

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2003-2004)

Members:

**MR B SMYTH (The Chair)
MRS H CROSS (The Deputy Chair)
MRS V DUNNE
MR J HARGREAVES
MS K MacDONALD**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 30 MAY 2003

**Secretary to the committee:
Mr D Abbott (Ph: 620 50142)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

The committee met at 9.34 am.

Appearances:

Ms K Gallagher, Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Family Services, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations

Department of Education, Youth and Family Services

Ms F Hinton, Chief Executive

Mr T Wheeler, Executive Director, Corporate and Training and Adult Education

Mr J Coleborne, Executive Director, School Education

Mr J Mason, Director, Curriculum and Assessment, School Education

Mr C Curry, Director, School Operations, School Education

Ms B Baikie, Executive Director, Children's, Youth and Family Services

Ms P Armstrong, Executive Officer, Intervention

Mr F Duggan, Director, Youth Services

Canberra Institute of Technology

Mr P Veenker, Chief Executive

Mr T Toshack, Acting Finance Manager

Youth Coalition of the ACT

Ms M Hunter, Executive Officer

Ms S Pellegrino, Policy and Project Officer

THE CHAIR: You should understand that these hearings, which are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protection but it also places on you certain 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 that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. The Assembly will treat as a serious matter the giving of false or misleading evidence.

Your evidence today will be recorded by Hansard, which will prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. Officers who are seated at the back of the room should come to the main witness table if they are called on to respond to questions. Witnesses should not speak from the back of the room. It would assist committee staff and departmental officers if witnesses could state clearly when a question is being taken on notice.

It would also greatly assist in the preparation of the transcript if witnesses state their full name and the capacity in which they are appearing on the first occasion that they give evidence. We will commence with page 310 of Budget Paper 4, output class 1, relating to government primary school education. Minister, the average cost per government primary school student in output class 1.1 has gone up by about 7 per cent. Is that mainly as a result of the EBA, or have other factors contributed to it?

Mr Wheeler: Essentially, it is the net effect of the EBA, some indexation and new initiatives announced in this budget.

THE CHAIR: What do the students of Canberra get for that increase?

Ms Hinton: One of the significant things that the students of Canberra have benefited from as a result of the enterprise bargaining agreement with teachers has been the capacity to recruit high-quality teachers who are at the end of their pre-service teacher training, and also teachers from interstate. Similarly, we are now able to recruit competitively principals from other jurisdictions. In addition, the EBA provides for a range of initiatives—in particular, the last couple of EBAs—which flow through into these areas. An important initiative in that process relates to issues concerning the performance appraisal of teachers. We have a general commitment to the reform and development of the education system.

MR PRATT: Minister, I think about \$42 million has been set aside in your budget for enterprise bargaining agreements, or EBAs, for the entire department—CIT, youth affairs, as well as education.

Ms Gallagher: There is certainly money in the budget for the final payment of current agreements. I am not sure whether that figure is \$42 million.

MR PRATT: It is about \$42 million. What proportion of that \$42 million is allocated to primary and secondary college schooling for teachers?

Ms Gallagher: It depends on teacher numbers.

Ms Hinton: Yes, it depends entirely on teacher numbers. If we go back a little, we find that the agreement negotiated with teachers about 2½ years ago provided for a final increase of about 3 per cent in early July.

MR PRATT: July this year?

Ms Hinton: Yes. That was the final payment. That was an average increase because the agreement provided for some small changes or differences in the annual salary for particular levels of the teaching service. So it was not a flat increase across every position. Broadly speaking, you could feel quite comfortable that the funds for the EBA are reflective of the number of teachers in primary schools, secondary schools and colleges. The differences that I am talking about were not sector-based differences. There might have been different percentage increases for teachers in their first year of teaching compared to teachers in their sixth year of teaching, irrespective of whether those teachers were at primary school, high school or college.

MR PRATT: Are you saying that that is part of a program that finalises across the board an EBA program that was allocated to teachers in all sectors?

Ms Hinton: Yes.

MR PRATT: Does that EBA include public servants in the department? Are they embraced in that \$42 million increase?

Ms Hinton: Included in our budget is funding for certified agreements for staff other than teachers. That has been agreed to.

MR PRATT: Has there been an increase or a decrease in the arrangements for core teaching positions versus departmental administrative staff, or do we have the same ratio that was negotiated a couple of years ago? Has there been a change to the focus of this funding?

Ms Hinton: Negotiations were undertaken separately and the outcomes were slightly different for the percentage increases. I am not sure whether or not that answers your question. There was not one certified agreement for all staff in this agency. Approximately 2½ to three years ago a certified agreement for teachers was entered into. An enterprise agreement was entered into with staff other than teachers just a few months ago.

MR PRATT: What component was allocated to primary and secondary schools and colleges? I suppose the figure would be somewhere in the region of \$25 million to \$30 million? Can you give us those figures?

Mr Wheeler: I am not sure whether I understand your question. I do not know where the figures of \$42 million, \$25 million or \$30 million came from.

MR PRATT: I confess that the figure of \$25 million to \$30 million is an assumption on my part. I think that the figure of \$42 million is the total amount of money allocated in the budget to support EBAs over the next few years. Is that not the case?

Mr Wheeler: Page 296 of BP 4 refers to the difference between the figures for 2002-03 and 2003-04. The amount in the government payment for output is as a result of the last EBA. In the case of non-teaching staff, it is for the new EBA. As you would appreciate, it is a pay increase for all teachers at a certain level. So the amount that is allocated would depend on how many teachers were in each sector.

MR PRATT: Is the major focus of that funding on core teaching positions? Is that what we are getting in return?

Ms Hinton: Overwhelmingly, teachers who are in receipt of that pay rise are in schools and in the CIT. The numbers in central office are minute by comparison.

MR PRATT: Do you anticipate the increase in departmental public service positions to be a factor against the organisational listing of teachers? Is the ratio the same as it has been, or will there be a change in the balance of departmental support positions versus core teacher positions? Do you anticipate a change?

Ms Hinton: We are anticipating an increase in the number of departmental support positions. That is set out in the ownership agreement that we referred to the last time we came before this committee. We also anticipate an increase in the number of core teaching positions in schools associated with lower class size initiatives.

MR PRATT: Do those two increases balance out? Do they maintain the ratio between support positions versus core teaching positions?

Ms Hinton: I have not looked at it in that context. One of the clear intentions in this budget was to provide increased support within central office in core areas such as the support curriculum development area.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I note that output class 1.1 refers to the number of schools reviewed annually through the system quality assurance process. A commitment to excellence and to ensuring that we achieve quality education at our schools is important to everyone. Why has there been an increase from 12 to 17 schools? What is being done? Are you happy that this process will provide quality education and excellence in our schools?

Ms Gallagher: The increase relates to the school excellence initiative, which will decrease the time it takes a school to go through quality assurance programs. Currently it is set at five years. As a result of this initiative we are looking at doing it in three years. We must constantly look at the way in which we are providing education. People must have an input into the provision of education. We must acknowledge that in some cases students and parents can enter a high school and go through that school without taking part in a process such as this one. We thought it important to reduce that program to three years, to constantly assess how schools are operating and to obtain feedback from the community about how education is being provided.

THE CHAIR: I refer to output class 1.2, high schools. I take up your earlier point that some students might get through the education system without ever having been part of the review process. I note in output class 1.2 that you are increasing the number of schools that are reviewed each year from three to four. I note also in output class 1.3 that you do not follow that process in relation to colleges. Why would that be?

Ms Hinton: We carry out the same process in colleges but, because there are only eight colleges and because we want an aggregated picture of what is happening in the college sector, we undertake the review and development for colleges in the same year. There was no review of colleges in 2002 and, under the cycle, no review is planned for next year.

THE CHAIR: How many high schools do we have?

Ms Hinton: We have eight colleges and 17 high schools, but that number increases to 19 if we count the two special schools.

MS MacDONALD: Are you saying that you review colleges every three years?

Ms Hinton: Let me review the process. Under the current school development process, schools are reviewed every five years. Generally speaking, primary schools and high schools are reviewed as part of the geographic cluster in which they are located. There are enough primary schools and high schools to review 20 per cent of them every five years in order to get some sense of what is happening in the sector.

That is not possible in relation to colleges, so we review and plan for each college once every five years—in that same five-year cycle. As the minister said, under our school excellence initiative we recognised that in the world in which we live a five-year cycle was too long and that we needed a much shorter period of review and development. Over

the next six months we will be obtaining the detail of how all that works and we will be working with the schools to determine the cycles that are to be implemented.

THE CHAIR: How many primary schools are we responsible for in the government sector?

Ms Hinton: Sixty-nine.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you said that you wanted to review these schools every three years as opposed to every five years. You said that you wanted to review every primary school once every three years. However, should we not be testing 23 primary schools rather than 17?

Ms Hinton: That list does not make a lot of sense to me. I apologise for that and state that I will go back and review it.

THE CHAIR: If the eight colleges were included with the 19 high schools we would have a total of 27 schools.

Ms Hinton: My comment applies across- the-board.

THE CHAIR: If you wanted to do that every three years surely you would have to review nine schools?

Ms Hinton: I apologise. Obviously those figures are not right.

THE CHAIR: Minister, given that you have been Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services for only six to seven months, what have you been told about the conduct of these reviews? Will you be following up on the results of a quality assurance program if it shows that a school is not performing as well as it should be?

Ms Gallagher: As a parent, I took part in the school development process this year. I filled out the survey, so I am taking part at that level. The important thing about a process like this is that it shows areas in which we need to improve. It informs me about areas in which we need to improve. It also highlights those areas in which people think we are doing well. From my point of view, it is important to address suggestions that have been made for improvement in these areas. We acknowledge that we constantly need to improve the way in which we operate. It is useful for me to be kept informed about areas in which we can improve.

THE CHAIR: What did last year's reviews show? What has been done to fix any problems that were identified? Conversely, what did last year's review show in relation to excellence? How were those ideas spread across the system? Do we have a system of acknowledging or rewarding teachers, principals and administrators for giving us quality in our education system?

Ms Hinton: Satisfaction levels are reflected in the performance report. The issues identified for improvement cover a range of different areas. One significant issue involved students seeking a greater input into school decision-making. Another issue left parents and carers feeling that they were not sufficiently aware of issues that the school

board was considering, which comes down to communication between the school board and the parent community. One issue involved the lack of a significant impact of system-wide assessment processes on high school programs. We are looking seriously at that issue.

Another issue involved feedback and the improvement of performance appraisal systems. We recognised that that process has moved some way but we need to keep working on it. The final issue involved indigenous students or students who were identified as indigenous and who did not feel as though they were included in the school community. From my perspective those issues, which apply across the board, relate to system approaches and to things that we must do at a system level. School communities address any issues that arise throughout the process of that review. Individual schools benefit from that process and, importantly, the system addresses those issues.

THE CHAIR: Is a report circulated throughout the system so that schools and teachers can gain from this survey?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. In fact the 2002 report is just about to be published. At present it is with the printer. That information is available.

MR PRATT: Does that report summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the system?

Ms Gallagher: It does, yes.

MR PRATT: So the lessons that are learned can be applied.

Ms Gallagher: Each area that addresses feedback is included in the report; for example, areas in which we are doing well and areas that require improvement. Those areas are itemised with graphs that indicate the level of satisfaction or the areas that require improvement.

Mr Coleborne: The report does not only address areas of strength and areas in which further improvements are needed. Strategies are identified for all those areas in which we believe we need to do more work. That applies across the board, as Ms Hinton has already said. Some of that work, which is embodied in the government's school plans and in the high school development program, involves indigenous students. So actions and strategies have been identified to address issues that come out of the 2002 school development report.

THE CHAIR: When will that report come back from the printer?

Ms Gallagher: It is back from the printer. I received the report yesterday and I will read it as soon as I have a chance.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps a copy could be forwarded to committee members.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: I refer to output class 1.1. The number of students in primary schools is set to decrease by about 500.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: I understand that those figures are always based on the census. Is that drop in students as a result of a population drop, or are we seeing more primary school students going into the non-government sector?

Ms Gallagher: There has been a decline in enrolments. Some students will be going to the non-government sector. When student cohorts shift to high schools it can have an impact on remaining numbers. If large numbers of students from year 6 move to year 7, that will have an impact on numbers. If you do not have an equivalent number of students going into kindergarten it will also have an impact on numbers.

MS DUNDAS: To what extent can we attribute those changes to a shift in population and to what extent can we attribute them to primary school students going to non-government schools?

Ms Hinton: We are expecting a gradual decline in the age cohort. ABS projections tell us that the size of the cohort will gradually decline by 0.4 or 0.5 of a percentage point per annum. That decline, which has been occurring over quite a long period and which will continue, has had a significant impact as the population of the ACT continues to age. Those statistics are also affected by a slow shift to the non-government sector.

MS DUNDAS: Minister, a lot of funding is going towards reducing class sizes in primary schools. At this stage it is focused up to year 3. As there is a natural progression towards making those classes smaller anyway, will you consider targeting that money towards reducing class sizes in high schools?

Ms Gallagher: There are mixed views in relation to this difficult debate. Teacher communities are supportive of smaller class sizes across the board. Some of the parents and citizens associations do not believe there is any documented benefit in having smaller class sizes. They would like to see evidence that smaller class sizes actually deliver improved educational outcomes. One of the ongoing discussions that we will be having relates to the need to reduce class sizes. There is agreement that we should have smaller class sizes in K to 3.

There is a lot of support for having lower class sizes for children entering the primary school system. There is less agreement for smaller class sizes in years 4, 5 and 6 and in high school. We must undertake more research in this area. As jurisdictions around Australia move towards lowering class sizes—as is the case in New South Wales—we need to do more research to establish how lower class sizes lead to improved educational outcomes. That would be useful in informing the debate.

MS DUNDAS: The transition from year 6 to year 7 has been identified as one of the key areas where things can go wrong in a student's life. What is the government doing to ensure that those transitions are as smooth as possible? Have you explored what has been going on in Queensland? Queensland has been working quite hard to ensure that there is a smoother transition for student cohorts from year 6 to year 7.

Ms Gallagher: I will address the first part of your question. We recognise the different educational needs of students in years 6 to 8 at Amaroo, Gold Creek and Telopea schools. Students in years 6 to 8 have different educational needs from students at high schools and at primary schools. There is an increasing recognition of the importance of those three stages of schooling. The government is allocating additional resources to Amaroo, Gold Creek and to other schools where year 6 and year 7 students have no opportunity to co-locate. Other measures are being implemented to support those children.

THE CHAIR: How is the Wanniasa campus going?

Ms Hinton: Very well.

MR HARGREAVES: As it always does.

THE CHAIR: Why is it going well?

Ms Hinton: Schools go well as a result of good leadership, good teachers, a focus on the needs of students and because schools operate as an inclusive model that determines the needs of individual students. As you raised this issue, Wanniasa campus is ahead of our system initiative for pathway plans. That school, which set in place arrangements for pathway plans, will assist our system initiative. I refer to Ms Dundas' question relating to student transitions from year 6 to year 7 and to other transition points.

A lot of the work that has been done in the areas of student support and inclusive education has identified the significance of key transition points from preschool to primary school, primary school to high school and high school to college. We recognised at each of those points that students are vulnerable and that attention must be given to easing their transition. A significant amount of work is being done in the professional development area. Teachers in different sectors must be made aware of the nature of the students that are coming to them.

Mr Coleborne: I support what Ms Hinton just said. One issue that we are following up is the transmission of student data, for example, year 5 ACTAP results. We ensure that we identify those students in need of additional support and assistance in year 7. We pass information on confidentially through the school system to teachers in year 7 so that they can identify those students who need additional support and those students who have performed at a high level, and so that support can be provided to students showing particular talents. We do the same thing in relation to student transitions from year 9 to year 10 and year 11. We transmit that information to colleges so that students needing assistance in the transition period are given that assistance.

We are also conducting a survey, through the student support action plan, for students moving from year 6 to year 7. Staff members who are involved in that unit are undertaking planning to identify how best to track students moving from year 6 to year 7 and from year 10 to year 11. A small team will do some work to identify what information should be shared across all high schools and colleges to improve the transition of students from year 10 to year 11. I assure you that there is a strong interest in the transition of students, the need to provide them with support as they move across the years and the need to follow up students who need additional help.

MR HARGREAVES: Some years ago we were concerned about the provision of airconditioning in transportable classrooms at primary schools at Gordon and Conder. The department put in place a program to provide airconditioning at those schools. Has that project been finalised, or we are still proceeding down that track? Is there provision in the budget for airconditioning at those schools?

Mr Wheeler: The transport amenity improvement program for transportable classrooms is continuing. About three or four schools had airconditioning installed in transportable classrooms this year and about another three or four have installed airconditioning, but they have yet to send us their invoices. It is an ongoing program.

MR HARGREAVES: When I recently attended the magnificent Richardson Primary School art show—a leadership exercise that is teaching the kids how to be community leaders—I was also treated to a demonstration of interactive computer technology for kids.

Ms Hinton: SMART Board?

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, SMART Board. If kids in primary school are gaining that level of expertise and they go on to secondary school or college where that sort of technology is not available, would that present a problem? How is the department tackling that issue? Is that technology available at other primary schools?

Ms Hinton: Richardson is not the only school that has SMART Board, nor is it the only school that has other kinds of technology. As you would know, there is a lot of technological development and the use of that technology is spreading. Our survey information and school development data clearly show that teachers are much more comfortable using computers and information communication technology in providing lessons and developing learning experiences.

The challenge in information and communication technology is more about the way in which it is used to enhance the learning experience rather than about hardware or software. It is about the professional development of teachers and the way in which they can change the pedagogy and the approach to technology. That is happening, but it is happening at different speeds and in different ways in different areas. I am quite confident that one sector is not more technologically advanced than another.

MS MacDONALD: What is SMART Board for those who have not seen it?

Ms Hinton: Essentially, it is a large computer-like screen which has a scanner attached to it. It has finger touch. You could put up a lesson on the board. For example, you could scan a child's work. A child might have written a piece of poetry and that piece of poetry could be scanned and put up on the board. Children could then work collectively to change it. Similarly, they could work collectively on a particular mathematical problem. A keyboard, which is not connected to wires, is passed between students. A child can go up to the board and touch it to change something. So it is a motivating tool and it is a particularly advanced way of teaching. It is a good product.

THE CHAIR: When I went to school we used to call it chalk. I am sure other members would remember that.

MR HARGREAVES: That was the thing that was hurled at me from the other side of the room.

Ms Hinton: Yes, that is right and it would have taken you much longer to put your work on the board.

THE CHAIR: That raises a question. Do teachers now throw keyboards at kids rather than chalk and dusters?

MR HARGREAVES: I am sure they do not hit them as frequently. Teachers are now guiding kids to teach themselves, an innovative approach that is bearing a lot of fruit. One of the difficulties involved with educating anybody is maintaining the interest level. If children are interested in learning they can, with guidance, teach themselves.

Ms Hinton: The greatest benefit that information communication technology brings to education is the capacity to tailor educational programs to individual needs and to cater for the interests of students.

MR HARGREAVES: I refer to Taylor Music Festival—a brilliant activity that I know many Assembly members have actively supported and compered. The festival is an example of the community and schools working together to achieve excellence and to display that excellence. Quite often when people in the community think about education they think only about the three Rs and their kids' achievements. They tend to forget about community leadership and excellence.

When I see teenagers at the School of Music I tend to forget that they had to undergo that development in their primary years. I place on record my congratulations to the department, principals, teachers and parents on their involvement in this festival. Reference was made earlier to Wanniasa school burning down and coming up out of the ashes. That is an example of the community and schools working together.

THE CHAIR: It is a good program.

MR HARGREAVES: There is a bipartisan approach to that program, which is great. Output classes 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 refer to the development of services to indigenous people action plan for 2001-2004, which has almost been completed. We are three-quarters of the way through the program. How is that program being implemented? What will happen to the three sectors after 2004?

Ms Hinton: The services to indigenous people action plan encompassed the whole of the responsibilities of this agency. When we talked with our indigenous education consultative body and with people who were actively involved in the indigenous area it was clear that they were looking for an integrated approach, not just to schooling but to training and family support. We responded to that with the development of an indigenous services plan that covered all those aspects. Mr Coleborne chaired a task force with representatives from different areas who put together a quite simple but powerful plan. I will let Mr Coleborne talk about it.

Mr Coleborne: The plan was put together by me and by a number of stakeholders committed to identifying key outcomes that we wished to achieve in the indigenous community.

MR HARGREAVES: Who were those stakeholders?

Mr Coleborne: Representatives of the indigenous education consultative body were present. A number of other indigenous staff members who worked in that organisation had an interest in ensuring that we progressed these issues. But, as Ms Hinton said, we had to make sure that the plan had an overarching involvement for the whole department. It was seen as a plan to provide services to indigenous people as a whole. Commitments that we identified included overcoming racism and valuing diversity. Also included were commitments to forming genuine and ongoing partnerships, creating safe, supportive, welcoming and culturally inclusive environments, and ensuring that indigenous students achieved outcomes that were comparable to the performance of the population as a whole.

We are putting a great deal of effort into that area to ensure that the literacy and numeracy performance of indigenous students receives a great deal of attention. We want to raise the performance of students so that their performance, in the long run, is broadly comparable or even better—it already is in some cases—than the performance of students in our system as a whole.

MR HARGREAVES: As I understand it, there is a preponderance of young indigenous people living in Tuggeranong Valley. If my memory serves me correctly, a lot of them are concentrated around Wanniasa and Kambah. I heard at some stage that 75 per cent of young indigenous people live in the Tuggeranong Valley. I will not argue the toss about that number, but it is a lot. If those numbers are correct, is there a corresponding concentration of activity in Tuggeranong schools?

Ms Hinton: The decision to locate the indigenous education support program and the Gugan Gulwan youth centre at Erindale was in recognition of the concentration of indigenous young people in the Tuggeranong area. That has been a pretty successful intervention.

MR HARGREAVES: I get the feeling that there is a strong relationship between the department and schools, in particular, Gugan Gulwan.

Ms Hinton: Yes there is. As you would be aware, Gugan Gulwan has had its own challenges.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes, very much.

Ms Hinton: Those challenges are not related to the quality of the program that it offers; they relate only to some difficulties that have been experienced. Notwithstanding that, I believe that the relationships are good. When I have been there it has been clear to me that the service that is offered has been well received. Strong relationships have developed between Erindale College and Gugan Gulwan youth centre and the indigenous

education program. But we are not at all complacent about the educational outcomes for indigenous students.

There is no doubt that they need to improve. Initially, we put a major effort into achieving good attendance levels. We made considerable progress in that area but we still need to work at it in a number of different ways. The inclusiveness of the Koori classroom at Narrabundah Primary School is important. We are continuing to work towards gradually increasing the role and skills of staff in the indigenous education unit—one of last year's budget initiatives that is just another part of that process. I will not pretend for a moment that that problem will be fixed in a couple of years.

MR HARGREAVES: I noticed that there seem to be two groups of indigenous people in Canberra. There are the Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri people—the locals, if you like—and there is a predominance of children from people who have come to Canberra from elsewhere, for example, South Australia and Queensland. Those people who have come from interstate would be a bit of a challenge for the elders. But there appears to be a relationship between them and the Ngunnawal elders. The department appears to be dedicated to addressing indigenous issues.

Ms Hinton: We certainly want to work with Ngunnawal elders. They have been pleased with the decision that was taken by our department—a decision adopted by the government—to include a welcome to country as part of all significant school-based celebratory activities. That occurs on a regular basis.

MR HARGREAVES: So they are visible in the school community.

Ms Hinton: They are visible in the school community. There is a strong commitment by principals to those activities. Most principals recently attended a particularly good professional development activity entitled “Dare to lead”, which focused entirely on Aboriginal educational outcomes. Professor Paul Hughes from South Australia spoke powerfully at that meeting. There was also a good presentation by David McRae, who produced a practical guide funded by the Commonwealth entitled “What works in indigenous education.” That guide addresses the practical things that can be done within schools. There is a strong commitment by principals to that.

Mr Coleborne: With more than 500 indigenous students in primary schools and more than 200 indigenous students in secondary or high schools, those schools are supported in having individual learning plans for each indigenous student, irrespective of their attainment levels. Recently, we held quite detailed discussions with principals about the value of individual learning plans and to ensure that the needs of indigenous students are supported through the provision of those plans.

In National Reconciliation Week we are encouraging schools to present to each school community a compact—a statement of the principles and the support to which the department and the indigenous community have agreed. That certificate is to be shown prominently in the school area so that all community members entering the school can see the support that exists between indigenous communities, the department and our schools.

THE CHAIR: Did you say earlier that we had 500 students in our primary schools?

Mr Coleborne: I said that we have more than 500 indigenous students in our primary schools and more than 200 indigenous students in our high schools.

THE CHAIR: So how did we lose 300 students between year 6 and year 7?

Mr Coleborne: Children go to high schools for only four years and to primary schools for only seven years. K to 6 is a seven-year period and children go to high schools—year 7 to year 10—for a four-year period. So you have four lots of cohorts in high school and seven lots of cohorts in primary school. Naturally, there are more cohorts in primary school.

Ms Hinton: Notwithstanding that, one of the issues with which we are grappling—I think Mr Hargreaves referred to this issue—is the movement of indigenous children. So when we compare year 3 literacy results from year to year, or year 3 to year 5 results two years later, the extent to which we assess the same kids can vary significantly.

