbell:** There is significant funding in this budget for young people at risk.

**Mr PRATT:** There is but—

**Mr Corbell:** To be fair, Mr Pratt, I don't recall the Liberal Party's education policy document dealing specifically with counselling services or career advice either.

**Mr PRATT:** That's history, Minister.

**Mr Corbell:** But it's entirely relevant. You say, "Why didn't you have it?" I'm saying that you didn't have it either. The reason neither of us had it is that these are very detailed and complex areas about which any sensible government would say, "Let's do the work to understand the scope and the range of the problem and how it can be best addressed."

The total ACT government education budget is close to \$300 million. You've got a sector that costs close to \$300 million per annum to run. I think it's a reasonable investment and a very cost-effective investment to spend half a million dollars out of close to \$300 million to make sure that the services we're delivering are effective and contemporary.

**Mr PRATT:** But consuming the first year of your three years in government before action can be identified and taken begs the question, doesn't it?

**Mr Corbell:** No, it doesn't.

**Mr PRATT:** It must.

**Mr Corbell:** Only to you, Mr Pratt.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Mr Pratt, if they allocated all the money without being informed via reviews, you'd be sitting there saying the same thing.

**Mr PRATT:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we'll go for afternoon tea.

### **Short adjournment**

**THE CHAIR:** We'll go in a few minutes to VET and CIT, but for the moment we'll continue with education.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, I go back to the \$19 million over four years that's already allocated and the \$250,000 over four years, or \$1 million, for IT upgrades. That is for Catholic systemic schools exclusively?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** What has happened to Catholic non-systemic schools and other non-government schools?

**Mr Corbell:** There's no money allocated in this budget for their IT needs.

**MRS DUNNE:** So they're on their own?

**Mr Corbell:** The commitment was fairly explicit. It was a commitment to Catholic systemic schools, and we've met that commitment. What the Chief Minister has said, and what I've said in the Assembly and elsewhere, is that we will certainly consider the needs of non-systemic Catholic and other non-government schools based on individual submission, particularly in the context of the Connors report.

**MRS DUNNE:** But prior to the tabling, consideration and determination of the outcome of the Connors report, and therefore the allocation of the \$7 million slush fund, if a non-systemic Catholic school or another non-government school felt the need to come to you for IT funding, where would you go for the money?

**Mr Corbell:** If it occurred this financial year?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes.

**Mr Corbell:** As a rule, I'd be considering those requests in the context of next year's budget.

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**MRS DUNNE:** So what that means is that this year everyone except Catholic systemic schools are on their own? There is no IT money this year? So when you said it would be considered on a case-by-case basis, that wasn't true?

**Mr Corbell:** No, it was true.

**MRS DUNNE:** You would consider it but then you would say no, because there's no money.

**Mr Corbell:** If I recall correctly—and I'm sure you'll correct me if I'm wrong—only one other non-government school made a specific request for IT support. No other non-government school made a specific request for additional support for IT needs.

**MRS DUNNE:** Because you've made it clear that there's no money.

**Mr Corbell:** You can't have it both ways. You said I considered them and I said no. What I'm saying to you is that that's not correct and that only one school—it was a very small school—made a request for support. We didn't believe it was a request that we could support in the current budget context.

**MRS DUNNE:** So the only school in the category that isn't currently covered and that did apply got knocked back?

**Mr Corbell:** That's correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Could I just go back to the \$7 million and ask you to give some indication of the process you're going to use to spend the money. I want to quote to you what you said when you were in the position of being chair of this committee two years ago. When you were giving a report to the house on the outcome of the estimates committee, you said:

Mr Speaker, outside the Chief Minister's portfolio, there were a number of recommendations in relation to health that the committee was particularly concerned about. The first relates to the proposed discretionary funding—some more unkindly would call it a slush fund—for the minister for health. Mr Speaker, the committee appreciated the efforts to which the minister went in attempting to detail to the committee exactly where this discretionary funding would take place.

It highlights the importance of having an estimates process that the minister was required to come forward and explain exactly how that discretionary funding was going to be used.

Why today can't we ask for details about how the discretionary funding is going to be used, given what you said two years ago?

**Mr Corbell:** I'm very happy to explain why. The situation two years ago was that you appropriated money for the minister for health to choose to spend in the same financial year. This government has indicated that the money is appropriated, but if you refer to your budget papers you will see it's appropriated for the next financial year.

The government will detail how it will spend that money in next year's budget. It will already be appropriated, but you'll see the detail of the expenditure in next year's budget, and it will be able to be examined and tested in the context of next year's estimates.

**THE CHAIR:** So you argue that if you're going to spend the money in the same financial year you have an obligation to detail how you're going to spend that money?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You can apply that principle to other discretionary funds which are being set up under this budget as well. Thank you for that advice.

**Mr Corbell:** You're very welcome.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, \$420,000 is allocated to teachers' laptops. Ms Hinton, could you quickly describe to me what the support package is for that asset? In particular, I'd like to know what measures you have in place to insure against loss and damage. What's the support package for this allocation of assets?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll certainly leave the detail to Ms Hinton and others. This is a program which I think is very valuable. It's valuable because the added flexibility that accrues to teachers and to schools by being able to have a percentage of their IT needs supplied through a laptop can't be underestimated.

Whilst I don't believe, as a rule, that IT and flash IT infrastructure are an end in themselves, they are a means to an end. Giving teachers flexibility to deliver relevant learning with the assistance of ICT, through a laptop computer, is very valuable.

The money comes out of the \$2 million for IT in government schools—as you rightly identified, \$420,000 per annum over a three-year period. That means up to 30 per cent of all the new computers schools are able to get through the IT renewal program can be laptops.

The beauty of the program is that there is discretion. Schools can choose to order up to 30 per cent of their total package to meet their needs. Some schools might take the full 30 per cent; others might take lesser amounts. It just depends on what their needs are.

**MR PRATT:** That's a laudable plan. I think it's fine, but the support package is very important. What are the details, please?

**MS DUNDAS:** Can I clarify that statement, Minister? Does that mean that if a school chooses they don't have to take any laptops at all; they can spend that money on scanners or on new desktop computers?

**Mr Corbell:** They can spend it on the other parts of the package that's been made available to them.

**MS DUNDAS:** And the other parts of the package are?



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**Mr Corbell:** Desktop PCs are the other key component of the package.

**MS DUNDAS:** So it's a desktop PC or a laptop?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** You can take 30 per cent in laptops or 100 per cent in PCs?

**Mr Wheeler:** We expect schools to take up a good deal of the laptop option, because we're providing extra funds for that. But we don't expect them to spend it on other things. I guess if a school said that they had no need for any laptops, then we wouldn't give them extra money to spend on other things.

**MR PRATT:** So it's tied funding?

**Mr Wheeler:** Yes, as the teacher computer program is. But there'd be a fair degree of flexibility around what they wanted to use it for within the teacher IT environment.

**MS DUNDAS:** And is it expected that—

**MR PRATT:** What happened to my answer?

**MS DUNDAS:** I am still on the laptops.

**MR PRATT:** I have half an answer floating, but that's okay.

**MS DUNDAS:** You said laptops were to meet diverse educational needs in a range of situations. Are you providing the tools for teachers to do more work at home? Will there be guidelines about where the laptops can go and when?

**Ms Hinton:** Teachers were given access to their own PC for the first time three years ago or thereabouts. The arrangements under that program enabled teachers, with the agreement of their schools, to have the PC at home, in recognition of what teachers were saying to us—that they like to do a lot of their work at home.

This program responds to the feedback we've had from schools and from teachers that they believe that the situation has changed somewhat and that they would like to have the PCs at school but they would like to have a significant proportion of laptops so that individual teachers can take them home and do work at home. They could take them perhaps to a professional development day. They could take a laptop into the classroom and be working on it with students.

**MS DUNDAS:** There was a report yesterday from the Industrial Relations Commission about long working hours. We know our teachers work long hours. We're trying to address that by getting more teachers into the system. Are we monitoring the out-of-school work our teachers are doing?

**Mr Corbell:** Teachers are doing that already, regardless of the technology they have.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are you looking at ways of addressing it?

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**Mr Corbell:** Longer working hours are a phenomenon not unique to teaching. This occurs right across a whole series of sectors in the work force. The issues around working hours, from a schooling perspective, are fundamentally dealt with through the negotiations the government has every three years with the teachers and their union in their enterprise bargaining arrangement. I know the union has already flagged that working hours are an issue. We expect to address that through that negotiation.

**MS DUNDAS:** And when is that negotiation going to take place?

**Mr Corbell:** The agreement expires about the middle of next year, so from the first quarter onwards next year we'll be actively talking with teachers about that.

**Ms Hinton:** Teachers value flexibility in where they do their work, as do many other members of the community who like to be able to do some work at home, particularly if they have other responsibilities, and not being required to be at their workplace for a fixed period of time. That's what the laptops are in part aimed at addressing.

**MR PRATT:** Could I ask again please for the detail of the support package for the laptop allocation of asset. What do you have in the budget and what are the support plans in place? What are the arrangements you have for insurance support?

**Mr Wheeler:** Both the desktops and the laptops have a three-year warranty. For desktops it's on site; for laptops it's off site, but the supplier will pick them up and take them away to fix them.

