



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2007-2008**

**(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2007-2008)**

**Members:**

**MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)**  
**MR B STEFANIAK (The Deputy Chair)**  
**MS M PORTER**  
**DR D FOSKEY**  
**MRS J BURKE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**FRIDAY, 22 JUNE 2007**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Ms G Concannon (Ph: 6205 0129)**

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

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

## APPEARANCES

<b>ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority.....</b>	<b>480</b>
<b>Canberra Institute of Technology .....</b>	<b>480</b>
<b>Department of Education and Training .....</b>	<b>480</b>

**The committee met at 2.00 pm.**

Appearances:

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

Department of Education and Training

Bruniges, Dr Michele, Chief Executive  
Davy, Ms Janet, Deputy Chief Executive  
Curry, Mr Craig, Executive Director  
Donelly, Mr Rob, Director, Finance and Facilities  
Hardy, Mr Matthew, Director, Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting  
Hare, Mr John, Director, Governance, Regulation and Risk  
Chandler, Mr Wayne, Director, Schools Northern Canberra  
Howard, Ms Joanne, Director, Schools Central Canberra  
Harris, Ms Carol, Director, Schools Southern Canberra  
Melsom, Ms Kathy, Director, Student Services  
Wilks, Ms Trish, Director, Curriculum Support and Professional Learning  
Bateman, Mr Michael, Director, Human Resources  
Vasey, Ms Jocelyn, Acting Director, Training and Tertiary Education

Canberra Institute of Technology

Adrian, Dr Colin, Chief Executive  
Cover, Ms Leanne, General Manager, Office of the Chief Executive  
Kowald, Mr Peter, Division Corporate Services

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority

Guy, Mr Gary, Chief Executive Officer

**THE CHAIR:** Minister and officials from the Department of Education and Training, welcome back to the 2007 estimates hearings. This afternoon we are first looking into department of education output class 4, early intervention, in budget paper 4, pages 363 to 371.

**Mr Barr:** Chair, before—

**MRS DUNNE:** I think we are going to continue with output class 2, non-government.

**THE CHAIR:** Indeed. We were looking at—

**Mr Barr:** I took a couple of questions on notice from Wednesday; I can provide information. It will take 30 seconds.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, if you could, Mr Barr.

**Mr Barr:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Before you do, though, I should read the card.

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings.

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

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

I remind witnesses to turn off their phones and to mention their name and position when addressing the committee. Minister Barr.

**Mr Barr:** Thank you. I took a couple of questions on notice on Wednesday in relation to the curriculum framework. Dr Foskey asked for a copy looking at essential learning area 19; I have that available. Mrs Dunne wanted information on the conference on bullying; I have multiple flyers for all committee members there.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. When you were with us on Wednesday we did not quite get to output class 2. Do you have officials to deal with output class 2 this afternoon?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** Non-government.

**Mr Barr:** Non-government, yes. We may begin with output class 2 and then move on to output class 3 after that.

**MS PORTER:** Mr Stefaniak is first; I have one after him.

**MR STEFANIAK:** My question is on non-government schools. Minister, how much money was allocated in the 2007-08 budget for the funding of non-government schools, what is the comparative figure for 2006-07, and where can those figures be found in the budget papers or in the core of the budget papers? You have a minuscule figure of about \$1.3 million. I know that you are not spending too much on the non-government area, but I do not think you are spending only \$1.3 million. It is obviously somewhere. It is 1.4, I think, in budget paper 4. Could you tell us why the figure is not shown separately.

**Mr Barr:** I can advise that the funding for non-government schools in 2007-08 will be \$40.5 million.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is more than you told me the other day.

**Mr Barr:** Yes; I found extra money, Mrs Dunne. I can advise the committee that that is a 32 per cent increase on the amount that was provided when the government came to office in 2001-02—so nearly \$10 million additional funding for non-government schools over that time, a significant increase. I will get Mr Donnelly to take you through the detail of the budget papers in terms of where this money is accounted for.

**Mr Donnelly:** We are just trying to get used to the new format of the budget papers.

**MRS DUNNE:** Tell me about it.

**MRS BURKE:** Good comment. Thank you; we note that.

**Mr Donnelly:** The revenue and expenses for non-government school grants appear as part of the territorial statements on page 386 of budget paper 4. You will note the figure of \$143 million in 2006-07 and estimated outcome at \$162 million in 2007-08. That figure is a summation of the total Australian government funding to non-government schools, the ACT government funding of non-government schools and a couple of other minor amounts.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, can I just—

**Mr Barr:** It would be worth noting to the committee that, over the past decade, there have been increases in funding to non-government schools by both the Australian government and the ACT government. Perhaps disappointingly, as I have observed to the committee before, the increase in funding coming from the commonwealth has largely been in the non-government sector—such that from 1996-97 to 2007-08 we have seen a 163 per cent increase in Australian government funding for non-government schools in the ACT and only a 54 per cent increase in Australian government funding for government schools over that same period.

As we all acknowledge, there are a number of funding sources for government and non-government schools. In the context of a 163 per cent increase in funding from the commonwealth for non-government schools, it is worth noting that in the last decade they have done very well out of both the ACT government and the commonwealth government. The level of resources available to the non-government sector in 2007-08, as compared to 1996-97, is considerably advanced. As is always the case, the ACT government is a minority funding partner for non-government schools. We have increased our funding and we are happy with the provision of \$40.5 million to non-government schools.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I do not know if you have had available to you the independent schools graph of payment fees—commonwealth grants and state grants and—

**THE CHAIR:** This was presented to us last Friday.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I received that a number of months ago.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Fundamentally, it was something like a reasonably steady but slow increase in both commonwealth grants and state grants between 1999 and the end of 2001. For example, state grants—\$1.8 million—

**MRS DUNNE:** That is for one particular school, Mr Stefaniak.

**Mr Barr:** I think that that relates to Marist College.

**MR STEFANIAK:** No, no, this is—

**Mr Barr:** I have seen the Marist College one.

**MR STEFANIAK:** It is the independent schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, it is one particular independent school—that graph. Does the minister have a copy of that?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I have been provided with a copy.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I am talking about—

**MRS DUNNE:** I would like to ask some questions about that.

**Mr Barr:** In a meeting with Marist College I have seen that graph.

**MRS DUNNE:** There may be a similar one for Marist. Could I ask a technical question of Mr Donnelly?

**THE CHAIR:** I think Mr Stefaniak is still in the midst of his question.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You probably got fairly close to that, but it was given to us on the basis of the independent school survey. I think they said they were about 10 or 15 per cent of total schools now.

**Mr Barr:** I think this is applying to an individual school.

**MRS DUNNE:** This is applying to an individual school.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Is that the one talking about fees and government grants?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, that one there. That is an individual school.

**Mr Barr:** They are territory grants when we are talking about \$1.8 million. I have just told you the budget for non-government schools for the ACT—\$40.5 million.

**MR STEFANIAK:** That is right.

**Mr Barr:** So you must be talking about just one school here.

**MR STEFANIAK:** One sector. The independent sector is a smaller sector.

**Mr Barr:** No; you are talking about an individual school.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You are saying that it is purely Marist?

**DR FOSKEY:** It is Daramalan.

**Mr Barr:** Could you two have a quick caucus meeting just to sort yourselves out.

**DR FOSKEY:** Can I ask a question on—

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter is next.

**MS PORTER:** On page 371, under the accountability indicators, it mentions non-government school registration reviews. What is involved in those reviews? Whilst you are looking up that page, can I say this? There is another indicator there about home education registrations; (b) is a discontinued indicator and (c) is a new indicator. I wondered why we had changed those indicators.

**Mr Barr:** Thank you, Ms Porter. You would be aware that part 4 of the Education Act provides the legislative basis for the registration of non-government schools, and the manual for compliance and registration of non-government schools in the ACT sets out the departmental procedures to be followed in processing non-government school registrations. There are essentially four discrete steps in the registration process. Provisional registration applies to proposed new schools that have been granted in-principle approval under section 84 of the act. Registration applies to new schools that have been granted provisional registration for at least 12 months. Registration at additional education levels applies to schools that have been granted in-principle approval to offer additional levels under section 84. There is no provisional registration step for schools seeking to offer additional education levels. Registration, renewal and registration apply to schools as entities and are for a maximum of five years.

Amendments to the Education Act in December 2006 clarified the original intent of the act—that any expansion of a non-government school by way of a second or additional campus would be subject to the in-principle provisions of the legislation. The act requires therefore that, before deciding whether a school should be provisionally registered, registered or registered at an additional education level, the minister must appoint a panel to report on the application. The panel reports against a number of criteria in the act that relate to the legal status of the school, the safety and welfare of students, the curriculum, the nature and content of the education to be offered, the qualifications of the teaching staff and processes to monitor quality education outcomes and the financial viability of the school. The panel is normally made up of five to six members, depending on the size of the school and the levels that apply for registration. The panel normally spends two to three days in the school,

examining documents, talking to staff and inspecting facilities. I can advise the committee that this year registration panels have gone into five schools and the department is expecting to undertake another four registration panels in the second half of the year.

You had a follow-up question in relation to home—

**MS PORTER:** Yes. I wanted to know about home registration. There are two measures there—one that has been discontinued and a new measure.

**Mr Barr:** I will get Dr Bruniges to talk you through those issues.

**Dr Bruniges:** The first one is now discontinued. The department has shortened the length to three months. We have put in a more rigorous process: home registration reviews for provisionally registered children to be completed in three months—we have shortened that back and want to be able to turn those round a lot faster; having the new act in in 2005 and going through a process where we have seen an increase, in last year's annual report hearings, in the home schooling of some students, and what we have decided to do to ensure the processing of those notifications.

**MS PORTER:** Just to keep a better eye on it.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, it is.

**MS PORTER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne, do you have a supplementary to Mr Stefaniak's question?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, I have a technical question for Mr Donnelly. On page 386, the \$143 million estimated outcome for this year and \$162 million for next financial year, is that all of the grants money from whatever source that goes to non-government schools? You act as a post office essentially for the Commonwealth money?

**Mr Donnelly:** We do.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is the Commonwealth money and the ACT government contribution. Is there anything else in that?

**Mr Donnelly:** Yes. Money for the junior bursary scheme is part of that appropriation and another small line item, which always escapes me when I have this conversation, may need to be provided on notice.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you take that on notice.

**Mr Donnelly:** The sum total of the junior bursary scheme and this other line item is less than \$1 million.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay. That is the same bursary scheme that has been extended to years 7 and 8?



**Mr Barr:** Yes. As I indicated last Wednesday, that is open to students in government and non-government schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you give us a breakdown on notice of all those moneys?

**Mr Donnelly:** Certainly.

**MRS DUNNE:** But the big ticket items are \$40.5 million this year from the ACT government, which leaves how much from the Commonwealth?

**Mr Donnelly:** \$122.5 million from the Commonwealth.

**DR FOSKEY:** I have two questions, please. First of all, I am just wondering if the ACT funding to non-government schools—

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Chairman, I have a substantive question. I will leave it until Dr Foskey has asked this question.

**DR FOSKEY:** is given in such a way that you are able to stipulate to some extent how it is spent. The article in the *Canberra Times* the other day indicated that public schools, especially at primary level, have what I consider a better student-teacher ratio. Would it be possible to stipulate that funds be spent in such a way—

**Mr Barr:** We obviously have no control over the Commonwealth's funding. We simply act as the post box there. We do have the ability through targeted grants programs to seek particular outcomes in the non-government sector. For example, in this year's budget we have provided an additional \$1 million to provide additional support for students with a disability in the non-government sector.

**MRS DUNNE:** But there is no money.

**Mr Barr:** To the extent that we can tie our funding to particular outcomes, we do it through particular program initiatives. There has been a number of them over the years. There was an initiative a couple of budgets ago around IT in non-government schools. When we come forward with a range of budget initiatives, particular policy initiatives, non-government schools, I suppose, could always say no, they do not want the money under those circumstances. Generally speaking, in discussion, particularly with the Non-Government Schools Education Council, we identify priorities and seek to fund those within the overall budget context and competition in the education sector around competing priorities. We have already discussed a range of issues that confront the education system and we have to make decisions. Essentially that is what we do around what the priorities will be. But, yes, we can to a certain extent seek to tie some of those grants. I come back to a point I made on Wednesday: my preference is to do that through consultation and negotiation.

I could have, for example, sought to tie \$40.5 million to compliance with the new anti-bullying policies that we have introduced into the public system, but my preference is to negotiate that with non-government schools rather than adopt the Julie Bishop-Brendan Nelson model of funding negotiation.

**DR FOSKEY:** This is not my second question. We were told last Friday that the non-government school sector feel that they are going to have a lot of trouble bringing wages up to parity. That is clearly a long way from dropping student-teacher ratios. My second question is: I note that the government does fund a number of small non-government schools, yet that has been used as a basis for closing government schools.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there a question there?

**DR FOSKEY:** That is a question. Sorry. I should have put it—

**Mr Barr:** That is a statement actually.

**DR FOSKEY:** I am trying it out on you. You may or may not agree.

**MRS DUNNE:** There is a statement.

**DR FOSKEY:** I want to hear about that.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can you justify that, minister?

**Mr Barr:** I do not think I can agree with the statement. There has been a well documented drift over a number of years from public schools to private schools. We do regulate the non-government sector in the ACT through the Education Act. But that said, the fundamental principle of supporting parental choice is there. The issue that I have sought to address through the record levels of funding into public education is to ensure that every family, every child in the ACT, every potential student, feels they have a viable option to attend a public school.

There will always be some who wish to pursue education of particular religious context. An alternate education model might be on offer in the non-government sector where that will be the only available option for that student and for that family, so I do not intend for government schools to go down the path of religious education, seeking to mimic the Catholic system, Christian schools or otherwise.

There is no way we are competing in that field, but I do sense a strong need for the public system to be considered viable and competitive in terms of quality education outcomes. There may be a perception problem that we need to address in some parts of the city. We have a number of public schools with outstanding reputations and we have some others that we need to do some more work on. There is no doubting that. Equally, there are some schools in the private system that have very good reputations and others that perhaps do not. But, no, I do not think I can accept the initial premise that public schools were closed to prop up small private schools.

**DR FOSKEY:** No, sorry. I really wish I had phrased that differently. Why does the government fund small non-government schools while it has used being small as a basis for closing government schools?

**Mr Barr:** We provide a similar level of funding. We fund on a per capita basis.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think Dr Foskey does not understand that funding for non-government schools is actually funding for the children in the non-government schools—

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it is on a per capita basis.

**MRS DUNNE:** irrespective of where they go.

**Mr Barr:** We provide the same level of funding regardless of the size of the school that a student attends. So if the same principle were applied in public education, then there would be some schools currently that would get a lot more money than they do within the public system and a number that would get significantly less. The issue around the inequity of the previous arrangements within the public system was that, in some schools, students were receiving twice as much funding as their peers in another government school, and that was the inequity that needed to be addressed.

The issue that I had—and I have said this repeatedly—is that there was no educational reason for it and no socioeconomic reason for it. If you are interested in addressing those concerns within a limited resource, you have to tackle those issues, as hard as that is, and as hard as it was through 2006. But there are very sound public policy reasons for wanting to invest the money where it will make the most difference in improving educational outcomes and addressing socioeconomic disadvantage. Our previous funding model within the government system was not doing that.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, if I could just bring you to page 357 of Budget Paper 4. One of the priorities listed there is “supporting implementation of the new ACT Preschool to Year 10 (P-10) curriculum framework”. Do non-government schools get an opportunity to participate in this?

**Mr Barr:** Yes; in fact, this has been a shining example of collaboration across the sectors. It has been, I think, not only a very useful process to show how the two sectors can work together but also a professional development opportunity for staff from across a range of Canberra schools to come together to work in small groups and then to bring back their work to a larger group to develop the new curriculum framework.

We are the first jurisdiction to incorporate national statements of learning into our new curriculum framework. It is something that we should be very pleased about. There has been a lot of controversy about curriculum renewal in other jurisdictions that has not been the case in the ACT because we have had such a collaborative approach. Again, I think it is an opportunity to show that the sectors can work together. The politics of education from time to time pit the sectorial interests against each other, but it does not always have to be that way.

There are a lot of resources provided by the department of education to support all schools in the ACT, and this is an example of such a collaborative work. I might get Dr Bruniges to outline a little more of the process, because it has been a very good collaboration between the sectors.

**Dr Bruniges:** Just briefly, there is the overarching curriculum task force which I chair.

All the stakeholder groups sit on that. There are various working parties that have had input. We have had a range of academics and stakeholders provide feedback to a number of documents that we put together. At the moment we are trialling a phase 2 document in both government and non-government schools. We are getting feedback on that with an aim of finalising that curriculum framework for all schools by November this year. We are continuing to work with the non-government sector, particularly around professional learning of staff and the development of resource material that both sector schools can use in terms of units of work.