THE CHAIR: If you divide those 500 students by seven years—K to 6—that is about 70 indigenous students per year. If you divide those 200 students by four that represents about 50 indigenous students per year. Twenty students go missing.

Ms Hinton: It is a small number. In recent years we also had a small growth in the total number of indigenous students, if we are up to that kind of number. There is considerable movement as young people and their families come into and out of the territory. So it difficult to make a judgment or to decide whether 200 students in their high school years were present in the territory in their primary years.

MR PRATT: Comments were made earlier about the student support plan, which reflects the fact that education is important to indigenous families. I do not see any performance indicator in Legislative Assembly quarterly reports on indigenous education. How successful have the department and schools been in engaging with families? What sorts of improvements have there been in the last few years?

Ms Gallagher: To begin with, it is difficult to measure the role of schools and the impact that they have on families. A school at Narrabundah has put a lot of effort into that area. The other night when I was at a dinner that school at Narrabundah received a Koori award for the work that it is doing in involving families in the education of young people. That involvement has resulted in good educational outcomes for children.

I think it is all about learning how to get it right. We need to involve indigenous communities and families across the board in all areas of children's education. Indigenous home school liaison officers are welcoming and supporting families and they are creating relationships with those families. Schools no longer appear to those families as being such a foreign place. We are achieving good outcomes for those students.

MR PRATT: In the 2½ years that this project has been under way what success rate have you achieved? How many families did you engage with in 2001 and 2002? It is probably too early to report on this year. Clearly, this is a fundamental issue. Are you satisfied that you have been able to engage with and involve those families, or are there problems that we should know about?

Ms Gallagher: It is an area in which we are having some success. However, it is difficult to measure that success rate. When families make a decision to become involved—and it requires some partnerships from them—they want to become involved with the school community. Work is being done to support them and we are achieving some good outcomes. However, there is no doubt that we could do more.

MR PRATT: I do not want to draw this down to a simple mathematical exercise, but are you stating that you are unable to quantify the number of families which have been engaged in a given year? Are you not able to compare current success rates with the success rates of previous years?

Ms Hinton: Yes, we are unable to do that. This issue is about trust and about establishing relationships rather than about ticking off the number of times someone comes to a school. The compact was predicated on enhancing and developing trust. Research on and information that is available about indigenous affairs emphasises the fact that it must be predicated on trust and on a respect for individuals. We must recognise the value of their way of life and what they bring to the school community. We must not simply want to engage them from our perspective.

That compact process was extraordinarily important. Before the chair of the indigenous education consultative group and I signed the draft document, the chair sent it to the parents or carers of every indigenous child in our system for a response. Mr Coleborne said earlier that the department and the indigenous education consultative group collectively presented a copy of that compact to each school community. That is part of the process of trying to develop that sense of trust.

Recently, when some other people and I were present at an Australian Education Union function, awards were presented to about 15 teachers in our system for outstanding work in the areas of indigenous education and reconciliation. The citations that were read out at the time covered many of the things that you were talking about, such as developing those sorts of relationships. It is difficult to quantify our success rate because meaningful contact with one family over an extended period is likely to be far more significant than a fleeting contact with 20 other families that does not achieve anything.

MR PRATT: I do not think anybody is suggesting that parents are being asked to sign a book to measure attendance rates. However, I would have thought that schools would have reported on and the department would have assessed in some quantifiable way the number of contacts that you have had and the amount of interest that has been shown by families after you sent out copies of that compact for comment.

Ms Hinton: We will include in our next six-monthly report statistics that show how we have engaged with the community. We will try to put something together in a qualitative way to help to address the issues that you are raising.

MR PRATT: That would be useful.

Mr Coleborne: We have upgraded positions in the department and given indigenous education workers further training and skills so that they can interact with and engage the parents of students. Currently, nine positions have been upgraded and two more positions

are to be filled. So we will have 11 indigenous education workers with a home school liaison role who will work closely with indigenous families. As Ms Hinton said, I am sure that a lot of work has already been done in that area. I am confident that schools such as Narrabundah would be aware of and would have close contact with every indigenous family.

MR PRATT: I have met some of those people. I was quite impressed with the amount of work that has been done.

Ms Hinton: There is monitoring of that kind in some schools, but it is by no means comprehensive. As I said earlier, we will include those statistics in our next six-monthly report.

THE CHAIR: Minister, it would be sensible if we dealt at the same time with all the subjects that are covered by output class 1—high schools, colleges and special education. We have 14 subclasses to get through before the close of business today. The more time we spend on schools, the less time we will be able to spend on other areas.

MR PRATT: Minister, I refer to school accountability and performance reporting. What does the department do to measure a school's performance? What sorts of benchmarks are applied? What performance indicators do you use to ensure that you cover all bases when reviewing schools?

Ms Gallagher: Are you referring to the school development process?

MR PRATT: Yes.

Ms Gallagher: I think we provided you with an answer to a question that you asked on notice.

MR PRATT: I am looking for more detail. I would like to know more about the model that you are using to measure a school's performance.

Ms Gallagher: I am not sure whether I understand your question. You want to know whether we benchmark information that we obtain from the school development program?

MR PRATT: What template are you using to measure a school's performance? Are you using a standard template to measure that performance, or does the assessment system change for every school?

Ms Hinton: A number of processes are used. Clearly, there are some differences, depending on the level of schooling. For example, at the year 12 level, a substantial amount of information is published relating to the educational outcomes of various government and non-government schools. The school development template and school development report cover that sort of area. Generally speaking, the government school plan determines general satisfaction rates, the extent to which the school system is addressing or meeting the educational needs of students, and the extent to which it is helping students develop into good citizens.

It covers a number of issues like that. Underpinning that school excellence initiative is the need for a more developed process so that schools can assess themselves in key areas. One of the elements of the school excellence initiative will be the development of a framework against which schools can assess their performance and identify the key elements that contribute to becoming an effective school.

MR PRATT: What do we have in place now?

Ms Hinton: The current system, which has been in place for some time, involves the writing of a report about a school's development.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 310 of BP 4, which reflects that 90 per cent of students met the national benchmark for reading. The bottom of page 307 refers to the children's, youth and family childcare parenting infrastructure. I note in output classes 1.1 and 1.2 a reference to student satisfaction with the school. Output classes for colleges are not reflected in the budget papers. Is there a reason why those statistics are not included in the government's special education program? Do we now not listen to the comments of college students?

Ms Hinton: The college issue is similar to the school development program issue. Because of the cyclical nature of assessment, we do not have information on colleges this year and we will not have information on colleges next year. The current arrangement involves a five-year cycle to obtain all that information, but that cycle will be reduced to three years. When I looked at the special education program I thought we had not expressed it as clearly as we might have done. However, that will be changed in the first quarterly report. We will be changing the process by which we report student or parent satisfaction with special schools. We will be linking that to the new student-centred appraisal process and individual learning plan process. There will be an amendment in the first quarterly report to provide for parent satisfaction as gauged through the individual learning plan process.

THE CHAIR: If you are reducing the cycle to three years it will mean that some college students will not be assessed. Are you able to obtain information from colleges every two years, otherwise a number of college student cohorts will never see a survey?

Ms Gallagher: When we are implementing that initiative we could look at reducing the cycle in colleges to two years. We are heading in the right direction by reducing the cycle from five years to three years, but it would be useful if we were able to obtain information from colleges every two years.

THE CHAIR: We need to do what we can for the small number of special students in primary schools, high schools and colleges. Is there some way that you could incorporate them? I take on board what you have said, but perhaps you could write a more distinct report?

Ms Gallagher: Relating to student satisfaction with these schools?

THE CHAIR: Yes, not just parent satisfaction. I know it would be hard to obtain statistics for some students.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, that is right. We could look at that as well in the new student-centred model. The ideal would be to have students signing on as well as parents, where they can, so we will be involving them at that level. Perhaps we could look at including students and parents.

Ms Hinton: Two approaches are used to identify student satisfaction with special education. We are seeking to identify that on an annual basis through the introduction of the individual learning plan process. In addition, the school review process involves special school students when they are at school. This year, for example, Koomarri will undergo that school development process. Students in the last two years of primary school and high school students will be invited to provide that comment, which will be included in the report.

MRS CROSS: I refer to the ratings that you have given. Mr Smyth touched earlier on output classes. I have been asking questions about ratings throughout these estimates committee hearings. What formula do you use to make decisions on targets and outcomes? There are inconsistencies throughout these output classes. You do not seem to be using a particular formula. The example that I will use is to be found on page 310 of BP 4 under the headings “Quality/Effectiveness” and “Parent satisfaction with their children’s education as measured by survey.”

The target in 2002-03 is 92 per cent, the estimated outcome in 2002-03 is 95 per cent and the target for 2003-04 is 92 per cent. Does that mean that you are happy with the original target and that you will not strive to reach the estimated outcome? There is a reference also on page 310 to students in year 3 who meet national benchmarks for numeracy. The target in 2002-03 is 90 per cent, the estimated outcome in 2002-03 is 94 per cent and the target for 2003-04 is 90 per cent.

Ms Hinton: It is not exactly a science; it is a more a matter of judgment about what might be an appropriate target having regard to past practice, past performance and what we might expect in the future. From time to time we look at the figures, review them and make some amendments to them. But, generally, we would not amend a target to increase it on the basis of one year’s performance in some of those areas. It takes a bit of experience.

MRS CROSS: If that is the case, why then on page 311 under the headings “Quality/Effectiveness” and “Percentage of year 10 students who proceed to government secondary college education” is the target for 2002-03 at 85 per cent, the estimated outcome for 2002-03 at 85 per cent and the target for 2003-04 at 85 per cent? The figures are all the same.

Ms Hinton: That is right. That target was developed on the basis of past experience—what we thought was a reasonable thing to aim for. That outcome is what we said it might be and that is what we think it will be next year.

MS MacDONALD: There is no point in setting the target at 95 per cent or 100 per cent if you are not going to achieve it.

MRS CROSS: On page 312 of BP 4, output class 1.3, under the same category, "Quality/Effectiveness," there is a reference to the percentage of year 12 students who receive a nationally recognised vocational qualification. You have a target for 2002-03 of 45 per cent, an estimated outcome for 2002-03 of 54 per cent and a target for 2003-04 of 50 per cent.

Ms Gallagher: I think that is due to the fact that vocational education is a growing area. We have upped the target in recognition of the fact that more students are participating.

MS MacDONALD: You are proceeding cautiously?

MRS CROSS: I agree. I think it is fantastic. I encourage students to participate in vocational education. Given that you have done so well in that area and given that your estimated outcome was 9 per cent higher than your target, I would have thought that you would have upped your target in 2003-04.

Ms Gallagher: We have taken the average. We will see where it goes.

MS DUNDAS: I refer to a point that Mrs Cross made earlier about the percentage of year 10 students proceeding to government secondary college education. Are you aiming to increase that number at all? Does that mean that 15 per cent of students are going to non-government secondary college education? Do you know where that 15 per cent of students is going?

Ms Hinton: We have done quite a bit of work in that area. Mr Coleborne, who has been working with college principals, has established that students are going to a number of destinations.

Mr Coleborne: Students are going to a number of destinations. Obviously, at that point they have a choice whether or not to proceed to further study, go to part-time or full-time work, do some kind of full-time or part-time training, or go interstate to other schools. Students can go to a number of destinations because of the mobility of the population. We are interested in working with students who enter year 11 and we are interested in ensuring that the greatest proportion of them proceed from year 11 to complete their education by the end of year 12. A great deal of work is being done to support students who, in their college years, enter our system to obtain a complete education.

Ms Hinton: We are interested also in students who do not proceed to any form of education and training after year 10. Those students are of considerable concern to us.

MS MacDONALD: Of the 15 per cent of students who do not proceed to secondary college, how many do not go on to undertake any of the other options that we talked about?

Mr Coleborne: We do not have that information to hand.

Ms Hinton: The number is large enough to cause concern, but it is certainly less than 15 per cent.

MRS DUNNE: How does that figure of 85 per cent relate to retention rates? Does that mean that 15 per cent of people in government schools who fail year 10 will not go on to do any further training?

Ms Gallagher: No.

MRS DUNNE: I want to know how meaningful that figure is. A first reading of that figure reveals it to be alarming. Fifteen per cent of people are not proceeding on to years 11 and 12. I think we referred last week to the importance of students remaining in school, as it improves their employment prospects.

Ms Gallagher: They are not going to government colleges.

MRS DUNNE: I know that they are not going to government colleges, but where are they going?

Ms Gallagher: ABS data reveals that the retention rates in the ACT in years 10 to 12 were 91.2 per cent for boys and 95.4 per cent for girls. Retention rates in Australia were about 70 per cent for boys and 80 per cent for girls.

Mr Mason: That figure of 85 per cent relates not to apparent retention rates, which are much higher than that, but to students in year 10. We wanted to determine what percentage of that group of students was completing year 12 certificates. We have to allow for the fact that people transfer out of the ACT for all sorts of good reasons and go to live somewhere else. If only 4 per cent of the people did that you would have a 96 per cent retention rate from one year to the next. When you compound that over a period of three years it would give you an expected 88 per cent retention rate at the end of year 12.

Ms Hinton: We are putting in place a couple of strategies to address some of those issues. Mr Coleborne has already talked about a better tracking of students at risk and working through transition points for students in year 10. We have to pay particular attention to literacy issues for students in year 9 because they are quite significant issues. We also have to pay attention to transfer protocols between high schools and colleges. Another important area is the development of a student pathway plan initiative, which at the moment is in its consultation and trial phase. That initiative is aimed at assisting young people to develop a sense of responsibility and an understanding about where they can go and what they can do.

Mr Coleborne: Over the next month we will be putting together a team of teachers to work on this transfer of students from year 10 to year 11. As Ms Hinton said, we will determine what information we should share about students moving from year 10 to year 11 so that we can best identify those who need assistance, obtain the closest possible liaison between high schools and colleges in that area, identify further strategic plans to address the needs of students at risk in the college years and pass on the kind of information that will allow those teachers to provide the best possible support to students entering year 10. A significant amount of work has to be done in that area.

Ms Hinton: I reinforce what the minister said earlier. We pay particular regard to this area because we know it is important to individuals and we know that it will enhance their life chances. However, it is important to keep the sorts of figures that the minister

talked about in perspective if we are to understand how well the ACT performs when compared to other states and territories.

MS MacDONALD: I add to that comment by stating that I understand the ACT has the highest year 12 student retention rates around the country. Maybe we should not be focusing on retaining year 12 students. Maybe we should offer them alternatives. Some students do not necessarily want to progress to year 12. However, that is just my personal platform. Obviously, some of these measures are fairly self-explanatory, but how do you determine them? Are they reviewed regularly or on an annual basis? Should we be adding to those measures?

Ms Hinton: We have just a small snapshot of the performance of schools. In fact, we are encouraged to keep them at a manageable size and not to have pages and pages of statistics. We present a lot of information in our annual report. We also present in our annual report a lot of information on year 12 literacy and numeracy assessments and results—for vocational courses as well as tertiary accredited courses—and we provide the school development report. Those documents alone, not to mention our six-monthly report to the Assembly on indigenous education, add up to a fair degree of reporting on activities and paperwork.

We have tried to maintain a focus on a number of key issues. The first issue relates to the satisfaction levels of parents and students. The second issue relates to educational outcomes, that is, literacy and numeracy outcomes as measured against national benchmarks. The third issue relates to participation and retention rates. Those are the three key strands of our reporting. While some people might quibble about particular measures, most people believe that those three areas—educational outcomes, the satisfaction levels of clients, and participation and retention rates—represent the key areas.

MRS DUNNE: I refer to what Mr Mason said earlier and seek clarification. Mr Mason said that 85 per cent of year 10 students proceed to government secondary college education. I understood from what he said that that was a measure of how many students got to the other end. Those are the students who left year 10 and who actually exited a government secondary college in year 12. Is that what that figure of 85 per cent is about?

Mr Mason: Yes. That figure represents the number of students who received a year 12 certificate divided by the number of students who were counted in the census.

MRS DUNNE: Two years before.

Mr Mason: Yes, when they were in year 10.

MRS DUNNE: I am not sure whether that is better or worse.

MS DUNDAS: I have a quick question on the figures. However, I think we discovered this morning that my maths is a little rusty. Eighty-five per cent of 10,037 students represents about 8,500 students. I am referring to the estimated outcome in the budget papers.

Mr Coleborne: No, the cohort is about 4,000 or 3,500 students.

MS DUNDAS: That is the estimated outcome.

Ms Hinton: That is the number of students in years 7, 8, 9 and 10.

THE CHAIR: So it is 2,500 students a year.

MS DUNDAS: Have you thought about adding the percentage of year 10 students who proceed to vocational education or to the CIT? Have you thought about the number of students who go through TAFE, the CIT or other vocational education providers?

Ms Hinton: Yes, we have thought about it. We are keen to get that sort of information, but real resource questions have to be addressed in obtaining that kind of information, aligning databases, et cetera. We have not abandoned thinking about it.

Mr Coleborne: We also have the view that involvement in vocational education and training is an inclusive curriculum matter. In our colleges alone more than 50 per cent of students are currently engaged in vocational courses. So we do not see it as a necessary path that students would go down. However, they would include it as much as possible when selecting their mainstream learning experiences.

MS DUNDAS: Another measure would be to include the number of students who are not going to secondary colleges. Because of the vocational plan that they pick up at schools they go straight to the CIT or to another training institute. So you would not necessarily be losing them from education; they would just be going to a different form of education.

Mr Coleborne: It happens at different times. Some students would go from year 10 and some students might start in year 11 and then decide that they would prefer to take that course. Some students might enter year 12 and decide at some point that they might like to take that course. So students do not do that at a predetermined point. A proportion of students undertake training not only at the CIT but also with other training providers. They do that as an alternative to completing a full secondary education in a college environment. But only a small number of students do that.

THE CHAIR: If you do the maths and divide 10,000 high school students by four it is about 2,500 students a year. If 80 per cent of those students go on to colleges, that represents about 2,000 students. So across the two years you would expect about 4,000 students in our colleges. However, we have 6,000 students. That is because there has been quite a surge back into the ACT college system. Going back to year 7, though, I would have expected the number of students in primary schools who go across to high schools each year to have been closer to 11,000. So there is quite a shift from government primary schools into the high school system.

Ms Gallagher: There is. That is where the major shift occurs.

THE CHAIR: Those students cannot go anywhere other than to another school. They cannot go to TAFE or anywhere else, so they have to go to another high school.

Ms Hinton: They are less of a concern, in a sense, because they are involved in education at school.

THE CHAIR: That is true. Students will end up in a school somewhere. At about the end of year 6 and at the start of year 7, parents are opting to take students out of ACT high schools and some are not even sending students to ACT high schools. What are you doing to address that loss of about 1,000 students a year?

Ms Hinton: The figure is actually a bit lower than the figures for metropolitan Sydney.

THE CHAIR: I am interested in hearing the minister's answer to that question.

Ms Gallagher: It is a difficult question to answer. I do not know why parents exercise that choice. The number of students in government primary schools and colleges is different from the number of students in high schools. I do not know why parents make that choice when students are at high school. The other night, when I was at a meeting, one of the parents attending that meeting asked me the same question. I said, "You are in a better position to answer that question than I am. You have made that choice."

I am not sure whether there is an easy answer to that question. Some parents are choosing, for one reason or another, to send their children to non-government schools. Approximately 44 per cent of parents are choosing to send students to non-government high schools. However, a proportion of those students return to the government college system.

THE CHAIR: If this matter has been brought to your attention, what have you done to establish why there is such a large shift? We are talking about a significant percentage of parents—not 1 per cent or 2 per cent—who are opting not to send year 7 students to a government high school. However, they are choosing to send year 11 students back to the government school sector. Clearly, we have a solid primary school sector and a great college system, but what is wrong with our high schools?

Ms Gallagher: I do not think that anything is necessarily wrong with them. Some of the budget initiatives this year and last year reflect the fact that extra support was needed in high schools. We have provided that support. We have in place action plans and student support measures and non-government schools and government schools are working together. Those parents who can afford it choose non-government high schools for their children.

Ms Hinton: One significant point is that students across all our government high schools are performing at extraordinarily high levels. So parents know that they can send their children to any government school in this territory and get good results. We know that because of the students' performance in years 11 and 12.

THE CHAIR: That is true. We have students who perform well and high schools produce a good product, if you can call students a product. Students get a good education. If that is the case, why is there a shift away from government schools? It is not cheap to educate year 7 and year 10 students. The fees for students in non-government primary schools are relatively low compared to the fees for students in high school. However, that factor might be taken into account when students are in year 11

and year 12. They tend then to come back to the college system. High schools have fairly high standards, so why are we seeing such a significant shift?

Ms Hinton: It is an interesting question and one that I think has strong connections with the age group. Most parents indicate that they have most difficulty with their children in that age period of 13 through to 16, rather than in the primary years. I think that is a factor that has an impact on their choice at that time.

THE CHAIR: Is it a matter of discipline; is that the perception?

Ms Hinton: We are talking about the transition of a child to adulthood—the transition from dependence to independence in society generally. That transition, which covers a range of different ages, is something with which young people and parents struggle.

MR PRATT: Perhaps it revolves around the formulation of values.

Ms Hinton: Not necessarily. You could view it from a different perspective. In some instances, parents are less willing to see their children becoming independent.

Mr Coleborne: Recent school development data that is shortly to be released shows an increasing level of satisfaction by parents and students in the high school years. Satisfaction levels in the high school years are strong—perhaps the best we have ever had.

MR PRATT: There has been a year 7 drift for quite a few years. When are you likely to analyse why that is happening?

Ms Gallagher: Non-government schools and government schools, which are working together, provide education for our high school students. I am not sure whether we need to be saying that we want all those students back in the government school system. I am sure that the non-government sector would not support that proposition. However, that is the framework within which we work. We recognise that high school years provide challenges for parents. It is obvious from the statistics that they have to exercise some choice in those years in relation to the education for their children.

They might base their choices on the fact that non-government schools provide single-sex schooling. They might base their choices on a number of other factors. We have to ensure that the high school system is there for everybody. That is exactly what we are doing. Increased satisfaction levels reflect that we are doing that work. We have a top quality education system in both the government sector and the non-government sector. Schooling is available to anyone who wants to access it. I do not believe that we need to change our enrolment system. That is not an issue that I am concerned about at the moment.

Short adjournment

THE CHAIR: Minister, we will pick up where we left off. Why do we have a large movement out of the high school system in the middle years—I'm not sure it's an exodus—and a large movement back into the college system? What is it about government high schools that makes ACT parents seem to have less regard for them; I'm

not sure it's less respect for them? We certainly have a very strong primary sector and a very strong college sector. I think you talked about same-sex schools, so is it same-sex education, is it boys' schools, is it discipline? What is it about our high school system that parents seem not to be enamoured of, given, as Ms Hinton said, we actually do get very good results from that part of the sector?

MR PRATT: Given that parents are prepared to spend money to take their year 7 children off to the non-government sector—and that's a persistent trend that we've seen for quite a number of years—what do you think is the reason they are spending money to go into a different system? What does the non-government sector, which is one of two sectors that make up the ACT system, offer that you think perhaps the government sector is not?

Ms Gallagher: Again, I'm not sure that I'm the best person to answer this question, if we're talking about parents' choices and the reasons parents make those choices. I think we need to focus on the fact that there is a dual system here, with non-government and government schooling. Across the sector, they provide excellent outcomes for students.

It's a system that works cooperatively. The numbers tell us that parents make a choice, particularly in the high school years, about which particular school offers their children something that they want for those years. It's not an easy question to answer. Considering whether I should address this decline is not a question that's taking up a lot of my time. I'm not sure that is something that the non-government sector wants to see me spending a lot of time on, nor is it where I want to spend my energies, which is in ensuring that the education system here provides the best education opportunities for all our children, regardless of where they're educated. I think that's a much more positive focus to have with regard to this question, rather than asking why parents make this choice. Again, it's probably a question that's better put to the parents who make that choice.

MR PRATT: Clearly, we would prefer not to have to ask parents and spend more funds. As I think you've said a number of times, the government sector is there to make sure that everybody is catered for. If there is a division in performance, which is what the feedback seems to say, what is it? Why did we spend \$276,000 on the Connors inquiry? Why could we not have spent some of that money on trying to drill down and determine why this performance gap exists in years 7, 8 and 9?

Ms Gallagher: I disagree with your statement that there's a performance gap. I think the results from both the non-government sector and the government sector support the fact that, on the whole, our students are performing at a level higher than national benchmarks. Certainly, within the government system, where I have responsibility, we're giving enormous energy and creating strategies to support students who aren't performing at those levels.

In relation to the Connors inquiry, I think we've probably visited this before, but I think the inquiry that Lyndsay Connors held was extremely useful. I have certainly heard that, across the board, from the people who participated in it, both within the non-government and government sectors. It's given us information that we haven't had previously, and some advice about how best to spend public money on education. I don't see that it was a waste of money at all. Your question was whether that money could have been used to

address the performance gap. I dispute the fact that there is a performance gap; so, no, I wouldn't agree with you.

MR PRATT: As we all know, the performance of ACT schools compared to the rest of the country is quite good.

Ms Gallagher: It's very good.

