



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND
YOUNG PEOPLE**

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2005-2006)

Members:

**MS M PORTER (The Chair)
MR M GENTLEMAN (The Deputy Chair)
MRS V DUNNE**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2006

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Lilburn (Ph: 6205 0490)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

APPEARANCES

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority	71
Canberra Institute of Technology	71
Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.....	47

The committee met at 2.07 pm.

Appearances:

Gallagher, Ms Katy, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Health, Minister for Disability and Community Services, Minister for Women, and Minister for the Arts

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Lambert, Ms Sandra, Chief Executive

Denley, Ms Louise, Executive Director, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Director, Finance and Budget

Wyles, Mr Paul, Director, Client and Adolescent Services

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Director, Child and Family Centres/Therapy ACT

Kitchin, Ms Jenny, Director, Partnerships Group

Harwood, Mr Neil, Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services

Duggan, Mr Frank, Director, Care and Protection Group

Collett, Mr David, Director, Strategic Asset Management

Overton-Clarke, Ms Bronwen, Executive Director, Policy and Organisational Services

Stankevicius, Mr Adam, Senior Manager, Governance, Strategy and Community Policy

THE CHAIR: I welcome the minister, Ms Lambert and the officials from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings.

Before the committee commences taking evidence let me place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee and evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others necessary to the discharge of the functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

Did you understand that? Thank you very much. Minister, would you like to make some opening remarks?

Ms Gallagher: No, thanks; with only an hour and 20 minutes to go, I'm happy to move straight into questions.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MRS DUNNE: I have a question that I thought you might have answered in your opening comments. But, seeing as you didn't, I'll ask it. The last year's annual report had a key achievements area in it and this one doesn't seem to. Could you give an exposition on what you see as the key achievements?

Ms Gallagher: In this portfolio?

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Ms Gallagher: Here's the opening statement that I didn't give. I think there has been a lot of achievements in this department, and we're talking primarily about children, youth and family here. A lot of it has been to do with the work being done through the child and family centres and the establishment of the Tuggeranong one, but also in care and protection in bedding down the teams and the staff that we've got, and focusing on how the appraisals are being done. That work is being put through. A lot of work has been done in children's services and in looking at childcare across the territory. I'm happy to go through specifics but a lot of work has been done across the board in this area.

Care and protection usually gets the focus because that's the big bulk of this area, but across the board it has certainly been a busy year. After a heavy focus on care and protection we've been now able to focus on other areas through the office and we'll continue to do that.

DR FOSKEY: There is a list of key achievements, by the way.

MRS DUNNE: I missed it. Where's that?

Ms Gallagher: It's through the chief executive's report.

MRS DUNNE: I'm sorry, Sandra. I've obviously overlooked it then. I do apologise.

Ms Lambert: We also decided this year, after some comments by the committee last year, to have key achievements in the output areas as well. So the achievements I tried to emphasise were a lot of the cross-linkages that were going on within the department and then within each of the output areas. That followed on from some comments last year. So you're quite right: it's not in the same format as we did it last year.

THE CHAIR: So we give you feedback, you change it and then we complain that we can't make our way around it.

Ms Lambert: I don't know that it was a complaint; I think it was just a clarification.

MRS DUNNE: It wasn't actually a complaint.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, Mrs Dunne; I will rephrase that: then we report that we can't find things.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. In relation to childcare and licensing and administration for childcare—this might be something that you'd take on notice—how many centre-based

care, school-aged care and family day care schemes are currently licensed?

Ms Gallagher: I think that information is in the report on page 48: 97 licences for childcare services over the year, with a number of new services. I think all of those are centre-based services coming on. I'm not sure if we've split it up into out-of-school-hours care and childcare centres, but we can certainly provide you with that information.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you.

Ms Kitchin: We've got 101 long day care centres licensed. We've got five family day care schemes licensed. I would need to get information on the number of after-school care licences that we have.

DR FOSKEY: Overall, what was the increase in the number of childcare services in the ACT in 2005-06?

Ms Gallagher: Are we talking about long day care or after-school care?

DR FOSKEY: Long day care.

Ms Gallagher: We can give the committee that information. I think there were 165 extra places through long day care: 75 at Conder Early Learning Centre and 90 at Thomas the Tank Engine Early Childhood Centre at Symonston. Over the next financial year there will be a number of other services opening—I think they are all opening—or expanding.

Ms Kitchin: There are five new centres.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, five new centres, which would be around another 400 places.

DR FOSKEY: The location of centres seems to be problematic. There's an oversupply of childcare places in some areas—I believe Tuggeranong, one of the operators there has indicated—and a shortage in others. Is this one of the things that's being addressed through the issuing of new licences?

Ms Gallagher: It can't be done through the issuing of licences, because organisations get the land and approval through the childcare benefit to operate a centre. We license that—

DR FOSKEY: That's at the federal level?

Ms Gallagher: Through the federal level, land. We license the centres but it is an area where there have been some issues for us, particularly in planning where the places are and making them the best use of commonwealth places and land and what parents need. Part of what we are doing at the moment is pulling together a group across childcare services, government, commonwealth government, to better coordinate this.

DR FOSKEY: That's good.

Ms Gallagher: Because of the way the process goes, it means often that licensing are the

last ones to be involved in the decision about where a childcare centre is. If we use the existing childcare industry here, who know about and are able to assist in advice around planning, that'll be better for people who want to come into the market, that they come in where there is a need, and better for the existing operators who have already got an established centre, in not being forced into competition. I hope through this process that we're setting up that we can get a bit better information communication and therefore provision of childcare centres across the territory.

DR FOSKEY: So are you leading the initiative?

Ms Gallagher: It's something that we're developing at the moment, yes.

DR FOSKEY: And do you find that the childcare industry here is well enough organised that you can get a person who speaks on behalf of all the centres, for instance, or is that a bit of an issue?

Ms Gallagher: No, they're a pretty good group here. I find the private and community centres work very well together. There's a Children's Services Association. I've certainly met with them. There is usually a group of childcare centre directors who come and speak with me. They generally know what's going on around the place and they are a good source of information. I guess their mutual motivation is to have a sustainable childcare sector, and that's regardless of whether they're private or community based.

MRS DUNNE: I have two questions, neither of which relate one to the other. Was the Yarralumla site that was put up for auction ever sold?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: And what sort of facility are they going to build on the site?

Ms Gallagher: I'm not sure about the details.

Ms Kitchin: It is a childcare centre.

MRS DUNNE: How many places?

Ms Gallagher: I'm not sure how many places.

Ms Kitchin: I couldn't tell you but it has been designated as a childcare centre.

MRS DUNNE: One of the concerns raised by some members of the community was that the site may not be big enough to build a childcare centre that was big enough to—

Ms Kitchin: I think it was a maximum capacity of 60 places that they were able to have on that site.

Ms Gallagher: That was certainly a concern raised by the parents of Teddy Bears Child Care Centre—that the places currently available at Teddy Bears wouldn't be able to be replicated at Yarralumla. But my communication back to them was that with the expansion of other services—Weston Creek Community Centre, which we rebuilt with, I

think, an additional 20 places—our commitment was to maintain places in the region, and we'll be able to very easily do that with the number of centres coming on, the Yarralumla site and the expansion of Weston Creek.

MRS DUNNE: I have a question on childcare facilities currently running out of underutilised preschools. I'll give you examples of Taylor preschool and Evatt preschool. Evatt preschool I know better; that's a sort of offshoot of an existing community facility and provides them with extra spaces. Rumour has it that these childcare centres are going to be evicted from the preschools to make room for preschool places in the consolidation.

Ms Gallagher: I'm certainly not aware of that.

MRS DUNNE: So at the moment I presume the landlord is someone in the department of education. Have you had any communication at all about concerns about losing places out of the community sector?

Ms Gallagher: No. This is a community-based long day care centre that—

MRS DUNNE: The one in Evatt is community-based long day, and they've got an annex in the Evatt preschool, and that's—

Ms Kitchin: They've certainly talked to the department, to our area, about that and we're working very closely with the department of education on what the options might be. But the whole issue of school closures and the impact on playschools and childcare is something that we're working closely with education on at the moment.

MRS DUNNE: So is there a possibility that people who run childcare centres out of currently underutilised preschools may lose places as a result of this?

Ms Kitchin: There's a possibility but there has been no firm decision about that.

Ms Gallagher: It certainly hasn't been brought to my attention, Vicki, and I'm more than happy to have a look at it because—

MRS DUNNE: It has serious implications for the viability of those usually community-based centres.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, absolutely. I will have a very close look at it. I certainly haven't had any briefing to that effect; nor have I been approached by the community sector; nor has this been raised with me in any other forum.

MRS DUNNE: I want to press it then.

Ms Gallagher: I'm happy to take whatever you've got on it and look very closely at it.

MRS DUNNE: Well, actually I don't have anything, except that it has been said.

Ms Gallagher: It's rumour. Well, it sounds like it's more than a rumour, so I'll have a look at it.

MRS DUNNE: It has been said to me that these people have been told that it's likely that they would be relocated and the two that have been referred to me have been Evatt and Taylor preschools.

Ms Gallagher: No worries.

Ms Lambert: We have asked that education work closely with us and as decisions are taken. As you'd be aware, decisions are not taken, but we have asked and we have been very well aware of where our services are in this exercise.

THE CHAIR: Minister, page 39 of volume 1 talks about the introduction of a one-stop shop for community youth justice being established to assist young people to access support services, to address such issues as substance abuse and homelessness. Could you advise the committee on how the service operates and what has been the response from young people using the service?

Ms Gallagher: Sure. I might get Paul Wyles to answer that.

Mr Wyles: The one-stop shop was an initiative of community youth justice, which is located on the ground floor of the 11 Moore Street building. It is seen as an opportunity for young people who are on community-based orders and who present to staff in that building as part of a supervision requirement by the courts to access a range of services. Some of the services which are part of that arrangement, which occurs on a Thursday afternoon, are Relationships Australia, psychologists from the mental health service, and the drug and alcohol service. There are some others, depending on who is available on the day. It really allows those young people to come together to be supervised and to receive some individual support in the community. Some of those young people will have been in custody previously and for others it will be their first offence. It is really a way of bringing those services in to meet the needs of young people, rather than making arrangements necessarily to take them out to those services.

Ms Lambert: It is also a good opportunity for staff to access those services when they are in situ, and that is beneficial as well, rather than having to go out and make the contact. So it works primarily for the young people, of course, but it works for staff as well.

MR GENTLEMAN: What sorts of numbers are you seeing?

Mr Wyles: I would have to check, but it is quite busy. We often see young people waiting there to see a mental health counsellor or a drug and alcohol worker.

THE CHAIR: Is it by referral or is it that if they are there they can see somebody if they want to?

Mr Wyles: The community youth justice workers will often make arrangements for them to attend for supervision on that afternoon so that in talking to them they can also make the referral and make the connection with the relevant agency. It attempts to get around the issue of those connections not necessarily being made by taking the young person to an agency, so the services are there.

DR FOSKEY: Does the staffing of that include using, say, volunteers of any kind? How many paid staff and how many volunteer staff are there?

Mr Wyles: There are 21 staff in the community youth justice area. Most of those staff would have a caseload of young people who are on community youth justice orders and then we have just worked to engage relevant government and non-government services to be part of that model.

THE CHAIR: To come in, right. There is no actual compulsion, though, on the young people to see anybody unless that is part of an order, I guess.

Mr Wyles: The community youth justice workers make assessments about what the clients' needs are and, in fact, the agencies we have engaged are the ones we would see where there is a clear need, so drug and alcohol services and relationship counselling as well.

Ms Denley: The participation is voluntary. I wasn't sure, chair, whether you were getting around to compulsion versus voluntary participation in the service.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is what I was trying to say.

