



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2005-2006)

Members:

MS K MACDONALD (The Chair)
DR D FOSKEY (The Deputy Chair)
MR R MULCAHY
MS M PORTER
MR Z SESELJA

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 27 MAY 2005

Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Leyne (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 which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

The committee met at 9.33 am.

Appearances:

Ms Katy Gallagher, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations

Department of Education and Training

Dr Michele Bruniges, Chief Executive

Ms Julie McKinnon, Deputy Chief Executive

Mr Craig Curry, Executive Director, Education and Training Network

Ms Anne Thomas, Executive Director, People, Information and Resources Network

Mr Rob Donnelly, Director, Budget and Facilities Branch

Mr Michael Bateman, Director, Human Resources

Ms Beverley Forner, Chief Information Officer

Ms Megan Douglas, Director, Strategic Policy and Planning

Ms Anne Houghton, Director, Training and Adult Education

Ms Fiona McGregor, Acting Director, Student Services and Equity

Ms Helen Strauch, Director, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Ms Carol Harris, Director, Schools, Southern Canberra

Ms Joanne Howard, Director, Schools, Central Canberra

Mr Wayne Chandler, Director, Schools, Northern Canberra

Canberra Institute of Technology

Mr Peter Veenker, Chief Executive Officer

Mr Peter Kowald, Acting General Manager, Corporate Services

THE CHAIR: Good morning, minister, officials. I will read the card that must be read. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false and misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. I think I am speeding up with reading that. I hope everybody is hearing me when I read it. By the end of the 2½ weeks it will be a blur; people won't be able to hear it.

I should also say: can each witness, on coming to the table, state their name and the capacity in which they are appearing. Officials will also note that there are name plaques on the side table. If they can bring their own plaque with them when they come to the table, it would assist the secretary greatly.

Please clearly identify when you are taking a question on notice. It is then your responsibility to check the transcript and respond to the question. Responses to questions taken on notice are required within five full working days. The transcript will be emailed to the minister and the departmental contact officer for distribution to witnesses as soon as it is available.

Proceedings are being broadcast to specified government offices, and the media may be

recording proceedings and taking visual footage. Can all witnesses and member please ensure that their mobile phones are not used in this room. Of course Mr Seselja has an exemption in case his wife goes into labour, which we are hoping she doesn't.

We will follow the order set out in the detailed daily program. As chair, I will try to ensure that we adhere to time frames. Can I remind members and witnesses that we have limited time. Please refrain from entering into argument or debate. Minister Gallagher is very good in that regard; she is very calm. I would also check whether there are any areas that people don't have questions in. Sorry, you have all got to stay. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Gallagher: Thank you, chair, and I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today. I have been listening, in and out, to the committee's deliberations over the past fortnight. I certainly have been keen to appear before you. I hope the committee is not too fatigued because we are certainly ready, willing and able to discuss all matters relating to education and training.

For the information of the committee, since coming to office in 2001, the Stanhope government has increased funding to education by \$94 million, or around 27 per cent. We have dealt with several issues in education, including recognising the importance of the role that teachers play in delivering education. We have had a huge project on the renewal of our curriculum, to make sure that schools remain relevant and challenging for the students in them. We have, as a government, prioritised education through each budget process. This year is no exception.

We have initiatives this year totalling \$27.6 million over four years. These priorities include \$8 million over four years to increase the provision of preschool education from 10½ hours a week to 12 hours a week. We have increased our funding for students with a disability. We have increased money going into training. We have increased, by about \$8.3 million, the money going into making sure our school facilities, our school infrastructure, can meet the requirements to provide good education within them.

Also there were a number of education initiatives in the second appropriation relating to student support funds, early childhood support, money for the non-government sector, some funding for interactive whiteboard technology in schools—again, all meeting our goals under the social plan and making sure that our education system remains in the number one position across the country.

Our students do very well in every testing regime that we have, that is, both national and international. Our students are performing well above national benchmarks and are certainly in the top 10 performing students around the world. We are very pleased with that. Of course there are areas where we know there can be improvement and we are focusing on those areas. We still have indigenous students not achieving to the level that we would like them to achieve. Whilst our students overall do very well, certainly 95 per cent achieve the benchmark in most areas, there are still some children who aren't achieving the benchmark. They remain a focus for the department.

I am happy to take questions. It is probably more beneficial if we move straight into questions. We have officials here. Michele Bruniges, the new chief executive, although not so new anymore, is appearing at her first estimates. All the department officials are

ready to take your questions.

Just in conclusion: for the benefit of the CIT, it would be great to get an indication of when they might be on, even if it is roughly—after afternoon tea or something—so that I can let officials there know when they need to turn up.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I did have a look. There are numerous output classes in government education. Do you want to do vocational education and training together with CIT? Would that be of assistance?

Ms Gallagher: We can do that, yes.

THE CHAIR: It would definitely not be till at least after lunch. I will have a closer look. We will get a bit of an idea as the morning progresses as to how fast we are going through things and whether or not we can get to it by the beginning of proceedings after lunch or whether or not we have to wait till after afternoon tea. But we will probably be able to get to it by the cessation of lunch.

I have a number of questions. I am happy to pass over to Dr Foskey to ask a few questions to start off with, while I get my head together.

DR FOSKEY: I note there are section overview statements and capital works listed first, but I don't have any questions in that category. If you want to stick with it, okay, but I am happy to move on to government schools.

MR SESELJA: If we are going to get into overviews, I have some questions.

THE CHAIR: There will be some overview and capital works questions. Mr Mulcahy has some questions.

MR MULCAHY: The reference is budget paper 4, page 396. There is provision for savings under the 2005-06 technical adjustments. They are described as a reduction in government funded superannuation. I am just wondering what is the basis of these savings, which amount to about \$7 million a year for the next five years.

Ms Gallagher: I will hand over to Rob Donnelly to answer that question.

Mr Donnelly: The savings reflected in that line relate to changes in the actuarial area of estimates provided by Treasury for superannuation liabilities of the department. Treasury's actuary each year goes through and updates the expected amount of superannuation required by each department. Last year they estimated effectively \$7 million too much.

MR MULCAHY: Do you know why that has happened?

Mr Donnelly: The Department of Education and Training profile of our workforce can change over time. The superannuation liabilities reflected by that will depend on, at any point in time, a mix of CSS versus PSS members, casuals versus permanents and the like. While I haven't dealt with the detail of the actuary's calculations, I would assume that it has something to do with that.

MR MULCAHY: If it was related to PSS changes, they are identified in the outyears as well. That probably wouldn't explain all of that, I guess, would it?

Mr Donelly: The estimate, in effect, if you have a look at it, is roughly \$7 million in each year. In effect, it is the same adjustment coming off in every year so that we start with a base amount for each year, which is built into last year's budget estimates. This adjustment, effectively, removes \$7 million, in round terms, from each year as a result of a revision to those estimates.

MR MULCAHY: We would take it as a matter of fact that Treasury has approved that incorporation because I haven't seen reflected in any other agency the savings in superannuation expressed like this.

Mr Donelly: Again, without having a detailed knowledge of every other agency's budget estimates, I am unaware of any other agency that has been in that situation.

MR MULCAHY: But they have had others surely who have experienced savings as a result of actuarial forecasting?

Mr Donelly: Presumably, and again without detailed knowledge of other agency estimates, the Treasury actuary goes through this process with all agencies each year and presumably some other agencies could be expected to have had changes to their superannuation profile.

MR MULCAHY: They just don't have your accounting skills, obviously. I gather you have offset all this more or less with wage increases; they have been applied against the savings?

Mr Donelly: The savings there represent the net impact of the change in superannuation after the actuarial adjustments are offset by any increases in superannuation due to wage increases, yes.

MR MULCAHY: It says here, in your budget notes 406, the savings have been offset by wage increases for teaching and non-teaching staff, amongst other things, of about \$3 million. That is all on that issue, chair.

MR SESELJA: I have been asking all departments this: what is the net position of jobs in relation to this budget? How many jobs are likely to be lost? If so, what will be the breakdown in terms of redundancies and natural attrition? In which areas are the job losses likely to come.

Ms Gallagher: I will get Michele to answer the detail of that. But I should say that the general savings being applied to education is \$2.8 million. The decision was taken to exempt school education from those savings; so our target is smaller than other agencies have been asked to find. That was to make sure that there would be no impact on schools and savings would be found from within the central office administration.

Dr Bruniges: The savings represent, for us, less than one per cent of the operating budget, to just put it in context there. As part of beginning that process, I have been

working with the executive directors and the directors to map out, across the organisation, our existing organisational structures and have a close look at the funding source for each one of those positions that we have. There is a combination of commonwealth funded positions and commonwealth-state. There are positions that look at direct service delivery to schools. What we have done is have a look at that.

Our first line of conversation has been identifying current vacancies and assessing the consequences of the impact of not filling that vacancy and making sure that we keep service delivery to schools. We are looking at areas where we have contract staff coming to conclusion at the end of this financial year and whether or not it is necessary to continue that. We are also looking for opportunities where we can work more efficiently in areas so that we do not have duplication. Each area is looking at that. We anticipate probably between 20 and 25 staff to meet that target and then having a look at how we go in terms of achieving the overall target.

MR SESELJA: There is no idea at this stage how many of those 20 to 25 will be redundancies and how many will come through natural attrition?

Dr Bruniges: No. At this stage there is no member of staff who has been formally identified as falling into that pool of potentially excess to requirements.

MR SESELJA: Clive Haggart from the Australian Education Union appeared before the committee earlier this week and expressed the view, I think, that departmental resources were fairly stretched already. How do you think these cuts will affect service delivery?

Dr Bruniges: The cuts that we are looking at will not affect service delivery to schools. The way in which I am looking at it, and then I will ask the senior executive team to look at that, is indeed to look at where we get synergies between groups of people and we can become more efficient in what we are doing. One of those areas, for example, that we have targeted looking at is having one centralised finance area rather than a whole lot of units out in different directorates—centralising that, having a look to make sure that we become better at service delivery, not worse.

THE CHAIR: This is usually the point at which I do my follow-on question, minister and Dr Bruniges. You should not take it personally because I am doing it to all of the government agencies, where applicable. This is only applicable to the departmental area, not to the school education area, because it relates to part-time work and the possibility of offering part-time work as a way of reducing the amount of expenditure that the department has to pay out but, more importantly, in my opinion, working towards providing work-life balance in terms of family friendly hours, especially for parents of young children—not just women, but men—who may be looking towards wanting to have more time with their young children while they are at that age where it would be good to have a parent at home an extra day a week, if possible.

The other thing that I have been saying about it is that there is a tendency within, I think, all government services around the country, not just this one, to offer positions on a full-time basis, not to advertise them so much on a part-time basis. Parents who might be looking to go back into the workplace on a part-time basis cannot necessarily see the jobs there. I was wondering whether you had a position on that and a comment to make about that.

Dr Bruniges: Probably a comment: thinking about the range of duties and functions that relate to the nature of the work, it certainly wouldn't preclude part-time opportunities for staff to achieve that life/time balance. In fact, I have noticed, since coming to the territory, the sense within the organisation of the importance of holding well-being for staff, getting the distribution of work to areas and the support from one area to another, ensuring that people do achieve that balance. I think that is a strategy that we could include as we look forward. I don't know the details but I think we would have some staff in that category already.

Ms Gallagher: I should say, just to add to that: we are going to be very sensible as we go through trying to achieve these savings. Where job losses can be avoided, we will be avoiding them. In the first instance, as Michele said, we are looking at positions that are vacant and that can be fitted in to other workloads; we are looking at priorities within the department. There is a whole range of things. The idea is to minimise any pain and job loss absolutely. If part-time work were one of the ways of doing that, then we would look at that.

MS PORTER: Minister, there have been recent media statements concerning voluntary contributions and other payments made by parents to schools. I noticed just recently in the media, in the *Canberra Times* and the evening news this week, that the issue seems to have been fixed and sorted out. How is that going? What is the current situation ?

Ms Gallagher: I would be reluctant to say any issue is fixed. It is going along smoothly at the moment. You are right. At the beginning of this year, the P&C came out with some fairly strong evidence that certain schools within our system were probably, to be polite, not being as upfront about the nature of financial contributions being sought. This came after—I think that department officials will agree with me—several requests from us to be clear about the nature of contributions, that they should be voluntary. I think it was clear that, despite those warnings, despite those requests, a number of schools still weren't following that advice.

Certainly much stronger action needed to be taken. That action has been taken. The form of words that has to be used in their letters home to parents is very clear now to schools. It needs explicitly to say that these funds are voluntary and that your child, should you not be able to pay these, will not be excluded from activities within the school.

Having said that, we did have an issue. I guess it touches mainly on extra activities or the add-ons. I might let Michele get into the words of it because she has done a lot of the work with the committee that was put together to deal with this. Overseas trips, for example, did they constitute free education? That is an issue for us.

We do rely very much on parents' willingness to provide us with a contribution towards their child's education. It is very important—at the school level—that those moneys stay within the school, to be used on things that the school prioritises. Unfortunately, every time this issue comes up, we see a reduction in the amount of voluntary contributions. I think it is fair to say that we have seen it this year so far. We will wait for the whole year to see what happens. It was very important that we had all stakeholders together, in agreement and working out exactly what free education means.

On the flipside, the government needs to look at ways to support schools to enable them to meet the costs of those children or young people that might not be able to pay. We did that through the second appropriation, in providing additional funds to the student support funds which, last year, we had asked the schools to establish. The schools had established those support funds and had put some of their own money into them. The second appropriation meant that we could provide them with some extra money for those funds. I will hand over to Michele who has done the finer detail of the work.

Dr Bruniges: I think one of the important things is to recognise that there are two issues. One is about schools, as the minister said, not declaring that the contributions need to be voluntary; we needed to be explicit about the fact that they were voluntary. Then there is another pool of activities and optional enrichment activities that seem to confuse some of the debate that broke at the beginning of the year.

In consultation—and we established a working group with the AEU, the parents, the principals and departmental officers—we worked towards compiling a statement that addressed those two issues: firstly, the fact that we should clearly articulate our expectations of schools about seeking voluntary contributions and financial assistance; and, secondly, to sit down and really have a talk based on evidence of what those groups knew about the nature and types of activities that were clearly beyond what would normally be expected to be delivered or accessed through the normal school. The last piece of correspondence that I have sent to schools covers both those issues and sets out a list of things such as international excursions, memorabilia and the hire and lease of equipment that we feel are optional enrichment activities that, in fact, we would expect parents to be able to fund.

The important issue there is that it doesn't impact on what students do each day in the classroom but, clearly, it relates to optional enrichment activities that we expect would go beyond what students normally access. That was agreed to by all of the groups as we went forward. From anecdotes and emails that I have received from schools, that advice has been well received. It has indeed helped clarify the situation and the discussion that was there at the beginning of the school year this year.

MS PORTER: Thank you. Could you enlarge a little about this fund you were talking about? The government is contributing to this fund. Is that for normal kinds of activities or these enrichment activities? I am not quite sure.

Ms Gallagher: If a student turns up at school and says, "I'd like to do this but I can't afford to pay," then it will be up to the school, primarily the principal, in consultation with the teachers, to work out a way to facilitate that. The goal is to make sure that everyone can do everything they want at school.

For schools where we know that the SES data supports the idea that there are lower income families, we already have the school equity fund, which we doubled, last year maybe or the year before, to about \$300,000. That fund goes to 16 schools. It was probably one of your initiatives, Mr Stefaniak. Because it is so successful, we doubled that fund. It goes to 16 schools. It is based on their SES data. Grants can range from \$8,000 or \$9,000 right up to \$30,000, depending on that data. That already exists in 16 of what we would say were our most disadvantage populations around those schools. This is in addition to that.

Again, it goes to every school. The component going to the schools will be 75 per cent, based on their enrolments. They will get a payment per student, and 25 per cent will be based on that SES data. You might have a small school but, because of their low SES data, they will get an additional amount of money. On average, it was around \$5,000 per school. But the way it has been put out fluctuates slightly.

I think it was \$250,000 in the second approp, rising to \$500,000 a year over our 100 schools. You can see the average there. That was responding to schools that we had asked to set up these funds last year, at the beginning of the school year, and that was responding to schools saying that they didn't have a great deal of discretionary money to put into these. This was to help that out. But it is in various capacities within schools to bolster that fund, should they need to.

DR FOSKEY: Correct me if I am wrong, but I thought that the government promised a great deal more for these student support funds. Would I be right? \$12 million?

Ms Gallagher: No. I don't have my election policy here, but it was certainly nowhere near \$12 million. We had high school student support teams that were around, I think, that area. That was around \$11 million. They weren't funded in this year's budget.

DR FOSKEY: You are not sure how much was actually promised in the election?

Ms Gallagher: I am just trying to recall the election document. I think it was half a million a year, \$2 million over four years.

MR MULCAHY: Minister, in relation to the core fees—I think voluntary contributions is the correct term.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MR MULCAHY: Notwithstanding there are people in disadvantaged groups and so on, what percentage of student families simply don't make a contribution or refuse to, for whatever reason? Do you have that data?

Ms Gallagher: We will see if we can get that figure. My understanding is that it is around \$3 million a year. But a component of that is excursion money. It is not just the \$50 that is sought through—I think it is \$50 a term—the voluntary contribution. I will ask Ms Anne Thomas.

Ms Thomas: Mr Mulcahy, we don't actually keep track of that information simply because they are voluntary contributions. So the number of students is not a set of figures that we keep, or that schools keep for that matter.

MR MULCAHY: Really? They don't have an idea who chooses not to pay?

Ms Thomas: They would from year to year but it is not the sort of—

MR MULCAHY: Not centrally collated?

Ms Thomas: No.

MR MULCAHY: I thought it would be useful information.

Ms Thomas: We certainly know how much is given in voluntary contributions in monetary terms but not the number of students who do or do not contribute.

Ms Gallagher: Some pay what is requested by the schools. Some pay more; some pay less. So it is not a matter of dividing the income. You could get an average per student if you wanted to do it by doing that but it doesn't give you an indication of what each school is getting.

MR STEFANIAK: I heard you mention a new fund. When was that established? Was that from that last appropriation and just how much is in that new fund?

Ms Gallagher: The funds were established before the money went in. We asked schools to establish a fund I think at the beginning of last year. I think Ms Dundas pointed out that there were parents who were saying they were missing out on things. So we asked the schools to establish this and to let parents know so that people understood that they could go and ask for a bit of assistance if they needed it. I guess our election promise was to support that at the school level by putting in this money. It is just over \$2 million over four years. There was \$250,000 in the second appropriation, and then \$500,000 every year.

MR STEFANIAK: So you put in \$200,000 for this financial year and there will be some extra money, another \$300,000, for the rest of the school year, I take it? So, in other words, for 2005 there should be half a million going in. Is that correct?

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MR STEFANIAK: And half a million thereafter. Good. How will that be divvied up between the schools?

Ms Gallagher: As I was just saying to Ms Porter, 75 per cent is on their enrolment data, so per capita and 25 per cent on the ABS, SES data.

MR STEFANIAK: Thanks. I have a final question. Voluntary contributions are always a vexed question, and I note the figure of \$3 million. What is the situation these days in other states? Do other states have a similar system to us?

Ms Gallagher: Well, I can't speak for all of the states.

MR STEFANIAK: Perhaps if you take that on notice.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I might take that on notice. I certainly know about New South Wales. I was talking to the New South Wales minister and they have voluntary contributions there. But we can take it on notice and have a look around the country.

MR SESELJA: I have a general question.

THE CHAIR: Just before we get to that, for the clarification of the minister and her officials—and I apologise of calling Dr Bruniges “Ms Bruniges”—we inadvertently left output class 4, early intervention, off our program. So what I am looking at doing is dealing with output class 1, output class 2 and output class 4 before we deal with vocational education and training and CIT as a block.

MR SESELJA: Minister, in BP4, page 404, under the heading “Notes to the Budget Statements”, we see that there has been an increase of just under \$30 million on the 2004-05 estimated outcome. Of this just over \$26 million relates to wage increases for the teachers’ enterprise bargaining agreement. Is there a reason why this figure was not budgeted for?

Mr Donelly: That figure is the result of the enterprise bargaining agreement that was struck, if memory serves me, in September of 2004. The funds for that were provided in the second appropriation of this year and the variations, which are explained in the notes to the financial statements, reflect the variations that were approved in that second appropriation bill.

MR SESELJA: Yes. But is there a reason? You would have known that there would have been enterprise bargaining agreements struck some time during the year. Was that struck earlier than expected or later than expected? Would you not have been able to foresee at the beginning of the financial year or when the budget was originally done that there would be pay increases that would have to be paid for?

Mr Donelly: These notes to the financial statements do not necessarily reflect the incremental amounts of changes to the budgets in the out year. They simply reflect the difference between the amount that was provided in 2004-05 and the amount that will be provided in 2005-06. So from looking at these notes you could not tell whether an amount was budgeted in an earlier budget. You are merely saying that the amount provided in 2005-06 is an amount higher than the amount provided in the previous year.

MR SESELJA: The note on page 404 seems to be saying—and I might be reading it wrongly:

government payments for outputs:

the increase of \$29.954m in the 2004-05 estimated outcome from the original budget mainly relates to:

It goes on to refer to wage increases of \$26 million. That does not seem to be referring to the 2005-06 budget; it is referring to the estimated outcome from the original.

Mr Donelly: You are correct, yes. That amount is the amount that was provided in the second appropriation and—I am just trying to refresh my memory; it has been a while since we dealt with the second appropriation—

Ms Thomas: Mr Seselja, I think the point is that at the time that the 2004-05 budget came down we were still in the process of negotiating the enterprise bargaining agreement and at that stage we really could not have sensibly foreshadowed what the increase was likely to be. That was still in a process of negotiation. So you would be

unlikely to be publishing an amount in the 2004-05 budget foreshadowing what was likely to flow.

MR SESELJA: You would not necessarily publish the exact amount but departments normally take account of wage increases in their budgeting, don't they? So it seems odd that that would not have been factored in when you knew there was going to be a wage increase during the year.

Ms Gallagher: Well, there was a component factored in. This is the difference between what was factored in and what was actually negotiated in the end.

MR SESELJA: So it ended up being well over what was expected?

Ms Gallagher: It was more than we had made provision for. Mr Seselja, you were not here at the time but we were in a position where New South Wales was bargaining at the same time and there was a strong desire by the AEU not to conclude discussions on negotiations until the New South Wales claim had been handed down. Despite our efforts to speed up that process and to have it resolved within what would have been that budget period, that was not the way the negotiations were being handled from one of the sides.

I think the length of that dispute and the nature of how we resolved it in the end is on the public record. In the end we had to be competitive with New South Wales. New South Wales got much more significant increases than I think any of us had expected through a yearlong case in their industrial relations commission and it is simply not feasible for us to not be competitive with those rates. That figure just merely explains the reason why that money needed to be provided in the second appropriation.

MR SESELJA: I make the point that it is a pretty significant increase on the estimate.

Ms Gallagher: We have a lot of teachers. It is a large work force.

MR SESELJA: Yes, I understand that. Obviously the teachers negotiated very well.

Ms Gallagher: I think we all negotiated very well in the interests of education in the territory.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I draw your attention to budget paper 3, page 226, under Department of Education and Training, capital upgrades. I want to inquire about a couple of areas. The first one is the specialist teaching area improvements, to which \$2.3 million is being allocated. Could you give an outline as to what that will include and where that \$2.3 million will be going.

Ms Thomas: I will answer that question. The specialist teaching area improvements program is a program that we normally run each year. It enables us to upgrade specialist teaching areas, such as science laboratories, technology areas, computing areas, arts areas—areas of that kind usually in secondary schools but sometimes in K to 10 schools, for example. It is used for that purpose and we make an allocation as part of our capital upgrades program for that each year.

THE CHAIR: So how do you determine who will get money out of that particular allocation?

Ms Thomas: It is part of our asset management plan and we do that on the basis of schools making an application for us to look at their particular area; on the basis of the age of the school, so normally you would not be upgrading a relatively new school; and also on the basis of the assessments that we gather as part of our routine rolling condition audit program. We have a three-year condition audit program that looks at every single school. So we gather information and schools also will put in a bid as part of our annual asset management planning process. Those final decisions are taken by the school resources group within the department.

THE CHAIR: Is there a queue for allocation of those funds?

Ms Thomas: I think there would always be a queue.

Mr Donnelly: There is always more demand for funds than funds available. I think we could say that even if we faced a 20-fold increase in funds, that would still remain the case.

THE CHAIR: Demand always exceeds supply. Also under that particular area there is \$1.3 million support for disabled persons. What will that be allocated to and is that worked out on a similar basis?

Ms Thomas: It is worked out on a similar basis. The kinds of things that that program enables us to do is to fit schools with ramps, with hand rails, with disabled toilets where that is necessary and from time to time with lifts if there is a need for supporting a particular disabled student or students in schools. Again, it is an annual allocation that we can use to support the needs of students with disabilities and it is done essentially on a needs basis.

THE CHAIR: Just before I go to Ms Porter on that area, I think it has been said that the ACT has the oldest school stock in the country. Is that right?