MR PRATT: Yes. In fact, it rates very highly, and we can be particularly proud of that. But it still doesn't get away from the fact that there is this constant migration, this trend, and it's growing.

Ms Gallagher: It's growing nationally, as well, I think.

MR PRATT: But that doesn't excuse it, does it?

Ms Gallagher: Is it a problem?

MR PRATT: It is if we can be proud of our system, but we can do better. We should always strive to do better, shouldn't we?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I think we all agree on that. We should always be striving to look at ways in which we can improve.

MR PRATT: Okay. Are you satisfied with the way in which we are imparting values in those crucial first three years of high school, which I think is probably what a lot of families are concerned about. That probably underwrites this drift: the teaching of values, or perhaps ensuring that values are well enshrined in the daily school routine, in the culture of our schooling. Are you happy that those requirements are being met in our government schools, particularly in years 7, 8 and 9?

Ms Gallagher: Our schools—again, this is across the board—teach our children and our young people how to be good citizens. That is an essential part of the teaching process. From what I can see, and from my visits to high schools and my visit to a primary school every morning of the school year, I see that this is ingrained in every aspect of teachers' learning: how to support our children and how to instil in them an understanding of what it means to be a good citizen.

With regard to whether parents have other areas that they perceive are met better by the non-government sector, that's a choice those parents make. Those areas may include religious study, the wearing of uniforms—if that's something that's important to the parent—and discipline, although I'm trying to think of a better word there. There are areas where I think that, if parents believe that their child needs something that is on offer in another school, they should make that choice. However, within our schools, I'm absolutely satisfied that what we're doing with our young people is supporting them to become good citizens.

MR PRATT: Are you satisfied that, for parents who are concerned about those crucial first couple of years in high school, schools are providing a non-disruptive environment for good teaching and for the development of self-discipline?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MR PRATT: You don't think there's a problem? You're not getting feedback from the community that those are the sorts of issues that bother parents?

Ms Gallagher: No, I am certainly not getting that from the community. No, I'm not having those issues raised with me by the community at all. I think I've answered this previously. The work that teachers do in the learning process is very much about supporting the individual needs of students, and instilling in them knowledge of how to be good citizens. Acceptance of diversity and inclusiveness in our community—all of that is very much part of the educational process here, and I believe that is the case across the board.

MR PRATT: Why are non-government schools doing those sorts of things better, particularly in those crucial first three years?

Ms Gallagher: I don't agree with you, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: Why is that the impression in the community?

Ms Gallagher: It's an impression that you have.

MR PRATT: Why is it a driving force behind this migration of students?

MS MacDONALD: Steve, you don't necessarily have evidence of that, so you can't actually—

THE CHAIR: Ms MacDonald, it's not a debating society. It is for the minister to answer.

MR PRATT: Can we debate that at lunchtime, please, Karin? That's my question, so I'll let that run.

Ms Gallagher: Can you repeat the question, Mr Pratt? I think it was something I disagreed with, so could I just say I disagree?

MR PRATT: This is the feedback that I get continually as a representative. Why do you think parents think that the non-government schools, particularly in those first three crucial years where you want to ensure that kids undertake that transition, are doing it better? Why is that perception there?

Ms Gallagher: I think perhaps you're right and you've put your finger on it. I don't agree that there's a difference in what's on offer but, in perception, I think there are some arguments there. Perhaps it's how this whole debate, non-government versus government, has actually proceeded, both in the media and at national levels. I think there is a perception there that non-government schools offer something that government schools don't, but I don't agree with that perception. I don't see it as a problem. I don't see the fact that we have a vibrant non-government sector coexisting with a top-quality

government sector as a problem. If it's a problem, it certainly hasn't been raised with me as such.

MR PRATT: I don't either. I agree with you entirely on this. Are you inclined to perhaps go and see for yourself, to analyse whether that perception is in fact reality, given this constant movement of children in that crucial phase of personal development?

Ms Gallagher: I visit government and non-government schools on an invitation basis where I can. It's an important part of my job. I think I have an understanding of what's on there. I don't see it as a problem that needs emphasis. You keep using the words "constant decline": it has been a decline that's occurred fairly steadily over a number of years, particularly if we look back to 1996. It's a decline that's reflected nationally as well. I'm not sure that we necessarily need to view it as a problem, instead of looking at how we coexist.

MR PRATT: But we needn't depend on other jurisdictional patterns. Thanks very much.

Ms Gallagher: No problem.

MS DUNDAS: I want to ask a question about how the money works in relation to the declining enrolments in government schools. There are different figures throughout the budget papers. I want an explanation for these figures in detail, and I'll get to that. However, more broadly, I want to know how the decrease in funding is actually affecting the ability of the schools to continue to do the work that they're trying to do, and whether or not it's then going to have a flow-on effect, in that reduced funding for schools will mean that they can't necessarily deliver the same outcomes, which will just add to the perceptions that Mr Pratt was talking about.

Ms Hinton: The process of allocating resources to schools uses a formula. That formula has a component that recognises the fixed costs associated with the operation of that school—the principal's salary, a janitor, administrative support—plus a per capita component that reflects the numbers of students enrolled in the school. Consequently, the school then configures its classes, having regard to the total resources that it has, which is the same per student amount, and the age groupings of the students that it has.

MS DUNDAS: Can you explain the different figures to me? On page 305, in the changes to appropriation table, lower down the table there are the adjustments for declining enrolments in government schools, which are calculated at \$1 million in the 2006-07 estimate, but \$978,000 this year. Then, in the budget statement on page 304, where it talks about the grants from the Commonwealth, there's a decrease to government schools of \$952,000 but then, for the next year, an increase in government schooling grants of nearly half a million. Then, page 297—and I think this is the difference between territorial and departmental figures—notes the "impact of declining student enrolments" with a figure of \$1.047 million. Can you give me a breakdown of the money that government schools are actually losing to declining enrolments?

Mr Wheeler: The impact of declining enrolments in 2003-04 is just a little less than \$1 million. It's \$900,000 and something.

MS DUNDAS: Is that the \$978,000?

Mr Wheeler: Yes. With regard to the numbers that you're quoting, one of them represents Commonwealth grants, which will be driven by programs as well as by enrolment numbers. To be honest, they're our best assessment of what the Commonwealth grants levels will be, and we never know that until the budget comes down.

You made a reference to some of the financial statement changes and, of course, some of the enrolment factors would have been factored into the forward estimates and some wouldn't have been. However, if there's a particular number there that you're interested in, could you just point that one out in the notes to the statements?

MS DUNDAS: Page 297 has the line, "offset by: impact of declining student enrolments in governments schools" to the tune of \$1.047 million, just after all the dot points. That is the departmental result, I think.

Mr Wheeler: The number on page 297 at "offset by" also picks up the cumulative effect of the previous year's enrolment adjustment. There's a small amount there.

MS DUNDAS: Of about \$50,000.

Mr Wheeler: Yes, it's not much. It's really the accounting way of recognising the declines over various years.

MS DUNDAS: Do you actually think that there will be a major impact in the outyears caused by the reduced funding for government schools, based solely on declining enrolments?

Mr Wheeler: What you're looking at, in the outyears, represents the way that the budget is put together. Once you've recognised the reduction, unless you have reason to think that it's reversing, you allow that to flow through to the forward estimates. Of course, in the case of enrolments, in the next year when you do another census, that position is then reflected in that year's current budget and, again, the impact of that flows through. Sometimes it will be a minus and sometimes it will be a plus. All those out year figures are doing is showing our best estimate of the flow-on effect of the particular adjustment in this current year.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. On a related topic, Mr Pratt has spoken at length about the reasons he believes that there is a perception that going to private schools is better than going to government schools. One of the reasons that I've heard that people are making those choices for their children is related to safety at government high schools. I notice that, on page 307, you have allocated money for safety facilities at various schools as part of the capital works program. Can you just explain to me what you are going to do with that money?

Mr Wheeler: This is a rolling program. The two main items are a long-term program to upgrade glass—providing higher standards of glass—and taking measures to make it harder to get up on the roof in a number of schools. We've actually had occasions where youths have been up on the roof, mostly in after-school hours. We've been putting in certain safety measures there.

MS DUNDAS: Is that across primary schools, high schools and colleges?

Mr Wheeler: Yes, it's a rolling program based on assessment of priority.

MRS DUNNE: I want to go back more substantively to the issues that we were discussing before morning tea and that Mr Pratt took up after morning tea. Minister, you say that, yes, there is a decline. I think the rough figures are that, in primary school years, about 38 per cent of children are in non-government schools but, when you get to the high school years, that figure is up to 44 per cent. I would say that people are voting with their feet by going to the non-government schools.

It's good to see that you're not flustered by this, but a couple of issues arise from it. Are you getting high school education on the cheap as a result? If there wasn't that six percentage points move, you would have to put a lot more money into high school education, so you're actually getting the high school sector of the schooling budget on the cheap. Is that the reason that you're not fussed about it?

Ms Gallagher: No, not at all. I am on the record, including during this committee's hearings, as having said a number of times that the system we offer, the government system, is there for everybody. We have put resources into it to ensure that it's the highest quality system that we can provide. As I've also said a number of times, parents exercise a choice about where they send their children, if they can exercise that choice.

MRS DUNNE: It seems though, Minister, that the people who can exercise the choice are, in higher proportions, deciding to exercise that choice somewhere other than in the schools for which you have primary responsibility. You asked whether that matters. That's a debatable issue, but doesn't it say something about the quality of the schooling? You're saying it's there for all, but the clear message is that increasing numbers of people don't want their kids in government schools.

I am not satisfied with you saying, "I'm not turning my mind to it. I'm not worried about it", because does it not tell you something about the underlying qualities that you are offering in high school education? I'm not satisfied with Ms Hinton saying, "It's happening everywhere." If you are supposedly providing education for all, you're obviously failing, because there are more and more people every year voting with their feet and taking their children out of government high schools. What are you doing about it?

Ms Gallagher: I'm not sure where you're trying to go, Vicki. We have a system here in which we have a number of non-government schools providing education to children and we have a number of government schools providing education to children. Is that a problem?

MRS DUNNE: It wouldn't be a problem, Minister, if the non-government schools were being treated fairly in funding arrangements.

Ms Gallagher: Right, so we're getting back to this.

MR HARGREAVES: Here we go.

MRS DUNNE: We had a long discussion last week about how it wasn't your responsibility to do that, but at the same time you're abdicating your responsibilities—

Ms Gallagher: No, I don't think I said that, Vicki.

MR HARGREAVES: You want everybody else to pay for someone's Catholic education.

MRS DUNNE: No.

MR HARGREAVES: Yes. Come on, be honest about it.

THE CHAIR: Do you want everybody else to pay for government education?

MR HARGREAVES: I don't want everybody to pay for choice.

MRS DUNNE: We had a long discussion last week about equity, and no-one in this room or anywhere else is saying that you should be providing the same amount of money to non-government schools as you are to government schools.

MS MacDONALD: That's just the underlying aim.

MRS DUNNE: It is not the underlying issue.

THE CHAIR: Members will come to order. Mrs Dunne, get to your question. It's not a debating society.

MRS DUNNE: What are you doing to address the inequity in funding when so many people are moving out of the government school system? They get to year 7 and they go out and they come back in. What is it that's wrong with the system that makes people vote with their feet? There has to be something wrong with the system if people vote with their feet. If you're not going to do anything about it, and you said that you are not going to turn your mind to it, what are you going to do about addressing the funding shortfall that that creates in the non-government sector?

Ms Gallagher: I don't think it does create a funding shortfall, Vicki, so I disagree with the proposition that you're putting.

MRS DUNNE: Right, that's all I need to know.

MS MacDONALD: In relation to this issue of high schools and the number of students in high schools, Mr Coleborne, you talked before about the level of satisfaction of parents with children in high schools being at its highest for a number of years. I'm interested to know how the department feels the money that's being expended on curriculum development will actually impact on the choice of government high school over non-government high school. Considering that we've talked about this issue and that there will be an element of professional development within that program as well, how will the development of the eight key learning areas in government high schools make changes in those schools that would have an impact on choice?

Ms Gallagher: Jim can follow up, but I think the curriculum renewal is a very important initiative and a very exciting one. The aim of it is to ensure that we have a curriculum that is engaging for all our students. Importantly, as we all know, the non-government system uses the government curriculum and so curriculum renewal is something that, rather than producing competition, will benefit the whole education community.

We've certainly invited the non-government schools' various representatives to work with us throughout the roll-out of that curriculum renewal, because not only will students in the government sector benefit from that, but there will be a direct benefit to all the students in non-government schools. We're very happy to cooperate with the non-government sector to implement that initiative. Jim may add something there.

Mr Coleborne: The ACT has obviously been a leader in areas of curriculum development with its school-based system. It's clearly time to address the question of where curriculum needs to go in the future, in schools. I'm quite confident that the work that will be done in reviewing the effectiveness of our current structures—looking at developing new frameworks, upskilling teachers, providing increased capacity in central office and putting in a quality assurance process—will ensure that the curriculum that is offered in high schools, which I think is the intent of your question, Ms MacDonald, will strengthen the work that's already being done and give the community an even greater sense of confidence. That, in turn, will be reflected in future years in the kinds of satisfaction levels that we're seeing at the moment, which are increasing.

MS MacDONALD: With regard to curriculum development in high schools, though, it has been put to me that not much has changed in high schools in a very long time, whereas there have been major changes in both primary schools and the colleges in the last 10 or 20 years. Somebody who'd gone to high school 30 or 40 years ago could easily walk through the door and feel as though they were still in the same classroom, in the same system. Regarding curriculum development, will there be some examination of the way the curriculum is actually delivered?

Mr Coleborne: Certainly there will, but could I come back to your first point about what has changed? Some recent data that we've obtained by replicating a study by Colmar Brunton has shown that students are showing increasing satisfaction levels with the work in schools, and that their satisfaction levels are a little ahead of the perceptions that parents hold, so it depends who is making that judgment. In high schools alone, the work that's being done in year 10 with ICT competencies is very different. It has meant that more than 95 per cent of students have reached 15 key competency levels in the use of ICT.

The work that's being done with year 9 students, who undertake exhibitions during which they make a presentation to a public forum at a round table, is new and quite different to things that have ever happened in high schools before. In fact, at the recent launch of that, this week or last week, the minister announced the development of a kit that's been produced in the ACT, leading schools across the nation in that area, clearly showing that the ACT is in the forefront of change.

Our perception, from working within the department, would be that a great deal is changing in high schools and that we are bringing about changes that students understand. Whether those changes have permeated the system and are reflected in parents' understandings is possibly a different issue.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary to my original question. Minister, you might not be aware of this, but I think Ms Hinton will be, because we put a certain amount of funding into it: As the previous government, we did see the loss of students from the government sector to the non-government sector in the high school years as a very serious problem for the viability of the sector, and we actually set up a program called high schools for the new millennium. It was a serious attempt to find out and address what was going wrong and causing this. Ms Hinton, what was the outcome of that program? Is there recurrent funding in this year's budget to carry out that work and was there ever an analysis done of the program at large?

Ms Hinton: High schools for the new millennium was a three-year program, funded for \$1 million over three years.

THE CHAIR: Which years—1999, 2000, 2001?

Ms Hinton: I think so, because in last year's budget, with the end of that program, a new high school development program was initiated with, I think, \$500,000 a year, \$1½ million over three years or \$2 million over four years. The program was enhanced in last year's budget and refocused. The initial work on the high schools for the new millennium program focused on working with principals and teachers on attitudes, on pedagogy and on the key purposes of high school education. A lot of the work was done with the University of Canberra as well, to assist that process of organisation.

At the start of the high school development program, the high schools came together to create a clear statement of the purposes of high schools. They established four purposes which were: developing critical literacies and reading the world, building communities, undertaking real life research and futures education, and working with environmental and cultural heritages. Those were established as the four key purposes of those high school years. Critical literacies involve a range of areas: not just simple reading and writing, but analysing, synthesising and using ICT.

At the same time, at the start of the school development program, we established a set of values underpinning high school education and they were referred to as the six Rs. They included things such as resilience, respect, rigour, relationships and relevance. What we have through this program now is four purposes and a set of values that's driving things like the exhibitions program that Mr Coleborne just spoke about. The teacher resource kit that was released last week, or this week, gave examples of the exhibition tasks that students were involved in and related those, in each case, to the purposes of high schools and the values underpinning them.

In addition to that, the high school development program now has four focus points: organisation and cultural change, promoting VET in high schools, middle schooling and providing a central office consultancy service to work with schools and school clusters in school improvement activities. So there's a range of focus areas for the high school

development program that flowed out of the high schools for the new millennium program.

THE CHAIR: Has there been any analysis of the high schools for the new millennium program? Did it actually work? My memory of the discussions in cabinet was that we saw a problem with the decline in the number of students in the high schools, and this was an attempt to look at the core of the matter and address those problems. That's why I put it back to you, Minister, that you actually do have a responsibility here because—

Ms Gallagher: I certainly have responsibility for quality within the high schools, I agree with you.

THE CHAIR: Except what we're seeing is a continuing decline in the number of students who are going to our high schools. There are issues that need to be addressed. The question is whether they are being addressed in this current budget.

Ms Hinton: The focus of the high schools for the new millennium program was the quality of high school education. I wasn't privy to the cabinet discussions but that was what it focused on. An evaluation of that has been undertaken by someone called Andrew Martin. It was a summarising process that looked at the actions that were taken and the developments that have occurred through that process.

THE CHAIR: Are the results of that review available?

Ms Hinton: It would be. It's only just been completed, I think, this year. Is that right?

Mr Wheeler: Yes, that's correct.

Ms Hinton: I think it was started towards the end of last calendar year.

THE CHAIR: So it's been to the minister and therefore it would be available for release to the committee.

Ms Hinton: I don't think it's been to the minister yet.

THE CHAIR: No. Can we have a copy before the minister sees it? Perhaps we can see it at the same time as the minister.

MR HARGREAVES: Is that a fishing trip or what? You can't have a copy before the minister sees it.

Ms Hinton: We can certainly make copies available.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Hinton.

MR PRATT: I just wanted clarification on that. Did you say that the high schools for the new millennium program has basically run out of steam now and has been replaced by a high school development program?

Ms Hinton: The high schools for the new millennium program was only a three-year program. It was only funded for three years, so it stopped.

MR PRATT: Right, so the high school development program has now taken up where that left off.

Ms Hinton: In an enhanced budgetary way, yes.

THE CHAIR: In an enhanced budgetary way? What does that mean, Ms Hinton?

Ms Hinton: More money.

THE CHAIR: With a view to what outcome?

Ms Hinton: The four focus areas.

MR PRATT: Clearly, the six Rs underpinning the previous activity—

Ms Hinton: Underpinning the high school development program, yes.

MR PRATT: And they do, don't they?

Ms Hinton: That's what I'm saying: this is the framework for the high school development program.

MR PRATT: So that package has been carried forward. Okay, thanks.

MS DUNDAS: Regarding government special education, output 1.4—

MR HARGREAVES: We've jumped one.

THE CHAIR: No, we're doing all of them. Some of us are capable of handling more outputs at a time than others.

MS DUNDAS: I've done the sums—we've already laughed at my maths skills this morning—and it looks like there are about 90 new students receiving special education assistance either in special schools or across the mainstream schools. Because all of the notes across the outputs indicate that there has been an increased number of special education students enrolled in mainstream schools, how is that being managed?

MR HARGREAVES: "Very well" is the answer.

Ms Hinton: It's a big question, Ms Dundas. The increase in the number of students with disabilities in mainstream schools is handled in the same way as the base level of enrolments are, that is, there are individual discussions with the parents about the needs of their particular children. Some of them are in special units and some of them are in mainstream classes with assistants, sometimes with full-time assistants and sometimes with itinerant assistants. I'm not quite sure of the thrust of the question.

MS DUNDAS: Are we likely to see students moving from special schools into mainstream education?

Ms Hinton: It's hard to know that, but you will also have noticed that the numbers of students in special schools have increased.

MS DUNDAS: Yes.

Ms Hinton: That's a slight change from previous years. Whether that's going to be a continuing trend or just a one-off based on some parent choices, I'm not too sure. Essentially, the decision about whether a student is enrolled in a special school or in the mainstream, with support, is one that rests with the parents.

MS DUNDAS: Okay. Again, is the increase in numbers a reflection of the population or is it due to the number of assessments? Have we had an increase in the number of assessments that are being done that show that there are kids requiring assistance?

Ms Gallagher: I imagine it's probably both of those.

Ms Hinton: It wouldn't be the result of an increased number of assessments by us. It may be that there are some issues of diagnosis, and there may have been some underdiagnosis in the past, but my sense is that we are just having an increase in the numbers of students coming in with disabilities. We expect that that will probably continue a bit, and may well flow through in future years. You can see that there has been a larger increase in the primary years than there has in the high school years.

MS DUNDAS: Regarding the needs assessment survey that has been ongoing, about which we've had discussions before, how has the pilot project of that assessment progressed?

Ms Gallagher: Is this the student-centred—

MS DUNDAS: Yes, the survey.

Ms Gallagher: The piloting has only just started.

MS DUNDAS: At the beginning of term?

Ms Gallagher: This term, term three and term four.

Mr Curry: The program is being implemented in the special schools this term. We hope to have all the students in the special schools assessed by the end of this term and then we'll move into the mainstream schools, assessing students in regular classes during third and fourth terms. We've had briefing sessions for parents and for teachers in the special schools. At this point in time, the majority of parents seem very satisfied with the instrument that we're using. It's very participative and it allows parents to take part in the process, which is linked very closely to the students' individual learning plan and the actual review. We're linking the planning cycle with it.

MS DUNDAS: As it is being implemented in special schools and then going on to mainstream schools in the latter half of this year, has it ceased to be a pilot project, as such, and is it actually now being implemented?

Mr Curry: We're providing the opportunity for people who are participating in the process to actually give us feedback, so we're going to have the capacity to refine it as we go. However, we're very happy with what's been developed at this point in time.

Ms Hinton: Notwithstanding the fact that we are providing that opportunity for refinement, we are moving to implementation now.

MS DUNDAS: Are students with ADHD classified as requiring special assistance in schools?

Mr Curry: A lot of those students will receive support through our learning assistance teams and teachers in schools, because all schools have LA points. If students have an associated condition or disability, of course, they will be classified as students with disabilities. It really depends on the impact of that condition on their learning.

Ms Hinton: In fact, the purpose of the student-centred appraisal mechanism is to make an assessment of whether or not a student has a disability. That impacts on either their access to or their participation in schooling. So, rather than relying on a diagnosis of a particular condition, the student-centred appraisal process will actually make a judgment about student access and participation needs in the education program.

MS DUNDAS: Is that an assessment that's only being done on students classified with a disability? Is it being done on all students?

Ms Hinton: It's a process that actually starts with the question of whether they have a disability. There is a set of criteria for that as well. That's part of the total process.

MS DUNDAS: Is the assessment made by the department or CHADS?

Mr Curry: The initial diagnosis? Our senior counsellors have the capacity to confirm that the student has a disability, but the actual assessment may be done by a range of professionals. It won't necessarily be our counsellors. They may have done the assessment if it was related to an intellectual disability but, if it was autism, a physical disability or some other condition, they probably look at evidence provided by a specialist in that area and just confirm it.

MS DUNDAS: I also remember there was some discussion about the establishment of the centre of excellence for educating those with autism. Have there been any decisions on that?

Mr Curry: There hasn't been a decision to date. We're still looking at that notion and looking at what its real purpose might be. We have quite a number of units specifically for students with autism, and the parents of students in those units have a high level of satisfaction with them. We really want to be sure that it would be viable to establish such a facility and we want to have sound reasons for doing so, so we're continuing our discussions.

MR HARGREAVES: I've noticeably aged while waiting to ask this question. It may very well be that some people will think that this question is actually related to the community services portfolio, but I don't think it is. It has a relationship to schools. It's about evacuation centres during the bushfire episode. I remember being involved, when I worked with Mr Wheeler and Chris Healy, in developing part of the disaster plan with regard to evacuation centres and the use of primary schools, secondary schools and colleges as low, medium and severe disaster evacuation centres.

I was pretty chuffed to see, in a perverse kind of way, that when the really severe disaster that hit us on 18 January happened, how quickly it was that that particular system became operational. By way of a commercial, with your indulgence, Mr Chairman, I'd like to pass on the committee's appreciation to the department for the great work that did go on in those evacuation centres. It was top class. I'd like to officially congratulate the school system on that.

I was also interested in obtaining some detail about the effect that the use of the schools and the colleges would have on the school system itself. If, for example, it hadn't happened on 18 January but on 18 March, what would have been the effect on the school community in terms of disruption and alternative plans? Also, were there any additional costs involved because of the use of the colleges, and what alternative processes came into place? I just wanted to see how those fit into the general disaster planning system.

Ms Gallagher: I think you're right, John. We were fortunate in many ways—well, unfortunate in the actual incident, but fortunate in terms of the timing—because those evacuation centres were needed for a number of days after 18 January. You are also right in acknowledging the work that was done to open those evacuation centres, certainly. Many of the school staff—the principals and the teachers—and the students were very quickly on the spot to open those centres, and staff them until the other members of the emergency framework—I forget the names, but people like those from St Vincent de Paul, the Salvos and the St John Ambulance—actually arrived on the scene. They played a very important role. Barbara was very involved in that; perhaps she can provide some detailed answers there.