We are also working with a range of stakeholders and cultural institutions here in the ACT, the war memorial, around civic citizenship, and units of work are being put together to support the framework once it goes in place. In the area of sustainability we are working on WaterWise with Actew—a seamless operation between the government and non-government sector when it comes to developing units of work. They will be valuable resources for all students P-10 here in the ACT once we complete that by November this year.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Thank you, chair. Minister, in an answer to Dr Foskey you mentioned the issue of bullying. I am sorry to return to it. I am not actually returning to the bullying but to something else. You know my interest in smoking and young people; a motion moved in the Assembly just recently. Do we have uniform policies across all schools—non-government schools as well as public schools—on the issue of smoking and our young people?

**Mr Barr:** Thank you, Ms Porter. No, I am afraid we do not. I think it is important that we do move to a more uniform policy across all schools in the ACT. I am very pleased to be able to announce today that from 1 January 2008 all public school grounds will be smoke free.

**MRS DUNNE:** Would you like to table the press release, minister, and we can move on.

**Mr Barr:** There are at least five ACT colleges that currently have designated smoking areas on school grounds where students and staff can smoke. We are seeking through this change of policy to ensure that, from 1 January 2008, all ACT public schools will be smoke free. I think we will then join with the Catholic systemic schools; we have a similar policy. I will seek to write again to the NGSEC to seek their views on the rollout of this policy to all schools in the ACT. As the Catholic sector has already moved on this issue, I think it is important that we are able to get uniformity across all schools in the ACT, but I am very pleased to be able to announce that from 1 January 2008 all ACT public schools will be smoke free.

**MS PORTER:** I am just concerned that there may be other policies in the non-government sector that we need to look at, minister. I would encourage you to look at all of the policies that affect the health of our young people in our schools—non-government and government schools. I would like to encourage you to do that, please.

**MRS DUNNE:** Do it in the caucus meeting.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, and that work is ongoing through a variety of—

**DR FOSKEY:** This is a supp which was raised by that question. Having been a teacher, I am interested in the obligations on teachers when students spend a lot of time in the toilets when smoking has been banned. How do you plan to support teachers in policing that particular policy?

**Mr Barr:** There are policies in place, of course, for those under 18 in all schools already. What we are effectively talking about here are policies, as they apply to college level, that will mean a complete ban on smoking inside buildings and on school grounds. That means that, where there is smoke, it will not be accepted, as is the policy for all government buildings, Dr Foskey.

**DR FOSKEY:** It may be difficult to determine which cubicle the smoke is emanating from.

**Mr Barr:** It may well be, but I do not think that is a good enough reason to ignore the public health issues.

**DR FOSKEY:** I agree. I am just wondering about the support for teachers, Mr Barr.

**Mr Barr:** We already have these policies effectively in place in all but the college sector. But it will apply to staff as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Burke.

**MRS BURKE:** Thank you. Good afternoon, minister, and thank you once again for appearing before the committee. I have obviously been listening to the news. I am not really up to speed on this, but I thought this was a good opportunity to ask: where are you up to with the commitment to the new funding agreement for non-government schools, particularly for the Catholic system?

**Mr Barr:** We are in negotiation. I have spoken with the NGSEC around future funding arrangements.

**MRS BURKE:** Was that recently?

**Mr Barr:** It would have been last month that I attended a meeting with the NGSEC. I indicated to them, as I have indicated to the non-Government Schools Education Council that I met with earlier this week, that the next four-year funding agreement with the commonwealth is up for negotiation. Hopefully that will commence later this year, although with the federal election getting in the way the expectation is that it will be the beginning of 2008. That quadrennial agreement will commence on 1 January 2009, I believe, and run for four years.

Until we have a better understanding of what the Commonwealth policy directions are in relation to both government and non-government schools we will not be in a position to finalise future funding arrangements from the ACT government. I want to

have a handle on exactly what range of ideological positions will be threatened to have our funding cut if we do not sign up. We have seen teacher performance pay as one of those issues.

**MRS BURKE:** That is not the answer to my question.

**Mr Barr:** We have an understanding from the Commonwealth around future funding arrangements. As I have indicated here before and again today, the ACT is a minority funding partner for non-government schools and we will need to make an assessment on the level of commonwealth funding and other competing needs within the education sector. For example, hypothetically speaking, if the commonwealth continues its current funding trajectory whereby resources are going into private schools at about three to one over government schools, then the ACT government will have to have funding policies to address that to ensure that public schools continue to get an appropriate level of resourcing. We will have to potentially counterbalance that to ensure that, whilst all schools will be getting more money—there is no doubting that—

**MRS BURKE:** They will?

**Mr Barr:** All schools will be getting more money—there is no doubting that.

**MRS DUNNE:** At WPR rates?

**Mr Barr:** But the question—

**MRS BURKE:** Yes. Is it WPR, CPI?

**Mr Barr:** But the question becomes one of: we are given the available taxpayer dollar and, where the greatest need is, we will allocate funding on that basis.

**MRS BURKE:** You have raised a good point there, haven't you? People sending their children to non-government schools are also paying taxes to supplement the government sector, which, you would have to agree, are paying fees and/or on top of.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MRS BURKE:** So hopefully they are going to get a very good deal.

**Mr Barr:** I believe they do get a very good deal.

**MRS BURKE:** I doubt that is right.

**Mr Barr:** If you look in the long run—

**MRS BURKE:** How do you make that out?

**Mr Barr:** How do I make that out?

**MRS BURKE:** How do you make out that they get a good deal when they are paying

tax already—

**Mr Barr:** Record levels of funding for non-government schools—record levels.

**MRS BURKE:** Is that right? Well there we go.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, from both the commonwealth and the ACT government.

**MRS BURKE:** Sorry, Mrs Dunne, you have a supp?

**MRS DUNNE:** Are you going to ask it or are you going to go back to your question?

**MRS BURKE:** No.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay, I will ask as a supplementary.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Mrs Dunne can do it.

**MRS BURKE:** If it is a supplementary to this it is important.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, I think Mrs Burke asked you about your commitment to organising and negotiating a funding deal with non-government schools, a commitment made before the last election.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** That commitment was supposed to be met by 2005, which was before your time.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** The question—correct me if I am wrong, Mrs Burke—was not what are you doing about the negotiations with the commonwealth, but what are you doing about your commitment to negotiate with non-government schools—

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, my words were: where are you in regard to your commitment—

**MRS DUNNE:** in relation to ACT funding to non-government schools, which did not happen before the 2005 budget?

**MRS BURKE:** Thank you, Mrs Dunne.

**Mr Barr:** The policy talked about reaching an agreement on a mutually agreeable methodology.

**MRS DUNNE:** Which did not happen before the 2005 budget, which is what the commitment was.

**Mr Barr:** I am not sure that that is—

**THE CHAIR:** Is that a question, Mrs Dunne?

**MRS BURKE:** Was the commitment before the budget?

**MRS DUNNE:** The commitment—sorry, Jackie.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Donnelly may be able to provide—

**MRS BURKE:** I think the minister knows well. Thank you, Mr Donnelly.

**Mr Donnelly:** Just for the information of the committee, I met with representatives of the Catholic Education Office and the former chief executive of the department, from memory, around 2004. We had a long discussion around the methodology that the government uses to fund non-government schools. It is fair to say that the consensus from that meeting was that the Catholic Education Office understood the methodology the government used but did not necessarily agree that that was their preferred methodology.

**MRS BURKE:** Were they correct in their assumption that it was not the correct methodology, and why did you say it was not?

**Mr Barr:** They agreed on the methodology that was being used. They would prefer to use a different one, but they acknowledged—and there was agreement around—how it was that we arrived at the figures we arrived at. They would love another methodology. I am sure they would love us to give them \$100 million a year extra every year from now until eternity. They would love that; anyone would. But we have reached an agreement in terms of what—

**MRS DUNNE:** That is not the Catholic Education Office.

**Mr Barr:** an understanding around what the methodology is that the ACT government uses.

**MS PORTER:** There are two sides to every story.

**MRS DUNNE:** When was the last time you met with the Catholic Education Office, minister?

**MRS BURKE:** It was referring to Catholic schools.

**Mr Barr:** I would have met them in the context of the Non-Government Schools Education Council—

**MRS DUNNE:** When was the last time—

**Mr Barr:** about four weeks ago.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay. Certainly not what they were saying at the time of—

**Mr Barr:** I have met with representatives of some of the independent Catholic



schools, such as Marist, already. I have met with parent representatives from Marist. I have a meeting with the principal of Daramalan college in the next three or four weeks.

**MRS BURKE:** I hope that it does finally include increased funding for students with a disability.

**Mr Barr:** We would note that there was an additional \$1 million in this year's budget to provide additional support for students with a disability in the non-government sector.

**MRS BURKE:** In the new agreement.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I will defer to Mrs Dunne and come back after the next round of members. I have a few other questions.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you. The secretary circulated this document and I would like to ask the minister some questions in relation to this. This was evidence that was submitted by one of the representatives of the association of independent schools and relates to a school.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Daramalan.

**THE CHAIR:** For the *Hansard*, that was for last Friday.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, last Friday. It relates to a school. It may not be absolutely typical, but the long and short of it is that for this school over the period 1999-2007 commonwealth grants have increased 62 per cent, ACT grants have increased 30 per cent and parent contributions to the school have increased 100 per cent. There is the constant rhetoric that comes from you and your predecessors, minister, about your role being as a minority provider. That is certainly quite evident from the information provided by this school principal in relation to his school.

It may be that some of the detail of this needs to go on notice, but can you provide for the committee a breakdown similar to this for all schools—not for all individual schools, but for the non-government school sector—of commonwealth grants over the period 1999 to 2007, ACT grants et cetera. I particularly want those figures, but I would also like to know whether it is in your capacity to provide information on parent contributions over the period. I am not sure that that is a reasonable question to ask.

**Mr Barr:** I can advise the committee that I can certainly provide that information to a certain level of detail. I am not sure that we are able to get parental contributions from non-government schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** We would have to do that on a school-by-school basis?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I can advise that in 1996-97 commonwealth funding to non-government schools was \$46,668,000; under the 2007-08 budget, that had risen to \$122,570,000—a 163 per cent increase in funding for non-government schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** But that would have to be moderated in terms of the number of students it was funding—which would have increased over that period.

**Mr Barr:** Would have increased over that period, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Also, it would have to be normalised in 1997 dollars or something like that.

**Mr Barr:** But in anybody's language an increase from \$46½ million to \$122½ million is a significant funding increase over a 10-year period.

**MRS DUNNE:** And it all—

**Mr Barr:** Particularly when you look at the same—

**MRS DUNNE:** depends how much of that—

**Mr Barr:** When at the same time—

**MRS DUNNE:** What the real term value is.

**Mr Barr:** the increase to government schools from the commonwealth was from a base of \$27 million in 1996-97 up to \$42 million in 2007-08. Again, this argument seeking to drill down to the ACT government that it is our responsibility uniquely to provide additional funding above and beyond is, in the end, not a useful argument for education overall.

**MRS DUNNE:** What is the level of funding—

**Mr Barr:** Given that the commonwealth contributes a paltry amount that increases at a rate of only one-third of the money that has flowed to private schools, if we do not fund public schools in the ACT no-one else will. There is no parental contribution or a very limited contribution in terms of voluntary contributions. If we are not funding public schools in the ACT, who else will?

**MRS BURKE:** People who are sending their children to the non-government sector—

**Mr Barr:** That is a fundamental commitment from this Labor government that we have backed by record levels of investment in the public education system. That is our core responsibility—the number one responsibility for the ACT government. We are a minority funding partner for non-government schools. And despite—

**MRS DUNNE:** And increasingly a minority funding partner.

**Mr Barr:** In spite of being a minority funding partner for non-government schools, we have provided the largest ever amount—\$40.5 million, a 32 per cent increase since we came to office. It is a significant additional amount. When coupled with the 163 per cent increase from the commonwealth, that is a major investment from

governments at both levels in non-government schools—

**MRS BURKE:** I thought *Towards 2020* talked about cutting, Mrs Dunne—

**Mr Barr:** and a major investment in education. It is important—

**MRS DUNNE:** I have actually got a question.

**THE CHAIR:** We will be happy to hear it when the minister has finished his answer.

**MRS DUNNE:** He actually asked me a question. His job is not to ask me questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Indeed.

**MRS DUNNE:** His job is—

**THE CHAIR:** So you have a question for the minister?

**MRS DUNNE:** I have a question for the minister.

**THE CHAIR:** Go ahead.

**MRS DUNNE:** Does the \$40.5 million this year include the \$700,000 for infrastructure for disability services in the schools? What is that \$40.5 million made up of?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it does include both recurrent and that capital grant.

**MRS DUNNE:** Apart from the per student allocation, what else is in that \$40 million?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Donnelly might be in a position to provide you with a breakdown in a bit more detail than I can, but yes, there is a recurrent per student amount. It does include the additional capital funding. And there would be some other ongoing programs.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Donnelly, the \$40 million which includes the recurrent per student amount—how much is that per level of education? How much per child in a primary school, high school and senior secondary school do you get?

**Mr Donnelly:** How much per child or per level of education?

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, for a child in each level of education how much would that child get?

**Mr Donnelly:** That would depend on the category of their school. The government funds non-government schools based on a 12-step—

**MRS DUNNE:** On the SES model.

**Mr Donnelly:** Based on the former SES model, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** And almost all of the schools in the ACT fall into one category?

**Mr Donnelly:** No, that is not correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** No?

**Mr Donnelly:** From memory, schools in the ACT range from category 2 or category 3 right up to category 12.

**MRS DUNNE:** In that case, can you give me—on notice—a breakdown of the schools and the categories that they fall into? In addition—and I will ask the rest of this on notice—can you provide the breakdown of per student contributions per level—the old SES contributions?

**Mr Barr:** It might also be useful for the committee to note that there is a large amount of support provided in kind to non-government schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** Have you put that in that \$40 million?

**Mr Barr:** No, that is excluded from that—I am being advised that a small amount of that is included: a couple of allocated shares around literacy and numeracy testing and BSSS. If we were, for example, to seek to provide the funding and then charge back, we could artificially, if you like, inflate the level of support to give a headline figure somewhat higher. Were we to, for example, charge non-government schools for the national assessment program that will commence in 2008, that would be in the order of \$30 a test. That would provide an additional amount of funding to non-government schools, but we would then have to bill them straight back.

In terms of accounting for the figures and making it administratively simple, the department simply picks up the cost for all students in the ACT. I am very happy—and I intend to do this work—to provide an amount of the in-kind support that is provided. If people want to continue to run this argument that we do not provide enough support, then you can go down the path of saying, “Fine.” It is an additional amount of, say—I am plucking this figure out—\$5 million worth of in-kind support.

Say we provide \$5 million and we collect it straight back for the services we provide. That will bump up the figures and give us a better headline figure. But is it necessarily a sensible way to approach policy? Probably not. It is administratively easier for us simply to pick up the tab for a variety of additional services, be they the national assessment program, the scaling test, the BSSS secretariat, year 11 and 12 moderation, the curriculum framework development, access to the department’s library, access to information communication and technology websites and a variety of servers or integration of the ANU secondary college program. There is a variety of compliance measures et cetera and reporting that the department does on behalf of all schools.

If we were to have a strict bill-back basis—back to the non-government sector—for every piece of work that we provide, then yes, we could provide a higher headline figure. That would probably make it easier for me sitting in this committee and under this sort of questioning to—

**MRS DUNNE:** No, it would not.

**Mr Barr:** be able to provide answers to meet your—

**MRS DUNNE:** It would just be an act of bastardry, but that is all right—

**Mr Barr:** imaginary targets—

**THE CHAIR:** Order, Mrs Dunne.

**Mr Barr:** or the desires that you have.

**MS PORTER:** Yes, that is exactly right: order.

**Mr Barr:** I do not see a huge point in going down that path. Nonetheless, I do intend to be able to provide, in terms of information for the public, that level of service in kind that is provided by the education department to the non-government sector.

**MRS DUNNE:** If you are providing a level of information for the public, it would be useful, first of all, if the actual amount of money that goes to the non-government school system appeared in the budget in some way that is reasonably accessible, so that, when you are asked, minister, you can turn to the page and say where it is—which you could not do and neither could anybody else.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a question in there, Mrs Dunne?

**Mr Barr:** I told you it would be in the territorial expenses.

**MRS BURKE:** Even Mr Donnelly had problems, though.

**MRS DUNNE:** The thing is that the figure that is there does not actually identify the amount of money that the ACT government contributes—and it has not for some time. It should, because you are talking about accountability. But let me get back to the issues in point. Your bottom-line position is essentially that you are happy with your status as being a minority funder, is it? I do not know that anyone says that the ACT government should be anything other than a minority funder, but your role as a funder of non-government schooling is a diminishing role on the basis that, as we know, back in 2004, the ACT government contribution was roughly 17 per cent of the cost of sending your child to a government school and the calculations from the Catholic Education Office as a result of the budget say that that has now declined—marginally, but it has declined—to 16.8 per cent. While you are saying that there is more money in the budget—

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne, have you got a question?