On the question of insurance, they're no different from any other assets held in the school. The government policy covers all school assets down to \$25,000, and the agency covers the difference. The government bears the risk up to \$25,000, and schools are free to use their own funds, as they do for other equipment, to insure computers if they wish to. It's an individual decision.

**MR PRATT:** So loss of laptops at home may not be covered. From a departmental point of view they are not covered. You're leaving it to the school to make that decision, are you?

**Mr Wheeler:** No. It would be school property. A single laptop lost would not be covered anyway. The limit is \$25,000. We bear the cost up to that.

**THE CHAIR:** If we can cut in here, we might hear from vocational education and CIT.

**Mr Corbell:** Would you like to do CIT first, Chairman, and then VET?

**THE CHAIR:** Vocational education and training is next in order, but if members don't mind I'm happy to deal with CIT next. I don't mind.

**Mr Corbell:** We can do them concurrently. There's a bit of overlap.

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**THE CHAIR:** That's fine. I assume the same people will be answering the questions. We'll start with broad questions about vocational education and CIT. Could I start by asking about the number of course enrolments the CIT is expected to deliver this year? I see that there has been an increase in your funding. The minister, I think, said it was \$700,000.

**Mr Corbell:** Overall it is just over \$2 million.

**THE CHAIR:** Overall, \$2 million this year. But the figures seem to suggest that there has been a cut in the number of curriculum hours from 4.1 to 3.75 and similarly a drop in the number of course enrolments from 15,000 to just over 12,000. What's the explanation for that?

**Mr Veenker:** I think the figures that you may be referring to are what is in the purchase agreement, what the government buys, and also the targets that are set internally for CIT which are in excess of the purchase agreement, because we can never accurately predict what the demand from students will be. Generally speaking, last year we overdelivered by 6 per cent, because demand was very strong in some areas and we still had the capability.

**THE CHAIR:** You're saying the target is higher than the demand from previous years?

**Mr Veenker:** Internally.

**THE CHAIR:** Comparing demand with the target is the reason for the apparent drop?

**Ms Hinton:** I think it's helpful, Mr Chair, to compare the 2001-02 target with the 2002-03 target, which in my area is on page 331. That's the process which occurs through the purchase agreement. But CIT, as Mr Veenker has just said—through its own processes, the way it manages courses, et cetera—sometimes overdelivers on that. "Overdelivers" is a difficult term, but it manages to provide more training hours than they have been asked to do for the funding. The target for annual curriculum hours, from the perspective of the department, has increased in 2002-03 from 2001-02.

**THE CHAIR:** I suppose then it doesn't matter if the target is \$3.7 million. You've got capacity to deliver more than that, and obviously if you get demand like you had last year, you'll be delivering more than \$3.7 million.

**Mr Wheeler:** Part of the extra funding that's going to the CIT is the passing on of additional moneys coming from the Commonwealth through ANTA. We're purchasing an extra 100,000 hours a year. At their present average hourly rate of about \$12.73, that pretty well takes care of about \$1.27 million worth of extra funding, which is what's coming through from the Commonwealth.

**THE CHAIR:** In other words, there shouldn't be any decline in the number of hours of teaching or the number of courses overall that the CIT is offering this year over last year?

**Mr Veenker:** We would expect a similar amount to what we delivered last year.

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**MS DUNDAS:** I'll start off by asking about St Anne's Convent.

**Mr Corbell:** This is where I was last year.

**MS DUNDAS:** We'll see where we're at next year, Mr Corbell. I understand that we've made \$317,000 from the sale of St Anne's Convent. Can you tell me who bought that property?

**Mr Corbell:** It was bought by a private developer. I can't recall their name. The transaction occurred two financial years ago. With all due respect to the wide-ranging brief of the committee, it did occur two financial years ago.

**MS DUNDAS:** I'm interested in how depreciation works for CIT. It seems that there was a need to review the depreciation expenses for buildings owned by CIT that were previously revalued downwards; is this correct? I'm getting my information from the statement of agreement. It says that there was a decrease of \$0.236 million in 2001-02 from the original budget due to the disposal of assets in 2001-2002 and the review of depreciation expenses for buildings previously revalued downwards. Can you explain to me why there was a need for that review?

**Mr Veenker:** We regularly have proper assessments of the asset values. This is done through proper valuers. Hence the value is considered lower. Don't forget it's the use that they look at in determining the valuation of the building. We sold St Anne's for in the vicinity of \$1.1 million.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is the gain of \$317,000 in this budget from St Anne's Convent this year's proportion of the sale two financial years ago?

**Mr Corbell:** Where are you referring to, Ms Dundas?

**MS DUNDAS:** It's in the CIT statement of intent. It's referred to on page 3. But it's the same information as in the cash flow statement of CIT.

**MS GALLAGHER:** It's on page 506 of the old one.

**MS DUNDAS:** It talks about the increase in other revenue. It refers specifically to St Anne's Convent. Because I wasn't on estimates last year, I missed Mr Corbell's insightful dialogue about this then.

**Mr Corbell:** I don't know how insightful it was.

**THE CHAIR:** You obviously missed it if you say that.

**Mr Veenker:** We have sought clarification. The figure is the profit over the book value.

**MS DUNDAS:** If you sold St Anne's two financial years ago, why is the profit from that sale being counted this financial year?

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**Mr O'Leary:** It's when the income comes in. Between when we determined the successful bidder and when the contract was finalised, it was necessary to resolve certain issues associated with the lease. The payment of the funds didn't happen until last financial year. St Anne's had a certain book value. We sold it for a different value. The \$317,000 was the difference between what we got and the book value.

**MS DUNDAS:** This goes back to the question I was asking about depreciation. Was St Anne's on the books at the wrong value?

**Mr O'Leary:** No.

**MS DUNDAS:** Or were you just really good at selling it?

**MRS DUNNE:** I think that's an example of the market at work.

**MS DUNDAS:** You said that you value your properties on the market rate.

**Mr Veenker:** On what we use them for.

**Mr Corbell:** It's quite common for the market value as assessed by a valuer and the actual value realised at an auction to be different, especially in the current market.

**Mr O'Leary:** We were using the St Anne's property for a particular purpose which gave it a certain value.

**MS DUNDAS:** And that was student accommodation?

**Mr O'Leary:** We were intending to. It was never used for that purpose. It wasn't used, because there were problems with asbestos and a number of other issues associated with the building. The building had a certain value for that purpose. Each year the building would have been depreciated according to a standard methodology, as are all of the other buildings CIT has.

That methodology was revised by the valuer a couple of years ago, which is what you were referring to before. So the value of the building would have been progressively marked down. However, when you sell the property, you sell the building and the land, and the land has a different value, depending on the purpose to which it could be put. They're putting it to a different purpose. From their point of view, the property had a different value to the value when it was used by a government agency.

**MS DUNDAS:** It's all making sense now. I have one last question on St Anne's. What are you doing with the \$300,000?

**Mr Veenker:** We're very conscious of student accommodation needs. Subject to the approval of the minister, we're in the preliminary stages of looking at providing student accommodation—looking at their needs and how we might solve them. We're looking at various options associated with that.

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**MR PRATT:** Minister, I am looking at output class 3. Clearly the activity plan for the current financial year is about the same as it has been. The priority you've talked about is a good move—to revamp or to keep developing the VET program that the previous government had started to re crank. Where do you plan to start expanding the CIT's capacity to take on more VET activities? Is there something else in the budget I haven't seen for increasing college capability to further VET training?

**Mr Corbell:** I'm not quite sure where you're referring to in the budget documents, Mr Pratt. I made reference in this morning's session to Skills 500. I guess they've been a bit underwhelmed by the number of applications from employers to take advantage of that incentive. We've had a modest take-up of Skills 500.

That experience over the past six months has led me and led the department to believe that there must be some better ways of improving the delivery of VET, especially for young people facing disadvantage and especially in regard to trying to get VET money to young people so that they can continue in some form of formal education or training.

As I indicated this morning, we will be working through a process which will commence shortly on the range of programs that are currently delivered through training and adult education in the department. That area will look very carefully at the experience of industry training activity and a range of other activities, and we will look at some ways of better focusing the dollars as a result of that. I'd be keen to see some outcomes early in the new year. That's the indicative timetable at this stage.

In relation to funding to CIT, there are some pressures the CIT faces which do need to be addressed and I'll be continuing to talk with Mr Veenker in particular and teachers at CIT about ways that that can be done. But at this stage there are no specific proposals in relation to additional funding outside of what's in this budget for CIT or in the VET area generally.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to be clear, what does the extra \$2 million in CIT buy?

**Mr Wheeler:** The primary chunk of extra training is in the 100,000 extra hours purchased with that \$1.29 million that has been passed across. Some of that \$2 million is also for indexation and for contributions towards teachers EBAs.

**MRS DUNNE:** Did I hear you say before, Mr Wheeler, that some of that was federal money?

**Mr Wheeler:** The \$1.29 million is federal money, yes.

**Mr Corbell:** That's money from ANTA, the Australian National Training Authority.

**Mr Wheeler:** It is provided on the basis that the territory matches it. So the territory has to increase the budget in the VET area by a similar amount in order to get that funding. We've done that, and that's why we've got it.