Ms Denley: Participation in the extended services is voluntary, unless the court has ordered the link with, say, drug treatment. But predominantly they are voluntary services, though attendance at the office for supervision is a requirement of the court. So it is being opportunistic but it is also working successfully, because my understanding is that there is a waiting list for some of the services now.

Mr Wyles: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: Before we leave that page, I have a question in regard to the new youth detention centre. One of the things that I raised before, and I am still hopeful that it will be given consideration, is the idea that the youth detention centre, taking advantage of economies of scale, consider being open to young people on a regional basis and not just within the ACT, given the free movement across the borders, especially amongst indigenous people. There is a huge range covered. Has there been any consideration of that?

Ms Gallagher: I am just recalling an issue which we are currently discussing with the New South Wales government. There is an issue around interstate transfers. Young people are placed in these venues either on remand or because they have been committed for sentence. We have used interstate transfers on occasion when they have been appropriate, particularly relating to the security rate or classification that has been required for the young person, that is, we have not had a maximum security facility and the young person has been assessed as requiring that. We have on occasion used interstate transfers, but my understanding is that there are some legislative restrictions at the moment that need to be resolved before that can be an option, either in or out.

DR FOSKEY: Is there any political will on either side to overcome that obstacle?

Ms Gallagher: From my point of view, if there was a young person in New South Wales

that really needed the new detention centre, whatever it is going to be known as, and that was seen by the New South Wales authority as the most appropriate place for that young person and we could take that young person, I would hope that there would be certainly a process in place to allow that to happen. At the moment that isn't there and it does need to be resolved. But I think it is all about appropriate placement, from my point of view. If there is a place available and it is deemed the most appropriate place, then I would hope that that could be facilitated.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, when do you expect to see the new detention centre completed?

Ms Gallagher: I will make Mr Collett nervous by what I say now. I will try to bring it back a few months. My understanding is that it is still on schedule for mid-2008, which is what we had originally hoped for when we went out. All the required planning studies and environmental approvals have been done, so we are all ready to go now, probably in the new year. Is that right?

Mr Collett: Yes, minister. In fact, I can report that I have just walked across from an industry briefing in the multicultural centre for construction managers. Our intention is to take that documentation for the selection of a construction manager either at the end of this calendar year or early next calendar year. All of the environmental assessment work, both ACT and commonwealth, has been gone through and there is no further assessment needed from either of those jurisdictions. That leaves us free to submit a development application, which we are on course to do before the end of this month. That would enable us to start the bulk earthworks and the site works early next calendar year and put us on course for completion of the centre by June 2008, which is the date the minister has announced.

MR GENTLEMAN: Will the construction go along with the same numbers as you expected in the planning originally, at this stage?

Mr Collett: Yes, we have not made any change to the establishment there. The facilities have been designed to cope with up to 40 young people and I don't anticipate there will be changes from those numbers.

DR FOSKEY: How many are in the current Quamby?

Mr Wyles: With the addition of the demountables, there are 39 units. Just returning to the question about the one-stop shop, the advice I have is that since it was begun on 27 March there have been 240 occasions of service, that is, individual appointments with service providers.

MRS DUNNE: In relation to Quamby rather than the new detention centre, there was the human rights report which is reported on here and we have talked at length about the demountable. How much did it finally cost to move and re-establish the demountable?

Mr Collett: We did it within the budget established.

MRS DUNNE: Which was a lot. I can't remember, but it was a lot.

Mr Collett: It was over \$1 million for the relocation. The bulk of that money was actually for site establishment and the commissioning of the new building, looking into the existing communications and security system at Quamby and planning some of the ground works that were necessary.

MRS DUNNE: Could the committee have a breakdown of those costs?

Ms Gallagher: I think we provided one to another committee for last year's annual report or estimates, but we can regenerate a question on notice, yes.

MRS DUNNE: I wasn't on the estimates committee so I missed it, obviously.

DR FOSKEY: Given that Mrs Dunne has started that line of questioning, I do have some questions that follow-up on the ACT government's response to that audit.

MRS DUNNE: I have some questions on that.

DR FOSKEY: The response actually starts on page 208 of volume 1.

MR GENTLEMAN: Just before you go to that, I wish to ask about something related to what Mrs Dunne just asked on the demountable building. Do you foresee that you will be able to sell it when the new centre is built or will it remain with you?

Ms Gallagher: It was excess to requirements in Queensland. We would certainly look at what it could be used for, because we did spend a fair bit on refurbishing it and improving its amenity. I would not be wanting to decommission it, but I am not sure at the moment what we could use it for. If you go out and look at it, it is a purpose-built detention centre. They are cells, essentially, so you could not use it just for anything, or maybe you could.

DR FOSKEY: Low cost accommodation.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, 13 units for a large family. You report a little on the implementation. Can you give a rundown on how procedures and operations have changed as a result of the human rights report?

Mr Wyles: I suppose the most significant work there has been with respect to the standing orders. A number of standing orders have been revised and updated as a result of the human rights commissioner's report. There was extensive consultation around those standing orders. These are essentially policies and procedures to staff about a range of things, including the admission of young people, classification of young people, how staff deal with young people making complaints.

That consultation involved a range of organisations. We were keen to get advice around child development. We spoke to an eminent psychiatrist, we spoke to a human rights barrister, we spoke to indigenous communities. That consultation was quite fulsome. We have now developed 11 standing orders and we have begun training on those standing orders with the staff at Quamby. There are two yet to be developed. The standing orders are before the minister and they will be notified publicly on the legislation register in January.

MRS DUNNE: Are all the standing orders on the legislation register?

Mr Wyles: The current ones are and these 11 are new, so we will revoke the ones currently and institute these new ones.

MRS DUNNE: You said that you have done 11 and there are two outstanding.

Mr Wyles: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Will the whole 13 become operative in January or the two outstanding ones?

Mr Wyles: There is some work to do on the two outstanding ones, but I would hope it would be soon after that.

MRS DUNNE: Are the 11 currently operational?

Mr Wyles: No, there are 27 currently on there.

MRS DUNNE: Okay. They are going to be collapsed into, effectively, 13.

Mr Wyles: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: And they will become operative early in the new year.

Mr Wyles: That's right.

MRS DUNNE: And part of that is the training-up process.

Mr Wyles: That's right, so we have started training staff on those.

DR FOSKEY: Recommendation 2.1 to which the ACT government agreed was about not only review of the standing orders but also the behaviour management system. It is to be comprehensively reviewed. I would like an update on the progress of that, please.

Mr Wyles: There was some initial work done on behaviour management and we received a report on that. We needed to do some more work on that. We are keen that the behaviour management system that is implement be a whole-of-centre model. We have done some work. We recently had Larry Brentro, an expert from the US, talk to us about a model called positive peer culture. We are looking at training staff in that model early in the new year. In terms of a whole-of-centre approach, we are keen that it not just be our staff, departmental staff, at Quamby. It needs to go across staff in education and health so everyone is using the same language, the same strategies.

DR FOSKEY: Could you just repeat his surname?

Mr Wyles: Larry Brentro. There is substantial work in redesigning a behaviour management tool, if that is what we end up calling it, but it also needs to be reflected in the range of policies and procedures we are developing; for example, handbooks for

young people in detention so that they are clear about the sorts of things that are occurring in terms of strategies, in terms of reward reinforcement, et cetera.

DR FOSKEY: Why did Larry Brentro appeal? Was his visit worthwhile? Are you going to adopt his approach?

Mr Wyles: I refer you to a book he has written called *Positive peer culture*, which was published in 1985. That model is well used across detention facilities in the US. It is an evidence-based model; it is strength-based; it looks at the whole-of-the-system, the whole-of-centre, approach. Those are the aspects that really seemed to align it with the approaches that we are developing.

DR FOSKEY: It sounds good.

MRS DUNNE: On the subject of behaviour management—this is a 2-phased question—does this include the use of the seclusion room?

Mr Wyles: We have revised that standing order and we are calling it the safe room because I suppose that more accurately reflects the sorts of reasons we might use that room. So there is a revised standing order on the safe room.

MRS DUNNE: Some time ago there were concerns from the public advocate, or the then community advocate, about the protocols for when the seclusion, now safe, room was used. Have those issues been addressed with the public advocate.

Mr Wyles: That's right. They were addressed soon after the release of the human rights audit and that standing order was updated. They have been addressed. The public advocate was quite happy with the response. We fax a pro forma document every time that is used. The use of that room is very minimal.

Ms Lambert: The public advocate, or community advocate at the time, was also concerned about the physical nature of the room, and that has been significantly changed as well.

DR FOSKEY: Is that the cage?

Ms Lambert: No, not the cage. This is a room that was called the seclusion room. The public advocate was concerned about the usage, but also about the physical structure of it, and we have done quite a lot of work on that, to the satisfaction of the advocate, as well.

Mr Wyles: It is probably worth advising the committee on the sorts of reasons it is used. In a recent report I read a young person had asked to go there for some time out, but more frequently it might be used where there are concerns about the young person, for example, self-harming, and there can be some observation and it is a safe room in terms of them possibly damaging themselves.

MRS DUNNE: Is it envisaged that there will be a similar facility in the new youth detention centre?

Mr Wyles: A safe room?

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Mr Wyles: Yes, it is.

DR FOSKEY: In relation to that, I gather that the person is under surveillance in that room. The ACT government response says that a number of policies and procedures regarding issues like privacy, correspondence and clothing were going to be reviewed last year, September-October, but it does look as though a number of those are yet to be completed. Is that the case?

Mr Wyles: I would have to go back to the specific recommendations out of the audit. I can tell you that, with the notification of the standing orders, 36 of the 52 recommendations will be implemented. We are certainly looking at clothing.

DR FOSKEY: Is that in relation to whether they are allowed to wear their own stuff?

Mr Wyles: Yes, it is around the provision of a variety of clothes.

DR FOSKEY: So that they can still be goths or whatever identity they wish.

Mr Wyles: The issue around searching and correspondence will be addressed in the searches standing order.

MRS DUNNE: What is the current arrangement in relation to clothing at Quamby?

Mr Wyles: They are issued with standard T-shirts, tracksuits, et cetera.

MRS DUNNE: They don't have arrows or anything like that on them, do they?

Mr Wyles: No.

Ms Gallagher: No, just a blue tracksuit, from memory. I think the human rights commissioner felt that there should be more individual choice, so we have to work through that.

Mr Wyles: There is an issue that when they go to court they should be able to use their own clothing.

MRS DUNNE: It would be the case with adult corrections, wouldn't it, that people would tend to get to wear their own clothes to court?

Ms Gallagher: They wear a suit, yes.

MRS DUNNE: I suppose one of the big, standout issues in the human rights report was co-locating different classifications of young people. How have you addressed that, and to what extent have you addressed that? Going on from that, how and to what extent will you address that in the new facility?

Mr Wyles: I might talk about the current facility. The demountables have certainly given

us more capacity. It is 13 units broken into two. That then allows us to have the three existing units plus these two additional units; so that is five units. Numbers currently are low. Today there are 14 young people in Quamby, so it is reasonably easy to achieve that separation.

The other comment I make is: I know the human rights commissioner has expressed some flexibility on best interests of young people. Clearly, there will be occasions where we may mix for programming purposes. In terms of the accommodation units, if there are siblings we may make the decision that, rather than be alone in separate units, they may be in the same unit. Certainly we have more capacity, but the ebb and flow of young people coming in means that we had have to make adjustment on a daily basis.

MRS DUNNE: You are saying that at the moment we are down to 14. What is the other end of the capacity? In the last year, what has been your maximum occupancy?

Mr Wyles: We have been up to 26 or 27.

MRS DUNNE: That is still fairly much below capacity. What is absolutely bursting-at-the-seams capacity?