**MRS DUNNE:** What are you going to do about addressing the substantial shortfall in funding compared to, say, the performance of the New South Wales government, which is moving towards—or has actually achieved—25 per cent of the average cost of government school education?

**Mr Barr:** I can advise that I completely rule out the ACT government matching the New South Wales government 25 per cent threshold. That will not happen. I have begun a conversation to look at what the Australian average funding for non-government schools is, and we can have a discussion around that. But if we do go down that path—and I will seek to account for in-kind support in achieving that Australian average—that would be a long-term goal rather than an immediate policy priority.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** I am on the next output class.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any more questions on this one?

**MRS BURKE:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I will just raise a question with you, minister. In your answer to Mrs Dunne, you mentioned non-government schools and the ANU advanced senior secondary studies for years 11 and 12. Non-government schools are able to take part in that? How does that work?

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, yes. It is a joint initiative—as I think I have said before to the committee—between the ANU and the ACT government, and it does cater for students in the government school system and in the non-government school system. It is taught by teachers from the Department of Education and Training. Non-government students are able to pay a nominal fee to be part of the program—or the school does on their behalf. Of course, for public students, public education is mandated to be free under the Education Act. Public students are catered for free within the government subsidy for the overall program.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You talked about a figure of \$40.5 million for 2007-08. I hope you will take on board for next year's budget a better break-up and more understandable budget papers. Could you also provide us with the expenditure break-up for 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07?

**Mr Barr:** I certainly can. I can advise, as I think I did initially—

**MR STEFANIAK:** If you can advise it now, that is good. If you take it on notice, that will be fine.

**Mr Barr:** that there has been a 32 per cent increase since the 2001-02 budget. But I can provide you with the funding steps as we have gone—

**MR STEFANIAK:** That will be very interesting.

**Mr Barr:** As we have gone from about \$30 million to \$40 million over the last five years or thereabouts.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I think it was from about \$20 million to \$30 million over the six-year period before that. I find that interesting, minister, simply because of the figures.

I note that it is one large independent school, but the state grants there—if you extrapolate them over an eight-year period, it is 30 per cent. In the first couple of years, it is in fact 12 per cent. Then it is 18 per cent for the six years you have been in government, which is very different from what you are saying there. I would be interested to see your total figures.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly. We can supply that information. We may be able to do it before the end of this afternoon's hearings.

**THE CHAIR:** Any other questions in this area?

**MR STEFANIAK:** I have a follow-up from what the minister said to Mrs Dunne. You indicated that you are looking at the Australian average. We all know that for many years New South Wales has contributed 25 per cent of what it pays for government schools to non-government schools. In the ACT I think it has been about 18 or 19 per cent, but it seems that we are down to less than 17 per cent. When will you be able to advise what you will be seeking to do in terms of at least perhaps getting us to an Australian average, which I suspect is considerably more than 16.7 per cent?

**Mr Barr:** Firstly, it is worth noting that New South Wales charge non-government schools for their testing regime, so they do what I have so far indicated we will not be doing.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** If we load on for a school that tests year 3, 5, 7 and 9 each year, that is another equivalent of \$120 per head for those schools for the testing for students across those four year levels. I have indicated, as I think I did in response to an earlier question from Mrs Burke, that once I have a better understanding of what will be on offer from the commonwealth's four-year funding agreement we will be in a better position to determine future funding arrangements for both government schools and non-government schools.

Of course, there is going to be a significant change to education funding should Kevin Rudd be elected at the end of the year. It is clear that education will receive a significantly greater share of the commonwealth budget than it would should Julie Bishop remain minister. We will need to assess the situation at the commonwealth level before making final decisions about the ACT government policy. I have indicated that, in terms of a longer term aspirational goal, Australian average funding for non-government schools is something to look at, but it needs to be an apples-for-apples comparison. Some in the non-government sector have sought to minimise the level of ACT government contribution and seek to ignore all of the in-kind support.

As I said, it is not my preference to have to go through a system where we provide the funding and then rip it straight back through user charges for all of the services that we provide. It would be preferable to continue the current arrangements. But I will be seeking an acknowledgement from the non-government sector of all of the in-kind support. We have already advised the Non-Government Schools Education Council

that we will pick up the tab for national testing for non-government schools. That is significant: it is \$30 a test for each student in the non-government system each year, and that is a significant amount of money for 25,000 students.

**MR STEFANIAK:** How many people are there in the non-government school office?

**Mr Barr:** Within the department of education?

**MR STEFANIAK:** Within the department, yes.

**Mr Barr:** Two.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I have one final question in this segment, on the interest subsidy scheme which your government cancelled. Whilst there are some schools who were lucky to get some just before that occurred—

**Mr Barr:** We closed it for new applicants, yes.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You closed it for new applicants. What are you doing for schools that need to expand—that need to have some support in terms of providing additional buildings—now that scheme has closed? I appreciate that you have got quite a few schools that involved the old scheme.

**Mr Barr:** We have allocated—

**MR STEFANIAK:** What are you doing for those new schools?

**Mr Barr:** We have consulted with the Non-Government Schools Education Council on their preferences for how that money should be allocated. They indicated a range of priorities. One at the top of the list was additional funding to support students with a disability in non-government schools. We provided that additional money in this year's budget. I am seeking—

**MRS DUNNE:** It is not additional money. It is not new money.

**Mr Barr:** I am seeking further advice from NGSEC on priorities to allocate the unspent amounts that sit within the former interest subsidy scheme. It is also worth noting that each non-government school that received a land grant from the ACT government over time—

**MRS DUNNE:** Not all of them.

**Mr Barr:** will have received a significant capital injection, or equivalent thereof, from the ACT government and from ACT taxpayers.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Do you have a break-up of those? I would like to have a break-up of what money would have normally gone to that scheme, which you have canned, and just how you have actually spent it since the scheme ceased.

**Mr Barr:** That information can be made available.



**MR STEFANIAK:** Thank you.

**MRS BURKE:** I was probably just concerned that it was being flagged as new money, that money for students with disabilities. I do not think it was.

**MRS DUNNE:** In the initiative it says it is agency funded. It is not new money at all.

**MRS BURKE:** Minister, Dr Bruniges referred earlier to home schooling or home education, and she said there had been an increase. One of the concerns I have is that, whilst parents may not choose to send their children to a government school and they cannot afford the fees or whatever to send them to a non-government school, they are opting for home schooling and home education. I want to know the figure for this financial year compared with last financial year, and 2004-05, basically the last three years.

**Mr Barr:** In 2004-05, 98 students were provisionally registered. In 2005-06, 68 students were provisionally registered. In 2006-07, 59 students were provisionally registered. Going through—

**MRS BURKE:** I am sorry, minister. Is this additional every year? You are saying additional, are you?

**Mr Barr:** No, it is just the total. So in 2004-05, 98 students were provisionally registered, with 82 progressing to registration. So it was 98 and 82.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** In 2005-06, 68 students were provisionally registered, with 43 progressing to registration. In 2006-07, 59 students were provisionally registered, and 15 progressing to registration.

**MRS BURKE:** Thank you.

**MRS DUNNE:** May I ask a technical question on that? If a child is provisionally registered and then, for whatever reason, is not finally registered, what happens to that child? Is it presumed that that child goes to school?

**Dr Bruniges:** Sometimes, Mrs Dunne, they will come into non-government schooling or government schooling. Sometimes it would be interstate. We would have to look at it case-by-case to provide that answer to you.

**MRS DUNNE:** Do you actually do any monitoring to see that those children who do not continue with their home schooling registration are, in fact, going to school?

**Dr Bruniges:** We do. In fact, each year, for every one of those students involved in home schooling we have a requirement that an annual report comes in for each of those students at the end of each calendar year.

**MRS DUNNE:** So is that the provisionally registered or the finally registered?

**Dr Bruniges:** The finally registered ones. For the provisionally registered ones, if they do not move to registration, then there would be follow-up to ask why they are not moving into being registered and so forth. As I said, we look case-by-case at family circumstances to see what decisions parents have made.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any more questions in output class 2? Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** It is just a topical question about indigenous education. Are you aware that in your proposal to close a number of government primary schools, five of the seven Canberra primary schools that have indigenous enrolments of over five per cent of total enrolment will be closing either in full or in part? Were you aware of that?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** We are actually dealing with output class 2.

**MR SMYTH:** How many of the indigenous families and students were consulted as per your commitment to the Assembly last September?

**Mr Barr:** All.

**MR SMYTH:** All?

**Mr Barr:** All were consulted in the transition plans.

**MR SMYTH:** Can you number how many students that was?

**Mr Barr:** We will be able to take that on notice, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you.

**MRS DUNNE:** I do have one more question in this output class please, Mr Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth moved to output class 4. You want to have one more question in 2?

**MRS DUNNE:** In 2.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** The other day, minister, you said that you had written to NGSEC about implementing the bullying policies that you have implemented in the government schools and the non-government schools.

**Mr Barr:** Countering bullying policies

**MRS DUNNE:** I am sorry—countering bullying, violence, harassment et cetera policies. How do you envisage that this reporting would take place? Who would be responsible for reporting, and to whom?

**Mr Barr:** I have written to NGSEC seeking their advice on whether they would like to pick up our guidelines and seeking their advice on implementation within the non-government school sector. But it may well be that they will be able to provide written reports to an area within the Department of Education and Training. They are required to—

**MRS DUNNE:** Who are they, the schools or NGSEC?

**Mr Barr:** The schools. NGSEC is a peak advisory committee—

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, I know—

**Mr Barr:** made up of representatives from—

**MRS DUNNE:** but I am just wondering—

**Mr Barr:** No. NGSEC would not collect the data. Individual schools or the Catholic systemic schools could perhaps as a group.

**MRS DUNNE:** One presumes, of course, that the systemic schools already have reporting mechanisms. Would you be expecting to duplicate those?

**Mr Barr:** No. I would seek to provide it, and this is the conversation that we will have over the next six months: how we can move to a situation where there are equivalent levels of reporting. I do not seek through that process to impose unnecessary reporting burdens on schools, but I think the issue is important enough to ensure that there is consistency of reporting across all schools. It is naive to think that this is not a major issue in non-government schools. It is something that needs to be addressed and it is something that this government will take a leadership role on.

**MRS DUNNE:** Since the implementation of these new policies back on 15 May—is that right, minister?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** How many reports have there been to the directors of schools of instances of violence that have resulted, or should result in, the calling of police, for instance?

**Mr Barr:** I will have to get that information for you. I do not have it available.

**MRS DUNNE:** Have there been any this week?

**Mr Barr:** I understand there may have been, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You are still asking about non-government schools, Mrs Dunne?

**MS PORTER:** Yes, apparently.

**THE CHAIR:** Output class 2?

**MS PORTER:** Supposedly.

**MRS DUNNE:** So have there—

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** been any this week?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, there have.

**MRS DUNNE:** There have?

**MRS BURKE:** How many this week?

**Dr Bruniges:** I am aware of three this week.

**MRS BURKE:** Three?

**Dr Bruniges:** Three this week.

**MRS BURKE:** I knew of two. That is one more that I did not know about.

**MRS DUNNE:** What was the process with the reporting of those?

**Dr Bruniges:** As per the policy, Mrs Dunne. Schools would have, in a number of instances, either contacted police or the directors of schools to seek clarification. They would have reported it immediately. They would be following up within 24 hours in terms of reporting to the directors of schools and then we would look at that information in order to ascertain follow-up with the parents, or indeed the schools, to make sure that appropriate support or action was taken.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am still unclear, Dr Bruniges. You just said then that the schools would either contact the police or contact the director of schools. What is the policy because it is entirely unclear who contacts the police?

**Dr Bruniges:** Mrs Dunne, schools will act immediately to contact the police if they feel that that is warranted. The safety or quality assurance step is that they notify the director of schools immediately. If the director of schools feels that the school's judgement on whether or not the matter has been referred to the police has not been adequate, then the police would be notified at that point.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can you point to me in the procedure where it actually says that the schools need to contact the police in the first instance?

**Dr Bruniges:** In the policy statement?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes. Actually, take it on notice. Show me in the tea break.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Unless I do not have the full set of guidelines or I am missing a line somewhere, I cannot find it.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Stefaniak.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Thanks, chair. I refer you to the saga up at Hackett with the Blue Gum non-government school. There seems to be a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between several government departments, largely over moving a demountable about 12 feet or something like that, which seems quite remarkably petty, really. But is the department doing anything to assist in that process and achieve an outcome which will—

**Mr Barr:** Moving demountables?

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes, just at—

**Mr Barr:** I understand that is an issue between—

**MR STEFANIAK:** I think it is ACTPLA and urban services.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I am aware through my planning ministerial responsibilities that the demountable in question was placed on a piece of land that it should not have been. That was done, as I understand it, against clear advice that it should not be placed in that location. It was placed anyway. I understand that the Department of Territory and Municipal Services have sought on a number of occasions over an extended period of time—years nearly; getting close to a year, I understand—to seek to negotiate the relocation of that particular building. My recollection is that they were in a position where, having asked on at least three occasions, they had reached the end of their tether and had indicated that they would remove the building if it was not removed. That is where I understand it was at. I am not sure of the final date for—

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes. I also understand that another department was going to redo the whole area, which would mean where it is is okay in terms of redrawing a shorter line.

**Mr Barr:** I am not sure that that is the case, Mr Stefaniak. I am not aware of that.

**MR STEFANIAK:** My specific question to the education department is: are you doing anything to try to assist in that, given—

**Mr Barr:** I have, in fact—

**MR STEFANIAK:** the needs of the school students at that particular school?

**Mr Barr:** I have had a meeting with Maureen Hartung, the executive director, and a number of parental representatives and have taken a role in coordinating. It is across a number of departments that fall within my responsibilities and we are seeking to get a good outcome. However, I need to stress that that school has an obligation to meet its requirements under the Education Act around providing a safe environment. It needs to act within the laws of the territory. There are no special circumstances or special exemptions granted for Blue Gum School over any other. We have put in place a number of resources across a number of departments over a number of years in relation to this issue. But, yes, I have taken it upon myself, Mr Stefaniak, to take a personal interest in this matter.

**MR STEFANIAK:** They would be delighted if you can sort it out, minister. That is good to hear.

**THE CHAIR:** It looks like we have completed output class 2. We will move on to early intervention, and I might kick off first. Minister, last year the government decided to amalgamate all preschools with primary schools from 2008. What progress has been made, and are you facing any difficulties?

**Mr Barr:** Thank you, Mr Gentleman. As you are aware, yes, from 2008 preschools and enrolments for preschools are being processed through their amalgamated primary schools. Parents are able to obtain the enrolment form from the primary school and submit that form with required documentation, birth certificates et cetera to the primary school. I am pleased to advise that the community has responded positively to the on-site enrolment process and that no problems had arisen as a result of this new process.

The Education Act specifies the constitution of school boards and does allow for the school board to appoint one or more people to be members of the board for a term of not less than 12 months. Under this provision schools can, and will, invite representatives from the preschools onto the school board. This is, I think, an important policy shift aligning our early childhood education provision with the new curriculum framework P-10 so that we have, through the integration of preschools into the primary school years, that continuity of learning. It does provide important professional development opportunities for teachers in the early childhood years. It allows a collaborative approach from those early years and is backed, of course, by the government's investment in increased preschool contact hours and our class size initiatives for kinder to year 3.

It demonstrates a clear commitment from the government to strengthen our early childhood education provision and to back that with additional resources, additional professional development opportunities for staff and the opportunity, through major and significant capital investments in older preschools—in fact, all preschools—to upgrade the quality of preschool education and early childhood education within the territory. It is an initiative that I am particularly proud of and one that I think will show great dividends for the territory over the next 15, 20, 25 to 30 years in terms of a great policy outcome for early childhood education.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Very important discussions were going on behind me, so you may have mentioned some of this in what you were just saying just now. Page 363 of budget paper No 4, under this output class, mentions targeted programs to those with special needs. What programs are being implemented to assist children with specific needs in the early intervention area?

**Mr Barr:** It is important to note that early intervention programs are catering for children from 18 months through to school entry age. Applications for entry into the program come from therapists, child health medical officers and other health professionals or preschool teachers. The programs include general play groups, communication and social awareness play groups, play groups for children with multiple and complex disabilities, early intervention units, autism intervention units and the language intervention unit.