Ms Gallagher: I don't know whether that is right but we certainly have an ageing stock. I cannot imagine that we have the oldest stock—we are such a young city. But our stock is ageing, there is no doubt about that.

THE CHAIR: So do you have any comparisons?

Ms Thomas: Not with other jurisdictions, Ms MacDonald, but we know that the average age of our school buildings is now over 30 years old, so it is an ageing stock, as the minister said. But I cannot imagine it would be the oldest, if you think about the number of schools that were built in New South Wales and Victoria very early last century. We don't have any of that kind.

THE CHAIR: I am confusing that with a statement another minister made a few days ago.

Ms Gallagher: It is all right; we forgive you. You have been stuck in this room for

a long time, Ms MacDonald.

THE CHAIR: Yes, it has been a long couple of weeks. There are still another four days. Would it be possible to get a breakdown of the age of the stock—the percentage of ages in, say, five to 10 years, 10 plus years?

Ms Gallagher: We have all that information. That is fine.

Ms Thomas: Yes, we will take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: I think it would be interesting to have a look at that. Thank you, Ms Thomas. Ms Porter has a supplementary.

MS PORTER: Yes, in the area of disability. You mentioned that assistance for children with disabilities was mainly in the area of ramps and those kinds of things. I was interested to know whether the \$4 million that is allocated to the SCAN program is a different amount.

Ms Gallagher: Yes.

MS PORTER: Could you talk a little bit about that program, please.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. Craig might want to talk through that but that \$4 million allocation is in addition to the \$4 million we appropriated in the previous budget to meet the increasing needs of students with a disability in the government system. We have just over 1,600 students with a disability in our government schools. We have seen significant increases. I think this year alone there has been an additional 70-odd students join our schools with special needs since the census. The complexity of those students' needs is also increasing.

This money has been appropriated to make sure not only that these students are cared for and safe in their school environment but that they engage in an education, and this is in recognition of that. I think our total appropriation for special education is getting near \$40 million a year. Do you want to add to that, Craig?

Mr Curry: Would you like me to talk a bit about the SCAN process and how it operates?

MS PORTER: Yes, thank you. For the benefit of Hansard you will probably need to tell us what SCAN stands for.

Mr Curry: Certainly. SCAN is an acronym for student centred appraisal of need. It was a process we developed in the ACT during 2003 and implemented fully in 2004 because we felt we needed a much more objective way of looking at the educational support needs of students with disabilities in their school setting and how we would have a consistent approach to resourcing those students.

The SCAN process allows us to look at the access and participation needs of students. We look at their communication, their mobility issues, their safety issues and their literacy and numeracy issues. We can look at it in a very objective way in consultation

with the parents and the schools. It is a moderated process and it takes some time but we want a consensus at the SCAN meetings that everyone is comfortable with the profile that will be developed for that student. Then from that profile we put the student into one of 14 resourcing bands, and that level of resourcing then goes to the school. If it is a mainstream school it is additional staffing points for the school to look at best meeting the needs of the student. If it is a special school, it is the way we resource the special school.

The SCAN process forms, I guess, a support needs profile for the student. From that we can then develop the student's individual learning plan and the goals of the student, and then at the annual review meeting we can look at the outcomes for that student and whether any further resourcing is needed.

It has been a very successful program. We have a review process for schools. If they believe that there was not enough resourcing coming through, we have an appeal process for parents. From memory, we have had only one parent appeal this year. So it has been a very successful process.

MS PORTER: Thank you. Ms Gallagher, I have another question on that subject. I recall during the election campaign that there was considerable discussion about this area of funding for non-government schools. What was the outcome of those discussions?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, this was an issue during the election campaign, where the non-government sector lobbied very strongly for increased resourcing for students with a disability within their sector. Outside that process, before that campaign kicked off, the non-government sector had agreed to undergo the same process for students in their schools, and that was for the first time going to give us an indication of the numbers of students with a disability within the non-government sector and also their resource level or their level of need.

From my point of view as the minister it was for the first time going to give me information on how many students there were and what their level of need was, and that information was going to be very useful. In the campaign, the Labor Party's position was that if it was shown once we finished SCAN that the ACT government was not meeting their funding responsibilities, we would increase the level of support going to those schools. I was very clear on that. It was an unpopular line to run, I have to say, but that was the commitment from the Labor Party.

We have finished the SCAN process now. The results of it are that there are fewer students with a disability in the non-government sector than we previously thought, and that we have an accurate level of the picture of need or the level of need required. What that information showed us—and we give around \$800,000 a year in addition to the per capita grants for students with a disability in the non-government sector—was that the ACT government is meeting around 30 per cent, just under 30 per cent, of the costs of educating a student with a disability in the non-government sector.

What that tells me is that the ACT government is meeting its responsibilities. To accept that argument you have to accept that the ACT government is a minor funding partner of the non-government system—which we are—and the commonwealth acknowledges that.

What that shows me is that we are meeting our responsibilities. On the data available to us it showed that we are actually exceeding our responsibilities by around \$100,000 a year going into the non-government schools.

What I said publicly—I must say that the Catholic Education Office and the AIS have not come to see me about this; they have been given this information—when the *Canberra Times* asked me was that I would not be seeking to remove that money from the non-government system. We will look at ways where we can split that money across that system in a fairer way than where it is going at the moment, and I will take that decision in consultation with the CEO in the AIS.

It has been a very useful process and I think the results demonstrate that we are meeting our responsibilities. If there is a funding shortfall in the non-government system, it is at the commonwealth level, and the stakeholders within the non-government system—and I am happy to support their claim—need to lobby the commonwealth for additional funds if that is what they think they need.

THE CHAIR: I understand that Mr Seselja and Dr Foskey have supplementaries to this.

MR SESELJA: I think most of it has probably been covered but I am just trying to understand the position. In relation to non-government disability funding, you are saying that you are overfunding it but you are not going to knock that funding off; you are going to continue to overfund it, as you say, for the time being? Are you saying to the committee that you are basically washing your hands of any additional support for students with disabilities in non-government schools? You seem to be saying, “It is a commonwealth responsibility so we will give it to them.”

I certainly would welcome the \$4 million of extra support for disabled students in government schools but there is a significant concern that there is still a significant shortfall now. You are the minister here and I understand there are split responsibilities, but don't you have a concern that these students are being short-changed? Whether they are in the government sector or the non-government sector, if they are being short-changed, wouldn't you have a concern about that?

Ms Gallagher: As I said, I will support a claim from the CEO and the AIS for additional funds from the commonwealth but we have to accept the funding framework we are in. Whatever position you take on this, the commonwealth government provides the majority of funds to the non-government sector. The commonwealth is quite up front about this and they say to us, “You look after the government system: we are the major funding partner of the non-government system.” We provide an extra around \$2,500 per child with a disability on average on top of their per capita grant going into the non-government system.

MR SESELJA: What is it in the government system?

Ms Gallagher: It depends what setting you are in—whether you are in a mainstream learning support centre, whether you are in a learning support unit or whether you are in a special school, and that varies. We have data now, Mr Seselja, that shows that the level of need in the government system by far exceeds the level of need in the non-government system in relation to the specific support needs of those children.

MR SESELJA: So your position is that the kids in the non-government schools are doing just fine?

Ms Gallagher: Mr Seselja, I am trying to answer the original question you asked and I am happy to take more questions from you. But what I am saying is that from the information we have our public funds are funding 30 per cent of the education and the support needs of those students. That is meeting our responsibilities—I have no doubt about it.

I worked in the disability sector for a number of years. I have worked with students with disabilities; I have worked as an integration officer with children going from childcare into education settings. I would argue that I, more than most, would want to make sure that we are doing the right thing by these kids. My conscience is clear. We are doing the right thing and we are meeting our funding responsibilities.

Where we have seen that there is excess money because the number of students has declined in the non-government system, I am saying we will not be taking that money out. I don't think it is fair to say, "Well, it is over \$100,000. We will withdraw that money." But I will be looking at the way it can be spent, and that will be based on every other decision I have made in education, which is about equity and need. The way that I am feeling now—and I want to discuss it with the CEO and the AIS—is to look at ways that we can support any capital upgrades of their buildings, for example, so that money goes into helping them to put a ramp in or something like that to make sure that those areas are being met.

But as I said, we have got the data now. We understand the issues, we understand the level of need, we understand the numbers and I am more than happy to support a claim by those stakeholders to the commonwealth for extra money, if they can argue that case.

MR SESELJA: Are you able to give us the average figure for non-government additional support?

Ms Gallagher: It is in the output classes, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Yes, \$2,500. You might be able to point me to this, then: what is the average figure for the additional funding of disabled students in government schools?

Ms Gallagher: Do you want to point to the page, Rob.

Mr Donnelly: Page 392, Mr Seselja. The very last figure against letter y shows that the total average cost, which includes both the base funding and the additional funding for the fact that students have particular needs in mainstream schools, is \$21,943 in 2005-06. From that figure you would need to deduct the average of \$9,473, \$11,473 and \$13,097—those costs that relate to the mainstream or the standard educational need of each of those students.

MR SESELJA: Does that mean the average additional costs per special school student in special schools? Is this the one we are looking at?

Mr Donnelly: No. You take measure y and subtract from that the average of measures u, v and w. So if you say \$21,000 less on average—

MR SESELJA: It is about \$10,000, is it?

Mr Donnelly: Yes, \$11,000 gives you around \$10,000 of additional need.

MR SESELJA: So it is about \$10,000 compared to about \$2,500? Okay.

Ms Gallagher: It is \$2,500 in addition to the per capita grant that we provide.

DR FOSKEY: I notice that we are now really in the output classes.

THE CHAIR: Well, actually no, we are not.

DR FOSKEY: When we talk about SCAN we are talking about special education.

Ms Gallagher: We will come across it again, Deb. There will be a couple of bites of the cherry.

DR FOSKEY: Well I am just going with the anarchy, okay?

THE CHAIR: You always end up getting things which could be put into the output classes or could be in the general overview.

DR FOSKEY: That is certainly true.

Ms Gallagher: That is all right.

DR FOSKEY: I want to go a bit further into this SCAN mechanism. Whilst I appreciate the extra funding that's there, I want to express some concerns that have been raised with me about this mechanism and ask whether you feel that some attention should be given to it. The process can be demeaning for students and families, since it focuses on deficits rather than strengths. The funds are capped and are often insufficient to fully address individual needs. This has led to failure in some cases, which contributes to the perception that integrating students with a disability doesn't work.

Funds are used at the discretion of principals, which works well in some schools but not in others. Increasingly students with a disability, especially students with particular needs such as autism, are being forced into specialist units and therefore there is decreasing participation in mainstream settings for them. Has any additional funding been allocated to SCAN to address any of these issues? Is there a mechanism for review and adjustment?

Ms Gallagher: I've heard criticism from one parent that there's a focus on disability rather than on ability. This problem is a bit insurmountable in the sense that we have to acknowledge the disability in order to get an idea of the support costs. I've sat through the SCAN process, and it focuses on what the student is able to do; the questions asked acknowledge that. We have to acknowledge that there is a disability there, because the whole idea is about resourcing support needs. Having worked in the disability sector for

a number of years, I have probably had two complaints about SCAN brought to my attention out of over 1,600 students in a year. I think SCAN has been a tremendous success.

I have always felt there is room for enormous disquiet from parents, particularly around whether the situation for their student will change. They are very strong advocates for their kids, and change is always a challenge. I think it is a real credit to the schools and the department that this program has been rolled out successfully. There is a set criterion for the level of funding to fall within 14 bands, and there are allocations of resource levels attached to those. I cannot commend the schools more for the way they support students with a disability in their environments and make sure that those students have access to all the support they require. It's a huge job to make sure that everyone's needs are met in a school environment. I congratulate the schools and the department for the work that's been done here.

The money going into SCAN is to make sure that the additional resourcing which was identified through the SCAN process can be attached, at the school level, to those students. We don't tell parents what their resource level is, and there are good reasons for that. We don't say that their child is worth \$10,000 or \$20,000 and that, if they try really hard to emphasise the support needs, they might get \$30,000 for that disability. That's not the approach that's been taken. The resources go to the school and it's in the school's interests to make sure those resources are passed on to the students in need, to enable those students to fully access their education.

There has been a real change in the way things are done. When I came in as minister the department told me that they needed more money for students with disabilities. When I went through the budget process I was told that the numbers were increasing slightly; that it was indexed, and that there was no data to support the request for extra money. We had nothing to show Treasury that our numbers were increasing and that there was a certain level of need within the system. As that work has now been done, we can confidently go with our data and explain all that. That is why we have an additional \$8 million going into this area.

DR FOSKEY: I understand the need for that seemingly objective data. Only one of those criticisms applied to the SCAN mechanism; the others were more related to the funding allocations. Will there be any evaluation of the impact of SCAN on students' achievements in mainstream education settings? Has the government had a look at models to support students with a disability in Western Australia and New Zealand which are considered to be good practice?

Mr Curry: During the development of the process we looked at a range of methods of resourcing students with disabilities, both within Australia and internationally. I guess our aim was to develop a process that we believed would work for us in the ACT, given that we have students in a range of settings. There is an ongoing evaluation process. We have not, at this point in time, planned a major review. We believe it is a bit early for that, but the review process is ongoing. Every student has a review every year, so we can look at it on an individual basis.

It is very difficult to talk about averages in this area of disability. When we start talking about average funding for one sector versus another it is a very misleading line of

argument because the range of need within disabilities is extreme. A student with an intellectual disability may have quite limited support needs and there may not be a particular amount of need in the classroom, but a student with a similar intellectual disability may have extensive needs. It is really a difficult place to start talking about averages. I would like to go back to one of the points you made earlier about students with autism. I was a bit surprised to hear you say that students with autism were pushed into special schools.

DR FOSKEY: Special units.

Mr Curry: Okay. Our data shows us that there are more students with autism in mainstream programs. Students with autism are in four settings. Some are in special schools; some parents choose autism-specific learning support units; some parents choose generic learning support units and other parents choose mainstream classes. We are operating on a system of choice for parents. After the meeting I'd be happy to follow up any issue where a parent felt they were forced into a particular setting.

MR MULCAHY: Minister, are you aware of your obligations under section 76 of the Education Act? I thought you might have touched on that in the last discussion.

Ms Gallagher: I don't have the act in front of me. Could you explain section 76?

MR MULCAHY: It is related to the requirement on you—and it is in the context of this budget—to meet with the Non-government Schools Education Council prior to each budget.

Ms Gallagher: I don't think there is a requirement to meet; there is a requirement for me to consider the advice of the Non-government Schools Education Council. Yes, I have received letters about that. The Non-government Schools Education Council was appointed on 30 March this year, post the budget being finalised. It existed in another form prior to this act coming into place.

The Ministerial Advisory Committee on Non-government Schooling, or MACNGS, has provided me with advice in the past. There is nothing to stop them providing me with advice but they did not. It is a question of why not. I was a little surprised to be blamed for them not providing me with advice this year. The CEO and the AIS provided submissions to the budget and the government school advisory education council, which is also established under the act, provided me with advice. It is out of my hands. My guess is that they did not do it because the council was not officially formed until 30 March, but I expect it next year.

MR SESELJA: Isn't it up to you to ask?

Ms Gallagher: No, I don't think it is. It is a requirement—

MR SESELJA: In the act it says that the minister must ask for and consider the advice of the Non-government Schools Education Council.

Ms Gallagher: Under the terms of reference, once the council is established, it is its job to do that. My guess is that, because of the timing of the appointments to that council—

the appointments were notified and successful nominees advised in March and April this year—that work was not done prior to the budget. I imagine it will be more than forthcoming next year. As I said, the representatives on that committee did provide advice to the government on budget priorities.

MR MULCAHY: Why did you take nine months from when the laws were passed to carry out your obligation to appoint this council? As I understand the act, these provisions came into being from last June.

Ms Gallagher: No, they didn't. The Education Act commenced on 1 January this year.

MR SESELJA: They were passed in June, weren't they?

Ms Gallagher: I would have to check when they were passed.

MR MULCAHY: By the Assembly.

Ms Gallagher: The act did not commence until January this year.

MR SESELJA: You knew about them well before January?

Ms Gallagher: Nominations were called for in August and the bill was passed in June or July. I would have to check the sitting period. A whole month passed before nominations were called and we went through the process from there. There's no problem here; I'm sure NGSEC will provide me with advice. I presume the reason why that advice was not forthcoming is because of the issue around its establishment this year. I expect it in full next year.

MR STEFANIAK: But you didn't ask, and the act says that you must ask.

THE CHAIR: Order!

Ms Gallagher: The council was not established until 30 March—I think that is when it went through cabinet—and they were notified on 20 April, when the budget had been well and truly put to bed.

MR MULCAHY: Have you taken advice on the legality of not complying with the act, as it requires, from 1 January?

Ms Gallagher: I will be responding to the correspondence. If there is to be some legal action about that, we will—

MR MULCAHY: No. I didn't ask if they were taking legal action. My question was whether you took legal advice.

THE CHAIR: Mr Mulcahy!

MR MULCAHY: I was asking whether the minister took legal advice on her failure to comply with the act as required from 1 January.

Ms Gallagher: No, I haven't.

MR MULCAHY: What measure of consultations occurred with the government schools council in relation to the budget?

Ms Gallagher: I didn't meet with GSEC, but that body was a GSEC before the act came into place. I'm sure they provided me with a submission.

MR SESELJA: Are you able to provide that submission for us?

Ms Gallagher: Well, I don't know—

MR SESELJA: The minister said she is sure she received it. I'm just asking that she provide it to the committee.

Ms Gallagher: These are the cutting issues!

MR MULCAHY: They are important issues.

MR SESELJA: You cannot be blasé about your statutory obligations.

Ms Gallagher: I can't see why I wouldn't be able to give you the GSEC advice.

MR MULCAHY: On what date was the government schools council formed?

Ms Gallagher: I would have to get those dates for you.

MR MULCAHY: All right. Are you saying that you did not consult them prior to the forming of your budget?

Ms Gallagher: They provided me with advice, as they have done in previous years. GSEC do reports and provide advice to me on a range of matters. They were established, I believe, by Mr Corbell. He established the new body when he came to power, or when the government was first elected.

MR MULCAHY: So you took their advice in relation to the budget, as required under section 19 of the act?

Ms Gallagher: I take everybody's advice in relation to the budget.

MR MULCAHY: No. You are not required to consult with everybody; as I understand it, under the act you are required to consult with a couple of councils.

Ms Gallagher: As part of my job, which I take very seriously, I consult with a whole range of people that, under law, I am not required to consult with. I take all of their requests into consideration in putting a budget together.

MR SESELJA: We are concerned with the ones you are required to consult with.

Ms Gallagher: I can see you are concerned.

MR MULCAHY: Yes.

MR SESELJA: I can see that you aren't!

THE CHAIR: Order!

MR MULCAHY: I just—

THE CHAIR: Order! Stop, Mr Mulcahy. I'd ask you to withdraw that please, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Hang on a second.

THE CHAIR: No. I'd ask you to withdraw that.

MR SESELJA: I'll need to respond to that before I withdraw. The minister is seeking to laugh this off. It is a serious issue and she is demonstrating that she is not taking it seriously.

THE CHAIR: No. I'm sorry, Mr Seselja. You have made an implication there and I'd ask you to withdraw it.

MR SESELJA: What implication are you asking me to withdraw?

THE CHAIR: You made the comment that the minister doesn't take her statutory obligations seriously. I would ask that you withdraw that, please.

MR SESELJA: I withdraw.

MR MULCAHY: Minister, I'm trying to be clear. You keep indicating to me that you talked to all sorts of people. I'm trying to clarify this and get confirmation from you, one way or the other. Firstly, did you consult the two bodies that you are required to under the act in the formulation of your budget and, if not, why not? Secondly, have you taken legal advice in relation to these possible breaches of the act?

THE CHAIR: Mr Mulcahy, the minister—

Ms Gallagher: I've answered your question; I've answered the second part.

THE CHAIR: Let me deal with this. Mr Mulcahy, you've asked that question, and Mr Seselja has asked that question in a number of ways a number of times. The minister has answered those questions.

MR MULCAHY: No, she hasn't.

THE CHAIR: Yes, she has. I have explained to you, to Mr Seselja and to many people who have visited this estimates process in the last two weeks that you can't direct a minister as to how they answer the question; they just have to answer the question. If you don't like the way they answer it, that's unfortunate.

MR MULCAHY: I'm not seeking to direct the minister. I appeal to you to stop protecting ministers from serious issues before this committee that the people of Canberra and the non-government schools want answers to.

THE CHAIR: I've ruled on this, and we are moving on.

MR STEFANIAK: You've asked him to withdraw, and he has done so.

MR MULCAHY: What are you ruling, chair—that we can't ask questions of the minister?

THE CHAIR: No—that the minister has answered the question and that we're moving on.

MR SESELJA: Your ruling is that she has answered the question?

MR MULCAHY: She hasn't referred to the legal advice. I'm still waiting to hear whether you've had legal advice.

Ms Gallagher: I have. Mr Mulcahy, I don't know what you can't hear. You asked me—

MR MULCAHY: You said that it doesn't matter if people take legal action. I asked if you have sought legal advice. That's what I want to know.

Ms Gallagher: If you invite ministers to the table and ask them questions, you should have the decency to let us answer the questions before you talk over the top of them.

MR MULCAHY: I did.

Ms Gallagher: You've done it again; you have just demonstrated my point.

MR MULCAHY: Chair, just get the minister to listen!

THE CHAIR: Order!

Ms Gallagher: Mr Mulcahy asked me if I have taken legal advice on this and my answer was no.

MR MULCAHY: Good.

Ms Gallagher: I have said that three times now. I don't know what you don't understand about that. No, I have not taken legal advice; and no, I am not required to consult. Read the requirement of the act.

MR SESELJA: You are required to ask for and consider the advice of the councils.

THE CHAIR: Order, Mr Seselja!

Ms Gallagher: I am not required to consult. That was the question asked of me.

MR STEFANIAK: Do you agree that you must ask for and consider their advice? That's clear; it's black and white; it's in English.

THE CHAIR: Mr Stefaniak, Mr Mulcahy and Mr Seselja will stop interrupting and come to order, as they have been requested to do several times.

MR MULCAHY: Can we clarify that the minister is saying she is not required to consult with those councils under the act?

Ms Gallagher: I'm not required to consult. There is a requirement for me to have advice provided to me from those bodies. That's what the act says.

MR SESELJA: What do you think "ask for and consider the advice of" means?

Ms Gallagher: I want to be clear about what you are asking. You are asking if the act requires me to consult. The act does not require me to consult; it requires advice to be taken. I've explained the reasons why advice was not provided to me, and I can only presume it was because the council was not established in time for that advice to be provided. They have provided advice to me in the past—they have provided it to the budget as individual stakeholders—so we had a full understanding of the issues from the non-government sector in relation to what they were seeking from the budget. I take all of that very seriously. I listen to it; I accept it; I look at what I can do to deliver it.

MR MULCAHY: From the time the laws were passed in the Assembly it took you nine months to form this council. Is there no plausible explanation, given that you knew you had a budget coming and given that you knew your obligations, as to why this wasn't addressed in sufficient time to enable you to fulfil that responsibility under the act?

Ms Gallagher: Nominations were called for in August. There is a process we go through in establishing councils. I've given you the timeframe when it was established. You can form your own view about whether or not that was speedy enough.

MR MULCAHY: I shall!

Meeting adjourned from 10.50 to 11.06 am.

THE CHAIR: I would like to finish the general overview section in the next 10 to 15 minutes and move on to the output classes. I have a capital works question that I want to ask, minister.

MR STEFANIAK: Madam Chair, just for the record, I have one more question arising out of the last discussion, especially given that the minister has given dates and times.

THE CHAIR: We have moved on from that, Mr Stefaniak.

MR STEFANIAK: Perhaps I can just indicate what my question is about. The minister has given us dates. She said that the Non-government Schools Education Council was established on 30 March this year. I think there was something about a notification in April. I appreciate that it happened close to the budget. My question simply is: noting all

that, minister, the act does seem to be quite clear in saying that before deciding the budget priorities for non-government schools each year the minister must ask for and consider the advice of the Non-government Schools Education Council. That might mean that you will not get any advice because it has only just been formed, but it is quite clear, do you not agree, that you do have a statutory obligation to ask? I am not saying that you might have got advice because of the time frames, but it is quite clear that you have a statutory obligation to ask. The question, again, is: why didn't you? I appreciate the difficulties, but why didn't you?

Ms Gallagher: The issue here is the translation under the new act to the new council. The council did not even meet until 9 May, after the budget had been handed down. There is a process to be established for the council. This is the only year that this will be an issue because of the new act. We started the process well before the new act came into place. We had a caretaker period. We lost six weeks or five weeks in going through that appointment process and putting it together. The process has been started. This is simply a timing issue. The act is clear. I am aware of my obligations. NGSEC is firmly established now. They have had their first meeting. I am aware of their concerns and this will not happen again, but it is essentially a timing issue around the commencement of the act and the establishment of the new council.