Mr Wyles: Last year, we were up to 30.

MRS DUNNE: Is that bursting at the seams?

Mr Wyles: In the current facility, it is difficult.

DR FOSKEY: Can I explore the issue of the cage a little more. It is an unfortunate name. I suppose it has another name in the institution, but I am wondering what measures have been taken to make that facility, that security measure, more compliant with the human rights code that the commissioner was so concerned about. Is it just that you cannot do anything until you have got a new facility? What is happening?

Mr Wyles: Certainly it is a challenge. We have a budget for minor works for the current facility which we continue to spend on a range of equipment out there. In a sense, it is balancing those modifications with the fact that we are building a new facility shortly. That area serves a purpose, in terms of being an outdoor, enclosed area for young people with behavioural problems. It is a way of managing and containing those young people and their impacts on other young people in the facility.

DR FOSKEY: It sounds a bit like Guantanamo Bay.

Ms Gallagher: It is certainly not ideal.

MRS DUNNE: At page 195, volume 2, there seems to be a \$1.3 million reduction in capital works at Quamby. I presume that \$1.3 million is used to offset other expenses. What is not being done at Quamby because you have reduced the capital works there by \$1.3 million?

Mr Hubbard: That issues relates to the comparison between a previous year and this year. That is saying that, whilst the total capital works in progress has gone down, it

could be any project that gets completed. It is not a fixed amount each year. It depends on what capital works are being done.

MRS DUNNE: This is the capital works in progress?

Mr Hubbard: That is right.

MRS DUNNE: It is not a reduction in the capital works budget simpliciter; it is what you are doing at the time?

Mr Hubbard: Correct.

DR FOSKEY: I have one question, if I may, about the detainees handbook. Mr Wyles referred to that earlier. Recommendation 12.1 was that that handbook be updated as a priority, but that appears not to have occurred yet.

Mr Wyles: We have been working on that. I am hoping to see a draft of that next week, in fact. We are developing a handbook for detainees and their parents or carers, and then a similar, parallel one for staff. Much of the recent work has been about cross-referencing the standing orders into those volumes. They are procedural guides.

Ms Gallagher: I also add that, when we went into this work, we thought the standing orders process, it is fair to say, was going to be a lot simpler than it turned out to be. The standing orders that are currently with me—and they have been with me for about five days now, and I am probably a third of the way through them—contain over 800 pages. They all had to be cross-referenced and individually gone through. Quite a lot of national work has gone on to make sure they are the best that they can be.

When we talk about standing orders, it gives the idea that maybe it is a page on each of the 27 standing orders. That is not the case. They are very complex, in-depth documents. They will be published, and you will be able to see that. What we thought originally was only going to be a few months work has taken almost a year to complete.

Ms Lambert: Paul and his team have been assiduous in the consultation process, as Paul alluded to before. There has been involvement, clearly, of our own monitoring agencies, interstate experts and so on as well. It has been a very, very comprehensive process. I had to read them all as well. Lou had to read them all, too. There is all that work. That is really important for us, too. So it has taken a much longer time than we expected.

THE CHAIR: We might move on then. At page 42, volume 1, towards the bottom of the page, it talks about the out-of-home-care service. I was wondering whether you could give us a bit more information about that. Is this a not-for-profit organisation?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I think we are the only place that has totally outsourced out-of-home care.

Ms Lambert: Yes, predominantly. A few years ago a lot of young people were moved interstate because we did not have the flexibility in the facilities that we were offering them and we could not place them in foster care. Some of these are children and young people who have very complex needs. These services are ones that have come on line

recently, through extra dollars funded by government and through using some of our capacity in terms of housing and so on as well. Ms Kitchin can tell you more about them as well.

Ms Kitchin: We have had an expansion of residential care facilities from 21 to 41 places and have expanded specialist foster care places by 21. There has been a total injection of about \$6 million extra into these services specifically to target children with complex needs.

Ms Gallagher: This, in the old days, or a few years ago, was for children or young people that were on individual support packages, which Vicki will certainly remember from the days before Vardon. Sandra alluded to spending a lot of money transferring these young people interstate because there was a lack of specialist services here to be able to deal with them in a residential setting. This is, I guess, a better use of that money, so that we can create some additional places and have the specialist services offered for this very, very complex group of young people that are very difficult to find, certainly, other accommodation for.

THE CHAIR: Another what you might call specialist but certainly another type of foster care which would need to be very carefully sought and be appropriate would be the foster care for indigenous youth, the kinship foster care, that is mentioned at page 44 of that same report. How is that going? How are these families selected? How do we take into consideration that their cultural needs are attended to?

Ms Gallagher: Neil Harwood, who is the Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services within the office, has been leading that work.

Mr Harwood: You were asking how the families are selected for the indigenous foster care service?

THE CHAIR: Yes, how the families are selected. One presumes they are all indigenous families. Are they? I am not quite sure. How are the cultural needs of the children taken into account?

Mr Harwood: We can go through an open recruitment process. They advertise in the media, in the *Canberra Times*, in the *Courier-Mail* and other papers. They also send out flyers to other indigenous community organisations. Another method we use is word of mouth through the community. So they are recruited in that way. They are introduced into the department for training and workshop process. If they are interested, after going through a workshop, they can put their name down to be registered. Then they are registered with the service.

The second part of your question was how they—

THE CHAIR: The cultural appropriateness of the care. One presumes that the families are selected in line with the particular cultural needs of the child.

Mr Harwood: Yes, that is part of the assessment process and the training process. They do training on cultural issues. In terms of the cultural needs of the children that might be placed with them, as part of the amendments to the act, we now have a new provision in

the indigenous placement principles which allows the development of indigenous cultural care plans. Under those cultural care plans, we can ask questions such as: what strategies have been put in place to ensure that the cultural needs of the child or young person are maintained, and how are the spiritual needs of that young person maintained in the placement?

We have done quite a bit of work on developing our indigenous cultural care plan. We have now got a number of documents that make up the cultural care plan. There is a policy framework. We are talking about a whole range of issues in terms of indigenous needs, particularly the stolen generation.

We also have a direction paper for care and protection workers on how to fill out the plan. There is a template which asks a series of questions. There are also training tools or resourcing tools that can be used by the care and protection caseworker, as well the care family. That includes a contact list of relevant indigenous community organisations that care families can access in terms of getting support on indigenous cultural issues.

There is also a calendar of events that lays out dates of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That talks about Sorry Day, Reconciliation Week, NADOC Week and all those sorts of things.

It is a kit, a package, that we can provide to the care and protection caseworker. They can talk through that with the child or young person or with the carer, and with a bit of support from my particular unit filling in. Hopefully, that cultural care planning process will meet the cultural needs of any kids that are placed in care.

Of course it is one thing to develop certain documentation but, connected to that, we are also developing a fairly comprehensive training package for our care and protection workers. Some of that training package can be delivered to NGOs in out-of-home-care agencies such as Marymead and Barnardos as well. They will be invited along to participate in the training as well. There are a whole range of things in place.

Ms Lambert: I was just going to say that we have only just got Neil's full staff quota. We are pleased with that. The majority of those staff—is it 90?

Mr Harwood: Roughly, 92—all but one or two.

Ms Lambert: The majority are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. It has taken some time to do that. We have been quite assiduous about that, but we are really pleased to have nearly a full quota there now. Neil has worked very hard on making that happen. It is timely because of, as Neil has said, the provisions in the revised act.

MR GENTLEMAN: I bring you to page 46 of volume 1. There is a new recruitment and retention strategy. Last year we might have discussed something along these lines, too, but I want to find out how the new strategy is working and how many people have taken up the option of postgraduate study.

Ms Gallagher: The first question is about the vocational employment strategy, which members would have seen in the press a little on the weekend. It is amazing: if you put

these media releases out enough times, eventually they get picked up. That was the second time we had gone out with that story. All of a sudden, it was on national ABC.

It is a fantastic program which has been developed here. It is driven by Frank Duggan. Several years ago he went overseas to get a contingent of staff, who have been fantastic and who are still with us. The idea was: how can we attract local students to these jobs and what incentives can be given to attract students?

The number of graduates coming out of the Australian Catholic University this year in social work could immediately be employed by care and protection; they could be immediately employed by ACT Health; they could be immediately employed by education. The commonwealth is recruiting very aggressively at the moment, let alone if you wanted a job out of the government sector. You can see the numbers that we are talking about.

This program is in its first year. In fact, it was launched only a few months ago. From my discussions with Frank recently, we have now got enough interest till 2008 with the interest that has been shown. The idea is that you come and do an internship during your 12 weeks leave from uni, when you are nearing your final year. If that is successful and you are offered a job with care and protection and you stay a year—you will move into the professional stream—you will get your final year's HECS paid as well.

We have seen the interest: over 100 expressions of interest and 41 applications for 10 positions in a year. It has been fantastic. Wait for other agencies to steal it, though, Frank. But it is a way of trying to get people into this area. I do not think it is an area that many people would choose as their first choice because of the nature of the work. It is very, very difficult.

Ms Lambert: There has been some comment in the media, since it has been picked up, on the importance of supervision. Very strong mentoring and direct supervisory support were always a key component of this. That has always been a feature of these programs. Many of you would know that I have a background in education. These are the areas that I feel very strongly about. When you have internships you must make sure that it is rounded experience. It is very important to have those processes in train as well.

Mr Duggan: To qualify what the minister said, we targeted the local universities. The uptake has been a phenomenon. To be able now to structure ourselves through to 2008, we have been really delighted. We have had 41 interviews conducted out of 100 expressions of interest and application processes. The level of qualification of the students has been on psychology and social work, which we were targeting with a broader strategy but we have been able to refine it back to our two most prominent disciplines.

We will be operational as soon as possible in the intake phases. It will offer five weeks of induction, plus seven weeks of further on-the-job training. We are talking about staff that we would hope that we have attracted in a competitive marketplace. Now we have actually secured them, it is fantastic for the agency.

Ms Lambert: There also seemed to be some confusion in some of the reporting that these would replace care and protection workers and they would be doing their full job.

That is simply not the case. This is an internship; it is like a trainee teacher; it is that sort of work. It is not about replacing but is about having a forward-thinking work force strategy. We have been so impressed with this exercise that we are thinking about broadening it to other areas of the department as well.

Indeed, it is based quite a lot on the work that has occurred in therapy as well. You would know that we are now—and we have reported in hearings before these—close to full staffing of therapy, where we used to have at least a third of positions unfilled. It is built on that work. It is part of a continuum of work.

Ms Overton-Clarke: We have been really aware, over the last two years in the department, that we have a strong professional staff across therapy, child and family centres, a small contingent in Disability ACT and in the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support. As well as that strategy, which was very much spearheaded and supported by Frank, we have very strong rotational and different experiences across the department that we can offer in a community-based setting. We find that, particularly for front-line care and protection workers, that additional support across other areas of the department is something that they can move into and move back again. It is great to have the numbers to be able to offer those rotational or different experiences. That is the work that we have been building on.

MR GENTLEMAN: Congratulations.

DR FOSKEY: At page 47—

THE CHAIR: Moving to output class 2.

DR FOSKEY: Yes. The schools as communities program, Youth Connection and the Adolescent Day Unit are all firmly tied in with the work that schools do, I am assuming. I am interested in how the programs work with the schools and with the education department and the contingency plans which are in place for students of schools that may close at the end of the year, given that that may require some extra bolstering and support from these programs for those students.

Ms Gallagher: They are different programs offering different services. Schools as communities goes to schools through the use of ABS data, I think—I am trying to get this with my education hat on—or the school equity fund. It is similar to the school equity fund. It targets those schools most in need. That would not change. These are hypothetical discussions.

DR FOSKEY: This is on socioeconomic data?