Ms Baikie: We were very involved with the process and we do actually have the carriage of the recovery subplan. It did involve a very large number of agencies. As the minister said, St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, Centrelink, housing, Anglicare, counselling—lots of people were involved. We had done some planning last year and had considered the prospect of what would happen if an emergency did occur during school time because, as you rightly said, schools were identified as an ideal location for a range of reasons. There's a range of rooms that can be used and there are big open spaces like gyms and halls that can be used. As you're probably aware, there was a mountain of donated goods, so large areas were needed to hold those.

In the planning, we had thought that, if indeed the school was operational, the plan would move into action as it did, and that people would be on the spot immediately. We also had concerns for the children who are actually at the school, and had contingency plans for notifying the parents and holding the children. In a sense, as the minister said, it was easier that the children weren't there, but we certainly had plans in case it was a school day.

Ms Hinton: I feel quite confident that the colleges would have been able to handle the evacuation function, together with the education of the students who were there, and that they would have moved very quickly into flexible approaches that enabled those things to happen. They probably would have used the students more, too, because these are young adults.

MR HARGREAVES: In the context of the general disaster plan, I'm aware that we have a seat on the emergency management committee. I don't know if it's yours, Ms Baikie, or whether it's still Ms Healy's.

Ms Hinton: Ms Baikie occupies that position and, in that sense, as director of family services, has responsibility for the coordination and pulling together of the community recovery subplan. So, when Ms Baikie said we were heavily involved, she meant that we were actually responsible for the direction of that plan, for the establishment of the evacuation centres, for the establishment of the hotline, for the payment of the emergency grants of \$75 a day, for the establishment of the conditions and arrangements for the payments of the grants of \$5,000 and \$10,000, and for the establishment of the recovery centre.

It was a very substantial responsibility for this department. In fact, as I said to the minister at one stage, I calculated that for a period of six weeks earlier this year we had 25 staff engaged full-time in the recovery processes, including the executive director and two directors, in addition to people in the finance area, the personnel area—because of the human resource issues—and a range of other areas.

It has actually put quite a strain on the work of the department in the first six months of this year. My view is that it's actually put a strain on the work not only of public sector agencies, but of private agencies and individuals right across the territory, because of the emotional connections that exist and the additional workloads created, and because people work in their volunteer capacities as well as in their professional capacities.

MR HARGREAVES: One of the issues that I do recall facing in the department during my time was getting people in the non-government sector committed to the process as well, which was the job of the person in the position that Ms Baikie now holds. Part of the problem, of course, was that we were dealing with the theoretical. The biggest problem we struck was the potential disaster during a bit of a fire at the back of O'Connor. We talked about what would happen in that instance, but that was about the biggest one we'd faced, so it was all very theoretical.

I got the distinct impression that some non-government agencies like St Vinnies—although St Vinnies isn't one of those to whom I refer at the moment, but others of that ilk—had a greater or lesser degree of commitment to the disaster plan, to the process and to the speed of action required once the button was pressed by Ms Baikie. Has that changed in recent times?

Ms Hinton: I wouldn't put it that way at all. I think we have a high degree of commitment from the key agencies that are identified as part of the community recovery plan. Indeed, in November last year, there was a training session associated with all of

this. However, you are right to make the point that there is less interest in disaster recovery in times when there are no disasters occurring.

We've also had a number of real ones, albeit less significant, since that time. Most recently, there was the problem at the airport with the collapse of the building, for which the community recovery plan went into action again. That involved people providing counselling and support to individuals. I remember there was a helicopter crash a couple of years back in Jerrabomberra somewhere, and the individuals were involved in that. But you're right, that's something that we have to work at.

Ms Baikie: Can I just say, too, that I think there's been a growing awareness of issues related to terrorism. It has focused people's attention a lot more and, certainly, as Ms Hinton said, at the training last year all the non-government agencies were represented. I think that was actually what enabled us to swing into action so quickly, because it was within two hours that we had the centres established.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Were you contacted by the ACT Fire Brigade on Friday the 17th to discuss the issue of the potential need for evacuation centres?

Ms Baikie: We had been in contact. They had been contacting us all week to alert us to the growing difficulties that they thought may exist. On Friday night, we went into a briefing and on the Saturday morning we were back in early, again.

THE CHAIR: What were you briefed about on the Friday night? What were you told was likely to happen?

Ms Baikie: At that stage, there were problems with some of the rural lessees and, at that point, it still wasn't anticipated that it would culminate in such a way.

THE CHAIR: It's just that the submission by the Emergency Services Bureau to the McLeod inquiry actually says of the ACT Fire Brigade, on Friday 17, that "Liaison occurred with Recovery Coordinators under the Emergency Plan to identify likely evacuation centres." Were you identifying specific buildings that could be used, on the Friday?

Ms Baikie: It's very hard to actually anticipate where you're going to need the evacuation centres, because it depends on a whole range of factors such as proximity to the emergency. You don't want them too close, in case you have to relocate. However, my recollection is that we didn't have a formal conversation about where the centres would be at that time.

THE CHAIR: What buildings were identified, though, because clearly you had Phillip College ready to roll?

Ms Baikie: We had Phillip College ready to roll very quickly. We did actually phone on Saturday morning to try to get the centres on notice. Again, the decision on where they were going to be happened, I think, early Saturday morning.

THE CHAIR: Do you recall what time Saturday morning those calls were made?

Ms Gallagher: Could we get back to you once we've had to time to reflect on our notes?

Ms Baikie: Yes.

THE CHAIR: All right. We've drifted away from education. We should get back.

MS MacDONALD: Regarding output 1.3, policy for education: we touched on this earlier when we mentioned the percentage of year 12 students who receive a nationally recognised vocational qualification. Your target was 45 per cent and your estimated outcome for the year was 54 per cent, and you're increasing the target to 50 per cent, which I don't have an issue with because that's an increase. The first part of my question concerns the nationally recognised vocational qualification. What level does that include? Does that include those people who've only got certificates of accreditation or does it also include all certificate 1s and certificate 2s?

Mr Wheeler: It includes them all.

MS MacDONALD: If somebody has elected not to actually complete the certificate qualification, do they get a certificate of accreditation?

Mr Wheeler: Of attainment.

MS MacDONALD: Of attainment, sorry. Thank you. There was something else that I wanted to ask. We were talking before about how the principal measures are developed. Has any consideration been given at secondary colleges to including SNAPs as a measurement in future years?

Ms Gallagher: I think it's probably something we need to look at, considering the increase in emerging areas. I don't know if Trevor has more to add to that.

Mr Wheeler: It is becoming more significant, and I think it would be a matter that government could have a look at measuring, frankly.

MS MacDONALD: Yes. I know that, the other day, when the Education Committee visited colleges, Copeland had about the highest number of SNAPs at 6 per cent. I commend them for that because they're focusing on an area in which there are a lot of kids who are not necessarily completing year 12 and not even making it to college.

They've pulled out a lot of those kids and focused on getting them into areas of interest to them, not necessarily through SNAPS. They've also got a very high number of students in that college wanting to do things like the T3 program through Toyota and TAFE, as well as the other SNAPS. They've got a student who is doing a chef apprenticeship, I believe. It was really good to see the work that they're developing there.

Getting back on my soapbox, I'd obviously like to see that happening in a lot more colleges across the ACT. I am interested in taking the committee to have a look at the other SNAPS that are being developed. It would be good, in future, to actually see that area.

Ms Gallagher: Certainly, we await with interest the standing committee's inquiry into VET. I think that'll certainly provide some good advice to government about VET and VET in schools. Regarding SNAPS, I have some figures here: over the last four years, numbers have grown from 58 to around 400, a significant increase, and they have doubled from 111 in 2000 to 293 in 2002. Certainly, we acknowledge that it's an area where there's increasing demand and interest. We will certainly look at it. Again, some of the work that your committee's doing, Karin, will support us in that.

MS MacDONALD: I am sure it will. In relation to that measurement, Trevor, does that include SNAPS as well?

Mr Wheeler: No, it wouldn't, because people who would be participating in the SNAPS program may not finish it while they're even at school. The other thing to mention is that recording those who get a nationally recognised vocational qualification is probably the most succinct way of measuring the level of involvement in VET in schools, bearing in mind that there might be a range of other activities and achievements going on in the school that one might try to measure. I think that's probably the most telling and succinct way of measuring a VET effort.

MS MacDONALD: We heard a lot about the T3 program the other day. Is that actually part of the SNAPS or is that separate?

Mr Wheeler: It's prevocational, yes.

MS MacDONALD: It's prevocational?

Mr Wheeler: Yes. It might lead to a SNAPS.

MS MacDONALD: I think they actually come out with an apprenticeship—

Mr Wheeler: At the end of it, yes.

MS MacDONALD: —because it's being done through the TAFE system. Sorry, I'm digressing.

THE CHAIR: Minister, last week you took on notice some questions from me that asked for the breakdown between the three levels of schooling in the government and non-government sectors. I think you also offered to give me a list of our schools and the numbers of enrolments in each school. I don't seem to have received those yet. The question that I want to ask is: what is our biggest high school?

Ms Hinton: All of that information about enrolments is published. My recollection was that the question was about the percentage of enrolments in priority enrolment areas, which we have provided to the committee.

THE CHAIR: No, I certainly asked for a breakdown of the percentages of primaries, highs and colleges in the government and non-government sectors, and I thought I also asked for a—

Ms Hinton: We haven't seen that question.

THE CHAIR: It was taken on notice here in the committee.

Ms Hinton: It wasn't given to us on the list of questions.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Does anybody know what our biggest high school is? Is it Lyneham?

Ms Hinton: Lyneham High School.

THE CHAIR: If somebody told me that Melrose was our biggest high school, they'd be fibbing?

Ms Hinton: They could be mistaken.

THE CHAIR: Is it one of our bigger high schools. Melrose is fairly big in the scale of things.

Ms Gallagher: It is.

THE CHAIR: Melrose High, to the best of my knowledge, does not have a gym.

Ms Gallagher: I went to Melrose High and there was a gym when I went there, or maybe it was a gym/hall.

THE CHAIR: I understand there's a bit of a push to have a gym built at Melrose High.

Ms Gallagher: I don't know that I've heard that one.

Mr Wheeler: There are some high schools that have combined halls and gyms, and one of the capital works provisions in this budget is to do a feasibility study on some of those high schools to see whether there's a need to have separate facilities or whether the existing facility can be enhanced. All new high schools have separate facilities.

THE CHAIR: Is Melrose High on that list on page 220, Budget Paper 3?

Mr Wheeler: I'll take that on notice and get back to you in about an hour.

THE CHAIR: All right. I've had representations from that community saying that they think the facilities they've got are deficient, given the size of the school.

Mr Wheeler: We can find out very quickly.

THE CHAIR: If you could find out and take that on notice, that would be fine.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, sure.

MR PRATT: Regarding the cost of middle schooling and also the cost of sharing facilities, how do you think the program of sharing between some Catholic systemic schools and government schools is going?

Ms Gallagher: The example that you refer to is in Gungahlin, I guess?

MR PRATT: Yes.

Ms Gallagher: I've been out to visit the school there and my understanding is that it's going very well. Certainly, discussions I've had with the teachers, the Catholic Education Office and the principal of the Gold Creek school have led me to think that they believe it's a great model.

MR PRATT: Yes, I think all the stakeholders agree with that, but are you satisfied that it is viable for the Catholic Education Office and the systemic family of schools to continue in this type of development program?

Ms Gallagher: Do I think it's for the Catholic—

MR PRATT: I'm particularly thinking about their finances, because it's clear that they have to put in a lot of money up front as their share of the cost of building the common structures.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I've had some discussions with the Catholic Education Office about that. I guess it's a decision for them at the end of the day. I understand that they did feel under pressure because they had to build at same the pace we were, which is something that they don't normally do when they're building on their own. That was something that they raised with me. I'd have to speak to them again to make sure I get it right, but it was certainly something that they thought was working well, but not something that they thought they would look at doing in future.

MR PRATT: And why is that?

Ms Gallagher: Because they were required to build their school at the same rate—where they do things in stages, that wasn't on offer this time.

MR PRATT: And is that because of the scrapping of the ISS?

Ms Gallagher: No.

MR PRATT: They haven't represented that view to you?

Ms Gallagher: No.

MR PRATT: It is clear that they rely on the ISS to be able to develop and, of course, they don't necessarily get the funding up front to be able to carry out those larger capital constructions.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. No, that wasn't the reason. I haven't had a discussion with them recently on it so I'd need to speak to them again. However, I certainly don't believe it was linked to the interest subsidy scheme, because the decision about closing the scheme hadn't been made when they made those comments to me. Trevor wants to add something.

Mr Wheeler: The decision about how to build the Amaroo schools was taken several years ago as part of the planning process. We were quite keen to see if we could have another joint facility. The Catholic Education Office thought about it, and decided in the end that they wouldn't participate, largely for the reasons that the minister has outlined.

MR PRATT: But wouldn't you agree that, given the dependence of those systemic schools on the ISS, they won't now be able to keep pace with the government sector and participate in these shared projects, which I think we all agree would have been an extremely valuable approach.

Ms Gallagher: Going back to what Trevor and I have said, the decision not to engage in shared projects was not linked to the interest subsidy scheme by them.

MR PRATT: I'd probably beg to differ, but we'll leave it at that.

Ms Gallagher: Certainly, in their discussions with me, they indicated that it was about the timing and staging of the building, rather than the interest subsidy scheme. In fact, that issue has not been raised with me.

Ms Hinton: As Mr Wheeler said, that decision was taken several years ago.

MR PRATT: I think they would have had an open mind, because the concept of sharing resources surely was a fundamentally efficient way to develop schooling capabilities.

Mr Wheeler: We pursued this with the Catholic Education Office at some length. We were quite keen to do this and I can only say that I think they thought about it very carefully but, for their own reasons, decided to go it alone.

MR PRATT: In my representative capacity, I've had certain feedback that indicates what I've just outlined.

Ms Gallagher: Sure.

MS MacDONALD: In relation to the sharing of resources at Gold Creek and Gungahlin, the building is quite separate from existing facilities. Is any research being undertaken into the sharing of resources and facilities with other existing schools where the schools are suited? For example, St Thomas the Apostle and, just down the road, Mount Neighbour Primary School are clearly within an easy distance of each other and have the ability to share facilities. Has any thought been given to looking at where there can be cooperative arrangements between schools with existing facilities in the government and non-government sectors?

Ms Hinton: I have had a couple of conversations with the Catholic Education Office on this issue and there was no interest in this for the ones that we talked about.

Ms Gallagher: Something that came out of the Connors report, though, was a recommendation to look at where we could cooperate, and where partnerships could exist between the systemic schools and the government schools. That's something that I'm very keen to have discussions about with the Catholic Education Office, to see how

we can progress that. Some of the work that we're already doing in relation to the curriculum, students with disabilities and areas such as those will encourage that.

Gold Creek is an excellent example. The only difference that you can see sometimes is that the kids wear different coloured hats. The emphasis is very much on sharing. The schools don't engage in any competition between themselves. They don't play sport against each other, they play in mixed teams with the other school. It's a good model.

Ms Hinton: Equally, I think sharing other sorts of facilities makes for a good model too: not just school to school, but community swimming pools and so on. Not many schools in the ACT have swimming pools, so those that don't have them can use the public swimming pools or halls, and a range of other sorts of facilities that are used.

MS MacDONALD: I'm surprised that the Catholic Education Office hasn't expressed any interest in that. I had a conversation fairly recently with someone on a Catholic school board and she was expressing interest in that idea. She raised it with me.

Ms Hinton: It might be helpful if she raised it with the Catholic Education Office.

MR PRATT: I must echo Ms MacDonald's perspective there. That's the feedback that I'm getting constantly, and from the CEO.

THE CHAIR: Moving along from the question of upgrading the gym at Melrose High, the whole issue of the fitness of younger Canberrans is something that is very much in people's minds. I notice that, just before the last election, Mr Stefaniak, through the department, let a tender to assess the fitness of school-age children. I know that tender was stopped when the government changed. What's the current government's policy on fitness and what are they doing to assess and ensure the fitness of young Canberrans?

Ms Gallagher: It's certainly an area of interest for me, Mr Smyth. I don't pretend I have all the answers because I know there's a very vibrant debate going on about fitness, body image, nutrition, obesity, the role of schools, the role of parents and the role of advertisers. I'm very keen on having further discussions on this, this year. Of course, we will be responding to the recommendations resulting from the standing committee's inquiry into the health of school-age children.

I'm very interested to find the right way forward here, because I think the health of our children is critical to the health of our community and our society. I don't know whether to bring together all those competing views on fitness, mandatory fitness and mandatory physical testing or focus more on nutrition, overall wellbeing and health. I think it's a very complicated debate and one that's very much going on in our community now.

THE CHAIR: You said some work is being done. Is that in a formal sense? Has a group been set up inside the department? Has an officer been tasked with specifically looking at these questions? I note that some of the department will be tied up in the response to the Health Committee's report but, from your perspective, what sort of direction have you given the department? Minister, you listed the issues so nicely: everything from nutrition to body image and obesity to fitness.

Ms Gallagher: From my point of view, coming into and recognising this debate, the first step is putting together a response to that standing committee's report, and also bringing together the whole-of-government responses to that report, because I think it is a bigger issue than education. I think we're due to respond to that quite soon. We have three months from tabling and it was tabled out of session.

MS MacDONALD: It was tabled out of session and, in fact, the Assembly is still in the middle of a debate about the report.

Ms Gallagher: I think our response will give some further information on it.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible to get a list of the schools that have a dedicated PE or fitness teacher? What do we call them these days? Are they still called PE teachers?

Ms Hinton: Essentially, all secondary schools have dedicated physical education teachers and, for the most part, primary schools don't have specialist teachers at all. They don't have specialist teachers in science and don't have specialist teachers in a range of other areas either, such as art. Some of the larger schools have managed to corral some resources to do a little bit around that, but the general approach in primary schools is to have the class teacher manage the education across the board.

THE CHAIR: Are primary school teachers adequately educated in physical education skills in teachers colleges?

Ms Hinton: I'm not sure about that. We've certainly advised the University of Canberra, which is a major source institution for us, that that's one of the areas that we're interested in and that we expect people who are graduating from such institutions to have some skills in that area. However, our primary focus has been on upskilling the teachers we already have and quite a lot of work has gone into that.

THE CHAIR: Has that been communicated to ACU, which is, I assume, our other source of teachers?

Ms Hinton: I work closely with ACU, and they have the same information about what our requirements are. We also talk about things like being competent in the use of information and communication technology, being competent in addressing the education of students with disabilities and inclusive approaches.

THE CHAIR: Minister, is there a general breakdown that would show how many children are considered fit or unfit, and how many are considered of the appropriate weight, obese and overweight?

Ms Gallagher: Not that I'm aware of.

THE CHAIR: Without the core data, it's very hard to formulate any response or tailor programs to assist.

Ms Gallagher: This is part of the debate, isn't it?

THE CHAIR: It certainly is but, in regard to what you will do, will there be some sort of baseline study to determine the fitness of our school-age children?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, there could be, and maybe there should be some data to underpin it.

THE CHAIR: Because the committee could be wrong.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

THE CHAIR: There is no data. The committee could be absolutely wrong, as could all the conclusions that the committee came to, without a baseline assessment—not that I'm saying the committee is wrong. I heard the same evidence the committee heard. Is the department aware or are you aware of any studies around the country that tell us how fit our school-age students are?

Ms Gallagher: Fran's just telling me there is some national data around.

Ms Hinton: On obesity and exercise levels.

MS MacDONALD: How far does that go back? Do you know what timeframe it covers?

Ms Hinton: No, I don't. It's a while, though.

MR PRATT: I think they go back over five or six years and show a constant trend of deterioration, as McDonald's stores have opened up widely across the country.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, and increasing levels of obesity.

Ms Hinton: I saw some interesting material quoted the other day, actually. I think it was a much smaller scale survey. It was a research project that focused on the amount of time young people, girls and boys recorded separately, spent each day in physical activity, and correlated that with whether they had backyards.

MR PRATT: If they had a larger backyard they would tend to be fitter.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MR PRATT: Why did they waste money on a study like that, you wonder?

Ms Hinton: It didn't say they were fitter, but that they spent more time on a daily basis in physical activity.

Ms Gallagher: It also raises another debate about what is fitness, and I think that's part of the discussion that's really important as well.

Mr Coleborne: More than 70 schools have been trained to be health promoting schools in the ACT. That provides a whole-of-school and community approach to maintaining healthy lifestyles, wellness and self-esteem, good diet and all of those elements of health

promoting schools. It takes a very global view of healthy lifestyles and what we can do to address some of the issues that you're raising as chair, Mr Smyth.

MR PRATT: Don't we have a wealth of information and a mass of data in the community generally which determine how we can assess people's wellbeing, their health and their physical fitness? Wouldn't you consider assessing each child's cardiovascular fitness and perhaps obesity levels? Are there not clear-cut objectives that we could pursue? Do we need more studies to determine how we go with this?

Ms Gallagher: You could do that. How useful that would be in terms of instilling in young people a sense of their own wellbeing and health, I don't know. That's where I think a considered debate is required, but also a bringing together of various strategies to promote and encourage health and wellbeing in the schools. I think the work that the standing committee has done has raised some very significant matters for us to consider concerning how we deal with this issue. It's not just asking, "Are you fat?" and, if you're fat, putting you down on a list. It needs to be dealt with much more sensitively than that.

I think we need to look at what we're doing in schools in relation to this, where we have responsibility, but it is part of a broader community debate, and one which I think is going to present issues for government for many years to come. Certainly, we can look at what's going on in schools, and we're going to use the standing committee's report to help inform us and help us to ensure that what we're doing is the best we can do for the kids.

MR PRATT: The Health Committee's report to one side, are you and the department satisfied that you understand the actual levels of fitness and health of our schoolchildren and are you satisfied that we have sufficient capabilities and programs in place to deal with our children's fitness and health?

Ms Gallagher: As Jim said, the health promoting schools approach is an indication of the commitment of the schools to addressing this issue. I know you don't want me to refer to the report again but I think, when reports come out like that, it does mean that you take a look at what you're doing. At the individual school level, the schools know a great deal about the wellbeing of their students. In fact, I'm constantly impressed by schools' knowledge about every individual student who attends.

We provide a framework within which individual schools operate but, yes, I am confident that at the moment we are doing the right thing. As to whether we could do things better, that's always on the table, I think, and that's something we're looking at as we consider our response.

MR PRATT: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I understand there is no standard benchmark in place which requires that all schools assess and test all children to a particular level. Is that correct?

Ms Gallagher: There is a requirement. Again, I stand corrected here, but my understanding is that there is a requirement that students spend a certain part of the school week engaging in some sort of physical activity.

MR PRATT: In PE, yes, but what about fitness assessments and health assessments?

Ms Gallagher: No, we don't do that, Mr Pratt. Again, it's part of this debate. Would that be useful in terms of the students' participation?

MR PRATT: Do you think it would be useful?

Ms Gallagher: As I said to Mr Smyth, I don't know. My feeling is no, it would not be useful. I've been fitness tested myself and I didn't come out of it very well. I'm not sure that, when we're dealing with young people at an impressionable age, the correct approach to dealing with a significant issue concerning their own image should be one size fits all.

MR PRATT: Don't you think parents would like to know if somebody assesses their child as having a tendency to asthma or a very, very low aerobic capability?

Ms Gallagher: As a parent myself, I am interested in that. I don't necessarily rely on my school to provide me with that information. It's part of a broader parental responsibility that I feel I have and that I think most parents feel they have, and take very seriously. Certainly, when we're looking at the responsibilities of education, it is about what goes on in the schools. We do try very much to link with the home and what's happening in the community, but there is a point where the problem can't be solved within the school.

Ms Hinton: In fact, one of the clear findings of the research is that even things like obesity are more strongly linked to parent characteristics than anything else. It's interesting to consider where the best points of intervention are.

MR PRATT: But don't you think schools have a vital role to play in the community, in the community's overall health levels? Surely, schools should be playing a larger role?

Ms Hinton: They play a role.

MR PRATT: I know they do, but is it constant, Fran? Are all your schools achieving a performance indicator set down by the department?

Ms Hinton: This issue is about changing community attitudes. There's a difference between knowledge of a particular activity or state of health, and changing behaviours. Smoking is a prime example of that. There is very strong evidence that, through our processes in schools and outside schools, we in schools and the community have been very successful in conveying the knowledge that smoking is bad for your health. But the schools and the community have not been successful in drastically reducing the uptake. I think the point that the minister is making about the complexity of causal relationships and deciding on the interventions that are most successful is one that we have to think about.

Mr Coleborne: It's worth mentioning that the curriculum area relating to physical education is the only area where we currently set mandatory times for student involvement in an activity.

THE CHAIR: Are they all being met?

Mr Coleborne: We've checked the compliance with that prescription in schools and we're satisfied that, not only is it being met, but in many schools it is being exceeded.

MR PRATT: Ms Hinton mentioned earlier that all schools have PE teachers.

Ms Hinton: Secondary schools.

Ms Gallagher: All secondary schools have specialised PE teachers.

MR PRATT: Are you happy that all schools have a bottom line of a correct number of teachers who ensure, as Jim was pointing out, that those required PE programs are being undertaken?