THE CHAIR: I have a question in relation to works in progress mentioned on page 399 of budget paper 4. As you would be aware, I have an interest in the progress of the Melrose high school gymnasium work. The school is sorely in need of that new gymnasium and I am just wondering about the progress of the work being undertaken. The completion date for the gym, I understand, is March 2006. Are you on target to meet that?

Ms Gallagher: I understand that there have been some delays with this project about bringing it in on budget which has had an impact on when it will be completed. I understand that Ms Thomas can answer the question as to the details.

Ms Thomas: The detailed design work for the new gym was completed. We are now in the process of revising those plans for the gym. We are looking at some options to revise those plans so that we can, as the minister said, bring that project in on budget. I expect, therefore, that we may not meet the March 2006 date, as originally planned, but we are working with the school and looking at other options for revision.

THE CHAIR: Do you have an idea of the time?

Ms Thomas: Not at this stage because we would need to look at a revised scope of works and then go through a procurement process.

Mr Curry: I would not expect that it would be delayed more than a few months.

MS PORTER: Minister, I refer to page 184 of budget paper 3 and the appropriation there with regard to interactive whiteboards. I had an opportunity to look at a couple of them when I went to the Amaroo school and found them very interesting. I was wondering whether you could give us an idea of where this initiative is at as far as putting them into classrooms is concerned.

Ms Gallagher: It is expected that the purchase of these whiteboards will occur this financial year. A panel has been appointed of providers of whiteboard technology—I should not say “whiteboard” because that is the trademark name, I think; it is interactive whiteboard technology—to provide those to schools. The commitment of this money is to match the purchase of a whiteboard at the school level with one from the government.

There is no doubt that this is the way that students learn. It is the way they are going to learn in the future and we have to keep pace with those changes. You do not have chalkboards any more. Whiteboards are on their way out and kids are learning through interactive technology. There have been some pleasing outcomes where an entire school has been pretty much decked out with these whiteboards in relation to improvements in learning outcomes for those students through the use of this technology. I think it is a real positive in terms of learning outcomes for students and a great way for kids to learn.

Anyone who has a child these days knows that they are on the computer all the time. They are MSN messaging; they are emailing friends. They are smarter than us in many ways in relation to the use of this technology and schools have to keep up with that in relation to keeping them engaged and challenged at school. This is, I would imagine, the first step. We have had the big rollout in ICT in schools that we funded through last year’s budget. This is in addition to that, but I do not by any means think that it will be the end of any commitment to improving IT in schools, because we are just going to have to keep pace with it.

THE CHAIR: I am particularly interested in the interactive whiteboards as well. As chair of the education standing committee in the last Assembly, I visited the teaching and learning centre, which is a fantastic place, and I got to play with one of the whiteboards. I had a great time with it. Actually, I want one for my own home, but that is another story. With the boards themselves, will it mean that there will be one for each school?

Ms Gallagher: The schools have to purchase one as well. Probably, on average, it will work out at two per school from the central office in terms of our contribution. They are costly for schools to purchase. Some schools are ahead of others. I can think of a couple of schools that have them in each classroom, and then there are schools that are just starting to bring this technology on board. This will mean that every school will have the opportunity to have some of this technology. I was at Latham primary school the other day and went into the learning support unit there to watch children who have a great deal of difficulty communicating use this technology—it was amazing—and to watch how it facilitates their communication and their learning in a way that we have not been able to provide before. It is fantastic for those kids.

At both ends of the spectrum, for all students, they are turning out to be just fantastic ways to learn. As I said, I think this is the beginning of what will end up being technology across the board. I have to say that we are leading the way. We are the first jurisdiction to promote these to this level. I understand there is interest from other jurisdictions in seeing what happens here. Of course, we are having to balance that with the increasing interest of the providers of the interactive technology in coming here with their products.

THE CHAIR: I did primary school teaching and a close friend of mine is incredibly jealous of the fact that we have them in the ACT. She continually harps on that.

MS PORTER: I am not trying to be ageist, but I understand that the age bracket for the teaching population in the ACT is on the older side rather than the younger side. Is that right?

Ms Gallagher: The average age is declining. There is certainly a fair whack of teachers that are nearing retirement age, but that is changing. As they retire, the number of 20 to 29-year-olds coming on board is increasing.

MS PORTER: You were saying that a lot of the kids are smarter than the rest of us with regard to the use of this technology. What is the comfort zone for teachers? Are we getting some support to help them? I am sure it is very exciting. When I saw it demonstrated the teacher was as much excited about it as the students were, but I think training is an issue.

Ms Gallagher: Professional development is being provided for teachers in this area. The teachers union, which represents probably 99 per cent of the teachers in our schools, was very supportive of this technology, but you can't just impose it without providing adequate training for teachers. Dr Bruniges might expand on that.

Dr Bruniges: In terms of teacher professional learning and building that capacity within the work force, it also has the impact of reducing teacher workload. All of a sudden, teachers have access to a huge resource of learning objects and e-learning equipment that they wouldn't have normally had. So it is building that capacity and the benefits for teachers. They will have various levels for where they wish to start and finish. The other thing that I've heard anecdotally is about the increased student engagement that it brings because you have a visualisation of things happening in the classroom that you normally wouldn't have been able to.

One example that I saw just recently was of continental drift, where the teacher was able to log straight into the internet and show the movement of continents. The students could see it before their eyes, whereas in past practice it would have been maps, shading, colouring, and cutting and pasting. So, for learning, the conceptual advantage to students is wonderful. I think teachers take one unit and have their own professional learning. They experiment with it. That, as well a system-wide approach to increasing their skills in that area, will benefit student outcomes.

DR FOSKEY: The up-front cost of these sorts of technologies is one thing, and we've certainly seen that with the installation of IT equipment in the schools. The maintenance and the actual setting up of systems within schools, which I saw first-hand as a parent when my daughter was in primary school, is another. In this case, I saw a teacher spend hours and hours in addition to her teaching and preparation time trying to get a system looped together in the school. My concern is that we buy these you-beaut things, leading edge, the latest and all that, inclined for obsolescence—this is one point—and there is a need for maintenance, a need for training and a need for replacement at a certain time. I am just wondering whether you have any idea about the life of these whiteboards, whether you have factored in those sorts of issues, and whether there are people available to assist schools when things go wrong.

Ms Gallagher: I will ask Ms Forner, the chief information officer at the Department of Education and Training, to come up, but I have a couple of things to say. In last year's budget there was just over \$11 million appropriated for ICT in schools. Two of those initiatives are relevant here. One of them was technical support for schools. For the first time, we are funding technical support officers to go into schools. We are not relying on expertise within the schools. Some schools had a group of teachers that were very competent in IT and they were streets ahead of the schools that did not have that level of expertise. So we have technical officers—around 24 of them, I think—now working across the schools, and their job is to support ICT in the schools, to deal with the problems that come day-by-day. So we are not expecting schools to deal with those.

The other area is the IT infrastructure fund. There is some money there to fund improvements in IT infrastructure within the schools. I was recently at a school which was in receipt of some funds under that program to see the improvements that have been made through that, and that is to make sure that we are dealing with things a little more systematically than we have done in the past. Ms Forner might like to add something to that.

Ms Forner: I cannot add a lot to what the minister has already said. We have used the initiative funding from last year's budget to make major improvements in the area of infrastructure within the schools for student computing, as well as to provide a great deal of support on site with technically competent staff available to the schools. We have four teams and schools have been allocated to members of the teams. Those teams provide, on average, at least eight days of full-time support per term per school, which is a significant advance on the previous situation.

In relation to the life of the interactive whiteboards, at the present time we are examining the responses to the tender and one of the issues around that in the tender is to do with the maintenance of the equipment and the support of it and the warranties for it. We are trying to cover a number of those issues around technical support in a contractual sense. The life of the boards does vary somewhat from item to item, from manufacturer to manufacturer, but they have quite a long life, potentially up to 10 years—some manufacturers say 12 years. The thing that changes more frequently is the software that is used in relation to the board. This contract does involve requiring the suppliers to provide upgrades to the software during the life of the board.

Another issue which we have tried to cover in the tender arrangements around that is the globes which have to be inserted into the projectors. Those have a life which is probably an average of one school year. The prices of those globes in the projectors can range from \$300 to \$700. We have asked for bulk pricing on those as part of the tender as well. This issue of maintenance and support is being attacked in a variety of ways.

THE CHAIR: Mr Mulcahy has a capital works question, and then I would like to move on to the output classes.

MR MULCAHY: Minister, in budget paper 4 on page 399 you report capital upgrades in excess of \$11 million and eight broad categories are recognised within the make-up of that \$11 million. Could you inform the committee whether you have determined the details of the spending within those groups? If so, can you provide that information to

the committee?

Ms Gallagher: My understanding—Mr Donnelly will correct me if I am wrong—is that we certainly have a broad understanding. We have an asset management plan which prioritises things and which just rolls over year by year. As we deal with the work, the next items come up. So, in terms of whether we know the older schools that are going to be refurbished, yes, we know that detail. There may be some movement. If we do not need all of the \$1.3 million in relation to preschool refurbishments this year, we will be able to shift that into another area where there is need. So there is some flexibility within those categories.

I am sure you have had it explained to you by the Treasurer that this is going to be the standard money each year that goes into upgrades in education, whereas previously we have had to go through every budget process and get this level of detail agreed to. There is agreement now that this is what the department will need each year for these categories. Through those discussions, if there are underruns in the preschools, for example, which I think is the area in which sometimes we might not need all that money, we can move it into another area.

MR MULCAHY: I don't recall the Treasurer giving us that information. He may have, but it is not one that I recall. Does that mean, then, that you are going to spend to budget, that you do not actually have an idea of the specific areas that will make up that spending? Is that what I am hearing?

Ms Gallagher: Mr Donnelly can answer it, but yes. These are the categories that we spend in and part of getting Treasury's agreement to the money being allocated is based on this being how much money we spend in these areas each year, but Mr Donnelly can answer that.

MR MULCAHY: Very persuasive of Mr Quinlan.

Mr Donnelly: If I can expand on the process a little: the way we manage both our capital works program and our repairs and maintenance program in the department is through an asset management process. Each year we do what we call a rolling three-year asset management plan. So we will get a return from each school and develop an asset management plan which will have firm figures for the works that will be done in each school and in each category for the forthcoming financial year, and then slightly more flexible figures for the two years subsequent to that year. At the moment, we are finalising the process for the 2005-06 year. We have identified that we want to spend the amounts in budget paper 4 in each of the categories and we are now finalising the process of looking at which individual projects and which individual schools will be funded to those levels.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to output class 1.1, which relates to government primary school education.

DR FOSKEY: I have a number of questions that relate to government schools in general. The ACT branch of the Australian Education Union has called on the government to implement a number of the recommendations of the review of student counselling services and substantially increase the capacity of this program. What

progress is being made in the implementation of a new framework for school counselling? Is it likely that the capacity of the service will increase or decrease in 2005-06?

Ms Gallagher: I can answer in broad. We have youth workers in place now—I understand 20 youth workers—in high schools as a direct result of that review. My understanding is that there are just over 50 counsellors—I'm trying to think of the exact number—working across our schools at the moment. There have been some retirements in that area. There is, of course, a work force shortage in school counselling. Recruitment is under way to fill those vacancies that have arisen through the retirements. We did have a program with the University of Canberra as well to retrain teachers and to provide opportunities for teachers to take on the role of school counsellors.

Maybe Mr Curry can add something to that. It's a challenge for us, and it's partly due to difficulty in recruiting school counsellors, but I believe that the whole student welfare area has been significantly improved with the introduction of the youth worker initiatives in schools. The youth workers are very busy. It is my advice that they are dealing with a whole range of matters now and have freed up the time of the school counsellors to concentrate on areas of their speciality, which was an issue for them in relation to students accessing counselling services that probably didn't need a teacher-trained psychologist to deal with but were other pastoral care issues which can be dealt with by a trained youth worker.

Mr Curry: Dr Foskey, what we are attempting to do with the new model is to look at a multidisciplinary approach to supporting students, which is probably what you are alluding to, following our review of counselling services. What we're seeing is less of a need for psychometric testing to occur but more of a need, as the minister said, for welfare support. So we're looking at a range of people who will be available in each of our three school districts to support students in our schools, ranging, as the minister said, from youth workers to health workers, a range of people that might provide the sorts of support that our students need. What we're seeing is that they require more counselling support around their own personal issues, personal problems, family problems, and really less emphasis, as I said, on the psychometric assessment processes that traditionally counsellors have tended to focus on.

DR FOSKEY: The Australian Education Union also identified that learning assistance teachers in primary and high schools are often untrained in basic analysis and identification of reading difficulties in students. I was just wondering whether the department recognises the need for training in simple techniques for learning assistance teachers taking on this role in schools.

Mr Curry: We do have people working in the learning assistance program with a range of skills and experience, and we do recognise that. We have a literacy and numeracy support team, based at Lyons, which looks at those areas of professional learning need in our work force and we provide training courses—one day courses, two-day courses—for people working in that LA area. But, especially to address those issues that you are raising, we really do want to have skilled people.

The other issue is that we have people moving into and out of those positions, and we think that that is an advantage to the system because we are actually putting back into

mainstream classes skilled people who have had some sort of training around these issues. Scaffolding literacy is one of the courses that we have offered to our LA teachers which is being funded. There is a range of things we are doing. Of course, it's based on identified need, what those teachers are telling us they need or what the schools are telling us they need in addition.

DR FOSKEY: Has there been any action taken to respond to the 2003 review of the provision of alternative education settings in the ACT, Robert Conway's report?

Mr Curry: Since that report, people working in our student services and equity area have met regularly with high school principals and primary school principals—they're the two groups in particular—to look at ways to best support students who might have particularly challenging behaviours in our schools. You will recall, I'm sure, from Professor Conway's report that he is saying that alternative settings aren't necessarily the ideal way of supporting students.

In fact, New South Wales have gone down that track and established a whole lot of behaviour-type schools which they have found extremely difficult to staff, not necessarily having the outcomes that they like because they're aggregating students with challenging behaviours, so you don't have any good role models. We are looking at a range of ways of supporting our students and we would be very cautious before we went into a totally segregated, separate school model or some model along those lines. But, as you know, a range of alternative programs already exists in the ACT, such as the adolescent day unit.

DR FOSKEY: I regret the loss of the School Without Walls because there is a particular kind of student who does not necessarily have a behavioural problem but who is not succeeding in traditional settings. I am very aware that there's nothing equivalent available.

Mr Curry: In a sense the Eclipse program at Canberra College and the alternative DCAP program at Dickson College are providing opportunities for young people who may not fit into the mainstream of schooling. They're not necessarily students that have challenging behaviours but they are students that may not fit into the regular education programs and we are meeting the needs of those students at the moment through those two programs.

DR FOSKEY: Has there been any review or evaluation of the effectiveness of the indigenous students accord initiative that was funded last year?

Mr Curry: There hasn't been a formal review at this point in time. I think it's perhaps a little bit early to do that. We are still bedding down many of the support programs around our indigenous students and it is a bit too early to start evaluating it until we get the programs bedded down and operating effectively.

DR FOSKEY: Any anecdotal feedback?

Mr Curry: The anecdotal feedback is mainly from the indigenous community in valuing the support of indigenous officers in our department working with their young people. The feedback generally comes from the indigenous population in terms of indigenous

workers in our schools supporting indigenous students. I cannot give you specific feedback yet from schools themselves.

DR FOSKEY: I have a couple more general questions. Has there been a review or evaluation of the effectiveness of the youth workers in schools program? It has been referred to today but I haven't yet heard any clear evidence that it's working well.

Ms Gallagher: It's early days yet. That initiative was rolled out over two-years. We took on the first intake of eight or nine youth workers in the first year and then went to the full complement. I think it is worth while having a look at how that initiative is being accepted and how that initiative is valued in schools. From my visits to high schools, and I've been to a number of them since the initiative was introduced, the feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive, just in terms of having somebody at school that they can go and see if they are having troubles at home or at school with friends, on less academic issues.

The feedback from principals has been very positive, and particularly from those schools that got the youth workers first. There has been pressure from principals for us to get them on board quickly. Certainly one high school sticks in my mind where the principal was saying it was fantastic having the youth worker in the school so that kids who come to school with any number of issues are able to sit down with the youth worker in the school, and that having that option is just fantastic.

Anecdotally it all looks good and I guess, when you put a positive thing in schools, you don't envisage having too many problems. There were some teething issues—well, not teething issues, there was some criticism at the time that the youth workers weren't employed by the community sector and that therefore there would be a reluctance by the students to use them because they were arms of the department, et cetera. I haven't seen that raised as an issue. In fact, it is my understanding that the youth workers in the schools are working very closely with the community sector youth workers in their local areas to complement each other's services. So whilst there was the potential for some turbulence when introducing that initiative it hasn't eventuated.

DR FOSKEY: It probably recognises that young people prefer to start with their peers if they can. I asked the minister a question on notice in February this year regarding bullying and I was told that during 2004 all primary and high schools undertook an audit of their existing policies and procedures, addressing issues of bullying, harassment and violence which will feed into a broader review to identify a range of options to meet the needs of school communities. Where is this review up to and has it been considered in budget deliberations in order to provide funding for initiatives?

Ms Gallagher: All schools are required to provide an audit report under the national framework that we work within. My advice is that all schools have finished last year's audit and have provided that information to the department. From memory, we have provided an example of one of those audits to Mrs Dunne in relation to what that looks like on paper. But I might hand over the Michele to talk more broadly on the issue of bullying.

Dr Bruniges: Working collaboratively in the national safe schools framework, all states and territories are working at implementing that and have a time line of next year to

report back to the commonwealth on the implementation of the national safe schools framework. All of our schools have now completed that audit and we now need to analyse that data to look at systemic strengths and weaknesses under that framework. There are a number of elements identified within the national schools framework. One of the positive things is that it allows us to see strengths and weaknesses in individual schools in addressing some of those elements. It also enables schools to inform their future action plans on an evidence-based approach to what they have found through looking at that framework. I think that is a very positive and consistent way in which schools will self-audit, have a look and then develop future action plans to address the areas of greatest need.

Another striking thing for me, in terms of the ACT jurisdiction and coming into a new jurisdiction, is working with the principals. I think we need to address some frameworks at an ACT level, and I will be working with groups of principals, through the principals policy forum that I have established, looking at examples of policy statements that we need to have across all government schools. In that way we can clearly articulate what it is here in the ACT. We believe it needs addressing at a systemic level. In summary, the national safe schools framework gives us consistency with other jurisdictions. It provides an evidence-based approach to informing school action plans and working with the community. The other body of work that we have under way is through our principals' policy forum to look at the need for a systemic policy framework in those areas.

MR SESELJA: How much money in this budget is specifically allocated for combating bullying?

Ms Gallagher: There is not a specific new initiative funded in this budget. The \$400-odd million that we appropriate for schools meets a whole range of needs, and bullying is one of them. It is core business of the department; it is core business of a school's daily life so there is money there to support making schools safe for everybody.

MR SESELJA: I understand that but there is specific funding for things like interactive whiteboards. Why not specific funding for bullying and where would we find that spending within that budget?

Dr Bruniges: Mr Seselja, if I can take up that point. In terms of the interactive whiteboard, I have a clear example of how that initiative supports students to recognise the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. I spent some time with a kindergarten class in week six of first term, where the interactive whiteboard technology was being used to help the students identify acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. It is not as though, on the timetable, there is a particular lesson that addresses the subject of bullying. It is a type of behaviour that pervades a whole lot of curriculum areas, and it is best picked up in context of a lot of other situations.

MR SESELJA: You would be aware that key element four in the national safe schools framework is managing incidents of abuse and victimisation. In response to a question on notice earlier this year the minister indicated that schools are not required to label incidents where students bully each other. The department does not keep aggregated data on teachers who bully students or on students bullying teachers. Why is it that your department does not keep aggregated data on this key element of the national safe

schools framework?

Ms Gallagher: Michele alluded to this in her answer to Dr Foskey that we think there are reasons for across the board standards or policies around certain areas within schools. Bullying and harassment are included in that and we have indicated that Michele will be doing some work with the principals around that issue. Bullying is like a catch-all phrase for a whole range of activities that happen within a school. These matters are dealt with daily by schools, from the very minor matters to very serious matters. We have a devolved system of school-based management in the ACT. There are those who are pro that and those who are anti that but, essentially, our schools are managed by a board with the principal to deal with the day-to-day issues in the school.

As I said, collecting data around this is very difficult because bullying is a term that is used for a whole range of issues in a school and we would have to look at the merit behind requiring schools to identify those and report centrally. I have not been convinced of the merit behind that. I would rather teachers and principals and parents were dealing with these matters as they arise, and without escalation, if that is at all possible. Having said that, there will always be cases within schools where matters escalate, and where there is difficulty resolving the issue to everyone's satisfaction, and those are dealt with by the department.

Mr Curry: Every one of our schools is required to have a student management and welfare policy, as the minister alluded to, developed with their community through the school board. Many of the schools in the ACT proudly display their welfare program. I do not know of many where you cannot see the way they manage the programs that they have in place to manage the welfare of their students. Whatever approach they are using to suit the needs of their community, it is quite clearly and proudly put around the school. I do not believe bullying is endemic in our schools in that it requires the sort of initiative you alluded to.

MR SESELJA: So it is not a significant issue in ACT schools?

Mr Curry: No, it is always an issue right across society. But I am suggesting that we are not going to put a label on it and say that we need a whole new grant of money just to address isolated cases where it might go back to an individual parent who was not particularly satisfied with an outcome. It is only small instances like that where these issues are not satisfactorily addressed through school procedures and programs. They are addressed very well.

MR SESELJA: Minister, is it your view that it is just a small number of isolated cases where bullying is occurring? Do you share the view of Mr Curry?

Ms Gallagher: I think bullying occurs, as Mr Curry said, everywhere across our community. It is something that we deal with and schools deal with every day. I think there are a very small number of cases where these matters are not resolved at the school level. We have 37,000 children attending school every single day. We have to put it in perspective. There are going to be issues that arise every day, and these are dealt with very well at the school level by the teacher on duty, by the principal, through restorative justice practices, through peer support programs.

It is just dealt with in such a fantastic way in the schools. I think it is one of those areas where the perception is perpetuated that it is endemic in public schools. I do not think that is correct, and I would certainly stand by that. It is fair to say that our transparency and our accountability, our reporting, mean that it probably comes up every now and again in the public arena, but that is fine. We have a fantastic school system here. We have thousands of kids going to school every day and enjoying their school life but, from time to time, we are going to have a minority of cases where parents, or students, are not satisfied with how it is being dealt with at the school level. Enormous effort and resources go into resolving those issues to everyone's satisfaction.

MR SESELJA: Given that, and you alluded to the fact that there is this idea in the media or whatever that bullying is going on, and your opinion is that it happens but it is pretty rare and that the schools do a pretty good job, do you not then see merit in getting the data on how much bullying goes on across the system? You could then get a handle on whether the issue is more serious or less serious than you thought. You could really get a handle on the total problem so that the government and the department are able to frame a response.

Ms Gallagher: I am certainly not convinced that noting down every incidence of bullying or alleged bullying would be useful. I think we have a fair idea of the serious allegations. Incident reports are provided when there are serious incidents at schools. So we are aware of those. But, as to whether it is useful for us to know that so-and-so pushed so-and-so in the playground and so-and-so felt unhappy about that, I certainly have not been convinced. I think we report against a number of measures in education. Teachers deal very well with the day-to-day running of their schools, and these matters are resolved in their infancy to the greatest degree that they can be. As I said, and Michele alluded to it, of more significant benefit is taking the uncertainty out of the picture about how each school deals with it. That means taking on a bit of school-based management because, as Craig said, each school is required to have a policy. They do that through their board process.

Michele and I have been talking about some areas where we think it would be beneficial, and this probably addresses some of that uncertainty in the media or that public perception that "Well, what actually happens in my school?" The government needs to be in a position to say, "This is our policy on bullying and harassment in schools, across all of our government schools. This is how it will be dealt with." Parents can then understand that process and there is no variation from school to school. I have no doubt that the day-to-day incidents will be managed at the school level. The area we will be moving on this year is to take some of the uncertainty out of the issue. When I go out and say, "Each school has its own policy" a logical question is "Do they cover the same issues?" People say, "I've got a child in high school and a child in primary school, will that mean that the way it is dealt with is different?" We think there is some sense in making sure that it is standard.

MR SESELJA: But you obviously do not think it would be useful to find out, even at base level, whether one school or another is reporting significant amounts—

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja, you have asked this question now a third time.

MR SESELJA: No, I have not.

THE CHAIR: Yes, you have.

Ms Gallagher: That's all right.

MR SESELJA: You spoke about incidents where one kid pushes another. But you do not think there would be any merit in getting even a base idea of whether one school has 1,000 more incidents or 10 per cent more or 20 per cent more or 50 per cent more than other schools, with a view to looking at how that can be addressed?