All programs work on a low child to staff ratio to ensure optimal intervention outcomes. The department works in partnership with Therapy ACT in the provision of services. For example, children in the language intervention unit attend two sessions per week and a speech therapist attends for one of those two sessions. When children are identified as having a specific disability, such as vision or hearing impairments or language development requirements, our services are tailored to meet their individual needs. Services can be provided through support to the family and child at the time of identification, which could be as early as at birth.

There are a number of particular programs. A community group and a social awareness group operate at Urambi and Maribyrnong preschools. Twelve places are available for children aged two to three years who have been identified as having autistic tendencies but who do not have a diagnosis of autism. There is a language intervention unit and up to 24 places available at South Curtin preschool and 54 places available in play groups, again at Urambi and Maribyrnong. There are 180 places in early intervention units for children with special needs from three years to primary school entry and 24 places in the autism early intervention unit. They are provided at Bonython, Chisholm, Giralang—which also has an autism unit—Higgins, Kaleen, Monash, Richardson, Waramanga and Village Creek.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, is there an increase in the number of children that are being identified? Are they being identified because we are doing this better or would there be an increase, do you think, generally? I am just wondering whether we have an increase at all.

**Mr Barr:** Well, I think perhaps a combination of both.

**MS PORTER:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** But Mr Curry might be able to assist.

**Mr Curry:** It tends to be a similar flowthrough in our early intervention programs, remembering that young children with special needs go into that range of settings that the minister mentioned. Some of them are in regular preschools, but through our programs it tends to be about a similar number each year for the flowthrough, as it is reported.

**MS PORTER:** There is not an increase?

**Mr Curry:** It is about 450.

**MS PORTER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Burke, do you have a supplementary?

**MRS BURKE:** Yes. I was interested in that. There are a couple of parts to the question. Page 363 of budget paper No 4 mentions that early intervention is a means of identifying needs. What tools or mechanisms are used to identify and address physical, emotional, social and educational needs of children from birth to five years? If that requires a complicated answer, you may be able to give me an outline now.

**Mr Curry:** Generally speaking, that is an issue for the parents themselves, in terms of referrals coming through paediatricians or people in the health sector. I guess the diagnosis side comes with the family working with a whole range of agencies and medical professionals. They then come to us for the intervention support. We are really the second part of that process.

However, issues might be identified as the individual learning program is developed. When that happens in the very first weeks of coming into a program, people involved in that learning plan meeting might identify other strategies or services that might be called in. But the actual diagnosis tends to happen with the medical professionals.

**MRS BURKE:** Minister, are you aware of the level of unmet need in this category of young children?

**Mr Barr:** There is always a degree of unmet need.

**MRS BURKE:** Do you know what the level is?

**Mr Barr:** Off the top of my head, no. But I can find out, or we can get some further information for you.

**MRS BURKE:** Does anybody here know?

**Mr Barr:** A little bit depends on what stage diagnosis occurs. Obviously the earlier a diagnosis, the earlier we can intervene and provide the range of services that I have just outlined. But to a certain extent the question is: how long is a piece of string?

**MRS BURKE:** There will be people who have had needs assessed and those needs are not being met.

**Mr Barr:** That level of information we can—

**Mr Curry:** We have around 180 places available in our early intervention programs. At this point in time we have about 125—around that figure—young children who have taken up those places. In essence, in terms of what we can provide, there is no



unmet need. Our services are free. I guess it depends on what we are talking about when we say “unmet need”.

**MRS BURKE:** Autism is the biggest area. I think that Ms Porter was asking whether we are identifying ASD a lot better or whether children are being categorised as such. Are children not getting the level of need and support they require because people such as voice pathologists, speech therapists and so on are not available? Are you aware of that?

**Dr Bruniges:** I am not aware of that. But Therapy ACT may have a better idea. From our end of the operation, as Mr Curry said, there are 180 places and 120 currently.

**MRS BURKE:** How many children are waiting to be assessed? I take it that those are the children who have been assessed.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, that is a medical process. Perhaps Therapy ACT would be better placed to answer that.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have a supplementary that stems from that and goes directly to the points being made by the minister and Dr Bruniges. Can somebody explain how this output class 4.1 reacts with output class 1.2, which is therapy services in the department of disability, et cetera? My concern is that you have two agencies—I am sure that everyone is well intentioned and trying to work hand in hand—whose descriptions of services provided are quite similar.

The other day I was given an assurance that, if we identify a need that has to be addressed by Therapy ACT, the schools sort it out. The other day a member of the public sitting in the gallery came to me afterwards and said that, from her experience, that is not the case. How does it work? How do you work hand in glove and seamlessly with the people in Therapy ACT? Is there duplication? Are there better ways of doing it? What is being done to ensure that people are not falling through the cracks? You have two agencies doing fairly similar things.

**Mr Barr:** It is not the same thing. It is important to note that Therapy ACT provides services across a wider band than these early intervention ones. There will always be an interaction.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, I know: there will always be overlap.

**Mr Barr:** If it would be of assistance, I am happy to get some further information for you about the interaction between the two. But, certainly in the 14 months I have held the education portfolio, there has not been a massive number—in fact I cannot recall any. There may be one or two. But they do not immediately come to mind in terms of this issue, and the level of service provision for early intervention within the education department, the overlap with Therapy ACT and the two working areas. People are not raising this with me as a regular concern.

**MRS BURKE:** They wouldn't, would they? It is like everything.

**MRS DUNNE:** Therapy services are provided by Therapy ACT. Am I right in

assuming that many of the therapy services—if you have a child in an early intervention unit or in a preschool, which is often when some of these issues first arise, and the preschool teacher says, “I think you need assistance for this or that or the other”—are not seamlessly organised by the school. As a parent, I would have to go to Therapy ACT and say, “I have been advised by my preschool teacher or my class teacher to come to talk to you about this service or that service.”

**Mr Barr:** More often than not, the referral would come from a health professional rather than from a preschool teacher.

**MRS DUNNE:** Possibly more often than not. But if a teacher identifies it, often this is the place that—

**Mr Barr:** I am not discounting the possibility that a teacher might identify it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Because no-one has ever thought that it was a problem until someone who is experienced in dealing with this—

**Mr Barr:** But I do not necessarily think that the logical extension of what you are arguing is that we want to set up preschool teachers as a referral service for—

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, let us just see whether she has a question.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I do have a question; I have asked the question; and I am not getting an answer. How do you account for the fact that—last Wednesday I was told that, if someone needed, say, speech therapy, that would be organised by the school and you have given me answers here—the other day a member of the public who was sitting in the gallery came to me and said, “Mrs Dunne, that’s not correct. That isn’t how it works.” How does it work if a school or a parent—or collectively the school and the parent—identifies that the child needs speech therapy? How does that happen? How long does the child have to wait?

**Dr Bruniges:** I have just been advised that Therapy ACT comes into our early intervention units. That is another source. They come in and work in our early intervention units and help any identification or referrals to medical assistance. If there is a particular case that there is more information on I am more than happy to—

**MRS DUNNE:** No; it is a general question. What happens if we are not in an early intervention unit and somebody says, “I think that this child needs speech therapy. I think this child needs occupational therapy. They don’t have a strong grip, and a strong grip is important in learning, writing skills”?

**Mr Barr:** I extend an invitation to you and any other committee member interested to a full briefing so that you can spend a little bit more time than you have today and ask questions on these issues.

**MRS DUNNE:** Before the estimates. Thank you, minister.

**THE CHAIR:** That is a good idea. Dr Foskey has been waiting patiently. I remind members that we will try to go to a break at half past three.

**DR FOSKEY:** I want to explore the amalgamation of preschools with primary schools. That is listed as one of the priorities on page 357. There seems to be quite a lot of enthusiasm for that model. I would be interested in knowing whether there is a strong uncontested educational base to that decision. If so, what is it?

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey, I did ask that question a little bit earlier. Not in the same vein. But I am happy for it to go ahead.

**DR FOSKEY:** You have asked that question? I was asking whether there is an “uncontested—

**MRS DUNNE:** I do not think the chair asked about uncontested education. I think Dr Foskey is looking for evidence—not, “How are we going boys?”

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes, I am looking for an evidence-based approach.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne, it is up to Dr Foskey to ask the question.

**DR FOSKEY:** I thank everyone for their assistance.

**Mr Barr:** I will do two things. Firstly, in a minute I will get Dr Bruniges to outline some of them—I think there are hundreds. Would I be right in saying there are hundreds of studies? We certainly have a very long list of papers that I encourage you to look at when you have some spare time after the estimates committee process is over, when you may have some spare time to have a look at them. But we will get to you that information in terms of studies. Dr Bruniges will give you a quick outline.

**DR FOSKEY:** I would like to see the debates around it too—not just the studies supporting it. I am sure that, like so many things, there are debates in the academies and so on about it.

**Dr Bruniges:** One of the significant writers in this area is Dr Alison Elliott from the Australian Council of Educational Research. She has looked at the care-education divide. If you go to the ACER website you will see many of her articles. This Australian research puts forward the notion that the care-education divide is blurring and that we should be talking about education occurring much earlier—not having childcare centres doing one function. That is one body of work that is Australian-based. Indeed, she has done many meta studies and work in that area.

At the moment the other significant one at the national level is in the human capital working group through COAG, and the research and identification of the early years, and some of the factors that contribute. In fact, it was put forward in our MCEETYA agenda this year that that period about two years prior to the traditional start of school is really important. That is currently being debated across the country in a number of forums. Indeed, we can probably refer you to some of that discussion. There is discussion and debate about that year—as early as three—and where schooling should start.

Most of that touches on the very valuable kinds of things that happen in our preschools around constructive play, the early years of schooling and not forcing traditional academic curriculum during the early years. It talks about the socialisation process that should be captured in education and, indeed, in the preschool years; and those very important social skills that young children need to be exposed to as being a stronger part of the curriculum in those early years.

We are very fortunate here in the ACT that we do have that 12 hours of preschool available. Some of the research is debating how much and what access, and linking it into early years. Yesterday I talked about Professor Fraser Mustard. His is another body of work in South Australia. They have done a lot of work and there has been discussion and debate about the best configuration for those early years of schools and linking primary in.

**Mr Barr:** Along with my state and territory education and training ministerial colleagues, and early childhood ministerial colleagues, I had the opportunity to attend a seminar in Adelaide last year where Dr Mustard was the guest speaker. His research is quite compelling. He is an internationally-renowned expert in this area. It was an interesting seminar. Rather than our just sitting there and listening to everything he had to say—he got up, turned the microphone around and demanded answers from each of the ministers sitting round the table as to what they are doing in their jurisdictions—we were fortunate to be in a position to outline the reform process that we have under way in the ACT.

As part of the year 1 of our education seminar series last year, we held a forum on this very topic. It might well be worth while revisiting that as a topic for next year's public education seminar series. I think that we are through three of the six in this year's series. They are very useful nights. The average attendance at these seminars has been between 50 and 100 people. We seek to get more people along. It can often be difficult to drag people out to events such as those. Nonetheless, we continue to promote those sorts of debates in the community through the seminar series.

**DR FOSKEY:** Forgive me for offering a little advice; I could put a question mark at the end. If those things occurred at school level—at day time or lunch time—people not already converted might come along. I wonder whether, in some cases, with this wholesale adoption of this model, you might be throwing out the baby with the bath water.

There are two glaring examples: one is the loss of Macarthur preschool. Macarthur was a stand-alone preschool. It looked like a perfectly good building to me. There is no doubt the community was really passionate about it, partly because it was their only community building. A stand-alone preschool is no longer viable. What would have been the additional cost to the territory of keeping that preschool open compared to accommodating the students elsewhere?

**Mr Barr:** A number of preschools are located stand-alone—as in off-site—from a primary school. For example, there is Reid, Spence and Hackett—there are a number—Flynn, Tharwa, Hall—

**MRS DUNNE:** And we have to be thankful for that, do we?

**DR FOSKEY:** We are going onto Tharwa in a minute.

**Mr Barr:** It is certainly not the case that a preschool has to be physically located with the primary school. It is simply that we had many more buildings than we had demand for in terms of student places. We often had a situation where—

**DR FOSKEY:** That was not the case there.

**Mr Barr:** We were often attempting to run preschool programs with four or five students.

**DR FOSKEY:** With respect minister, that was not the case in Macarthur.

**Mr Barr:** No, from memory it had 15 or 16 students. But there is another preschool less than 1,500 metres away in Fadden. I think there are others in surrounding suburbs. Dr Foskey, the logical extension of your argument is that there be a preschool on every street.

**DR FOSKEY:** No, it is not.

**Mr Barr:** You have to make a balanced decision about how many buildings you will operate, and about the effectiveness and the quality of the education programs that you can offer stretched across that many sites. It was overwhelmingly clear that the quality of preschool education was suffering because it was being spread so thinly across so many sites. On average, the recurrent savings each year for a preschool site are \$26,000. That money is now available and has been reinvested in preschool education in the territory.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. We will take this opportunity to go to the break. Thank you members. We will come back at 10 to four. We will still be on output class 4.

**Meeting adjourned from 3.31 to 3.48 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** Members, returning to the department of education, we are still on output class 4. We have to go then to output class 3 and the CIT shortly after that. Are there any more questions on output class 4?

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, chair. We hope we won't keep on this one too much longer. I refer to page 363, flicking over to page 372, and the accountability indicators. I am really backing up the question that Ms Porter asked. I think it was the consensus of the minister and departmental officials that the number of incidents or assessments—positive assessments, if we can call them that, but negative for the child—positively identified as having a need was on the increase. I think that is what you were intimating.

**Mr Barr:** No.

**MS PORTER:** They were saying it was staying static.

**Dr Bruniges:** The same number.

**MS PORTER:** Static, staying the same.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, I know that is what it says here, but I actually took it from what Ms Porter was saying that you had said, “We are able to identify these children. It’s becoming on the increase.” That is what my question was going to be. Why is it static when we do know—

**Mr Barr:** No, I don’t know that that—

**MS PORTER:** Could I clarify that? My question was “is it on the increase?” not that it is on the increase.

**MRS BURKE:** I thought you said it is because it is on the increase and you all said yes.

**MS PORTER:** No.

**Mr Barr:** No. I think the question was “is it on the increase?”

**MRS BURKE:** All right. Given that, I think that we all would say that we do know that it is being identified. Does this include children with autism? That is one that we do know as being exponentially on the rise. Would you make a comment on that?

**Mr Curry:** My comment would be that we do have the places available for young children with autism, and I guess the issue would be about whether parents are choosing to take up our service, as opposed to a private therapy service or some other program. Our early intervention programs focused on children with autism are there and in some ways they are demand driven. If we felt that we needed to create another program, we would certainly look at that.

**MRS BURKE:** So 450 is the maximum that can be managed within that program.

**Mr Curry:** That shows the general flow through over a year, given that some children might be identified or diagnosed, if you like, in May, come into our program in June and exit in September and go into one of our regular preschools or might stay till the end of the year. So there is always a flow through in the early intervention programs.

**MRS BURKE:** I was surprised to see that it remains static, that’s all.

**Mr Barr:** I draw your attention to the new performance indicator b, whereby individual learning plans will be commenced within one month of the student’s first attendance at an early intervention program, and the 100 per cent target as an indicator of a desire to have that occur, so that all students have an individual learning plan prepared within one month.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, but that’s a different thing, I think.

**Mr Barr:** It is, but in terms of strengthening our—

**MRS BURKE:** We're talking about numbers, though, minister. We are talking about why the number is static when, surely, children are being identified more readily.

**Mr Barr:** I am not sure that we are agreeing with the statement you are making.

**MRS BURKE:** So you are not expecting any more than, as you have said here, 450.

**Mr Barr:** We have got the capacity to add additional programs if they are needed, but the expectation based on the data over a number of years is that that—

**MRS BURKE:** Can you provide data from, say, last year and the year before, 2004-05 and 2005-06, as to the number of children involved and identified?

**Dr Bruniges:** In autism units, Mrs Burke?

**MRS BURKE:** No, just in relation to item a of output 4.1, accountability.

**Mr Barr:** In relation to early intervention programs. Yes, we can get that information for you.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes. I am really amazed, but thank you.

**MR SMYTH:** Just on that point, you say you have the capacity. How much more capacity do you have?

**Mr Barr:** It is demand driven.

**MR SMYTH:** So anybody that presents will be given the early learning plan.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**Dr Bruniges:** Mr Smyth, we have previously explained that we have about 180 provisions. At the moment, we have got 120 of those filled, so we have got excess capacity to take on more children. If in fact it exceeded that 180 places, then we would look to move to be more accommodating as we could.

**MRS BURKE:** But will that include, as I said earlier, the speech therapists, voice pathologists and so on?

**Dr Bruniges:** It will if it happens within the early intervention, but some parents may choose to go to a private provider.

**MRS BURKE:** Correct. But isn't there a problem, though, within the system for getting the private providers that there are not enough speech pathologists to cope with the current demand or to give enough face-to-face contact hours with the child?