**MRS DUNNE:** So where is the similar amount?

**Mr Wheeler:** For one thing, there's the indexation on the teachers EBA money that I mentioned before. In the past year there was the virtual campus funding. But each year the territory must analyse its contribution to make sure that it attracts that Commonwealth funding.

**MRS DUNNE:** Excuse me for being a bit dim, but doesn't that mean that ANTA says, "Here's a bucket of money, however sized" and they ask for a matching of it, so you look at your budget and say, "There's a bucket of money the same size that we'll say is the matching" or do you have to increase it?

**Mr Wheeler:** You have to increase it. For the last few years it has been what they call growth through efficiencies. They required states and territories to increase their training effort without any additional funding, which meant productivity had to go up. Last year was the first year they moved back to additional moneys for growth, and that's what this is about.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is it an extra \$2 million matched by an extra \$2 million so it's an extra \$4 million, or is it half a million?

**Mr Wheeler:** CIT received some additional funding in the previous year, and it stays in there and we add to it further funding so that the 2002-03 amount totals just under \$1.3 million additional money. In the next year there'll be another half a million coming from the Commonwealth, provided we can demonstrate we've increased funding by half a million dollars.

**MS DUNDAS:** You said some of that money is going to the teachers EBA and indexation. There is \$175,000 in this budget for employment change for CIT teachers. Can you explain what that is?

**Mr Corbell:** That relates to recognition of long-term casual teachers and a change to their employment status, given that often they have been casual teachers for very extended periods of time. It recognises that their status is now permanent casuals or contract teachers. That results in a change in the pay and conditions of those teachers.

**MS DUNDAS:** And it's a one-off payment this year? I'm trying to figure out how it works. You've made a one-off payment this year, and it's not being repeated in other years. Is that because the ongoing costs associated with having teachers on a contract or permanent are being subsumed into the normal staffing budget?

**Mr Veenker:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** So has the staffing budget also increased?

**Mr Veenker:** We think we can manage a decrease in the level of casualisation within the existing resources. Our target is to have 25 per cent casual teachers. That brings it down from what we have been operating on, which has been about 36 per cent from time to time. We feel we can manage that and the support is appropriate.

**MS DUNDAS:** The change from 36 per cent to 25 per cent will be subsumed in the normal indexation that is happening with employee expenses?

**Mr Veenker:** Still how we work the total budget within CIT.

**Mr Corbell:** It depends also on the exact rate of take-up by casual teachers. Following strong representations from teachers at CIT, the government agreed and CIT agreed to convert those positions to contract and permanent employment. But the exact level of take-up is a matter for individual teachers. It may be that take-up isn't as strong as we anticipate or it may be to the full extent. We just have to wait and see.

**MS DUNDAS:** You mentioned the teachers EBA. Is that the one coming up for negotiation, or are you talking about ongoing pay increases from the last negotiation?

**Mr Corbell:** No, these are EBA increases as a result of the last agreement.

**Mr PRATT:** Just putting aside the Skills 500 program for the moment, are you in a position to describe the sorts of strategies or other surges you intend to run to get this VET thing moving along? Hopefully, there won't be another inquiry.

**Mr Corbell:** You're doing one, Mr Pratt, so we'll rely on yours.

**Mr PRATT:** That's what I'm here for, Minister

**Mr Corbell:** Seriously, the Assembly inquiry is an important inquiry, and we'll certainly treat recommendations from that seriously.

**Mr PRATT:** We'll save you the expenditure of running one.

**Mr Corbell:** We're always happy to cost-shift to the Assembly, Mr Pratt. What we have said and what I've said today, Mr Pratt, is that we're going to look at ways of focusing our dollars better, especially around support for disadvantaged young people, but there is no specific proposal at this stage. The activity will be conducted in house, with some external assistance, and we'll work through a process which will also be informed, hopefully, by the findings of the Assembly inquiry, if it's in the appropriate time frame.

**MR PRATT:** Would you hope to drag on Commonwealth funding to assist you with that process, given the Federal government's priority?

**Mr Corbell:** I beg your pardon

**MR PRATT:** Would you be hoping to drag on some federal government funding to help kick this along?

**Mr Corbell:** This process?

**MR PRATT:** Yes.

**Mr Corbell:** In terms of funding?

**MR PRATT:** Yes.



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**Mr Corbell:** For the review or for the actual activity?

**MR PRATT:** For implementing enhanced VET as a stronger component of our education. Have you got some plans for that?

**Mr Corbell:** I never say no to Commonwealth funding, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** Do you have a plan for it?

**Mr Corbell:** All state and territory ministers at the recent ANTA ministerial council meeting—

**MS GALLAGHER:** All Labor. Sorry, I just had to get that in.

**Mr Corbell:** It's just synonymous now.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Yes, you just accept it.

**Mr Corbell:** All state and territory ministers are Labor ministers.

**THE CHAIR:** What goes up must come down.

**Mr Corbell:** You had your chance with Tasmania, Mr Humphries. All state and territory ministers at the recent ANTA ministerial council meeting requested that the federal government provide an additional \$130 million nationally to support programs for young people at risk. Clearly the delivery of VET to those young people would be an important component of that request. I and my Labor colleagues in other states and territories have unanimously been lobbying the Commonwealth to make additional funds available. So, yes, I am taking action at a national level, along with my colleagues.

**MS DUNDAS:** In the statement of intent for CIT in attachment A, page 4, there's reference to administrative expenses and a reclassification of insurance cost and other expenses offset by a discount for IT costs, partly refunding previous years' invoices. It also refers to another cost offset by increased IT costs as the discount received in 2001-02 ceases. Can you explain to me what's going on there? Does CIT receive its IT services from InTACT? Is this to do with the incorrect invoices that InTACT has now wiped off as bad debt?

**Mr Veenker:** I wouldn't have thought so. We do deal with InTACT, but I wouldn't have thought that would be the case.

**MS DUNDAS:** What is this referring to?

**Mr O'Leary:** Last year InTACT identified the fact that there had been some overcharging of all agencies in the ACT government and it made a return to all agencies of various amounts of money.

**MS DUNDAS:** And that return was in the form of a discount for future services, not necessarily a lump sum cheque.

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**Mr O'Leary:** We never received the money. We had it credited against our future obligations. We didn't expect that the money would be converted, but we had a credit, if you like.

**MS DUNDAS:** Will this lead to a greater growth of IT services being purchased from InTACT by CIT because you now have this discount, extra funding?

**Mr O'Leary:** It was a one-off adjustment. Therefore, it doesn't have a recurrent impact.

**MS DUNDAS:** What are you going to spend the one-off adjustment on?

**Mr Veenker:** It will be discounted against ongoing services that we receive from InTACT.

**MS DUNDAS:** So you're making savings?

**Mr Veenker:** We work according to our student demand and staff demand, and this is a credit against that.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you've got a credit in the bank with InTACT?

**Mr Veenker:** On their account, yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** I'm still trying to understand.

**Mr O'Leary:** It's not a windfall for us.

**MS DUNDAS:** Are you just going to bank it?

**Mr Veenker:** What will we do with the money?

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes.

**Mr Veenker:** You can't say what you would do with those particular dollars. Because it was an unanticipated amount of money, it will lead to a surplus at the end of last year's accounts. Because we work on a calendar year, that will have shown up at the end of last calendar year. Working out this year's budget, we would take into account that we had that. We have a series of educational initiatives which we run each year. The amount of those educational initiatives goes up and down, depending on the amount of money we've got available. For instance, this year we will have done certain educational things that we wouldn't have been able to do if that particular money hadn't arisen. That could have been a particular project, or it could have been the purchase of equipment, but in the scheme of our total budget it's a relatively small amount of money.

**MS DUNDAS:** You've also raised another question I wanted to ask about—the fact that CIT reports on a calendar year. I would hazard a guess almost everybody else in ACT government reports on a financial year as part of the budget processes. Is there any reason why you report on a calendar year, and has there been any discussion about moving you in line to be on a financial year?

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**Mr Veenker:** The reason is that all TAFE institutes around Australia operate on a calendar year basis.

**MS DUNDAS:** It's a national program?

**Mr Veenker:** No, it's consistency in the way educational institutions operate in this sector. It's not dissimilar to the way universities operate as well.

**Mr O'Leary:** However, we do provide financial reporting back to our purchaser on a calendar year basis as well, so that there can be a reconciliation between the—

**MS DUNDAS:** Sorry, was that a calendar year or financial year?

**Mr O'Leary:** Financial year.

**Mr Veenker:** We do both.

**Mr O'Leary:** We provide both, but because we enrol our students, our casual teachers and people like that—all of those expenses are on a calendar year basis—it's much more natural and it fits in line with what happens on a national basis to do it on a calendar year basis. It's not causing a problem.

**Mr Corbell:** Equally, to a degree, government schooling plans and operates on a calendar year basis even though it reports on a financial year basis.

**MS DUNDAS:** I understand now. It was interesting reading the statements around it.

**Mr Corbell:** I'd be happy to have my Christmas holidays in the middle of winter if I could.

**MS DUNDAS:** And miss out on estimates? In the output for coordination and purchasing of vocational education and training services, you have condensed the number of training commencements through competitive processes and the number of training agreements administered under user choice to one output of the number of persons in training under programs available for competitive purchase.