Ms Gallagher: I think I have explained my answer to that question and the reasons that it would not deliver exactly what you are saying it would deliver, because of the nature of school life. In the department we have directors of schools across three areas. They visit the schools regularly; they talk to the principals. There is an understanding, as a department, as to whether there are issues in particular schools. Our directors know the schools very well. If there are repeat instances of concern coming up at schools, not just on bullying but on a range of matters, we know that information and we will be managing that, as we do. It is not that we do not have a picture of what's going on, I think we understand it, but I do not know the benefit of having to dot down every time someone gets tripped over at school.

DR FOSKEY: Have you ever considered the program that I believe runs in NSW where celebrities and leaders in the community are invited to take on the role of principal for a day in order to facilitate understanding of the system? With the way I have heard "bullying" addressed in the Assembly and here today it indicates a lack of understanding of the way schools work in addressing those issues from moment to moment. That program might be something to be considered to extend that understanding.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I think the challenge for us is to get people to understand what school life is like. We had the principal for a day program last year and we are hoping for a little more interest this year. That was the first time last year, and Craig just advises me that we advertised last week for the principal for a day for this year.

DR FOSKEY: Have you invited Assembly members?

Ms Gallagher: That is a good idea. If we have not, we will. I think I was down for it last year. I think it was a sitting day in the end. I think Mr Pratt and I were both down for it last year but we were caught on Assembly business. Quite a few notable Canberrans did take part in that. I spoke to one of them afterwards who was amazed by the issues that were dealt with day-by-day at schools and he needed a good sleep afterwards.

MS PORTER: Dr Foskey mentioned indigenous education and it reminded me that I had a question about it. Page 392 has got a whole lot of accountability indicators. If you go down to G, H, I, J, K, L, M, it talks about the percentage of indigenous students in year 3 and goes through to year 7, which of course would be tertiary education by that time. It gives the benchmarks we are aiming at for those students in reading, writing and numeracy. It notes that it is 90 per cent of the students in year 3, 75 per cent of the students in year 5 and 65 per cent of the students in year 7. Why do these targeted amounts seem to be reducing over time?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, it's a good question, and a question I asked as well in relation to this table. These targets are set using what is being achieved at the current time, and certainly it is an increase on what is being achieved at the current time. I've been pretty up-front in saying that indigenous education outcomes are not acceptable. In fact the recent MCEETYA meeting of state and territory ministers are so concerned about the learning outcomes of indigenous students that in an historic meeting we had a whole day designated to dealing with issues around indigenous education, which hasn't happened before around the country. In fact that meeting resolved to make indigenous education the key issue being dealt with by MCEETYA over the next three years. That's the significance of this issue. For the first time in the ACT our reports this year show that our year 3 indigenous students achieved in reading and writing at the same rate as non-indigenous students.

MS PORTER: That was very high, wasn't it, for a national benchmark?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. Well, we usually achieve well above national benchmarks anyway but for the first time our indigenous kids in year 3 were having the same outcome that non-indigenous kids were. Whilst you want to scream from the rafters about that sort of achievement, you have to have some caution, because we have a small cohort of indigenous students going through our schools each year, but I think it's probably the first time anywhere around the country that we have seen that result in any measure against indigenous education.

So one of the initiatives in last year's budget, or it might have been the budget before, is tracking those students that are not performing in year 3, putting some extra effort into them in at year 4 so that hopefully by year 5 they are well on track to achieving benchmarks. But we do see those achievements for indigenous students decline, as they get older. In fact the outcome for indigenous students in year 7 who meet and exceed national benchmarks for literacy is probably around 60 per cent and we've set ourselves a target of 65. Hopefully we can increase that target each year, but we're trying to set achievable outcomes for those students. There is no pretending here that that's an acceptable situation, it's simply not.

MR MULCAHY: Minister, on page 405 of BP4, in the notes to the budget statements, we're told that there's about \$32 million in government payment for outputs appropriated to government schools to fund administration costs. The funding provided to each school is calculated using the school-based management funding model. Are you able to inform the committee how much unspent or uncommitted money under the schools based management model is currently sitting in the accounts of government primary and secondary schools and colleges?

Ms Gallagher: Rob might have the actual exact figure, but it is my understanding that it's around \$16 million. That's not uncommitted funds. A component of that is for things on the drawing board. I've been monitoring this issue fairly closely since becoming minister. I think bank balances peaked in 2001 at just over \$19 million and we have been taking steps to ensure that, where there is discretionary money available to schools, money is being spent in a timely fashion on students who are currently within their schools. So we are seeing the discretionary funds within those bank balances decline over time.

Schools need to keep a certain amount in the bank for rainy days and such things so the department—I think it was last year or the year before—sent out guidelines to schools about what’s an acceptable buffer in terms of maintaining good business sense in having money available. Where there’s money on top of that we’d be interested in knowing how they’re going to spend it. I wrote to every school board and every school principal drawing their attention to money in their bank and seeking advice from them about how that money was being prioritised within the school. I got some very fulsome answers and it would be no surprise to anyone that most of that money was due for expenditure shortly. But I don’t know if you want more information on that. I don’t know if Rob can give the discretionary amount.

Mr Donnelly: I don’t have that information to hand but it could be provided.

Ms Gallagher: We can provide it.

MR MULCAHY: And you’d be able to indicate the uncommitted money by school?

Ms Gallagher: I don’t know that I would want to make that detail public because it varies. We’ve got a small system here and we are usually reluctant to make public data that identifies different schools, whether they are poor schools or whatever. I can certainly give you an indication, maybe a snapshot. We can give you the overall discretionary funding available across all schools. That will give you the picture of a college, a high school and a primary school. But, to the extent that I’d be prepared to make that information public, I will.

MR MULCAHY: Can you delineate between that which is committed versus that which is uncommitted?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, we can do that.

MR MULCAHY: Okay. In the provision of future school-based management funding, are you going to take into account past expenditure or lack of expenditure? Is that part of your process?

Ms Gallagher: That’s not our intention. When school-based management was bought in, schools were very uncertain about what that meant for them and their financial situation, and probably quite rightly, because it did herald a change in the sense of what schools were expected to manage themselves. What we have seen over the years it has been in is that certain provisions were being made, money was being stored away for a rainy day, because of the uncertainty about how that program was going to work. Essentially we are telling schools that there is some comfort in that the system has been working for such and such time now and they should know what their normal day-to-day business transactions are going to be. From that they can take it that the money they may have been saving in the past needs to be expended, and schools understand that. As I said, there has been significant decline in bank balances since we began managing that.

MR MULCAHY: So you are stopping them hoarding cash basically.

Ms Gallagher: Well, yes, but that’s sort of putting it in a negative way. We had a review of school-based management that finished last year. To give them credit, I don’t think

they understood what it meant in terms of what they needed to keep in the bank and what expenditure was going to come to them. It was a change in the way they had to operate their business. Whilst you could say it was hoarding, I think it was protecting their schools and making sure they had money to pay for things. In many ways the schools have been taking really good business decisions. However, once we started looking at some of the discretionary money available it did seem that in certain schools, and it's not in all schools—I mean, some schools operate on the smell of an oily rag, and sometimes you want them to put a bit more aside for a rainy day—that there was excess capacity there and we politely asked that it be spent on the school, and that's happening now.

MR MULCAHY: Do you have a formal mechanism for keeping track of these unspent moneys? Is it just that you periodically check on what is going on, or do you have a reporting mechanism there? Related to that, if I could ask maybe Mr Donnelly: is there any form of financial expertise you provide for them in terms of budget planning?

Mr Donnelly: To answer your first question first: yes, we monitor that school by school on a monthly basis and a report is provided to the school directors and the chief executive and others in the management chain regarding the movements in school bank accounts on a month-to-month basis. Obviously, there are particular times in the year when it is easier to monitor that. We tend to give an update to the minister after 31 December each year because a report in April will have a large amount of unexpended quarterly payments for school-based management. We make a payment to schools every quarter. That has to see them through for three months. So if you look at the balance at the end of March and then at the end of April, you will see a significant increase in apparent discretionary funding.

In relation to budgetary support for schools: we have a number of mechanisms that achieve that. Principals had the option to attend a number of different budget management and financial management courses organised by the department through the year. They have access to specific officers within one of my sections, the financial services section, to assist them in managing their budget. Obviously, registrars, who tend to be the front-line financial managers in schools, have access to similar levels of training support.

MR MULCAHY: On this general area, minister, BP3, page 184: it speaks of an extra \$8.3 million allocated over four years to the school building renewal fund which is designed to provide a more functional and pleasant learning environment. How much of that is going to be able to be spent at the discretion of school management?

Ms Gallagher: That won't be. That will go into our capital works program. When we go through the \$1.8 million for older schools upgrades, that will go into that capital upgrades program and will be done through the asset management plan.

MR MULCAHY: With submissions from schools?

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely. More than we can deal with.

THE CHAIR: It is another case of demand outstripping supply?

Ms Gallagher: As we said, our buildings are ageing. Our average is, I think, 33. That

comes with the need to increase infrastructure costs, which is simply the case. This, in a way, is to meet some of those challenges.

MR SESELJA: I have a general question about voluntary parental contributions. I know it was covered a little bit before; so I have to apologise in advance if this particular aspect has been covered. It is just one question. I think you have been quoted, minister, as saying that the total in these voluntary contributions amount to around \$3 million a year. Is that correct?

Ms Gallagher: That is right. I believe that figure includes excursions. No, that is without excursions.

Mr Donnelly: The \$3 million figure, in round terms, would apply to the sum of voluntary contributions in the purest sense, and what used to be called voluntary subject contributions.

MR SESELJA: I understand the new guidelines that have been issued make it clear that schools must now provide free access to school facilities—you were probably speaking about that before—for all students regardless of voluntary parental contribution. This is where I apologise if it has already been asked. Does this year's budget, in any part, seek to address the funding shortfall that I expect will probably come from that being clearer? I guess the premise to the question is that you would think it would be likely that if it is made perfectly clear that it is voluntary fewer people will pay therefore there will be a shortfall. Is there anywhere in the budget that seeks to address the expected shortfall?

Ms Gallagher: Not in a specific initiative. Of course the education budget is indexed so that additional funding goes in through the indexation arrangements. We are currently experiencing, if I get this right, a nine per cent decrease on what we would have seen this time last year.

MR SESELJA: Is that since this controversy, since it became public?

Ms Gallagher: Since it became public, yes. Apparently, if you talk to teachers who have been in the system for a long time, they will say that every time this issue arises they see a small decline in contributions. But it certainly is something that we need to keep an eye on, watch and hear back from schools about what impact it has at their school level. We will take that into consideration if it impacts of course on the delivery of education in those schools.

There is a challenge for us in high schools around woodwork and providing those sorts of materials. The high school teachers tell me that that is an area where they think they will see their greatest need. I have certainly given a commitment to them that we will keep an eye on it this year and see what happens. If we need to make future increases to their SPN payments or to the appropriation to education, we would certainly be considering that as part of next year's budget.

MR MULCAHY: A supp on this: I have become aware recently of the challenge this clear appreciation of the voluntary nature is presenting in things like school excursions. On a personal basis, I became aware of one school excursion that was nearly derailed because the school couldn't get enough parents to make those contributions. That is sad

for the children, particularly the families who are willing to pay their freight. Certainly those who have got the capacity to pay, I think, should try to participate.

Are you looking to any solutions to that? It seems regrettable that children are potentially going to miss out on a valuable part of their education process because an element is deciding to vigorously decline to make a contribution. I am not talking about people who are in disadvantaged positions. I accept that they should be treated differently.

Ms Gallagher: I agree. That is why, in the presentation of this public debate, I have been trying to say, “Please don’t think this means that we don’t need or accept your voluntary contribution if you can afford to pay.” We really do rely on those families being able to make some sort of contribution. When this issue became public, I think there were a lot of anecdotal stories going around about swimming carnivals being cancelled, other local excursions being threatened. I am not aware of one that actually was cancelled due to this.

To some extent, part of it was trying to say to the schools, “We need to just calm this down a bit.” We know the schools have some discretionary resources available to them. We have set up these student support funds. Really, we just wanted some commonsense to be maintained through the debate. When schools get uncertain about what it means to their financial impact and their planning, they do get very worried. When you are dealing with 96 schools getting very worried, that is an issue to manage.

The offer was made to schools: we want to help where we can. Schools need to take into consideration the fact that, in planning excursions and planning events for a school, there may be a proportion in the school that cannot afford to pay. Whether that means increasing the cost for those who can afford to pay or the school being prepared to supplement that themselves with some sort of funding, then that needs to be looked at. That was trying to find the right balance in these discussions about how you plan for each excursion or extra curricular activities on top of education.

MR MULCAHY: In cases where there is a shortfall potentially, you would look at special requests from schools rather than see a number miss out on camps and things like that?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I look at any number of things. People come to me with any number of things. If a school came to me and said, “This is going to be a problem for us,” then of course I would look at it and work with the department to look at what we could do. But, having said that, I felt there was an element of cheekiness in some of the debate, as in: “That’s it. The school swimming carnival is being cancelled.” I do have an understanding of how much money is in bank accounts. I would be very surprised if a school could not carry that cost—not that they should be expected to—and in that immediate sense that excursion could not go ahead.

THE CHAIR: Output class 1.1, government primary school education. Any questions? I think this means that we will not get to CIT until after afternoon tea.

MS PORTER: I have a question about the number of children in primary schools. I have done the raw maths. It probably is a simplistic reading of the statistics, but it appears, from my simplistic reading of the statistics on page 388 of budget paper 4, if you do

those maths—and I think my maths are correct—it looks like we have an average of 275 students per primary school. Probably that varies from school to school, but I was wondering how we compare to other states.

Ms Gallagher: In the size of the schools?

MS PORTER: Yes, the size of the schools.

Ms Gallagher: Take New South Wales, for example. They have very large schools, but they have very tiny schools, too, like rural schools and very small schools.

MS PORTER: Compare it to a city kind of an area. I am not talking about rural here.

Ms Gallagher: Michele might be able to answer that, having just come from Sydney. But we have a big range in our primary schools. We go from quite small, around 70 students, to large schools of 400-odd students and anywhere in between.

MS PORTER: It varies quite dramatically?

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely.

Dr Bruniges: I can speak about the area of western Sydney that I had operational responsibility for before coming here. The diversity of schools around that particular region of Sydney would be very similar: from very small—it might be down around 10 to 15 students in some of the schools around Windsor and remote schools—to very large schools. I think the ACT probably sits within similar parameters. It is not quite as big as some of the bigger schools in that particular area and not quite as small. So it probably sits there in the middle.

MS PORTER: I had a question about the way parents are able to give input into the shape of their child's education in government primary schools. I was wondering what mechanisms are set up within government primary schools to encourage and enable that.

Ms Gallagher: There is enormous parental involvement in school education, of course, down at the class level. At individual level, between the teacher and parent, there is probably daily contact and certainly the offer of daily contact from teachers if they want it. There are parent/teacher interviews, parental involvement on the school board, parental involvement about events at school through the P&C committees. I have to say again that, like the numbers in schools, that varies enormously across schools. You have schools that are tightly influenced by parents, to those where you struggle to get a parent rep on the school board. It varies enormously. But certainly in regard to the day-to-day education and a parent being able to raise concerns about their child's education and have an influence on their child's education, that opportunity is there.

I am a parent in a school and I have found that to be a very open dialogue with the school. There is an opportunity, if I have concerns, to have those addressed. That is part of a teacher's daily workload.

MS PORTER: In that curriculum development that went on for quite a long time?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, the P& C were involved, absolutely. The P&C is involved in everything.

MS PORTER: Thank you for that.

MR MULCAHY: Just one question in relation to this output class: you are aware of course, as a consequence of the drought and the water restrictions, that many school ovals have become unusable. I have received advice that children—in some instances, and this is the one that has been presented to me—from Ngunnawal school are having to, I am informed, walk some eight kilometres to use the oval at Amaroo school. Whilst exercise is undoubtedly a good thing—

THE CHAIR: How many kilometres, did you say?

MR MULCAHY: They said eight. That is the advice I have received. It seems a fair hike. Whether it is eight or five, whatever the distance is, the issue that is of concern—and I have not measured the distance out—is having primary school children doing this trek. Do you think that is prudent or do you think that some form of transport ought to be provided until the school ovals can be brought back into order? Is this a widespread practice where schools have now to have their students walk to other areas to access facilities? If so, what is the solution for primary school children?

Ms Gallagher: It is an issue for us that we are managing. You look around Canberra and you see how dry the ovals are. Of course we have tried to maintain a balance where there is a functioning oval within a very short distance for students to be able to use. Usually that is the local high school or the community oval being managed by urban services. If there is not one of those, then it is the nearest local school. My understanding—again, we have not had the walking tape out at the Ngunnawal to Amaroo link—from the school director in that area is that it is quite a short walk in actual fact of one to two kilometres.

MR MULCAHY: It might be the round trip that they are talking about. But even four ks is a bit much. It may be a very indirect route.

Ms Gallagher: They are going round and round then. We have not got to Mr Stefaniak's favourite area of PE in schools and childhood obesity yet, in which case perhaps you could give the answer there. But it is an issue. Certainly once the drought breaks the restoration of those ovals will be an issue for us. Again, while I have heard anecdotal evidence or claims that school carnivals have been cancelled or not been able to go ahead, my understanding is they have. They have gone on at the nearest oval possible to the school. For some, that does involve a short walk or transport arrangement.

MR MULCAHY: You do not think there is any major inconvenience as a consequence of these things?

Ms Gallagher: There is a major inconvenience. It is a major inconvenience for everybody, these water restrictions. My own garden looks as dry as a chip. I would like it to be green and lush as well. There is inconvenience there. I drop my daughter off at school every day. I looked at her oval today. It is not nice; it is not the sort of environment you would like your children to be playing in. But it is just the environment we are enduring.

MR MULCAHY: Would you consider some provision for some transport for these schools that feel it is an issue?

Ms Gallagher: If someone came to me and said, “This is how far we have to go for our activity,” then, yes, we would look at that. But I think, again, the primary schools, the way they work with the high schools, everyone is working together to make the best of this. But it has an impact on the activities, not just sporting activities but activities that can happen outside the school gate, in the play areas. Some of those areas are no good for playing on anymore, the hard ground. It is being managed at the school level. As I said, once the drought breaks we will have to put in place a restoration plan which no doubt will have significant costs attached to it.

DR FOSKEY: On the other side of children’s fitness: I have had issues raised with me by parents about the standard of food available at canteens and the inability of, in this case, interested parents through the P&C and other processes currently available to influence that. We all know that, when we send our children to school with a certain amount of money, we cannot prescribe what they spend it on, even if there is perhaps one item—and often there are only a couple of items—of food that is really nutritious. Does anything exist across the ACT to assist canteen managers to get together a menu that parents can confidently feel is not increasing their children’s unfitness and potential for obesity?

Ms Gallagher: Again, this is an area where, I think, over the past couple of years we have sought to intrude a bit more, if you can say that in a positive way, into school life. Again, like my answers to other questions: we have a huge variance between what is offered. One school I can think of in particular outsources their canteen. They have some beautiful food, from what I see. Others rely on the P&C to do it. If you take my daughter’s school as an example, they do not even have a canteen because the P&C cannot get one up, in which case I do not deal with a lot of the issues that many parents deal with. High school is going to be a real eye opener to her. She does not even know canteens exist. It is good for me as a parent.

DR FOSKEY: Conversely, you have to make lunch everyday.

Ms Gallagher: I know; it is one of my most loathsome jobs. But there you go. We are doing a lot of work with the Heart Foundation. Of course we have the health promoting schools initiatives. Canteens are getting accredited by the Heart Foundation, but before I say anything incorrect I will hand over to Craig. I met with the Heart Foundation last year to talk to them about the canteen program and influencing the food on offer there. A lot of work is going on. Craig might want to add to that.

Mr Curry: The minister mentioned the health promoting schools initiative. Schools that sign up to that take on board this approach to promoting good health throughout their school, through their curriculum, their school organisation, the partnerships they have with the community. So there is a big drive for any school that signs up to be a health promoting school.

But in relation to your specific question: we do have the ACT Department of Education and Training school canteen accreditation program. The last training day was held on

10 May, and 11 schools attended. Each school gets a booklet about the accreditation program. They look at how they are going, to make sure they have a very healthy canteen program. There are levels of accreditation for how well they are achieving that. It is quite a strong incentive program and, yes, it does provide a whole range of recommendations about the sorts of foods and activities they should be providing. You may have noticed a story in the *Canberra Times*, early this week I think, about Farrer primary school as an example of a school that has joined up and is operating a very healthy canteen program. There are, I guess, those two key approaches that are being used.

DR FOSKEY: Supplementary, though: what if you don't live near there and the school that your child attends has a P&C that says, "You obviously don't have enough junk food at home if your child buys it at school." There are schools that participate and there are schools that don't. So what is out there to get a bit more participation all around?

Mr Curry: We have two officers working in our curriculum area who focus just on the issues around promoting healthy canteens, healthy practice exercise, all those issues that we have been talking about. Those two officers work closely with schools to encourage them to participate in programs such as these and try to identify schools where work really needs to be done. I think you identified a school where work needs to be done.

DR FOSKEY: I can talk later about that.

Mr Curry: I guess we can take that on board and work with that school. I am sure it wouldn't be difficult to work with the teaching side of the school to look at some of these issues through their curriculum and influence what children are saying to their parents, which is often a good approach as well.

MR MULCAHY: Supplementary to that: would you not agree—

THE CHAIR: It has gone past 12.30.

Ms Gallagher: I am happy to take that question.

THE CHAIR: That is fine; I am happy to allow Mr Mulcahy to ask the supplementary. Mr Stefaniak has one more on 1.1. We will deal with that after the lunch break.

MR MULCAHY: Minister, would you agree with the view that certainty is advanced by a lot of specialists in nutrition that the real key is to ensure people get good dietary advice, such as through some of the teaching programs, rather than artificially trying to control their intake in the school environment, keeping in mind also the financial viability of these canteens?

Ms Gallagher: I was going to say that is the challenge for us. Nothing works in education if you go and say, "This is the way it has to be. You will serve apples, oranges and you have got to get rid of your menu." You would be a very brave minister—and I am not that brave—who would take that fight on.

THE CHAIR: Courageous.

Ms Gallagher: I am brave but I am not that brave.

THE CHAIR: But you are not that courageous.

Ms Gallagher: The big issue for us is to convince canteens that are offering a healthy menu, or a healthy alternative, that it is as financially lucrative as offering the other things. P&Cs rely on this as their income to do a whole range of things. That is part of this approach of working with the Heart Foundation, getting canteens accredited, offering a range of food. Probably, as with bullying and harassment, it is an area where it would be useful for the department to have a central view, a central policy, about canteens and canteen policy, to set a framework so that, again, parents know what is on offer across the board. At the school level there will be variances.

Meeting adjourned from 12.35 to 2.02 pm.

DR FOSKEY: I go back to the inquiry by Lindsay Connors into ACT education funding and the point she made that future territory budgets should give priority to reducing the resources gap between secondary schools and the early years of primary schooling, which has been wider in the ACT than elsewhere in Australia. Given that some of the budget submissions highlighted this fact as well, that high schools are an area for concern—for instance, over 10 per cent of year 9 students are not achieving adequate literacy standards—and the disparity in outcomes, although some of our students are performing well, between the highest and lowest performing students and the dropout rate of students, I was just wondering whether the government recognises that there are performance problems with high school and whether it has any plans to address those issues.

Ms Gallagher: It is an area in which we would have liked to put more resources if we had them available through this budget. It is the area that they would have gone to; namely, the high school student support teams, which was an election promise of ours. That was around \$11 million and it simply didn't get through because of the price tag this year; we didn't have the money to fund it. That was with some disappointment for me personally because I think that those teams, which would have, on average, given each high school an extra couple of staff to deal with some of the issues seen in high school, particularly around pastoral care, would have been able to enhance resources. Unfortunately, it just wasn't the year to fund that initiative; we didn't have the cash.

In relation to high schools, there is a lot of public perception that high school is the area that has been neglected in the past or hasn't received the attention that the earlier years had received. I wouldn't necessarily support that. I think the issue facing high school is the issue that we are dealing with young people of an age group that presents us with significant challenges—keeping them engaged, keeping them at school, dealing with their independence in going from being children into being young people, and supporting them through those difficult early teenage years. I think high schools do that very well. However, if more money had been available for education, I would have liked to have put it into the high school system. Do you want to add anything?

Mr Curry: I was looking, while the minister was speaking, at the year 7 reading results for 2004: 92.4 per cent of our year 7 students were at or above the benchmark, and 90.3 per cent in writing. I was just thinking about your comment around achievement

levels. The high school development program and the feedback we give our schools, diagnostic information, around ACTAP are showing that we are actually improving in the high school years in terms of our results in literacy and numeracy. I think that shows in our ACTAP performance results.

DR FOSKEY: I remember the report on students at risk of failing in education, or whatever its full and very long title was, and recall my experience of teaching in secondary schools. While averages are all very well, the main point of my question is related to those students who are not succeeding. As we know, lack of success is a cyclic thing. I watched students that my daughter went to primary school with fall through the net and, once they have fallen through the net in a busy high school, it is very hard to pick them up again because they are not at school. This is where broader issues come in, like different kinds of schools for different kinds of students. The minister considers it a perception, but I think it goes way beyond being a perception. I think it is a real issue and I would encourage the government to tackle it and would certainly work with the government on doing so.