Ms Gallagher: Exactly. If there were schools to close next year which had schools as communities money, once that decision was taken, I would probably be wanting to meet with everybody and talk about the best way forward, whether it was through relocating the program to the next school in need or looking at support arrangements, which is similar to what we did with Ginninderra District high school, as students transitioned to other schools. It is something that we will need to discuss once the decisions on the closures are taken later this year. I do not see the Adolescent Day Unit being affected at all by the school closures.

DR FOSKEY: Because a student goes to Adolescent Day Unit and is not—

Ms Gallagher: It has changed its focus recently, hasn't it? It used to operate very much outside of the schools. You would go to that program and then you would be reintegrated after a number of weeks. My understanding now is that the program is more looking at working with individual young people to sustain their enrolment in the school that they are currently attending.

Again, in regard to students who were affected by any potential closure of a school—and we are talking about high school students for the Adolescent Day Unit—there would be no-one affected. Based on the plans at the moment, there would be no-one affected next year.

These are all things that will have to be resolved once any final decision is taken. It is very difficult to be contingency planning on a proposal that is out because cabinet has not taken those decisions. But it is certainly on our agenda that we would, once decisions are taken, need to look at the best way to provide these services to individual students. We would need to look at how schools as communities operates and whether, again, there be some transition or whether those resources be relocated to another venue. In an ideal world, you would have schools as communities operating at every school, I would say. It is a very successful program. It was started under the previous government. It is a fantastic program. There is not a shortage of places that the schools as communities program can work from.

DR FOSKEY: Why can't you have it operating at every school?

Ms Gallagher: It is money.

THE CHAIR: I have questions on schools as communities. I note, at page 49 of volume 1, it mentions a trial jointly between care and protection services and schools as communities. I was wondering whether you could let us know about that.

Ms Gallagher: Jenny might have some more to say about it, but some of the benefits of having all of these services together in a human services-focused agency are that it makes sense that, when you are dealing with a diverse group of children and young people with diverse needs, we look at all the different programs that are operating and how they can all work together. In the hospitals they call them frequent flyers, but they are people who frequently attend the hospital for one reason or another. You would see connections between these programs and individual families.

Children may move through these various programs. As they get older, they are known through schools as communities but they end up as a client of the Adolescent Day Unit. It makes sense to look at how these areas can all work closer together. That is the idea behind that initiative. It is not just care and protection; it is across Youth Connection, the ADU and the Early Intervention and Prevention Unit.

Ms Kitchin: Quite often the schools as communities worker or the youth connections worker has formed a really strong and good relationship with the family. It may be much better in a number of situations to have the care and protection worker working through

that schools as communities worker to do a lot of the family support and then keep feeding some of those concerns and issues back to the care and protection worker.

It is really looking at how we partner much better with care and protection around our work with families. I think that is going to be much better for families. It is proving to be much more useful for the school and how they connect with the office as well.

DR FOSKEY: On page 49 the final dot point talks about the Minister's Youth Council. It mentions looking at identifying further opportunities for the council in representing young people. Firstly, is the council itself involved in these discussions? Secondly, a point was raised at a hearing of this committee where the council was attending in relation to the 16-to-18 voluntary youth vote. They were talking about the website and the potential for the website to do a lot more than they believe it does now.

It seems as though it is an issue of their control or their ability to decide what is on there, or to put it on. I do not know. These are technical or policy issues. They were really quite excited about what could be done with the website, but they saw those limitations. Am I representing that adequately, do you think?

MR GENTLEMAN: I think so, yes.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I think so. I have spoken to them too. This dot point probably relates to me more than anything, in the sense that I have been minister for youth for a number of years. It is one of the areas of consultation and representation that I find most difficult across my portfolio in terms of consulting with young people in the ACT about what is important to them and what they want from government. I have tried, through the Minister's Youth Council—which I make appointments to, but they are usually done through recommendations to me—to get as broad a range of representation across that council as I can.

I have not gone out and hand-picked people, but I have certainly encouraged people to come on the council. An example of that is seeking out some of the young women from the young women's film project a number of years ago who had been involved in that. They had done some work, but that is a different story. Particularly in trying to get those kids that are not engaged with us, how do we consult with them? It is very easy for these advisory councils to get dominated by young people who are very articulate and very knowledgeable about services and who can very much direct the work of these councils. I have never been sure that it is giving me a really good picture of what young people want across the council.

Looking at the whole area in the youth program, the youth website is "Youth InterACT". That is part of that. It looks at the role of the Minister's Youth Council and how it is structured, and it looks at the conference we hold every year, which is run by the Minister's Youth Council. It looks at how that is run and whether it actually delivers what we want it to do. It looks at the capacity-building grants that go out. There is quite a bit of money that goes out every year. Do people know about it? Is it targeting the groups we need to provide extra support to?

There is a bit of turmoil at the moment in terms of that. I am talking to the Youth Coalition and I have talked to the youth council. The youth council are very involved in

this work, in the sense that they attended a workshop over a weekend with an expert in youth participation, who came up from Melbourne, I think, to facilitate that workshop just with the Minister's Youth Council.

My frustration is echoed by the youth council's frustration at times about what their role should be and how much they can do. There is a fairly big piece of work going on to make sure the program we have in place is the best one we can have and that it targets and reaches out to those kids that we need to be talking to. It is a bit of a waffle, but that is because it is up in the air. Yes, the youth council are involved in it. I think we need to look at the website and how it is used.

DR FOSKEY: It seems that websites are a way that young people across the spectrum engage.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

Ms Lambert: We are certainly looking at the expertise we have within the department, being mindful that we need to make sure the young people's interests are very much in there in the design. We are trying to see what we can do with the internal resources we have as well for that.

DR FOSKEY: I am looking for a list of grants, like, for instance, the youth grants.

MRS DUNNE: Volume 2—right at the back.

DR FOSKEY: Some departments have not reported them, but this one has.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, I have some financial questions, but before we go there perhaps I could come back to page 40 of volume 1 and the review of the Adoption Act. The discussion paper is out. I have not had a look at it yet. I wonder if you could outline some of the anticipated changes to the Adoption Act.

Ms Gallagher: This review has been pretty uncontroversial, I would say, in terms of legislative reviews. I think there were 10 submissions to the review process. Most of the amendments are about bringing the act into line with the Hague Convention. There is one controversial element around it, which is around the surname.

Mr Wyles: No, the birth name.

Ms Gallagher: I am sorry, the birth name—keeping your birth name as your name once you are adopted. The submissions we received—I think they were primarily from parents who had adopted—were not supportive of that, but there are also strong arguments in support of keeping the birth name as part of keeping these children's identity.

MRS DUNNE: Do you mean given names—or Christian names—or surnames?

Ms Gallagher: Their first name. We are proceeding with that. That I think is the most controversial element of the legislative review.

MRS DUNNE: It is not an easy question, is it?

Ms Gallagher: It is not an easy one. I think at the end of the day your name is your name. There are ways in which you can be accommodated in your family. You can have your name on your birth certificate. There are many children in this world whose legal name may not be the name they are commonly known by at school or at home. I am one of them and my sister is another. I think there are ways to accommodate adoptive parents' wishes whilst protecting the cultural identity of the children at the same time, through the keeping of their name. That is probably the most controversial element.

MRS DUNNE: One of the things that seems to have arisen fleetingly recently—and I have not read the discussion paper either—is that there has been some discussion that the commonwealth might take a greater role in coordinating overseas adoptions. Is that covered in the discussion paper? What is the view of the minister, the department, or both, on this?

Ms Gallagher: I am happy to give you my view.

Mr Wyles: This came about through a federal government inquiry that Bronwyn Bishop chaired. That report came down probably six months or more ago. There were 27 recommendations. Many of those recommendations relate to, as you say, the commonwealth Attorney-General's Department having a larger role in intercountry adoption, particularly as it relates to the Hague Convention and Australia being a signatory to that. Largely, the ACT government response agreed with those recommendations. There will need to be some sorting out, given that the legislation is state-based. The assessments of prospective adoptive parents rest with this department. In terms of program development and possibly centralising waiting lists et cetera for overseas countries, I think there is a clear role for the commonwealth.

MRS DUNNE: Thanks.

Ms Lambert: Can I correct something? We do not have our grants in the annual report this year. Apparently that was not part of the directions this year.

MRS DUNNE: What did I read, then?

Ms Lambert: In the interests of keeping it as short as we could, we did not put them in, but we can certainly provide a list of those youth grants for the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

MR GENTLEMAN: Turning to volume 2, at the bottom of page 191 there is a comparison for 2004-05 actual expenditure. At about the third line down it talks about additional funding for initiatives in 2005-06 of \$4 million. I wondered if you might be able to go through some of the projects that were involved in that additional funding.

Ms Gallagher: I am not sure which ones would have been involved.

Mr Hubbard: I can tell you the initiatives and how much they are. But, being a financial

person, I cannot promise I can tell you anything about the initiative itself.

MRS DUNNE: That would be a good start. Give it a name and somebody else can take it.

Mr Hubbard: Probably the largest amount out of the \$4 million would be additional funding for individual support for children. That amounts to \$3,000,161 out of that \$4 million. So that is the bulk of the money. Possibly someone else could tell you what that is about.

Ms Lambert: That is what we used for the out-of-home care services. Rather than have it as ISPs, we translated it into residential services.

Mr Hubbard: The next largest amount was the accommodation consolidation, bringing all the disparate group accommodation from around the territory primarily into 11 Moore Street. That essentially was the recurrent funding for rent. They came out of a lot of properties that were relatively cheap to rent, or had no rent because they were educational facilities, into 11 Moore Street.

The next largest amount was the \$700,000—I think we have gone through this before—for the development of the ATSI unit. That was a specific initiative. Finally, probably the most significant amount of money would have been the additional funding for Quamby security. There was additional staff for Quamby security. That gives you your total of \$4 million.

MR GENTLEMAN: The next one is on page 194, the comparison of the budget. That is item 2. On the fourth dot point, there was interest of \$0.1 million due to larger than expected investments. What sorts of investments have you been able to make?

MRS DUNNE: Stocks, shares, futures?

Mr Hubbard: No. We are not allowed to do any of that at all.

MRS DUNNE: Actually, they put it all on the horse that was scratched yesterday.

Mr Hubbard: We did very well yesterday, but that is in next year's report. We had quite a lot of capital works roll through the department. How that works is that we draw down the funding on capital works as required, or as an invoice comes in. In the meantime, we have it invested with the Central Financing Unit of Treasury. Because we had a larger volume of capital works, we had more money with CFU. That enabled us to get \$100,000 worth of additional interest above what we budgeted for or what we believed it would be.

MR GENTLEMAN: At the bottom of page 194, 79 per cent of all the assets were in property, plant and equipment. Where are the other 21 per cent of assets?

MRS DUNNE: I think they are sitting in front of you.

Ms Gallagher: There is a graph on page 195.

Mr Hubbard: I will read it out. Unfortunately, the minister has pointed to the chart that is at the top of the next page. That gives you a total breakdown of our assets.

MRS DUNNE: Madam chair, with your indulgence, I have a question which does not relate to the annual report directly—I had to leave the room—and it may have been asked already. There was a report earlier this week about paid work experience for university students.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. We covered this off.

MRS DUNNE: If you covered it, I will go back and read it in the *Hansard*.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. We did it for quite a long time—I think most of the time you were out.

MRS DUNNE: I knew that would happen.

THE CHAIR: We had quite a long discussion about it.

MRS DUNNE: The other issue is that, over the years, there has been considerable cooperation between care and protection, and particularly social work at ACU. I wanted to have some sort of rundown on where we are and what the current projects are.