This is on page 29 of the loose-leaf. I have no idea where it is in the budget paper. Can you explain how those numbers are being rationalised into the 4,800 and how those three outputs compare? With the squishing of the two outputs into one, what are we now looking at, and how does that figure relate back to the two figures before?

**Mr Wheeler:** Essentially, we've changed the performance measure from the number of agreements or contracts to the actual people undertaking training. We think that that's a more useful measure, because an agreement may have a number of people in it. It may have a lot; it may only have a few. And ditto with the contracts. We think this is a more accurate reflection of the level of activity. We've ceased the others and started this one.

**MRS DUNNE:** They're not really comparable, are they?

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**Mr Wheeler:** They're not comparable in that sense. We've disbanded looking at agreements, and we're looking at people under training, in place.

**MRS DUNNE:** That seems to make more sense.

**Mr Wheeler:** It's a bit like comparing it with the hours of training for CIT. It makes a bit more sense. There's only one contract between us and CIT. It's that's sort of thing.

**MS DUNDAS:** I was wondering if there was any way we could make a comparison between what was going on last year and what's going on this year.

**Mr Wheeler:** I'll have to take on notice whether we have the number of people on it as well as contracts. We may have. We could give you some numbers if you'd like to see a comparison. We'll take it on notice.

**MS DUNDAS:** That would be great. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We will go specifically to output class 3, vocational education and training. It says in the old BP4 that there is expected to be a decline in revenue from the ACT government of \$198,000 due to fewer training courses being expected during the year from government agencies. Why do you expect fewer ACT government agencies to be doing training courses, to the tune of nearly \$200,000?

**Mr Veenker:** We were heavily involved in training in a number of areas associated with accrual accounting, and we think we've satisfied that need, and hence we don't anticipate the same level in the future.

**THE CHAIR:** You're still getting large numbers of courses on accrual accounting as late as last year, three years after it was introduced?

**Mr Veenker:** Yes. We've developed on-line packages as well.

**Ms Hinton:** I assume, Mr Chair, that there were courses from Commonwealth government users too.

**THE CHAIR:** The figures suggest that the reduction was due to ACT government courses not happening, but that might be an overstatement. How is the virtual campus or the virtual CIT progressing, and what sorts of courses are now offered under that program?

**Mr Veenker:** That's going very well. We have 500 modules that can be accessed via that particular mode. That's 500 that have five or more students in them. They're predominantly in the business IT-related areas but will be expanding into the human services areas as well.

There are 5,000 student accounts. That means they're accessing on-line delivery. The money has been largely spent on on-line support teams for staff and students and on-line course development, but we've also had a very good relationship with other systems around Australia, and therefore we've shared expertise. There have been expenses

associated with leases and software licences. But I think that there has been a good outcome for us.

**THE CHAIR:** Do students who have accounts or enrolments with one of those virtual courses have means of accessing a real-life person for inquiries or for further clarification of issues and so on?

**Mr Veenker:** Yes. The option is to do the module totally on line, but there's a whole range of other delivery strategies that the student can access as well. Certainly they can attend campus. They can also attend the flexible learning centre that is available on our different campuses and in Tuggeranong as well.

**THE CHAIR:** That sounds good. If there are no further questions in the area of VET or CIT, I thank the officers from that area for attending. We'll go back to education more generally.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have a general question that relates to the \$19.2 million over four years and specifically to the reduction of class sizes for year 3. I state my interest, in that I have someone going into year 3 next year.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Which stream of schooling?

**MRS DUNNE:** Year 3.

**MR HARGREAVES:** In a Catholic school or non-Catholic school?

**MRS DUNNE:** In the ACT government system. I should put on the record, Mr Chairman, that at the moment I have a member of my family in every phase of the ACT schooling system from preschool to university, and I use both the public and the private system. But with the issue of the year 3 I don't have any barrow to push.

**MR HARGREAVES:** If you can't recruit them, breed them, I always say. That's an old Labor party adage. That's how you get the numbers.

**MRS DUNNE:** I want to get back to the year 3s, who can't vote in preselections. There's \$1 million set aside for capital. Is that a one-off?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, it is.

**MRS DUNNE:** That's the transportables. You buy them in the first year. There's \$1.2 million next year for recurrent. What's the recurrent in the outyears.

**Mr Corbell:** There is \$1.247 million this year.

**MRS DUNNE:** So do we know what the figures are in the outyears?

**Mr Corbell:** The figures I have, Mrs Dunne, are just over \$3 million for 2003-04 \$3½ million in 2004-05 and \$3.6 million in 2005-06.

**MS DUNDAS:** Did you mean to say just under \$3 million?

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**Mr Corbell:** Just over \$3 million in 2003-04. That's the figure I have. That's from my briefing notes.

**MRS DUNNE:** What have you got?

**MS DUNDAS:** The figure in the budget paper on page 6 is \$2,900,000.

**Mr Corbell:** My apologies. I think that must be an error in my brief. Yes, \$2.968 million, \$3.522 million, \$3.610 million.

**MS DUNDAS:** If you were getting different numbers to us, that would be incredibly exciting.

**Mr Corbell:** My apologies.

**MRS DUNNE:** What causes the ramp up from \$1.2 million to \$2.9 million?

**Ms Hinton:** We're commencing the introduction of the lower class sizes in year 3 from the beginning of the 2003 calendar year—

**MRS DUNNE:** It's half a year. You don't have to finish. It's all right.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have a question about the \$70,000 review of school reporting. Is this a repeat of the consultation done about reporting on literacy and numeracy outcomes in government schools?

**Mr Corbell:** No, it isn't. The previous government, if you recall, had a proposal in relation to reporting. I forget the specifics.

**Ms Hinton:** It was reporting school average results to the parents of that school community.

**Mr Corbell:** This government made a decision not to report the school result to parents. We report to parents on the individual student result but not on the school result. We think that leads to some fairly serious potential problems in relation to league tables, and we don't want to go there. We don't think it's appropriate.

**MS DUNDAS:** I agree with the government on this.

**Mr Corbell:** However, at the same time I didn't want to simply say that that was the end of the discussion about reporting. I believe that reporting does have considerable benefits, as long as issues around unfair comparisons are properly taken into account. Reporting can lead to significant improvement in the focus that individual schools and individual teachers provide to students in addressing the needs of those students and where those students may be not performing as well as their peers.

So the review of school reporting isn't simply to address issues around literacy and numeracy. It's also to look at whether there are other measures that it would be appropriate to report on as well. That's a view that has also been put forward by the P&C

association here in the ACT. They believe that there is potentially a range of other issues that it would be appropriate for the government to look at reporting on, not just the straight literacy and numeracy.

**MS DUNDAS:** But the consultation that was done in 2000 by DECS on the reporting on literacy and numeracy outcomes in ACT government schools, I assume, would have fed a lot of different ideas into DECS. Is the information from that consultation going to be used in this review?

**Mr Corbell:** Without a doubt. It's important to stress that this is a process that will be undertaken by the Government School Education Council. It's one of their tasks that I will be formally referring to them. We want to make sure that that's effectively resourced so that they can do that work. I'm sure that they will take account of existing research and information in making their recommendations to me.

**MS DUNDAS:** And it's just for government schools?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MR PRATT:** After you analyse the reporting system as it now stands and what recommendations you might implement, do you support a system of formal reporting? I agree it should cover many areas other than literacy and mathematics. Where do you think you're going with that? What do you think is appropriate feedback to parents and to the community? Once you get that formula sorted out and a fair, balanced testing regime in place, what have you got in mind?

**Mr Corbell:** The government doesn't have any specific agenda except to make sure we continue to have a contemporary reporting framework for parents on the performance of their children. As I've indicated, the value of reporting has been demonstrated in the outcomes teachers can deliver to students, along with the parents of those students as a result of being informed by the performance of their children through the existing reporting framework.

I don't have any particular agenda, except to make sure it's a contemporary framework. The key issue is that whatever framework we have for reporting there has to be a high level of ownership and acceptance in the education community. For it to work well, it can't be a divisive agenda of reporting on some things which some people may want but which others may feel very strongly about and say shouldn't be happening.

The point of the Government School Education Council process is to build that consensus and get a consensus view across the government school education community about ways of improving still further on the reporting framework and in particular take advantage of looking at the experience of individual schools that already report to parents outside the formal framework in a whole series of ways. They report in the traditional report card way. They report in a more qualitative way. There's a range of measures that are already being used by the schools. Drawing on that experience as well will be important.

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**MR PRATT:** How do you see the community being able to quality assure its schools? What role with the government play in that? I take your point about ownership by various education stakeholders across the community, but how do you see what the broader community would demand from its schools kicking in?

**Mr Corbell:** The Government School Education Council has representatives from the specific education community as well as broader community representation. It doesn't simply have people on it who are representative of particular parts of government school education. There are community representatives as well.

**MR PRATT:** I want to ask you a question about that later.

**Mr Corbell:** Clearly, that level of input is valuable. Ms Hinton is drawing to my attention that the school development process is in itself a quality assurance process for government schooling, so there is already a framework for quality assurance in relation to the government school sector.