Mr Curry: Some of our high schools are focusing on those middle schooling years and are restructuring the way they approach, particularly, year 7 and year 8, those early years in high school, and are taking almost a primary school approach in that the students have the majority of their curriculum delivered by one teacher, so they are having a peer support type of program, a home room type of program, and getting a closer association with one teacher, rather than the traditional high school approach where there is a different teacher for every subject, and those approaches are quite successful. The high school development program and the people on that reference group have looked at middle-schooling practices and the benefits of those, and you are seeing some different structures in high schools to respond to that.

DR FOSKEY: I am wondering whether you have measured the differences in outcomes between grade 6 to the high school system and the new kinds of schools—the middle schools—to ascertain whether they are having better outcomes in terms of the students' sense of confidence and therefore ability to succeed.

Mr Curry: We have anecdotal evidence from schools like Gold Creek, where those practices have been in place for some times, and Caroline Chisholm high school, which has a slightly different approach to the way things are organised. The anecdotal evidence is that students feel much more supported in that home room type of process. I guess we can look at those schools and look at how their ACTAP results are going and their rates in terms of students continuing on in those schools.

DR FOSKEY: Perhaps it is not a question of comparing children with other children but of a child's performance with an earlier performance.

Mr Curry: That is true.

DR FOSKEY: Are there any plans to do those kinds of things?

Mr Curry: We are looking at longitudinal ACTAP data and we can do that now. That is really, I guess, what you are asking: do we have that capacity? We do.

DR FOSKEY: It would be good.

MR SESELJA: My question is in relation to secondary schooling but it is about some of the numeracy indicators and I will need to refer to the primary school indicators as background. Page 390 of budget paper 4 shows the ACT doing very well against other states and, against international standards, doing exceptionally well. The year 4 science indicator shows us as being close to Singapore, which is a pretty good outcome. My question relates to the latest trends in international mathematics and science study, TIMSS. The year 8 figures that have been published show Singapore at 605 points for mathematics and Australia at about 505. Are you able to give the committee an idea of how the ACT did in those scores, because I have not been able to get hold of those ones?

Ms Gallagher: Is that through the TIMSS testing?

MR SESELJA: Through TIMSS, yes, the year 8 figures.

Ms Gallagher: Do you have that data, the year 8 figures, Mr Curry?

Mr Curry: The actual scores for the ACT?

MR SESELJA: Yes. The figures I have show that Singapore got 605 points and the Australian average was, I think, 505. I was wondering what the figure for the ACT was.

Mr Curry: The figure that I have was that the Australian mean in year 8 was 527 and the ACT mean was 538.

MR SESELJA: Are you talking about year 4 science?

Mr Curry: That's year 8.

MR SESELJA: Where is that one?

Ms Thomas: That's for year 8 science.

Mr Curry: Year 8 science, sorry.

MR SESELJA: Sorry, I missed the second figure. It was 527 for Australia. What was it for the ACT?

Mr Curry: It was 538

MR SESELJA: The point I'm getting to is that in both of those figures Singapore does really well. Australia does pretty well and the ACT does well, but Singapore does particularly well. Do you have any idea as to why they're doing better than the rest of the world and what we might learn from them?

Ms Gallagher: Ms Strauch can provide some advice on that. In fact, I was due to travel to Singapore to ask these questions. I have had to delay the trip for personal reasons. It was due to take place in July. I intend to travel there at some point. We will be going there for a couple of days to visit some schools and try to understand what is different

about Singapore. I certainly have the belief, and I am supported by the Chief Minister, that we should be able to achieve what Singapore is achieving. So we want to know what they're doing differently.

MR SESELJA: It should at least be the aim, I guess.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. Ms Strauch might want to expand on that.

Ms Strauch: We have actually looked at the reasons behind the differences and there is a whole variety of reasons. One of them is the cultural differences in terms of the very high priority that families and the society generally place upon education. Differences are reflected in the resources in the home that are actually put aside for supporting student education. A very high priority is placed on that. The parents' level of education is a very strong predictor of success.

MR SESELJA: Is that higher in Singapore than in Canberra?

Ms Strauch: I don't have the comparative figures, but that certainly is being identified in the TIMSS study as having a very strong correlation with high achievement.

MR SESELJA: Is there a difference in approach in the curriculum for maths and science?

Ms Strauch: Yes, there are certain differences in approaches.

MR SESELJA: Are you able to say briefly what is the main difference?

Ms Strauch: Yes. The research is indicating that the pedagogy focuses very heavily on more direct teaching of specific curriculum content. Much more emphasis on the content is being put across and less on a cooperative, team-based approach—what they call initiate, response, evaluate. They are given the information, they respond, and that is evaluated. There is a very strong emphasis on that approach. Singapore spends about four per cent of its GDP on education and has recently allocated \$47 million to research curriculum pedagogy. They quite clearly have indicated that education is the key to success in that area.

MR STEFANIAK: I appreciate that you probably don't want that sort of approach in a lot of the subject areas, but didn't we use to teach maths along similar lines? It lends itself to that type of approach.

Ms Strauch: Yes, certainly. Of course, some of that still occurs, but a lot of our pedagogy is actually emphasising that in the modern world the employers are looking for other skills and our students need to be prepared in those areas. I know that Singapore is concerned about that.

MR SESELJA: How would you categorise our approach to maths teaching? You are saying that you are looking for other skills. Is there still a lot of doing it by rote? One of the only ways really to learn the times tables is to do them all the time and know them. Is there less emphasis on things like that now or is there still a strong emphasis on that basic rote learning and then looking to expand the skills in other areas?

Ms Strauch: There is a whole variety of approaches being used. There is a combination of that and cooperative learning, students actually thinking and reflecting on the material rather than just learning and memorising it and then repeating it. So I would say that the pedagogy is a whole variety of approaches. We are really looking at the particular needs of individual students as well.

MR SESELJA: Minister, in terms of maths and science, if in your visit to Singapore or in the investigations you find that what they are doing differently in the curriculum is a positive and is a plus, will consideration be given to changing some of the emphasis on the way we teach maths and science to try to come up to that standard?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I think you have to have an open mind. Singapore obviously does very well and there is no reason why we should not be trying to exceed where we are now, which is in a very good position. But we do live in a different country and there are different challenges for all our children. We try to make the curriculum as relevant as possible to the world in which these kids live. They live in a global world, of course, so we have to prepare them for that. I don't know if Dr Bruniges wants to add anything.

Dr Bruniges: Just that we have the opportunity now in the development of our new P to 10 curriculum over a period of time so that implementation comes about in 2008 to have a good look around at what constitutes the core body of curriculum knowledge in each of those discipline areas, make sure that we identify clearly where we have that and articulate what we expect to change as a result of students spending time in school in each of those discipline areas. That is in front of us as we go forward with the new P to 10 framework.

DR FOSKEY: I want to check whether the minister is aware that a lot of the students that come from the Singaporean model of education have significant problems at our universities. I have taught some of these people. While content-based learning has its place, it is important to learn how to analyse, to think and to be critical and to understand that, because someone has said something, it does not mean that you can just take the whole script and include it in your answer. There is a whole lot of issues there. In fact, our public school students do best at the university level, as studies comparing them with students from some independent schools have shown. I think that that grain of salt should always be in the mouth.

Ms Gallagher: That is what I alluded to when I said that we live in a different country and we have different expectations. We expect our children to be problem solvers, to be independent thinkers, to be confident about speaking publicly. When I went to school, we hardly did any public speaking in the early years of primary school. Kids are now put out in front of the class all the time, they host assemblies and they take an active role in the management of schools. There is a whole range of skills that we try to promote and foster through the delivery of a comprehensive curriculum. My view on the science and maths testing, all the testing, is that the ACT does very well. We do very well against Australian standards and we do very well against international standards, but, as Dr Foskey pointed out, a number of children don't do as well as others. We can't become complacent and we should always be looking to improve those results. That is certainly what we will be trying to do.

THE CHAIR: Just on that, minister: we are dealing with high school education as well and, whilst I take the point that Dr Foskey has made, our system overall would be very different from the Singaporean system of education anyway. You have made the point that we do have an overall approach rather than just a rote-based learning approach. I would like your comment on the role that the colleges play in preparing students for university and helping them to think analytically about things before they get into university.

Ms Gallagher: We are very proud of the college system here and a component of the university admission score, if you choose to seek one, is based on your continuing efforts throughout years 11 and 12. Those efforts are marked on course work and presentations; they are not just based on exam results at the end of year 12. I think that does give our students very good skills to equip themselves to life in university. I should say that a review of the college system is about to kick off. It will enable us to make sure that our college system is still delivering what we want to deliver now and into the future as well. We will look at the results of that review.

That review will be looking at curriculum, how courses are offered and whether they are relevant and engaging. All of that sort of stuff will be looked at in this review. It will be the first time a review has happened since the college system started and it will give us some fantastic information about making sure that we do keep the college system where we want it to be, that is, retaining students, giving students a variety of career pathways and hoping that when the students leave college they leave with a year 12 certificate. They may leave with a university admission score. Hopefully, they will leave with some sort of VET qualification as well. The college system is an area that we need to look at. I guess it is around not being complacent because all the indicators are that we are doing very well. That can just keep going if you want, but we want to make sure that it is better than that.

MS PORTER: Minister, I note in the descriptor on page 384 about what this output is to deliver that it is an objective of the department to create core links and programs with industry to allow students, as you just mentioned, to have some kind of VET qualification by the time they come out of college. Obviously, some of this building up of links with industry to allow students to have vocation opportunities, work experience and career stimulation starts at high school. Could you expand on some of those programs and how they help students?

Ms Gallagher: Sure. There are probably a couple of initiatives relevant here. We have the career education support service, which was part of last year's budget and might have been the year before; all these budgets go together. Also, there is the pathway planning that has been under way, along with the delivery of VET programs in high schools, programs that you would be aware of, BICEP and GRAPES. They are all trying to meet the individual needs of students, particularly, in relation to BICEP and GRAPES, programs where children at risk of not engaging with their education are provided with another pathway. But for all year 9 students, providing them with a pathway plan, getting them to think in year 9 about where they would like to be, what they would like to be doing, and providing them with some guidance on that.

I believe that 90 per cent or so of the year 9 students last year had a pathway plan in place. Of course, we will be rolling it out to year 10 and year 11 students as well to make

sure that that planning goes through, that they are helped within the transition from high school to college, and, more than ever, focusing on career pathways and pathway planning for those students. It is critical that in this sort of competitive world we are making sure that the students themselves are making those right decisions when they need to and are being involved in that and are planning that pathway themselves, with support from their teachers and career counsellors.

There is a lot of effort going into that and encouraging those choices and letting kids know that it is all right not to want to go to university if they do not want to, that there are other really legitimate choices to make. The goal is that we want 95 per cent of our students to finish year 12. We are not at that level yet, but that is where we want to be. That is the goal we have set ourselves. Part of that transition planning and career and pathway planning that needs to occur in high schools will assist us to achieve that and help us map the way.

MR SESELJA: How many of the ACT students who complete year 12 go on to university the following year? Do you have the percentages on that?

Ms Gallagher: I am not sure if I can give you a figure for how many actually go on. I know that around 50 per cent get a university admission score.

MR SESELJA: They get an offer.

Ms Gallagher: No, they actually get the score that enables them to apply for university.

MS PORTER: Minister, you have mentioned that the preference is for young people to go on. I noticed on page 392 the percentage of year 10 students proceeding on to secondary college. It says approximately 85 per cent. What programs are run to prepare any young people that don't go beyond, say, year 10 to help them join the work force? What other measures do we have in place to encourage more to go on to year 12, if that is what we are wanting them to do?

Ms Gallagher: That is part of the planning that we are doing in year 9.

MS PORTER: It is the same sort of thing.

Ms Gallagher: Exactly. It is sitting down individually with those students and mapping a way forward. If they say that they do not want to go past compulsory schooling or past year 10, that is going to be dealt with through the planning of those pathways and whether they want to get into a trade or an apprenticeship. Of course, training is part of the education department, so there are obvious links there. Whilst we cannot tell young people that they have to go to years 11 and 12—their families can make that decision—they are certainly encouraged to do so. We know that people that go on and get a year 12 certificate generally do better in terms of the options post year 12. We did have a program which tried to map those who did not finish year 12. I am just trying to think of the name of it.

Mr Curry: Training pathway guarantee.

Ms Gallagher: The training pathway guarantee, that is right. It was funded in last year's

budget. It offered those students that dropped out of year 12, or completed year 12 but then did not go anywhere, the opportunity to come back and have some training provided to them. We are not where we want to be in terms of year 12 completions. We have set ourselves a pretty high target, I have to say, but I think you have to do that in trying to make sure that we are putting all the effort we can into making sure students complete year 12 or equivalent, that they go on and get a certificate in vocational education and training.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to page 92 of budget paper 4B, which is the appendix. I note that there may be some changes, although I presume you will still be measuring in some way. You have exceeded by one per cent the target for year 10 students achieving ICT competencies. It was a high target anyway, but it is excellent that it has been achieved. Would you care to comment on the importance of achieving that? We touched on it when we were talking about the interactive whiteboards.

Ms Gallagher: This is an important area. I have to say that it is greatly assisted by the fact that young people want to do this sort of learning. It is one that is heavily promoted in the schools and we have a high level of engagement from the student population. It is one of those areas where our indigenous students are performing very well. Do you want to talk about it, Mr Curry?

Mr Curry: I think you have covered it. We believe that it is particularly important that our students leave high school with those competencies. There are 15 competencies that we ensure our students attain. They are around accessing information, producing works, authoring and using a computer. There is a range of skills within those. We had a process where it was really a year 10 activity, but some of our students were becoming so computer literate that we dropped down and many of our students achieve the competencies much earlier these days. We believe that these are skills that our students need to have to be successful in the future.

Dr Bruniges: That raises an interesting point about ICT competencies. What is ICT literate today is different from what it will be in two years time because, as the ICT agenda changes, the expectations of what can be done with it will change. It is the dynamics of construct. It is constantly on the move. We see things like kindergarten children operating whiteboards at a level that we wouldn't have seen two years ago.

THE CHAIR: With regard to the usage of the computers themselves and the information and technology software associated with it, has there been any move towards things like developing software programs and breaking down the hardware, working out how it works and building it back up again?

Mr Curry: I am not an expert in this area, but I know that there are some quite advanced courses being offered in our colleges which Ms Strauch would probably have more knowledge of than I do. There are opportunities for students who are very interested and have quite a bit of talent in this area to be extended through a couple of quite advanced programs in colleges.

Ms Strauch: Both programs focus on software program writing, but also on the hardware and networking and, in fact, using industry accredited programs around

networking. Many of our students are very highly skilled in this area.

MR STEFANIAK: My question applies to primary schools to an extent, but certainly to high schools. Minister, you mentioned the problems with the drought and what is happening to try to make sure that kids can engage in various sporting and recreational activities. I know that there is a real problem there. I was recently in Chisholm, where there is a big problem with the primary school and the local suburban oval. There are problems there for the high school as well as it has not been tended to for about 12 months. Canberra high school was doing something in Belconnen with its oval. Several junior clubs used it as well as a joint facility, but they have been shunted off to another oval. Perhaps you can tell me what is the status of that oval, because it is affecting several junior clubs as well as the school, and when it is going to be brought back to proper maintenance.

Are you taking any steps to ensure that as many of these high school ovals as possible can still be used? The Catholic high school in the Chisholm area is under the same water restrictions but seems to be able to maintain its oval. I just wonder whether there is any cross-fertilisation with the non-government sector there. Finally, I understand that Macquarie primary school is bringing back some of its oval for utilisation, despite the drought. Do you know anything about that? If you do, is there something on which you can tick-tack with that school as to what it is doing because it seems to be overcoming the problems of the drought and utilising some of the playing surface of its oval?

Ms Gallagher: I hadn't heard about the Canberra high oval or having to send people to other ovals. The answer is pretty much the same. We have tried to make sure that an oval near a school is maintained by DUS—the ones that aren't seem to be high school ovals—so that the school there can use that oval. If that is not the case, I would be interested to hear about it. If there were those situations, we would have to look at them. If the drought keeps going, we will have to have this under review all the time. We are going to have to be flexible. In fact, the department has placed some fairly stringent restrictions on itself, in excess of the water restrictions, because it is a big user of water. The target was to reduce water consumption by 25 per cent, which the department has exceeded; that is my understanding. We may have to look back at that and see if there are particular ovals that we need to bring back on if the drought is going to go on indefinitely.

MR STEFANIAK: I appreciate that you may not know, but I would ask you to look into it, given that Macquarie primary is doing something. There might be a logical explanation for improving the Canberra high school oval for use. Apparently, MacKillop are on the 40 per cent outdoor restrictions, which are meant to be common under the DUS program, yet they seem to be able to maintain their oval. If you talk to the people running that system, you might get some ideas.

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely. You have just reminded me of something. I drove past Marist College the other Saturday morning and they had all their sprinklers going full bore on very plush ovals and I made a mental note that I should find out what is going on in the non-government schools.

MR SESELJA: I think they have a bore.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, they do, which shows the beauty of having a bore.

MR STEFANIAK: They have a bore, but I don't think the Catholic school near Chisholm high has one. The parents at Chisholm primary told me that apparently the Catholic one is on the 40 per cent outdoor restrictions and they do not know how it is managing it. It is worthwhile checking it out because it's a considerable problem.

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely.

MR SESELJA: Does Marist share its bore with Melrose?

Ms Gallagher: No, not if you look at Melrose's oval. You wouldn't say that there was a great deal of water flying between the boundaries there. It's pretty brown.

Mr Donnelly: I can probably expand on a couple of things that might add some extra light to that discussion. Over summer the department was subject to, and achieved and exceeded, water restrictions of 40 per cent under stage 3 restrictions. I think it was in February of this year that we moved back to 25 per cent, back to stage 2 water restrictions. As a result of that, we have been encouraging a number of schools which were disadvantaged by the fact that they hadn't been able to water their ovals to try to restore some of them. I would imagine that Macquarie primary is one of those.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other questions on 1.2?

MR STEFANIAK: Just on the curriculum. I note some 35 areas that seem somewhat general. I also note the list of people you have consulted. The curriculum development strategy is from K to 10, isn't it?

Ms Gallagher: P to 10, preschool to 10.

MR STEFANIAK: That also affects the non-government sector. There is a list of the groups to be consulted.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. Geoff Joy was the deputy chair of the task force. It was an extremely cooperative process. Everyone with an interest in education was involved in that either at the task force level or in the reference group which sat under the task force.

MR STEFANIAK: Is that all the result of the consensus of all those groups?

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely, yes, and there has been a great deal of excitement from all of those people about the rollout of this new curriculum.

THE CHAIR: We might move to secondary colleges. Minister, I draw your attention to page 183 of budget paper 3. I am aware that this is a result of the second appropriation college review. You did touch on this a bit when I raised the issue of colleges being a means of preparation for university. I am curious as to what is involved with the college review. I know that there was a commitment at the election to do a college review. For the information of the committee and me, could you just expand a bit on that.

Ms Gallagher: Yes. We are just about to advertise for an independent review so that we can kick this review off. We are hoping that it can be completed this year, which will

give us some time to respond to its findings. Earlier this year in February I had a roundtable with college stakeholders. We discussed the terms of reference at that meeting. We have finalised the terms of reference for the review, which I am happy to provide to the committee. It is a very broad look at the college system. It will look at the effectiveness of the college system to ensure high quality outcomes. It will also look at the quality impact and relevance of the programs being delivered. It will identify opportunities to ensure that the system is well placed to move into the future. It will look at the relevance and suitability of courses and assessment processes, teaching strategies, system data, national and international standards and any other related matter.

So you can see it is a big ask. We have done some work internally. In fact, a college principal was offline doing some work that involved data around the college system, choices that are being made, and things like that. So, we have got a fairly good piece of data which will help this review. And this is really to take it just that one step further—to have an independent look at it, to talk to everybody involved and, I guess, to provide advice to us. As I said, this is the first time in 30 years that this will have been looked at. So it is timely. We want to make sure that what we offer our year 11 and 12 students is the best in the country. We want to maintain and continue our premier position into the future. That is it in a nutshell.

THE CHAIR: I am sure that the consultation will be fairly extensive. Places like BSSS—

Ms Gallagher: Absolutely. Yes.

THE CHAIR: You will be consulting with them and other organisations that presumably have an interest as well?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. You know what education is like—stakeholders are engaged well and truly.

THE CHAIR: They are indeed.

Ms Gallagher: So there will be no group left unconsulted. We did offer it to the non-government colleges as something that they could be involved in and they have chosen not to take part. So this will be a government college review. Of course, we work pretty collaboratively with the non-government system in years 11 and 12. Certainly, the board is there for all and curriculum cooperation is very high. I have no doubt that any findings that relate to the government system would be useful to the non-government colleges as well.

THE CHAIR: I presume that they will end up following any changes. Only one non-government college goes through the New South Wales system and all the rest follow the ACT government college system.

Ms Gallagher: That's right.

THE CHAIR: I am curious that they chose not to participate in the process, considering that they do follow the ACT process.

Ms Gallagher: I guess they can take on board the findings without necessarily having to undergo the analysis. Really, I was very open. I said that this is for everybody if you choose to take part. We sent out the terms of reference. It was clear that it was to be a government college review.

THE CHAIR: You have undertaken to provide us with those terms of reference. I would certainly like to make some comments. In my previous life I remember having a look at the way the streams or the lines worked. I remember speaking to somebody who was involved with vocational education and training and had two kids in college. I asked, “Do you understand how it works?” They said, “No.”

I asked somebody at the BSSS, “Do you have any information to give out which explains this to parents?” Parents are concerned, of course, when their kids are taking their first steps toward adulthood. They want to know that their kids are going to get the best outcomes. The person said to me, “No, I just left it up to them in the end. It was too hard for me to understand.” I thought that might be something that you might like to have a look at.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, sure.

THE CHAIR: Dr Foskey has a supplementary.

DR FOSKEY: One thing that I have observed and others have just mentioned to me is that the transition between secondary high school and college is a big one whereas the transition from college to university is a much easier one. Unless they are highly motivated, the transition between high school and college is another gap that students fall through. This is often especially the case if they have made the swap from a non-government school to a college. This is happening quite a lot.

I am wondering if this review will look at those transitions. Will it, for instance, look at whether college education sets people up well for university and whether the transition from high school could be managed better?

Ms Gallagher: I think there is no doubt that there is an area where there could be stronger links between high school and college. I have heard that the youth worker initiative is assisting there, particularly for students who are concerned about taking that step from year 10 to year 11. The links between high school and college are getting stronger. Again, our pathway planning is pulling those links together. I have just been advised that I said that 90 per cent of year 9 students had a pathway plan. I should have said that 90 per cent of year 10 students had a pathway plan. I will just correct that answer while I have the opportunity to do so.

If I have overheard Carol Harris properly, I understand that high school principals are meeting with college principals to discuss those transition links. So that work is being done.

DR FOSKEY: And will the report be made public?

Ms Gallagher: The report of those meeting between the principals?

DR FOSKEY: No, I mean the final report—the college review.

Ms Gallagher: I can't see why not.

DR FOSKEY: I hope so.

Ms Gallagher: I cannot think of any report that I have not made public.

DR FOSKEY: We will be worried if it is not.

Ms Gallagher: I hope there are areas for improvement, and there always are. I don't think we would have any reason not to provide that to interested people. Usually all the education stakeholders that have been involved in reports are given a copy as well.

DR FOSKEY: Is it okay if I ask a question which slightly takes us off the review?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: Is there any funding in this budget to increase resources and personnel of the Board of Senior Secondary Studies, which you alluded to, minister, when you were speaking before?

Ms Gallagher: I might let Michele answer that. There isn't a specific initiative that deals with that but Michele can certainly add to that answer.

Dr Bruniges: There has been some additional staff given to the BSSS. At the moment we are working through a process to develop a memorandum of understanding for the supply of resources to the BSSS. In doing that it is critical for us to identify the nature and types of functions and where we can get synergies across both government and non-government sectors in terms of a range of things that we are going through and discussing with the BSSS.

In the short term it is a matter of thinking through the processes that we need to put in place each year. I have been working closely with Bob Edwards in the BSSS. I have asked him to look at ways in which we can increase the quality assurance processes and, again, additional resources will be required in order to do that. But, certainly, in terms of discussions that are under way, we need to have a close look at areas such as professional learning and areas that affect both the government and non-government sectors to make sure that we have sufficient resources to do that across all sectors.

MS PORTER: Minister, I notice that reference is made on page 93 of the appendix to budget paper 4 to a series of quality effectiveness measures, targets and estimated outcomes. It talks about the percentage of year 12 students who receive a year 12 certificate, tertiary entrance statements, et cetera. Are we able to get a breakdown of the post-college direction of ACT students? We are obviously tracking what they attain but once they leave, having obtained those qualifications, do we have any information about what actually happens to them?