Ms Hinton: We know that they are being undertaken. I have not received any evidence that we should reduce the number of mathematics teachers, for example, and increase the number of physical education teachers.

MR PRATT: I wasn't suggesting that—a balance please.

THE CHAIR: I will make a comment, just before I hand over to Ms MacDonald: I understand that, in a project in England, the Blair government has announced that it will be extending the hours of schooling in five or six high schools as a trial. The schools are going to take it out to 6 o'clock or 5 o'clock at night, I forget which, so that the students in those schools will do two hours of compulsory sport and activity every afternoon—rather than going home and watching videos and the television—with a view to improving the educational outcomes of students in England. They are doing this simply because they have a huge concern over the lack of fitness amongst school-age students in England. With that small sermon, which is obviously against the rules, we'll go to Ms MacDonald.

MS MacDONALD: I talked about this last week and I will bring it up again as we're talking about output class 1. I suppose this is a comment rather than a question. The career education support service has been initiated to cover years 7 to 12, but there needs to be more going into any career education support service, any career counselling that goes on from an early age, to look at encouraging both teachers and parents to examine alternatives to university in the long run. The earlier that's done, the better.

Do you have any comment to make about that support service and how it can be encouraging our careers counsellors to give out that information?

Ms Hinton: We don't have careers counsellors in primary schools.

MS MacDONALD: No, I'm talking about years 7 to 12.

Ms Hinton: I think that a clear message is being sent about that. We only have to look at the uptake of school-based new apprenticeships and the increase in the number of students doing vocational education and training to see that that's happening. I feel quite confident about that. I believe there has been a very substantial change since I came into this position. I'm not claiming that there is a causal relationship, but I'm saying that I can

see a very big difference in the responses of parents and students to discussions about vocational education.

THE CHAIR: Its being 1 o'clock, the committee will adjourn. That is the end of the consideration of output class 1. Members, all other questions on output class 1 should be placed on notice.

Luncheon adjournment

THE CHAIR: We will now move to output class 2.1, which relates to maintenance of standards and administration and grants. It looks like a class all of its own. Minister, what is achieved by this output class?

Ms Gallagher: I guess it is for information. It gives you the number of school reviews, the value of the grants going through. It serves the purpose that other output classes do. And the description there sums it up.

THE CHAIR: The registration reviews, I take it, are quite different to the schools reviewed annually through the quality assurance process.

Ms Hinton: Yes, the school review and development process only occurs in respect of government schools. There is a separate process in respect of non-government schools. There is both a review in relation to proposals to establish new non-government schools and there is also a regular process of review associated with re-registration for non-government schools. And that is what this particular one here is about.

They operate on much the same cycle. If you are after a little more information about it, that process has been delegated to the Catholic system in relation to its own schools. It does that process of re-registration itself and reports the results of those back to us. In relation to non-systemic schools, the review process is undertaken by a panel with membership drawn from government and the non-government sector and they do a report on the education that is offered at that school, the curriculum, and recommend re-registration or work that needs to occur.

MS MacDONALD: My question is to Mr Wheeler. In relation to the average cost per registered school, I notice that the target for 2002-03 is slightly above what the estimated outcome is going to come in at. But you have reduced it, I suppose, by about \$1,000. The average cost has gone down by about \$1,000 per school. Is there a reason for that?

Mr Wheeler: That one is more in the nature of an accounting adjustment. In the previous year, when the attribution of overheads and so on had been calculated through, we found that we had a GPO greater than the cost, which, of course, shouldn't be the case, so we have adjusted that. We have done an overhead reallocation across the whole department and the share of it here has picked up that anomaly and sorted it out. All you are seeing now is a slight reduction in the average cost for a registered school. But the actual funding that is going into the non-government schools office is as you see there. The direct costs, payments, haven't changed. It is just a little bit of the overhead redistribution. It is really the accounting.

MS MacDONALD: At first I thought, because it goes from 26 to 25, it is not really that huge an amount.

Mr Wheeler: There is a very small direct cost in the non-government schools office. Most of the fluctuations you see at this level are really around the overheads that it attracts as its share of the department's overheads. It doesn't impact on the office's operations at all.

MS MacDONALD: Non-government school education covers kindergarten to year 12. Is any information gathered—I can't remember whether it's gathered in the annual report—similar to the one done for government secondary colleges of the percentage of students who are receiving a nationally recognised vocational qualification? Is a similar type of survey done?

Mr Wheeler: There is, and we certainly can tell you that.

MS MacDONALD: I was just curious to know whether it has been collected.

Mr Wheeler: We do collect that information.

MR PRATT: I have a question about the IT grants to Catholic systemic schools which were announced in the 2002-03 budget. First, was all the money allocated for that initiative spent by the department in the 2002-03 financial year?

Ms Hinton: No, it was a staged provision of the grant over, I think, four years, \$250,000 a year.

MR PRATT: How did you end up allocating that money—to what tasks, to what activities?

Mr Wheeler: My understanding is that \$250,000 a year has been provided to the Catholic Education Office, subject to an MOU by which they will undertake to spend it on IT matters. As is normally the case with the MOU, they will report at the end of it that they have so spent it. It is no more prescriptive than that.

MR PRATT: Therefore, you don't know how many schools have been able to take programs from it. You are still waiting for the CEO feedback, are you, on where it has been allocated?

Mr Wheeler: No, they won't be telling us what schools they give it to, but they will use it for IT purposes.

MR PRATT: How do you account for where that expenditure goes?

Ms Gallagher: It came up in the Connors inquiry and it is certainly something we are considering in the education bill, with some accountability measures that Connors recommends along the lines of reporting to the Commonwealth. It is something that we are looking at. Also, we need to be very respectful of the non-government schools' role and their capacity to have a view about how money should be spent. But that doesn't

detract from the fact that they have to be accountable for public money. As we have done with the K to 3 initiative money, we haven't actually told them how to spend it. I am sure they have a view themselves about how that money could best be used, but we need to ensure that they are accountable for those public funds. So they are some of the things we are looking at in terms of amendments to the bill.

MR PRATT: I presume that you will be seeking reports back on all of those sorts of activities? I absolutely agree: if you allocate the bag of gold to the CEO, the operator/user needs to be able to spend a bit, of course. You don't really have those measures in place now, do you, but you are seeking to have something put in place—perhaps some sort of reporting system whereby they report back and confirm where it has all gone to?

Ms Gallagher: I think they are some of the things we are looking at in terms of accountability for public funds. But it's not something that has happened before, so it is a new area. We need to be respectful. I don't run the non-government schools—they have their own system—nor do we intend to micro-manage the non-government school system. So I think just with those parameters in mind—

MR PRATT: I think it is a good initiative. I am sure they would understand and agree with the need to account for public moneys, which is what it boils down to.

Ms Gallagher: And balance that with the need to direct the funds as they see fit within their schools for that particular purpose, but for them to have a say about the use of that money.

MR PRATT: Given the business of allocating funding, accounting for where it has gone and looking at other educational outcomes, are you satisfied with the way the department is structured to run that link through the non-government sector?

Ms Gallagher: Are you speaking about the area within the department that supports non-government schools, the non-government schools office?

MR PRATT: Yes; indeed, the entire structure. Are you satisfied, Minister, that the way the department is designed it is able to overview these areas?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I am. I have had representations in the last week from people concerned about the level of resourcing within the non-government schools office. I will certainly have a look at that. It has only recently been raised with me, but I think if we look at the output class there is a high level of satisfaction in terms of people using the department's non-government schools office as well. There is a high level of satisfaction there, but an issue has been raised in terms of resourcing which I will take a look at.

Ms Hinton: I think the issue really should start with the functions that are required to be performed in relation to any area, but in this particular instance for the non-government schools, and then take a look at the resources that need to be applied to perform those functions, rather than starting with the resources and then determining what they might do.

MR PRATT: It certainly makes sense.

Ms Hinton: At the moment, the role of the non-government schools office is largely to pass on the grants and to undertake the support work associated with the registration and reregistration of schools. That is basically the only work they do—and some policy advice, but that’s about all.

MS MacDONALD: I have a couple of questions. The first is in relation to the number of registered schools. Just out of curiosity, are there any non-government schools that aren’t registered?

Ms Hinton: No. Under the legislation, non-government schools, or any schools for that matter, have to be registered.

MS MacDONALD: I thought that would be the case. I don’t know the legislation in detail; I know that that is a major failing on my part. With the reviews being conducted, is that also the same as the government schools being done on a five-year basis and being reviewed over a shorter timeframe?

Ms Hinton: We haven’t extended that process in relation to the non-government schools at this stage, and I can’t quite recall what arrangements the Catholic systemic schools have. I mentioned before that we have delegated the responsibility for conducting the quality assurance in the Catholic systemic schools to the Catholic Education Office, and then they report to us on that total process. I can’t recall the length of time. It would certainly be no greater than five years.

MR PRATT: Given that, Ms Hinton, are you therefore satisfied that you are well structured to be able to do that quality assurance and maintain those links in terms of the two-way street? Those in the non-government sector seek support, but they have to be accountable, too. Would you consider any restructures to make that seamless process even more seamless?

Ms Hinton: I am not sure what additional functions the non-government sector is looking for, what additional interventions they are looking for from the department in the operations of their schools. I would need to know that before I made judgments about structuring.

MR PRATT: Would the minister think that we might have a better integrated ACT education system by bringing the two sectors closer together with the sharing of ideas on both sides—both sectors have their own strengths and weaknesses—by perhaps “enlargening” the presence in the department itself of the non-government—

MS MacDONALD: You are making up your own words—“enlargening”.

Ms Gallagher: I understand what you are saying.

MR PRATT: I have got a raging imagination, Ms MacDonald.

Ms Gallagher: I think cooperation is very important. I think there are always areas where we can look at how we can improve that. Like Ms Hinton said, the department doesn’t run the non-government schools, nor do the non-government schools want that.

So, in terms of further cooperation, we would be needing to discuss those options in consultation with the non-government school sector about exactly where they think we could improve accountability and quality assurance, if they chose to.

Ms Hinton: And there are other areas of the department which work closely with the non-government schools and support them in different ways. The one that comes immediately to mind is in relation to literacy and numeracy testing, where the curriculum and assessment area that works with literacy and numeracy testing for government schools also conducts that process in close liaison with the non-government school sector, who do the same sort of testing.

Similarly, in the professional development area, quite a lot of joint professional development occurs. So the non-government schools office, as I said, is responsible for the issues about paying the money, about the registration and reregistration of non-government schools and then other support things happen in other different ways.

MR PRATT: I was coming to that. You are happy that the core business of schooling in terms of standards is being handled in a myriad of ways through other connectivity—I suppose that is the term we might use—and that this does not necessarily need to be centralised alongside the administrative functions and the linkages between the department and the sector?

Ms Hinton: I haven't had much evidence that the non-government sector is seeking a lot more from us.

MRS DUNNE: Except money.

Ms Hinton: Yes, that's right, except money. That's exactly right. I haven't had much evidence of their wanting to have us come in and give them advice on how to do this, that or the other in their schools.

THE CHAIR: This is principally the non-government sector and how they are funded through the ACT government. The claim has always been that they would like to receive 25 per cent of the level of funding that the government provides to government students. The funding level, as I understand it, is currently about 17 per cent. So for every \$100 that is spent on a government school student, a non-government school student gets \$17 from the ACT government. Does the government have any intention of ever lifting that level in an attempt to reach 25 per cent, say, as has been done in New South Wales?

Ms Gallagher: The government's decision about funding in schools is based on need and equity. I don't think we view it in terms of percentage cost; I don't think it is useful. We also base it on the complete picture of funding to the schools. In the non-government sector that takes into account Commonwealth funding as well as parent contributions.

THE CHAIR: If somebody else is willing to pay, the ACT government won't.

Ms Gallagher: No, I don't think so. I have responsibility to ensure that the sum of money that we have in the budget is disbursed on the grounds of equity and need, and we believe we have done that in this budget and last year's budget.

THE CHAIR: If any school can make a case that on their need and on equity issues they deserve more funding from the ACT government, you will consider it.

Ms Gallagher: We would look at it, as we have with Blue Gum, as we discussed at last Friday's estimates. I mean, \$116 million goes into the non-government school sector here through ACT funding and Commonwealth funding. That is a significant amount of money; significant.

MR PRATT: But it is still only 17 per cent.

Ms Gallagher: No, our contribution is around 17 per cent, but the Commonwealth is the major funding partner in non-government schools.

MR PRATT: But why do you tie that allocation decision of yours to the Commonwealth funding line when other jurisdictions don't necessarily?

Ms Gallagher: Because we have to.

MR PRATT: Other jurisdictions have made a conscious decision to promote X per cent.

Ms Gallagher: I just don't think that you can have a discussion about funding in dollars without taking into consideration all the funding partners. You cannot have a discussion about it based on what the ACT government gives without looking at what contributions the Commonwealth makes.

MR PRATT: If the Commonwealth's contributions benefit all schools anyway, why are you not willing to make a decision based on the needs of the community as determined by the government? Why can't there be an entirely independent decision? You have so many resources, you have so many schools—some are government and some are non-government. Why do you need to have that decision tied to what federal funding is available?

Ms Gallagher: It makes a significant difference. We are the major funding partner in relation to ACT government schools. The Commonwealth provides us with a small amount of money and it is the reverse in the non-government sector. We have to take it into consideration when we are looking at the money that we have available to fund all schools.

THE CHAIR: Under what conditions would the government consider extending its 17 per cent expenditure on non-government schools? You say on a needs and equity basis, so what are the conditions for that?

Ms Gallagher: Perhaps I have misled you—not misled in the serious use of the term—a bit with Blue Gum. Blue Gum is an exception. Blue Gum sits—

THE CHAIR: Is there any non-serious sense of misleading?

Ms Gallagher: Blue Gum is drawn out in Connors as being in a particular situation on its own, where it had been disadvantaged, and primarily just in terms of timing. It arrived on the scene, it missed out on funding maintained under the Commonwealth model, and

we are looking at that. In relation to the non-government schools, we have adopted a funding model which we believe meets the needs when we take into consideration the Commonwealth grants and the needs of students in the non-government sector.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps I am wrong, but I thought I had asked for a breakdown of students in both areas. I was wondering if you would take this on notice, unless you have got the numbers here now. How many students do we have in government and non-government sectors in the ACT in primary, secondary and high schools—numbers and percentages, whatever you want to provide?

Ms Hinton: Yes, we can provide that. It is published annually and it is on the web, so we can provide that without a problem. Do you just want the numbers?

THE CHAIR: Just the numbers.

Ms Hinton: By school, the proportions—

THE CHAIR: No, I don't think we can do it by school.

MRS DUNNE: No, not by school, by sector.

THE CHAIR: Yes, just by sector—government, non-government, primary, secondary, college. It seems for the 17 per cent of \$118 million there is about \$20 million that the government chooses to spend on probably more than a third of the students of the ACT. I think in terms of equity that is wrong and I can't see how you can build a sustainable argument that says on equity grounds we'll spend \$20 million on—

Ms Gallagher: It is \$33 million.

THE CHAIR: You just said 17 per cent of the \$118 million.

Ms Gallagher: It is \$33 million.

THE CHAIR: Okay, \$33 million on a third of the sector, on the private education market. How much do we spend on government schools if we spend \$33 million on—

Mr Wheeler: It won't be a straight proportion, Mr Smyth, because to some extent this is historical.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Mr Wheeler: If you go back a few years, you will find that the states and territories, and particularly the ACT, were funding non-government schools in a linked arrangement with the Commonwealth. This was prior to 1996.

THE CHAIR: That's okay. There must be a simple number, though. There must be a number that says, if we are spending \$33 million on the non-government sector, how much we are spending on the government sector.

Mr Wheeler: The GPO was about \$304 million.

Ms Hinton: However, that includes the Commonwealth support for government schools, so the comparison is not just \$304 million to \$33 million, but \$304 million to something like \$116 million.

THE CHAIR: All right. Can we remove the federal government component of the \$304 million? I am happy for you to take this on notice if you have to.

Ms Hinton: Yes, we would.

THE CHAIR: But it would be interesting to compare it. I know that a significant amount of federal money joins the \$33 million; but if we take the federal money out of the \$304 million, how much is spent from ACT revenue on the ACT government sector? I would put it to you, Minister, that it is not equitable to spend \$33 million on one-third of our students and spend a sum that may be 10, six or eight times that on the other two-thirds.

Ms Gallagher: You are just completely ignoring the Commonwealth's funding responsibilities in relation to non-government schools by making that simple analysis.

THE CHAIR: And you are ignoring your responsibility as a minister who, through MCEETYA, has, on behalf of your government, signed up to an agreement to fund students based on needs and equity. I am just surprised that I cannot be told straight up what the figure is.

MR PRATT: That's all of those students.

THE CHAIR: Even if you take a third of that, if you are spending \$200 million—

Ms Gallagher: I think you are quoting selectively from the MCEETYA document.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you have it in front of you. Read it.

Ms Gallagher: I am sure you have all got it. If you don't have it, we can table it.

THE CHAIR: Read the paragraph that your government signed up to that says funding must be based on needs and equity. I cannot for the life of me see how you make a case that a third of the students in the ACT get \$33 million from their government and the other two-thirds get four, five or six times that.

Ms Gallagher: Do you want me to quote from the document?

THE CHAIR: Yes, go for you life, Minister.

Ms Gallagher: It says, "Public funding across different schools and sectors is distributed fairly and equitably through a consistent approach to assessing student needs and through having regard to the total level of resources available for students."

THE CHAIR: Yes, that's fine, but I look forward to getting the breakdown that has the ACT government funding.

MRS DUNNE: Minister: how many resources, irrespective of source, go into one year 6 child in a government primary school?

Ms Gallagher: I can't answer that myself.

Ms Hinton: We could, however, provide for the committee, if it would be helpful, some of the nationally published information on the expenditure per child in government and non-government schools.

THE CHAIR: We will take you up on that offer.

MRS DUNNE: I would like to know what is spent on, say, a year 6 child in a government primary school as opposed to a year 6 child in a Catholic systemic school. The question I was going on to is that not this year during estimates but last year during estimates the Catholic Education Commission for the Canberra/Goulburn Archdiocese gave evidence to us that they had more resources at their disposal for children at Batemans Bay, Batehaven or Lake Cargelligo than they had for children at Evatt, Calwell or anywhere like that because there are more resources coming from the New South Wales government to fund those students than come from the ACT government. They have an interesting perspective because they administer across two jurisdictions and the kids in Lake Cargelligo are better funded than the kids in Canberra. I would like to know whether that is still the case. It would be very informative for this committee and the community to find out whether that is still the case.

Ms Gallagher: Okay, yes.

MS MacDONALD: Minister, reference is made on page 308 of Budget Paper 4 to Commonwealth grants. Having just done a quick calculation of the amount of grants from the Commonwealth to government schools, if you add up those figures it comes to \$30,104,000 and if you add up the figures for non-government schools it comes to \$84,597,000. Has this impacted on your decision on how the funding is allocated by the ACT government?

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely. It has and I think that is what I have been trying to say here—you cannot treat the funding of schools in isolation without acknowledging all the funding partners in it, and that's why I keep coming back to that point, Mr Smyth.

THE CHAIR: I don't think anybody has said that you shouldn't, but I am still curious—and these are your words—about needs and equity. We find that one-third of the students have so much less spent on them by the ACT government. Yes, they have more spent on them by the federal government, but all up that sector still gets substantially less than the other sector.

MS MacDONALD: Substantially more; in fact, almost three times the amount for government schools.

THE CHAIR: And the ACT government spends something like six times as much, Ms MacDonald. I assume that is your definition of equity as well.

MR PRATT: Minister, going to the amount of money that has been allocated in your budget to non-government schools for the smaller class size program, \$1.3 million has been allocated for smaller class sizes over some time.

Ms Gallagher: Sorry, could you tell us where?

MR PRATT: I knew you would say that. That's all right.

Ms Gallagher: I just want to make sure we are talking about the same initiative.

MR PRATT: I'll get to it shortly.

Ms Gallagher: Or the early childhood initiative—the one that we are giving to non-government schools in this year's budget?

MR PRATT: I think it's the early childhood one.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, that's the early childhood one. Again, we are not saying it is a lower class size initiative. It is for the non-government schools to determine the best use for that money, along the lines of information technology. We are not being that prescriptive with it.

MR PRATT: Clearly, you are again awaiting to see where they allocate their own funding. Does that 1.3 represent basically where you think the \$1.5 million interest subsidy scheme allocation of funding will go?

Ms Gallagher: No, the interest subsidy scheme money is—

MR PRATT: Is yet to be reallocated?

Ms Gallagher: It is yet to be reallocated, that's right.

MR PRATT: That is not necessarily where it is being absorbed, through that particular program.

Ms Gallagher: No. I think we discussed this last week, where that was in addition.

MR PRATT: We probably did.

Ms Gallagher: As the money becomes available, which will happen over time, to reinvest that money in the non-government sector.

MR PRATT: That is right, you did say the allocations of that have yet to be made.

Ms Gallagher: Only because the money has not become available because the scheme is fully committed.

MR PRATT: Yes, of course, over the next number of years.

THE CHAIR: Are there any more questions for output class 2? Minister, is it better for you to do output class 3 and the CIT at the same time?

Ms Gallagher: If you wouldn't mind.

THE CHAIR: No, that is acceptable. Members, we will now move on to output class 3, which relates to vocational education and training services.

Ms Gallagher: Could we do Children, Youth And Family Services and then come back as I have just been told that CIT will be arriving at three?

THE CHAIR: Okay. Let's move to output class 4 and look at the Office of Child Care, early intervention programs, preschool education support for young people, youth justice, care and protection services and family support services. Minister, work force planning is a big issue in the provision of child care.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, that's right.

THE CHAIR: What is the government doing to ensure that we have an adequately trained and available work force to work in the child-care sector?

Ms Gallagher: We are doing quite a bit. Actually, I met with your federal colleague, Larry Anthony, last week to talk about some ways that we see we could work together with the Commonwealth to address some of these. As you are probably aware, we forwarded a copy of the ACT work force planning study which we completed last year to Mr Anthony's office. At about the same time, he held a think tank specifically on this issue. During my meeting with him last week, he confirmed that the findings of the ACT work force planning report were replicated almost identically nationally.

There are a couple of things that we are doing here in terms of providing support and further training opportunities to child-care staff, particularly those who are wanting to study at diploma level. Certainly, at the moment employer incentives are available from the federal department for traineeships but not for diploma level. I have asked the minister to look at that to see whether we are providing support for the cost of the course for the students who wish to undertake it, and we want to see whether we can get some support for employer incentives so that centres can afford to release their staff. Hopefully, it will have an impact on retaining staff in the sector, but also supporting them to gain further qualifications while they are at work.

I guess it is a national problem. It is a difficult one. The Commonwealth acknowledges they have got responsibilities. It is not as simple as raising wages, although that's a key part of this. At the moment, the parents foot the cost of all pay rises, and we have to be conscious that it can't be solved just that way. We have to look at other ways, like providing capacity within the sector but providing the staff and trying to keep the staff there. It is not an easy problem to fix.

THE CHAIR: I notice under "Quantity" that the number of contracts administered is going down and the footnote says that that is to bring it in line with what actually happened in the course of the year. There is no reduction in the number of service providers; it is just that contracts on locations have been amalgamated.

Ms Gallagher: That would be right, yes.

Ms Baikie: Yes, that is correct.

THE CHAIR: The waiting lists in government-run child-care centres.

Ms Gallagher: We don't run any child-care centres. We have community-based and private providers.

THE CHAIR: In the community-based sector, sorry.

Ms Gallagher: It is hard to get a gauge on the actual numbers. I believe that part of the problem is parents put their children's name down at a number of centres and don't take their names off the list when they might find a place. So it's difficult. I think in certain areas there is still unmet demand. I talked to the federal minister about other child-care options—family day care, for example, where they control the number of places—and ways to ensure that there is capacity not only just in long day care environments.

It is difficult to put your finger on it. Some centres at the moment have vacancies, others are full. Full-time care seems to be a bit easier to find than if you are after particular days or afternoons or mornings because that is difficult to fit in under the numbers that child-care centres are allowed to have. I don't know the answer to that.

In terms of where we can work together, we are building the new Gungahlin early child-care centre, which will provide, I think, 90 places in Gungahlin, plus there were some transportables already out there which provided 54 places. In addition, we have allocated almost \$1 million to existing centres dotted around Canberra: Charnwood, Kaleen, Civic, Curtin, Greenway and Conder, which will provide about 77 places. But, again, it is not as simple as even providing the places if you don't have the staff to provide the care to the children. Also in terms of change in five years—particularly this is relevant to private providers—if they come into a centre and in years to come there isn't the demand for child care in those places, then it's a problem for their business. Again, it's a hard one just to answer with one simple move.

THE CHAIR: I notice that in your government payment for outputs through the second and third appropriations you received extra money, which brought the target to \$3.5 million for the year, but only managed to spend \$3.271 million. Is there a reason for receiving extra funds and then not spending them?

Ms Gallagher: I'm not sure.

Mr Wheeler: The difference in both costs and GPO for this output, as well as most others, is a combination of factors, but the largest one is the redistribution of overheads following the creation of a new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. When we first began operations with short notice at the last budget, we took the overheads for that department from 4.7 and a little bit from 4.2, and later on, when we had a chance to adjust things, we spread that overhead adjustment across the whole department. That is what you are seeing there; that is part of what that change is.