**Mr Coleborne:** The school development process that is used in the ACT is one of the very powerful ways that the system maintains its strength and its credibility, with schools being assessed every five years. All schools go through this process, working on a cluster basis, using high schools and the feeder primary schools, involving parents, teachers and students in that process, providing feedback and information and then working on a plan for the school on the basis of that. That process will continue, as it has in the past, with further refinement and efforts improve it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I go back to about quarter past 2 this afternoon. I'm sorry to do this, Ms Hinton, but then we were talking about the \$14 million worth of new money. You mentioned that there was some for indexation. What was the indexation item?

**Ms Hinton:** It was about \$5.9 million.

**MRS DUNNE:** What does it cover? Indexation for what?

**Ms Hinton:** For cost increases in the government schooling budget.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you get that from Treasury as a matter of course?

**Ms Hinton:** As part of our GPO.

**MRS DUNNE:** That's only for the government schooling budget?

**Ms Hinton:** We get it for the government schooling budget. We also get a separate amount of money for the preschooling budget. There's indexation within the non-government school funding as well.

**MRS DUNNE:** And do you get that for the family and community services part of the department as well?

**Ms Hinton:** Generally speaking, yes.



**Mr Wheeler:** Generally speaking, except for the grants area that we discussed earlier today.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you get it for everywhere but the grants area?

**Mr Wheeler:** We would normally, but this year we're getting 1 per cent.

**MS DUNDAS:** Was that a decision made by the department and then conveyed to Treasury, and they just didn't give you the money?

**Mr Wheeler:** As the minister said this morning, that was part of a government decision. Essentially, the government required us to take a 1½ per cent saving on those grant-funded programs.

**MS DUNDAS:** But who made that decision?

**Mr Corbell:** Budget cabinet did.

**MS DUNDAS:** So budget cabinet decided that in youth and family services—

**Mr Corbell:** No. Budget cabinet resolved that there would be a certain level of savings achievable in the non-schooling elements of the department, and then I had the responsibility to determine exactly how that was implemented.

**MS DUNDAS:** So it was your decision that was then conveyed to Treasury, and they just didn't give you the money?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, I took the decision about how that would work, and that's what's reflected in the budget papers.

**MRS DUNNE:** I was trying to get a handle on which bits were indexed at what level. The indexation money you talked about before, the \$5 million odd, was at what rate?

**Ms Hinton:** At 2.5 per cent. It was consistent as if that applied across the budget.

**MRS DUNNE:** There is case before the Federal Court in relation to a deaf boy in a school whose name I can't remember. Without commenting on the case, because that would not be proper, what are the implications for the funding across sectors of students with disabilities? That probably has implications not just for students in non-government schools.

**Mr Corbell:** I don't want to comment on the individual case—

**MRS DUNNE:** I wouldn't ask you to.

**Mr Corbell:** I appreciate you're not asking me to. The legal obligations of all schools in the ACT are very clear and are unchanged. The disability discrimination act, which was passed in the early 1990s, sets out very clearly the obligations of all governments in relation to providing access to people with disabilities. That has been tested in a variety of ways by individual students and their parents. But from the government's perspective

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we think the legal position is very clear. We understand what our obligations are, consistent with the federal legislation, and we seek at all times to meet them.

**MRS DUNNE:** As the minister responsible for the educational outcomes of all Canberrans at school, do you see that you have responsibilities to help the non-government school sector address their services to students with disabilities?

**Mr Corbell:** It is in some respects an issue that I think will be better quantified through the inquiry into education funding. We will see some of the relative need, I would hope, emerge through that process. This is a debate about the share of funding responsibility for non-government schools between the Commonwealth and ACT governments.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, I don't really want to revisit that.

**Mr Corbell:** Neither do I.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay, good.

**Mr Corbell:** Maybe I do, but I only raise it in the context of saying that in the same way that other pressures are accommodated between the Commonwealth and the ACT governments the needs of students with disabilities would be no different.

**MRS DUNNE:** In general terms, which level of government has primary responsibility for addressing the issues of discrimination in this context?

**Mr Corbell:** I don't think you can separate this issue from other issues. This issue is just another issue, significant but simply one of many issues that non-government schools have to address in their funding arrangements. Funding arrangements are shared between the ACT government and the federal government.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, if the non-government sector were to have their disability children programs supported to some degree at least, and they would be able to better carry their share of the burden, which I understand a lot of non-government schools wish to, and this might lighten the load on the government sector, which tends to carry the full weight of the responsibility?

**Mr Corbell:** As I've indicated, we would hope that the Connors inquiry would help us with that sort of assessment. We're also doing a special needs assessment for children and young people with particular needs around disability.

**MRS DUNNE:** This is for all children or for children in the government school sector?

**Ms Hinton:** The process that we're undergoing is an attempt to find a mechanism, an assessment instrument, for comparing relative needs of students with disability. One of the complex areas in the education of students with disabilities is being able to weigh up the relative need of a student with one level of disability with a student with another level of disability.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you're finding a way of comparing apples with pears?

**Ms Hinton:** Exactly. That process is one we've been grappling with for some years. We hope that we're getting a little closer to having an instrument. We have engaged an organisation from South Australia that has been working on this for some time. Their task is to suggest a set of criteria for assessing need, to develop an instrument for assessing that need and to provide us with some advice about resourcing within the government school sector. But the work that will occur in the first couple of bits of that will be quite significant for non-government school enrolments as well.

**MRS DUNNE:** But the instrument is aimed at assessing children in the government school sector. You feel that you'll be able to use the instrument to assess the needs of children in the non-government school sector, but would there be concomitant money to go with it?

**Ms Hinton:** The issue we're addressing in this process is not money. We're looking at a process for assessing the relative educational needs of a student with disabilities.

**Mr Coleborne:** The ascertainment instrument that Ms Hinton refers to is a way of assessing the needs in the particular setting of the student. That will be developed for the government system. It will be a matter for the non-government system to decide if they want to use it or not.

I come back to funding. The non-government sector get per capita funding on the number of students enrolled, based on the same disability criteria as students in government schools. They are Commonwealth funds. How they choose to allocate it is their decision.

**MR PRATT:** Is it true that ACT government provides some money to non-government schools on a ratio of about 1:12?

**Ms Hinton:** Some funding is provided to non-government schools from the ACT for students with disability. Decisions are made about how that funding is allocated by the particular sectors.

**THE CHAIR:** Could I ask some questions about the teachers EBA? I understand that the last EBA was certified in August 2000, and that's due to be renegotiated quite soon. When does the present EBA expire?

**Mr Corbell:** The EBA expires around this time next year. We will enter into negotiations with the Australian Education Union at some stage prior to the expiration.

**THE CHAIR:** In the next couple of months, would you say?

**Mr Corbell:** I'd say some time in the first half of next year.

**THE CHAIR:** Part of the last EBA was an agreement that there be an enhancing teacher quality program to assess the performance of individual teachers. Presumably that would mean that teachers who were not performing up to a satisfactory level would be dealt with in some way. I use that term in a kind way, if possible. What percentage of teachers have been assessed under that process as being below satisfactory performance?

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**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Ms Hinton to give you some more detail on that Mr Humphries, but generally speaking this program of professional development enhancement has been a very good process, and I think it's to the credit of the particular union that they have engaged positively in this process. The approach adopted by the AEU has been a very forward-thinking one and one which recognises that the ongoing professional development of teachers is in the interests of the profession overall as well as very clearly in the interests of students in the system—not only this particular aspect but also aspects around the teacher fellowships program. There is now a partnership between government and teachers in improving the professional development of teachers. I certainly welcome that process, and I'm very keen to build on it. Ms Hinton can give you some more information about the appraisals program.

**Ms Hinton:** It was quite a significant program to introduce, and we recognised that it needed to be treated as a major change management exercise. With that in mind, we commenced professional appraisal with principals and engaged principals in discussion about how the appraisal process would occur.

We had independent reviews done of the range of different professional appraisal programs working in other education systems and outside education systems and came to a program that applied. It was introduced from the beginning of second term in 2001.

With that program, each of the principals established a performance agreement which set a number of targets, perhaps five or six. Those targets were negotiated with people from the central office and were a mix of school specific targets and ones that related to whole-of-government priorities—for example, literacy/numeracy outcomes and indigenous students.

We gave all principals training in the process of giving and receiving feedback in the process. The program is structured around an initial planning conference to determine the agreements and the priorities, a mid-cycle review discussion and a summative review at the end of the process for the principals. They were quite substantial conversations, professional conversations, around the operation of schools and the focus on improvement.

What distinguished the principals professional appraisal program from many other similar sorts of programs was a very strong focus on student outcomes as the key measure of the effectiveness of the operations within the school. The management and leadership actions taken to lead to improved student outcomes such as professional development and change classroom strategies were seen as a means to that end.

We did an evaluation at the end of 2001, particularly from principals, made a few changes, and we're in our second cycle with the principals appraisal program.

**THE CHAIR:** I appreciate that this is all important, but the question I asked was: what percentage of teachers at the end of all this process were found not to have been satisfactory?