Mr Curry: We don't have, I guess, a rigorous destination survey in place at this point in time, although a lot of our schools would have an understanding, on a school-by-school

basis, of where students have gone. But we are very much looking at the issue around a destination survey and ensuring that we can report on that and have much better data and information for our own use. Michele, I don't know whether you want to add to that.

Dr Bruniges: I think if we look around the country, one of the things that all jurisdictions are trying to do is make sure that they have post-school destination data to look at. It is really a reflective look. So if you carry that data after they have finished school you have a mechanism to look back at where they have come from as well as look forward to where they are going.

So that is on our agenda. We are doing a stocktake at the kinds of measures we have got and what measures we need to put priority towards collecting. Certainly, we have already had some conversations within the department on how the need for a post-school destinations survey is critical to understanding where our students go.

THE CHAIR: On that same page reference is made to an increase in the numbers of students receiving vocational qualifications. Some people might look at that and say that an increase from 55 per cent to 58 per cent is not that great. However, I believe that when you consider where the mark was a few years ago, it is pretty good.

Do you have a target figure that you would like to achieve? I know that there has been an increased emphasis. Certainly, in my first term in this place things like the student pathway plan have assisted students seeking vocational qualifications in college, especially students who might have otherwise dropped through the net. Do you have a target that you would like to see for the percentage of students who gain vocational qualifications? What impact do you think that would have on things like skills shortages? The second question is possibly one for you, minister.

Ms Gallagher: I did not hear the second one—I was listening to Mr Stefaniak's mobile phone being turned off. I heard you say "skill shortage" but I did not hear what went before that.

THE CHAIR: I was asking if you were looking at having some sort of indicative percentage target in respect of the number of students gaining vocational qualifications. You do not necessarily want to achieve 90 per cent of students getting a vocational qualification, because that does not suit everybody.

Ms Gallagher: I think the Canberra plan—and I think it is in the social plan—sets a target of 95 per cent of year 12 or equivalent, and the "or equivalent" is vocational training. It is a high standard to reach. It is not going to be easy to do but that would be where we set the target.

We are seeing the numbers increase. Part of the college review, of course, will be looking into the offering of vocational education and training and specifically the impact on teachers, the availability of the courses—all of those issues. As this becomes more prevalent, I think the actual delivery through the colleges will increase.

I know that the colleges and the CIT are forming stronger links—and they have had strong links. I know that Mr Veenker is meeting with college principals. I saw him walk in before and I said to him that he was little early. But that is an important link, too. We

have to see how the colleges and the CIT can interact in relation to that.

But the target is set. We need to have a more thorough look at how this is being offered in the colleges and that will be done through this review.

THE CHAIR: The second part of my question was: do you think it will have an impact on the skills shortages?

Ms Gallagher: It is all about choice really, isn't it? We know the areas we would like students to take a career in. I am not sure I would be encouraging my daughter to gain her bricklaying qualifications but it is an area that, of course, we need people to go into. But students can choose, and you know they are very good at making those choices. Democracy and citizenship is alive and well in the school system and they make those choices. Although those choices do not necessarily line up with areas of skills shortages, because there is a wide area of skills shortages the chances are that some of those will be met through these programs in the colleges.

THE CHAIR: Personally I am pegging for a benevolent dictatorship. Mr Stefaniak.

MR STEFANIAK: Minister, some \$75.5 million is budgeted for government secondary college education this year and that incorporates, of course, vocational education. Can you tell us what percentage of that money is allocated to vocational education and training programs?

Ms Gallagher: I cannot tell you. I do not know whether Rob is in a position to do so.

Mr Donnelly: \$75.5 million dollars in output class 1.3 in colleges. No, we are not able to.

MR STEFANIAK: You can't break it up?

Mr Donnelly: No.

MR STEFANIAK: I know that there are some very good liaisons with the CIT. Do you utilise only the CIT or do you utilise some of the competitive vocational education and training market as well for the college programs?

Ms Gallagher: It is not just through CIT. We have over 382 SNAPS and they are all largely industry placements. So, again, there are really good relations—

MS PORTER: I can name at least a couple of private providers that actually deliver under the SNAPS program.

Ms Gallagher: We have had a really good success rate with that program. Looking at some statistics, I note that the New South Wales region which is near to us has had seven SNAPS. We have got 382 in Canberra. So, we are doing very well under that program.

MR STEFANIAK: That is good to hear. I think the competitive VET market is \$22 million, down \$2.1 million from last year. Is that likely to have any flow-on effect to the delivery of programs to colleges?

Ms Gallagher: No. We are moving into another output class there.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate that.

Ms Gallagher: As I have explained before, there was a one-off supplementation to this area of \$3.1 million in the second appropriation last year to deal with what we saw as a very significant peak in training in the ACT. We are not expecting that peak to continue. It was clear at the time that that money was not to continue. It was 3.1 in 2004-05 and 000 in the outyears. We have made provision for an extra \$3 million over the next two years to deal with what we see will be a downturn in that peak. But, hopefully, there will be a levelling out of still high levels of activity.

When I became minister we were not achieving our targets under the ANTA agreement. Because we were not achieving the training levels that were required under that agreement, the commonwealth imposed a penalty of around \$500,000, which we later got back. The line has gone way up the other way and that \$3.1 million last year was really to supplement that urgent and largely unforeseen expansion of training. You can argue that it is a \$2.1 million cut. It is actually \$5.9 million more in vocational education and training than in 2004-05. The sum of money in that second appropriation is just not ongoing but it is on top of the \$2 million per year for SkillingACT and the \$1.5 million in each of this year and next year.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Ms Porter, do you have a question?

MS PORTER: Probably a very quick one. I note that reference is made on page 392 to the average cost per government secondary college student and high school student. How does this compare with New South Wales, because obviously they don't have the same system as us? Do we know the amount of money that they spend on high school students? You don't know?

Mr Donnelly: No. We are doing some internal analysis on that but that is based on some fairly round assumptions. So I would not be confident in making a statement as to how we compare with New South Wales in that regard.

Ms Gallagher: The obvious area to have a look at is the Productivity Commission's report on government schooling. This would need to be done with hesitation because there are always differences in the way those figures are reported. But that would probably be the most public document.

Mr Donnelly: Those figures do not separate the colleges and high schools of most states and territories. But I can say we spend a little more than most other states and territories on the combined college and high school amount.

MS PORTER: I would imagine that would be because of perhaps the more intense nature of things, such as smaller class sizes, by the time they get to college.

Ms Gallagher: It can be that and it can be superannuation. It can be a whole range of things.

Mr Donnelly: There is a huge array of reasons why the costs are different.

MS PORTER: Thank you. That was quick, wasn't it?

THE CHAIR: We will now consider output 1.4, government special education.

DR FOSKEY: Chair, this morning I asked some questions about the SCAN mechanism and indicated that some parents perceived some problems with it. I just want to expand on that a little bit this afternoon. I think it is important that parents do get heard. I know that one of the frustrations of having a child with a disability is that you are often not recognised as the person who knows that child and that experts and others often do not really listen.

I have a page in front of me with some quotes which set out people's feelings about what is not working in this area. It might be helpful to refer to some of the questions that parents ask. Those questions include: "I thought that it was supposed to be an individual assessment. Why then do the teachers openly compare students?"; "Why won't the department tell parents how many points their child attracts? What is the big secret?"; "Did this school gain extra staff or additional funding for purchase of aids?"; "What happened to the training for parents that the minister promised before SCAN was introduced in 2003?"; "What external validation of the SCAN process and the resource allocation has been undertaken, and if not, why not?"

So I guess that there is a sense of frustration there, and I just would be keen to hear the response. Either the SCAN process needs improving or parents need to be heard and understand better what is going on.

Ms Gallagher: Deb, again, whilst I accept that there would be some parents out there who are not happy, I have to say that this program has been very successful across the board. That is not discounting that there may be individual grievances within that.

You referred to teachers openly comparing the assessment. I find that a bit confusing because, whilst teachers are involved in the process as are parents and the students themselves if they are able to participate or if they want to participate, the assessment is done by trained moderators who facilitate that program. So it is not actually up to teachers to conduct the assessment.

I have alluded to the question of why we won't tell parents about points. This is because we don't want to be in a position where people—and it is difficult to say this—may influence decisions in the assessment process based on a belief that they may get more money for their child or their young person. That is the rationale behind that. I would not blame parents for doing this. If you understood that you would get an extra two hours per day support for your child if you ticked this box or if you said this is what you wanted to achieve, why would you not want to see that happen?

DR FOSKEY: Just to interrupt—I am sorry. I am talking about comments from quite a range of parents—not just one. This is the result of conversations that Consultation Advocacy ACT carried out with parents. In one case a parent tried to point out the child's strength "but the principal kept saying that we had to paint the worst case scenario to ensure that my son would get the support the school needed". Again, this is a little bit like the ISPs—

Ms Gallagher: That is precisely the point I am making, Deb.

DR FOSKEY: Yes. That is right. But I made the point earlier about a needs base rather than strengths, where to point out your child's strengths actually might reduce the amount of support that that child gets. It is a little bit like the ISPs—this sort of idea of competing by saying that your child needs things more than another child. It is a difficult thing when there are scarce dollars but it does not have the best outcome.

Ms Gallagher: And that is the whole issue. We can't stop those individual discussions happening that people believe they can influence a process. I am advised this is an extremely rigorous and fair process which has resulted in some students receiving additional resources or the school receiving additional staffing points due to a student's disability.

In fact, there is \$8 million over the next four years as a direct result of this SCAN process. We had a budget of around \$32 million for special education. That budget is now \$40 million. I can't see how any parent could think that this process has not resulted in additional resources—the sort of money we are looking at—going to, I would imagine, every single school. This year alone we are opening five learning support centres or learning support units at Kaleen, Stromlo, Rivett, Amaroo and Gowrie schools. We are dealing with the growth in the numbers we are seeing; we are dealing with the complexity. Individual cases where parents are not happy with what is being provided at school—I know because I see the cases that come to my attention—are being managed and where extra resources are required they are being given.

I do not know if Craig can answer what has happened with the training of parents—that was about familiarising themselves with the SCAN process and the external validation of that process.

Mr Curry: Could I just respond first to the issue around the perceived negativity. That discussion has happened right through the developmental phase of SCAN and it is something that we have tried to address and can continue to address if it is to do with the wording of the actual instrument and how it profiles. But, I guess, on the other hand, we are looking at the reasonable adjustments we need to make for a student to access and participate in their education. So as well as their strengths we actually need to know what needs to be modified so we can work through what level of support they need. So it is a bit of a balancing act.

I do appreciate the sentiments you are expressing and if we can look at the wording and structure so that it can be more positive for parents we can continue to do that. The wording is not totally set in stone but certainly we believe the domains are correct—the various categories within the instrument that we need to look at around safety, communication and those areas I have mentioned this morning.

I know that we have offered training for parents. You mentioned training and I know there were a few glitches, but I know that the special education section of the department does offer familiarisation sessions for parents now. I can probably get some more information on that if you would like it.

DR FOSKEY: Yes, please.

Mr Curry: We have not gone to an external validation or external review of the process yet but we are happy to consider that when we believe we have got things right. We are modifying as we go. We get feedback around the process every time we go through the process and we want to refine it so it is meeting everyone's needs.

MR SESELJA: Minister, in answer to a question on notice earlier this year the acting education minister—I don't know who that was—indicated that the number of students with pervasive developmental disorder, which is, I believe, one or other variant of the autism spectrum disorder, rose from 130 in the year 2000 to 323 in 2004. That is about 2½ times over five years. Has the government been able to ascertain why there has been such an unusual increase in the number of students meeting the PDD criteria and has there been any significant funding initiative in respect of the means necessary to deal with it?

Ms Gallagher: The only research I have seen on this is that the diagnosis of the autism spectrum disorder—and that is a wide spectrum—is getting better; that maybe there has not been the big increase that we have seen; and that specialists are better at diagnosing them correctly. An obvious one is that children who were diagnosed with maybe attention deficit disorder or some learning disability may now fall within the autism spectrum disorder.

In relation to specific resources, yes, we have many more autism specific units open now than we did three years ago and there is a variety of approaches to learning within those settings. As Craig said earlier, the number of students who have autism exist across all settings that we offer in the school system. There is flexibility within the special education budget and within the larger education budget in that if we need money to open these units when we need to, where there is demand, those units are provided as demand rises.

A great deal of effort has gone into ensuring that those students are placed appropriately, that what is provided best meets their needs. Hopefully as much as possible and depending on the nature of students' disabilities, this is within an area that is convenient to their parents because it is not always at the local primary school. Of course, some of this extra appropriation will go to meeting the needs of those students. It is certainly the area within the disability spectrum in which we have seen the biggest increases.

THE CHAIR: When you come before us on Tuesday as the Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, the officials from that area might be able to shed a bit of light because the increasing levels of ASD is an issue that does get canvassed with them on a regular basis.

Ms Gallagher: And I guess the actual diagnosis probably rests outside of all of my portfolios. The department educates children who have already been diagnosed by a suitable professional.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja, if you are interested in pursuing that one you might want to put that as a question on notice to Minister Hargreaves, diagnosis being in his portfolio now.

MR SESELJA: Certainly. Do you mind if I ask another question on this output class?

THE CHAIR: No.

MR SESELJA: Thank you. I think we touched on this before but it is a different issue. I draw your attention to the accountability indicators x and y on page 392 of budget paper 4. The average cost per government special school student in special schools is \$48,000 and the average cost per government special education student in mainstream schools is \$21,900. I understand that a lot of factors would go into that difference and probably what would come to mind is the significance of the needs. Are you able to give us a breakdown of why there is such a significant disparity between those two figures?

Ms Gallagher: Well, I can kick it off. The level of need of students in the special schools will without doubt be much, much more significant than those students that can exist and participate in their education in a mainstream school. If you are looking at the numbers in the special schools, we have around 340 students in the special school system—I am searching for better words than “special schools” but I have not come up with any yet. There are about 1,300 to 1,400 students in special education in mainstream schools. So they are the numbers that you are dealing with.

Mr Donnelly: I think the minister has covered it quite well. It really does come down to the greatly increased level of need of the students who tend to attend special schools, which is reflected in both increased infrastructure costs in those schools and also in decreased staff-student ratios—more staff to fewer students.

MR SESELJA: Are there economies of scale issues as well, just dealing with 340 versus 1,400, or is that not a significant factor?

Mr Donnelly: There are probably some economies of scale when dealing with students with special needs in mainstream schools. You already have a particular infrastructure for mainstream students, which can be a leverage to provide additional services.

MR SESELJA: Is it possible, on notice, to get a slightly more detailed breakdown of the various costs that make up those two figures?

Mr Donnelly: What level of detail?

MR SESELJA: Something greater than what we have in the budget papers, just to give us an idea. You listed a couple of the factors such as the different infrastructure and the numbers of the student-teacher ratios. Are we able to get some sort of breakdown that would just unpack that a little for us—where the costs are coming to make those two figures?

Ms Gallagher: Where we can provide extra information, we will. We will have a look at what we can provide and stop short of reporting actual student allocations.

MR SESELJA: Thank you. I have other questions on this but I am happy to give someone else a go and come back on this if there is time.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MS PORTER: I have a supplementary on what you have been talking about. Minister, I presume that whether a child accesses a special school or whether they access special assistance within a mainstream school would be based on the level of need of the student to a particular kind of support. Do parents have a preference to one or the other? Does that play any part in it or does it come down to the level of support that the child needs?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, it does come down to the level of support a child needs. But the parents, of course, do have a very significant say about that. We have a number of students in mainstream school settings that would be appropriately placed within a special school setting. I know of a number of students that move within as their parents search for the right setting for them. For some parents choice and location, whether it be a special school or a mainstream setting, are very important to them personally. There are extra things in special schools—better security measures can be met, and for some parents that is very important; for others it is going to school with a sibling and having the family treated as a whole. So there is a range of ways that parents can choose, but this is under the advice of and close work with the department and the school about what is appropriate for their student.

Mr Curry: I guess it is really about parent choice in the end and what the different settings offer. When a parent looks at a special school what they would see is a more intensive approach with the smaller teacher-student ratios. Some of the facilities that are offered in special schools have been built particularly for the range of students in the school. So parents also make the decisions on what the setting actually offers. But we are also mindful of the DDA legislation and the standards for education. If a parent were particularly strong about inclusion and wanted a mainstream setting, we would look to accommodate that as well. But it tends to be the choices parents think their child needs. Many parents of young children with significant disabilities often see the special school as a safer place. It provides facilities like a hydrotherapy pool and so on and they will go for that sort of setting. But they might change, as the minister said, as the child goes through school.

MS PORTER: Are individual learning plans for students in special schools also accessed in mainstream schools?

Mr Curry: Yes. It is the same structure of the plan that we use for students regardless of the setting.

MS PORTER: They are different to—

Mr Curry: Yes. This is the students' learning goals while they are in the education setting.

MR STEFANIAK: This is something different to what we have been discussing here. There are other students, of course, with special needs. Some, for example, need additional support for literacy and numeracy and we have programs for that. There is another group of students you could reasonably say has special needs—that is, gifted and particularly talented kids. There has been a fair bit of research to indicate that those students often benefit considerably from being taught in clusters of similarly able

colleagues. Is there any provision of funding in this year's budget to cater for the educational needs of this rather forgotten group?

Ms Gallagher: I would not say they are forgotten; it is core business of the department. Funding is provided for those students through our general appropriation to the education department. I just looked at LEAP, for example, when I visited Lyneham High last week or the week before. Students ranked in the top two per cent, leaving primary school, undertake extension courses in LEAP at Lyneham High. It was a buzzing class of very enthusiastic learners. I had a discussion with the teacher about the specific teaching needs—what a teacher has to do to engage these groups of students.

I know that, at a range of primary schools within the normal teaching program extension, courses are provided to students who are performing better or moving a bit faster ahead of their peers in their class. So there is a range of ways—there are other programs in high schools similar to LEAP; they are called different names—to deal with gifted and talented students.

MR SESELJA: I was just wondering if you could confirm something for us, minister. Is it true that Therapy ACT has a waiting list of up to eight months for appointments for children with special needs who may, for example, need gross motor or physiotherapy assessment?

Ms Gallagher: Therapy ACT does not come under my portfolio. That is a matter for Mr Hargreaves to answer.

THE CHAIR: If there are no further questions in this output class, I might suggest that we go to afternoon tea. When we come back, if it is okay with you, minister, I would like to deal with output classes 1.5 and 4.1 together. Is that all right?

Ms Gallagher: I have no doubt that that will fine.

THE CHAIR: They are physical education, early childhood and pre-school education. They have been split up recently but slot in nicely after dealing with special education.

Meeting adjourned from 3.28 to 3.50 pm.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back. We are now dealing with output classes 1.5 and 4.1. These outputs encompass preschool education and early childhood.

MS PORTER: Page 396 of budget paper No 4 mentions amounts of money for increased preschool hours under budget policy adjustments. Could you give us some more information about the benefits of this expansion and the reason behind the government's decision to make this a priority area of education funding?

Ms Gallagher: This was a key election promise of the government to inject around \$8 million into preschool education. It is the biggest injection of funds into this area in many years, probably since the preschool program started in its current form. This funding will allow preschool education to increase from 10.5 hours per week to 12 hours a week.

The idea is to not only increase the number places for eligible students to a preschool program and increase the hours of contact in a classroom situation but also to modernise the preschool system, that is, to offer a range of programs and times for parents, and to be as flexible as we can with that program. The idea is not to force people to do the two-day a week, six hours per day program, although we think many parents will like that option, but to have those choices balanced out with choices for longer days over three days.

At the moment children go in two 3½-hour sessions and a three-hour session. I am trying to think—it is a while since my daughter was there—but it is something like 9.30 to 12.30, 9.00 to 1.00 and 12.00 to 3.00, dotted through the week. That presents some challenges to families, particularly working parents who want the benefit of the preschool program but have childcare arrangements that do not necessarily fit within the two. This will hopefully provide some more flexibility and more options for families.

We hope that it increases the numbers of eligible four-year-olds accessing the program. Currently, around 80 per cent of eligible four-year-olds undertake government preschool education. We think there could be a positive flow-on in relation to the pressure on childcare—namely, if a parent is accessing the longer day program from 9.00 to 3.00, two days a week, they may only need to be in a position to pay for childcare for the other three days or for the other days that they need care. That will free up some spaces for the childcare centre to offer some part-time places to other children. There is a range of benefits.

I guess the main driver is to increase government support for this age group. Once you are an eligible five-year-old, you go to school full time. This is covering the year before when we are expecting these littlies to be getting ready for big school. I do not think it will be a problem asking them to attend 10½ hours and increasing that to 12. If you tried to increase the hours of education in primary school or high school, you might find the student population rebelling somewhat but in this age group they are on track to be compliant with this change.

MS PORTER: Maybe not always at home!

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, this will obviously require the recruitment of additional early childhood education teachers. Are you concerned there might be difficulties in recruiting these teachers?

Ms Gallagher: Craig can expand on how many teachers we expect to recruit because it is difficult to explain. We have a number of part-time preschool teachers now who may wish to go to full-time teaching. We have a number of part-time preschools. Planning preschools is a science. Every year we have to work out where the students are going and make decisions about whether it is a full-time preschool, part-time preschool and, industrially, what that means for the teachers who are working in those environments. You might have a full-time preschool teacher whose enrolments go to a part-time level and what we do with their other hours needs to be managed.

A full-time preschool operates two streams of classes, that is, up to 50 students accessing two times 10½ hours going through the same preschool. It really is a difficult science. I do not think there will be any shortage of early childhood trained teachers, that is,

teachers who can teach from preschool into the early years in primary school. We have never had problems recruiting in that area. In fact I was looking at some figures the other day that show we have around 1,400 applications for about 300 positions within our schools each year, so there is no doubt the teachers are out there.

It is also an area where we have seen low attrition, and we have an ageing work force. Once teachers are in the preschool system they enjoy it and they choose to stay in it. I think this change will also encourage a bit of workforce enhancement in the sense that we may get some younger teachers—I don't want to be ageist, because they might not be younger—or new teachers into the preschool system.

Mr Curry: It is a bit hard to calculate numbers at the moment but we're moving into two stages of implementation. Next semester, in term 3, about half our preschools will move to offering the 12-hour a week programs. We are moving to look at preschools where staff are willing to extend their current employment times, because there are many part-time people working in our preschools. We believe we will need to employ three more teachers to cover the first stage.

The second stage, though, are preschools where it's a little bit more complicated and they don't have a structure at this point in time which lends itself as easily to moving into the model; so we are leaving that group until the beginning of next year to implement.

There are a number of ways we're going to do that. There will be part-time teachers who want to extend their time. There are contract teachers who will be interested in being part of the program. We need to actually cover the release time of teachers in our preschools, which hasn't been an issue for us in the past. So it's going to depend on the actual mix of staff and the interest people show in whether they want to extend their involvement in this. It could involve recruiting up to 40 early childhood teachers, but it depends on the mix and what people chose to do, and we won't know until we start talking seriously to current employees.

DR FOSKEY: Are there any viability issues in preschools and, if there are, will the increased funding assist in addressing them?

Ms Gallagher: There are some viability issues that have been around for some time. We have some very small preschools and if you talk to some teachers they will say that a preschool program, educationally, is challenged by small numbers, that you need a certain critical mass of students in order to make the delivery of the preschool curriculum work. Whilst I accept that view, on balance, I have taken the view that it's more important at this early stage to have children actually attending preschool.

The location of some of the very small preschools may result in, if they were suspended, those children not attending preschool at all. We've taken a very sympathetic view to preschools and particularly those that, while not threatened, have small numbers. I'm talking here about preschools with eight or nine students in them, and of course we have the whole mix. On the other hand, and as in any area of government education, we have Amaroo preschool that's actually bursting at the seams. We've got transportables there trying to deal with numbers, and that's a purpose-built preschool for 100 students.

So as usual it's dealing with those extremes in the provision of education but, as I said,

I have no plans at this stage to suspend any preschool, but I have to keep that under advice, I guess. Every September the census data is collected about parents who want to enrol their children. We look at that and I discuss it with the department. We look at what it means for staff and staffing changes. So far in my role as minister I haven't made any decision to suspend any preschool even though, if you listen to some of the educational arguments, there would be reasons to look at shifting those children to another preschool.

DR FOSKEY: I notice that the last strategic plan for preschools appears to be dated 2001 to 2003. Has a more recent plan been developed and, if not, will this be undertaken in the coming financial year? Furthermore, is there a report against the goals of the strategic plan for 2001 to 2003 and how far have those goals been progressed?

Dr Bruniges: Yes, there been a plan since then. A one-year plan for this year for preschools has been released. We are working on a framework for P to 10 and the next strategic planning exercise for the department has commenced. It will be one strategic plan going right across from preschool to year 12 and hopefully it will be launched at the end of this year. I might ask Mr Curry whether there's been a report from 2001 to 2003 that I'm not aware of.

Mr Curry: I'm not aware of one.