THE CHAIR: Why would you therefore amend the 2002-03 target? That makes it very hard for comparison. The question now is: what was the original government payment for output for that class?

Mr Wheeler: If you are looking at the target for 2002-03, all agencies, as you would expect, are required to adjust that target for any appropriated amounts. The explanation I just gave you was about the estimated outcome, but the second and third appropriations impacted on the actual budget for a range of departments and those budgeted targets have now been adjusted, hence the footnote. The funds have actually been appropriated, or were appropriated.

THE CHAIR: Why, therefore, is the cost for output, payment for output, going down? You expected 3.5 this year; the target is 3.3 next year. What was the original target this year?

Mr Wheeler: We have an expected outcome. Are you talking about costs or GPO?

THE CHAIR: Government payments for output.

Mr Wheeler: It goes from 3.27 to 3.30, which is a slight increase—indexation and non-teaching EBA. But the estimated outcome is adjusted for the reason I mentioned before. It is the reallocation of overhead, reductions across the department with the creation of a new department. Every output in our portfolio is so affected.

MRS BURKE: In output 4.1, the Office of Child Care is described in the following terms at page 320 of BP 4:

Monitor and license of operations of child care services under the Children and Young People Act 1999. Provision of resources to the community for delivery of quality, accessible and affordable children's services.

Minister, do you believe that you are fully complying with the Children and Young People Act 1999—I haven't got it in front of me, but I think it is pages 8 and 9—in relation to the placement of young Aboriginal children into foster care in the ACT?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I don't know how that relates to this output, but—

MRS BURKE: I am just looking in overall terms at your monitoring and licensing under the Children and Young People Act.

Ms Gallagher: Child-care services?

MRS BURKE: Yes. It is a service, and in relation to adoption services. I have just asked the Chair if this is relevant here—whether you believe that you are complying with the act in the placement of Aboriginal children in the ACT?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

Ms Hinton: Yes, and that will come under output class 4.6, care and protection—not that it matters, but yes.

MRS BURKE: It is just a general overview. All right, thanks.

THE CHAIR: On output class 4.2, relating to early intervention programs, I notice that the number of eligible children who might attend such a program has not risen this year. Is there a reason for that? It remains at 350.

Ms Hinton: Where are we?

THE CHAIR: Page 321.

Ms Hinton: The question is: why hasn't the number of children attending an early intervention program increased?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Hinton: I am not too sure of what the answer to that question would be. We have a mix of students or children who are assessed as in need, who come to early intervention, and we balance that against the funding that is available. Sometimes when additional children come to our attention we create an additional class around that. We did increase the target last year because there was some additional funding that came through, so it probably reflects the fact that we had increased it before. I don't have it with me.

THE CHAIR: From what to what?

Ms Hinton: I can't recall. An extra half million or so went into this area, I think.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, the target of funding or the—

Ms Hinton: No, I was talking about the money, but the target was adjusted in relation to that.

THE CHAIR: You estimated the average cost per child attending at \$2,909 for this year. The estimated outcome is \$4,237 this year, a third higher than you estimated, and it will go up slightly again in the coming year, which I assume is the EBA impact. But how can you estimate \$2,900 and spend \$4,200 and why isn't that enormous cost reflected in the figures somewhere?

Mr Wheeler: Mr Chair, are you talking about the difference in cost between target and estimated outcome for 4.2?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Wheeler: I made that comment earlier about the creation of a new department and I mentioned—

MRS DUNNE: There were no targets; it was a new item last year.

THE CHAIR: Even with the creation of a new department—

Mr Wheeler: I am sorry, I thought you were talking about the cost variation of 4.2.

MRS DUNNE: I thought we were, too.

MR PRATT: That's the question you asked.

Mr Wheeler: Average cost per child attending.

MR HARGREAVES: Please keep going, Mr Wheeler. I am listening—one out of five is good.

Mr Wheeler: When the new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services was established, departments had very little time to make the adjustments to take from their budgets those bits that were transferring to the new department. In our case, the overheads for that new department were taken from two outputs, 4.2 and 4.7. When the rush of the budget was out of the way, we went back through that and apportioned the reduction in overheads on a more appropriate basis, and that has seen the share for those two outputs of their costs and GPO go back up again to what they should be. The same thing applies in 4.7.

There is also an additional item where we had youth justice coming into the department in that year. We found that we had picked up an overhead attribution rate from Justice and Community Safety that was too high for a department of our size and again we had to make an overhead adjustment. In neither case does this make any difference to the actual funding, the direct funding, going into those activities. It is more the adjustments made for things such as overheads which have no practical effect on the delivery of services.

THE CHAIR: How can you add 45 per cent extra costs for overhead? The costs per child attending an early intervention program have gone from \$2,900 to \$4,200, and that is all overheads.

Mr Wheeler: There are only two adjustments that we have made to that output.

MRS DUNNE: What are the overheads?

Mr Wheeler: It is a share of the departments. Everything other than that are direct costs.

Ms Hinton: Overhead attributions are a little like the black box of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, I think, because it includes so many different aspects. Proportions of staff, for example, are allocated. Decisions are made about what proportion of my time and what proportion of Mr Wheeler's time goes on each one of these output class—what proportions of the rent, what proportions of telephone costs, utilities. We are always, frankly, trying to get more accurate attributions of the cost, but it is only our best estimate at the formula. When we are required to do things like when the new department was created, we are always looking to see if we can improve and refine what we do.

Mr Wheeler: Can I clarify that as well, Mr Smyth? The explanation I gave related to the treatment that we accorded that output in taking overheads away. We actually took more than would be attributed to that output because we took the outputs for the total that we are transferring to the new department.

MR HARGREAVES: Excuse me, Mr Wheeler, I think you might have to go back and say that again, because members seem to be a tad distracted. Could you do that again, please? Back to you.

Mr Wheeler: The \$2,909 per head is a grossly deflated cost because the total overheads for the new department were taken out of this output and another one. That is why the adjustment to get it back on to what it should be looks greater than it really is. I have already said that we took out of it the total overheads for the new department—not the overheads applying to this output, but the total overheads this department was contributing to the new department, because it was a convenience—

THE CHAIR: Why was it only taken out of two classes?

Mr Wheeler: It was a convenience. We had very little time to establish a new department and sort out the budgetary implications of that, and we chose to do it out of two outputs—this one and 4.7. Later we had to remedy that and put that back up on to a level that was appropriate, and that's all that is. Every other output in the department has taken a share of the overhead reduction that went to the new department, but in this target figure that you are looking at we are all in those two outputs. That is why it is so large; it's a grossly deflated figure. And 4.7 says it pretty well. You have now got a government payment for output of \$800,000, and when it is adjusted for the full-year effect, what it ought to be, you are talking about 2.745.

THE CHAIR: But you are talking about a 75 per cent increase in 4.7 and you are talking about 45 per cent in 3.2. How can it vary, if overhead costs are proportioned?

Mr Wheeler: We didn't take from those two outputs their share of the overheads that were going to the new department. We took the total department's share of the outputs out of those two outputs.

THE CHAIR: Why would you do that?

Mr Wheeler: Because we didn't have time to sit down and run the attribution model.

THE CHAIR: So the figures in last year's budget are way out as well, on the basis that in the blue volume it would be grossly inaccurate as well?

Mr Wheeler: To the extent that they attribute the overheads down to output level, yes.

MR PRATT: So this is a correction to make up for it.

Mr Wheeler: Done during the 2002-03 year.

Ms Hinton: If I could add that this is compounded by the fact that I have just been advised that there is also an underestimate of both the estimated outcome for the year and the target, which we will be adjusting in the first quarterly report.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, in output 4.2?

Ms Hinton: In output 4.2, that's right.

MRS DUNNE: What is the new target?

Ms Hinton: The new target is going to be somewhere a little over 400.

THE CHAIR: Can I make the comment that it is impossible for a committee to know this. If I had not asked that question, would the committee have been told that that target had gone up?

Ms Hinton: They would have been told, possibly not today—I am sorry about that; my apologies—but certainly you would in the next quarterly report.

THE CHAIR: That begs the question: how many other targets would be adjusted and brought to light in the next quarterly report?

Ms Hinton: We endeavour to get it as accurate as we possibly can at this stage of the year, but you will know through looking at other quarterly performance reports that there are adjustments that are made at different times.

THE CHAIR: Will the budget therefore be adjusted to spend the average cost of \$4,286 per child, or will the numbers be made to fit the final result and therefore the average spent per child will go down?

Ms Hinton: The reason for the change in the target relates to the fact that this is a measure of throughput and not students who are in this process, early intervention on a full-time basis. Children come into the early intervention programs for a shorter period of time, so that doesn't necessarily mean that the cost per child is—

THE CHAIR: It is an average cost per child.

Ms Hinton: Yes, but the average cost per child in those circumstances would come down if you have a greater throughput.

THE CHAIR: Correct.

Ms Hinton: So there is a compounding here.

THE CHAIR: Except this is going up. I have to say, I don't know now which figures there are accurate and which aren't.

Ms Hinton: We will provide you with an amended version in terms of the target, if that would be helpful.

THE CHAIR: It certainly would be.

MRS DUNNE: It would be useful, if you are going to do that, Ms Hinton, to provide us with an accurate figure of what last year's target really was because the \$2,800—

Ms Hinton: The target?

Ms Gallagher: The cost.

MRS DUNNE: The cost. The \$2,889 in last year's budget or the \$2,909 that is purported to be this year's target. Why that changed from last year's budget to this year's budget paper, I don't know.

Ms Hinton: That has been entered. We can do that. We could footnote that to attempt to put more clarity on it for you.

MRS DUNNE: That would be useful.

MRS DUNNE: In regard to timeliness, 90 per cent of the parents were notified of children's early intervention placement within three weeks of the executive officer's approval for placement. How long does it take? That means that in 90 per cent of cases it takes three weeks to write a letter. I think a much more important measure would be how long it takes someone to get a placement, rather than to be notified that they have been approved for placement. When you actually identify that there is a child who needs a placement, how long does it take to get one?

Ms Armstrong: It will vary on whether or not there are vacancies where the placement is recommended. It could be into a particular unit. Some children can go in immediately, they are referred and placed, and some children would have a waiting period of not very long. We have been able to place all children who have been recommended and referred.

MRS DUNNE: What would you say would be an average time for a placement?

Ms Armstrong: It varies. There are about two or three processes. One is a referral: one then goes to a counsellor, and then it depends on the assessment process when they work with families. It could vary anywhere between two to six weeks.

MRS DUNNE: From when someone first says that a child would benefit from the early intervention program.

Ms Armstrong: It depends on where that initial referral comes from. It could come from a child health medical officer, it could come from a health professional. By the time it comes to our office, it then goes to our school counsellors, and they make contact with families. So the whole process is anywhere up to—we say when we are giving information to parents; from the time that the initial application comes in, becomes a referral, to the time of placement—six to eight weeks.

MRS DUNNE: That's not too bad.

Ms Armstrong: On occasions it has been longer. That is normally when we have been working with a family where maybe they are not ready to accept a placement, or they are still coming to terms with the issues around why the child has been referred, and some parents actually decline and wish to wait for a bit longer.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you for that. That is most informative.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other questions on 4.2?

Mr Wheeler: Mr Chairman, could I answer your earlier question now, before we forget, about feasibility studies on gymnasiums?

THE CHAIR: Yes, please.

Mr Wheeler: The feasibility study will look at a number of schools on a random basis, just to see what we can work through on that, and Melrose is one of those.

THE CHAIR: Thank goodness for that. Thank you. Moving right along now to 4.3, preschool education. Minister, there was a symposium at the Lakeside recently where interest was expressed, I think it was across-the-board, in bolstering the education of Canberrans aged 0 to 5. There doesn't seem to be significant increase or a reflection of that sentiment in output class 4.3. Is the government going to learn anything from its own symposium called *Children Now*, and will there be greater emphasis on preschool education in coming years?

Ms Gallagher: I think we will be learning from our own symposium. The children's plan is on track. It will be looking at all the issues around providing services and support to children between the ages of 0 and 12. Preschool years certainly will be covered in that plan.

THE CHAIR: When is that likely to appear?

Ms Gallagher: You can correct me if I am wrong: later this year; it is hoped to be in the latter part of this year. The consultations are going on now. There is a reference group working very hard on putting together some documentation to go out to broader community consultation. But it is hoped to have the plan ready for September on.

THE CHAIR: The government payment for output was expected to be \$12 million, I take that to be—\$12,047,000. It actually came in at \$11,124,000. Is there a reason for it coming in significantly—

Mr Wheeler: We are back to the attribution answer again. You are talking about 2002-03?

THE CHAIR: You told me not five minutes ago that the attribution answer only applied to 4.2 and 4.7.

Mr Wheeler: That is where all the overheads were taken from in the first instance. When we corrected it, every other output in the department had to be adjusted because it took its share of the overheads that went to the new department. But in the first instance, as a matter of convenience, we had taken it from two outputs.

THE CHAIR: And that will be the case in 4.4, 5 and 6?

MRS DUNNE: Surely, Mr Wheeler, part of the downturn for government outputs outcome over a target is the fact that we have fewer kids to target than we estimated we would?

Mr Wheeler: There is a range of factors in there, to be honest.

THE CHAIR: And the increase from \$11.124 million to \$11.508 million is due to some indexation, some EBA and some money for cleaning and toilet paper?

Mr Wheeler: For a new initiative, that's it.

MRS DUNNE: Actually, where is the money for cleaning and toilet paper?

Mr Wheeler: In there.

MRS DUNNE: Is it in there? \$125,000; is that in the \$11.5 million?

Mr Wheeler: Yes. That's there, the new initiatives.

MRS BURKE: I have a very general question in relation to the KLAs, the key learning areas. Can you tell me if culture actually comes under studies of society now? I know that some time ago there was talk about introducing a ninth that was going to stand alone, as in culture. Does that now come under studies of society?

Ms Hinton: Studies of society and environment.

MRS BURKE: We are still in the eight KLAs.

Ms Hinton: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The next one is output 4.4, which relates to support for young people.

MS DUNDAS: I think this is the right area to ask this question. We had a brief discussion under the education portfolio last Friday about youth workers in schools and you mentioned then that you know that there is a shortage of youth workers in the community anyway. How are you going to manage that in terms of this output, support for young people, which administers the contracts with community organisations that employ youth workers and how they will react to the youth workers in schools program?

Ms Gallagher: I had a meeting yesterday with the Youth Coalition about this matter and they raised concerns primarily about who employs the youth workers. That is their issue; it is not to do with the initiative at all. We certainly had a very good discussion over their

concerns and they raised a couple that I certainly want to seek some more advice on, and that is what I have said to the Youth Coalition. I think everyone is on the same path.

It is a fantastic initiative, it is exciting, and everyone wants to see it implemented so that it delivers the best it can. I think we still need to have some discussions about the implementation of it. The idea is to have eight or nine youth workers ready to start work at the beginning of the next school year, so we do have a bit of time to have those discussions.

The Youth Coalition represent services to youth and they certainly have the support of a lot of the providers of youth workers down to the regional community services, and they are advocating their concerns. I think there are some things there that we need to look at and they relate primarily to their concern around who employs them.

MS DUNDAS: The money that is being allocated is specifically to employ people in the department to be youth workers in schools. Will there be extra support given to the youth service contracts that you administer to provide greater linkages from those youth workers into the youth programs that are already running in the community?

Ms Gallagher: That is one of the things they have raised with me—about how we are going to do that. I think it is valid. They raised some very good points yesterday about their concerns, and some of it was linkages and not setting up two tiers of youth workers in Canberra; the ones that work the public service, and we do employ youth workers now. I think that because it is new we have got an opportunity to talk through some of the concerns, and we do recognise that the job of those youth workers, if they are to be very successful, is going to rely on the linkages outside of schools.

MS DUNDAS: So you are still working through those problems.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I only met with them yesterday and, as I said, they raised some good points with me that I want to have further discussions on, not only with them but with the department.

THE CHAIR: No firm decision has been made on whether the department will run the youth workers or whether they will be outsourced.

Ms Gallagher: We have a firm position on it, but the Youth Coalition disagree.

MS DUNDAS: In a response to a question I put on notice about the youth workers program, you said that there would be a working group established to work through the establishment of the program.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MS DUNDAS: Who will be on that working group?

Ms Gallagher: Staff from within the department. The Youth Coalition will be invited to participate. I am not sure if that invitation has been extended to them yet, but it didn't come up. They have had some discussions and we didn't raise it yesterday. And the counsellors as well. I am not sure if there are further people, Barbara, that you want—

Ms Baikie: Schools as communities.

MS DUNDAS: You mentioned counsellors.

Ms Gallagher: The existing school counsellors.

MS DUNDAS: Sorry, I got the counsellors and youth workers confused. So the Youth Coalition will be representing these workers in those discussions—the community-based youth workers.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I presume so. We acknowledge their expertise in the area and we would like to cooperate with them. That is aside from some of the other issues they raised with me yesterday. But, as I said, this initiative will work best if we have the support of the community sector youth providers, and that is why they are important players.

MS DUNDAS: I will just to go back to my initial question: as part of the discussions you will be having about building this program up, will it involve more finances going to the youth service contractors out there in the community as they link into the schools? Do you see the need for them to have more resources? Is there a possibility that they would be able to access more resources?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I know what you mean.

Ms Hinton: We are looking at a project that would involve providing some resources to the non-government youth sector, probably to Youth Coalition, in terms of facilitating linkages between youth centres and the youth workers and the counsellors in schools, but it is not about changing the contracts for all youth services.

MS DUNDAS: Sure. Do you have any idea yet how much money that will be and when it will arrive?

Ms Hinton: We will be talking through with Youth Coalition about what the functions are. It's a bit difficult to start with an amount of money and then determine the functions. It will be looking at what the model might be, what needs to happen and then discussing those issues.

MRS BURKE: Mr Chairman, I have a supplementary question. Just on that note, I have had stakeholders approach me in relation to this very issue, and whilst we always need to work smarter, not harder, and reassess where every dollar goes, can you tell me if your program is going to re-evaluate Aboriginal youth workers? There is obviously a need in our community. I am concerned about the one at Woden that I think will finish up on June 30. And the future of that is uncertain, is that correct?

Ms Gallagher: The one at Woden Youth Centre would have an employment relationship with Woden Community Service, so I am not sure about the details of that.

MRS BURKE: In your program you talk about having a look at it as a whole now. What scope is there for Aboriginal youth workers, outreach workers, to support young people?

Ms Gallagher: In relation to this initiative, we would we be looking—

Ms Hinton: We'd love to have one, an indigenous person.

MRS BURKE: You hope to have one or you would love to have one?

Ms Hinton: I would love to.

MRS BURKE: Do you have a vision for having one? Is that in the forefront of your mind?

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely. We have targeted areas, as we do with teachers, where we would like to recruit people into positions—with teachers it is more male teachers, the languages other than English side, indigenous teachers. Again, this comes back to the employment relationship. I think that certainly we acknowledge that indigenous students within high schools could certainly benefit from having an indigenous youth worker and we will be—I imagine it won't be me who is employing these people; it will be the department—cognisant of that, but at the end of the day they would be merit-based selections, I presume.

MRS BURKE: I was just wondering if it was part of your vision, though.

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely. I think this is a really exciting initiative and we want to get it right and that is why we are taking the time to talk to people and glean their expertise.

Ms Hinton: If you include Quamby as part of the youth services branch, we already have 10 indigenous staff in that area.

MR PRATT: I am not sure whether we covered this last Friday, but I would like to go back to Ms Dundas's question about the negotiations, the discussions between stakeholders and the department over the employment of youth workers and counsellors. You are going to ensure that they are inducted into the education culture, that that process is going to be put right through.

Ms Hinton: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I would like to go back to the numbers at the bottom of page 323. This one actually defies the trend in that you have got extra money which wasn't spent, but then you have got more money in this year. If you look at the government payment for outputs across the very bottom line you will see that for the cost of students attending the adolescent day unit program, the target was \$25,000, it came in at \$16,000 and it will go up to \$17,000 this year. Is that because of distribution of overheads?

Mr Wheeler: There are two answers to the question. Let me deal with the \$25,000 to \$16,000 first, the average. That is an error—the \$25,000 is an error. It was computed using 12 students instead of 20. The \$16,800 uses the 20 students that is mentioned up at the top there as the number of students who attend, and that is consistent with the 2001-02 figure as well. It is an error that crept in and we didn't catch it in time.

MS DUNDAS: What should it be?

Mr Wheeler: \$16,852.

MS DUNDAS: So your target estimated outcome is net target.

Mr Wheeler: It is corrected, yes.

THE CHAIR: When was that discovered?

Mr Wheeler: Some time during this current financial year. The second part is the trend of the GPO and costs actually going down. In answer to Mrs Dunne's question, I indicated there were other factors that impact on the shift costs. One of them is that we have reviewed the attribution arrangements for the whole of children's, youth and family services, because in the previous budget we found that we actually had, once the model had been run, some outputs that had a GPO greater than their costs, in effect making a profit which, of course, doesn't make sense. We have had to fix that, and that is one of the reasons that support for young people has gone down, not by as much as some of the other outputs but to some extent to reflect the fact that we didn't have the attribution quite right. The price has now gone up again, essentially because of indexation, some SACS funding, and some non-teachers EBA funding.

THE CHAIR: Don't all parts of the department cost the same to run in terms of attribution of a percentage of the CEO's time, services delivered to the minister—all those things that are taken as the corporate whole?

Mr Wheeler: Not really, but the one that sticks out most, and this is where we ended up in difficulty, is that our attribution model didn't take a careful enough approach to depreciation, and so those outputs that have more assets than another should have attracted more. That is how come we ended up with that profit figure, and from memory I think Ms Dundas picked us up on that last year—it was one of her questions.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible, Minister, to have a breakdown of all these figures and the attribution? It just seems that they are all over the place, that there doesn't seem to be any consistency in the application.

Mr Wheeler: For which output, Mr Smyth?

THE CHAIR: All of output class 4.

MS DUNDAS: There is going to be one extra youth service contract administered next year. Do you know what that is yet?

Ms Gallagher: Sorry?

MS DUNDAS: We are going to have one more youth service contract administered. It will go from 25 to 26. This is at the very top of the page.

Ms Gallagher: I think it is the new contract in Belconnen.

Mr Duggan: Yes, we have a new contract in Belconnen, and we have also extended the Youth Coalition's contract for the youth week to a longer term contract. That is the extra contract.

MS DUNDAS: So the extra contract is the youth week contract, because there has been a contract in Belconnen and it has just changed?

Mr Duggan: Yes. We have had a short-term arrangement. Now we have gone for a long-term contract next year for three years. We actually went for a long-term contract over three years with the Youth Coalition. That is a new contract rather than a variation.

MS DUNDAS: You have just confused me with the discussion about Belconnen. That new contract is the new youth week contract.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

Mr Duggan: Yes, the minister is right: there is a new contract with the new provider in Belconnen—

Ms Gallagher: In this financial year there was an extra one, which probably isn't reflected in these papers.

MS DUNDAS: No.

Ms Gallagher: Sorry.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions on that, we will move on to output class 4.5.

MS DUNDAS: None of the numbers change, except for the costs down at the bottom. Mr Duggan, in the general discussions that we had last Friday I think you said that you were looking to decrease admissions. Why do none of the quantity numbers change?

Mr Duggan: We will endeavour to change admission rates at Quamby youth detention centre. However, we don't determine them. Therefore, we only accept what the courts send us. But some of the strategies we are working on now is to try to get a restorative justice model through the sentencing reviews, and by then targeting that as our first line of diversion we hope to actually allow the numbers to decrease over the next number of years.

MS DUNDAS: While the numbers don't change—as you say, that is because they are determined by somebody else; and, Trevor, you might have answered this already—why do the costs change, especially the average cost per custody day?

Mr Duggan: The average cost per custody day is dependent on the numbers of young people coming in at any one time, so they can fluctuate marginally because they are identified there in the length of stay. Depending on the needs of the young person, we are forced to actually put on more staff.

MS DUNDAS: Even though the target has met the estimated outcome, including youth with special needs and number of days used annually, why has the cost dropped by \$90 per day?

Mr Wheeler: Are you looking at the \$17,000 versus the \$9,000?

MS DUNDAS: Firstly, I am looking at the average cost per custody day, and then back up to 833.

Mr Wheeler: I think it's the end result of those—

MS DUNDAS: If the actual cost per custody per day, based on 2002-03 figures—

Mr Wheeler: It has come down in the last year, in the 2002-03 year, as has the GPO, and, at the risk of being boring, we are talking about the attribution again. But can I just add a plea here that the estimates on which budgets are prepared are typically prepared before a department does its annual financial statements, at which time a lot of these things are sorted out, and so we are always playing catch-up a bit. That is what is happening with our overhead attribution. But the cost and GPO—the cost is marginally going down, the GPO was marginally going up. We have got a 9 per cent drop in the average cost per custody day. I don't think I can explain that one, actually.

MR HARGREAVES: I think I can ask a question which might elicit the answer. Do the complexity of the young person that is being taken into custody and their gender actually have a contribution to the fluctuation in the per day cost, given the amount of professional support that has to be given to these particular people?