**Ms Hinton:** I was moving through that. We determined to introduce the principals appraisal program first and go through a complete cycle of that before we introduced a teacher professional pathways program. We needed to ensure that we had a strong and

consistent message coming from principals about that process, and we needed to go through a major change management exercise in training all teachers and principals about that process. Consequently, we commenced implementation of the professional pathways program for teachers in 2002.

All permanent teachers currently working in schools and preschools have completed a professional pathway plan along the lines I've talked about in relation to principals. We are going through the mid-cycle review at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** So no teachers have been assessed at this stage?

**Ms Hinton:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Either to be above or below satisfactory performance?

**Ms Hinton:** No. If you leave principals aside, that's right. The aim of the process is improving and enhancing the performance of all teachers. That has been the focus we've maintained through all of the training and the development work that have occurred.

We are very determined that the introduction of the professional pathways plans will not be just another process, paper exercise, that dropped into schools, got done, had the paperwork completed, and everybody moved on and got on with the real business of the day. This was to be a very serious professional enhancement process. That has been the focus.

**MR PRATT:** How happy are you with the first round of assessments? What's the overall view of the performance of our tribe of principals?

**Ms Hinton:** We're very happy with the process. We believe that it has enabled a sharper focus on the key outcomes people are looking for, the student outcomes. The process has involved drawing together a range of data and evidence about the operation of the school to inform the discussions between the director and the school principal about the work that's going on in that school. That's been very significant.

By way of example, we give each principal a list of the names of the indigenous students within the school to ensure that there is an easy focus on the performance of those students, given our focus on improving indigenous outcomes generally.

**THE CHAIR:** I was going to ask if you intend at the next EBA round to strengthen that quality assurance or that enhancing teacher quality program. Obviously, since you haven't completed the first round, you won't be able to answer that question. Will you have any outcomes for this process already commenced before negotiations are begun for the next round?

**Ms Hinton:** We are very comfortable with the program. The professional pathways program also includes a pathways to improvement program that provides for a streamlined inefficiency procedure, if that process is necessary, but it's not the key focus of the program, because that would only be quite a small number.

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**MRS DUNNE:** I'm getting the impression, Ms Hinton, that there's a lot of pathway assessment and people feeling comfortable, but I'm wondering about the parents. We all know, as we see our children progress through the schooling system—it doesn't matter what the system is—that you get good teachers and you get dud teachers.

I'm wondering whether parents are seeing the improvement. You might be comfortable and the system might be comfortable, but do the parents and the children, who are the consumers, have that same level of comfort? Are they seeing improvements across the board? I know we're talking about improvements across the board, but we're also talking about that small proportion of teachers who are not up to the mark. Are they seeing improvements there, and are they substantial improvements?

**Mr Corbell:** Some fairly clear opportunities are taken up through the government's arrangements for individual schools that allow parents to give fairly immediate and direct feedback on performance of teachers. School boards—the key government arrangement in the relationship between the schools and their community—provide very valuable forums for feedback. Representatives of school boards are directly involved in selection processes for the principals. The relationship between the school board and the principal is very important.

The principal is much more than the administrator of the school. The principal is the leading teacher in the school and performs a very important leadership role. Certainly the emphasis from the department's perspective and from the government's perspective is that principals have to embrace that leadership role and have to accept the responsibility that goes with that—and they overwhelmingly do so—to ensure that the performance of the teachers they are responsible for is a strong performance and that any issues or concerns that parents raise are addressed.

Some fairly effective mechanisms are starting to evolve. The exposure draft of the new education bill provides particular responsibilities both to principals and to school boards in relation to some of these issues. That will only help strengthen that relationship. So there are mechanisms. I think this is an evolving process.

This accountability debate is a relatively recent one. It is taking some time to roll through the system. Compared to even a few years ago, principals in particular are much more conscious of the more immediate reporting and accountability requirements they have to their communities than perhaps they were previously.

**MRS DUNNE:** I hope, Minister, that it is better than it was a few years ago. It's a very daunting thing for a parent to go to a school and say they are not happy for a variety of reasons. It could be something as simple as a personality conflict, or it could be a question of teacher competence. When you have to go to a school with a question of teacher competence, sometimes it is in an area where as a parent you're not an expert yourself. If I thought that a physics teacher was not up to the mark, a lot of it would be gut feeling rather than something substantive.

I have had experiences which have been pretty unsatisfactory. I did have some expertise and said, "This teacher is not up to the mark for these reasons." I was told, "Don't you worry, Mrs Dunne. It'll be all right." The other teachers didn't agree with me, quite frankly. If the supervising teachers didn't agree with me, I had nowhere to go. I'm no

shrinking violet and I persisted with this. But three or four years down the track everything I knew then I can now substantiate, because the student involved is behind the mark as she has moved to the next level of education. Those are things which are very difficult for parents, who are lay people in this system, to address when confronted by a group of professionals who have a certain degree of professional solidarity. Those things are very hard to break into. I would really like to be able to see over the next couple of years some substantial changes that break down those barriers and allow people to express their concerns and have them treated with some validity. In the past they haven't been.

**Ms Hinton:** The point you make emphasises why it was so important to undertake a very significant change management approach to the introduction of this process and not just think that dropping something in from on high will make it happen. It may take a little longer but it's going to be much more effective in the longer term, because the processes that we've put in place have a very strong emphasis on the classroom strategies that are required in order to improve student learning outcomes. There is funding also to support the training and upskilling of teachers who need that additional support. In any organisation, whether a government organisation or a private sector organisation, the most effective approaches to performance management are about lifting the skills of the work force you already have and not about just showing people the door.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, it's not about showing the door, but it's also about being responsive and treating the concerns of parents or students, when they're old enough to make judgments themselves, with validity and taking them seriously. In from my 21 years experience in the education system, I haven't seen that across the sectors. I hope that we will see this. While you're of going through this change management process, there are victims in the education system.

**Ms Hinton:** I'm not sure that I would use the term "victims". I think our overall satisfaction levels are pretty good. That's not to say that at an individual level there aren't issues. Most parents at different times have had that experience. I get letters from parents and have conversations with parents who are unhappy and have had experiences of the kind you describe. Others take the trouble to pick up the phone and ring me to tell me about the kind of response they've had from the teachers at their child's school. So there are differing experiences. We want to build on the good practice and have a greater sharing of that practice across the system.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Chairman, I think what Ms Hinton says is correct. This is a minority. Most people don't go to the school about the good experiences, and we should, because there are lots of good experiences.

**MR PRATT:** I echo Mrs Dunne's concerns. We wish you well in the change management process. We certainly want to see some change. This is a bipartisan thing. This is an issue that has been around for a long time. To build confidence within the community, would you have plans, if you haven't already done so, to put out into the community the framework, the criteria, you are using for the performance appraisal of both principals and teachers?

**Ms Hinton:** There are a series of public brochures available about the systems that are around. But we have been fairly keen to get the systems in place and to get the teachers on side and accepting what they're doing before it becomes too much of a public issue.

**MR PRATT:** Change management involves people accepting.

**Ms Hinton:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Before it gets too late in the day, I was wondering when it would be appropriate for me to ask questions about the University of Canberra. We've had discussion in the Assembly over the last few sitting weeks about the University of Canberra. We are coming to the decision that, through the Chief Minister, the University of Canberra does have a reporting relationship with the ACT government. I'm quite happy not to ask my questions this evening, because obviously you're not ready. When would it be appropriate to ask questions relating to the University of Canberra?

**Mr Corbell:** If you'd like to put a question on notice, Ms Dundas, we'll certainly seek to answer it if it's appropriate to do so. But I need to make the point that the Chief Minister has said in relation to one particular aspect of the University of Canberra's operations that the advice he has received is that they are required to comply with other ACT government legislation. But the day-to-day operations and activities of the University of Canberra are the responsibility of the University of Canberra and not the responsibility of the ACT government.

**Ms Hinton:** And they're accountable for funding to the federal government.

**Mr Corbell:** And in relation to funding arrangements they're, as Ms Hinton points out, accountable to the federal government, not the ACT government.

**MS DUNDAS:** Could you explain your relationship with the University of Canberra as minister for education?

**Mr Corbell:** As I understand it, under the University of Canberra Act I'm not formally responsible for the legislation that governs the relationship between the university and the ACT, and I think I have a role in recommending to cabinet appointments to the University of Canberra Council.

**THE CHAIR:** It's the Chief Minister who appoints them though, isn't it?

**Mr Corbell:** I think so, but I think there is a role for me as minister for education in that process. In relation to other issues, I meet with the vice-chancellor of the University of Canberra from time to time. I have done so since I became minister. I certainly seek to explore ways in which we can achieve greater levels of partnership, both with UC and with ANU. I've met with both the UC and the ANU vice-chancellors to try to progress those issues, but outside of that their operations and their activities are matters for them. But as an alumnus of the University of Canberra, I do advocate their interests where appropriate.

**MS DUNDAS:** Did I miss it, or have the revised policy and guidelines for volunteers in schools and preschools been released?



**Ms Hinton:** No, they haven't been released. We had a draft some considerable time ago. We received quite a lot of feedback from the community about concerns about that draft. We're in the process of reworking it at the moment, and we have a new working title of "Working with children: volunteering". Our expectation is that we'll have something ready to have another round of consultations in a month or so, if not earlier.