DR FOSKEY: It's my understanding that the Australian Education Union has argued that preschools need better access to particular student support resources, including access to the SCAN funding; support from school counsellors, as recommended by the review of school counselling in 2003; and additional support for ESL students. Has any thought been given in the budget to this resourcing? Are there any plans for the future for increasing support to students with additional needs?

Ms Gallagher: It's a good question. At the moment we are undertaking a preschool primary links trial across about 14 preschools, if I get that number correct. That is looking at ways to better facilitate links between the preschool environment and bringing them into government education. In a way they sort of sat outside of government schooling itself, and I think there are very good reasons that they should come under the umbrella of government education as a whole. That's what we're providing: government preschool education. The teachers providing it are government teachers, employed by the department.

It's a historical thing that there has been a divide between preschools and primary schools, which I think has evolved for various reasons, and to some extent it has been to the benefit of preschools. Preschools haven't sought to become closer to primary schools.

I think this work will be important. We're doing it in a very sensitive way that makes sure we're bringing the preschool sector with us into the primary school environment so it doesn't look like it's a takeover or anything like that, but the preschool system does need to modernise.

In relation to specific services such as extra support, it is my experience, having gone through the preschool program three years ago, that if support were requested from

preschools, I would be very surprised if that support wasn't provided from the department. If a child needed extra support around disability or counselling there simply is no way that that support wouldn't be provided. I cannot think of any reason why it would not be.

DR FOSKEY: It would probably help if people felt they could make those requests, and perhaps that's a cultural thing. Preschools are an opportunity, in a sense, to educate parents about what they can expect, working in partnership with the system. In fact, the preschool is an excellent place. Is there any chance of it being a place where the need for support in parenting could be identified? Being a sole parent, it's very much a partnership for parents like that, and it could be just the thing where we can identify kids very early on, through the system, and come up with things to help them and their parents, because they need help as much as kids.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I agree. I would say that work is already done. Wearing my other hat of children, youth and family, with child protection and family support concerns, quite often that is reported by a preschool teacher or a primary school teacher. Importantly, for preschoolers, it may be the first time that they've come into contact in some way with the government or with the authorities. That work between teachers and the office, and to some extent the new child and family centres, in the areas that they're operating, is going very well. I'm not saying that there couldn't be better enhancement of that and information sharing and networking, but teachers do a pretty good job in alerting people to the need for extra support or calling for the provision of extra support.

DR FOSKEY: My final questions in this area are around the five Koori preschool programs that received expansion funding in this year's budget. Are they all up and running? Can you give me a snapshot of how they operate, including the number of children currently attending indigenous preschools, the staffing profile and whether there are parent committees or advisory structures?

Ms Gallagher: I can certainly confirm that the five Koori preschools are up and running. With the detail of the staffing profile and the numbers in the Koori preschools we might take that on notice and give you the specific data.

DR FOSKEY: That would be appreciated.

THE CHAIR: That brings us to non-government school education.

MR SESELJA: Page 184 of budget paper 3 indicates an initiative through a second appropriation of additional support for non-government schools for kindergarten to year 3 classes. For the next financial year, I think this comes to \$250,000. Whilst any additional funds are welcome, what does this amount come to per individual non-government school?

Ms Gallagher: The amount is in addition to the \$2 million we provided, I think over four years, in the previous budget. It is basically an extension of the grant that we gave in the last budget. So you would need to add it on top of that. Total K to 3 funding going into the non-government system is just over \$1 million a year in relation to the initiatives we have funded in previous budgets, and this is just a simple add-on to that.

I do not know if it is provided in a per capita way once it reaches the school. We do not have a say in that. It is just provided in individual grants to the independent schools, based on their K to 3 enrolments and to the Catholic Education Office, which receives a lump sum. As to whether that translates into a per capita payment, I could not tell you. To do a quick analysis, you would just simply divide the K to 3 enrolments into that.

MR SESELJA: By the number of schools, obviously. How many schools are eligible for that funding?

Ms Gallagher: It would be all of the Catholic systemic schools, the primary schools and many of the independent primary schools.

Mr Donnelly: There are 38 non-government primary schools.

MR SESELJA: I am sure I can work that out. In one of your press releases, following the launch of the new ACT curriculum, you said that the principles and framework had been developed following extensive consultation with the government, Catholic and independent school sectors, professional business and community organisations, teachers, parents and students. Are you able to give us a breakdown of the number of times that you have consulted with the following organisations—and I am obviously happy if you take this on notice—the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union, Catholic Education Commission, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools, the Association of Independent Schools for the ACT and individual non-government schools?

Ms Gallagher: Sure. In answering that question, I will table the meetings of the task force where all of those people were represented, and the consultative committee where a broader representation was also established. There were no individual consultations with stakeholders on the curriculum. We set up a task force and a consultative committee to manage that.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, have grants to non-government schools been reduced, as a consequence of the decision to acquire debt to find that \$2.8 million in savings?

Ms Gallagher: No. As I said earlier, the \$2.8 million saving is restricted to departmental savings. It will not impact on money going into the schools, and that goes for the non-government school system as well.

MR GENTLEMAN: Is that in the area of administrative overheads? I imagine that over the last several years, particularly under the last Liberal government, the education department must have had to absorb administrative cuts. Has the non-government sector, to your knowledge, ever had to absorb similar savings?

Ms Gallagher: Certainly not while I have been minister. They have not been asked to find any savings. Back when there was a fairly severe savings regime placed on the department, and I cannot recall what year that was, I think there was a 20 per cent savings imposed on the department and 70 jobs were lost. That was the last savings imposed on education. To my understanding, that did not involve cuts to the non-government school grants.

DR FOSKEY: On page 15 of budget paper 2, the budget at a glance, there is a total increase of \$13.7 million in 2005-06 to non-government schools but in the budget initiatives I can only find one directing funding to non-government schooling and that's \$250,000, which we've already talked about on page 386 of budget paper 4. Could you explain the figures? Does that 147.6 include funding from the commonwealth government and is the increase of \$13.7 million largely as a result of increased commonwealth grants?

Ms Gallagher: Yes and yes.

DR FOSKEY: And how much has the ACT government increased spending on non-government schools other than the initiative for additional K to 3 support?

Ms Gallagher: Overall, we provide around \$34 million to the non-government school system each year and that's made up of per capita grants, funding for students with disability, redirected money, or money from the interest subsidy scheme that's still going in there from obligations under that program, and other ongoing initiatives.

Mr Donnelly: The total ACT government increase in funding to non-government schools between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 budgets was 1.6 million and of that amount 250,000 was provided as part of the K to 3 initiatives; so it would be 1.35 million.

DR FOSKEY: Is that per capita grants?

Mr Donnelly: That amount is provided as per capita grants and is provided in recognition of indexation and enrolment growth.

DR FOSKEY: Is the ACT government linking per capita funding for non-government schools to the suggested schools standard cost mechanism as recommended by the Connor inquiry in 2003? If so, how is it working; and, if not, why not?

Ms Gallagher: If you're referring to the recommendation I think you are, that's the recommendation the government didn't accept.

DR FOSKEY: Okay.

Ms Gallagher: That was basically to dream up a new model for funding just for the ACT. At the time we said no. MCEETYA was looking at this issue on a national level, through the student resourcing task force. We felt that, rather than going ahead and doing something on our own, we should wait for that work to be finished. That work is in its final stages and hasn't been considered by the ministerial council at this stage. We didn't discuss it at the last MCEETYA meeting. The system we fund schools on is the same as has been in place for many years.

DR FOSKEY: Once the ministerial council considers that, will it make a decision that all states and territories will then adopt?

Ms Gallagher: It could. The ministerial council has the commonwealth on it as well. We would be looking for support from the commonwealth. It is school resourcing. Hopefully, what they will come up with is a resourcing index across all schools. For

a student at a school, this is what it costs. The work that was being done was: this is what it costs for a student that doesn't have any of these other issues, and then looking at the cost of any other impact that may happen on their education.

DR FOSKEY: Do you think it is a preferable model?

Ms Gallagher: An enormous amount of work has gone into this. All ministers signed up to try to do this, to find what it costs, and then be able to make those decisions. Because of the way the commonwealth has indicated it is going to fund, particularly the non-government system under their model—it is certainly for the next quadrennium, until 2008—my guess is that that model will not be adopted by the commonwealth in that time.

There are ways that we can look at it. The government's strong view is that we make funding decisions based on need. That is what guides our decision making. If the states and the territories accept something, then we would be looking at how to implement it here, for sure.

DR FOSKEY: Thanks. That is the end of my questions on non-government schools.

MR SESELJA: A quick supp: during the election campaign there was a lot of discussion about percentages. I remember a campaign from the non-government sector. I forget the exact figure. It was about the 17 per cent mark, I think, of ACT government funding per capita for students in government schools and it was, I think, quoted as 25 per cent in New South Wales as a guarantee. What is the current figure? Do you have those? Have they gone up or down in this budget, those percentages?

Ms Gallagher: The figure is maintained at around 17 per cent.

MR SESELJA: There has been no movement up or down?

Ms Gallagher: No significant change.

THE CHAIR: If there are no further questions on this output class?

DR FOSKEY: You can give them an early mark.

THE CHAIR: We can give those parts of the department an early mark. Let's put a big line through 2.1. We will move onto output class 3, vocational education and training.

Ms Gallagher: If we could deal with vocational education and maybe have the CIT at the table, is that all right?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Gallagher: Michele and Craig will probably stay for that output class.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I appreciate that.

Ms Gallagher: And Rob will stay because he is a man of figures. Early mark withdrawn.

MR SESELJA: I notice, minister, you had a bit of an exchange with Mr Stefaniak on this issue before. I want to get a bit of clarification. Mr Stefaniak put it to you that, despite the skills shortages that are going on at the moment, there is \$2.1 million less in this budget on VET overall in comparison with 2004-05. You said that is a result of the additional \$3 million that came in as a one-off last year.

My understanding is that groups like the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry have said that there has been a 15 per cent increase in demand for apprentices over, I think, the last year. They don't see that changing significantly. Are you able to explain to us what figures you have to show that it was a one-off spike and how that is going to level out in the next couple of years, to justify the lower level of spending?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. I should explain this a bit better. I can say that vocational education and training is demand driven. Therefore, it is your best guess when it comes to making budgetary provision. We have not turned away one apprentice or one trainee in the ACT. We have no control over when those arrangements are engaged upon. It is people entering into an employment relationship of which training becomes a part.

I can tell you that the extra money provided in that was to deal with what we saw as a sharp increase. VET reports figures ad nauseam. There is no shortage of reporting of figures in this area, which we can provide: where we were; where we are now. I think it is around 6,700—Anne will correct me—in training at the moment, which is a substantial increase on where we have been in the past. With our best guess, we just can't see that level of activity being maintained, in our small jurisdiction. Some of the peak we have seen is as a result of the bushfires and some of the extra work that was generated through bushfire recovery. Of course, we are peaking now, a couple of years on, as those students are progressing through their training.

We knew, at the beginning of the budget year that what was provided last year was not going to be enough to see us through the next year, but we didn't believe that to the extent that there would be activity that was generated last year that would be maintained into this year. In a sense, our view is that we have made provision. If that provision isn't enough, then it is up to me. I can't predict that, necessarily, to an exact degree, as we can in other areas of education, because of the fact that it is demand driven. The decrease occurs, not with the actual budget of 2004-05 but the outcome of 2004-05. There is increased money this year on what was provided in last year's budget.

MR SESELJA: But not what was provided last year. It is a net decrease, isn't it, not from the original budget but from the spend of last year, at this stage, if everything goes according to plan?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, because that money was not ongoing, so, yes, it is.

MR SESELJA: It is a net reduction. I understand that it is sometimes difficult to judge. From talking to the construction industry on the amount of on-hand construction in the city area, section 84 is going to be the size of Woden Plaza. There is more land released this year, we were told the other day, than there will be in future years and certainly more than there has been in the past couple of years. In some significant drivers, it seems that there is even more upward pressure. That has got to, to a degree, call into question

perhaps some of the estimates. We may well be seeing then additional appropriations needed during the year.

Ms Gallagher: We are hoping not, because there is the requirement, in a tough budget year, to stay within budget. Whilst there may be pressure in certain areas, and hopefully they will be in areas of workforce shortage, there may not be the same pressures maintained in other lower priority areas. That is the challenge for us in managing VET at the moment, whilst it does appear to be volatile.

MS PORTER: On what you've been talking about, minister: I was just noticing, on page 393, the middle chart talks about total reported number of training commencements under available programs, 7,000 in 2004-05, then 6,200 in the next financial year.

Ms Gallagher: That was what I was talking about. We are estimating that people drop off. If you look at any other area where VET is tracked, you do see peaks and then declines. We can't go on expecting this peak to plateau. That is the nature of it. We are expecting a small decline.

DR FOSKEY: Has the ACT vocational education and training strategic plan for 2005-09 been completed yet?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, it has. We can provide you with a copy of it if you like.

DR FOSKEY: That is much too short an answer. Thank you. I am sure a copy would be appreciated. In relation to the ACT vocational education and training strategy for people with a disability, dated 2000-03, has there been any analysis of achievements under this strategy and further work needed to improve access to vocational education and training for people with a disability?

Ms Houghton: The disability subcommittee of the Vocational Education and Training Authority is fully involved in developing the new strategic plan and has developed, under that plan, an annual action plan. There has been a change in procedures in that they will be, as a group, deciding which actions they are going to do in 2005. They have their own action—one page that looks like the strategic plan veto. It matches in and will be on the website as soon as that committee has signed it off. That committee has been with us for about two or three years in various guises and, yes, they are very rigorous at reporting against the agreed outcomes. That is available.

DR FOSKEY: Has the government department reviewed its performance against the national strategy, partners in a learning culture 2000-2005, for increasing opportunities for indigenous people in vocational education and training?

Ms Houghton: I will just go back a bit. The Vocational Education and Training Authority has three subcommittees that work on vocational aspects: people with a disability; women in VET; and indigenous participation in VET. They are very active committees, with a wide-ranging membership, which meet at least four times a year to progress the national agendas. Not only are they looking at the ACT agenda for indigenous people in VET, they are also looking to the national strategies developed by ANTA.

DR FOSKEY: How many students have accessed the training pathway guarantee funded in the last budget? Has there been a review of the effectiveness of this program in relation to course completion, qualification attainment and employment outcomes?

Ms Houghton: The training pathway guarantee has only been going for one year. The survey was conducted last August of the 2003 cohort who left year 12. We identified over 2,000 leavers whom we wanted to contact. Anybody who got a place at university or a place that we knew about at CIT was excluded from this survey.

The take-up wasn't as good as we had hoped. It was very difficult to contact these young people. In fact, out of the 2,300, we had trouble contacting 1,000 of those people we wanted to talk to. Mobile phone numbers had changed; they had gone to work in a pub in London. It was very difficult.

In the end, we came up with 268 people who were interested in progressing further training. There were eligibility criteria. They couldn't be in receipt of commonwealth funds for training; they couldn't be already enrolled in another program. Those 268 people were then referred on to registered training organisations. We had five willing organisations that were going to look at these young people's needs and then get them into training.

DR FOSKEY: Does that program work, for instance, for students who have been out of year 12 for, say, 12 months? As you know, what often happens is that students spend that year in a certain way and then decide they had better get back into something the year after that.

Ms Houghton: We found that it was people who had left or drifted out in year 11 that we were coming up with. Their parents and their grandparents were very appreciative of our calling and offering this training. It was like a little check for them. I would have to say, though, that they were very difficult to contact. We kept losing them at each contact. To date we only have 30 enrolments. Most of them are at the CIT. They are a great success for those young people. But we had hoped that we would be collecting perhaps 100 more than that. That is what we would like.

The program hasn't got the numbers but it has quality outcomes for those 30 young people. We will be looking at contacting and gathering those people in more tightly, perhaps cut out some of the steps straight from the survey. We would hope to refer them directly to the registered training organisations that we know can deliver that service so that there is not a chance for them to lose interest.

THE CHAIR: In relation to that: somebody came to me six months ago and told me their son was being pursued by, I think, the registered training organisation about a training pathway guarantee. The suggestion to me was that the person from the RTO was less than inspirational. Obviously, you can't have it as a requirement that people within the RTOs be inspirational but it was raised that—

Ms Houghton: I think we can. It is terribly important. Our evaluation of this first trial has shown two significant facts. Firstly, they need career planning, not just to be offered courses that are available. They have been out of the system long enough to appreciate and to need a normal skills audit and the time and trouble that a qualified careers

counsellor can give them. So we hope to build career counselling into this program.

The other thing is that we have evaluated the five registered training organisations that participated. We are recommending that three not be invited to participate again, that we need the high performers, the people who go that extra mile, because you are talking to people who are disengaged from the system. They do take a lot of care, a lot of extra effort. I had one of the teachers at CIT say to me, “I said hello to five of my TPGs”—we love acronyms in VET—“last week and they’re all doing well.” That personal care is what’s needed. We didn’t build it in last time; we went straight from the phone to pick a training course. We now know we need another step.

THE CHAIR: I have to say that I felt a bit of guilt because the time that this father approached me was about two weeks before the election. I was feeling a bit under pressure at the time. I was saying to him, “What is your son interested in?” I was talking about all those things that really this person from the RTO should have been speaking to him about. This kid had an interest in computer games. I said, “Are you aware of the courses that are being offered through CIT? Maybe he can get involved in that. Get him interested in designing computer games and that sort of thing as well.”

Ms Houghton: I think it is incredibly important that we reengage them, give them a view of themselves in the future. I think that is what is missing from some of these young people; they really can’t see themselves in any form of work. They need that extra support. Can I just add that we are hoping to do a very expensive promotion. It was fairly low key the first time, thinking that the telephone contact would be enough. I think we need people like that father knowing how to engage with this program.

THE CHAIR: I would be happy to assist however I can. I am sure we all would be. We spoke about it at last year’s estimates very positively. That had bipartisan support. I know Mrs Dunne was incredibly impressed with the proposal to get those kids who were sitting on the couch in front of the telly off the couch and into some sort of training, study or work of some description.

Ms Gallagher: Following on from that: whilst there are areas for improvement, for those 30 who have engaged in training, it is a fantastic outcome.

DR FOSKEY: I am interested in the gender break-up of those 30, if you would not mind.

Ms Houghton: I will have to get that for you. I did not get that level of detail. I can tell you that someone wanted to do fire-eating. A lot of people wanted to do photography.

DR FOSKEY: Did you say fire-eating?

Ms Houghton: Yes. That was one of the requests for training that they wanted. It is a different program from what we usually do.

MS PORTER: I wanted to ask a quick question about the promotion that you were planning. I think the answer is going to be yes, but it will be web based as well, will it not? Young people use the web all the time. I presume that young people will find this program on the web if we promote it in that way.

Ms Houghton: We are actually going to get some expert advice on this age group. It may be on FM radio. We are really looking to match the advertising to that age group, but also to have that layer. There were several grandparents. One even wrote to the minister and said what a fabulous program and thank you very much. We do not know exactly what the promotion will be, but it will be layered and will be carefully thought out.

MR GENTLEMAN: Mr Seselja and Mr Stefaniak talked about the skills shortages earlier and asked questions on those. I understand there is an additional amount of funds allocated by the government over four years to meet the skills shortage in the ACT and the recent growth in training and apprenticeships in the territory as a result of efforts of the VET sector and the government. The Stanhope government has an excellent record in increasing funding to the sector. Minister, can you tell us the amount of increased funding over the four years? Can you advise whether you anticipate further growth in this area?

Ms Gallagher: If you look at where we have injected the funds: we have \$8 million in Skilling ACT; we have \$3 million in this budget for VET growth to meet skills shortages, plus the one-off peak money, which we can call it now, of \$3.1 million. It is about \$14.1 million from 2004-05 to 2007-08. That is the increase. That is a substantial increase. We have to try to work within our budget. The government is in a position where we have had a tight budget this year. As much as we have prioritised VET, there is a whole range of other areas where we could have put money into education, as always. We have prioritised VET growth and meeting the skills shortages with that extra money.

I have to say that, whilst we have injected \$14.1 million, the money from the commonwealth to assist us has not been as forthcoming. I think the growth money on offer next year is around \$500,000 in addition to what they currently give us for VET in the ACT. As the commonwealth likes to say, the states have to match every cent they put in. We would like the commonwealth to match every cent we have put in this time around, but I do not think they are going to do it.

I think, if we are looking at a national training system, national skill shortages, there has to be willingness from all levels of government to be funding this area. We are certainly meeting our responsibilities.

MR SESELJA: Just on that: I understand that part of the issue with commonwealth funding is the refusal of state and territory Labor governments to sign a new national training agreement. Are you able to tell us how much of a shortfall there is for ACT apprentices as a result of this refusal?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. Nothing. The VET money is rolled over. The ANTA money is being rolled over until August, in anticipation of the states signing up to the agreement before that date. We are in the final stages of negotiations in that process. We had the ANTA minco last month; we have got another meeting on 10 June. ANTA is to be abolished on 30 June. The new training arrangements will commence after that date. We have some time frames being placed on us.

I have to say that we need to look at what is on offer from the federal government. I was

trying to explain this to my daughter the other day when I was doing some work and she asked me what the problem was. I said, “It’s like this: you’ve got 70c and your friend’s got 30c. Your friend says, ‘Let’s pool our money and get \$1 and then we can buy something we want.’ That sounds like a good idea, except the friend takes the dollar and buys what they want, not necessarily what the person who brought the 70c to the table wants. That causes the problem.”

That is what we have got here: we provide 70 per cent of the funding for training in the ACT—in fact, more than that—and the commonwealth provides 22 per cent of the funding; yet they want a 100 per cent say about where our money goes. That is of enormous concern to the state and territory governments.

I know that Mrs Dunne tried to present this as an ideological opposition to what the commonwealth was doing but it is not; it is simply that this is a bad deal for the territory. Why should we appropriate millions and millions of dollars, way in excess of what the commonwealth is prepared to give us, and hand over, with that money, all the decision-making powers about how that money is spent? You wouldn’t do it in any other area of business if you were a businessperson. They are the issues we are working through.

The commonwealth has a very hard agenda on this. Whilst it has a hard agenda around governance of the arrangements and decision making, they are not providing the additional funds to support that extra interest that they want to see in the governance of the national training system. What has operated in the past has been a national training system where all levels of government have worked cooperatively and sensibly together in the interests of training nationally. What we are seeing now is a shift away from those arrangements. It is a very unfortunate position to be in. It is not in the interests of training across the country.

At the end of the day, Mr Seselja, I can tell you that I am not going to say no to the commonwealth money; we can’t afford to. It is around \$17 million a year. We cannot afford that money not coming to the territory, but I will work my butt off to make sure that we get the best deal for the ACT through those discussions. That is why we have strung out the discussions and why every other state has as well.

THE CHAIR: On that: I understand it is not just the states and territories that have concerns about this, though, is it?

Ms Gallagher: No. It is everyone involved in training. I think it is probably a unified position, including the ANTA board that are due to be dissolved on 30 June.

THE CHAIR: What sort of lobbying is going on by those within the training sector in regard to this?

Ms Gallagher: I can’t speak for those groups but I think there is enormous lobbying going on. Every time we have met we have said, “Can we talk to you around the finer detail of this; what it actually means in the ACT?” For example, they want us to sign up to last year’s training numbers as our base level in order to get any money from them in growth over the next three years. What we are saying is: “But that’s a peak. We would be mad to sign up to what we cannot, in all honesty, see continuing in the outyears.”

In a way, they are trying to force us to sign up to something which we are going to be penalised for down the track when those numbers slip off, as they will. What we are arguing for is an average over the last three years of what should be used as the base rate, to allow us some flexibility in those numbers.

We have asked for these discussions. We get to the ministerial meeting and nothing has changed. “Yes, we’ll talk to you. Yes, we’ll have a look at areas where we can be flexible.” This is what the commonwealth says. Nothing changes. We got to the last meeting in May and the commonwealth minister said, “Yes, we’ll talk to you; we’ll talk to you on a state-by-state basis,” which we are currently now doing in the bilateral discussions. We go back—

MR STEFANIAK: You are doing that?

Ms Gallagher: Yes, every state and territory is, because we are all beside ourselves about getting the right deal under this model. We are all working in good faith. We are asking the commonwealth to recognise the legitimate and non-ideological issues. They are simply not about ideology—the issue that we have with what they are currently proposing. But we will sign the agreement. The commonwealth knows that. We are going to hang out to the last minute to try to get the right deal for the ACT.

MR SESELJA: In relation to that, I just wanted to confirm your position. It is a slightly different issue, going back to where we were before. You were saying there was this peak. You said it in your answer again there, I think. There was this peak last year. Yet your public statements, the media releases for the budget, talk about additional funding of \$3 million to meet the increasing level of skills shortage in the ACT. I am just trying to clarify your position. Is there an increasing level? Is it still going to get worse or did it peak last year and not get covered by the \$3 million?

Ms Gallagher: They are two different issues. Numbers in training and meeting the needs of skills shortages are two different issues.

MR SESELJA: But wouldn’t the skills shortage go to the numbers? It is not going to affect it at all?

Ms Gallagher: No, not necessarily.