**Dr Bruniges:** Not that I'm aware of in our early intervention units.

**MRS BURKE:** So it is actually after that that there may be a problem.

**Dr Bruniges:** It hasn't come to my attention in terms of demand there that is not met within the public education system.

**MRS BURKE:** It may be the older age group which we are not dwelling on now.

**Mr Curry:** We actually have six early intervention programs for children with autism.

**MRS BURKE:** What funding is allocated to those programs?

**Mr Curry:** They are funded through our own special education-targeted budget.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, but what amount of money would you be targeting?

**Mr Barr:** I think you will find that's in the budget papers: funding of \$19.1 million, government payment for outputs, and a total budget of \$21.5million, page 363, which includes funding for preschools as well, but that is the total.

**MRS BURKE:** So that it is all within that.

**DR FOSKEY:** We were talking before about the amalgamation of preschools with primary schools. It would seem to me that Tharwa was probably one of the best integrated preschools around, in the same classroom and everything. Were the benefits of such a well-operating integrated model considered in the decision to close the primary school, or was that decision made without reference to the preschool?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, that was a factor that was considered.

**DR FOSKEY:** Did the department compare the costs to the ACT government of keeping the Tharwa school open as an annexe of a larger school against running a stand-alone preschool and maintaining an otherwise empty building?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Can I see those comparisons, that analysis?

**Mr Barr:** I think that information was provided as part of the consultation process last year.

**DR FOSKEY:** Nonetheless, I would really like to see it.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly I can provide the information around the cost savings that were achieved vis-a-vis the closure of Tharwa primary school. The fact that the preschool program continues to operate within one of the buildings meant that the savings target that was announced as part of the budget last year was adjusted, I think the average cost being about \$26,000 per preschool. So there was a reduction in the savings that were achieved in terms of the overall program by the fact that Tharwa preschool was kept open.



The issues in relation to the ongoing recurrent costs of running Tharwa as an annexe of another school would be, I presume, the saving of a principal's salary. A principal's salary would have been the only cost saving that would have been achieved by annexing the school, and perhaps a proportion of school-based management funds, but you would still be operating the site and you would still need teachers. So the majority of savings that were achieved by the closure would not have been achieved by annexing the school to another school and effectively only removing one staff position.

**DR FOSKEY:** Did the government take into consideration the social capital and the community cohesion that was provided by both the Macarthur preschool, the stand-alone school, and the Tharwa preschool when they made those decisions to close them? I refer you to *Stateline* of last week, which really did, I think, tell the story very much about the impact on the community.

**Mr Barr:** It told the story of six individuals whom Phillip Williams interviewed. Yes, those factors were taken into account as part of the consultation process and part of the decision-making process.

**DR FOSKEY:** Has there been an assessment of the impact of the closure of those preschools in one case and school in the other on social capital and community cohesion?

**Mr Barr:** No.

**DR FOSKEY:** That, to me, is what is missing.

**THE CHAIR:** Was there a question in there?

**DR FOSKEY:** No. That's it.

**THE CHAIR:** As there are no other questions for output class 4, we will go to vocational education and training, output class 3. I have one specific question, minister, around Australian school-based apprenticeships. On Wednesday you made mention of the breakthrough 500 program. What is the breakthrough 500 program?

**Mr Barr:** It is a target that we have set to achieve 500 new Australian school-based apprenticeships in 2007. In 2006, there was a total of 321 ASBA commencements. School-based apprenticeships offer students the opportunity to achieve a nationally recognised vocational qualification by combining paid work and training as part of their education. These programs provide valuable experience to students, increasing their industry specific and employability skills. Also, they provide students who otherwise might have left school early with an incentive to continue their studies and to achieve a senior secondary certificate.

As I indicated, there were 321 commencements in 2006. In launching the breakthrough 500 program, an ambitious target of 500 was set. What this will require, of course, is employers to be prepared to partner with government schools and non-government schools to be able to achieve this. I am very pleased that at the

information session and open night that was held at the centre for teaching and learning there was a number of employer groups—the MBA, amongst others—represented, and that was a very positive event, one that I know the department put a lot of effort into. I think all of the students and parents who attended appreciated the work that was done to pull together that event. Certainly all of the businesses that were there and the various training providers were quite pleased with that event and the program overall. But, in terms of achieving that target, we will of course need industry to work with us, and it is pleasing to see that occurring, but we will continue to promote this program in our desire to achieve that target.

**MS PORTER:** With regard to that, minister, page 357 talks about strengthening the Canberra community by targeting skill shortages, which you have mentioned, and page 363 talks about engaging with industry, which you were just referring to. Do you think that we are going to be able to do both those things? Do you think that we are going to be able to engage with industry so that we can predict industry trends and identify our future training needs and really tackle the skill shortages? Are there ways of doing it other than that?

**Mr Barr:** There is a variety of initiatives in this year's budget and in policy announcements building on the work in 2006-07 that do show the government's commitment to work with industry to address those issues. You would be aware of the legislative change around industry involvement in the CIT advisory board, for example. The additional funding through this year's budget for user choice training does involve an injection in the order of \$6.2 million over the next four years. Also, \$1.5 million per annum will be available for vocational education and training grants.

This is, I think, an important policy response in terms of seeking industry involvement through a range of advisory functions, with the skills commission at a higher level, and seeking specific industry advice, not just through the CIT, but also through a range of other advisory bodies. We did go through a process of streamlining through the abolition of VETA. Nonetheless, I think the industry advisory practices that are in place now are very useful and provide that direct advice to government, and that is being backed by additional resources in this year's budget.

**MR SMYTH:** Just on that, action 32 in the white paper said that the government would develop, in conjunction with peak industry bodies, a new program to build links between schools and industries. Did that ever occur?

**Mr Barr:** The student to industry program. Yes, it is run.

**MR SMYTH:** But that is a new program. There were student to industry programs.

**Mr Barr:** We are building on them; so new work was done in relation to that.

**MR SMYTH:** So there is not a new program as such.

**Mr Barr:** There has been work undertaken around the issue that you raised from the white paper and that has manifested itself in the student to industry program and the work that occurred there.

**MR SMYTH:** Okay, so you see that as fulfilment of action 32 in the white paper.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** I will again ask my perennial question about the integration of technical-type courses and classes in secondary school at a much earlier stage, partly to tackle the issue that we were talking about the other day of an unacceptable loss of students at year 10, often I think because school doesn't engage their particular learning styles. I am wondering if there has been any progress made or there are any new programs that would deliver technical-type education. I am talking 1970s language here, I'm afraid, but hopefully you will understand what I mean.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, there has been considerable work done, particularly around student pathways and the development of student pathway plans for all students from year 9, so going back a little bit earlier into high school years than you indicated in your question. There are school-based apprenticeships. Breakthrough 500 is an example. There are programs in alternative settings. There are programs also running in the building and construction area; a pilot program with the CIT in plumbing; the northside high school support centre; the southside high school support centre; Dickson college's alternative program; the CC cares program. There is a variety of different initiatives that are there to address those concerns.

The department also continues to work at a national level and we discussed some of these issues at the ministerial council in Brisbane only a matter of weeks ago. In the development of a new commonwealth-state training agreement these issues will be further discussed in terms of new program opportunities. As I indicated on Wednesday, the commonwealth has involved itself in years 11 and 12 alternative programs through Australian technical colleges.

There has been a considerable amount of money invested in effectively running parallel systems to what is on offer in state and territory TAFEs. That program hasn't been extended to the ACT. I argued at that time at the ministerial council that I would welcome the money and that we could use it for VET in schools programs and we could use it with the CIT; that, if the commonwealth did determine to provide some program funds for the ACT, rather than building a technical college here and duplicating existing infrastructure, they would do well to make that money available to the CIT, to schools and to the more than 150 private training providers that we have in the territory.

As Chris Peters from the chamber of commerce has indicated, we have the highest level of private training providers per capita of any jurisdiction in Australia. Given there is a particular ideological bent from the commonwealth not to provide additional funding to TAFEs, I still think it is important that that money is available for the training sector in the ACT, and stress that that money would be welcome for our private training providers, most welcome in the CIT, and certainly could be used for VET in schools programs.

**DR FOSKEY:** And you understood, Mr Barr, that my question was about lower secondary, not upper secondary; it was about years 7 to 10 high schools.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. These programs extend, as I indicated at the beginning of my answer, into those high school years.

**MRS BURKE:** This is an area I am quite interested in and, before politics, I had a fair bit to do with it. At that stage we had what were called industry training advisory boards, as you probably know, across all the sectors.

**Mr Barr:** ITABs.

**MRS BURKE:** You know the acronym. Very good, minister.

**Mr Barr:** It is a test for most new ministers in the vocational education and training portfolio. I had an interesting conversation with my federal counterpart, Andrew Robb, who is just learning some of the acronyms and is finding there are far too many in this area actually.

**MRS BURKE:** You get a gold star! Sadly, though, there has been the demise of those, if not in totality. Maybe you can give me an update on that. Also, I know or understand that perhaps around Easter there was an RFT released for the provision of services or advice to government on training matters. Has that been filled? I can see Ms Davy signalling, minister.

**Mr Barr:** We will be able to provide some information in a moment, but I am not sure that it is correct to say that ITABs have disappeared. That is not a correct statement, but I will get Ms Davy to provide some further information.

**Ms Davy:** ITABs still exist. You may have been talking about what was the ACT Industry Training Advisory Association—ACTITAA, as it was known—which was a contractual group of the ITABs.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes.

**Ms Davy:** We have streamlined the nature of support around sourcing industry advice direct back to the ITABs. The tender you are talking about is the seeking of a group of people to provide that direct industry advice as well as consult with other stakeholders like community groups, indigenous groups and other equity groups.

**MRS BURKE:** Was it released at Easter? Was that right??

**Ms Davy:** It was. That was the pre-consultation prior to the release of the tender. As I understand it, that tender has closed and an evaluation panel is either currently meeting or has just met to make a decision and an assessment about that. There has been no decision yet, but it has closed.

**MRS BURKE:** Okay. Who has been giving advice to government from industry so far with the gap?

**Ms Davy:** We have continued to contract each of the individual ITABs until such time as the new tender is in place.

**MRS BURKE:** How many are there?

**Ms Davy:** Six.

**MRS BURKE:** And they are?

**Ms Davy:** We will get that information for you.

**MRS BURKE:** Okay; you do not know? You cannot tell us now? You could not tell the committee now?

**Ms Vasey:** Building and construction; hospitality and tourism; community services and health; transport and distribution. Is that five? And utilities. They are the ones that are currently functioning.

**MRS BURKE:** Thank you. Minister, what is the level of funding that has been allocated?

**Mr Barr:** I am just getting that figure—\$250,000.

**MRS BURKE:** Is that after the outyears as well—so \$1 million?

**Ms Davy:** It will be recurrent. It will be an annual process. The contract itself—

**MRS BURKE:** That is a separate issue. What funding is allocated to the monetary operation of the five or six industry trading advisory groups—the ITABs—that you have at this stage? Is each funded the same or is it different?

**Ms Davy:** As I understand it, we do not fund the ITABs. In terms of the \$250,000, what we are talking about is the quantum of the contract price for the sourcing of the industry advice, pending who wins the tender. Jocelyn may have—

**MRS BURKE:** Sorry, can I just clear that up? There will be \$250,000 per annum to give advice to government—sorry, to manage?

**Ms Davy:** Yes; \$250,000 is the price per annum for this tender that has currently been let.

**MRS BURKE:** Ms Vasey, did you want to say something?

**Ms Vasey:** Currently the extension of the contracts for advice for those individual ITABs is based on services, so it is a different amount depending on what services they are actually providing.

**MRS BURKE:** Can you provide the committee with the amount of funding per group?

**Ms Vasey:** Not at the moment, but we could take that on notice.

**Mr Barr:** We will that on notice.

**MRS BURKE:** Thank you. I have one final question. The ITABs are an ongoing thing in this? You do not foresee them being further streamlined, as I think your words were, in the foreseeable future?

**Mr Barr:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, you mentioned the commonwealth. I am aware that there have been some changes at the federal level. I was wondering if they have affected the national agenda in any way and how that impacts on the ACT.

**Mr Barr:** Thank you, Ms Porter. Yes, we do have a new commonwealth minister and clearly a different approach in some key areas, as was evidenced by the tenor of the ministerial council meeting in Brisbane as opposed to the previous ones that I had the pleasure of attending. We do have a number of challenges at a national level. Key to that is the negotiation of the next four-year funding agreement. As is the case with education, with the MCEETYA level, there are a number of outstanding issues in different policy directions that are being progressed within our federation. It would be nice to see a greater level of collaboration.

The key example, which I have given before, is Australian technical colleges. That has been a key agenda item for the commonwealth, but has involved a massive outlay of funding for very little in terms of actual student numbers and very little outcome delivered in terms of better training outcomes for the jurisdictions that have benefited, or not, from that additional commonwealth funding. Where they have been successful is where there has been collaboration between the commonwealth and the state or territory government. Where they have been manifest failures, such as was evidenced in Western Australia, where more than \$20 million has been expended on 63 students, an Australian technical college—

**MS PORTER:** Sorry, could you say that again?

**Mr Barr:** In the order of \$20 million was spent with 63 students in the entire state of Western Australia. I spoke about that additional funding at the time. A jurisdiction closer in size to the ACT, the Northern Territory, received something in the order of \$10 million from the commonwealth towards a facility. At least there was a partnership there, and it has been delivered with some integration with Charles Darwin University in the NT.

Looking forward to this national agreement, the key agenda item for the ACT is, firstly, to attract some commonwealth funding in this area and be able to get a collaborative outcome. I have indicated to Minister Robb that that is my desire. He expressed some surprise that the ACT had been excluded—as did Minister Jim Lloyd this morning at a meeting I attended with him when the issue of skills shortages within the ACT were discussed. I have an undertaking from both Minister Lloyd and Minister Robb to look at this issue again in terms of future opportunities for the ACT.

I have indicated a desire to work collaboratively with them, but I have said from the

outset that our preference would be for something other than building a technical college in the ACT. As Minister Hargreaves—the previous minister—said, that was just too difficult to do. If that still remains the case—and, as I understand it, it would be a silly duplication of facilities—my preference would be that that money be made available for training needs within the ACT and, as I have indicated to the committee, I would like to look particularly to provide additional resources for the CIT and for our school system and also the opportunity for private training providers to compete in a user choice model.

**MS PORTER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** I understand that two weeks or so ago there was an announcement about the reinstatement of a program of funding called either user choice or user funding. Why was the program reinstated?

**Mr Barr:** It was not a case of reinstating the program. We had budget funding in a two-year initiative going back to 2005-06. It was a demand-driven program, and the level of demand had outstripped the budgetary allocation available for that program; so we were forced to impose some restrictions on eligibility for that funding. As a result of the additional funding that was made available in this year's budget, those restrictions will be removed from 1 July this year.

**MR SMYTH:** How much was in the program in 2005-06?

**Mr Curry:** The total funding for user choice is of the order of \$11.4 million.

**MR SMYTH:** For a single year?

**Mr Curry:** Per annum.

**MR SMYTH:** \$11.4?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** That was in 2005-06 and 2006-07?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. And with the budget initiative the government has announced this year, that funding will continue at that level.

**MR SMYTH:** At \$11.4 even though demand has outstripped?

**Mr Barr:** It did in previous years, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Okay. In 2005-06 \$11.4 million was spent on how many students or employers?

**Mr Barr:** We will have to take that on notice. That involves the collation of a lot of data, because it is not all with government training providers.

**MR SMYTH:** Sure.

**Mr Barr:** You have to understand that there are 150 private providers—

**MR SMYTH:** So we heard.

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**Mr Barr:** Who may well have—yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Perhaps for the edification of the committee you might explain what the program actually does. If it has been successful, why has it been left at only \$11.4 million this year?

**Mr Barr:** It was a targeted initiative in previous years to address specific skill shortages. The program would have slipped back to a lesser amount had it not been funded in this year's budget. It provides the opportunity to address some of the key skill shortage areas and also provides the opportunity for people to upgrade their qualifications. People may already have some qualifications but seek funding through this program to obtain new qualifications or upgrade the level of qualifications they already hold in a particular area.

**MR SMYTH:** What assessment of demand was done before it was decided to leave it at the same level of funding for this year.

**Mr Barr:** It is indexed, as you would see in the budget papers, into the outyears as well. So it is not the same level; there is an indexation factor worked in. In some instances, it is difficult to get, because it is entirely demand driven—an absolute to the final dollar.

**MR SMYTH:** When was demand met in the current financial year?

**Mr Barr:** We did have to place some restrictions on people who already had qualifications accessing the program to upgrade those qualifications. Those restrictions were put in place on 1 January 2007. There is an issue in seeking to address what are competing needs, both to provide training opportunities for people without qualifications to obtain a qualification and also to support people who wish to upgrade their qualifications or move into a completely different area. As this program is demand driven, we will be monitoring—and we do monitor—the uptake very closely. We will have the opportunity to have a look at how we progress through the financial year.