**MS DUNDAS:** So we'll have another round of consultations through term 3 and term 4?

**Ms Hinton:** Starting in term 3.

**MS DUNDAS:** Can we expect a final document by the start of school term 2003?

**Ms Hinton:** Hopefully, yes.

**Mr Corbell:** I should stress that the additional comment period is driven by the comments that have been received from a wide number of organisations and individuals on the issue.

**MS DUNDAS:** I'm just looking for an update. Public information about that update seems to be not easily available.

**Ms Hinton:** I've had conversations with the P&C council about it.

**MS DUNDAS:** But if you go to the DECS website, you're still getting the revised policy with the old time line on it.

**Ms Hinton:** My apologies. We'll clearly have to deal with that.

**MS DUNDAS:** Thank you. I have a question that relates to outputs but it's a general question. You've revised down the number of students in government primary and secondary school and college. You say it's based on the February 2002 census. But the number of students in special schools has remained constant, even though again the target is based on the February 2002 census. Can you explain to me why the census shows that the number of students requiring non-special education has dropped yet the number of students requiring special education has remained constant?

**Ms Hinton:** I'm not sure I have the answer to this question, but I might try to talk my way through it. You're quite right. We haven't changed the estimate of students in special schools. We have seen an increase in recent times in the number of special students in mainstream schools and from our 2001-02 target to the outcome, and the outcome then is reflected in the target.

**MS DUNDAS:** Which target?

**Ms Hinton:** The target for numbers of students receiving special education assistance in mainstream schools.

**MS DUNDAS:** They've remained constant as well.

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**Ms Hinton:** Not really. They've increased from the 2001-02 target, in the primary sector in particular.

**MS DUNDAS:** And decreased for high school and college?

**Ms Hinton:** That's right. But we're seeing a growth in primary, which is quite interesting.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is the information really from the February 2002 census?

**Ms Hinton:** I don't know the answer to that question.

**Mr Wheeler:** I might be able to elaborate a little on this. As much as anything, it's a question of scale. The census is looking at all students, measured in the thousands, and the special education you're looking at is 285.

**MS DUNDAS:** Yes, comparatively it's a very small number.

**Mr Wheeler:** Yes, it's a very small number. The demographic shifts which are driving the total student population are not big enough to impact on the sample size of 285, which to some extent is driven by need. It's just not worth trying to estimate. What would you do? Take one off? It wouldn't make any difference.

**MS DUNDAS:** I'm just wondering where the numbers are coming from. It's explained that they're coming from the 2002 census, but if that's an inaccurate number I just wanted to know where the numbers were coming from.

**Mr Wheeler:** It's not inaccurate. It's just that when you do a census on such a small total you don't really get much change.

**MS DUNDAS:** Fran, did you have anything else you wanted to add?

**Ms Hinton:** Only that our experience in observing what's happening is that whilst there may be some decline overall in numbers of students enrolled there is not a decline by any means in the number of students with serious disabilities.

**MS DUNDAS:** By comparison, do we have more children with disabilities or special needs in the school population?

**Ms Hinton:** That's what we're thinking, particularly in the primary sector.

**MS DUNDAS:** Is that just more diagnosis of early autism and—

**Ms Hinton:** It could be more diagnosis. For example, we're certainly seeing increased diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. On the other hand, some of the students who go into specialist learning support units in the early years manage to move into broader mainstream education in their later years of schooling.

**MS DUNDAS:** The number of students receiving special education in mainstream schools drops quite dramatically as you go through the schools. We're talking of close to 800 in primary school but only 300 in high school and only 82 in college. Is this because the students don't continue through the mainstream education system? If so, what happens to them?

**Ms Hinton:** To a point, yes. Primary schools probably have seven years, high schools only have four years and colleges have two years. That's part of the explanation but not the total.

**MS DUNDAS:** No. If you add them together, you still don't get enough.

**Ms Hinton:** That's right. We're interested to see if the increase we've seen in recent years in primary schools flows through into high schools and colleges. That is some of the analytical work we're undertaking at the moment.

**MRS DUNNE:** So there's a pipeline effect, you think, at the moment?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes. That's right. Could well be. Perhaps another answer to that in part is that students with particularly severe needs in the upper part of schooling may well be in Koomarri rather than colleges. But I think it probably reflects a growth in recent years.

**Mr Coleborne:** The numbers of students, particularly those who would fit within the autism spectrum disorder, are largely focused at the moment in the primary years. There's a significant number who have been so diagnosed and are gradually moving through the school system and will no doubt move into the secondary years in the coming years. But as students get older sometimes they prefer not to be in the special schools but to be in the units.

**MS DUNDAS:** These are the numbers for the special units in mainstream schools?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes, but there are also specialist services which can be provided in high schools or colleges which are not identified as being specialist learning support units for students with disabilities.

**MS DUNDAS:** On that point, there was a lot of confusion at the beginning of this school term about the level of special education assistance that was going specifically to primary schools. I think it was around the support teachers for those assisted education units.

**MRS DUNNE:** LSUs.

**Ms Hinton:** Learning support units.

**MS DUNDAS:** Eight students equalled one teacher and one support teacher. Was that the correct formula, or was it six students?

**Mr Coleborne:** In the units focusing on students with autism spectrum disorder it was one teacher to six students, with the option of additional support on request for an additional support teacher. There was one teacher and one teachers aide, then there was

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the option of additional support being requested by the school and being provided by the department to meet the needs that are identified at the school level.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you consider that that ratio of 1:6 plus the ability to access other resources will continue for the next school year, 2003?

**Mr Corbell:** I see no reason for it to change.

**MS DUNDAS:** So it will stay at 1:6?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes, that's our plan.

**Mr Coleborne:** If you look at the ratio of adults to students, it's at least two adults to six students, with the option of additional special teacher aide support being provided on top of that.

**MS DUNDAS:** And that will continue for the next—

**Ms Hinton:** That's our policy setting.

**Mr Corbell:** It's the ratio. There's no proposal to change the policy.

**MR PRATT:** What's the bottom line for allowing an LSU to be established—six students and nothing less?

**Ms Hinton:** We're much more flexible.

**MR PRATT:** For a small primary school, for example?

**Ms Hinton:** We are much more flexible than that. We look at the needs, and the needs vary across the system. People move. The children may be enrolled in different schools. Children come through a unit. When they move from primary school into high school, you don't have the same need in that particular primary school.

Constantly we are essentially case managing where the student needs are, what the parents want, and making decisions about that. We would on occasions establish a unit without six students, on the basis that we would fill up those additional spaces when we had children requiring additional support.

**Mr Coleborne:** The department has recently streamlined how placement in those units occurs by coordinating from a central committee and working with the school itself so that the best mix of students is achieved and students with very high needs are not placed in one particular unit, taking into account the behaviours of students and the level of support that's needed for the unit to function effectively. So we are looking at the needs of the students, the setting itself and the other students who are already enrolled so that we get the best possible balance, taking into account the parents' wishes and the needs of the student. So the six is just a number. Behind that lies a lot of consultation and placement options that continue to be explored and refined.

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**MS DUNDAS:** You're waiting to see whether or not the increase in special education assistance in primary schools flows on to high schools. I know you're talking about individual cases and case management, but what do you perceive the level of support being in high school for those students who are currently in primary school LSUs? Will you transfer the same level of support, two teachers for six students, to high schools? What are you thinking at the moment for higher education?

**Mr Coleborne :** We would need to look at the particular needs of the student. The needs-based assessment instrument that has been developed for the ACT government schools system would look at the level of need of the student in relation to the setting. That would be determined on the basis of the work that is yet to be concluded.

On the current basis, we would look at the needs of the student in the setting at a secondary level. But in the future we would try to make sure that the resourcing that's provided is absolutely right for the student in the particular setting, using the instrument that's yet to be completed.

**MS DUNDAS:** There were some shouts from the gallery, so I will seek to clarify that. Is the high school LSU ratio still 2:6?

**Ms Hinton:** Yes, it is.

**MS DUNDAS:** When students with special needs move onto college where it's not compulsory education—it's a different stream altogether—how are those needs met?

**Ms Hinton:** Generally speaking, we have two special needs groups—one at Dickson College and one at Canberra College. That's where the students attend. There are some college-age students also at Koomarri.

**Mr Coleborne :** Certainly there's no intention to reduce the level of support for students as they move through the system. There's no desire to take away resources from students who have particular needs. The issue is making sure that they have sufficient resources to learn adequately in the setting.

**MR PRATT:** I've had some feedback from a constituency area that Duffy LSU may be closing. Is that right? If so, is that because the numbers have dropped significantly? Is this an efficiency drive?

**Mr Corbell:** No, it's not an efficiency drive. The numbers of students at Duffy are declining, so we won't be providing a full LSU. But for those students remaining in the school who still need special support, that will continue to be provided but it won't be a formal LSU arrangement.

**Ms Hinton:** Learning support centre.

**Mr Corbell:** My apologies. I have to keep differentiating. It is a learning support centre at Duffy.

**Mr Coleborne:** The Duffy learning support centre will basically close at the end the 2002 year because of declining numbers, but the five students requiring support will be enrolled at the school in 2003 and receive assistance through part-time employment of a teacher who'll provide intensive literacy and numeracy programs for those students. The declining enrolments are an issue, but the students will continue to receive support.