Ms Lambert: We have a partnership with the ACU in a range of ways. We have it, of course, with post-graduate work. That has continued. I think Frank would have the details on the numbers of that. We also have the partnership around the Institute of Child Protection Studies. They have engaged in a range of projects for us, the most significant of which for me has been the paper on the principles for child centred practice. That is a very good piece of work, but there has been a whole range of other pieces of work too.

That particular partnership is one which has expanded to include just recently the Australian National University and the University of South Australia. As a consortium, if you like, we have received—and we are a partner as well—money through ARC grants to do more work on how we can get more compliance in the child protection area. There are a range of ways that we have partnerships with them, from student work to their partnership and the “practice talking” conference we just held, through to academic study and on. It is quite an extensive partnership.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I do not think there is any more.

Ms Lambert: I have an answer to a question we did not have an answer to before. There are 93 before and after school care licences.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Lambert and your officials.

Meeting adjourned from 3.31 to 3.46 pm.

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Industrial Relations

Canberra Institute of Technology

Adrian, Dr Colin, Chief Executive

Cover, Ms Leanne, Senior Manager

Kowald, Mr Peter, Dean, Corporate Services Division

Kaye, Mr Shane, Senior Manager, Finance

Croucher, Mr Vaughan, Dean, Learning Services Division

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority

Service, Mr James, Chairman

Guy, Mr Gary, Chief Executive Officer

THE CHAIR: The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

Do you understand that? Thank you very much. Thank you, minister, Dr Adrian and all the officials for attending this afternoon. Do you want to make an opening statement, minister?

Mr Barr: I have a very brief opening statement. The annual report covers the calendar year 2005 and Dr Adrian and I were not in our current positions at that time. We will endeavour to draw upon the expertise of others in the room should we not be in a position to answer particular questions from the committee as we were not, as I say, in our current jobs during the reporting period.

I would just like to highlight that the report indicates that in 2005 there were more than 23,300 enrolments in CIT and CIT Solutions programs, that in excess of 4,800 qualifications were awarded and that the CIT is now offering over 450 programs across five faculties. It is, I think, an organisation that is going from strength to strength. It is the largest provider of VET in the ACT and one of the key things looking forward, I

think, is to strengthen partnerships with the other VET providers, with schools and colleges in particular. It is an area of strong focus for the government in 2006. Having said all of that, we are happy to take the committee's questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I would like to ask you a question about what you have just said about the focus for 2006. You would be aware that this committee will be doing some work in the skill shortages area and will be having further discussions with you about that, I am sure. You talked about the way you will be working with other partners, with schools, et cetera. The previous chief executive and director makes quite a point of that in his outlook for 2006. Obviously, one of my areas of interest is in what this means for vocational development for young people in schools and colleges. I was just wondering whether we could perhaps have a bit of an outline of where that might be going.

Mr Barr: Certainly. I am sure that committee members would be aware that the CIT has put in place a range of activities to support close linkages with government and non-government schools in the ACT and the region, seeking to foster pathways into CIT, to support VET in schools and to collaborate with the broader educational sector. I think that there are five key areas for collaboration, that is, the provision of vocation and technical education programs for high school and college students, the promotion of CIT to high school and college students, the provision of pathways for high school and college students, shared knowledge and professional development, and maintaining a systemic and strategic communication base between the sectors.

Each semester, CIT provides central programs for college and high school students and students attend CIT for these classes. There is also an annual event for school careers advisers and the CIT careers adviser attends the school careers events. The CIT also participates in ACT and regional careers expos. I might at this point get Dr Adrian to outline some of the further detail in regard to this overarching strategy, but it is a very important focus. As I think committee members would be aware, 70 per cent of students in the ACT, upon completion of year 12, do not go on to university. So we are talking about providing educational pathways for the majority of students in the ACT.

Dr Adrian: As the minister has indicated, certainly from the annual report and since I have been at the institute, I have become aware of extensive linkages between CIT and both the high school and the college system in the ACT. I think there is a rich history of interaction there. It is one that I am certainly keen to pursue further. In fact, I think it is one of the key issues facing us in terms of having young people coming out of the school system and becoming job ready as quickly as possible.

I have had a meeting with a number of the college principals and you would be aware, hopefully, that CIT recently announced that we will guarantee entry from 2007 onwards into CIT for all students that successfully complete VET courses within the school system. So we want to give a strong emphasis that CIT is a pathway for students in the school system, and certainly for those students who won't be going on to university.

As the minister indicated, and I do not think it is commonly known, for a number of students, whilst some might and their parents certainly might have aspirations for them to go to university, that probably isn't the path they are going to take; in fact, it is a vocational path that is becoming increasingly common for students and also for others in

the work force. So, in the discussions I have had with the principals and with careers advisers, I think there are some issues.

One area that we need to explore further is the process of credit transfer and curriculum continuity, if you like, from the school system into CIT, or for other registered training organisations as well. In some cases, it is not an easy pathway for students; from certain courses they might do in the school system there is not necessarily a direct transfer into, for example, certificate III courses or other courses in CIT. That is something I think we need to work on simplifying and making sure the curricula at the school end fit with the curricula at our end and vice versa, in the same way that we have done a lot of work looking at the articulation from CIT into the university system.

MRS DUNNE: Dr Adrian, could you give an example, because it seems quite alarming that there isn't always an easy pathway out of school VET courses into CIT VET courses? Could you give an example of one of the impediments?

Dr Adrian: I could ask Vaughan Croucher to go into detail, if you want to explore it in some detail; but, for example, students can do either V courses or T courses and in some cases the T courses do not have a V component to them. If, for example, a student who might have aspirations to go on to university but then does not reach the required level to go on to university and is then seeking other alternatives, one of which might be CIT, there become questions then of the competencies that they have actually reached and whether they accredit directly into our vocational courses.

MRS DUNNE: I see. I misunderstood. I actually thought that there was lack of a pathway between the V courses.

Dr Adrian: No. There might be some examples where there are issues there; but in all the examples I have had quoted, no, there are very clear pathways. But there are other examples where it is not clear in terms of some students coming into CIT. The other thing that we need to recognise there is that the school courses are always under review and changing, in the same way that through the training packages nationally our courses are always undergoing change. So it is a process of continually updating and making sure there are regular meetings between the curricula people in the schools and the careers advisers and teachers in the particular subject areas and our staff.

There was recently a meeting, for example, in the information technology business area where there were representatives from most of the colleges in Canberra teaching in those areas and our staff going through the curricula and the credit transfers in a lot of detail. They are asking us to become increasingly involved at looking at their courses and being involved on panels approving their courses, and so on. I think that is a process that you've got to work hard at as those things continue to change.

THE CHAIR: Minister, thank you for that explanation. It also mentions working closely with not only education instrumentalities and institutions but also local and national industry and a global approach, too, in that introduction area. I was just wondering whether we could have a little bit more information about those two things.

Mr Barr: Sure. A range of strategies are being employed to strengthen those relationships. I will highlight a few and then get Dr Adrian to provide some more detail

on each: a small business at CIT program, a regional at CIT, a CIT advisory committee, CITAC. The organisation also recently hosted a meeting of the ACT executives for it which was attended by senior executives from across all ACT government agencies and provided an opportunity for some networking to occur and for the CIT to be advised of future training needs of those ACT government agencies. There has also been the development of a strong relationship with some of the major clubs in town, such as the Hellenic Club, but I will get Dr Adrian to provide a bit more detail on each of those.

Dr Adrian: The government has asked us to review CITAC. We have announced some new members, but the government has asked us to review CITAC—that is, the advisory committee—with a view to increasing the industry representation on CITAC. If you look down within CIT, each of the faculties has advisory committees and faculty program committees and they have a large number of people from industry groups and from community groups that actually become involved in the regular activities of each of the faculties, including the design of courses.

There are lots of other forms of association; there is a myriad of them. Just to quote a couple that have really struck me, one that I think is an excellent example of partnership is in the plumbing area, which has been a massive growth area for us in terms of apprenticeships. It has been one of the largest growth areas in our apprenticeship numbers over the past four years. We have a very healthy relationship with the master plumbers association and individual plumbers and suppliers. If you look at that sector and if you went to the Fyshwick campus, for example, the plumbing facilities there, all the equipment, have been provided by the suppliers and that equipment is regularly updated by the suppliers, so it is all the latest equipment in terms of drainage and all sorts of plumbing. The industry regularly has industry meetings there and work really closely with staff. Obviously, it is their apprentices that are training at CIT.

It is that form of fairly direct and detailed association—in that case where they are actually paying for infrastructure to be on our site—that I think is a direction we need to head. Similarly, with small business at CIT, the business community have been heavily involved in designing that program. The minister mentioned the clubs as an example. In tourism and hospitality, one of the areas that we have looked at is providing tailor-made courses direct in clubs, and we are looking at other clubs where we might be providing courses to all levels within a club. Some of that course content is provided on CIT campus and other course content is provided at the club site itself. Those are just three examples and there would be many others, but it is a direction we have just got to increasingly push down and keep up to date in terms of those linkages into industry.

Mr Barr: It would be remiss of me not to give a further plug to regional at CIT and the fantastic cafe and store where all of the local regional produce is available, including some of Tim Kirk's finest from out at Klonakilla. Apparently, it is one of the few places in Canberra that you can still get it. There is a fantastic facility down there and, if you have not had an opportunity to go and have a look, please do. I think it is open between 10.00 am and 3.00 pm Monday to Friday.

MRS DUNNE: You have talked a lot about linkages and getting that part of it right. Something which is not specifically covered by the annual report but which has been raised with me by students is that a cutback in face-to-face teaching seems to be happening this semester. I am aware of its happening in some areas. Is it happening

across the board? To what extent has there been a cutback in face-to-face teaching?

Dr Adrian: I would not term it a cutback in face-to-face teaching. I think what is occurring is a change in the whole nature of demand and delivery with courses. Increasingly, you are seeing courses being delivered outside the normal semester term context and outside the large lecture-style context, and in some cases out of the large tutorial-type context as well. Increasingly you are seeing courses that might be being delivered online, for example, and there is not a direct interaction, face-to-face interaction, between the teacher and the student, but students in online courses work on a self-paced program. They can get advice on an online basis or they can arrange tutorial sessions at Bruce, Reid or in the Tuggeranong flexible learning centre.

I think it is about a whole change in the way in which courses are going to be delivered, largely because of the change in the nature of the demand for courses. What we are finding with a number of courses is that people want to do short components of the courses and be in and out relatively quickly, or they want to do the courses online. That is a trend that is happening not only at CIT but right across all the training organisations and I think it raises real challenges for us and for the staff, as well as the students, not to mention some of the infrastructure challenges. But it is happening right across the industry. So the traditional way of delivering, which is very much face-to-face and fairly rote learning, is changing. That is more what it is about and it is something that has been occurring over a number of years, and increasingly so.

DR FOSKEY: I have a question related to that. Do the new ways of delivering education in response, as you put it, to demand assist in helping the CIT find the \$3 million cut that has been imposed upon it? Are these cheaper ways of teaching?

Dr Adrian: Not necessarily. If you look at the savings that we are required to make, and the big year of saving is 2007, and it is just over \$3 million in 2007, most of those savings are in administrative areas. Some of the savings, for example, are associated with the shared service arrangements. CIT has to meet the requirements and finance HR, procurement and IT as part of the shared service arrangements. So we now purchase those services from shared services in Treasury and have had to make savings in that area. We are making some other savings in our central administration areas and in our faculty management units, and in some cases we are rearranging some of our course delivery. So, at the margins, that might be a factor, but it is certainly not the key issue in the way in which we are achieving our savings.

DR FOSKEY: It sounds from your answer to Mrs Dunne's question that you do envisage less face-to-face teaching hours for students.