Ms Baikie: It is an average, but it can depend on the type of clients that you have. It does happen that you may have a run of, say, young people who are subject to self-harming. Then you have to one-on-one them, which means that it increases the cost because you have to have one worker per client. When we say "one-on-one", that is actually three-on-one, because there is 24-hour coverage.

MR HARGREAVES: I understand that there is some—I didn't ask this in the overview and I meant to—post-release for these young people. Do the figures for the cost include the actual cost of post-release support for these young people?

Mr Duggan: The cost would be contained in the community-based client per day costs, because when they leave the institution most often they have a second order that commences on their release, so then the community unit supervises them after their post release.

MR HARGREAVES: Given the information from Mr Wheeler on attribution and all those sorts of things, and I expect that to be an effect, is there an effect because of the type of program which is being delivered now to these people post release than was delivered in the past post release? Has that sort of been a more effective program and therefore a less costly one?

Mr Duggan: Depending on the needs of the young person, and most high risk young people are allocated to the intensive supervision follow-up. By doing that, obviously there is a cost to the agency. But the numbers in the community have grown over the last number of years, so therefore the actual cost of intervention drops based on the actual numbers of young people in the community.

MR HARGREAVES: That makes sense. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: This is one of those classes where you hope the target for use doesn't go up, so you have not factored in at least a 1 per cent growth of population. That is a good sign. Why? What are you doing that will be different in the coming year that brings this target at least to a plateau, if not down?

Ms Hinton: In terms of this particular target area, as Mr Duggan has explained, we don't determine the numbers of clients who come to us. Our responsibility is to take those that are referred to us from the courts.

THE CHAIR: What is your recidivist rate? How many kids come back? How many kids spend more than one visit at Quamby?

Mr Duggan: We are actually mapping our recidivism rate and we have taken a through cut of 1999, from July 1999 to June 2000, and our recidivism rates, I would say, are the lowest in Australia. We have now got a recidivism rate on those 160 clients of 29 per cent, which I think is significant.

THE CHAIR: I think that's fantastic. 29 per cent.

Mr Duggan: Twenty-nine per cent of all the young people we engaged in the financial year in 1999 to 2000 and we counted them for two years.

THE CHAIR: Is there a national average?

Mr Duggan: Western Australia yesterday informed me that they have reduced theirs from 56 per cent to 48 per cent. Victoria is over 45 per cent, Queensland and New South Wales are around 37 per cent. We have tried to use the same methodology so as we could do some comparison.

THE CHAIR: Whilst I take your point that you don't have any control over what the courts do, and perhaps we need to train judges or something, you do have a huge impact in terms of what it is that you do to help kids when they are in your custody. Is there a recognition in your figures that we are getting it right either in Quamby or on community-based orders, that we are actually breaking the cycle of crime that would lead to a 29 per cent recidivist rate?

Mr Duggan: Obviously, it is the interventions, I would argue, that we are offering them. It is the integrated interventions we are offering, Mr Smyth, because that's how we know them—they have come to our attention and we have worked very strongly with them. We have a very good community-based unit and we have a very comprehensive case management service to young people, and in the same way the integration between Quamby and our community. Additionally, our educational programs are very strong in

the institution, and being able to return young people either to school or training we have really targeted as one of our strengths.

MR HARGREAVES: My memory of when you were here last time is that we were talking about those numbers coming in, being collated and being produced. But I don't remember anything being said—I am sure it was said, but I don't remember—about whether there was going to be a report issued.

Mr Duggan: We have been putting out those figures into a report and then, within the data, actually trying to identify ages and offences and different interventions. But it is basically a data report, and we have not actually then borne down to see what actual interventions were the most successful with which clients. But we will produce that report in the next number of weeks.

MR HARGREAVES: In the context of that report, you mentioned just a moment ago that the department essentially has embraced the restorative justice model. I believe that probably that model is where the success can be attributed. Will you be commenting in the report about that model vis-a-vis other models? I understand that in some of the other jurisdictions there is the lock-em up, chuck away the key method, a warehousing philosophy. Some of the other jurisdictions are into the rehabilitation model, which doesn't go quite as far as the restorative justice model. Will you be doing a comparison of those models?

Mr Duggan: Part of the discussions we are having at the Australian juvenile justice administrators forum is about what works and where it works. Yes, we will be having a very strong look at what we do. Our model during this period, I think, was a very active case management model and it was not just solely based on the principles of restorative justice and the best decisions associated with it.

Obviously, there were conversations about the research that we are going to carry out long term with this cohort to try and understand why the recidivism rate was low, and then when did they come into contact with the justice system and what did we offer. But the sentencing review that has been undertaken by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, we are trying to influence it. We do have a collective feeling in the jurisdiction that restorative justice and perhaps diversionary conferencing may be an outcome of that over the next number of years.

MR HARGREAVES: Given that the area that has been taken away from Justice and Community Safety now embraces the restorative justice model—and adult corrections can't because we depend on an interstate jurisdiction—

THE CHAIR: We could.

MR HARGREAVES: We can't. Any examination of the contract between ourselves and New South Wales Corrections will reveal that pretty quickly. I think I heard you say that the Justice and Community Safety people are looking at the success of Quamby in a philosophical and program sense to adopt those sorts of processes, or at least examine them in their application to adult corrections. Firstly, I would like you to confirm or not confirm that. Secondly, given that those figures seem to indicate a really good news story, Minister, will you table that report in the Assembly?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much.

MR HARGREAVES: That was half the question. All I need is a yes or no on the other one.

Mr Duggan: I think that any successful model should be utilised by all the agencies, and, yes, we still have a very collegial role with adult corrections and we do do a lot of joint training. So, yes, I would say any model that we have, if it's suitable to their environment, they have endorsed.

MR HARGREAVES: If yours is working and theirs isn't, it would be a good move.

MRS BURKE: I am looking at the cost per community-based client per day, \$16. In terms of outputs for the service, do you receive more for the same, less for the same or the status quo?

THE CHAIR: The status quo. Nothing else has changed.

MRS BURKE: I am wondering what is actually involved. It doesn't tell us in terms of the cost.

Ms Hinton: Another way of looking at it is to look at the average cost per community client receiving wellbeing programs as well. That process will depend a lot upon the individual needs of the young people at that point that have come through the system. As was discussed a little earlier, some of them—

MRS BURKE: Just an estimate of cost.

Ms Hinton: Yes, some of them would have much higher needs than others. What we are indicating there is that over probably an extended period of time the cost is estimated to be around about on average \$10,000—a little under \$10,000—per young person, and that is a process of connection with the young person, continuing to talk to them to make certain that they are on the right track and to link them in with other kinds of services.

MRS BURKE: Over what period are we talking?

Mr Duggan: What we are talking about there is there are two programs we offer: the \$16 a day course is really our normal supervision in the community; the more expansive course per year against the client who has intensive needs. But I think the principal argument is that it is always far cheaper to have a young person in the community than to have them incarcerated in an institutional environment. That is why those costs—

MRS BURKE: I was just wondering what constituted that cost, whether it was wages or administration, and whether there will be a rise.

Ms Hinton: Staff time, usually.

Mr Duggan: No, it's staff time.

MRS BURKE: Therefore, wouldn't there be a rise in staffing costs over CPI or wage increases?

Mr Duggan: Yes, but those costs are also associated with the number of young people who come through.

MS DUNDAS: To balance that out, because that is a \$16 targeted estimated outcome and it is what you are projecting for next year, is it more clients bouncing off against the CPI/EBA increases?

MRS BURKE: That is what I am trying to establish. You are going to see the same number of people for the same amount of money. It seems strange. You just told me it is in relation to people who are going to deliver the service and people cost money, and that is associated with wage rises each year I would have thought.

MS DUNDAS: Why hasn't that number changed, especially because all the other numbers have changed because of the redistribution?

THE CHAIR: Would you like to take that on notice, Minister?

Ms Hinton: No. The figure is really just an estimate. It is very difficult for us at that level of generality to be able to determine what the particular cost is going to be of some unknown individuals at that time, and that we attempt to estimate.

MRS BURKE: So it is a rise and fall either side. It could take into account fewer or higher wage costs or whatever?

Ms Hinton: Yes, exactly.

Mr Wheeler: There is a small component for indexation and non-teacher EBA wages. But the impacts on prices, if you look at it that way, will depend on the price. It is \$16, it doesn't go down to cents, so if there is a variation based on a small amount of indexation or EBA it just won't show up in this.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions on output class 4.5, we will move on to output class 4.6. I think we had a fair whack of it last time. The household disaster relief grant is all the bushfire money, and that is why the budget goes from \$20 million back to \$17 million?

Mr Wheeler: That's right.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Are there any other questions on output class 4.7?

MS DUNDAS: I don't know if this is another redistribution of funding across the departments, but that is a big increase of the bottom line.

Mr Wheeler: That's the one that took the biggest hit.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions on 4.7, that is the end of output class 4. We will move back to output class 3, and invite vocational education and the CIT to the table.

MS DUNDAS: I'm going to ask about the ANTA grant, which I think comes under here. It's mentioned on page 305—that is, the Commonwealth grant from ANTA. Page 305 shows it dropping from \$649,000 to \$127,000 between 2002-03 and 2003-04. Is there an explanation?

Ms Gallagher: My understanding is that that's the growth money that's agreed between the Commonwealth—it's not. I'll stop there.

Mr Wheeler: That's an increase of \$127,000 on the previous year's \$649,000.

MS DUNDAS: The figures go from \$649,000 to \$127,000 and then back to \$619,000. What's happening in 2003-04 that has it at such a different rate?

Mr Wheeler: It's the adjustment from one year to another—the increase from the previous year. If you look at the start numbers at the top of the page, you've got, for the 2002-03 budget, \$399 million. All of those ons and offs are against a base. Then they will appear in the next base.

MS DUNDAS: I understand that these are changes to appropriation. I'm just interested as to why the 2003-04 change to appropriation is so much less than the changes to appropriation for the outyears and for the 2002-03 estimated outcome.

Mr Wheeler: We're picking up on the changes from the forward estimates, so we have already factored in an amount. On the top line are the forward estimates. You've got \$399 million, \$416 million and \$426 million. What we're doing is adjusting against the forward estimates, to come up with the bottom line. In other words, some of it's already in there.

MS DUNDAS: I refer specifically to the Commonwealth grant from ANTA. I understand these are changes to appropriation—that they're adjustments against the bottom line, and what was done in last year's budget.

Mr Wheeler: It's not a reduction.

MS DUNDAS: I know it's not a reduction—it's more money coming in. But why is there less money coming in next year than the amount which came in this year—and the amount coming in the year after?

Mr Wheeler: In the previous year's budget, the ANTA funding was \$16.996 million. That is from last year's budget paper, which you probably haven't got there. This year it is \$17.644 million—that's on page 308. What you're seeing is the difference.

MS DUNDAS: Then why is it projected to go up in the outyears? Are we looking at the same page? I'm looking at page 305—the Commonwealth grant from ANTA, which is at the bottom of the page.

Mr Wheeler: It's \$649,000, then \$127,000 in 2003-04.

MS DUNDAS: Then \$619,000, \$695,000 and \$692,000.

Mr Wheeler: The outyears are just our best estimates of what we think the Commonwealth is going to pass onto us.

MS DUNDAS: Do you think the Commonwealth is going to give you a lot more money in the outyears from ANTA than it did for 2003-04?

Mr Wheeler: That's what we've projected.

MS DUNDAS: Then why have you projected it to be so low for 2003-04?

Mr Wheeler: We've got a better feel for this one, because it's in this year's budget. We were able to find out from the Commonwealth pretty well what it was going to be. We knew what the three-year growth funding was, for example—where it is \$1.72 million over three years.

MS DUNDAS: Based on that, why are you so optimistic—and especially for money coming through ANTA? Every other department is being pessimistic about budgeting across the outyears. It's strange that you're being so optimistic.

Mr Wheeler: Can I take that part of it on notice?

MS DUNDAS: Yes, sure. Perhaps you can explain those things to me on notice.

MRS BURKE: I understand that the remaining eight industry training advisory boards are now receiving \$500,000. I'm always concerned. I am, and have always been, a very big supporter of ITABs. I know there's been some rationalisation, but can you explain why the government is not making a funding contribution to the ITABs? Given the ITABs' strong relationship with the unions and your strong and necessary relationship with the unions, why isn't the ACT giving more money to the ITABs?

This is Commonwealth funding. I'm not going to go into the Commonwealth issue—that's not for discussion now. I just want to know why your government isn't going to offer more funding to the ITABs.

Ms Gallagher: This happened a bit before my time, but my understanding is that it wasn't an area we previously funded. We lost the Commonwealth funding—therefore, we had to come in. We are funding them at \$500,000.

MRS BURKE: I understand that.

Ms Gallagher: The government is funding them.

MS MacDONALD: Wasn't an ITAB review done?

THE CHAIR: One at a time, please.

MRS BURKE: I have just said that. There has been an ITAB review. I welcome that because there was some wastage. We needed to consolidate the activities of the industry training advisory boards. The ITABs are necessary for advice from industry to governments. I'm concerned that, in a particular Labor government, you would not have seen the need to meet the obligation to fund industry training advisory boards, given their strong and necessary relationship with the unions and your obvious links there.

Ms Gallagher: We are funding it, Mrs Burke.

MRS BURKE: That's Commonwealth funding, isn't it?

Ms Gallagher: No, it's our funding of \$500,000. They stopped it—they just took it out. The ITABs would have gone. We had to find new money to fund those, and we found \$500,000. It's our money.

MRS BURKE: Is that a drop in what they were getting?

Ms Gallagher: It is a slight drop—of about \$100,000. We had to find the new money—and we found \$500,000.

MRS BURKE: I appreciate that.

Ms Gallagher: It is our money—we are supporting them. We have entered into a new phase of the ACT industry training and advisory association in pulling the ITABs together. That's in a new stage now. We're keeping an eye on how it's going to work—and so far, so good.

MS DUNDAS: On 3.2, looking at page 318 of BP 4, note (1) says, "The number of course enrolments has increased, without a corresponding increase in annual student contact hours purchased, due to a trend toward more enrolments in shorter duration programs." Can you explain why the 2002-03 estimated outcome for the number of annual student curriculum hours purchased is up from the target of 2002-03, and why you've put the target back for 2003-04?

Mr Veenker: The target has been constant. We estimate that we'll exceed the target. However, the composition of the courses and the way the enrolments are going varies from year to year. That's what the note is trying to explain.

THE CHAIR: If a population increase were built in, you'd have expected it to have gone up 38,000 hours, just on that increase. You've changed the nature of the courses. The courses are now shorter, but there should be more people doing them—just with natural increase. You proved that last year, by going from 3.735 up to 3.8 million hours of contact, but this year we're coming back to 3.735.

Mr Veenker: That's the target we've negotiated, and that's the funding arrangement. When we exceed that, we do over-deliver from time to time, if we have a capacity to do it; if demand is there; and the quality is not compromised. The population figures are important, but a slight increase in population does not necessarily translate into direct demand for CIT. There's a whole range of other things that influence when people want to access our services. A lot of the VET courses are in module form.

MS MacDONALD: Mr Veenker, you know you're not supposed to use that word any more. Modules were supposed to have been done away with years ago.

Mr Veenker: Well, shorter components—meaning that people would access a smaller part of a total program.

MS DUNDAS: On these figures, even though you estimate that the number of hours purchased will be more than the target set, are you going to cut services back next year—because you're again winding the target back and you've negotiated on that amount?

Ms Gallagher: The target's not being wound back, it's being maintained.

MS DUNDAS: The target is consistent but, this year, you have exceeded that outcome.

Mr Veenker: We exceed the target. The actual outcome is more than the target.

MS DUNDAS: That's consistent through the years. Is that what you're saying?

Mr Veenker: We'll go close to the target this year, and we may slightly exceed it again.

MS DUNDAS: You're delivering more than you're being paid for?

Mr Veenker: That's correct.

MS DUNDAS: Is that having an impact on how CIT is being forced to operate?

Mr Veenker: We would not be taking on additional numbers if we felt that we were compromising quality. It depends a bit on how many are able to fit into particular classes. If we can meet a need; if it is in excess of the target and doesn't compromise the quality, we would try to meet that need.

THE CHAIR: Your target in the year before that, though, was 3.6 million contact hours, and you achieved 4.1.

Mr Veenker: It was a super effort!

THE CHAIR: The 2001-02 target was 3,635,000 hours and 4,078,000 hours were delivered. Your target this year was 3.7 million and you're going to achieve 3.8 million hours. Clearly you always over-deliver, so why is the target understated?

Mr Veenker: The target's the funding figure.

THE CHAIR: Minister, why aren't you buying more hours? Why are you being stingy in vocational education?

Ms Gallagher: It's a lot of hours. The issue I'm picking up here from the committee is that you feel the target for 2003 should be going up.

MS DUNDAS: We should be paying for the services being delivered. If we keep underestimating, that's not good economic management.

Ms Gallagher: The way arrangements have been in the purchaser model is something on which we're keen to have a discussion. I think this is happening more generally in other areas of government delivery—or delivery into the non-government sector—in looking at more partnerships, rather than purchase of specifics. Whether this would give CIT more flexibility around decisions they make, so they're flexible to meet demand, is something we're looking at. We're going to have discussions with CIT on that. Maybe that will have an impact on this sort of measure.

Ms Hinton: At the moment, those 3,735,000 hours are the aggregate of a range of different areas. You'll understand that, from the perspective of the director of an institution, you're managing a whole array of different courses, at different levels, in different areas—responding to both what the department and the government are interested in, together with what the community is interested in. The differences in that area are not great across that number of hours, across the range of courses we're talking about, and the ranges of levels of those courses.

A number of courses are more costly to deliver than others. Therefore, an adjustment in the provision of less costly courses, which might reflect student demand, would result in an increased number of hours. Alternatively, if the demand was for areas of high-cost delivery, that would act as a dampener on the number of hours that could be delivered.

These single numbers represent a very complex array of adjustments which are made throughout the year. That's part of the reason why the minister has asked us to look at greater flexibility in the arrangements in moving to some sort of planning protocol, in a partnership arrangement, rather than the purchaser/provider arrangement.

MS DUNDAS: Still on that page, the graduate satisfaction with courses is 87 per cent, when the target was 90 per cent. Why aren't our graduates happy?

Mr Veenker: They're pretty high figures.

MS DUNDAS: Why aren't they as happy as they should be?

Mr Veenker: I'm constantly trying to make them happy. There are fluctuations. We estimate that we might be slightly under the target this time.

MS DUNDAS: Why?

Mr Veenker: We constantly talk to students. We then make an intelligent guess, based on that. I can't describe exactly what the reasons are, but I think there's room for improvement in certain parts of CIT—and that includes our enrolment processes. We monitor fairly carefully the total range of services we offer; analyse the responses and try to probe why. Students have identified the enrolment process as one area they would like further updated—and maybe even more on-line enrolments in the future.

MS MacDONALD: How do you gather the information on student satisfaction?

Mr Veenker: There are different techniques. An audit of a sample is done through NCVER. We also interview students at the graduation ceremonies, when we can capture a large cohort. We invite them to answer a questionnaire.

MS MacDONALD: What percentage of students are filling out questionnaires?

Mr Veenker: At graduations?

MS MacDONALD: Yes.

Mr Veenker: The majority of students who come to the graduation ceremonies—about 60 per cent—would be part of the survey. But the NCVER audits, which are separate, take small samples from different areas. It might be between five and 10 per cent.

MS MacDONALD: In the surveys, where you're asking for information about how satisfied people are on their courses, or on their experience with CIT, if they're dissatisfied, are you asking why they're dissatisfied?

Mr Veenker: Yes. It would include teaching, non-teaching and relevance of course—that sort of activity.

MRS BURKE: Can the minister please explain the rationalisation which I understand is currently underway in colleges in relation to their status as registered training organisations?

Ms Gallagher: I'm not sure I understand the question. I don't understand that there's any rationalisation.

MRS BURKE: I understand the college is going through accreditation for registered training organisation status.

Ms Gallagher: They all are.

MRS BURKE: I realise that, but I understand that a number will not be. Is that correct, or is my information incorrect that a number won't be? All they'll be doing is making partnerships with, say, Erindale to Tuggeranong—and I know that Canberra College goes to Woden.

Mr Wheeler: All the colleges are registered RTOs. From time to time, like any RTO, they go through a reaccreditation process. What the north and southside colleges are doing is quite exciting. They're grouping together—clustering together—so they can offer a wider range of courses to their students. When it was limited to one college, they didn't have the numbers.

MRS BURKE: I understand it became quite a challenge for colleges to meet a great array of courses. That's where rationalisation comes in—in wiser use of resources.

Ms Gallagher: I thought you meant winding it back, rather than cooperating.

MRS BURKE: No—not at all. My information is incorrect, then. They will all remain RTOs. Is that what you're telling me?

Mr Wheeler: They'll all remain RTOs.

MRS BURKE: Some will do less, and others will combine?

Mr Wheeler: No. It will mean that, if a student wants to do a course that's not available in that college, they may be able to do it in one where the numbers are up a bit and they can continue to offer it. It opens up the selections—the opportunities—for students, rather than reducing them.

MRS BURKE: I notice that you're getting an increase of \$1.4 million. What does this buy us?

Mr Veenker: That's money for expenses that we're already committed to—certified agreements and salary increases. There has been a series of wage increases.

MS DUNDAS: I'm looking at page 454—user charges, ACT government. This increased for 2002-03 and is set to increase again for 2003-04. You have explained that that's due to wage increases, but why does it decrease for 2004-05?

Mr Veenker: This decrease represents estimates based on our knowledge of the ANTA agreement.

MS DUNDAS: We were discussing that earlier—that for 2004-05 it was increasing.

Mr Toshack: In our budget, the ANTA agreement was a three-year agreement that went from 2001-02 to 2003-04. It's in our budget just for those years. This means that, in the 2004-05 year, we have a reduction of \$1.7 million in that. That's the total amount of funding over the three years. Because the new agreement has not been finalised, we don't have that in our budget.

MS DUNDAS: Then why is it estimated on page 305?

Mr Wheeler: CIT is obviously not factoring into its budget something which relates to an agreement that's not yet signed between the department and the CIT. We've already taken on notice the question of why we're assuming a higher increase in the outyears.

MS DUNDAS: It's been factored into the department's budget, but not shown in CIT's budget?

Mr Wheeler: I'm taking that on notice. I think we need to explain to you what that means. Nevertheless, it would be an appropriate course of action for the CIT to take, because it needs to secure an agreement from the department before it knows where it's going.

MS DUNDAS: Is that why the employee expenses budget for 2004-05 has also dropped—because, since you had less funds, you assumed you'd have less staff?

Mr Wheeler: That's right.

MS DUNDAS: But there aren't people sitting around thinking they should be planning their retirement—because you are still expecting to get something from ANTA?

MS MacDONALD: I don't think they sit around and think about it too much! I will refer to output 3.1. Before we go on, I'd like to make the comment that I'm surprised that the target outcome for 2002-03—both the target and the estimated outcome—and then the target for the next year of 75 per cent for satisfied users of accreditation and registration services is so high.

Mr Wheeler: Is that the question?

MS MacDONALD: No, that's not the question—that's just my cynical comment. Regarding the total number of hours and programs available for competitive purchase, that's the number of hours across both CIT and private RTOs, isn't it?

Mr Wheeler: That's right.

MS MacDONALD: You're looking at increasing the total number of hours by 14,000?

Mr Wheeler: Yes.

MS MacDONALD: In looking at the bottom of that output class, I was a bit confused as to what it meant—the total cost versus the government payment for output. Mr Wheeler, do you want to give me an explanation as to what those figures mean?

Mr Wheeler: Do you mean the difference between the cost and the GPO? There's very little difference there, as you can see. To have that sort of thing, we must have some asset against our VET output class. It's about \$80,000. There's not much in it.

MS MacDONALD: The total cost?

Mr Wheeler: For 2003-04?

MS MacDONALD: Yes, for both.

Mr Wheeler: It is \$19.253 million.

MS MacDONALD: That's greater than the government payment. Where's the rest of the money coming from?

Mr Wheeler: There will be, essentially, non-cash costs, for which we're not funded. I hope we have fixed every one of our outputs this year, where the GPO is less than the cost. In large measure, it's because several of the costs are non-cash, and they're not funded.

MS MacDONALD: I refer to 3.2. Mr Veenker, going to the quality and effectiveness in the principal measures on page 318, you've talked about graduate satisfaction with courses and employer satisfaction with employees trained by the Canberra Institute of

Technology. We've discussed this before but, on the record, I want to talk about how wonderful CIT is, when it comes to putting trainees into the work force. Can you tell me the percentage of students who obtain employment straight after completing their CIT courses?

Mr Veenker: We do measure that. The percentage is in the vicinity of the high 70s—within a short timeframe.

MRS BURKE: As you probably know, I'm interested in school-to-work initiatives, particularly at college level. That is obviously now flowing and involving CIT, to a greater or lesser degree.

Minister, other than the careers education support service, which I note is probably going to be swallowed up a lot in policy development, I'm trying to think of the practical aspects of what your government and yourself are going to drive, to encourage industry to take a more active part in school-to-work initiatives. I don't see much activity on that, but I see a lot of departmental stuff. I congratulate you and the department on that.