**MR SMYTH:** The question for this year is: for 2006-07 when did you stop approving applications?

**Mr Barr:** We have not stopped approving applications. We are continuing to approve applications all the way through. But from 1 January we put restrictions in place—that people who already had qualifications were not able to access this funding source. With the allocation that was provided in this year's budget, we are now in the position of being able to remove those restrictions from 1 July.



**MR SMYTH:** Will they go back in if demand exceeds expectation?

**Mr Barr:** We will monitor that.

**MR SMYTH:** I am just making a point. It seems as though you have a successful program—it is a good initiative—but you seem to be putting the brakes on at a time when you need people up-skilled and when we need more skilled people.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed. We are also waiting on some recommendations from the skills commission in relation to the targeting of that funding. There is a question in all of this about where—given that it is not an unlimited bucket, we cannot just say that this program is bottomless in its funding. The skills commission is looking at examining this issue. There was a need to address—for the start of this financial year to provide that additional funding and to have those restrictions removed. We will very closely monitor and assess the program. But there is an argument—and I am expecting a recommendation from the skills commission—to look at how we might target those resources and/or target and supplement over the course of the financial year.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Stefaniak.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You mentioned the skills commission. How many times have you met with the skills commission since it began its work in October last year? And what recommendations of the commission to date have you actually discussed?

**Mr Barr:** I understand that the skills commission has met on four occasions. Dr Bruniges has been—

**MR STEFANIAK:** Have you met with them yourself?

**Mr Barr:** I have met with members of the commission. It sits in the Chief Minister's Department, but I have regular meetings with members of the commission. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline that. She has been in the meetings themselves and has a little bit more information on that. Then I have some further information I can provide the committee.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Thank you.

**Dr Bruniges:** Sorry, Mr Stefaniak—your question?

**MR STEFANIAK:** The question is this. How many times have you met with the skills commission since its inception in October 2006? What recommendations of the commission have you discussed—what matters? And where are we at with the commission?

**Dr Bruniges:** As a skills commission member—as part of that group—I have attended three out of four meetings. We have set up five working groups as subsections of that, to do bodies of particular work. One of those, which I sit on, is around developing local talent. We have another group about attraction and retention strategies, looking in particular at the area of information technologies, looking at the ACT skills future—and there is a fifth one looking at community involvement. Each

of those working groups is doing a range of research in order to come together with a series of recommendations—under the leadership of Professor Chubb, as you know. We report back to that group with a view of coming together by about midyear, probably July, to have a look at the first cut of that work that we have been doing over the last eight months.

**MR SMYTH:** What recommendations has the commission made to date to you, minister—the Minister for Education and Training?

**Mr Barr:** I am expecting recommendations in August and—

**MR SMYTH:** So the answer to that would be: none to date?

**Mr Barr:** It has not made any specific recommendations to me yet, but I am expecting some in August. As Dr Bruniges has outlined, the working groups are undertaking that work. I am expecting a report from the skills commission in August.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** I do not have any more on this output class.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Burke.

**MRS BURKE:** I have a supp on the skills commission. It is in connection with youth. I know that the skills commission is not all about young people, but—particularly from their perspective, and I think from what we are hearing so far—it appears to be talking about them rather than to them. When and how are we going to engage and involve our young people? Has that process started?

**Dr Bruniges:** As individual commissioners, we probably—I speak with a whole lot of young people in schools and secondary colleges. I talk about different pathways and I get a feel from that. But as a formal process, our research and the work that we are doing to establish a good data set to put together recommendations for the consideration of minister and Chief Minister around each of our working groups is just the starting point. Depending on the government's decisions about which one of those recommendations they wish to pursue, I would think that we would begin whatever consultation was needed following that.

**MRS BURKE:** Wouldn't you have thought that you would get them in on the ground floor? Have you spoken to people like the youth coalition for example?

**Dr Bruniges:** No, I have not met with the youth coalition as a skills commissioner.

**MRS BURKE:** Why?

**Dr Bruniges:** Because the focus of our work to date is making sure we have accurate and reliable data. In terms of my working group, developing local talent—

**MRS BURKE:** Data on what? What data are you collecting?

**Dr Bruniges:** One of the issues that we are faced with is that the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not disaggregate ACT data away from New South Wales data. So you end up with a hybrid set of data that is not reflective of the ACT environment at all. In fact, many of the issues that are relevant to New South Wales are not relevant to the ACT working context. It is important that we have accurate and reliable data. So there are exercises where we have a close look to see if data from the ABS can be disaggregated—to make sure that we are talking about, for example, youth in the ACT and not youth in general in a way that incorporates all New South Wales youth as well—so that we have an accurate data source to work from.

In terms of youth in particular, what we are doing in the Department of Education and Training is, for the first time, a post-school destination study from year 12 leavers last year. We will try and catch post-school destination data to have a look at where our youth actually go. In that way, youth are engaged in asking us to complete that destination survey. We will be providing that as a new source of information to inform the skills commission.

Can I say that youth is only one particular when we are talking about labour shortages—

**MRS BURKE:** I did say that at the beginning.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes. It is only one. Some of the other work in developing local talent—the group that I am on—covers not only youth but mature age workers.

**MRS BURKE:** Are you talking to COTA?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, there have been some conversations there, I understand, by the chair of that working committee. And I notice that this week NCVER, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, have put out issues about analysis for Australia. But again that report does not take us to the ACT level.

**MRS BURKE:** Could I ask this? Minister, maybe you know this. Wouldn't you say that there is already a lot of information out there? Why aren't we sourcing that information?

**Mr Barr:** Not at an ACT specific level.

**MRS BURKE:** No, from ACT groups that would probably have been able to give you direct and quite comprehensive—

**Mr Barr:** That is part of the process.

**MRS BURKE:** But why wasn't that done before—to guide and direct you in terms of where you are going?

**Dr Bruniges:** It has, Mrs Burke. For example, Chris Peters has been really useful in terms of the work that the chamber has done and has given us lots of data and information—the blueprint plan from Mary Hicks and the Australian chamber of commerce and all of that. We have access to a whole range of research, both at the

local level and using those key people in terms of the local industry groups. Professor John Richards is another skill commissioner; he has links in terms of ARC.

**MRS BURKE:** Do you have a supplementary, Mr Smyth?

**MR SMYTH:** On a different subject.

**MRS BURKE:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Stefaniak, do you have a question?

**MR STEFANIAK:** I refer to the economic white paper, which has a number of relevant points in this area. In that paper, the government undertook to implement a program to build links between schools and industries for senior secondary students.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth has already asked that question.

**MS PORTER:** We talked about it before.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I am sorry; I have been called away a bit. Did you talk about the training path guarantee for school leavers? That is another one of the actions in that plan. What has been the progress—

**Mr Barr:** Would you like me to read you some information on the training? I have a sheet.

**MRS BURKE:** Sheet No 4.

**Mr Barr:** It is actually No 7, but that is—

**MRS BURKE:** Close.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed. The training pathway guarantee was a 2004-05 budget initiative to target school leavers who are not in some form of employment, post-school study or training within one year of leaving school. The aim is to provide eligible applicants with up to one year of post-school training in a relevant and available vocational course. The guarantee is that, if a young person is not in a job with a future, a job search program or an education or training program six months after leaving school, they will be given access to training. The program includes provision of a one-hour free career counselling session for eligible students. Should the student subsequently take up a place in a vocational training program and still be in training six months after commencement, they will be funded for up to a year of training. In order to identify eligible students, the BSSS conducts an annual survey of ACT students who are enrolled in year 12 and who were not offered a place in a territory institution. In each year since 2004, over 2,000 students have been contacted but only 60 to 100 deemed eligible for the program.

**MR STEFANIAK:** How many have actually been helped?

**Mr Barr:** Following the 2006—

**MR STEFANIAK:** How many have been helped into jobs as a result of the program?

**Mr Barr:** Following the 2006 survey, 63 students were identified as eligible.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes, eligible.

**Mr Barr:** Of the 63, 40 participated in the career counselling component of the program. Of these, 12 students have been identified as being eligible following the first six months of 2007. In light of the relatively low number of recipients, the department is considering options with regard to the viability of continuing the program beyond 2007. The estimate of expenditure for the 2006-07 financial year is between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Do you know how many actually got jobs as a result or are in, say, CIT-type training or something where obviously they have a chance of getting a job?

**Dr Bruniges:** Mr Stefaniak, just before you came into the room, I highlighted the fact that this year will be the first year that we will do a post-school destination study.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You haven't done that yet.

**Dr Bruniges:** We haven't had one before. This is indeed the first year that we will attempt to capture where students have gone, having left school. There have been some attempts in the area of post-school destination studies to work nationally to try to get up one instrument so that we could have data that was comparable across jurisdictions. That has not been possible, so the ACT has decided to run that and to embed within that nationally agreed items so that we have some form of benchmarking on where our students go, indeed following them. That will be a new initiative that will help us better understand what happens to students once exiting year 12.

**MR STEFANIAK:** That is something. That was in terms of younger people. Looking now at older people, what programs have you actually got running for people aged over 45 and how are the programs going there? Again, have you done any tracking to ensure that older people have been assisted into employment as a result? Have you done any tracking of any programs in relation to getting older Canberrans back into the workforce?

**Dr Bruniges:** Mature age worker programs. I know there are some initiatives. There is the silver lining project. I think some of you actually attended the opening of that.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes, indeed.

**Dr Bruniges:** Silver lining is one. There seem to be a number of initiatives being promoted in joint partnership between different departments and industries to re-engage mature age workers in the workforce that are working very successfully. That one in particular seems to be very successful. As I said, it is not only the youth; it is going to be mature age workers as we all head down that continuum, and the

re-engagement of that workforce is incredibly important.

**Mr Barr:** I can advise that the strategic priorities program, SPP, as part of the skilling Australia's workforce agreement, has provided funding for 570 mature age participants as at—

**MRS BURKE:** That is not ACT funding, minister.

**Mr Barr:** No, but that is part of a national program that we signed up to as part of the national vocational education and training agreement. Yes, that is a program that we are part of. As at 1 June 2007, there were 570 mature age participants.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You have talked about the Australian technical college in Queanbeyan, minister.

**Mr Barr:** It doesn't exist. There is no such thing.

**MR STEFANIAK:** It is about to be getting up and running, but that was discussed.

**Mr Barr:** That is not what Minister Robb was indicating only a few weeks ago.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You also mentioned and have made many comments about how a lot more could be done with the \$10 million or \$12 million should it not go ahead.

**Mr Barr:** It is not for the ACT.

**MR STEFANIAK:** No, it's not.

**Mr Barr:** Unless the border has been moved, it is nothing for the ACT—a big fat zero.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Correct me if you have actually answered any of this already, and my apologies for being out for about 10 minutes, but, in relation to a priority to develop a year 12 vocational college in the territory, what would that mean and what actually would be involved? Would that mean that you would be looking at some new building or looking at some program in relation to our existing colleges?

**Mr Barr:** No, a collaborative arrangement. It wouldn't be a new building. Looking along the lines of a VET equivalent to the ANU secondary college perhaps in the broadest terms would be how I would describe that, but it would clearly involve working with the CIT and pulling together a range of programs that are available already within our college system.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Are you looking at running that across a number of colleges? From the way it looks in the budget, it would appear to that you might be comfortable with a particular college, for example.

**Mr Barr:** No.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Do you intend it to be across the college sector?

**Mr Barr:** I think you would need to look at multiple delivery sites in running that college, but not in the physical term, as in pinned down to a single building.

**MR STEFANIAK:** What is involved? Have you worked that out yet?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. Dr Bruniges will provide some detail.

**Dr Bruniges:** Mr Stefaniak, all our colleges are registered training organisations to begin with and, indeed, run a series of VET courses, with the opportunity for students to obtain dual accreditation. In fact, for this year we are anticipating that about 63 per cent of our year 12 students going through will come out with a VET qualification. That is very high. If you look at the statistics, they have been very encouraging over the last number of years for those who are going on to year 12 but using the college system and coming out with dual qualifications.

In terms of setting up vocational provision, think about a network of educational provision that is as strong as we can get it that enables students to access courses at CIT. One example is, as Minister Barr has spoken about, the ANU college, where on Thursday afternoons all our colleges are indeed timetabled on the one timetable run now. Last year was the first time. That actually broadens the opportunities for students to move in different pathways and provision.

Our next step, having the ANU college up and, I believe, very successfully catering for the needs of a particular targeted group, what I would like to be able to do is to extend the same provision but link with CIT. I have had preliminary discussions with Dr Adrian about how we might use that same common timetabling to allow students to attend CIT. Indeed, in our last conversation, which I think was the week before last—I am not sure whether Colin is behind me—we were but talking about CIT teachers coming in to deliver within the college system. At this stage, in terms of that broader network, we have also got Gungahlin college. We intend to have an integrated CIT learning provision in the new Gungahlin college. That's just a matter of time for us. The basics are there. It comes down to the logistics, the timetabling, making sure we provide the network of educational provision to allow those students to access those courses and gain qualifications in that area.

**MR STEFANIAK:** When you say “qualifications”, does that mean that they might as a result of their work whilst in senior secondary college have, say, a year or maybe a two-year diploma course accredited in some subjects, that they will go to the CIT and do a much shortened course as a result of completing some modules?

**Dr Bruniges:** Not necessarily a shorter course.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Are you talking about full qualifications?

**Dr Bruniges:** We are talking about certificate 2 and certificate 3 courses for those students. It is not a short term or bridge course; they actually finish with the full qualification. ICT is one in particular that I recently had a look at the stats. There is a range of courses that they are able to do that actually engage students in those post-compulsory years of schooling that I think are very valuable.

The fact is that many of them choose to finish with a VET qualification as well as their year 12 qualification. It enables students to go along the VET path and they can re-enter later. I know that the CIT also has provision for the completion of the year 12 certificate. So the boundaries between what were traditionally post-compulsory settings and indeed the institution of schooling, I think we are giving a good crack at breaking those down from a student point of view by allowing that flexibility.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You mentioned that 63 per cent of the students who finish year 12 will have a VET qualification. When do you aim to have that? What is the current percentage of students doing VET courses in senior secondary colleges?

**Dr Bruniges:** I would have to take that on notice. I don't have that on the top of my head. We can do that breakdown about which ones are certificate 2 or certificate 3 for you, if that would be helpful.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes.

**Dr Bruniges:** As I said, I have just the figure that around 63 per cent of our current year 12 students will at the end of this finish with some form of VET qualification.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Is that in government and non-government schools?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, indeed. More so in the government sector than in the non-government, but it is growing in both sectors.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, referring to page 371, I note that indicator b for this output class says that next year you are expecting 6,500 commencements under available programs. For the current year, there are to be 6,800 commencements. How many of those will be completed?

**Mr Barr:** Again, we will have to take that on notice.

**Dr Bruniges:** Completed this year, Mr Smyth, or—

**MR SMYTH:** You had as a measure last year course completion by students and I notice that you have changed this year to commencements.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, partly because some courses can take up to four years to complete. I will take that on notice.

**MR SMYTH:** Okay. Following up on some of the other programs that the government promised, there was to be a skills development for young people at risk program. It would be either six or eight in the briefings, if the other one was seven.

**Mr Barr:** It would be eight, in fact, the youth at risk developing skills program.

**MR SMYTH:** It would be eight. Well, there we go. Isn't this educational for ministers as well?

**Mr Barr:** Indeed. Would you like me to talk a little bit about the youth at risk



developing skills program?

**MR SMYTH:** How many years has it run? Will it continue this year? How many students have been involved each year?

**Mr Barr:** It was implemented at the CIT in 2004. Since commencement, 103 participants have benefited from participation in the program. Of these, 50 have gone on to enrol in further education, 20 have found employment and 23 have been referred on to other agencies. There are 34 people enrolled in semester 1 in 2007; 29 enrolled in the access 10 units, with a view to going on to complete access 10 at CIT; and two are undertaking year 10 qualifications with a view to going on to CIT to complete year 12.

**MR SMYTH:** Will the program continue in the coming year?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it is provided with \$225,000 each year. It has been brought to my attention that the program has submitted a nomination for the national crime prevention awards.

**MR SMYTH:** What percentage of those students were indigenous or from other disadvantaged groups?

**Mr Barr:** I will have to take that on notice as I don't have the detail on that.

**MR SMYTH:** All right. Any breakdown: non-English speaking background; indigenous; other special groups.

**Mr Barr:** Sure.

**THE CHAIR:** We will move on to the output class for the CIT.

**MR SMYTH:** I have still got a number of questions. Can I just ask one on a range of capital works?

**THE CHAIR:** In vocational education?

**MR SMYTH:** Yes. It crosses over forward planning for the Gungahlin college and CIT campus.

**Mr Barr:** In the 2006-07 budget, do you mean?

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, in the 2006-07 budget. Has that all been expended and is there a report that talks about the viability of vocational education being delivered in that way?