Dr Adrian: In some courses that might well be the case, but, if you look at what is happening, it is not just an issue within CIT. If you look at what the competition in the private sector is delivering, they are delivering courses with far less face-to-face in many cases, a lot more online delivery, or flexible arrangements where part of the course might be online and then there is an intense period of face-to-face over a weekend or over two or three days, for example. So it is really a reflection of just the whole way in which the vocational training area is changing its method of delivery.

DR FOSKEY: Are the teachers happy, for instance, to work over weekends, develop

course material for online learning and so on. How do teachers feel about that?

Dr Adrian: I guess it is fair to say that there are probably some mixed feelings in relation to that. If you look at the age of the work force, you will find some teachers have been early adopters. Certainly, CIT has some excellent examples of online service delivery, with teachers that are amongst the leading in the country in that form of course delivery. There would be others for whom, it is fair to say, that is a challenge. That is one of the areas, certainly in the chief executive professional development priorities, in which I have identified we need to invest more money for those teachers that might find that a challenge.

Where they would need to be looking to shift to redesigning courses, where you have to design the course up front with a stronger online component, some teachers who have not got the online and IT software skills are going to have to upgrade those skills. But in all the discussions I have had as part of our EBA negotiations with the unions and now with a large number of individual staff, I would have to say that they have been raising it more with me as where things are headed, rather than the other way round. I think they recognise what is happening in the industry and are being very responsive to it.

Mr Barr: I draw committee members' attention to page 85 of the annual report, in particular the section on professional development funding. The CIT does put a strong emphasis on providing funds for professional development. That is something we will continue to pursue through future EBA rounds as well. I think there is a joint effort on behalf of both the AEU and the CIT to see that there are resources provided for staff professional development.

But, as I think Dr Adrian has said, the changing nature of education provision is a certain, if you like, collision of cultures and worlds, as we are seeing in our education system, whereby the digital age is coming in at a pace a lot faster than some people are quite prepared for. So we are conscious of the need to provide that professional development support.

Again, as we see in the general teaching work force, as the larger cohorts of older teachers move towards retirement there will be particular emphasis, obviously, on the recruitment of younger teaching staff as well, for whom some of these issues around the changes in our world they are perhaps more used to in their working environment. We are conscious of that through a number of programs. I particularly want to draw attention to that professional development funding that is provided by the organisation.

DR FOSKEY: Does the CIT see it has a role in solving the skills crisis? If the committee that Ian Chubb is heading says that CIT should have its funds restored or increased because that would be a major solution to the skills crisis, how likely would that be to happen? If that proves to be the one main thing the government could do, would it do it?

Mr Barr: That is obviously a hypothetical question, Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: Don't you answer those?

THE CHAIR: Not under the standing orders, no.

DR FOSKEY: To ask the question differently, how could CIT participate in solution of the skills crisis with a funding cut of \$3 million?

Mr Barr: Again, Dr Foskey, you are seeking to imply that that funding cut is going to directly impact on CIT's ability to respond and, as I think Dr Adrian has outlined, we are seeking to make some administrative changes and to make some savings around a shared services facility. All ACT government agencies are contributing towards a savings target and we are hoping to make some savings on things like procurement through economies of scale. That seems to me to be a sensible, commonsense approach in a jurisdiction of our size in relation to our administrative arrangements.

MRS DUNNE: But only if the savings are being made in those areas, minister. I will give you an example where some students in a course were sat down by their course organisers and told, "We have to make some savings here. How do you want to work it out? Do you want to have fewer contact weeks or fewer contact hours per week, but somewhere we've got to make the savings?" They have decided that they are going to have fewer contact hours per week.

Mr Barr: Without knowing the specifics of that case—

MRS DUNNE: Graphic design, minister. I've got a mole.

Mr Barr: I am not in a position to comment on the fine detail there.

MRS DUNNE: Those were the options offered to them.

Mr Barr: In looking at providing some productivity offsets in relation to the EBA, we did look to increase average class sizes from, I think, 15.5 to 16.

MRS DUNNE: They have 20-odd in their class.

Mr Barr: Average class sizes. There are certain areas, obviously, where, in seeking to make some productivity and some efficiency savings, we will need to make some adjustments but, again, without the fine detail of the particular course, I am not in a position to provide a comment on that.

MRS DUNNE: The students in graphic design were offered fewer contact weeks or fewer contact hours per week. How many other courses are being told that you will be cutting back on their contact hours one way or the other?

Dr Adrian: I can't enter into this because I don't know whether they were the exact words or whether there were other comments made. For example, as I indicated before, it is not just about the number of direct contact hours. There are other modes of learning, if you like, that are increasingly coming to the fore and are part of a course that somebody is offered. So it is not just the direct, face-to-face contact hours with the teacher. Increasingly, there are other ways in which the courses are delivered, other access to information, project information, online information, which is where courses are headed. It is not simply the number of direct, face-to-face hours with an individual teacher necessarily that constitutes the whole of the course.

The other thing is that in the contract with government that I signed with the minister and with the Treasurer, we are actually required to deliver, despite those savings, the same number of total hours. We will deliver on those hours this year and I certainly intend for us to deliver on those hours next year. What you are finding is that when we deliver those hours the number of enrolments are actually going up. Often people are doing shorter courses or different sorts of courses than what they have done traditionally in the past. In short, we are required as part of the statement of intent between myself and the government to deliver a certain number of hours and, as part of that, if you have a look at our enrolments, they are up this year and we will meet the target of nominal hours.

The other area that is important is that there are other sources of funding. The funding for apprentices comes in through a different funding stream. If you look at our apprenticeship numbers over the past four years, particularly in the skill shortage areas, they have gone up dramatically. I could go through them. There have been rates of growth over the four years of 40, 50 and 100 per cent in some of the key areas, such as carpentry, plumbing and those sorts of areas, and that source of funding goes to individuals and is then linked to an employer, and they have discretion as to which RTA they use. If they use us, which a large number of them are, that funding source comes in direct to us.

It is a similar situation with the new money that the commonwealth has announced. We certainly intend to put in place making ourselves as competitive as possible to access students coming in through that source of funding. That is another area of demand, as is the work where we might bid for contracts through, for example, commonwealth agencies, where it does not come in through the traditional forms of funding either from the commonwealth or from the territory government, and it is important we do look at those other areas of funding and other sources of getting training dollars.

THE CHAIR: I want to go back to the second part of my question that started this whole conversation. The report mentions a worldwide education network and global exchanges. Is that global exchange two-way? International students come to us perhaps, but what about the opposite direction?

Mr Barr: There are several projects in place to support that overall strategic goal. There is a long list, which I think you will find in the annual report. I am not across the fine detail on each of them.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps you could give some examples.

Dr Adrian: The key area in the main is the international students that come to CIT. We have roughly 600 students. They come in through CIT Solutions, the company that we run on a commercial basis. A large number of them do English training, but an equally large number do other forms of vocational training within the faculties. They are an important source of income for us.

We also have a large number of educational network links, for want of a better expression, internationally and they are things that you need to pursue cautiously. They can eat up resources and you want to make sure that you are getting value for money out of those linkages. One that I am particularly keen to pursue is where I believe we have

some competitive market edge, that is, in the forensic area. Members might well be aware that CIT has, for a number of years, offered very strong, practical forensic programs at Bruce. We have strong linkages into the AFP, customs and the state police forces, particularly New South Wales. Through those connections, we are now looking at the possibility of some linkages into Asia, into America and also into Britain. So it is really leveraging off where we have a real strength in a particular area of course delivery and are offering programs that might be reasonably unique, either in Australia or internationally. That is where we need to maximise our linkages. So that is one example.

One that recently we have been pursuing is with Christchurch polytechnic. Christchurch is roughly the same size as Canberra and Christchurch polytechnic is roughly the same size as CIT and there are some good synergies there in terms of possibilities of staff exchange and also some student exchanges. There has been quite a degree of interaction between CIT and Christchurch polytechnic in recent years. So that is another example that is very important in terms of the professional development of staff, but also opens up some possibilities for perhaps a limited number of students to be exchanged between the two institutions.

MR GENTLEMAN: Just while we are on those overseas students, page 62 refers to a responsive housing objective and talks about accommodation for students. I guess some of those would be from interstate and overseas. Where are these student housing projects located?

Dr Adrian: The main hostel has only recently been built. I might ask Mr Kowald to outline in more detail.

Mr Kowald: The two most recent facilities are at Bruce campus, which in total holds about 50 places for students. We have a small number of rooms available in Reid, in the building on the previously Narellan House site, and also access to a number of rooms at Arscott House, which I think is a former ACT government public housing facility.

DR FOSKEY: What would be the impact of the Currong redevelopment, where I assume you have a number of students at the moment through APSA? It's mentioned here on page 62.

Dr Adrian: Just as a general comment, I was aware when I was in housing that CIT was one of the student areas that did have students placed when they made the emergency arrangements at Currong. I'm not sure to what extent that's continuing.

Mr Kowald: There was certainly a demand for that up to a year ago. I think that has fallen off. What we have found within CIT is difficulty in filling the rooms that we have available, so, quite clearly, the demand for student housing has changed dramatically in the ACT because students seem now to be able to find accommodation readily at other facilities. So the crisis that we expected two or three years ago seems to have been addressed and has dissipated.

DR FOSKEY: But you're not aware of exactly why that has happened?

Mr Kowald: I think because there's been a substantial increase in student accommodation in the ACT.

Mr Barr: You need only look at the ANU campus at the—

DR FOSKEY: You mean the ANU has taken the pressure off?

Mr Kowald: ANU, University of Canberra; they have—

Mr Barr: There has been significant construction. There's a refurbished building in Hobart Place, is there not, that—

Mr Kowald: Yes, and also home stay places.

Mr Barr: Yes, student accommodation. I certainly was aware this was an issue a few years ago, but significant efforts were made at that time to address it and we're seeing the results of some longer-term construction now completed or verging on completion and that has made a significant dent in that particular problem.

MR GENTLEMAN: Not on that subject, but could I bring you to page 14 and major issues and challenges. Down the bottom it says that the introduction of new federal legislation such as Skilling Australia and WorkChoices has impacted on CIT during 2005. Can you tell us how that has impacted? What has been affected there?

Mr Barr: As I'm sure the committee is aware, the CIT are required to offered AWAs to employees as part of their funding arrangements with the commonwealth. As we discussed yesterday, it's an example of the commonwealth seeking to tie these particular ideological agendas into their funding arrangements.

MRS DUNNE: And you wouldn't do that, of course, minister.

Mr Barr: Indeed. Just like we've seen, as I say, in the broader education portfolio, this is another example where the commonwealth will seek to push a particular ideological agenda and tie it to much-needed funding to organisations. I understand Peter is in a position to provide some specifics on the number of AWAs that have been taken up within the CIT.

Mr Kowald: Yes. Mr Gentleman, you will see in the annual report reference to two residual AWAs. Those AWAs were terminated during the year. At the moment we don't have any AWAs, but, as the Skilling Australia legislation requires us, we have to make available the facility to offer AWAs to our teaching staff—to our staff, actually, if you look at the legislation—and we have in place the policy and we're just about to publicise that arrangement to all our staff.

MR GENTLEMAN: None of the one million AWAs have been signed up by CIT?

Mr Kowald: That is correct.

DR FOSKEY: On the major issues and challenges it mentions the implementation of the Chris 21 human resources management system as a major challenge.

MRS DUNNE: It was for everybody else so why should CIT be any different?

DR FOSKEY: I was just wondering how much it cost CIT?

Mr Kowald: I'd have to take that on notice. I think it has been in the order of a few hundred thousand dollars, but I haven't got an exact figure.

MRS DUNNE: Does it have its full functionality, Mr Kowald?