MR SESELJA: It won’t; okay.

Ms Gallagher: If you would let me answer the question before you continue on. The issue I am trying to alert you to is that training goes in a number of areas. Not all of them are areas of skills shortage. While your commencements can drop, the numbers being encouraged into areas of skills shortages can increase. That is the point I am trying to make here.

MR STEFANIAK: Minister, it is good to see you are having bilateral negotiations with the commonwealth. Firstly, what is the state of play there? I appreciate your difficulties, but I recall that once in the past a number of states and territories, including the ACT, did some successful one-on-one negotiations with the commonwealth, got some money early

and then further pressure was put on the commonwealth who relented down the track and basically gave what the states and territories were more or less after. At least the ACT and several others probably got an extra million dollars or so from the commonwealth by doing it one-on-one.

THE CHAIR: Is that when you were minister?

MR STEFANIAK: It was a while ago. I can appreciate the minister's difficulties. I am just wondering what is the time frame for this. Are we missing out now on dollars we could have by doing a one-on-one? If so, can you tell us how much we are actually missing out on because of the delays?

Ms Gallagher: We are not missing out on anything because, in the interests of having an agreement signed up, the commonwealth has agreed to rollover the current ANTA agreement. We are operating on those arrangements. I think the deadline is probably 30 June. Because the ANTA agreement goes to August, it could probably go out. The legislation comes into effect on 30 June or 1 July. If we can get the bilaterals finished, it is in our interest to sign. I don't think any other state or territory differs from my position.

There is a lot of money at stake here, less so for the territory than in other areas where it's hundreds of millions of dollars. For us, it is still a significant amount of money that we can't refuse, nor will we. As I said, on those matters that we are concerned about—and I might not be minister in a couple of years time in this area; who knows what happens in politics—is it responsible for me to sign up to an agreement when I know there is a high chance we will be penalised under the provisions of that agreement and not do the right thing and try to argue that before we sign up? That is essentially what we are doing now.

We have the final ANTA minico on 10 June. This is another meeting, a special meeting, in a sense, to have feedback from the bilaterals and the extra work that is being done by the commonwealth and see where we can go after 10 June and onwards. But we will sign the agreement. It is just trying to iron out those real difficulties we have with some of what they are requesting.

DR FOSKEY: Moving away from that topic and back to the general trend of my earlier questions: has there been any analysis of the vocational education and training needs of people who are long-term unemployed? What strategies are in place to facilitate their access to courses that may improve their employment outcomes?

Ms Houghton: The long-term unemployed, of course, are a priority group for everyone in this community, but the way the funding works is that, once you are registered with Centrelink, there are various steps that give you access to commonwealth money. The long-term unemployed have a series of steps and gates to go through, and at each step and gate they get more funding through Job Network and other support organisations that are funded by the commonwealth. We learnt this when we were researching the training pathway guarantee. That is why we targeted August. If they have been unemployed for a year, they really have access to a huge range of services that are funded very generously by the commonwealth. For the long-term unemployed, their training needs are addressed by Job Network.

MR SESELJA: I apologise; this has a bit of a preamble to it. Minister, your colleagues in the federal parliament have indicated that they will not be opposing the Australian technical colleges legislation. You have indicated, in reply to a question on notice, that you have had discussions with one stakeholder involved in negotiations over the college to be sited in Queanbeyan.

As you are aware, the question of whether the college is entirely within the jurisdiction of New South Wales or is a cross-border operation is not an academic one. It has several practical implications for the ACT, including, among other things, the nature and funding of training agreements; the academic and vocational curriculum to be followed; employers with whom the training packages will be negotiated; the number of New South Wales based students who will study in the ACT; and possibly, and not least, the future viability of some ACT secondary colleges. I have a question on the subject. Is it still the case that you have had discussions with only one stakeholder involved in negotiations over the Queanbeyan based college?

Ms Gallagher: I am probably referring to a meeting with the chamber that I had earlier this year. I have had discussions with my ministerial colleague in New South Wales about the technical college in Queanbeyan because it presents us, as you quite rightly point out, with some cross-border issues or potentially some cross-border issues. I have had discussions with her, as the minister responsible for registering this technical college when it gets formed and as a keen stakeholder in that process, about the issues to do with that college.

Other than that, the college isn't going to be in the ACT; it won't be registered under our Education Act; and it won't receive funding from the ACT government in relation to non-government school funding. Therefore, my discussions have been restricted to the potential impact that this college may have on the ACT school system.

MR SESELJA: Given that potential impact, wouldn't it be incumbent upon you to negotiate widely and to talk to, say, your federal colleagues in relation to this matter and widely talk to stakeholders to ensure that there isn't too much of a significant detriment or there aren't significant issues for the ACT?

Ms Gallagher: I have talks about the technical college all the time with a whole range of people.

MR SESELJA: You have mentioned two that you have had.

THE CHAIR: That doesn't mean she hasn't had more.

Ms Gallagher: I have had discussions with—

MR SESELJA: In answer to a question she said one. Now she has given us one more.

Ms Gallagher: When that answer was given, I imagine that answer was correct, as I always try to have correct answers as at the time. I have had discussions with the AEU; I have had discussions with Unions ACT; I have had several discussions with stakeholders in the VET industry who want information on how the technical college is

going to work. To the extent that I can give them that information, I do.

Of course I sit on the Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, of which I am the chair at the moment, and technical colleges come up there. I attend the ANTA minco. The college has come up there. As to the degree of the information that is available from the commonwealth about those colleges, I am well aware of that.

MR SESELJA: Have you sought meetings with the federal minister?

Ms Gallagher: I have met with the federal minister, as all ministers have. We meet through MCEETYA.

MR SESELJA: But on this issue in particular?

Ms Gallagher: The issue came up at MCEETYA. There was a paper on the technical colleges. We had a wide-ranging discussion on it, so, in that sense, yes.

MR SESELJA: If the winning bid for the Queanbeyan college does involve cross-border cooperation, say, ACT-based employers, to what extent would the ACT government then become involved? Specifically, would the ACT government fund the appropriate qualifications through user choice for ACT and/or New South Wales students?

Ms Gallagher: If they are undertaking training in the ACT—I don't know whether you want to answer that, Anne—I would say we have some obligations, which we meet, as we meet for anyone who is undertaking training in the ACT.

Ms Houghton: I think we have to wait and see what the bid is proposing. Yes, you could say, "The employer is in the ACT; they will be entitled to ACT funds under user choice." But another point of view is that New South Wales students and any other high schools don't have access to user choice. New South Wales high schools fund their training through their education bucket.

You would have to say, "Why would we hand over our user choice dollars to the New South Wales student in Queanbeyan, when perhaps the New South Wales government isn't going to change its processes and give user choice funding to every other high school student around the country?" You really have to wait and see what model is accepted.

Ms Gallagher: The discussion at MCEETYA was, frankly, confusing. The federal minister, that is, minister Hardgrave, didn't seem to understand the complexity of some of the requirements the technical colleges are going to impose on the states and territories. The Queensland minister gave an example of a situation they have where, in a sense, a technical college already operates in a location where a technical college is going to be built. That is going to be placed in jeopardy. There was this broad-ranging discussion. The actual detail was very unclear, as was the detail of what sorts of arrangements would be acceptable to the commonwealth in the nature of the bids that were being put forward. So it is really a bit unknown. There are two bids for the Queanbeyan college.

Ms Houghton: There could be three. We don't know. There could be what is called, QUEBEC, the Queanbeyan Business Council; we aren't sure whether they have put in a bid. The department of education in New South Wales, we understand, has put in a late bid. So there could be three bids. But we really have to wait and see the model they are proposing.

Ms Gallagher: Minister Hardgrave said, "It could be a model that takes in the ACT or it could be a model that takes in the south coast; we don't know yet." That is what the commonwealth is saying. So it is hard for us as well. I am in no way being shut out of discussions on the technical colleges. I don't necessarily agree that they are needed. I question the motivations around them. I have some concerns around them. I have some concerns that they will threaten the viability of public high schools in Queanbeyan. Here our colleges are RTOs and we have many students who undertake work placements while they are continuing their year 11 and year 12 education.

I am comfortable with the synergies that exist here in the ACT and with the way we provide that education. I understand the world we live in. I understand the federal government has a majority. I understand these technical colleges are going to go through. So it is in our interest to be involved in those discussions and make sure that we are abreast of the consortiums and certainly the successful consortium and how they are going to operate their operation once it has been approved.

MR STEFANIAK: Budget paper 4, page 393: the target for the total number of hours under the programs available for competitive purchase has gone down from 1.7 million to 1.6 million. The total recorded number of training commencements has also been reduced from 7,000 to 6,200. How is that helping to meet what you have emphasised as a growing demand?

Ms Houghton: It is the peak drop-off. That is what we are envisaging, anyway.

Mr Curry: I might also point out that, in the 2004-05 budget figures, those numbers were 1.5 million and 5,500, respectively. In that respect, the 2005-06 targets are significantly higher than what we had expected this time last year.

MR STEFANIAK: You may have answered this. I am sorry; I was out of the room attending to something else. What has caused the peak drop-off? I just hope that you are accurate in that.

Ms Gallagher: Do you want to answer that, Anne? I have gone on about the peaks. Peaks usually drop off.

MR STEFANIAK: There are peaks and troughs.

Ms Gallagher: Otherwise there wouldn't be peaks.

MR STEFANIAK: You seemed so confident that that is a peak and that there is this drop-off.

Ms Houghton: We are providing the minister with figures on apprentices and trainees

weekly. In monitoring the system, we have a number of sources of data: the new apprenticeship centres, our own training contracts. But there is a time lag before these are fully audited and validated.

We are confident that the peak has gone. We are not heading downhill quickly. It is levelling off. You cannot maintain a 90 per cent increase in building and construction apprentices forever. That is what happened between 2000 and 2004. There are not the houses being built, but there are still other areas where we think there will be growth—the wet trades, the bricklaying, the tiling, and the plastering. There is capacity for many more apprentices. As the minister has said, though our commencements might go down, we will still be working at that top end, that skills shortage end, with all our vigour.

MR STEFANIAK: Is plumbing included in that skills shortage end?

Ms Houghton: Yes, refrigeration mechanics. Every six months the Vocational Education and Training Authority have an extensive SCAN. The next one comes out in July. Building and construction has dropped from the very top, as I understand it from the draft. It is those wet trades. Electricals has dropped and up has gone refrigeration. We monitor this at a very fine level of detail, with help from the industry training advisory body. Though it is an estimate, it has got some science to it because we are underpinned by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research. Our ACT informal figures are going to be validated by the NCVET very shortly.

THE CHAIR: Shall we move on?

Ms Gallagher: Is that the CIT?

THE CHAIR: Yes. We will do provision of VET through CIT and CIT together, in 3.2. CIT is on page 541.

DR FOSKEY: Thank you very much for coming and for giving such full answers, departmental people.

THE CHAIR: Yes, thank you, for your attendance. Welcome, Mr Veenker, Mr Kowald. Minister, did you want to make an opening statement in relation to CIT?

Ms Gallagher: No, thanks, chair. I am happy just to move straight to questions.

THE CHAIR: Can I start with a question about capital works building improvements, page 542. This is, I think, the usual amount allocated to CIT. What are you going to be spending your dollars on this year?

Mr Veenker: Although that is worded “capital works program”, we deal with that as minor works, because we also have capital works for buildings, which is basically federal government money. The \$2 million will largely be spent on what we call minor works, but it is very significant work. The various campuses will be looked at. For example, at Bruce we’ll be looking at stormwater, irrigation and holding ponds to avoid the run-off that currently occurs there.

We’ll be making arrangements to try and make the campuses more attractive and

conducive to adult learning and tertiary education. We will therefore be doing some landscaping at Reid; there will be some work, like covered-in walkways between various buildings, at Fyshwick; there will be some panels for solar power at Bruce; we will be connecting our hot water to a co-generation plant at Bruce campus, which is a cheaper form of electricity; and we will be installing sun-control louvres in some of the buildings at Bruce. In summary, the minor works are to make the campus better for its current use, but it's not a major injection in terms of lifting the campus with either new buildings or a huge facade lift.

THE CHAIR: While at the restaurants last week for a dinner I noticed that you had put in a perspex or glass screen, so people can see into the kitchens. I think that is fantastic; it's good to be able to see some of the things being cooked. I was looking longingly at the stoves, wanting to get in there and cook, but that's just me.

MS PORTER: I wasn't longingly looking at the stoves, I was just appreciating the wonderful food!

DR FOSKEY: I understand the government made an election promise to boost CIT's funding by \$2 million and introduce a bursary scheme for disadvantaged students. However, I can't find these commitments in the budget. Have I looked in the right place?

Ms Gallagher: The bursary scheme is within the Department of Education and Training. There is a junior bursary for 14-year-olds, but it is not a CIT initiative.

DR FOSKEY: That's the existing scheme?

Ms Gallagher: Yes. The promise was an expansion of that scheme. We had a commitment to look at extending concessions to non-payment of fees for year 12 students. You're right, Ms Foskey; you've looked in the budget and haven't found it because it's not there. It was a difficult budget year and we couldn't deliver on that promise this year. We have ensured that the efficiency savings sought by the government will not impact on the institute of technology. So, whilst we're not increasing their funding through a specific initiative, we are not asking them to find any savings. That's in recognition of the fact that they were repeatedly requested to find savings under the previous government. It is my strong belief that there is no fat to be found in the CIT.

We have recently approved increases to the training providers for the provision of vocational education and training in the territory. The CIT, as a major provider of those services, will receive some increases in money that way. We certainly have not increased the funding to the \$2 million we outlined in the election commitments, but we have several more budgets in which to do that. That's one of my key ones.

DR FOSKEY: I refer to fee relief for secondary students undertaking VET study at CIT while completing years 11 and 12. The AEU suggested a centralised payment mechanism as a way of facilitating that. Has that been considered by the government?

Ms Gallagher: No, it hasn't. Again, that wasn't included in this year's budget.

DR FOSKEY: And the fee relief?

Ms Gallagher: It just wasn't funded.

MR SESELJA: As a point of clarification, page 404 of budget paper 4 talks about the increases to vocational education and training, and we've discussed the additional appropriation of \$3.1 million. Then on page 546 of budget paper 4, referring to CIT, it says:

... additional revenue provided to the ACT under the user choice program for increased numbers of apprentices and trainees, (\$2m).

Is that the same for all the funding? Is that \$2 million out of that \$3.1 million?

Mr Kowald: It is.

MR SESELJA: Okay, thank you.

Mr Kowald: Would you like a further explanation?

MR SESELJA: I'd be happy to have a further explanation.

Ms Gallagher: That's through the whole year, though.

Mr Kowald: Yes, through the whole year. The money comes to CIT tied to the student, and the source of the money is the department through the user choice programs.

MR SESELJA: Is two-thirds of the additional finding for vocational education and training there, or not?

Ms Gallagher: I have a question about that. I don't think it's \$2 million of \$3.1 million; it's \$2 million of the total money going into training in user choice payments. There is an additional \$2 million. That's not \$2 million of \$3.1 million, it's an increase of \$2 million in the amount going to the CIT through that program. For that year, there is much more than \$3.1 million going into training. We could probably give you a figure.

MR SESELJA: Yes, but we're talking about additions, aren't we? The \$3.1 million was clearly an additional thing that was put in to top it up.

Ms Gallagher: So was the \$2 million in Skilling ACT.

MR SESELJA: The \$2 million hasn't just come from the \$3.1 million; it doesn't represent two-thirds?

Ms Gallagher: No.

MR SESELJA: Where else does it come from?

Ms Gallagher: There's a component which is user choice funding, but the \$3.1 million is not user choice funding for the total year. That was a supplementary appropriation for those peaks.

MR SESELJA: Yes, but the \$2 million is not part of that supplementary appropriation?

Ms Gallagher: No, although some of that \$3 million is.

MR SESELJA: How much of that \$2 million comes from that \$3.1 million?

Ms Gallagher: There doesn't seem to be a ready answer to that. We can provide that to you on notice.

MR SESELJA: Thank you.

Ms Gallagher: Compared to other states and territories, our user choice component is very high in the context of the private sector getting access to that funding.

MS PORTER: On page 541, under the highlights, it states that one of the operational issues to be pursued is expanding national and global education networks to provide staff and students with access to global knowledge and international educational experiences. Could you expand on that please?

Mr Veenker: We consider it important—it is in our strategic plan—to train to international best practice where we can. We can prepare people better for the global work force by making sure we get a significant number of international students studying in Australia and that we have relationships with very good international institutes that are not dissimilar to ours. We do that through the post-secondary international network, which facilitates information. That allows us to have some staff exchange when appropriate, and we can also share information about how we can further internationalise some of our course curriculums.

We encourage an international approach through participation at various international conferences. We try and map our courses as best we can. We are looking at places like Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, America. Of course, we draw a lot of students from our immediate region of South-East Asia. I think the raising of cultural sensitivities is done very well at CIT, not only in the context of working with people from abroad but also in benchmarking appropriately.

MS PORTER: I refer to smart classrooms. Are they to do with similar technology that we talked about with regard to the interactive whiteboards, or is that another type of technology altogether?

Mr Veenker: I will give you a preliminary answer and Peter can provide more detail, if necessary. The smart classrooms revolve very much around engaging the computer more. An intelligent whiteboard is used, as well as a light probe, projector and screen. That makes it easier for instructors to use software and to engage the students. Some time ago we started to upgrade classrooms to make that technology available. We want to continue to do that.

Mr Kowald: We currently have 39 classrooms with fixed installation light probe projectors and we plan to install a further 18 projectors during 2005-06. They are high cost items at \$5,000 to \$9,000 each. Smart whiteboards are installed in a total of

10 classrooms. We are currently conducting a trial of a wireless network of 20 laptops within the faculty of tourism and hotel management.

MS PORTER: I asked this question this morning about staff training. As far as the use of that technology is concerned, is there some additional support or staff training to help teachers or tutors who may not be familiar with some of this technology?

Mr Kowald: Yes. We have ongoing extensive training in educational software usage. That is a necessary part of how we operate.

DR FOSKEY: I have heard that the equipment in the trades area is becoming outdated and needs upgrading. Could you please confirm whether this is correct, and indicate what capacity CIT has to respond to this need?

Mr Veenker: The trades area is predominantly at Fyshwick and, to a lesser extent, at Bruce—and of course hospitality and tourism is at Reid. We look at that equipment on a regular basis, and we rely on industry support as well. We think the equipment is appropriate in terms of meeting industry standards. From time to time we need to replace welders and things of that nature. We try, where possible, to be cutting edge. It is fair to say that we are training on equipment that is appropriate for the industry our students are going to.

DR FOSKEY: When you say you rely on a bit of industry support, is that usually forthcoming? How do you elicit that support?

Mr Veenker: We work actively with industry. For example, it is not uncommon in the automotive area to receive donations of motor vehicles to work on, or parts. Those are provided free of charge. That is the type of arrangement that tends to occur in this sector of education.

MR STEFANIAK: I understand that the CIT is not the main training provider for most traditional trades in the ACT. Please correct me if this is wrong. I'm advised that the only traditional trade where CIT is the main provider is commercial cooking. I understand that most of the others are catered for mainly by private training providers, which cover about 75 per cent of apprentices in those areas. I see from BP4 at page 387 that your budget is going to increase by a modest \$500,000 a year, but that the budget for the open competitive market will decrease by some \$2.1 million. Minister, how does that square with your stated commitment to dealing with skills shortages in the traditional trades?

Ms Gallagher: Are you going back to output 3.2?

MR STEFANIAK: Yes. Page 387 is simply the CIT budget. It goes up from \$57.499 million to \$57.928 million, but the budget for the open and competitive market decreases by some \$2.1 million.

Ms Gallagher: Yes, I see where you're going—and then back to \$3.1 million?

MR STEFANIAK: Yes.

Ms Gallagher: My advice is that CIT has about 70 per cent of the traditional trades market share. Can you confirm that, Peter?

Mr Veenker: That would be close, yes.

Ms Gallagher: CIT has to compete for user choice money, as does any other provider. The money follows the student.

MR STEFANIAK: I refer to the annex to BP4 at page 97—the cost per hour of training through competitive purchase.

THE CHAIR: We've moved off that area; we're onto 3.2.

MR STEFANIAK: I realise that.

MR SESELJA: It compares 3.2 to 3.1—and page 98 does 3.2. We are dealing with CIT here. It's a question for CIT.

MR STEFANIAK: It's a CIT question; it's a fairly quick one too. That says that for competitive purchase it's \$11.54. On page 98, for CIT, the average government payment in the annual curriculum hours is given as \$15.4.

Ms Gallagher: Can we explain the difference?

MR STEFANIAK: On the assumption that both costs refer to the same practical outcome, why does it cost a third more to do it at CIT?

Ms Gallagher: I would imagine that is because it takes in the running of the institute.

Mr Veenker: It's a lot to do with the range of programs we offer, and we do offer higher cost programs in our profile as a general rule. As well as that, the salaries are higher.

MR STEFANIAK: Has that changed in the last few years? I note that the CIT was down to about \$12.5 per contact hour. Have those factors upped it—salary increases and different programs?

Mr Veenker: The last ANTA figures I have available, which compare jurisdictions, makes the ACT the second cheapest, or most efficient, in Australia. We deliver roughly 80 per cent of that. It includes more than trades, of course. In terms of efficiency, this jurisdiction is very high. You could flow that on to CIT.

MR STEFANIAK: We'd be lower than the national average, in terms of costs?

Mr Veenker: We are either just below it or right on it, which I think is a huge effort.

DR FOSKEY: I refer to budget paper 4, page 393. Under the accountability indicators for this output class, the estimated outcome for 2004-05 appears to be above target in the areas of student contact hours and publicly funded course enrolments. Has this been achieved within existing resources? Why isn't this increase projected forward into 2005-06? Are we talking about peaks here again?

Mr Veenker: Yes, we are, in part. I think the outcome in terms of enrolments is partly explained too. As there are additional work opportunities available within the ACT jurisdiction, we have found that we have a larger percentage of part-time enrolments; so the part-time enrolment figures have increased. You have also picked up an error that we are in the process of correcting.

MS PORTER: This is probably to do with the dreaded peak!

DR FOSKEY: It's a good peak!

MS PORTER: I'm sorry, the wonderful peak! At page 19 of the statement of intent, the target was 4,500 and the outcome was 5,506. It is obviously a wonderful result—it is a significant result—but is that again attributed to this peak thing? That is technical language, by the way—"peak thing"!

MR SESELJA: I think there will be a discussion in the report about the peak.

Mr Veenker: This is a change in what people are demanding from us. We have noticed that there has been a trend to part-time study, as I mentioned before, so the enrolment numbers have gone up. The way people are using the VET courses is encouraging more exit points. In other words, rather than waiting until they have completed, they may do a series of programs and exit. They are all stepped into one another. You might have certificates I, II, III and IV, moving into diplomas. We are finding that people are using these exit points and graduating on a more regular basis.

DR FOSKEY: By how much have the numbers of apprenticeships and traineeships increased as a result of the Skilling ACT initiative funded in last year's budget and expanded again this year? Which industries have had the strongest demand?

Ms Gallagher: That is a question for the department of education to answer. I am happy to take it on notice. Ms Houghton indicated a 90 per cent increase in building and construction; in community services there is an increase of about 87 per cent; and in tourism and hospitality there is an increase of around 16 per cent. We can give you that because it is not specific to the CIT.

DR FOSKEY: In the economic white paper, action 36 on page 74 says that the government will introduce a voc-ed and training program specifically targeted at the over 45-year-old age group, with a particular focus on people re-entering the work force and those in the work force who need to retrain in order to remain in employment. I can't see any budget initiatives in 2004-05 or 2005-06 in relation to this. Has there been any action taken?

Ms Gallagher: Again, that's not a CIT issue, that's a training and adult education issue under the department of education.

THE CHAIR: Ms Houghton is nodding.

Ms Gallagher: We will provide you with that answer.

DR FOSKEY: Anything to get out of here. Right?

Ms Gallagher: No. Seriously, the chief executive has left.

DR FOSKEY: I'm still not aware. The distinctions are a little unclear to me.

Ms Gallagher: Yes; not at all. That's fine.

MS PORTER: On page 541, again under the highlights, it mentions researching leading edge approaches to education and training. Is that similar to what you were talking about before—expanding the educational network with the international approaches and things like that?

Mr Veenker: Yes, it is similar to that. We have a research centre that largely tenders, and is often successful, for national projects about how people learn—making sure that we're completely on top of the latest information about how we can best plan our learning experience. Our centre is called the CERV centre—the centre for educational research in the VET area. By being constantly part of national projects that deal with education as well as working closely with industry, we're pretty confident that we are at the cutting edge, as well as with what happens internationally. It is a centre that complements our own thinking and what we do.

MS PORTER: It would be good to visit that centre at some stage.

Mr Veenker: Yes. It has a number of national projects and is quite highly regarded.

THE CHAIR: We've obviously come to the end of questions. Thank you, minister, and all the officials who've appeared both from the department and from CIT today.

The committee adjourned at 5.38 pm.