What encouragement and incentives are you giving to business? Where is the money that was put into that side of it, to get the message across? It's only industry that can teach young people the skills they need. Education does a brilliant job in the core skills. What's happening with the business sector?

Mrs Gallagher: There's quite a lot of collaboration with industry occurring in relation to school to work.

MRS BURKE: Are there any new initiatives? Is there any more money there? Are you putting in any extra money?

Ms Gallagher: We're looking at several initiatives—or that are currently being done. In relation to specific initiatives funded through this budget, it's the careers one. There wasn't another initiative in relation to funding.

MRS BURKE: You can see my point. It's very geared at schools, and what's happening on the schools side of it, but it doesn't tell me an awful lot. I'm happy to take it on notice if you can tell me what that will involve.

Ms Gallagher: Within the construction industry—

MRS BURKE: I know about that one.

Ms Gallagher: There's a lot of industry collaboration occurring at the moment. In many ways, it's when you have shortages in certain industry areas that industry is given the incentive to get involved with working with education and training providers. We're seeing interest in particular areas—in construction. The automotive and pharmacy industries are also getting involved. So there are things happening in relation to a specific funded initiative in this budget. We have funded the careers one—but not in relation to funding industry.

MRS BURKE: I am not talking about funding industry. I'm saying it seems to be heavily bureaucratically weighted towards policy development, administration and advice to people. What's the practical application of the amount of money we're spending?

Ms Gallagher: Through careers.

MRS BURKE: Possibly, but where does the business side of it come in? You see, there's little to no mention of business, which is where young people end up, and I'm concerned. I'm happy to take it on notice.

Mr Wheeler: There is a range of things we do—broadly aimed at increasing the number of new apprenticeships taken up in the territory. They're specifically aimed at industry. A lot of those will be for young people, many of whom have just left school. Several will have been out of school for a while.

You'll be aware of the promotion campaign that's been running for the past few months. That's been a resounding success so far—the number of new apprentices has risen dramatically. That's one way of getting business involved, and a practical application of getting more new apprenticeships.

MRS BURKE: On notice, could you give me a breakdown of what this money is going to buy us?

Ms Gallagher: In the curriculum? On the careers?

MRS BURKE: Yes. If you could give it to me in writing, that would be good.

Ms Hinton: I can tell you very easily now. It's based around, essentially, three or four staff and administrative work associated with making the liaison between business and schools, and providing information to career counsellors about the way in which they can work with students. It will also provide professional development for career counsellors, which will involve connections with business and industry.

MRS DUNNE: Perhaps you could put the breakdown of money in.

Ms Hinton: I don't think I could give you anything more than I've just given you, because that's the budgetary basis on which it has been made.

MRS BURKE: You've identified personnel in that; you've identified administrative costs, and you've identified liaisons. You surely would have a nominal idea—an estimate—of where each of those three levels would be applied. Would it be right to say that, or not?

MRS DUNNE: Or is it that you haven't thought it out yet?

Mr Wheeler: What we're doing is establishing a unit. The primary aim, as the minister and Ms Hinton said, is to support teachers, career advisers and schools to better advise their students about career opportunities. A lot of the work that unit will do will be

determined by the unit when it gets going. That's the whole point. They'll be networking with career advisers, and they'll be networking with business.

MRS BURKE: We don't see a mention of business in here. We see school to work—work transitions.

Ms Hinton: The work part is the business part, Mrs Burke. You can't have school to work without the business side of it.

MRS BURKE: I realise that, Ms Hinton. I'm just wondering whether, therefore, you can give me a breakdown, or a nominal idea, of how much you'll spend on staff, how much you'll spend on admin, and how much you'll spend on anything else. I think that's a fair question.

Ms Hinton: We could put an estimate together, but it won't be finalised until such stage as we have spoken to career counsellors, to find out their needs. We will be working with the business community around that as well.

MRS BURKE: You'll be happy to provide that?

THE CHAIR: Yes, that's coming on notice.

MS MacDONALD: I believe that Business ACT, with Canberra Business Advisory Service, provide a lot of advice to industry on training needs. So there is input going into that area as well. Mrs Burke wasn't listening—there you go.

This is probably a question for Mr Wheeler. Talking about the ACT training plan in output class 3.2, previously the ACT training plan has been informed by the information provided to Training and Adult Education from the industry training advisory board. There has, of course, been a big shake-up in what happens with the industry training advisory boards with the pool cut of Commonwealth funds to state and territory ITABs.

Can you tell me how the training plan will now be put together, considering that the profiles submitted by the ITABs in previous years have gone to make up a significant part of that training plan?

Mr Wheeler: The training plan gets its input from a number of sources—and obviously the ITAB input is important. We were in the process of reviewing the arrangements, but the Commonwealth ceasing all funding made a certain amount of restructuring absolutely essential. The good thing about the new arrangements is that all the ITABs can continue to exist, but there will be an industry training advisory association sitting over the top of them.

It will use part of the funding it has to enable the ITABs, which are all voluntary, to continue operating—to service those boards. One of its key roles will be to make sure there remains that two-way flow of information from them—input coming in—to contribute to the training plan. We're optimistic that this will be a quality product and that we'll continue to get sound advice from industry.

THE CHAIR: No further questions? Minister, thank you very much for your patience and forbearance. Your role as minister for education, appearing before the Estimates Committee, is now over. We now call the Minister for Industrial Relations, referring in particular to ACT WorkCover.

Ms Gallagher: That will be me too. It will be a short appearance. I understand Mrs Cross would like to put the questions on notice.

THE CHAIR: The Estimates Committee now recognises the Youth Coalition of the ACT. There are a few procedural things I need to do before we can start, as to what happens today and how we record the afternoon.

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

To help the recording of the afternoon, Youth Coalition and friends, your evidence today is being recorded by Hansard to prepare the committee's transcript of proceedings. It is therefore necessary for you to speak clearly into a microphone when you answer questions. Please do not speak from the back of the room.

It would assist the committee staff and departmental officers if witnesses could clearly state when a question is being taken on notice. It would also greatly assist in the preparation of the transcript if witnesses would state their full name and the capacity in which they are appearing, on the first occasion they give evidence. Would you like to make an opening statement on behalf of the Youth Coalition of the ACT?

Ms Hunter: As you know, the youth coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory. We're responsible for representing the interests of young people aged 12 to 25, and those who work with them. We're here today specifically around one of the budget initiatives. That is the initiative around youth workers in schools.

When this initiative was first announced, it was well received by the community youth sector. At that stage, it was very unclear where these youth workers would be, or by whom they would be employed. After meetings with the department, it became clear that there had been a decision made that these youth workers would be departmental employees. That has raised substantial issues and concerns with the community youth sector.

We raised these issues in a meeting with Minister Gallagher yesterday afternoon. She was pleased to meet us, and to hear what these issues and concerns were. She was unaware of the issues beforehand.

One of the issues was around the implementation of this initiative. After raising our concerns, what came out of that meeting was a commitment from the minister to look at the issue of where these positions would be based—whether the workers would be

employed by the department or by the community sector—and to continue dialogue around this issue, plus implementation issues of this initiative. We are pleased to be part of that process.

We have given you written information on our concerns, which I'm sure has been distributed. To go over those matters again, I'll allow Susan to take the first couple of issues.

Ms Pellegrino: Several of the main issues we had, to support the fact that these youth workers should be based in the community, were around ensuring that the young person remains the primary client. The concern is that, if they are departmental employees, the department will be the main client and will lose sight of the needs of the young person.

Also, greater links can be made for both the young person and the young person's family through having a person based within the community. The family and the young person need to be able to access things after school hours of 9.00 am to 3.00 pm. They should be aware of the greater services out there—and they should have somebody who is able to support them in accessing those services.

It's about broadening the community for young people, outside of the school itself, because we acknowledge that schools can't be expected to fulfil every role. It's also about broadening people's choices around the kinds of services they wish to access.

MRS DUNNE: In what way would that be better provided by somebody in the community, rather than a department of education employee? What would constrain a department of education employee?

THE CHAIR: Can I suggest that we keep the questions until the end? We can then get the whole picture, and it's a little clearer.

Ms Hunter: We have been putting on the table—for at least 18 months, if not two years—our concern around the fact that community-based youth services have been providing a lot of services into schools which have not been resourced. We put that in our budget submission again this year. This initiative provided a great solution to that. Number one, it would have addressed that issue, and it also would have enhanced the services already being provided into schools, to consolidate the relationship between schools and communities.

In the ACT, it has been mooted that schools are to be made more a part of the community. This initiative provides a great way forward, in pursuing that goal, in that it connects community services with schools. As Susan has said, schools cannot be expected to take on all these roles—nor is that desirable.

Young people and their families need choice. They must have a broad range of choices which are not just about going through schools. These links to the community are very important. The thing is that, with the expertise around youth work, and about these programs, it is out there in the community sector—it is not in schools and in the department. That's why we are very strong that this initiative should rest out there in the community and that these people should be employed by existing youth services which have the expertise to do it.

Ms Pellegrino: We also see that placing youth workers in existing youth services will mean that they will be supported in a workplace which has professional understandings around youth work and the nature of youth work. It is important to ensure that linkages and supports are in place. That is a big consideration in how those people can carry out their work and be supported.

The area of linkages is important as well, which both Meredith and I have spoken about. This area was raised in the recent report by the Assembly committee which looked at the health of school-aged children. Those linkages were acknowledged as being important.

The issue of confidentiality for young people in schools is important. Reports previously done by the Commonwealth show that, at times, young people are reluctant to speak to staff within school settings—whether they be counsellors or other staff—because sometimes those issues are not kept confidential. We see that somebody external to that setting might be seen as a better point of access for a young person, because they're not aligned with the existing system. Those issues can then be seen as separate from other school issues.

Ms Hunter: Another issue we have raised with the minister is the impact on the community youth sector. Taking 17 positions out of our sector is considerable. It will have an enormous impact on youth services, which are already struggling in this area. If they are departmental positions, we understand that they will have better wages and conditions. Of course, that will be attractive to many people in the sector.

We can see that there could be a flood of youth workers going into the department. That will undermine the capacity of the community-based youth services to operate. That means down time; it means recruiting; and it means training.

I know that, at the CIT, there's a youth work course, and they will be graduating 40 or so youth workers. However, that does not address the issue. All that means is that, again, community-based youth services will be recruiting and having to put their resources into training and building the knowledge of those workers. We're behind the eight-ball again on that issue. That's very concerning. That point has been raised with us by executive directors of youth services, who are very concerned about the issue.

Ms Pellegrino: Work is currently being done by the department to look at the culture of schools, to make sure that they're more inclusive—and also to look at the curriculum to make sure it's relevant. That ongoing work would be complemented by having these positions based in the community, to ensure there is a crossing of cultures, to allow both cultures to benefit from the different understandings and learnings in each, and influence those.

Ms Hunter: At this point, we'll leave it and see what questions come up.

THE CHAIR: All right. We had the minister for education in earlier today. She was quite emphatic that the officers would be employed by the department. There is an implementation committee to be set up, apparently in which you, or a member of the youth coalition, will be asked to participate, so your advice and experience can be taken into account. The issue seems to be that, fundamentally, you don't see youth workers

employed by the department of education as having the sorts of freedoms they need to carry out the job properly?

Ms Hunter: Absolutely. We see far greater benefits in community-based youth services—that that will lead to far greater outcomes and better outcomes for the students who access the services. I'm quite disappointed to hear that. Our understanding from the meeting yesterday was that there would be further discussions on this and that a firm decision had not necessarily been made. Our understanding is that that is still open.

THE CHAIR: Maybe I've overstated the minister's position, but that is what I thought I heard.

MS DUNDAS: Mr Smyth, to provide information, I have a question on notice, the answer to which was provided today. The answer was that they would be employed by the department.

THE CHAIR: Yes. That's what I thought she said. What you are proposing is simply more community-based youth workers. Why should we do that? If there are community-based youth workers out there already doing the job, it sounds fine to me.

Ms Hunter: There are community-based youth workers out there, and they are providing great services, not all of which are being properly resourced. I think we could be enhancing what's out there, through this initiative.

Ms Pellegrino: We saw that it would have been a good initiative to identify that the community youth sector does have an important role to play in the lives of young people. That's not really recognised, if those people are being employed by the department. There is also the continued lack of funding for community youth services to provide in-service school delivery.

THE CHAIR: I say that ironically. Of course, the *Hansard* won't show that with irony in it. You stated that a lot of community-based youth services have been going into schools. Is there any indication of the level of hours of support currently being used up through the schools?

Ms Hunter: The short answer to that is no—not hard data. We have not had the resources to be able to go and do that sort of mapping. We are hoping to do it, we are in negotiations with the department at the moment for extra funding around sector development for the youth sector, which would include a mapping exercise around this.

There are so many hours in a youth centre's contracts, to deliver into schools. I would say it's significant hours of delivery. A number are used for specific services and others are related community organisations that work very closely with youth services. Again, we would say this is why this initiative would be better placed out in the community—because the community has those partnerships, networks, collaborations and corporations, and the department doesn't.

MS MacDONALD: I refer to the comment made by Ms Dundas about the question on notice having been answered today. That would have been put on notice and answered before you had the meeting with the minister yesterday. Things may have changed as a result of that.

Ms Hunter: We had a fruitful discussion with the minister yesterday afternoon. She was very open to hearing what we had to say. There were a number of issues she was not aware of and she was very keen to continue the dialogue. Our understanding is that that means also the issue of where these workers will be based and who will employ them.

MRS DUNNE: My question is a fundamental one. You're saying that community-based youth workers are better placed to do this work than people employed by the department of education. I'd like you to expand on why that is the case.

Ms Hunter: Susan has alluded to part of it—that is around the fact that, already out there, youth services have supervision set up. There are professional development opportunities and training; there's already a supportive team to work within; and we have skilled people who have designed and delivered youth programs and activities over many years. The expertise rests there. That's what we should be doing—for want of a better word, exploiting and enhancing that expertise. That is why it makes no sense to us whatsoever to put it in with the department, where that expertise does not exist.

MRS DUNNE: This is not an area of my expertise, so forgive me if I ask obvious questions. You were saying that youth centres already have contracts which require them to do a certain amount—to go into schools.

Ms Hunter: A certain number of hours—yes.

MRS DUNNE: Do you see this initiative in the budget as overriding that, subverting that or augmenting it—or can't you tell yet?

Ms Hunter: It certainly wouldn't assist—that's the bottom line. Clearly, what we got back from our sector was, "We have been providing these services and we have been building very good relationships." We have great models out there. One of the ones I'd use as an example is the relationship with the Gungahlin Youth Centre and Gold Creek high school. There is a great relationship there.

We're concerned that it would undermine what's already operating there. There's no logic to not enhancing what's been there and set up and has the skills and knowledge and knows what works and what doesn't work—people have already built relationships with schools, principals and counsellors.

MRS DUNNE: I don't understand, in the education context, the difference between a youth worker and a counsellor.

Ms Hunter: I think that's one of our questions, too.

MRS DUNNE: Then it wasn't a dumb question.

Ms Hunter: No, it wasn't. What hasn't been articulated, and what we're not clear on, is the role and purpose of these workers—and that should be a starting point. We would expect that that would be in our ongoing dialogue with the minister, to be very clear around the role, because this should be providing a complementary service. This certainly should not be seen as undermining the positions, or the place, of counsellors in schools. We know they provide a very important service. It's about complementing that service.

MRS DUNNE: I don't want to put words into your mouth.

THE CHAIR: That would be very unparliamentary.

MRS DUNNE: From where you are now, have you got a feel for this particularly well thought-out initiative?

Ms Hunter: We just haven't got that information. That's why we said we needed to see the minister very quickly. One of the questions we asked was: what has been the thinking behind this? Where is the research as far as the placement of these people is concerned? What's the thinking behind it? We haven't got that information.

MR PRATT: On one hand, we are talking about wanting to link schools with communities—community-based schooling—which is probably where you are coming from. I can see the merit of your proposal, but we also need to see what the evidence is, where schools are failing.

Wouldn't it be better to try and develop schooling capabilities—to perhaps formalise partnerships between your people and schools? Surely we want schools to be places of nurturing. If we do run community-based youth services, as opposed to what's available in schools, are we putting too many masters into the mix? Kids go home, they've got the youth service and they've got school. Don't we need to focus our efforts?

Ms Hunter: I would say that schools should—

MS MacDONALD: It's a very regimented way of looking at things!

MR PRATT: Sometimes it happens.

Ms Pellegrino: I think a lot of research around the health and well-being of individuals in the community has shown that the more linkages they have into different supportive environments, the healthier they can be—whether that's sporting groups or whatever. I think that having different environments where young people can go and feel that that's a positive experience is a good thing. However, while it might be supportive, it doesn't mean that they're overlapping. Schools have a role to educate around a specific kind of curriculum.

Ms Hunter: And pastoral care. We expect all of our schools to have a level of pastoral care. This is where you ask: where is the line drawn around what should be expected of teachers and schools in that regard—and where does someone else, with the expertise and knowledge, pick up and take that further? Of course, we expect the level of pastoral care that is being provided in our schools, and we expect that to continue. Nevertheless,

we should not have the expectation that schools can be everything to everybody. Their primary aim is to educate young people and obviously instil values, principles and all those sorts of things—but they can't be the be-all and end-all.

Ms Pellegrino: I think linking those existing systems means that there's less chance of a duplication of roles and a better way to achieve continuity of care.

MR PRATT: That's the key, isn't it? Could you guarantee that, if you were given a formal role to link with schools, as far as community-based schooling is concerned, duplication wouldn't occur—that the pastoral care in schools would be integrated with the services you would be providing?

Ms Hunter: I think that's very important.

MR PRATT: How do you guarantee that—without having a clash of values or interests?

Ms Hunter: You'd have contracts. It would be clearly stated as to what you are purchasing, what the outputs would be and how the two systems relate to one another. There are many different protocols already in place between youth services and schools, and also between youth services and government agencies.

One way to go would be to have a protocol in place, clearly stating how these two systems would interact, and how that youth worker would come in and operate in the school, to ensure that there is a healthy, productive, working relationship going on. That's what you would need to achieve, for this initiative to be successful at the end of the day. There are examples. It's out there—it's happening now.

Two models were put on the table yesterday. There's a model operating in Queensland and there's a model operating in Victoria. In fact, the Victorian model was referred to in the counselling services review undertaken recently. This is where they are. They are community-based and they go and work in schools, their roles are slightly different in those states, but the general idea is the same. They're community-based; they have protocols; they have ways of operating; they complement what the schools are doing and support the schools.

MR PRATT: You're saying that the contracts regarding those two models are tightened up in such a way that the school is able to get a complementary service which doesn't cut across the school's objectives?

Ms Pellegrino: Certainly having read the interim evaluation of the Queensland model, the schools were quite positive. They also chose schools which were willing to form collaborative relationships, where there was a commitment to that. I suppose the aim to achieve an integrated service delivery model for young people was recognised—that that's what people were there to try and do.

There were protocols put in place with the workers in each of the schools selected, to ensure that they were different within each area, depending on the different needs. It would also depend on what was already operating in individual schools, and the existing service delivery area.

THE CHAIR: Are there any models operating anywhere in Australia, or around the world, where the youth workers are located in the schools? You've found two models where the youth workers are in the community, servicing the needs of the school students. Are there models where the youth workers are housed in the schools? Do any of those work properly?

MR PRATT: On campus.

Ms Hunter: No, I couldn't tell you that. I'm not aware, at this stage. There was a full service for schools, which was Commonwealth funded. That was putting youth workers into schools. That initiative did not continue to be funded. I'm not sure if an evaluation came out about that.

I have heard that DEST will be releasing an evaluation on a similar scheme. I don't have the details, other than that they did an evaluation where there were workers based in schools and others who were independent. My understanding is that, overwhelmingly, there was support for the independent versus the in-school employees.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a timeframe on that report?

Ms Hunter: No, but I can follow up with DEST, to see when that will be released.

THE CHAIR: If you could, that would be fine.

Ms Hunter: There's not much I can say, other than that I know this research is on its way to being released.

MR PRATT: I think everybody agrees that pastoral care has to be upgraded in schools. You clearly have a concern about school-based youth workers. Fundamentally, what's the problem? You talked before about confidentiality. Is that the only issue?

Ms Hunter: No—certainly not. We have been through a list. You may have received the information.

MR PRATT: I've been missing in action!

THE CHAIR: You wouldn't have received the document that was distributed to committee members.

Ms Hunter: There is a list of issues. That certainly is one of them. One that has been spoken about before was the idea that, if it is a community-based youth service, the young person is definitely the primary client. Conversely, if they're departmental employees, obviously the primary client is the department—after the government.

MR PRATT: It's a fence issue, though, isn't it? We expect our schools to lead the nurturing process.

Ms Hunter: Certainly it's not taking away from that. That is something we definitely support, which should continue and should be supported in schools. Basing these people in the community definitely does not undermine the idea you're putting forward. It does not undermine that—it's about complementing it.

MS DUNDAS: We've identified pastoral care as something that needs focus in our school communities. Do you think this youth worker program—be it based in schools or in the community—is enough when it comes to supporting and building pastoral care in schools?

Ms Hunter: A number of initiatives are underway. If it's lacking in that area, hopefully it will be addressed. As I said, the counselling services review has been conducted. Four models have been put up, and a number of recommendations made as to ways forward. That may well result in enhanced pastoral care—or better pastoral care.

There's also the high school development project going on. There's a reference group driving that. That was put in place because of the high level of dissatisfaction from high school students. That is looking at the curriculum and cultural change. I think it's also looking at VET—and there is another sub-group under that.

We're hoping that will come up with good ways forward, to bring high schools into this century—it's early days in this century—to make the curriculum more relevant, and to address issues around pastoral care and the culture of the schools, and how that can best support students and their families, to ensure better educational outcomes for young people. We are hoping those measures will result in changes, and in schools moving with the times. We are involved with that reference group, so we're providing input there. It's early days on that project, but we have a role there.

THE CHAIR: The central issue seems to come down to independence and trust. Your fear is that the responsibility of somebody employed by the department, or the way they behave, will be governed by what the department expects, rather than by what the young person needs.

Ms Hunter: That is a key issue. Again, the expertise rests in the community. We've been doing this for many years. It's disappointing when there's a lot of praise for the community sector, as to how well it does and that the community sector does so many things better. Yet, when it comes down to resourcing the community sector, it doesn't necessarily flow through. That's the challenge we're facing now. That was clearly put in the budget submissions of a number of peak organisations, not around the sustainability of the sector but around the viability of the sector at this point.

THE CHAIR: Page 175 of Budget Paper 3 says that the proposal will particularly target disadvantaged families and students, including those students most at risk of not completing school. This might be a silly question, but is there a time in the day when crises seem more likely to occur? Is it first thing in the morning, or is crisis one long day?

Ms Hunter: Sometimes!

Ms Pellegrino: That's obviously a very difficult one to answer. With families and young people who need additional support, allowing them access to after school hours support is critical.

THE CHAIR: That could be provided by somebody based in a school who had a flexible work arrangement, though, couldn't it?

MR PRATT: Surely there could be a normal community support activity—beyond the school's core requirements but linked—after-school stuff.

Ms Pellegrino: I suppose making those linkages would be part of the beauty of having the youth workers under this initiative based in the community sector. For example, they might be part of an organisation where there are other youth workers. As part of their role, they might transport a young person to an appointment or something. They would be able to utilise additional resources to meet the needs after school hours. That would allow greater flexibility.

I think there needs to be recognition of the work youth workers are currently doing in getting young people who have been out of the school system back into the school system. I don't think that's been recognised. Having those linkages would create better pathways for re-entry for students. If there's respect by a school for the work the youth worker is doing, and what's happening in that sector, then increasing pathways and ensuring that there's going to be continuing support for the young person upon re-entry I think is very important and would be valued.

THE CHAIR: We've encountered a number of examples in the past 10 days where plenty of good ideas have had lumps of money put against them and dropped into budgets. However, when we've inquired as to how they've been implemented, or asked what the breakdown of the costing is, answers haven't been forthcoming. It appears to me—and I'm asking if it appears to you—to be a good idea that they've thought up and put into a budget, without consideration as to the implementation of it?

Ms Hunter: We haven't seen any implementation plans at this point.

MR PRATT: You have tabled a couple of documents. Do those documents include examples of current partnerships that you have with a couple of schools?

Ms Hunter: We can provide those.

Ms Pellegrino: The paper put together was about the reasoning for the youth worker positions being based in the community. We can certainly provide examples of what's currently happening in the ACT.

MR PRATT: I would appreciate examples of where you believe partnerships with a couple schools are working pretty well.

Ms Hunter: Yes. We can say right now that the partnership between Gungahlin youth centre and Gold Creek high school is a very good one.

Ms Pellegrino: I can get more details for you about how that operates.

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MR PRATT: I'd appreciate that.

THE CHAIR: If you provide that to the secretary, we'll distribute it to all members, including Mr Pratt.

Ms Hunter: Certainly. There's also the youth worker at Northside Community Services, who does a lot of work in Dickson College.

MRS DUNNE: You mentioned Gold Creek.

Ms Hunter: Yes, we did.

Ms Pellegrino: When I was putting together our document for the ACT budget process this year, I was talking to a lot of youth services. The difficulty has been that they have continual demands from schools, but they're unable to meet them because of a lack of resourcing.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 5.01 pm.