Mr Kowald: Not yet, because there remains a problem with long service leave advice being able to be given to staff. With recreation leave and sick leave we have 150 staff cases that we have to complete and we expect to complete those by the end of this calendar year. Long service leave remains a problem and I expect it to be resolved in the early part of next year.

MRS DUNNE: Is that a matter that needs to be resolved by CIT or is it a software issue, a problem with Chris 21?

Mr Kowald: It's a whole-of-government issue arising from the software.

MRS DUNNE: I must say it seems absolutely breathtaking—and this is not a criticism of CIT but a criticism of the system—that this far down the track there is a problem with something that is taken for granted by public servants, that they can log on themselves and find out how much long service leave they have. But people in the ACT and your staff, minister and Dr Adrian, can't do that in CIT. It is just unbelievable that this could go on so long and that organisations like the CIT are probably still manually processing this stuff at considerable cost because the system doesn't work.

Mr Kowald: When people put in a long service leave application we do a manual check about whether it's possible. So it's not an issue of staff being disadvantaged by the situation.

MRS DUNNE: But the whole idea of Chris 21 was to take away the need to do all those manual checks. It was supposed to work out—

Mr Kowald: Yes.

Mr Barr: Certainly, Mrs Dunne, having a centralised unit for all human resources within the ACT public sector will lead to some of the positive outcomes that you have highlighted. It is questionable in a government of our size why we had so many different payroll processing centres. Again, the commonsense factor comes into play here. That would be one of the key advantages of having such an arrangement: those functions that are common to all agencies are provided out of one location and with one system. But I acknowledge the point that having the system fully functioning is particularly important in that service delivery.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, while we're on staffing issues I have a financial question. Page 126 on the operating statement for 2005, under the expenses line, shows that the actual amount of superannuation expenses was up quite a bit from the budgeted amount. The budgeted amount was \$6,800,000 and the actual amount is \$7,582,000. Page 140, note 9, talks about superannuation expenses, but it doesn't really explain why there was

that differentiation.

Mr Barr: I'll ask Peter for his assistance on that one.

Mr Kowald: Mr Gentleman, I expect it's due to the significant salary increases that were awarded to staff in the 2005 year and the effects of those. Plus I think there was also an increase in the percentage amount that had to be paid into the central fund for some of the schemes, which is a whole-of-government ACT determined amount. As you're probably aware, contributions have to be paid for CSS members, the oldest funder, quite significant; I think there was an increase in those contributions, as there was with the PSS fund. So those two things combined led to that increase above budget.

MRS DUNNE: So there are just the two schemes?

Mr Kowald: No, there are now effectively four, I think: CSS, PSS, PS Act, plus the more recent ACT government decision that new members have a nine per cent funding rate, so that would be four different arrangements.

DR FOSKEY: With the wage rises/salary increases that you mentioned, wasn't an efficiency dividend of around 12 per cent over three years part of that EBA?

Mr Kowald: No, I can't recall that.

MRS DUNNE: I want to go back to some of the issues raised about skill shortages and particularly plumbing. This committee visited the Fyshwick campus and the plumbing was quite good, but is it the case that CIT is the only provider of plumbing training in the ACT? I know that the MBA group training scheme sends their plumbers there; I don't know about CIT.

Dr Adrian: I'm told the answer is yes, which I wasn't aware of I must admit.

MRS DUNNE: And what's the student capacity? Are we close to student capacity out there at that site?

Dr Adrian: I'm not sure what the absolute capacity is, but we're accommodating all of those that have made application to do apprenticeships at CIT and my understanding is that the numbers probably peaked last year and this year. Looking to next year, in talking to both the industry and to the staff, the sort of numbers that you'd expect will be what we'll get. Whether there's additional capacity to take more, I'm not sure, but certainly we are meeting all the demand and there's not an expectation that that demand will increase above the levels we've currently got, keeping in mind that it is an area that has increased over 100 per cent over the past three or four years.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I gathered and from memory that there are about 90 apprentices in the intake this year and—

Dr Adrian: No, well above that. My understanding was that it's certainly in the order of 400 in training. The intake this year—I'm just trying to think whether I've got stats on it.

MRS DUNNE: I thought the intake was about 90 this year, but that doesn't make it 400;

that makes it closer to 360.

Dr Adrian: If you look at plumbing it's not 400. So 400 would be the figure for total new apprentice enrolments, in training. We've had 250 through to October this year, last year we had a total of 215 new enrolments, the year before 172 and 131 the year before that. So the numbers have kept going up. My understanding is that what we've got at the moment is about where it will peak, and those apprentices are drawn, obviously, not only from the ACT but from the broader region as well.

MRS DUNNE: I've been told anecdotally that the number of apprentices in training wouldn't actually cover the people who are projected to retire in the next 15 years; that if we keep training at this rate we're only going to be covering the retirement of people rather than addressing the extended need for plumbing services and those sorts of things. Do you have a feel for that? That is the feeling that I get in the industry and amongst people involved in teaching in the industry.

Dr Adrian: That's probably reasonably accurate if the figures, as I say, are peaking now and if we're looking at something similar next year that's probably about the peak. I guess the critical determinant is going to be the level of activity in both the residential and commercial sectors not only in the ACT but in the surrounding area and probably nationally. If you looked over a longer period like 10 or 15 years it would be a mixture of those that are already in the industry—to what extent might they be looking to move out of the industry, or retire or whatever—as opposed to the demand for new people coming in.

The other thing, of course, with plumbing—and again it's not my area of expertise but I have talked to some of the industry people—is the whole changing nature of the industry, with the growth in gas supply, for example, and the whole changes in the nature in which plumbing is done—

DR FOSKEY: Grey water recycling.

Mr Barr: Indeed, Dr Foskey, amongst other worthy initiatives.

Dr Adrian: That might be another determinant of the demand as the industry changes, whether there's increased demand for plumbers that have got different skills from the traditional plumber in the past.

THE CHAIR: And attitudes to retirement and all those kind of things as well. As it is 4.35 pm now, we thank you very much, Dr Adrian, Mr Kowald and officials.

Short adjournment.

THE CHAIR: I now welcome Mr Service and Mr Guy from the ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority. I need to read this card to you. The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings.

Before the committee commences taking evidence let me place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee and evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding the publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing. Did you understand that?

Mr Service: Thank you, yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to make any opening remarks, minister?

Mr Barr: No, I think we'll move straight into questions.

MRS DUNNE: One of the things I've never really got my head around is the building and construction industry training fund. Is it the conduit for the direction of money through to RTOs and to CIT, or does it have its own personal bucket of money to expend? It does not seem to be any sort of logical fit with what's happening elsewhere and I'm obviously not reading it properly. If the minister, Mr Service and Mr Guy can tell me where it all fits in the panoply, I'd be—

Mr Service: I'm happy to go first, minister, if that suits you.

Mr Barr: Yes, indeed; I'll let the experts talk on that.

Mr Service: The fund, now known as the authority, was created by our legislation in the Assembly. My understanding was that that legislation was a bipartisan piece of legislation. The creation of the authority was primarily to provide what I would regard as a conduit for the industry itself to make available substantial additional funds for the training of those people that it needs as resources and workers every day of the week. So we collect a levy on building projects, both through ACTPLA and through an inspectorial process, and our legislation requires us to provide those funds—not specifically to people like CIT; that is, we don't have any funding arrangements with CIT specifically—to registered training organisations for the purpose of training, and we can then do other things under our act in terms of administration and promotion et cetera.

So we in effect use the money—and we try and use all of our money—to provide training opportunities in the areas that the report identifies, including apprenticeship training, upskilling, cross-skilling. We do some access and equity programs, promotional and administration of the fund. With respect to the government of the day, we stand somewhat quite independent of the government in that provision of training. My view is that that gives us a capacity to do things more quickly than if we were an instrument of government, even though we're a creation of government. We have a capacity to make

sure that we can do long-term funding projects, particularly in the upskilling, cross-skilling and apprenticeship programs.

MRS DUNNE: I understand how it creates extra flexibility because of the sort of administrative structure or the government structure, but how do you determine where you spend your money and how do you measure the effectiveness of that and whether you're crossing over other people's expenditure?

Mr Service: I understand that question. We prepare an annual training plan. We have an arrangement with the Construction Industry Training Council—who do all our consultation, our stakeholder engagement, our market surveys, our industry surveys—to determine what is required under the various disciplines within the training gambit that we operate. In that stakeholder consultation we also look at where we can be active participants in the creation of new opportunities, where we can support new training regimes.

For instance, over the last couple of years we've been quite instrumental in supporting the creation of the Housing Industry Association's registered training organisation as a registered training organisation. So we can do more training in the housing industry. So the training plan is not our view about training needs; it's the industry's view. The members of the authority do not write the training plan; we actively and deliberately have the training plan prepared for us external of the members and of the secretary to the authority. In that way we can always say as members appointed by the government and representing the stakeholders that that is their training plan.

I've been the chairman since the fund was created and one of the principles that I've had as chairman is to say that it is of little use for the members of the authority to tell the industry what sort of training it should have; we should simply take their views through a consultative process and say, "This is the training plan," have that training plan signed off by the industry and then ask the minister if he, through the Legislative Assembly process, is prepared to support it and table it in the Assembly. So it's the industry telling us what they need and us making sure, to the extent we can for the funding that we get from members of the industry, we can then do all that training.

THE CHAIR: I go to page 8 of the report. It indicates that during the year 205 school-based new apprenticeships were commenced. How many are we anticipating for this year? What steps do you take to ensure young people know that these opportunities are available to them?

Mr Service: I will get Mr Guy to answer that.

Mr Guy: Most of the school-based programs are run through the registered training organisations and the group training organisations, be they CITEA, MBA, HIA or the Electro Group. They go to the schools and promote the student-to-work programs. The students then go and work for them in those particular organisations. Most of them do certificate I or certificate II in the construction program. That is a very good breeding ground to get people into the industry.

It gives the young students an opportunity to see what the work is like, how the work is, whether they want to go on in this particular industry or whether they want to change

altogether and go elsewhere. It is a good feeding ground for group training organisations. It is also a good, knowledgeable place for these young students to gain knowledge on the industry and, if they select that, to go on so they know what it is about.

Mr Barr: It has certainly been described to me as a very competitive process. All of the organisations seek top-quality apprentices and to get those students early on. I certainly know that David Dawes of the MBA has described in some detail the way that they seek to engage early on. This continuation of these linkages is very important. I know the high schools and colleges are very receptive to these programs and the approaches from all of the organisations.

THE CHAIR: Is there a limited number of what is available?

Mr Guy: There is a limited number because of the number the group training companies can take on and employ. I would imagine that the three group training companies that run the school-based programs would be looking at probably 100 students all up. In the apprenticeship programs at this particular point in time, there are huge numbers. One of the group training companies has got over 200; one has got about 180; HIA, 70-odd; and the Electro Group, 90-odd. The numbers are very high and going very well in the construction side of the apprenticeship side of the program.

MRS DUNNE: Are these 708 places new places?

Mr Guy: In the school-based programs, they would be new places. Some of the ones that are working for group training companies would not be new; they would be existing places that we fund annually each year.

MRS DUNNE: The 439 which will be going to RTOs of some of the group training schemes is not the sum total of all the people in the group training schemes?

Mr Guy: No, not the sum total of people there.

MRS DUNNE: Apart from the exigencies that you have this much money to spend on, how do you decide how you chop it up between them?

Mr Guy: With the group training companies, we have got an annual allowance, or an annual fund, that we give them. We give them \$1,000 per apprentice per year for all the certificate III apprentices. That is for all the group training companies.

We also provide the group training companies with funding for a field officer program, where they can employ a field officer. We fund MBA and CITEA exactly the same. HIA and the Electro Group get a little less because their numbers are not as high. The regional group training organisation get less again because they only do horticultural landscaping. We reduce our funding compared to their field officer program.