**Mr Donnelly:** I can report that not all of that money has yet been expended. I recall that a small amount of that money was carried forward in the 2007-08 budget. The master planning work for that site is well underway, with a report which either must have been received recently by the department or will be very close to that point now. As you would be aware, funding for that joint college and CIT facility was provided

in the 2007-08 budget.

**MR SMYTH:** Is the report available for the committee to view?

**Mr Barr:** It is not complete yet, is it?

**Mr Donnelly:** As I have suggested, the report either has been recently completed or will be completed in the near future, and I am sure that that can be made available to the committee when it is available.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We will go on to the CIT. Welcome, Dr Adrian and Mr Kowald. Were you here earlier when I read out the card?

**Mr Kowald:** No, I wasn't.

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

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

**Mr Barr:** I did have a long one, but I will spare the committee the prepared speech, other than to say that it is particularly pleasing to note that for 2006 the CIT achieved all of its major performance targets. That is a very pleasing outcome and I am very grateful to all of the staff at the CIT for the hard work that they have undertaken in the last 12 months. It has been a pleasure to work with them and I look forward to taking the committee's questions.

**MS PORTER:** Page 465 of BP4 mentions minimising CIT's impact on the environment. I was wondering if you could outline to the committee the strategies that are being implemented and what goals have been set.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I can. I think there have been some particularly good outcomes achieved at CIT. Overall, through a variety of measures, energy consumption has been cut by 35 per cent, water consumption reduced by 40 per cent, and waste disposal

reduced by 45 per cent. This has been part of a 10-year program under ecologically sustainable development principles that the CIT has been implementing. All new building works include requirements for energy efficiency, resource usage and waste disposal, and existing plants and buildings have been retrofitted with current technologies to increase efficiencies and reduce energy usage.

That work over that period has led to those very significant reductions in energy, water and waste, which is, I think, a very good outcome. Examples have been around the use of bore water at Bruce and Weston campuses, triple A showerheads, tank water use for irrigation and toilet flushing in the student residences, changes to the air conditioning systems, power load shedding—a variety of measures across the campuses to deliver those outcomes. I think that is something we should all applaud.

**DR FOSKEY:** I am interested in whether there have been any developments or any more decisions related to the future of the Weston campus and where the future of horticulture and related trades lies.

**Mr Barr:** You would have seen that we have funded a feasibility study into the possible relocation of the Weston campus to the Bruce campus.

**MRS BURKE:** Is that the \$1 million, minister?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, feasibility and forward design.

**MRS BURKE:** That is a lot of money, isn't it?

**Mr Barr:** In a moment I will get Dr Adrian to give you the full detail around the feasibility study, but there is a variety of issues driving the need to look at the Weston campus and where we should perhaps best locate those services. Key amongst that is the level of student support services that can be delivered at the Bruce site as compared to the Weston site. There is also the issue of the condition of the infrastructure and the ageing of those facilities at Weston. There is a need to reinvest. The question is whether that is best done at the Bruce campus or at Weston, and the feasibility study will be addressing the issues in relation to the Bruce campus. I will get Dr Adrian to provide some further detail.

**MR SMYTH:** Before you hand over to Dr Adrian, you have just mentioned forward design. Does that mean the decision has been taken?

**Mr Barr:** No, but we have a view to investigate the feasibility thereof.

**MR SMYTH:** What component of the \$1 million is devoted to actual design work?

**Mr Barr:** That is yet to be determined because we have to go through the feasibility phase in the first instance.

**MR SMYTH:** What component is devoted to the feasibility phase, then?

**Mr Barr:** I think we can get that information for you. Whilst we are doing that, I will get Dr Adrian to provide some information on the terms of reference and stakeholder

consultation process.

**Dr Adrian:** Essentially, as the minister has outlined, we have been asked to conduct a feasibility study and design process for the possible relocation of horticulture from Weston to Bruce. In terms of the amount of money that will be spent on feasibility vis-a-vis design, we have not finalised the quantum between those two processes.

**MR SMYTH:** How did you know how much to bid for then?

**Dr Adrian:** How did we know how much to bid for? In aggregate that is what we saw as what would be required to do some initial feasibility work. Obviously, in putting forward a budget bid, we undertook some initial work. How much additional feasibility work there will be vis-a-vis the amount that we will spend on design remains to be seen. The next step—we have appointed a project manager, who is a member of CIT staff. He will be working on the project full time. We have conducted initial discussions with staff, firstly, at Weston. I will be embarking on a series of discussions with staff across all the campuses, because this is not the only area that we are looking at: there is also the master planning exercise at Reid; we are already spending some capital works money at Weston; we plan to spend some money at Fyshwick; and, as was discussed earlier with the department of education, we are looking at Gungahlin college.

So I will be conducting further meetings with staff. We will be writing to all stakeholders. We are getting input from staff in that process—as to those stakeholders that are involved and have an interest in our operations at Weston. We will be writing to all those stakeholders to invite them to make comments about the move—or the possible move—from Weston and the nature of the operations that we might undertake at Bruce. That will include industry groups and community groups, many of which we already have a strong association with in our existing operations.

**DR FOSKEY:** What do you—

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Stefaniak.

**DR FOSKEY:** Sorry, I have a line of questioning on this. Is it okay if I finish on Weston campus?

**THE CHAIR:** Sure.

**DR FOSKEY:** Should it eventuate that horticulture is transferred from Weston to Bruce, what do you envisage would be the impact on horticulture training in the CIT and hence in Canberra?

**Dr Adrian:** There would certainly be a continuation of horticulture training. We would envisage the possibility of enhanced training programs. I have already had some initial discussions with Actew, for example. One of the advantages of the move to Bruce would be the possibility of linking it into a number of our environmental science and technology programs there—and also programs that we run in the building and construction area. It is our view that we can look at a continuation of existing programs, but with the possibility to look at new forms of delivery and new

courses involving sustainable technologies, the use of different forms of garden operations, and the use of plantings adapted to the water restrictions and so on.

The project officer has commenced looking at courses delivered through other TAFEs and private providers interstate. Part of both feasibility and design work would be to look at not just replicating what is at Weston but what we can provide in terms of a contemporary horticulture operation on the Bruce campus.

**DR FOSKEY:** What would happen to the Weston campus site? Are there any CIT plans for it?

**Dr Adrian:** The site in that sense is not ours; it is a government-owned site. We do not have title over the land. What we would envisage in the consultation process is this. Groups have already raised issues about the site—“If you moved, what would happen to the site?” We will be making a commitment to all the groups that we consult with that, if they have any views about the site at Weston, or alternative uses—it is not our responsibility in terms of what decisions the government might make around that—we would take on board any views that they expressed and make a commitment to them that they will be all conveyed to the minister. I have discussed that with the minister, but at the end of the day, if the government agreed for us to move to Bruce, a decision about the future use of Weston would not be a decision within CIT’s responsibilities.

**DR FOSKEY:** If this happens, will it mean that voc ed delivery in the ACT will be more centralised—and what would be the benefits or disadvantages of that?

**Dr Adrian:** Voc ed is delivered by a number of providers. Speaking solely for CIT, I can say that it is an issue in terms of the extent to which courses are offered in a centralised location. In some cases that is necessary because of the nature of equipment, buildings or having a concentration of staff to deliver courses. What we are looking at for the future would be to have our headquarters at Reid, to continue to deliver from our Woden campus and the Bruce campus, and then to have a presence associated with the new Gungahlin college. We already have a small presence, through our flexible learning centre in the arts centre, in Tuggeranong, but the minister has raised the possibility of us having some form of presence, potentially with the University of Canberra, on a redeveloped Kambah site.

It is important that we offer a mixture of centralised courses—in some cases people will have to travel to a particular location, and they already have for many years—but also offer the possibility for courses to be delivered in as dispersed a model as possible.

**MR SMYTH:** What is the time frame on the decision?

**Dr Adrian:** In terms of our requirements, we have to deliver to the minister. It is in the budget papers. I think it is 28 February when we have to deliver the feasibility and design work to the government for them then to make a decision.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter, you wanted to clarify something.

**MS PORTER:** I just want to clarify—you did not mention Fyshwick in the list.

**Dr Adrian:** And Fyshwick. Yes. If I missed that in the list of—

**MR SMYTH:** You did miss Fyshwick.

**Dr Adrian:** My apologies. I would not want—

**MR SMYTH:** The plumbers would be upset.

**Dr Adrian:** I would not want anything taken into that. I was out there for a long period yesterday—

**Mr Barr:** I had the opportunity to visit the Fyshwick campus. It is an outstanding campus, and it will continue to be an outstanding contributor to the CIT as a whole.

**MS PORTER:** It is.

**Dr Adrian:** Yes, my apologies.

**MS PORTER:** I did not want them to be missed out in the list.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Stefaniak.

**MR SMYTH:** Just before we go off that, can I ask this: minister, if CIT moves to Bruce will the facility be retained as an educational facility?

**Mr Barr:** At Weston?

**MR SMYTH:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** We will—

**MS PORTER:** He has already answered that question.

**Mr Barr:** We will consider that, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Will you rule out selling the site?

**Mr Barr:** No.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Page 466 of BP4 deals with estimated employment levels. For the last year, it was 743; this year, there is a decrease of 15. CIT has had a number of restructures—a significant one when I was minister and several since. CIT has not had a huge amount of extra money thrown at it, and we see a further reduction of 15 staff here. Why is this happening and what message does this decision send when it is so crucially important to train people with skills in voc ed?

**Mr Barr:** As we discussed in last year's estimates, as part of the EBA there was a reduction in the number of casual teaching positions.

**MR STEFANIAK:** This is FTE, though.

**Mr Barr:** Yes; and those casuals contribute to a total FTE.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** The reduction in 15 relates to a reduction in the use of casual teachers; that is nine of the 15 positions.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** There is the reorganisation that occurred—

**MR STEFANIAK:** So that might be 18 or 20 casual teachers—is that what you are saying—if you are talking full-time equivalents?

**Mr Barr:** Potentially.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. It could be less; it could be more. It is the equivalent of nine FTE positions as a result of the EBA and a desire to, amongst other things, reduce the level of casual employment and—

**MR STEFANIAK:** Sure.

**Mr Barr:** The productivity efficiencies that were linked to that agreement comprised another three positions. That takes it to 12. The remaining three were positions that were no longer required after the 2006-07 internal reorganisation.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Have any courses been cut as a result of efficiencies over the 2006-07 period—indeed, if you are doing courses in the calendar year starting in 2007?

**Dr Adrian:** No courses have been cut as a function of that. We do regularly review the courses each year. There are often modifications, as you would be well aware—modifications in courses and changes on an annual basis. But there have been no cuts to courses associated with those reductions. I would stress that the teaching-associated reductions were done in full consultation with the union and were part of an agreement that we reached with the union, including not only numbers but the way in which that EBA was finalised and hence would be implemented within CIT.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Stefaniak, in your preamble you made mention of different funding arrangements over the years. I thought it would be worth having a look at the funding history of the organisation, so I asked for some information to be prepared. I can advise that, going back over that last decade—

**MRS BURKE:** We know what is coming now.

**MR STEFANIAK:** That is all right.

**Mr Barr:** In the five-year period 1997-98 to 2001-02, funding for the CIT decreased by \$4.3 million or nine per cent.

**MR STEFANIAK:** As I said, we did a very substantial restructuring—

**Mr Barr:** Gutting of the organisation in the late 1990s—

**MR STEFANIAK:** and you have not done much to increase it since we have had more money.

**Mr Barr:** I then looked at the five-year period from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and noted that funding had increased by \$11.8 million or 24 per cent over the last five years. In your five years in government, there was a \$4.3 million decrease—a nine per cent decrease—in funding. In the last five years, there has been a \$11.8 million, or 24 per cent, increase in funding. When you go back and look from financial year to financial year, in 1997-98 the CIT received just over \$50 million; in 1998-99 it went up by \$2½ million, so it was a good budget for CIT that year. In 1999-2000, it was cut by \$5.1 million, followed by a cut of \$3½ million in 2000-01—so back to \$43 million, just shy of \$44 million. Then it started to increase. In your final budget, you put about \$1.8 million back in. When you left office, there was \$45.759 million in funding.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You did not hear the preamble properly, Mr Barr.

**Mr Barr:** We increased funding each year—each year following.

**MR STEFANIAK:** So you should have.

**Mr Barr:** In 2002-03, there was an increase of \$2.691 million; in 2003-04 a further increase of \$2½ million; in 2004-05 an increase of just shy of \$6½ million. In 2005-06, last year's budget, funding increased by just short of \$500,000. And in 2006-07 there is an additional \$2.315 million.

**MR SMYTH:** You did not read the 2004-05 figure.

**Mr Barr:** In 2004-05 an increase of \$6½ million—to just \$1,000 short of \$57½ million.

**MR SMYTH:** And do the footnotes talk about the \$344 million operating—

**Mr Barr:** It is now up to 60.243 and rising—

**MR SMYTH:** It is nice to be left a surplus, isn't it?

**Mr Barr:** And rising over that time.

**MR SMYTH:** It is nice to be left a surplus.

**Mr Barr:** So your cuts during your time in office were contributing to reducing a



budget deficit—

**MR SMYTH:** Nice to be left a surplus, isn't it?

**Mr Barr:** reducing a budget deficit. Reducing a budget deficit, were they? In every other portfolio—

**MR SMYTH:** Absolutely.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth, you will acknowledge my work in reducing expenditure. I will look forward to that.

**MR SMYTH:** It is nice to look forward to a surplus, isn't it, Mr Barr?

**Mr Barr:** I look forward to that.

**MR STEFANIAK:** My point, Mr Barr, is this: out of all agencies, the CIT did take some very significant cuts. It did a magnificent job in doing so.

**Mr Barr:** Under the previous government.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Under the previous government.

**Mr Barr:** This government has never cut funding to the CIT.

**MR STEFANIAK:** What amazed me was that, with a very strong budgetary position and a worsening skills shortage, your investment has not been huge compared with other areas; and we are still seeing some cuts, albeit fairly small ones, in staffing. Basically it got down to the bare bones in the late 1990s. When I sat in your position, I made no apologies for that, but it was hard. The people at the CIT responded magnificently. Given subsequent advances in things like skill shortages and real problems there—

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a question in there, Mr Stefaniak?

**Mr Barr:** From where I sit, I see a 24 per cent increase in funding.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I get back to the fact that I am still concerned to see numbers being cut. You have answered that question, but it is a concern.

**Mr Barr:** I know you do not like hearing about—

**MR STEFANIAK:** It is a concern—

**Mr Barr:** that comparison.

**MR STEFANIAK:** to see numbers cut. Of all agencies, this agency probably should not have to suffer that.

**MR SMYTH:** We are well aware of the circumstances we inherited, but that is

another point.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** Right, I see.

**MR SMYTH:** Well aware.

**Mr Barr:** Of course.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Might I finish, Mr Barr, by—for the first time in probably over a decade—complimenting whoever did this at the CIT, with an extra \$55,000 for capital upgrades. That has been, since 1995, a regular \$2 million—not that that would cover inflation. What type of new capital upgrades are you undertaking in this current financial year?

**Mr Barr:** There is a variety of work going on across a number of the campuses. I will ask Peter Kowald to give you the details.

**Mr Kowald:** That \$2 million is for minor new works—projects which are of a value of above \$50,000 and—

**MR STEFANIAK:** Is there anything significant in that that will enhance—for example, in the past there was \$200,000 for B block air conditioning which I can recall.

**Mr Kowald:** Yes, there is—

**MR STEFANIAK:** Is there anything new there that has been hanging around for a while which you will be able to do and enhance the operation of CIT as a result?

**Mr Kowald:** All of the projects will enhance the condition of our facilities.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Perhaps you could just table something.

**Mr Kowald:** There are some energy efficiency measures—

**MR STEFANIAK:** That is good.

**Mr Barr:** I can happily read you a list.

**Mr Kowald:** Yes, we have a list.

**MR STEFANIAK:** It is probably easier just to table it.

**Mr Kowald:** I have photos, if you would like them.

**MR STEFANIAK:** That is even better.

**Mr Barr:** We will table the list.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Burke.

**MRS BURKE:** I have a point of clarification in relation to page 468, under "Accountability Indicators", row (b), "Publicly funded program enrolments". Your footnote says:

The 2006-07 outcome and 2007-08 target have increased from the 2006-07 target due to the continuing trend of students undertaking shorter duration programs.

We see 17,926 but now we see the target 17,500. Why the drop? You talk about a continuing trend and yet we see a drop.