**MRS DUNNE:** What's the difference between a learning support unit and a learning support centre?

**Ms Hinton:** On the spectrum of need, learning support centres are provided for students with less severe learning disabilities. Learning support units are generally for intensive needs.

**MRS DUNNE:** If the children didn't continue to enrol in the mainstream of Duffy, what would be options next year? If they are currently enrolled in Duffy and are in the learning support centre and they want that sort of maintenance support next year, what would their options be?

**Ms Hinton:** Many students who are enrolled in a learning support centre are integrated for a very substantial part of the day within the mainstream education program. They come out of the mainstream classes for some particular intensive support, maybe around literacy, maybe around some social activities.

As I said, their level of need is not as great as those in the learning support units. It's really a matter of degree and a different way in which you can provide the level of service to them. As Mr Coleborne said, we're planning to provide an additional part-time teacher who can provide support there for those students.

**Mr Corbell:** When this issue first emerged, I recall that the advice I received was that the total number of hours to be made available to assist children at Duffy who were remaining would be greater than the current number of hours delivered through the LSC. We don't believe there are any reason why parents would choose not to continue at Duffy, given that the level of support is at least equal to that that was provided through the LSC.

**MRS DUNNE:** Why is this structure changing? Why are you moving away from an LSC structure to a part-time teacher?

**Mr Corbell:** Because the number of students who need the support is going down.

**MRS DUNNE:** What's the optimum number for an LSC as opposed to an LSU?

**Ms Hinton:** Fourteen students.

**MR PRATT:** You have a quite effective focus in the schooling system with LSCs and LSUs to pick up on kids who are in trouble. You might be looking at children at risk and children with behavioural problems, but do you have plans to put in place support units in schools where there may be a significant number of children in that category so that children can transfer in and out of the mainstream classroom and be given more focused attention? This is in addition to the counselling services you are currently looking at.

**Mr Corbell:** Support in what regard, Mr Pratt?

**MR PRATT:** Support in terms of more focused teaching and supervision for children who are continually disruptive in classes. This is a question that's often raised. Do you consider that a relevant strategy? If not, why not?

**Ms Hinton:** There are two prongs to that, I suppose. One is alternative education settings. We have a number of those. In the primary sector, we have quite a large number of those, in the high school sector as well, and some in the college sector in the government school system. We also have some within the community sector that we use. The second prong is in relation to behaviour management in schools. Mr Coleborne can give you a quick run-down.

**Mr Coleborne:** The department uses a variety of strategies to support schools with students with dysfunctional behaviours. The issue of students being disruptive in the school isn't new. The support that's provided is quite extensive.

There's a range of ways in which it's done. There are student management consultants who work with schools on a needs basis, depending on the number of referrals that have been provided. There are short-term withdrawal programs to take students out who need particular help. Work is done with child and youth interagency network meetings to bring agencies together to provide support to students from outside the initial school environment. There's a lot of early intervention work done with preschools and kindergarten. There's training for teachers in how to handle students who are sometimes violent, to ensure that their needs are met, and how they can de-escalate conflict.

An initiative undertaken in the last 12 months was to do with promoting a positive behaviours program for primary schools so that the staff were trained. About 15 schools were identified as needing particular support and professional development was provided to the staff in those particular schools experiencing a larger number of issues involving students with dysfunctional behaviours.

The initial response from that training has been very positive. A number of schools have asked if they could be involved in the training, on a self-nominated basis, from the initial targeting of those resources to particular schools with high needs. A variety of strategies are used to support the students and to support the teachers in their work so that the students with disruptive behaviours don't disrupt not only their own learning but the learning of other students.

**MR PRATT:** Teacher numbers are coming down, and the burden on teachers and long hours of work—

**Ms Hinton:** Excuse me, teacher numbers are coming down?

**MR PRATT:** No. We are hearing about teacher shortages. Are you happy that you've got mechanisms in place to help ameliorate those concerns? Are they working?

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**Ms Hinton:** The issue around teacher shortages is more about recruitment than an operation within the schools. We're not reducing teacher numbers within the schools at all.

**MR PRATT:** No, I didn't say you were.

**MS GALLAGHER:** You did say "reducing teachers".

**MR PRATT:** No, I didn't say that teacher numbers were being reduced. I was talking about the teacher shortage you have and the ability to bring people back. Are you happy?

**Ms Hinton:** We don't have a major teacher shortage. We are fortunate in the ACT with the attractive city we live in and the school system we have. For most teacher vacancies, there are many more applicants than we can find positions for. However, there are some shortages in some specific areas, particularly maths, technologies and languages other than English.

As you'd probably be aware, we have undertaken a major recruitment campaign nationally. We take quite an innovative approach to our recruitment in our visits to educational institutions. We take principals and teachers in their first couple of years of teaching to talk to students from the institutions. Our website has a series of vignettes about teachers who have commenced work in our system over the last couple of years and why they like teaching in our system, why they're valued, why they like the lifestyle here. Our brochures work on that basis too.

There's generally a wish to work in our system that is more pronounced than for other systems. But we still have to keep working on that. We have to keep making certain that our remuneration levels are right up there and that we continue to have targeted recruitment campaigns. We particularly need to make certain that we have done appropriate analytical work about August and September in identifying our needs for the following year so that we can recruit teachers when they're available and not have vacancies come up in March, when it's much harder to recruit.

**MR PRATT:** Are you saying, therefore, that the reporting of 14 teacher numbers down at Calwell High School is a myth?

**Ms Hinton:** There is a difference between being able to replace and have permanent teachers in place and casual teachers. The issue of casual teachers is one that we have been addressing. We have established a working party to look at that.

The issues are complex, because quite a number of people who are on the casual register don't want to work full time. That's why they're there. They only want to work part time and in some particular schools. We also believe that we can do a lot to make casual teaching more attractive. That's part of the work the working party will be looking at.

**MR PRATT:** Going back to my original question, there is no disruption at Calwell High School which may have contributed to the problem they have there?



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**Ms Hinton:** I didn't make any of those sorts of judgments. The situation at Calwell High School is a combination of a number of things, and we're addressing quite a few of those. One of them was that there was a combination of circumstances that involved too many teachers from the school going off on professional development, teachers going off on excursions at the same time, some illness and some family circumstances. We've had a look at and are looking at the way in which professional development is managed to try to minimise those sorts of arrangements.

The other factor there was that the school, for all the best reasons in the world, had allocated all of its staffing resources to particular classes to minimise the class numbers and had no capacity to manage when teachers went off to do professional development or on excursions. Many schools maintain a capacity to handle that kind of process.

**Mr Corbell:** It can be very school specific, and it depends very much on how the schools choose to staff themselves. Schools have a high level of discretion as to their staffing numbers and how they use their allocations.

For instance, there are other high schools with a similar number of students who haven't had the same problem in relation to casual relief as Calwell has, but I think to suggest that it's driven by some broader issue around student behaviour within the school is quite inappropriate and simply is not accurate.

**MRS DUNNE:** I thought Mr Pratt was seeking clarification that that wasn't the case.

**Mr Corbell:** If that's the case, I can certainly assure Mr Pratt it's not the case.

**MR PRATT:** My question was not inappropriate, Minister.

**MRS DUNNE:** On the subject of casual and relief teachers, it has been put to me by a constituent that the ACT is not competitive in remuneration with New South Wales. I know constituents who do relief teaching in New South Wales because they get paid more.

**Ms Hinton:** Yes, they do get paid more. This is an issue that we'll have a look at in the next certified agreement. However, a recent survey that we undertook of all casual teachers rated remuneration well down the list of factors that influenced where they worked and how much work they did. It was not a major issue for them. It was fifth on a list of issues.

**MRS DUNNE:** I suppose it's a bit hard to say what the differential is. It depends on teacher experience and whatnot.

**Ms Hinton:** Yes, that's true.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's not a flat rate for relief teaching or anything like that?

**Ms Hinton:** There is a flat rate for some teachers but not others. The remuneration was negotiated as part of an overall package in the last enterprise agreement. The lower rate of pay reflected the fact that for the most part casual teachers work from nine till three, as opposed to teachers, who work a much longer day. That was the rationale behind it.

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New South Wales—Queanbeyan, Yass, Murrumbateman—don't seem to find it much easier to get relief teachers than we do.

**MRS DUNNE:** But they are getting them out of the ACT.

**Ms Hinton:** It's not clear-cut. It seems to me that if that was the answer they would have no problems.

**Mr Corbell:** There are over 1,000 teachers on the ACT education department's list, which you'd think would be more than ample to meet any demand, but we still have these problems. It's a fairly complex issue, and that's why I've agreed to the establishment of the working group Ms Hinton refers to, which is a union, principals association and department-based group.

**THE CHAIR:** I think that's an appropriate time to draw down the curtain on another day. We're due to see you again tomorrow, Minister, at 9 o'clock to resume discussion on this and then to move on in the course of the day to industrial relations and then back to planning and transport, if time permits, at the end of the day but certainly not before 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

**The committee adjourned at 6.02 pm.**