With the school-based program, they had 200 last year. We will probably run around that again, or maybe a fraction less. The skills shortage program is where we have identified, through consultation with the industry and TAE, or what TAE is known as today, where there are shortages in the trade and in the industry. We fund employers who then take apprentices on in that particular trade.

Mr Service: To the extent that our funding allows, we are happy to fund any number they put up at the moment.

THE CHAIR: I beg your pardon?

Mr Service: To the extent that we have funding, if one of the group training companies said, “We have another 50 apprentices that we can take on and can place,” at the moment, we would happily fund those extra numbers. We do not start off the year, except for the total amount of funds available to us and any that we are holding in reserve or in surplus, with a particular cap on the number of new places that we are prepared to fund.

I add, if I may, that I did not answer one of Mrs Dunne’s questions clearly enough. You asked how we measure the performance. We measure the performance of our programs in two ways. We have an audit system where we have an arrangement with the industry training council to do a number of audits each year. The other way we measure it is to say to our stakeholders that, if our revenue is \$2 million and we spend \$2 million, we have done our job. We are one of the few organisations that might come before any committee and say one of our goals is to spend every single dollar that we get. We do not have a goal to retain any money; we have a goal to spend.

Mr Barr: It is the balanced budget strategy, yes.

MRS DUNNE: In 2005, your expenditure was \$2.3 million.

THE CHAIR: Which page are you at?

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, page 7. You funded 700 training places. That is about \$3,000 a training place. Are you saying that you are giving \$1,000 for each apprenticeship in the group training scheme and that you are funding a field officer?

Mr Service: We are funding a number of field officers.

Mr Guy: Five field officers.

MRS DUNNE: Essentially, one for each group training scheme.

Mr Guy: Group training company, yes. The skills shortage money is also in that entry level stuff, because it is entry level money.

MRS DUNNE: I counted the skills shortage in the 708 places. That is about \$3,000 per training place, of which \$1,000 is directly given. “Here is some money to go with this head.” The rest of it goes through what?

Mr Service: It goes into the field officer program; it goes into the schools program.

MRS DUNNE: How is the skills shortage program different from the \$1,000 to the RTO program?

Mr Guy: The skills shortage program is different, where we select a trade, or a number

of trades, where there are skills shortages. Over the years it has been bricklaying and plastering.

MRS DUNNE: Pick any one.

Mr Service: Yes. They are all short.

Mr Guy: First of all, when we kicked this program off back in 2003, bricklaying had four apprentices in the first year. We are now up to about 29 apprentices in first years with MBA and CIT running the courses. By giving the employers \$5,000 for their first year of apprenticeship, it has increased the employment of apprentices. Most employers tell you that the first year is their dearest year of employing an apprentice. There is a lot of down time.

MRS DUNNE: In a sense, you are subsidizing the wages bill.

Mr Guy: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr Service, you mentioned before the access equity program and that you work with particular young people through that program. I was wondering if you could give us some examples.

Mr Service: Yes.

Mr Guy: With access and equity we provide funding to group training companies and individual employers who employ women in the industry.

THE CHAIR: There is a graph on page 12 which gives the expenditure.

Mr Guy: Yes. In 2005 we had a terrible year. As you can see from the program, we did not fund a great deal at all.

THE CHAIR: Was that because the demand was not there?

Mr Guy: The demand was not there and there were not a lot of people employing people in those particular industries, or in that particular section of the industry. In 2006 the numbers went up because of the school-based programs. More women were employed in the industry, and a number of indigenous Australians were employed.

MRS DUNNE: It is about funding either indigenous people or women in that. Women generally do not like becoming plumbers because it ruins your nails.

Mr Service: It is also to try and increase the awareness of the youth at risk program.

MRS DUNNE: Your hands bleed all the time.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Service. I could not quite catch what you were saying because Mrs Dunne was talking about ruining her nails.

MRS DUNNE: You would not become a plumber either, for the same reason.

THE CHAIR: No, I would not.

MRS DUNNE: Your nails are better than mine.

Mr Service: My thing is that I would never become a painter. That is because I cannot stand painting. I would probably prefer to be a plumber. We find, despite the fact that we put quite a lot of people time into promoting the access and equity program, that it is a variable issue. We have in some years been quite successful, for instance, with the indigenous programs and in other years we have been quite unsuccessful.

We find that in all sectors of the industry there is still a fairly transitory type of funding that we can do there. The consistency of training, particularly for young indigenous people, is still not great anywhere. It is equally a problem in the building and construction industry. But certainly as we have gone into 2006, where there is more demand and there are more places, we think there are better opportunities now. We are seeing a growth in women and we believe that, going forward, there will be a greater growth in the indigenous side. But it is still a very difficult program to make successful. We make no bones about that.

MRS DUNNE: How does it run? Do you pay people bonuses for taking on girls and indigenous people?

Mr Service: Yes. We provide some additional funding at those levels, not dissimilar to the skills shortage programs.

MRS DUNNE: Are there sign-on bonuses for the trainees?

Mr Service: No, there are not.

MRS DUNNE: Or stick-at-it bonuses for the trainees?

Mr Guy: Not bonuses. We pay them additional funding for training.

MRS DUNNE: It goes to the employer or the RTO.

Mr Guy: It goes to the employer, yes.

MRS DUNNE: Not to the person being trained.

Mr Guy: Yes. No money from the training authority actually goes to the individual. It goes to the RTO or the company that is applying for the funding.

Mr Service: We have capacity to provide extra funding to subsidise the cost of individual training programs. That reduces the costs of the program and also increases the access. It increases the number of places.

THE CHAIR: On page 10 in table 4.1 you talk about promoting the program and getting the message out there. The marketing and promotions budget was \$58,000 in 2002. It seems to have gone up and down a bit over time. Are we not needing to market?

Mr Service: No. We find occasionally that there are a couple of things. We have tried to be involved with all the key groups in the industry on a regular basis. That is that we have said that we want to keep doing the MBA industry awards at a certain level for a certain thing; we would like to do the HIA awards; and we would like to do industry training council awards. We try to get year-on-year arrangements where, each year, we have the first opportunity to be part of certain things so we get some regularity of recognition.

There have been a couple of years when a couple of things we might have done in the year before have not gone forward. We have had a couple of changes in terms of the levels of some events and promotions we have done. It has certainly grown, if you like, from \$58,000 to the \$70,000 to \$80,000 range. There has probably been a bit of growth in recognition.

With the fact that the authority is now better recognised, we have a few more opportunities. We have always said to ourselves that really the \$79,000 to \$90,000 per annum range is about the right level for us with the size of our budget and the size of our coverage. It changes with a number of things that are brought to us. We are pretty blunt about the levels we do. We have adopted a policy at the authority that we fund most of the five key industry group awards nights. We fund them at exactly the same level. We do not have any favouritism. We fund everybody the same way. We have tried to do that across all the things we do so no-one can ever say to us, "You gave them more," or, "You gave us less." We think it is very important to keep the consistency there. The recognition value has been very good.

Mr Barr: It is particularly pleasing that the authority has been able to support events such as Floriade as well. You will see in the middle of page 10 the support of entry level apprentices from CIT working on Floriade. Of course with my tourism minister hat on, I am always very pleased to see such support and encourage it.

Mr Service: Given my long history with tourism, I think it is a very good thing for us to be involved in.

MRS DUNNE: Going back a page to the existing workers in professional development training, in reading that, my feeling is that it is about improving the skill level of people who are already in the industry. Is there any component of retraining for people who might be in industries that are redundant? It is a bit hard in the ACT with 2.7 per cent unemployment. I suppose there are not that many unskilled people or people who have redundant skills who are looking for retraining, but is that part of the vision?

Mr Service: It is probably the smallest part at the moment. The largest part is clearly occupational health and safety, and safety on building sites, basically. Heightsafe and the various access arrangements for people to have a sufficient knowledge of safety procedures and their own obligations on sites is probably the biggest single part of the program. In the last three years we have had a developing demand for the professional development site. That tends to be more at the academic level.

It is probably not at a level yet where I think it is enough, but the vast majority of this is about occupational health and safety on sites, people having sufficient access and us

making sure that we fund enough. We agree very early on in each year to fund enough places so that anybody who wants to go and do an occupational health and safety course can do it, knowing that the places are there and the funding is available. We have never really placed a limit on that.

MRS DUNNE: Who would be the principal providers of OH&S? Is it still the just RTOs and the group training schemes?

Mr Service: Yes.

Mr Guy: They are OH&S the RTOs, MBA, HIA, CITEA, CSI, Heightsafe, the Electro Group and CIT. CIT do not do a lot in the OH&S area, but they do a lot in the general construction area. They do rigging, dogging, scaffolding and all those. They run the courses out there. Other RTOs cannot run them because they do not have the facilities. Where CIT picks up, that is where they have a facility available. They can use that facility out there. We fund CIT in training areas as well.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Guy, you mentioned Heightsafe. Heightsafe is not a course.

Mr Guy: Fall prevention. The course is fall prevention. Heightsafe is a company that provides the training through the Electro Group Training company.

MRS DUNNE: Getting back to the question, Mr Service, do you see that there is a role for the authority to get into the market of reskilling people, as part of addressing the shortages?

Mr Service: I think we are in there. I think the difficulty with the shortages is not reskilling. It is simply a body count, if I can describe it that way. There are not enough people to do the work. In my own business, I have been looking at something for somebody where the construction price is not a reflection of the fact that they are fantastic builders, it is simply a reflection of the cost of getting resources.

We are seeing very great numbers of people coming into town arriving Monday and leaving Friday—or leaving Saturday, because most of these sites are trying to work six days a week. We will need to see, in some senses, some change in the employment cycle where there are people who physically want retraining or have the time, or we in fact have the resources—that is, the people—to fill the places.

MRS DUNNE: You are saying there is no demand, particularly for—

Mr Service: I think there is a limit at the moment, simply as a result of the enormous volume of work. It may change. I am probably a bit of a merchant of doom. The industry at the moment is fantastic, but I do not think we can continue with this volume beyond perhaps the next two years. We will see a downturn at some time. Maybe it will be a bit longer than two years because the federal government still has a reasonably substantial demand, or reported demand, for additional public servants. We will see a change in the cycle eventually. In some senses, that is why the authority maintains a very substantial reserve account. A lot of the programs we have put in place have quite long periods of implementation.

We do not want to be in a position where there is a downturn—when there is a downturn there will be a downturn in our receipts—for us not to be able to continue those programs when in fact they will be of most importance to an industry that is in a weaker position than perhaps it is now. I look at the demand for the professional development and the changes in skilling. I think the demand for those grows when the industry is weaker than when it is very strong.

MRS DUNNE: Can I go back and clarify. You said before that your policy was to spend as much as you earned, but then you said you have substantial reserves.

Mr Service: The board implemented a policy the day it was created that, while ever the authority was in existence, it would create and maintain a reserve—that has been created since day one—so the authority could fund all of its programs and its operations for a period of not less than six months in the event of an industry catastrophe. Let us say we had an industry-wide strike for three, four or five months. The authority would have absolutely no income, but it would still have, and would still want to have, ongoing obligations to continue the training. So we have a reserve policy which maintains us for at least six months.

The balance of the funds that we keep as unspent we can only spend to demand. When the demand does not require all of our funds, we do one of two things. We look for opportunities to continue to invest that money in training—we hold it so we can look at opportunities to either fund greater opportunities like some additional places in skills shortage areas; or we can look at opportunities to increase funding for individual apprentices. We can only spend what people ask us for, but we have a goal to spend everything.

MRS DUNNE: Up to the reserve. I think I have a more perfect understanding of the authority now.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Service and Mr Guy.

The committee adjourned at 5.03 pm.