**Dr Adrian:** We were surprised at that figure of 17,900. It might well be that the target of 17,500—that we go higher than that. We took a conservative view, which one tends to do with targets. We will have to see whether that figure of 17,900 will be maintained. There certainly has been a trend over a period of time for shorter course delivery and demand for shorter courses; hence that increase of 15 to 17. But whether it is quite at that level remains to be seen. I would say that the target is, if anything, on the conservative side; but with setting targets one tends to take—

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, I appreciate that, but you are talking of—

**MR SMYTH:** Technically in line with the government policy of conservative targets.

**MRS BURKE:** I am sorry, but you are talking about a continuing trend. If you are talking in that language, why aren't you continuing to trend upwards rather than downwards? I acknowledge 2006-07; then you jump to 17,926 and you downtrend to 17,500. If it is a continuing trend—

**Dr Adrian:** The continuing trend that is referred to is over a two or three-year period. Whether it continues beyond—

**MRS BURKE:** No, it is two years—2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09.

**Dr Adrian:** Three years.

**MRS BURKE:** No, 2006-07, 2007-08.

**Dr Adrian:** Yes, but the trend has been there over a three-year period based on information.

**MRS BURKE:** That is what I am saying to you, though. And how is this going to be affected in funding in the outyears for CIT? It is 400 programs or enrolments.

**Dr Adrian:** Our funding is not based on enrolments, though.

**MRS BURKE:** No. How are you going to deliver the programs, though, if you are

downtrending and all of a sudden your—

**Mr Barr:** Because they are shorter courses.

**Dr Adrian:** They are shorter courses. Our funding—

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, well—

**Dr Adrian:** Our funding, if I can answer the question—

**MRS BURKE:** Yes.

**Dr Adrian:** Our funding is based on nominal hours. It might be that a particular course is half another course, and that is the trend. The actual number of hours associated with courses that we are delivering is less, which means that you can fit in more courses because the course somebody is doing is just a one-off short course.

**MRS BURKE:** Exactly, but why aren't you reflecting more in the trend?

**Mr Barr:** The target has increased from 15,000 to 17,500.

**Dr Adrian:** To 17,500.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, but what about the increase in the target, minister? I am talking specifically about 17,926 to 17,500. If you cannot answer it, that is fine.

**Mr Kowald:** I can answer—

**Mr Barr:** So what you are saying really, Mrs Burke, is that this would not be a line of questioning if the target had been set at 18,000?

**MRS BURKE:** No, I am just querying it. Don't be on the defensive or offensive. I just can't understand.

**Mr Barr:** I just said it is a lot of time to spend on—

**MRS BURKE:** Vocational education training and upskilling on short courses is really a critical issue and people like doing that. So you are talking about a downtrend, not an uptrend. You have downed it by 400.

**Mr Kowald:** What has also occurred over recent years is a strong move from full-time to part-time enrolments. I think that has also been observed in the university sector, as employment conditions have been very strong. Hence, we have also seen the same trend within CIT, where full-time enrolments have dropped and part-time enrolments have increased substantially.

**MRS BURKE:** Well, perhaps the note should have reflected that then.

**Mr Kowald:** Hence the movement from 15,000, which is more a historical figure, and the 17,900 reflects strong part-time enrolments in 2006-07.

**MRS BURKE:** Your notes don't reflect that.

**Mr Kowald:** Also, I should comment that we have observed within the current enrolments for the 2007 calendar year that there has been a slight movement back the other way.

**MRS BURKE:** But other than a footnote, which refers to shorter duration programs, your notes don't reflect full-time, part-time or short course—

**Mr Kowald:** Well, the part-time courses are shorter duration programs in large part.

**MRS BURKE:** Of course; I realise that. I will leave it at that. But it is talking at cross-purposes to your own statements. Given the trend for upskilling, I cannot see how you are forecasting a lower uptake.

**Dr Adrian:** As I indicated, we tend to take a conservative view of the estimate. It might well be—

**MRS BURKE:** I asked how that is going to impact on your funding. Is that reflected?

**Mr Barr:** It doesn't impact on the funding.

**Dr Adrian:** It will not impact on our funding because our funding is based on total nominal hours. And so within that total funding envelope you can deliver any number of courses, and if we are delivering more shorter courses, the overall number of courses will be higher but within a certain funding envelope.

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

**MRS BURKE:** It's like Chinese, but anyway.

**Mr Barr:** Not really. It is reasonably simple, actually.

**MRS BURKE:** Oh, is it? Right.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, just before we go to the next question, it looks like we are going to run out of time for the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority. I was going to suggest that we let them go and bring them back on a carryover day.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I fully anticipated bringing them back on the carryover day, so yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Staff from the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority can go home if they wish. I call Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** Mention of graduate satisfaction is made under "accountability indicators" on page 468. The footnote talks about continuous improvement measures. I was wondering if you could talk about that a little bit more.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I will get Dr Adrian to provide some information.

**MS PORTER:** While you are looking for that, I would like to refer to the strategic indicator on the preceding page that refers to measures of student outcomes. I wondered if you could explain a little bit more about those student outcomes.

**Mr Barr:** Just very quickly, surveys are conducted both by the CIT and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research into graduate employment outcomes, student satisfaction, employer satisfaction, and it is very pleasing to see that all of those surveys show that CIT results are amongst the best in the country. I will get Dr Adrian to outline some of those results.

**MS PORTER:** So you are saying that we are the best in the country?

**Mr Barr:** Amongst the best.

**Dr Adrian:** As the minister indicated, there are national survey results and also our own survey results. We regularly conduct, as part of our reporting to government, surveys of graduates. We do employer satisfaction surveys and we do student satisfaction surveys. In summary, on all of those surveys we get results that are over 80 per cent. They vary from year to year, depending on sample sizes and individual results, but we regularly get survey results well over the 80 per cent. That is relatively high when you compare us with other TAFEs or other private providers. So we are very happy with those results and it is important for us to continue to monitor them to check that we are delivering both what students want and what employers want, that graduates are happy with what they qualify for and that that leads them into employment.

In regard to improvement, ensuring that we deliver contemporary programs is a critical area for us. What we are referring to there is the increasing trend to flexible learning courses, online courses, blended courses. They are extremely popular with students of all ages. One would tend to think that some of the traditional user-choice areas—hairdressing is an example—cannot be delivered through an online process. Some of those courses do have online parts only.

**MRS BURKE:** Virtual online stuff?

**Mr Barr:** I take it, Mrs Burke, from this morning's *Canberra Times*, that your wonderful new hairstyle was not delivered virtually.

**MRS BURKE:** No, definitely not.

**MR SMYTH:** Virtual cuts, though, might be one interpretation there.

**Dr Adrian:** That is one area where we get a very positive response from students and from staff. Another area is the improvements we have put in place—and we have agreed to provide that information—in terms of classroom facilities, infrastructure and equipment. We also do, and increasingly are doing, partnerships with industry in terms of scholarship programs, placements with industry and, in some cases, the delivery of training with industry as well.

Perhaps the final area that I will touch on that I think is associated most importantly with online learning is IT infrastructure. Again, it is very important to deliver contemporary courses with the latest in terms of IT equipment. We do this through an education and training system called WebCT, which we are looking at upgrading. We have recently introduced a student-staff email arrangement associated with teaching. Later this year we will be introducing text arrangements between students and staff. As well, we will, again later this year, be introducing through our capital program wireless operations on the campuses.

**MS PORTER:** The strategic indicators on page 467 talk about where the students go after they leave. Is that an exit survey? How do you find out?

**Dr Adrian:** We don't conduct that survey; it is conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. It is an independent nationally based survey across all VET providers.

**MS PORTER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey.

**DR FOSKEY:** Minister, what has been the impact on student enrolments of the increase in fees in last year's budget?

**Mr Barr:** Virtually none, I understand.

**DR FOSKEY:** Are there variations between courses?

**Dr Adrian:** I will answer that. This is something that we have been monitoring closely. There has been no discernible impact in terms of either students deciding not to come to CIT—we have not had any feedback of that nature—or students indicating that they cannot undertake a course because of the costs associated with the course. I think it is important to understand that CIT courses are heavily subsidised by government and that our relative cost compared with that of private providers or university competition is substantially less. For example, our certificate 1 to 3 courses cost on average about \$400 per semester, our certificate 4 through to diploma courses are around \$700 on average per semester, and our advanced diplomas are up around \$900 per semester.

We also have a variety of scholarship programs in place, and we introduced in November last year within CIT a form of student fee payment plan for the program fees for any courses of above \$500 per semester. So we were conscious of a potential impact for some students and we have tried to take steps to modify that to make sure that anybody that wants to do a course can do so. So, in summary, we have not seen an impact from those fees, and certainly our student numbers are exactly on par with last year.

**DR FOSKEY:** Is there a push at all, given family constraints and moves from various directions, to move the CIT into a more commercial environment; and, if so, how is this manifest?

**Dr Adrian:** If you look at our operating statement on page 471, which indicates our different sources of funding, you will see that the bulk of our funding is from government. It is our base funding, and the more funding we can get from government the better. It represents \$61 million out of our total revenue for 2007-08 of \$86 million, and in the outyears it continues to be our base funding.

Another important component is obviously the money we get through user choice, but that is in a competitive situation where we are competing with other providers. That is government money but not money that is directed directly to CIT. We also get money through fees and charges, and we get a dividend from CIT Solutions, depending on what decisions the company makes about its profit and how that profit is distributed. You will note that in this past year there was a profit of \$900,000, and we are projecting that profit into the outyears. So increasingly those commercial operations do provide a dividend back to CIT.

In addition to that, I have made it clear since I have been at CIT that I think it is vital that we seek in certain areas where we have expertise to compete in the commercial marketplace, and that will involve the expertise of both CIT Solutions and also other staff within CIT. We already bid for some commonwealth contracts. For example, the adult migrant education program is one that we have won in the past. That is a big contract; it is a competitive contract.

So certainly we see that in the future we will have a core base of funding from government. But if we want to expand CIT, employ more teachers and look at meeting the full training needs of the territory we will need to expand our commercial operations.

**DR FOSKEY:** Is there a new plan for Reid CIT, and, if there is, what is the forward thinking about that site?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, there is. I think this is a fantastic opportunity to make a significant change to that precinct. The commonwealth government has very kindly provided funding in relation to the Griffin legacy around upgrading Constitution Avenue, and we have a master planning process underway that incorporates St John's Church in Reid. It is a collaborative exercise. Dr Adrian will outline some of the very exciting prospects to the committee.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, just before Dr Adrian gives us an outline, I should remind the committee that we are almost out of time. I think members still have a couple more questions. Would you like to have another five minutes this evening rather than call CIT back again later on?

**Mr Barr:** I would be happy to do so if it means everyone can be finished in five or 10 minutes.

**Dr Adrian:** I can be brief. I think people would be aware that we have commenced a Reid master planning exercise. The Lahz, Nimmo, Spackman Mossop joint venture is undertaking that master planning exercise for us. They will have that work completed in August-September. We will then have to give further consideration as to how then



we want to proceed. I think it is fair to say that the site at Reid on Constitution Avenue is just a fantastic site. The changes to the Griffin legacy planning enable us to look at redevelopment of some of the buildings, possible new buildings on site, car parking, student accommodation and, most importantly, the possibility of opening up some of our training facilities with public access, in the right sort of way, onto Constitution Avenue.

The minister has mentioned the links with St John's. We are in discussions with them. They are also doing a master planning exercise, looking at water capture and having some jointness, if you like, in terms of the design, pedestrian flows through from one site to another and so on. So I think it is a particularly exciting possibility for us to reinforce Reid as the centre of CIT operations into the future.

**THE CHAIR:** We have one question from Mr Stefaniak and one from Mr Smyth.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I note on page 468 that the target for student contact hours delivered by the CIT this coming year is 3,735,000. Note 1 at the bottom of the table indicates that this includes 75,000 student contact hours delivered through a recognition of prior learning. You say that is consistent with national VET sector standards of accounting or recognition of prior learning by assessment in the manner equivalent to other modes of training delivery. It is a little bit surprising that those 75,000 hours are actually prior learning—they are not actual contact hours delivered by the CIT or, for that matter, any interstate institution. So why is that there? What is the rationale behind that and is that a measure that might be revised to better reflect the real provision of the contact hours?

**Dr Adrian:** It is slightly separate than contact hours. But we have found that there have been processes within CIT, which vary from faculty to faculty, department to department, where recognition can be given to prior learning for particular courses. When you look at the other jurisdictions you find that in fact most TAFEs have, as part of their total agreement with government for delivery, RPL hours along with delivered hours. It varies from TAFE to TAFE but in some cases they are amalgamated and not separated out. In other cases they are separated out. In most cases TAFEs get funding for those RPL hours. They do involve assessment processes that vary from course to course.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Do you get funding?

**Dr Adrian:** Yes, we do, to the tune of that 75,000. So we believe it is necessary as part of the agreement to government to be explicit about what that number is. We have currently commenced a process of reviewing how we conduct RPL within CIT across all the different courses. The rationale behind that is to get a better understanding of how that works, particularly with people wanting to come back and upgrade their skills, or as they get older, for example, or they have been in employment—

**MRS BURKE:** Are you talking about RCC rather than RPL?

**Dr Adrian:** Yes. It could be that. It could be prior learning from all different sorts of contexts. It could be based on the workplace or it might have been something that was

done on an unaccredited course, for example. So we want to review how that all currently works, with the idea of developing further the idea of actually going out to the community and inviting people to come in—saying, “Come in. We will do an assessment of the work that you have currently been doing or any training you have done that might be unaccredited and, depending on what your interest is, you might be able to get recognition for a course or for part of a course, depending on what your history is.”

If you have a look at a couple of jurisdictions, Queensland and South Australia—Queensland in particular—have been very active in marketing a concept like that, where you are inviting people to come in and get an assessment of what their career has been and, if they are interested in a new career, getting some recognition.

**MRS BURKE:** What about the payment for that assessment—for RPL or RCC?

**Dr Adrian:** If we went into that in a large way, we would either need to fund it ourselves or seek funding from government if we decided to change what we are currently doing. I actually think it is a very important area if you want to attract people because they are looking at changing their careers, particularly later in life.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth with the final question.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, we heard in May that you will be putting in place, or you have put in place, guidelines for reporting bullying, assault, violence and sexual assault in schools. We have heard this week of your desire to extend that to the non-government sector. Will those guidelines be including the CIT?

**Mr Barr:** Not at this stage, no. It is a slightly different environment involving adults, and certainly people outside of compulsory school age. I am not aware that there is an issue at the CIT anything like there is in private schools and public schools in the ACT, as has been well documented.

**MR SMYTH:** If you are not aware, I might ask Dr Adrian. Are stats kept on bullying, assaults, violence, sexual assaults at the CIT and, if so, could they be made available to the committee for this year and, say, last year or the last couple of years?

**Dr Adrian:** I will have a look and see. We do keep information with regard to any complaints. It could be classroom situations or on-campus situations. We have processes in place that staff are trained in. In a large number of cases they are dealt with in the faculties. In some cases it does involve heavy interaction with our counselling areas and so on. In certain cases there will be incident reports, depending on what the level of the issue was, that come up into our central corporate area. They are looked at by Mr Kowald and Leanne Cover, who runs my office, and they can be brought to my attention. I will have a look and see the form they are in.

**Mr Barr:** Presumably, Mr Smyth, I will also then seek the same information from private training providers.

**MR SMYTH:** As you see fit, minister.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed.

**MR SMYTH:** What would trip the need to report to the police or at what time is an incident reported to the police?

**Dr Adrian:** I will get Mr Kowald to outline the processes that are used in that.

**Mr Kowald:** If there has been violence involved or if we have a particular very difficult situation with an uncontrollable student, we will call the police. It is an assessment by the teachers who are on the ground at the time of the incident, plus any other support person. I should add that there are very strong links with our internal counselling services who also respond to incidents of this type. I should also add that I am pleased to report that generally extreme incidents are a rare occurrence at CIT.

**MR SMYTH:** If the police are called, it is reported to Dr Adrian's office?

**Mr Kowald:** Yes, it is.

**MR SMYTH:** So we would get all that in a statement.

**Mr Kowald:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Just to finish off, I refer to the last dot point on page 465, which says that one of the corporate and business strategies is to use financial practices which satisfy the requirements of the FMA. Does that mean that the CIT has not been satisfying the requirements of the FMA and you are having to improve your reporting procedures?

**Mr Kowald:** We meet all the reporting requirements of the FMA.

**Dr Adrian:** That is just reconfirming our strong adherence to those requirements.

**MR SMYTH:** You looked worried there for a minute, minister.

**Mr Barr:** No.

**Dr Adrian:** I almost felt slightly flattered but of course we meet the financial management requirements.

**MR SMYTH:** I am pleased to hear that, Dr Adrian.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you minister and officials.

**The committee adjourned at 5.37 pm.**